



Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work
Experience in Higher Education

National Literature Review United Kingdom

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Warwick, 2018



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

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This WEXHE publication is applicable to the following disciplinary sectors:

- Hard pure (e.g. physics etc.)
- Soft pure (e.g. literature etc.)
- Hard applied (e.g. engineering etc.)
- Soft applied (e.g. management studies etc.)

WEXHE research has showed that there are no substantial differences between these four sectors regarding the implementation of Work Based Learning in Higher Education. Therefore this document represents the four sectors mentioned.

This publication is a result of the project that is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2, Knowledge Alliances Projects (Grant agreement: 575683-EPP-1-2016-1-NL-EPPKA2-KA)

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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SUMMARY


WEXHE is a European funded research project concerned with the promotion and innovation of work-based learning (WBL) in higher education. By documenting the provision across Europe in seven EU countries, this research provides a platform for carrying a wide-ranging analysis of work-based learning. The aims of the project include identifying examples of successful practices within work-based learning, what the accreditation processes are, as well as establishing where this leads to high quality jobs. This research project seeks to advance the transition into employment from higher education by matching skills to fit with the needs of employers and develop modules that can serve as a template for future implementation within work-based learning.

In the UK, work-based learning is defined in the context of higher education in terms of skills acquired with respect to either a direct experience within, or a distinguishable relationship to, a working environment. In short, its focus is on learning in and from workplaces, underpinned as it is by the belief that higher level knowledge is not merely acquired through academic learning but also can be developed through engagement within work situations and scenarios.

The concept of work-based learning has been evident in the UK for a long time. Historically its relevance and significance was shaped more in terms of subject-specific considerations, and thereby more commonly associated with certain directly 'work-related' disciplines than others, particularly those with a focus on applied skills. However, in the wake of the expansion of university provision and changes to the method of funding the higher educational system in the UK, as well as the consequent introduction and increase in student tuition fees since 1998, the position of higher educational institutions has evolved both with respect to their relationship to external partnerships including those of industry as well as their role in guiding the path of student educational development.

In this context the promotion of work-based learning, prompted by government policy, has led to changes in disciplinary course provisions by many universities, indicating a shift towards learning approaches guided by practical orientations that exist directly alongside courses structured and weighted down by more traditional authentications of value.

The forms in which work-based learning is practiced is most commonly encountered through work placements and sandwich courses that operate as an extension of the skills associated with a specific discipline. These are then practiced and assessed within a work-based environment. Assessment methods vary but often include critically reflexive tasks that endeavour to draw students into evaluating their own practice within work. In more recent times work-based learning courses have extended beyond the confines of more recognisably



applied subject areas to include, at least to some degree, subjects also identifiable with the soft-pure areas of study such as those connected with the arts and humanities.

A relatively recent development in the field of work-based learning has emerged with the increasing investment and proliferation of courses concerned with entrepreneurship. Such courses, targeting specific skill sets, combine business acumen and creativity with the endeavour to advance market innovation, and the development of competences relating to the identification and marketisation of ideas, have gained ground in higher education both within business departments and beyond.

The drivers for introducing and enhancing the opportunities supplied by work-based learning, cultivated and encouraged by government policy recommendations and incentives, include the endeavour on a structural level to in effect harmonize or otherwise pool the resources of different sectors, transferring more efficiently and effectively the skills operating within the higher educational environment into that of organisations in the wider economy. Such a process invites not merely a closer partnership between higher educational institutions but also a greater appreciation on the part of educators within higher education as to the demands of the broader economy and the co-ordination and enhancement of skills required to succeed in this environment.

On the level of agency, the task of work-based learning is in the first instance to deliver courses that foster students with skills applicable to the needs of employers. That is, to host programmes that raise student employability. Furthermore the success of such activities entails achieving a balance between theory and practice, one that enhances learners' capacity to renew themselves in the workplace. However, as identified later in this literature review indicate challenges to promoting successful examples of work-based learning continue to exist, not least due to the gulf in language and consequent problems that exists between employers and academics within their respective environments.

