OVERVIEW OF WORK BASED LEARNING IN EUROPE

Deliverable 6: Work Based Learning as an Integrated Curriculum (WBLIC)
Overview of Work Based Learning in Europe

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Report authored by Dr David Devins (Leeds Metropolitan University)

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**European policy context**

The policy environment at the European level provides a supportive context for the development of work based learning (WBL) as an integrated curriculum. The Europe 2020 strategy puts the quality and relevance of education and training systems at the heart of EU efforts to improve competitiveness and achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The development of partnerships between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employers is seen as a critical factor in identifying learning requirements, improving the relevance of education and facilitating access to education and learning. An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs suggests that employers should be encouraged to co-invest and participate in the development and delivery of education through WBL. The knowledge triangle – the connections between HEI, research and business lies at the heart of European Commission thinking associated with a range of policy agendas including innovation, lifelong learning and competitiveness. The design of new curricula and programmes, innovative ways of delivering education and knowledge and stronger business partnerships are an essential element of this policy at the University-Business Forum [http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/business_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/business_en.htm).

**National policy contexts**

The national regulatory framework in each member state supports or incentivises partnerships between employers and HEIs and the development of WBLIC in a variety of ways and to varying degrees. The type and number of HEIs varies between countries. HEIs can be academically or professionally oriented, publicly or privately funded or there may be other distinctions applied within member state contexts. In several countries a distinction is made between HEIs with a research or academic orientation and HEIs with a more professional or vocational orientation. However, in many cases this distinction is increasingly less clear cut than it was in the past.

National regulations govern, to varying degrees, a variety of WBL practices including for example; work placements, the communications processes between labour market intermediaries and HEIs, recognition of prior learning, or the amount of WBL that should be part of HEI programmes.
Key issues

Research identifies two key issues which influence the development of an overview of WBL in Europe including (i) the nature of WBL and curriculum and (ii) the current state of the evidence base to inform the development of a baseline/benchmark.

The nature of work based learning and curriculum

A wide range of terms are used interchangeably for the concept of WBL across Europe including work integrated learning, workplace learning, work-related learning, vocational learning, flexible learning, experiential learning, situated learning, competence-based learning, problem-based learning and problem solving. This leads to some confusion associated with what WBL means in certain contexts and the form that WBL should take to achieve its learning outcomes. A narrow interpretation of WBL relates to learning in the workplace that is driven by employer interests whereas a broader perspective emphasises learning that relates to work and is driven by individual and societal needs.

The concept of an integrated curriculum is similarly open to multiple interpretation and definition. For example, it may be seen as a means of supporting student mobility as a key element of the Bologna process; it may relate to the use of evidence from a variety of stakeholders to inform the design and development of a curriculum or it may be seen as an innovative method of education with a broad-based, multidisciplinary, organisation-centric approach.

An integrated curriculum can be developed and implemented using a variety of approaches including:

- Work placements (including problem solving and project related activities)
- Comprehensive case studies and simulations
- Virtual learning environments (including co-creation and peer-peer support)
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The literature suggests that the dominant approach to achieve integration is through work-placement and ‘reflection’ with the adoption of an approach emphasising learning outcomes or a competency approach seen as an effective way to enhance employability and promote active learning.
Eurydice identify two major trends apparent in curriculum reform across Europe. The first is enrichment of curricula and the second is enhanced flexibility.

- **Enrichment of curricula** - Curriculum traditionally emphasised the body of knowledge to be transmitted to learners but they are now increasingly seen as policy instruments setting a framework for learning. This framework may include elements such as RPL, location of learning, role of ICT, specification of pedagogy and learning outcomes.

- **Flexibility** - The legal frameworks adopted at the national level create the pre-conditions for flexibility in terms of, for example, part-time study and/or RPL. The definition of part-time students varies between member states and individual HEIs define their requirements related to part-time student status. RPL recognises the previous/current experience of learners as a valid form of learning that can count towards entry requirements or particular units associated with a learning programme. In some member states, legislation refers to alternative access to higher education in a relatively open way whilst in others it is more prescriptive.

