



INTEGRATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCE INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

WEXHE JOURNAL
January 2020 ISSUE



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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GREETINGS FROM THE WEXHE TEAM!

The WEXHE Project consortium welcomes the year 2020 with its brand new issue of the WEXHE Journal, dedicated to showcasing the project's outputs and exploring the experiential learning landscape in Europe. This issue also marks the concluding output of the WEXHE project, which has developed extensive research on the topic of Work Based Learning (WBL) over the past three years.

Joining our efforts, the WEXHE team have taken the final stride to complete the replicable models for implementing entrepreneurship, traineeship and internship programmes by universities, businesses, and public organisations. Please visit our project website www.wexhe.eu and the online learning platform to check the reports, accompanied by relevant reference case studies featured in our blog articles. The closure of the project WEXHE was also marked with a large public event organised by EURASHE in October 2019 that brought together academics, quality assurance agencies, business representatives, and policy professionals in Brussels.

The event offered its guests various workshops, presentations and info sessions around the WBL, what triggered astute talks.

The content of the February issue is dedicated to present the final outputs of the WEXHE project, including the Case Study Report and the WBL packages composed of 9 guidelines, as well as Spanish and Slovenian good practice examples for traineeships and work placements. We invite you to acquaint yourself with our guidelines and collection of cases that illustrate successful WBL practices through entrepreneurship initiatives, traineeships and internship programmes put into practice across Europe.

We trust that our final edition of the WEXHE journal will give you an insightful glimpse about the current state-of-the-art of the WBL practices and motivate you to promote good practices in your locality. We also hope that our findings will find translation in your professional areas and workplaces, inspiring you to launch, or strengthen your existing public and

business partnerships for student employability.

Please note, our consortium members will remain WBL reference points, in case you would like to get in touch.

WE WISH YOU A PLEASANT READING!

WEXHE Consortium

OUR GOAL:

The goal WEXHE aims to achieve is two-fold: to help bridge the gap between practical and theoretical learning in HE, and skills set of graduates and the skills they require in their early careers.

The WEXHE project aims to create an impact on a wide range of different stakeholder groups in the educational and business ecosystem:



Higher Education Leadership & Staff:

HEIs will benefit from better aligning their curriculum to the demands of practice. HEI lecturers will benefit from getting access to validated work experience models, which can be adapted to their HEI environments.



Students & Graduates:

Students will benefit from greater access to high quality work experience, and graduates to high quality internships that will support their careers.



Industry:

Enterprises will gain guidance and quality tools designed to support their role in providing work experience for students and graduates.



Policy Makers:

Policymakers will benefit from a better understanding how work experience can contribute to the modernisation of HE, and its contribution to employment, economic growth and social goals.

THE RENAULT EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

BOOSTING GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN REGION

The Renault Experience program is a comprehensive training program that strives to achieve a unique balance between theory and practice. Jointly formed by Renault Spain, the government of Castilla y León (Spain), and some of the regional universities, including the Universities of Valladolid, León, Burgos and Salamanca the program aims to prepare recent graduates of engineering for the world of work.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

The goal of the program is to boost the employability of the engineering graduates through targeted training that complements and activates some of the knowledge acquired by graduates



during their stay at the university. The program is structured in three phases: training, work placement, and employment. The training covers a wide range of technical competences, including e.g. product-process engineering, production systems and logistics and generic competences such as team management, communication, and language skills. Offered for total of 200 hours, the training includes lectures and factory visits among other activities.

Upon successful completion of the training program, some of the high calibre candidates pass to phase two, where they carry out a paid internship in one of the facilities of Renault Spain for a period of up

to one year. During the work placement period, the trainees are expected not only to put into practice some of the theoretical knowledge they acquired during the training phase but also to develop their understanding of Renault's organizational culture.