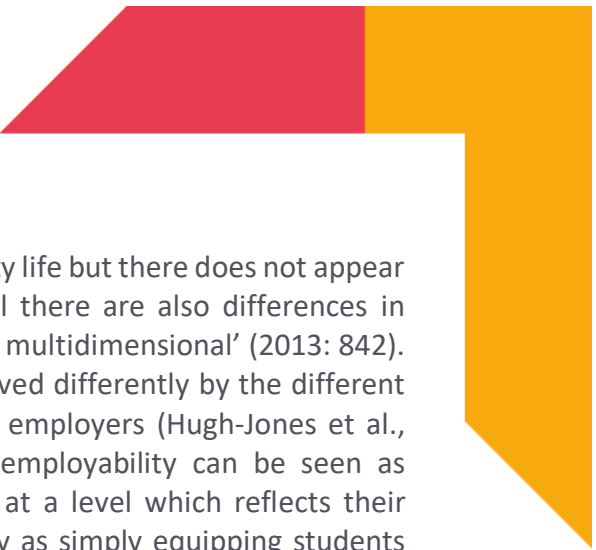
INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions within the UK are transforming, albeit reluctantly in some cases, as a result of changing state/university relationships, economic and social changes, internationalisation and globalisation. Increasingly they have been subject to the influences of marketisation and neo-liberalism. Externally universities are also now engaging with other sites of knowledge producers while internally new and diverse student groups are entering (Scott, 2005). Traditional universities are also under pressure to break down the ivory tower image and engage in partnerships with employers and local communities to the extent that according to Barnett: 'Institutional boundaries become less tight as interrelationships with the wider society grow' (Barnett, 2003: 27). While some systems remain elite the system as a whole has become a mass-based one (Scott, 2001, Osborne, 2003) opening up opportunities for widening participation and access for groups who never previously entered higher education. As a result the student population has become more diverse by age, class, gender, ethnicity and disability. Higher education, therefore, has an important role to play in providing lifelong learning opportunities, including within this employability skills and knowledge for the labour market.

Expansion of UK higher education has, therefore, enabled a higher percentage of people to enter and participate at degree level. For Redmond (2006) expansion is associated with the need for a more highly educated workforce to enable competition in the global and knowledge-based economy. The labour market is also changing. Between 2010 and 2020 the proportion of jobs requiring academic skills will rise from 20% to 34%, while low skilled jobs will decrease from 23% to 18% during the same period (EC Rethinking Education, 2010).

The issue of employability and higher education has become a key policy concern and there is pressure on universities to equip students with skills, knowledge and competences needed for the graduate labour market. This has resulted in a closer relationship between universities, employers and the labour market (Morley, 2001). Yet despite this according to Little (2003) conceptual and contextual differences exist between universities and industry which makes it difficult to assess whether graduates are meeting the needs of employers. This has changed the fundamental nature and purpose of the university and critics point out that this situation entails a shift away from the social purpose of a university to what Gumpert (2000) calls an industry.

The external economic and social forces which have led to transforming the purpose and nature of the university have in turn impacted upon the perspectives and expectations which students bring with them to their undergraduate studies. For many undergraduate students studying for a degree is not just about learning for learning sake's and following a particular discipline in depth but rather as Tomlinson points out: 'It now appears no longer enough just to be a graduate, but instead an *employable* graduate' (2012: 25). Higher education is now viewed by students, as Tomlinson (2012) asserts as being an investment in their future lives in the labour market. They realise that it is a competitive world out there and that to get the best graduate jobs they need to offer more to employers than just their degree qualification. This process also puts increasing pressure on students to engage in activities other than their degree work in order to gain extra credentials to help them in the graduate labour market.



Employability has, therefore, become a key aspect of university life but there does not appear to be a consensus as to its meaning. At a conceptual level there are also differences in approaches. As Tymon asserts: 'employability is complex and multidimensional' (2013: 842). This is partly because the meaning of employability is perceived differently by the different actors involved: students, higher education institutions and employers (Hugh-Jones et al., 2006) and even differently within those groups. In brief employability can be seen as preparing graduates for employment in the labour market at a level which reflects their qualifications and intellect. Some authors view employability as simply equipping students with the appropriate skills but there is a need to go beyond just a skills definition. Yorke's definition has a more holistic understanding as he defines employability as:

a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (2004: 210).

However, Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2002) are critical of defining employability from an individualistic perspective as they stress that 'employability is primarily determined by the labour market rather than the capabilities of individuals' (2002: 9). Instead they argue for a definition which takes into account the 'duality of employability'. This encompasses an 'absolute' dimension and refers to graduates having the appropriate skills, knowledge and commitment. The second dimension they describe as being 'relative' and relates to what is happening in the labour market in terms of supply and demand as a graduate may have the appropriate skills and competences but there may not be graduate jobs available. In such a situation graduates may be employable but not have a job. For them employability is defined 'as the relative chances of finding and maintaining different kinds of employment' (Brown et al., 2002: 11). Their dual definition is important as it recognises that the individual should not always be blamed for not finding a job or a job at an appropriate level as structural factors also have an impact on the graduate labour market.

There is still concern amongst employers that graduates lack the appropriate skills on entry into graduate employment (Cumming, 2010). Archer and Davison's (2008) looking at employers' perspectives illuminated that they increasingly valued key soft skills such as communication, team working and integrity as much as knowledge/subject skills as a result of work becoming more customer focused. Most of the definitions do appear to focus on the individual student but as Brown et al (2002) assert a student does not exist in a vacuum but interacts with others and also institutions in particular contexts. Employability and securing a job in the graduate labour market has also to do, and drawing on Bourdieu's work, with the levels of cultural, social and economic capitals a student brings with them to the university and develops while they are there. Employability is also about managing the transition from learning to earning, from education to the world of work.