**The current state of the evidence base**

Research by Cedefop suggests that the evidence base to assess the progress of WBL in Europe and vocational education more generally is in need of considerable development. Whilst there are many examples of HEI engagement with WBL, baselines are difficult to establish at the European and national levels. This reflects to varying degrees differences in the definition of WBL in different countries and the state of measurement and monitoring systems at the national and European levels.

Education discourse is influenced in some countries by an elitist view of education which tends to see WBL as an inferior form of education. This has hampered the development of WBL in several countries. Work based learning integrated into curricula is most frequently found in the more recently formed Universities rather than the more traditional universities where the emphasis of education retains a strong academic focus.

In terms of a means of access to higher education, the dominant pathway into higher education is the traditional road through secondary education. Most European countries do not provide any systematic opportunities to enter higher education without a standard upper secondary school qualification. Alternative pathways into
higher education generally account for a small proportion of all entries (up to 5%) in most European countries. Only the UK reports a significantly higher proportion of those who enter higher education through non-traditional entry routes (around 28% of all entries).

Information provided by partners in the WBLIC project reveals the extent of WBL in Higher Education as highly variable and difficult to quantify within and between member states. Projects funded by the EU such as DEWBLAM, E-View and WBLQUAL and agencies funded by national governments have helped to develop awareness and capacity to take forward the WBL agenda. In some member states work based learning in higher education appears to be emergent or re-emerging, in others it has become part of the HE landscape in recent times (i.e. during the last couple of decades). The most common form of WBLIC is enacted through student placements and in some member states legislation has been passed to increase the emphasis and quality of work placements within HE curriculum. The incidence of other forms of WBL such as bespoke programmes designed in collaboration with employers and/or students is less clear.

The evidence of employer engagement with WBL in HE is limited. Although employers make a considerable investment in continuing and professionally oriented upgrading of HE qualifications across Europe, there is little evidence of the scale and scope of such activity. At a national level, research by Eurydice suggests that at least half of the European Higher Education Area countries make a direct reference to continuing professional development of those working in regulated professions (e.g. teachers, medical doctors) although relatively few countries are involved in other types (including bespoke programmes) of provision for industry or other external partners.

Similarly, there appears to be little evidence associated with the scale and scope of employee engagement with HE programmes at the European level. Comparisons between nations should be undertaken with caution however Eurostudent research reports several countries with few if any part time students and a small number of countries with more than a quarter of students reported as being part-time. Research also suggests that more systematic and substantive approaches to learning embodied in WBL in HE is required to lead to improved employability and to contribute to transformative changes in career trajectories.
The development of WBL challenges traditional models and metrics associated with the Quality Assurance of Higher Education. Research\(^1\) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education reports variety and dynamism as distinctive features of the European system. The accreditation and evaluation of programmes are the most common approaches adopted followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions. No single model for external quality assurance in European higher education is in place let alone a system for the external quality assurance of WBL.

**Conclusions**

The European policy context is favorably disposed towards WBL at this time given the significant role that higher education systems are seen to have to play in the transition towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. However, the analysis contained in this report suggests that the nature and prevalence of WBL at the European and national levels is difficult to capture. This is partly due to the fact that WBL is seldom reported on as a distinct entity in strategic policy documents at the European and national levels. Where WBL does feature the data does not allow a full understanding of its nature in the higher education context nor its incidence, funding or impact.

Cross country comparisons are inevitably fraught with difficulty given the conceptual ambiguity and methodological complexity in this field. There is considerable variation in the legislative and regulatory frameworks governing HEIs in different member states and this has an impact on the development and implementation of WBL. WBL in HE appears most prevalent where the legislative framework provides HEIs with the autonomy necessary to develop and accredit higher education programmes at the institutional level.

At the heart of the distinctive nature of WBLIC is the role of the external organization as a partner with the HEI and the individual learner in the planning of learning activities that are responsive to the needs of a specific workplace. This contests the supremacy of the role of the HEI in curriculum design and validation of knowledge and challenges conventional approaches to education to varying degrees within and between countries. In some countries, regulation is in place to support partnership working between HEIs and industry and curriculum development. In other countries

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a voluntary system is in operation and HEIs often face considerable challenges in engaging employers in curriculum development and delivery.