Those who successfully demonstrate their competence are rewarded with a work contract. Although the minimum threshold Renault Spain set at the design of the program is to employ at least 40% of the trainees, in practice it has hired as many as 80% of the trainees. It is also indisputable to argue that, even those not hired by Renault have a great chance of securing employment in other prominent

companies in the region due to the relevant practical and theoretical insight they gained from the program.

BARRIERS AND DRIVERS INVOLVED

The main driver for the involved stakeholders has been the desire to improve employability of the graduates in the region. All the four participating universities as well as companies in Castilla y León region are clearly benefiting from this high quality training program.

The main challenge has been the competition from other employers in the region. Owing to the fact that it takes a relatively long time to get a work contract through the Renault Experience program, graduates have become more reluctant to apply to the program in the recent years. Additionally, language barrier was identified as one of the major challenges for those who do not have the sufficient foreign languages skills to benefit from the training or potential employment opportunities.

TRANSFERABILITY OF THE PROGRAM

Provided there is a concerted effort from all the key regional actors such as the city municipality, universities and companies in the region, the Renault Experience program is easily transferable to other regions which are committed to enhance the employability of their graduates.

This article is based on a case study originally written by the Chamber of Commerce of Spain, developed as part of the Erasmus + Knowledge Alliance Project "Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience into Higher Education" (WEXHE).

WORK PLACEMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DEWESOFT

While the majority of hardware developing companies design tools starting with the device and ending with the user experience, DEWESoft, an international provider of data measurement devices with its headquarters in Slovenia, takes an opposite approach. DEWESoft places the human element at the heart of their vision. The company practices it externally, with its customers, and internally, with its staff. Apart from developing its own in-house talent with educational opportunities, DEWESoft opens its doors for the outsiders – the students – to learn from DEWESoft best practices and gain invaluable practical experience.

DEWESoft engages in such “open door” practices for students, which can also be referred as work-based learning (WBL), for the past 3 years continually. In its majority, the students undertake their work placements or summer students work, but also write a practice-oriented diploma or bachelor thesis. Most of the students work in the software department. There are between 20-25 students experiencing practical aspect of their specializations at DEWESoft. As a follow-up, around 5-10 % are offered a permanent employment after their time at the company is finalized.

DEWE Soft WBL practices allow the students to get connected with the world of practice and enhance chances of their graduate employability. Importantly, it also ensures the inflow of the best talent, new expertise and inspiration to the company. To support the local youth talent and its entrepreneurial activities further, DEWESoft accelerator (Katapult) next to the company, which serves as a centre for start-ups. On

one hand, the company helps start-ups to succeed; on the other, it helps to recognize the talent.

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EURASHE, together with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the University Industry Innovation Network (UIIN), and University of Groningen have organised the WEXHE project consultative workshop on Work-Based Learning and Entrepreneurship in Higher Education on 9 October, in Brussels, Belgium.

The recent development within higher education has strengthened voices calling for equipping graduates with competences and skills relevant for their civic, personal and professional life which would allow their smooth transition into professional life, yet

WEXHE PROJECT WORKSHOP IN BRUSSELS

also set a solid basis for further learning, initiative and flexibility within their career. It has been shown that such competence development is the most successful in changing realistic professional situations. Various approaches providing practical experience have emerged within the work-based learning concept and over the years have been introduced throughout higher education. Still, there are various questions and concerns on how to address and support active, flexible learning beyond the university site while meeting the learning objectives, assuring necessary quality and respect values and principles of higher education.

The EURASHE workshop has provided a platform to share and discuss key issues related to further development and support of work-based learning and development of entrepreneurial competences within higher education – the concept, role of various stakeholders, key principles, role of leaders, active role of students and world of work. European partners representing higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, experts in university-business cooperation joined forces to provide a solid basis for sharing views, as well as setting directions for further policy development. The event brought together policymakers, representatives of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the world of work.