WBL UNDERSTANDING

In the UK, 'work-based learning' (WBL) is a complex and multifarious term that describes a diverse range of learning strategies and practices. Nevertheless, the manner in which these activities coalesce can be broadly identified with respect to the ways in which they are situated in the workplace environment, or arise directly out of workplace motivations, experiences and concerns.


One of the drivers of programmes of work-based learning is to provide a path to integrate higher-level learning with work place learning, experience and expertise. It entails unlocking the potential of students, familiarising them with the workplace environment and enhancing their skills within this sphere. Work-based learning also refers to a resource for further developing the skills of those who are already in the workplace environment. Within the frame of work-based learning one encounters the preparation for future employment, training within employment, and training within aspects of life outside of the workplace that serves to enhance career skills and orientations to the marketplace.

Within the literature, Boud and Solomon (2001:4) highlight within the work-based learning the significance of the relationship between higher educational institutions and employers when they state that it is "...the term being used to describe a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organizations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces." In this regard, work-based learning programmes often entail a partnership, established more or less formally, between academic institutions and external organisations or working practitioners. While opportunities can be created for work-based learning not directly involved in an organisation, for example as in the case of simulated situations for students engaged in entrepreneurial 'start-up' activities, nevertheless some level of practical employer input and support provides a valuable or, in certain instances, essential aspect to the functioning of work-based learning.

Consequently, university engagement in the field of work-based learning has resulted in the development of partnerships with employers both at a more formal level and informal level. An example of a formal arrangement could be where an external organisation has approached a university and is directly strategically invested in the programmes provided, viewing the consequent training and development of the staff as contributing to the intellectual and structural capital of the company (Garnett, 2001). The promotion of work-based learning by organisations may also be tactical in achieving specific or general staff development aims (Lyons, 2003). In contrast, the relationship between organisations and higher educational institutions may be established in more informal arrangements, as in the case where the agreement is established through the activity of the students themselves in securing their own work placements while operating within the frame of their university departments.

As is elsewhere highlighted in the literature, work-based learning seeks to address directly both the needs of students and organisations, with a programme of study "designed to meet the learning needs of the employees and the aims of the organization" (Sodeichowska and Maisch, 2006: 14)

In clarifying the elements that make up approaches to work-based learning Gray defines the forms of work-based learning as involving "any of the following learning types; learning



through work, learning for work, and learning at work” (Gray, 2001: 11). Using this definition, he further clarifies that work-based learning can involve:

- work placements to gain experience of working environments while in full-time education or training – for example, a sandwich course, year in industry or a period of apprenticeship in a professional setting (learning for work)
- acquisition or renewal of skills while in post, plus any workforce development initiated by the employer (learning at work)
- re-engagement with education or training in order to achieve a better standing at work using the workplace as a learning environment or point of reference (learning through work)

The relevance of this typology to the way in which work-based learning can be understood in the UK will be investigated further in the next section.

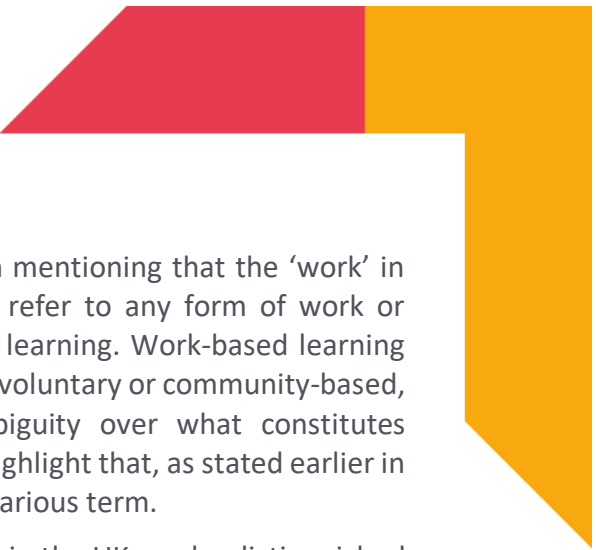
In pedagogical terms, the practice of work-based learning is also notable for being associated with lifelong learning; that is to say, as an ongoing process, one in which adults may engage in or otherwise return to throughout their lives. The forms of work-based learning are thus adaptive to different learning scenarios and strategies of learning. As an educational tool it is something that is utilised by both higher educational institutions and businesses, in the case of the former to develop student aptitude and readiness for their transition into the employment market, in the latter to up-skill and advance the effectiveness and efficiency of their workforce.