This review has identified major information gaps associated with WBL in Europe. There is a pressing need for a common framework to capture the incidence of essential characteristics of a range of forms of WBL to inform policy development, implementation and evaluation. WBL (or flexible learning or whichever label makes sense) holds the key to unlocking the potential of HEIs to make a greater contribution to a smarter, more inclusive Europe and investment in the evidence base to monitor its development and implementation over time should be a policy priority for governments at the national and European levels.
1 INTRODUCTION

This review (Deliverable 6) has been prepared as part of the Erasmus funded Work-Based Learning as an Integrated Curriculum project (WBLIC). The aim of the review is to provide an insight into the evolution of work based learning as an integrated curriculum and its nature and form at European and in selected (partner country) member states. It draws on secondary literature to provide an overview of the economic and labour market context and the key European policy responses that influence the WBLIC agenda. The review discusses what is meant by the term ‘Integrated curriculum’ and draws attention to the increasing focus on employer-higher education institution (HEI) alliances at the European level. It draws on a limited evidence base to explore WBL in Europe and provide a baseline for the project.

2 ECONOMIC AND LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT

Europe is trying to recover from a severe economic and financial crisis which has emphasised the need to reform economies and societies in line with a smarter, more sustainable and inclusive European Union (EU) in line with the vision articulated in Europe 2020. At the same time, the shift in economic power from West to East is accelerating and putting pressure on Europe to adapt and change to the new opportunities and challenges that this brings. Europe’s research and innovation performance has declined over recent years, causing a broadening of the already sizeable innovation gap vis-à-vis the US and Japan. Furthermore, China, India and Brazil have started to rapidly catch up with the EU by improving their performance faster than the EU year on year over the last five years (Com 2011).

High quality education and training systems, which respond to the needs of today and tomorrow, are viewed as a critical success factor in the transition to a sustainable knowledge economy (Com 2010). The economic and labour market context emphasises two key priorities. Firstly, restructuring to service the knowledge based economy which is accompanied by an increasing polarisation of the labour market and an emphasis on individual employability as the key to enter and adapt to a changing labour market. Secondly, an emphasis on an enhanced role for Higher Education Institutions and their partnerships with business to develop the higher-level skills which are viewed as a key driver of prosperity both now and in the future.
2.1 Labour market restructuring

The labour market continues to go through a process of dynamic change. The proportion of jobs requiring higher levels of qualification has been rising while the proportion requiring low or no qualifications has been steadily declining for a number of years (Cedefop 2010). Knowledge and skills intensive jobs, such as managers, professionals and technicians are expected to grow in the next decade. The transition to a green economy and the emergence of the digital economy affects the nature and level of skills across many different jobs and sectors. Key competences for the knowledge economy and society, such as learning to learn, communication in foreign languages, entrepreneurial skills and the ability to fully exploit the potential of ICT, e-learning and numeracy, have become ever more important in the labour market (Com 2011a).

In order to reach the 75% employment target for the working population (aged 20-64 years) envisaged in the EU growth strategy, the transition of young people to the labour market needs to be radically improved. By 2020, it is estimated that 35% of all jobs (compared to 29% today) will require high-level qualifications, combined with a capacity to adapt and innovate in work (Cedefop, 2010). Forecasts suggest that there will be 15 million more jobs that require high-level qualifications and that there is an impending skills shortage which will hamper productivity and competitiveness. Less than one person in three in the EU (31.1%) has a higher education degree compared to over 40% in the US and over 50% in Japan. However, progress is being made and in 2017 Europe is likely to reach a new European benchmark set for 2020 which requires at least 40% of the 30-34 year-old population to have successfully completed tertiary education.