The event was organized within the WEXHE project, yet it raised synergies with other projects on work-based learning and its quality (ApprenticeshipQ, ApprenticeTrack, SAPS, SPRINT) within which

EURASHE as representation of professionally oriented higher education mapped various aspects of work-based learning, the discussions within European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education as well as a vast expertise of University Industry Innovation Network and UAS Munster from the field of university-business cooperation.

The article has been provided by EURASHE

Image credits: EURASHE

WEXHE CASE STUDY COLLECTION IS OUT!

Over three years of its activity, the WEXHE project has successfully identified and elaborated three modes of Work Based Learning (WBL), namely Traineeships, Work Placements and Entrepreneurship, through an in-depth literature review and analysis of 80+ case studies mapping the WBL landscape in Europe. In order to highlight the diversity of applications in different European countries and inspire those who are planning to introduce WBL schemes in their institutions, the consortium decided to work on a publication that will allow sharing of a selection of good practices with the HEIs, businesses, and relevant public organisations.

The WEXHE Case Study Collection Booklet provides an overview of 21 case studies developed by the project teams from seven project partner countries – Netherlands, Germany, Slovenia, UK, Spain, Poland, and Cyprus, categorised in three chapters according to the mode of Work Based Learning (WBL) they are representing. Each chapter starts with a short description of the mode of WBL in focus, along with further sub-categories of the mode that might help the readers to match with the case studies that follow.

The articles selected for the overview have been prepared for online publication in the form of blog articles, and do not have a direct link to the case studies themselves

You can download the booklet from the following link: [WEXHE Good Practice Case Study Collection](#)



wexhe

Integrating Entrepreneurship
and Work Experience into
Higher Education

**CASE STUDY
COLLECTION**

This publication is a result of the project that is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2, Knowledge Alliance Projects (Grant agreement: 575683-EPP-1-2016-1-NL-EPPKA2-KA). The views expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the author(s), and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.





WEXHE PROJECT TRAINEESHIP, WORK PLACEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PACKAGES

The WEXHE Consortium has recently published 9 reports on the 3 modes of Work Based Learning (WBL) - Traineeships, Work Placements, and Entrepreneurship - with each including information and guidelines for Higher Education Institutions, Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), and Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies. The reports also provide an in depth analysis of different approaches to Work Placements and Entrepreneurship.

Traineeship package includes information and guidelines targeting three major stakeholders of the Traineeship schemes offered to students, namely Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), and Government Institutions & NGOs. As the cases of the WEXHE project show, the major coordinators of a traineeship can be various types of organisations (companies, enterprises, firms, NGOs, institutions, etc.) which offer employment and posts for trainees, and will be in these reports termed as 'employers' or 'organisations'.

The Work Placement Package is composed of content discussing three work placement approaches - integrated approach, clearing house/ intermediary approach, and corporate approach - identified through the analysis of WEXHE case studies of good practice. The cases identified by WEXHE covering a range of different countries, show a great variety of placement forms, even though they are limited to learning and training of university students in real work environments, i.e., at the workplaces carrying out meaningful workloads.

The Entrepreneurship Package is composed of content discussing three approaches - entrepreneurship promotion, business creation, and innovation enhancement - identified through the analysis of WEXHE case studies of good practice. Entrepreneurship cases are not bound to workplace environments, nor aimed specifically at current or graduated students. What differentiates entrepreneurship from the other modes of delivery is that it is innovation-driven and/or project-driven.

Please visit the WEXHE platform to download the reports: <https://wexhe.eu/index.php/iewexhe-platform/>

“GET LOST, I’M TRYING TO DO A DEGREE HERE!”

OR WHY THE EMPLOYABILITY AGENDA OFTEN MISSES THE POINT



During my second interaction with him, Tony expressed his sheer frustration about the reminders he received for a job application he had started as part of a career-preparation assignment. His outburst quoted in the title highlights a tense relationship between employability and doing a degree.