Since work-based learning in the broadest sense refers to all learning that is practiced in the workplace or emerges out of work place concerns it is also worth emphasizing that, while it is often subject to forms of accreditation within academic institutions, there is a significant amount of what can be classed as work-based learning in the UK that is not formally accredited. Arguably much of this has the potential to be since it includes the development of skills that take place at work including for example problem-solving specific issues in the context of coaching, training exercises and so on. While some of this learning is outside the scope of higher educational assessment, there remains aspects that do engage higher level skills and knowledge that could potentially be recognised and enhanced through university recognition and engagement.

The value of learning within the work context has been documented in research such as Eraut *et al* (2000, 2005), Felstead *et al* (2005) and Eraut (2007). Here the effectiveness of the skills developed in the workplace, imbued as they are with critical reflective practices and problem-solving activities that derive from an interface with work-based situations and environments, has been highlighted and contrasted positively against those gained in off-job training.

Higher educational institutions have responded to this by both extending their own provision with existing departments to incorporate a work-based element as well as moving into the space of the workplace (Scott *et al*, 2004) to enhance and accredit learning that takes place in this environment. A distinctive feature of such programmes is the emphasis on reflecting on work activities and developing people as resilient, self-organised and highly motivated practitioners who are committed to their further development.

Other factors that are consequential in understanding work-based learning in the UK is that the courses that offer it do not necessarily promote it as a compulsory element within the



fulfilment of the respective degree. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the 'work' in work-based learning is not necessarily paid work as it can refer to any form of work or purposeful engagement relational to work that gives rise to learning. Work-based learning may also for example be distinguished in terms of work being voluntary or community-based, involve domestic or leisure activities. That there is ambiguity over what constitutes purposeful activity relating to a work context only serves to highlight that, as stated earlier in this section, that work-based learning is a complex and multifarious term.

The development of work-based learning in higher education in the UK can be distinguished in terms of programmes concerned with using the workplace as an environment for subject-specific learning, courses tailored for specific organisations designed to up-skill pre-existing employees, those that provide experience in designing and starting up companies, or as one in which the 'curriculum' grows out of the experience and work context of the learner (Boud, 2001, Nixon *et al*, 2006).

WBL TYPES/TIPOLOGY

The main modes of delivery associated with work-based learning in the UK that are relevant to the WEXHE project are with reference to forms of work placement that are offered in relation to subject-specific areas as well as more independent work-based learning models, particularly entrepreneurship. A further model identified here is with reference to Gray's definition of "learning at work" which refers to the example of those who gain specific tailored, often non-accredited higher educational experience in the context of their training. These will be discussed further in the following section.

Work Placements

Identified by Gray (2001) in terms of "learning for work" this approach is identified with respect to practices that entail students gaining experience through working within a work-based learning environment as part of their study engagement. In this context work placements or internships serve as a common example of this approach to work-based learning. In contemporary higher education in the UK these are focused on improving the development of students' employability and transferable skills.


Sandwich courses, where students spend a year in a working environment, are well established within UK higher education. The National Council for Industry and Commerce characterised the sandwich principle as being founded upon "an interaction of academic study and practical applications such that each serves to illuminate and stimulate the other" (Brennan and Little 1996: 4).

Harmer (2009) argued that learning and teaching would be enhanced for all stakeholders if every student gained direct experience of the real-life complexities of organisations as part of their programme of learning. In this regard, many previous studies looked at how effective such placements are in developing career-related competencies (e.g. Murakami et al. 2009). Auburn (2007) addressed the skills acquired on placement in relation to students' final year studies once they return to complete their degree. Furthermore he distinguishes a range of knowledge areas, skills or values acquired from the placement year that can be deployed in the final year.

The degree of collaboration between higher educational institutions and external partners varies with respect to work placements. Of particular significance in this regard lies in whether work-based learning is a core feature of the course or whether it is optional. With regard to the former, clearly the ties between external partners and higher educational institutions are fully integrated in the running of the programmes. However, where work-based learning is an optional feature of a course the relationships with external partners are more loosely defined. Nevertheless the quality assurance associated with such placements requires meeting specific learning outcomes in order to achieve accreditation. Furthermore, the placements are based on a contract between the provider, the student, and the higher educational institution.

Traineeships, Learning at Work, and Apprenticeships

In respect to defining traineeships, the status of these in UK tends to refer to a programme of



training and education within the workplace that operates for young people, for example school leavers, often serving as an alternative route to higher education, in the path to employment. There are however other permutations for experiencing education within work that are operational within higher education. One of these is identified in relation to what Gray identified in terms of 'Learning at Work'.

Learning at work as a form of work-based learning refers to instances where organisations, often in partnership with higher educational institutions, promote programmes of professional development. Gray (2001) refers to these as often 'in-house' training but the reach of this training can also be developed in partnership with higher educational institutions. In these instances, partnerships between employers and higher educational institutions can be particularly closely integrated in the development and tailoring of courses relevant to achieving desired advances in the development of businesses. Within higher educational institutions in the UK there are examples of departments that are specifically geared to industry in this regard, promoting and embedding partnerships that have established a reputation for developing skills, enhancing motivation and transforming the workplace environment for organisations.


