



Workshop 1

Quality assured work based learning and work based assessment

The main criterion for selecting this topic is its shared importance for both VET and HE and the need for responses which are shared between both subsystems. **Answers for existing challenges should derive from both the differences and commonalities between subsystems and result from a common learning process. Differences between subsystems should be seen as privileged areas of mutual learning.**

For the VET subsystem, learning for and through work is a structural component. Historically, apprenticeship has been the first form of learning in arts and crafts and is embedded in the design of every national VET system. So, learning by working is omnipresent, its importance being underlined in all analyses and policy documents. However a huge variety in implementing work based learning (WBL) can also be observed. The differences are obvious not only among national VET systems, but also between the different forms of VET, between initial VET, offered by schools, and continuous VET offered by other providers, between public and private providers, even between sectors. The main differences concern:

- The place of WBL – real work places, in companies, or school based facilities (workshops, simulators, exercise kitchens, exercise companies etc.).
- The duration of WBL and the proportion of WBL within the VET programme, compared with classroom learning.
- The structure of WBL- limited to workplace tasks only or including general skills and competencies (entrepreneurship, communication and group work etc.) to develop a comprehensive “mindset” suitable for the world of work by a greater practical exposure to the workplace culture.

One of the most obvious differences among national VET systems relates to the extent of learning in real work environments through apprenticeship or other similar forms. Countries with dual systems include, by definition, large parts of learning in real work conditions within companies. At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are countries with relatively little learning in real work conditions, despite government efforts to encourage it and there are even more countries “in the middle of the spectrum”, with a small dual system in secondary education alongside a larger and school-based VET¹. But all VET systems have significant (and increasingly important) components of learning in “real work” / “similar to real work” conditions (company and/or school based).

¹ W. Norton Grubb (2006). Vocational Education and Training: Issues for a Thematic Review. Paris: OECD, p. 6-7

For the HE subsystem, responding to the labour market needs is also an important issue, although balanced by the Universities other “missions”, namely preparing learners for life as active citizens in democratic societies, personal development and the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base. “There has been a general tendency for universities and their academic staff, engaged as they are with what they perceive as the noble pursuits of education and research, to see themselves as somehow apart from the societies that host them; a very different posture from the intentions of their founders”². Traditionally, “learning by practice” (in real or simulated work conditions) has been a less important part of the academic curriculum than of VET programmes. “Perceptions of work-based learning show that it is still seen by some as belonging to more vocationally oriented institutions. It is very much a contested area felt by many to be the preserve of particular disciplines and outside this it tends to be a bit of a ‘cottage industry’ supported by enthusiasts. However, in the institutions surveyed, work-based learning is seen as a means by which to pull together learning and teaching, research and third strand agendas”³. But in recent decades, the “third mission” of the higher education institutions (that emphasizes their social involvement and role as development agents), is becoming increasingly important, mainly by fulfilling the “qualification function” for the local/national labour market. In this context, HE institutions have developed an increasing interest in WBL. This trend is enhanced by the fast technological changes both in the production and service economies that require highly qualified workers capable of permanent updating and retraining.

The Bologna process has enhanced this trend and the various existing rankings of the Universities render them more competitive and “market oriented”. The traditional autonomy of Universities meant that their approaches regarding the design and implementation of WBL activities have been decided at institutional rather than at national level. Consequently, the ways WBL is implemented in HE are very different to each other and it is difficult to find common trends and policies other than at the level of a single University. This trend is underlined by all recent policy initiatives at EU level⁴.

Common challenges in VET and HE

Based on the challenges listed below, we propose specific sets of questions in order to brainstorm on new ways of improving cooperation between HE and VET, for the benefit of all stakeholders (learners, employers, providers, administrators).