Tony was one of eight young people whose journeys I followed from their last year in their degree to their situation six months after graduating. Although Tony suggested that he was not interested in satisfying employability expectations, he did engage with opportunities that could be identified as CV-building such as gaining teaching experience in schools. He was also able to get a graduate-level job through a friend in order to satisfy his priority to return home

to the countryside. For classmate Jane, her struggle with mental wellbeing meant focusing on just getting the degree done. As for Alice, seeming CV-boosting activities like doing a year abroad and achieving one of the highest grades possible on her degree meant little for her immediate future; she was more concerned with traveling and experiencing the world following her degree. Even Isaac, who diligently engaged with employability development opportunities to influence his employment prospects, finally revealed how stressful it was to manage these demands atop a degree. The nature of the relationship young people had with employment and thinking about it varied over time and ranged from optimism to sheer annoyance with the same. Clearly, employability is now not just embedded in Higher Education, it has gone far beyond and become a task that seems to have lost its meaning.

What these very short summaries demonstrate is a discrepancy between what young people are expected to do and their actual lived reality. For the former, this relates to how expectations of employer and policy-makers are actioned as employability development and provision in universities, such as through curricular activities like a year in industry or

career fairs, career-center services, and university policies. The expectations would include, for example, the grade the individual achieved, how they can demonstrate having various skills, how they can respond to gaps in the economy. An example of this is seen in the UK’s 2016 Higher Education White Paper titled Success as a Knowledge Economy, which was criticized for its focus on marketability^[1] and metrics in higher education^[2]. Meanwhile, there is little work on how young people decide on certain pathways. The research revealed that in today’s technology-focused, quick-paced life – or ‘Late Modernity’ – when young people ‘make their way through the world’, they are confronted by multiple priorities, merely by virtue of the range of options available to them. Therefore, in addition to considering the employer and policy-maker expectations, given how embedded employability has become in higher education lingo, they also need to consider, for example, their personal circumstances in their so-called ‘choice’ for their futures. This can include a consideration of whether they should focus on mental wellbeing or career, which job offer to select, if they have the financial capital to do certain things, how their family would react, if they should return home, etc.

While these assertions may seem common-sense, work on employability has continued to focus on the demands of employers and the economy. Instead, if such work incorporated young people’s own admission of concerns, not only could we view the increasingly challenging work landscape more critically but we would also be able to support young people in their transitions. In practical terms, this can be carried out through improved career support. For

example, it is crucial to consider the role of geography in young people’s decision-making rather than assuming mobility, that they will go where jobs are available. There is also a need for career professionals to stay clear of prescribing or insisting on a linear and pre-composed career trajectory as not only is the illusion of a ‘job for life’ just that, people are also likely to change their paths if it does not suit them. All in all, it is crucial to be aware that any decision must be understood within their context. Here, the futures of young people must be understood within their interpreted reality.

Sinead D’Silva is a Postdoctoral researcher based at Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, funded by the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation program. Her Doctorate which was based at the University of Leeds focused on decision-making by young people as they transition from STEM degrees in the UK. Sinead’s area of focus relates to young people’s engagement with their future through work and place. In this article, she shares the results of her doctoral research.

[1] Tomlinson, M., 2018. Conceptions of the value of higher education in a measured market. *Higher Education*, 75(4), pp.711-727.

[2] Frankham, J., 2017. Employability and higher education: the follies of the ‘Productivity Challenge’ in the Teaching Excellence Framework. *Journal of Education Policy*, 32(5), pp.628-641.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The WEXHE Project brings together ten partners from enterprises, associations and HEIs based in eight countries in Europe.

Extensive knowledge and expertise of each partner ensures achievement of the project goals regarding WBL policy and practice development in a dedicated manner.



University of Groningen
(Coordinating organisation)
The Netherlands



University of Warwick
The UK



ENQA
Belgium



EURASHE
Belgium



Spanish Chamber of Commerce
Spain



UIIN
The Netherlands



Polish Chamber of Commerce
Poland



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