However, despite the forecast increase in higher skilled jobs, it might be difficult for some of those with higher level qualifications to find the jobs that match their qualifications, forcing them to accept jobs that require lower skills levels. Unemployment among graduates from different levels of education and training is increasingly a cause for concern for policy makers. Cedefop forecasts indicate an emerging gap between the supply and demand for skilled people, as well as an increase in the proportion of workers who are overqualified for their current jobs (Cedefop, 2011). These findings indicate a misalignment between the numbers of skilled jobs and skilled people, between the skills available and those that are in demand. At the same time, to be in a relatively safe position in the labour market, individuals are required to be adaptable and preferably highly skilled.
The future European labour market will be simultaneously confronted with an ageing population and shrinking cohorts of young people. As a result adults, and in particular older workers, will increasingly be called upon to update and broaden their skills and competencies through continuing Vocational Education and Training (VET). This increased need for lifelong learning leads to a requirement for more flexible modes of delivery, tailored training and well-established systems of validation of formal and non-formal learning. Initial and continuing VET share the dual objectives of contributing to employability and economic growth and responding to broader societal changes, in particular promoting social cohesion. There is general agreement across Europe that education, training and learning enables people to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies that enable them to get and keep a job and manage the complexities of everyday life in the 21st Century (Com 2011, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c).

2.2 An enhanced role for Higher Education- Business Alliances

European policy is placing an increasing emphasis on involving employers and labour market institutions in the design and delivery of programmes, supporting staff exchanges and including practical relevance in courses that can help to attune curricula to current and emerging labour market needs and foster employability and entrepreneurship. At the heart of this approach lies the promotion of systematic involvement of HEIs in the development of local and regional development plans and the targeting of regional support towards HEI-business cooperation, particularly for the creation of regional hubs of excellence and specialisation (Com 2011).

Higher Education is associated with preparation for work, particularly in relation to entry to the professions. In the past, once entry was achieved, being a member of a profession was regarded as a ‘job for life’. However, in most European societies, employment patterns have undergone considerable change and the labour market has become more dynamic. Traditional career patterns are breaking down and full-time permanent employment for life is becoming less prevalent. Workers are increasingly likely to be employed on a part-time, casual or temporary basis. Individuals are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own careers and develop their own skills to improve their employability and their opportunities to progress in the labour market.
Distance learning, e-learning and the recent development of open universities in a number of countries, illustrate how the traditional HE landscape is changing (Eurydice 2011). The role of labour market intelligence is crucial here with current and future projections of skills needs required to play a key part in course design, delivery and evaluation. One of the ways in which this is to be done is through encouraging a greater variety of study modes (e.g. part-time, distance and modular learning, continuing education for adults). This needs to be accompanied by the adaptation of quality assurance and funding mechanisms to reward success in equipping students for the labour market. One key way of achieving this is to exploit the benefits of ICTs and other new technologies to enrich teaching and improve learner experiences, support personalised learning and virtual mobility and to collect, process and analyse graduate destinations data. Alternative modes of delivering higher education programmes usually include the provision of open and distance learning and technology supported learning. In some countries, there are HEIs specifically set up to deliver degree programmes under open and distance arrangements (Eurydice 2012).

However, policy analysis suggests that European education and training systems have been slow to respond to the requirements of the knowledge society, failing to adapt curricula and programmes to the changing needs of the labour market (Com 2011). A debate in most European countries surrounds the extent to which higher education produces graduates who are ready and able to make a difference in the world of work. Research, particularly in the UK, suggests a gap between the skills required in the workplace and the knowledge and skills developed through higher education (Eraut, 2004, Cedefop 2011) which on the one hand hampers productivity whilst on the other acts as a barrier to realising potential in the labour market.

There is general agreement across Europe that policy intervention is required to encourage employers to co-invest and participate in the activities of education and training institutions, particularly in higher and vocational education. These partnerships are seen to provide a vehicle to develop and update skills profiles, multidisciplinary curricula and qualifications, and facilitate the provision of a range of work-based learning, from apprenticeships to industrial PhDs (Com 2010a).

On the demand side of the labour market, certain studies have shown that companies that adopt new forms of work organisation, which encourage innovation, employee autonomy, on-the-job learning and quality management, tend to provide higher training opportunities to their staff (CEDEFOP 2011a). However, policy
analysis suggests that too few employers adopt these high performance working practices which would provide a foundation for the development of employees. It is becoming increasingly accepted that to build a smart, sustainable economy, policy making will need to invest as much effort in raising employers’ ambitions, through highly performing workplaces that produce high quality goods and services, as well as in enhancing skill supply (UKCES, 2009). This requires a refocus of education and training policy from a supply side to a demand side orientation and presents a challenge for policy and many HEIs across Europe (Com 2011c).