Such courses can provide a different access for an organisation's employees to enter into higher education and thus are examples of widening participation, particularly given that the cost of the education tends to be covered by the employer.

A specific area in which the relationship between higher education and employers is being mobilized in the UK in this respect is with degree apprenticeships. Launched by the British government in 2015, these combine full-time work with part-time university study and can offer candidates the opportunity to gain both undergraduate and Masters degrees. The courses are designed to operate according to a flexible study method that suits employer's needs, whether that's for example, blended learning, distance learning or block mode learning.

As mentioned earlier, in the context of the WEXHE project, 'learning at work' is in certain respects proximal to the definition of 'traineeships' insofar as they are funded by the employer and are not themselves necessarily accredited. However, with regard to the classification of 'traineeships' as designating graduates who, on completing their studies, undergo a selection procedure before being selected as 'trainees' in organisations, this is more akin to what in the UK are refer to as internships, some of which are offered, are a selection process, to graduates by employers once they have completed their course of study.

Entrepreneurships

Throughout the 1980s universities were encouraged to participate in programmes that would raise students initiative and enterprise, advancing projects to start their own business. During the 1990s engagement with this model of learning declined, but was once again revitalised in Dearing's National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) that recommended that universities once again assess the scope for encouraging entrepreneurship through innovative approaches to programme design.



By 2000 business and entrepreneurial development had been listed by Universities UK as one of four strategic goals for British universities. The UK Government introduced a significant third funding stream to English higher education institutions, with the aim of stimulating universities to reach out to business and the community, called the Higher Education Innovation Fund. The broad aim of this initiative was to add value to society and the economy through the transfer of knowledge and presented an opportunity for higher education institutions to contribute to the development of entrepreneurial and enterprising staff, students, and graduates.

Entrepreneurship courses within higher education operate on a different basis to other examples of work-based learning. They do not, for example, entail direct partnerships with industry or workplace experience. However, they often involve introducing students to experienced practitioners from outside of the higher educational environment.

CONTEXT

Work-based learning has increasingly become an area of interest for the higher education (HE) sector. It is seen as means by which to support the personal and professional development of students who are already in work and the focus of the learning and development tends to be on the student's workplace activities (Brennan and Little, 2006).

Work-based learning at higher education level has long been a feature of UK higher education. For example, in the 1950s, the National Council for Technological Awards advocated that undergraduate programmes in engineering and technology should incorporate planned periods of industrial placement. Since that time, undergraduate programmes incorporating such work-based placements have been introduced across a wide range of subject areas.

Nevertheless, the landscape of higher education in the UK has experienced significant changes, most notably since the introduction in 1998 of tuition fees and their subsequent escalation producing in effect a shift from public liability to market-led determination of value and, from the perspective of the student, an individual debt-based system.

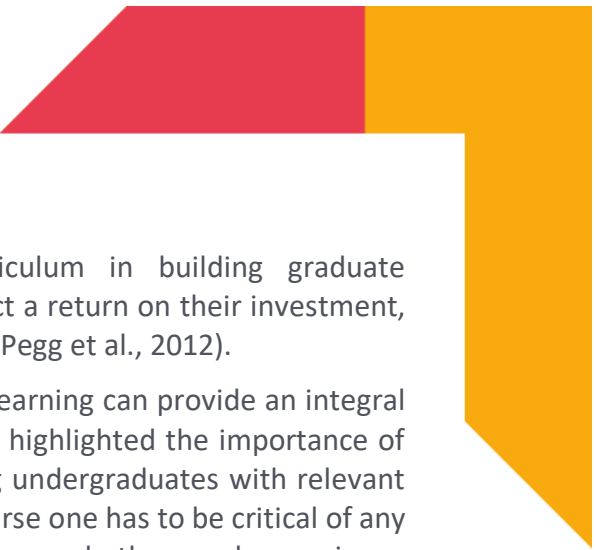
Along with the introduction of student fees there has been a withdrawal of state funding in the higher educational sector. Hence, the consequent shift in the architectonic of higher education may be characterised as one away from public investment towards increasing market discipline.

One of the impacts of this changing climate has been increasing numbers of students undertaking part-time work in order to support their studies.¹ Furthermore, the number of applicants to university has decreased, particularly with respect to mature students. Finally amongst attending students, less are likely to take gap years.

In response, higher educational institutions have put increasing emphasis on employability, acknowledging a gap between higher education and the world of work and a corresponding need to provide students with guidance on how to approach employment and establish their careers. Furthermore, they have recognised the potential limitations of academic tuition when it comes to equipping students with what they need to be successful in the employment market. With this in mind, work-based learning, immersing students in authentic employment scenarios has become more prominent.