- **The assessment, recognition, validation and certification of competencies (or parts of competencies) acquired via WBL.** The competencies acquired via work experience are not always evaluated, recognized and integrated in the learner’s portfolio. On the other hand, WBL is multidimensional: problem solving in a real work situation and at a real work place involves not only sector specific, technical, competencies (developed by specific training), but also “generic” or “key competencies” (e.g. digital competencies, communication in mother tongue and/or in a foreign language, social skills etc.) developed in the so called “general education”. Thus, the evaluation must aim and address explicitly the overall combination of “generic” and “specific” competencies.
- **The relationship between classroom based and work based learning.** Sometimes, the connection between the work experience and the “on-campus” curriculum is only

² Green Paper Fostering and Measuring ‘Third Mission’ in Higher Education Institutions.

<http://www.e3mproject.eu/docs/Green%20paper-p.pdf>

³ Work-based learning. Illuminating the higher education landscape (Prepared by Iain Nixon, Kevyn Smith, Rob Stafford and Steve Camm (KSA Partnership)) (2006). York: The Higher Education Academy

⁴ See, for instance, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems (Brussels, 20.9.2011. COM(2011) 567 final: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0567:FIN:EN:PDF>

loosely formed and there are gaps and mismatches between what is taught in the classroom and the demands of the real work place. For this reason, it is difficult to apply the “theoretical” knowledge, taught in school or university in the real work conditions and, vice versa, it is difficult to use the work experience to enhance classroom learning.

- **Better correlation between the changes in the economy and technology and the education and training standards and curricula.** There is always a tension between what a specific employer expects from a labourer and the learning outcomes of a VET or HE programme. This gap is due, on one hand, to the lack of a sufficiently structured communication between employers and educational institutions and, on the other hand, to the fact that institutions tend to respond to new demands/changes with a certain delay and this structural characteristic has to be dealt with, as well.
- **The involvement of employers and the availability of work place learning.** There is currently a shortage of work-based learning placements, including in countries with well-established dual systems. At the same time, and mainly in the times of crisis, companies tend to “poach” trained workers from other firms rather than to further train their employees avoiding the relevant costs. Therefore countries trying to emulate the dual system in the present times of crisis with firms closing down or focusing on their survival, should consider closely the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of government efforts to stimulate work-based learning.
- **The double profile of VET and HE teachers and trainers.** Teachers should have both a good expertise in their own cognitive field and good pedagogical expertise in order to transmit their expertise and experience various categories of learners. Teachers/trainers should follow further training both in their vocational field and in teaching methods including the use of up-to-date technologies, equipment and facilities.

Issues for discussion:

- How to improve communication within the educational system (among sub-systems) and with the external stakeholders (such as employers) in order to overcome the lag between the changes in the economy and technology and to respond in terms of education and training standards and curricula?
- How to, improve the tools and mechanisms for analysing individual and social needs in terms of WBL?
- How to optimize the curriculum design mechanisms and the relationship between classroom-based and work-based learning?
- How to improve curriculum delivery by involving and motivating employers to offer opportunity for work based learning?
- How to tackle the dual professional profile of VET and HE teacher and trainer, which are the best ways to keep him/her up-to-date in both areas?
- How to assess and to integrate (via recognition, validation and certification) the competencies (or parts of competencies) acquired via WBL (generic and specific)?
- What kind of updating could be envisaged in order to ensure the continuous improvement of WBL design, delivery and assessment?

Workshop 1		Quality assured WBL and WBL assessment	
Chair		EURASHE – (tbc)	
Rapporteur		Ms Katalin Stadler Molnár, Hungary	
VET HE	Germany	<i>Quality assurance of work based learning with the focus on cooperative studies</i>	Ms Ewa Traenkner, Depart. of cooperative studies, BSEL-Berlin
VET	NL	<i>VET and the labour market: the Dutch approach</i>	Ms Monique Jordense, The Centre of Expertise on VET and the labour market - KCH
VET	France	<i>Academie de Caen : preparing the way to firms</i>	Mr Alain Tambour, Min of Education, Training Advisor - GRETA network, Caen
VET	Malta	<i>VET and industry working together: a quality assurance approach in Malta</i>	Ing Vincent Maione QA Director Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)