Employers have a vested interest in developing their human resources and ensuring that employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to help the company succeed. About 80% of the 2020 workforce in the UK is currently in employment and, along with young people entering the labour market, there is a need to re-skill and up-skill many of these workers to cope with current and future competitive challenges (UKCES 2009). In all European countries, employers contribute significant financial resources to adult education and training. However, this contribution is usually directed at non-formal learning activities such as job-related courses and seminars, ICT courses, languages, etc as opposed to accredited learning in HEIs.

Employer training tends to be strongly focused on the daily functioning of employees in the workplace and not on strengthening their employability through the acquisition of competences that can be transferred across different working environments, enterprises and even sectors or occupations. Employer training practices are seen by some as producing ‘firm specific skills’ and not necessarily the generic or transferable skills that will benefit society more generally. On the other hand, firm specific skills can be highly sought after by other employers in the labour market and more generally skill development can play a significant role in flexicurity strategies which attempt to enhance the flexibility of labour markets and work organisation in enterprises at the same time. Adult learning, in a variety of forms, and career guidance are key building blocks of the flexicurity agenda and an integral part of work based learning for many older people (Cedefop 2011).

### 3 THE EUROPEAN POLICY CONTEXT

The Europe 2020 strategy, its flagship initiatives and the new Integrated Guidelines put knowledge and quality and relevance of education at the heart of EU efforts for
achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Bruges Communiqué (Com 2010) on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training identified work-based learning as one of the areas that requires increased political attention and strategic action. Adult learning in the workplace brings a fundamental contribution to lifelong learning strategies, flexicurity and employment policies; it also supports policy measures for increasing enterprises' capacity for innovation, competitiveness and adaptation to sectoral changes. The European Strategy 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth gives emphasis to improving the quality and relevance of education and training to empower people for career shifts, engaging in further learning and fully participating in society through skill development. Seven flagship initiatives are designed to provide new engines to boost growth and jobs. These flagships include three of direct relevance to the WBLIC study (i) An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs (ii) Innovation Union and (iii) Youth on the Move. The initiatives are briefly summarised below.

**An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs** (Com 2011a) aims to help the EU reach its employment target for 2020: namely 75% of the working-age population (20-64 years) in work. Investment in education and training systems, anticipation of skills needs and matching and guidance services are seen as the fundamentals to raise productivity, competitiveness, economic growth and ultimately employment. Partnerships at regional and local levels between public services, education and training providers and employers, can effectively identify training needs, improve the relevance of education and training, and facilitate individuals' access to education and training. At a European level, dialogue with social partners' is seen as particularly important in achieving effective cost sharing arrangements, the provision of learning in the workplace, and on the promotion of cooperation between public sector organisations and business.

Intervention is also required to assist businesses, and particularly small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to help them develop and make the best use of competences in the workplace. The Agenda suggests that employers should be encouraged to co-invest and participate in the activities of education and training institutions, particularly in higher education. These partnerships are seen as central to the development and updating of skills profiles, multidisciplinary curricula and qualifications, and the provision of work-based learning, from apprenticeships to industrial PhDs.
Education and particularly higher education with its links to research and innovation plays a key role in developing highly skilled human capital and citizens that are needed to create jobs, economic growth and prosperity. The Innovation Union, is a flagship initiative under the Europe 2020 strategy, built around 34 specific commitments. Based on a broad concept of innovation, encompassing the private, public and third sectors, it aims at ensuring that innovative ideas are translated into new goods and services that create growth and jobs (Com 2011). It draws together investments in research, innovation and education in support of the EU’s growth agenda. In line with Europe 2020 and An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, a central element of this approach has the objective of bringing together business and academia to address innovation skills gaps through the design of new curricula and courses, developing innovative ways of delivering education and knowledge, and the modernisation of universities towards inter-disciplinary, entrepreneurship and stronger business partnerships.