Employability has become a new norm in which universities now, at least in part, have come to measure themselves, their role within society, and their responsibility to their students. Employability is a term that refers to a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that can make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke and Knight, 2004). However, as Johnson and Burden (2003) suggest, many of the employability skills that employers are seeking can only be learned in 'real life' situations as 'there is a limit to the extent to which educational establishments can 'teach' the necessary skills and attributes, even where extensive efforts are made to simulate the work situation" (p.39). Over the recent years, driven by the rise in tuition fees, institutions have increasingly recognised the many benefits of incorporating

¹ Indeed it was estimated that 61% of UK students work during term time, for an average of eight hours a week.



authentic work experience in the undergraduate curriculum in building graduate employability, especially as students are more likely to expect a return on their investment, namely, the real prospect of a job at the end of their studies (Pegg et al., 2012).

By offering students real-life learning activities, work-based learning can provide an integral link between education and employment. The literature has highlighted the importance of structured work experience as an effective way of providing undergraduates with relevant employment skills and awareness of employer culture. Of course one has to be critical of any claims since, as Mason et al. (2009) noted, 'it is difficult to say whether work experience makes students more employable or whether the more employable students are more likely to choose, find and successfully complete work experience opportunities' (p.23).

The government in the UK has supported this trajectory by producing the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2008) that required all subjects on undergraduate degree programmes to have transferable skills. This has been followed more recently by the proposal of a Teaching Excellence Framework that recognises teaching practices that promote "students' knowledge, skills and career readiness" (p.32).

An indication of UK government ambition with respect to long-term policy in advancing the skills-base of the workforce was provided within the Leitch Review of Skills (2006). Here a cognitive assessment of the challenges to increasing the skills-base in STEM subjects in the UK was presented and the target was set for the UK to be in the top eight countries in each skill sets by 2020. Critically one of the requirements identified for successfully upskilling on this scale was greater partnership between higher educational institutions and employers.

Nevertheless, in the UK the investment and promotion of work-based learning is more developed in some disciplinary areas rather than others, its appearance being far more prominent within applied areas of the sciences, business and engineering than in the humanities, the soft-pure, or the natural sciences, the hard-pure, disciplines. Institutionally, this division is also reflected in some respects in the historic division between traditional universities, which tend to be more research-driven, and the post-1992 universities, which are more attentive to market-needs and with developing programmes with a work-based element. However, with the changing environment in higher education in the UK, this picture has become more complex.

A final contextual consideration for work-based learning is with reference to entrepreneurship. Research commissioned by BIS and undertaken by Hayton (2015) that suggested there exists a deficiency within a substantial proportion of the UK's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in relation to entrepreneurship skills. Here Hayton (2015) defined entrepreneurship skills as, "identifying customer needs, technical or market opportunities, and pursuing opportunities" (Hayton, 2015: 3). In the context of this report greater investment in entrepreneurial and leadership skills has been encouraged, factors that are positively associated with performance and growth. Towards the latter part of the 1990s programmes of entrepreneurship have been recognised and supported as sources of potential innovation and growth.

IMPLEMENTATION - DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

As distinguished within previous sections, in the UK context the implementation of work-based learning has been explored in various formats but is commonly identified in terms of its relationship to the place of work. Work-based learning provision for students entering the university has been commonly promoted through work placements and, in more recent times, entrepreneurship. However, direct partnerships between universities and industry has also led to work-based learning accreditations that are funded by employers.

Drivers

According to research in this area there are a number of drivers promoting the implementation of work-based learning in the UK that will be summarised in the following address. Firstly, the concern to improve the alignment between the knowledge and skills provided by higher education and that requested by industry. The gap between employers' needs and the graduates entering into the employment market is an ongoing concern particularly in the context of a changing working environment. Improving the relationships between higher educational institutions and organisations reflects back on the programmes of study on the student level of experience by making the courses they study as more closely proximal to employment needs and consequently improves their employability.

Secondly, as working environments have become more knowledge-based they have also become more dynamic with rapidly changing contexts, leading to an ongoing need for the up-skilling of employees to improve skills and productivity. A third factor stemming from the previous point is the need to promote continuing innovation in industry to maintain competitiveness within an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Work-based training is ideally suited to advance these requirements.

A fourth factor is concerned with continuing the project of expanding the reach of higher education, widening access and participation, enhancing the skills of those who might otherwise have been excluded from this level of education and providing them the kinds of flexible skills and resilience to succeed within the contemporary work environment. An indication of the success of this has been provided that many of those who enrolled

Finally, there is a drive to reduce the reliance on the public funding of higher education within the UK. Insofar as universities have relied heavily on government related funding there has been a drive to encourage higher educational institutions to turn more towards partnerships with industry for future investment. Collaborations between university and industry are encouraged as a way to promote innovation and enterprise within the economy as a whole. The change in funding situation within higher education has also had a consequential impact on the scenario faced by students, who in the context of experiencing the brunt of being charged substantial tuition fees are increasingly directly concerned with the "value" of their qualifications and how their learning can be practically applied to the workplace.

Barriers

Despite the advantages that come with the experiences accrued through work-based learning challenges have been identified to effectively operating these programmes particularly with respect to language barriers, different ways of working, perceptions from either side with respect to the value of such partnerships, the complexity that can be involved in producing a successful course and the work required to administer it.

In the first instance, the problem of language can be a considerable one. Higher educational institutions, public sector organisations and industry often have different language. Given the ambiguities over the framing of work-based learning itself confusion can potentially ensue in terms of for example, managing expectations.² Together with issues over language, work-based learning programmes can entail different sets of skills and supports than are available on conventional degrees (Boud and Costley, 2007).


Furthermore companies and higher educational institutions operate on different financial years, have different ideas about timescales, calendars and processes and indeed about what are seen as the measures of success, so building mutual understanding and effective communication is at once a challenge but also a necessary condition to achieving a successful partnership. It takes time to arrive at a position where there is a blurring of the boundaries of where theory and practice take place.

Making it work occurs in many different ways and often requires careful planning. In work-based programmes the employer is often of considerable significance by often providing input into the outline or outcomes of the programme, assisting with aspect of the teaching input, providing support to the students, having involvement in the assessment of students, and potentially paying some of the costs. The range of responsibilities for aspects of teaching, support and assessment will vary and requires discussion and negotiated outcomes. This requires extra effort and at times additional resources, policies, quality assurance and staff development arrangements to be put in place.

With regard to the time required to implement such investments the perceptions that exist between higher education and external organisations remains a factor. Not all higher education staff are disposed towards businesses, and fail to recognise the benefits of academic involvement in workforce development. Indeed, in this regard it is important to highlight that the validity of work-based learning remains a contested area (Nixon et al. 2006).

From the side of employers similar challenges arise coming from the opposing perspective. Employers are not necessarily disposed to academia either. Nevertheless, particularly amongst competitive and highly skilled industries, there is recognition of the need for innovation and increasingly competitive outputs. Furthermore, externally-accredited programmes provide additional assurance of quality to prospective customers, so being able to demonstrate partnership arrangements and links with higher educational institutions is becoming an attractive option which adds value in the global marketplace. Nevertheless, employers can also face challenges internally as many employees and managers may not make the immediate link in the sense of knowing what higher education have to offer.

² In the UK “terms such as work-based learning, vocational education and training, and workforce or professional development are all used interchangeably” (Nixon et al, 2006)



Tensions also exist within companies with respect to other implications of advancing the skills-base of their staff, particularly when it leads to accredited qualifications. Many companies, particularly

small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) offer training which does not lead to accredited qualifications yet increasingly employees themselves value qualifications. Many SMEs have not developed links with higher educational institutions and are uncertain about how higher educational institutions might be able to help in terms of enhancing skill levels of their workforce.

As previously indicated, higher educational institutions are by nature different operations to external organisations and the challenges entailed in establishing and maintaining partnerships can be a complex. Furthermore, they may be differentiated with respect to the differing domain areas that are a feature of the WEXHE study.

The ways in which approaches to employer engagement and establishing networking opportunities are co-ordinated and the challenges associated with this endeavour will be a subject of further investigation as well as the systems of accreditation and quality assurance that are currently in operation in work-based learning programmes in the UK.

IMPACT

The impact of the implementation of work-based learning programmes on higher educational institutions, external partners and society has been significant, for example with respect to the perceptions of higher education, the role of universities and the nature of the provisions they offer. The effects in the long-term remain difficult to gauge, dependent, as they are, on shifts in the political, social and economic context. Nevertheless, the evidencing of increasing provision of work-based learning serves to highlight the links between external organisations and universities have been reinforced and the orientation of higher educational institutions have themselves, in the context of league tables and rising tuition fees, arguably become more self-consciously business-oriented in their approach. In the context of government resolutions to further promote the skills-base within the economy to maximise innovation, enterprise and creativity, and amongst the student-base the desire to find a path into work in a challenging and competitive employment market, the commitment to work-based learning is set to continue.

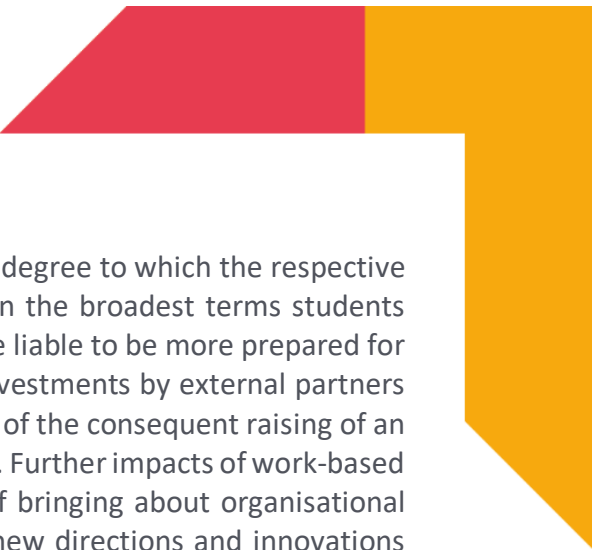
Thus far, research into the outcomes of the introduction of work-based learning into higher education has provided evidence that it is an advantageous measure in aiding the path of students into future employment. Furthermore, it has been shown to be effective in increasing adult participation in higher education, developing the skills and transforming the work lives of individuals, as well as increasing the productivity and success of organisations.

Factors identified in the literature include increased job satisfaction and salary (Blasco et al, 2002), workplace performance (Harvey et al, 2003), commitment and adaptability (Lesley and Richardson, 2000), superior transferable skills (Davidson et al, 1993), and improving effectiveness in a teamwork environment (Hall et al, 2009). Furthermore, Blackwell and Harvey (1999) found that students who have experienced work-based learning are more likely to have permanent work.

Work-based learning has also had an impact on the accessibility of higher education, changing perceptions of the role of university education and the ways in which education can be accredited. The promotion of work-based learning in higher educational institutions has provided an entry point for many into higher education who would not have otherwise considered this route or would have otherwise been put off by due to lack of confidence or aversion to the classroom environment.

For individuals, prior research indicates that the benefits of work-based learning programmes are that they are both practical insofar as they promote expertise in relevant areas and specific skills to respond to the demands of a work-based environment as well as having an existential impact on the quality of their lives, for example by increasing their confidence, their desire and willingness to continue to learn and reflect on their practice and development. In this regard, the research indicates the readjustment of people's lives in the wake of entering into and succeeding in work-based learning programmes include achieving greater competence and recognition within their respective areas of work, taking on greater responsibility and seeking career development and promotion (Stephenson & Saxton, 2005, Nixon et al, 2008).

Organisations have also been shown to benefit from work-based learning in a number of ways



and the form and degree of these benefits may partial to the degree to which the respective businesses have been involved in the educational process. In the broadest terms students who have been through work-based learning programmes are liable to be more prepared for operating effectively within the work environment. Closer investments by external partners with relevant programmes can be motivated by a recognition of the consequent raising of an organisation's intellectual or structural capital (Garnett, 2007). Further impacts of work-based learning on an organisation have been identified in terms of bringing about organisational developments within the operations of businesses, forging new directions and innovations within its administrative operations or product development (Costley & Clegg, 2005).

CONCLUSION

This review of the research literature on work-based learning in the UK has indicated that this form of learning is proving to be a valuable asset to learners, higher educational institutions and employers. More broadly, it is recognised by government as having a vital role in both the preparation of the future workforce as well as the development of the existing workforce.

Work-based learning is an evolving area in terms of its role and status. It can and has been regarded as a mode of learning within an established academic field of study but it is increasingly traversing various fields and distinguishing itself in different forms. Perhaps more radically, it could be engaged with as a distinct field of its own, theorised in its own terms. The emerging scholarship and generation of literature on this topic may lead us to be drawn towards the latter conclusion as a meta-analysis of practices that meet the needs of employers and the consequent theorisation of said practices that successfully advance student potential within their work relations, the transitions they take in the working environment and support and enhance market opportunities and the cause of industry. Such investigations are however at an early stage, and with respect to the UK, require further investigation, structural analysis and critical engagement.

Through work-based provision, higher educational institutions align more closely with external organisations, potentially leading to greater coherence and understanding, and consequent tailoring, of skills practiced and valued most highly by industry. However, distinctions remain with respect to disciplinary areas, in the application to work-based learning with being more prominent in applied sciences, business and engineering than in the humanities or the pure sciences. This division is also both historically and attitudinally reflected in some respects between traditional elite institutions, guided more by research trajectories, and the post-1992 universities, the latter being more familiar with developing programmes with a work-based aspect.

In conclusion, in providing a more detailed assessment of the status of work-based learning within the UK a number of avenues would benefit from further investigation in order to establish a greater insight into the future impact of this approach to education and the challenges it faces. These include more precisely identifying factors including, the assumptions and challenges surrounding different disciplinary fields in which work-based learning is practiced; the structure and efficacy of these approaches to work-based learning; the needs of employers and the challenges to satisfying these by higher educational institutions; the infrastructures in place within higher educational institutions to support work-based learning; and the types of partnerships that have been forged in respective fields.

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