A further flagship initiative, Youth on the Move (Com 2011b), has the central aim of improving young people’s education and employability by making education and training more relevant to young people’s needs. Quality education and training, successful labour market integration and more mobility of young people are a key to unlocking young people’s potential and achieving the Europe 2020 objectives.

Europe needs to raise the percentage of young people participating in higher education or equivalent to keep up with competitors in the knowledge-based economy and to foster innovation. In particular young people should benefit from the expansion of opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and from strengthened provisions for the recognition and validation of such learning within national qualifications frameworks to support entry, progression and attainment in education. It also needs to make European higher education more attractive and open to the rest of the world and promote student and researcher mobility. Youth on the Move will support the aspiration that by 2020 all young people in Europe should have the possibility to spend a part of their educational pathway abroad, including via workplace-based training (Com 2011b).

In order to maximise the contribution to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth reforms, modernisation of Higher Education is needed to (i) Increase the quantity and relevance of human capital development in higher education (ii) create effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence (iii) strengthen the knowledge training between education, research and business (Com 2011). The
knowledge triangle – the connection between HEI, research and business lies at the heart of European Commission thinking associated with a range of policy agendas including innovation, lifelong learning and competitiveness. Stimulating the development of entrepreneurial, creative and innovation skills in all disciplines in all three Bologna cycles and promoting innovation in HE through more attractive learning environments and strengthened knowledge transfer infrastructure lie at the core of the knowledge triangle. The design of new curricula and programmes, innovative ways of delivering education and knowledge and stronger business partnerships are an essential element of this policy at the University-Business Forum (http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/business_en.htm).

4 WBL IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Interest in work-based learning (WBL) has expanded over the last two decades and currently research in this area is wide ranging and interdisciplinary. The rapid change in information and communications technology, the increasing importance of the knowledge economy, growing internationalisation and globalisation as well as changes in occupational structure and the organisation of work have all challenged not only higher education institutions but also public, private and third sector employers to find new ways of ensuring that the workforce is sufficiently skilled to meet these challenges.

WBL has a long tradition in many European countries and is an emerging concept in others. In several Western European countries (e.g. Germany, Austria) it has been associated with various types of apprenticeships and effective employer-education partnerships for many years. It has also been established within Higher Education, in so far as areas such as medicine and education have included WBL as central elements in their programmes for many years. However, in several countries (e.g. Poland, Czech Republic), WBL is not reflected in the existing education and training system and there appears to be little awareness of the benefits that can be gained from the development and diffusion of this approach to learning (Cedefop 2012).

4.1 Some definitional issues

A wide range of terms are used interchangeably for the concept of WBL across Europe including work integrated learning, workplace learning, work-related learning, vocational learning, flexible learning, experiential learning, situated learning,
competence-based learning, problem-based learning and problem solving. This leads to some confusion and obfuscation associated with what WBL means and the form that WBL should take to achieve its learning outcomes. A narrow interpretation of WBL relates to learning in the workplace that is driven by employer interests whereas a broader perspective focusses on learning that relates to work and is driven by individual and societal needs.

Curriculum is increasingly seen by stakeholders as a dynamic framework guiding teaching and learning processes and as a steering mechanism for quality (Cedefop 2011). It features in key European policy documents as a new consensus for contributing to Europe 2020, the European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. To promote creativity and innovation in European societies, the council recommends using curricula as an instrument to foster more learner-centred approaches in education and training (Council of the European Union 2008 in Cedefop 2010b). Research recognises that curriculum relevance is a necessary condition for improving the human capital of learners and the retention of learners in education and training systems. An integrated curriculum is therefore a key to successfully matching education and training provision to learner and labour market needs.

The concept of an integrated curriculum is similarly open to multiple interpretation and definition. There are many definitions often highly dependent upon historical circumstances, pedagogical approaches and national contexts. For example, the concept of integrated curricula can be seen as a means of supporting student mobility as a key element of the Bologna process (Com 2012). Joint programmes and degrees have emerged and been encouraged in the post Bologna European higher education landscape. The adoption of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) has given further emphasis to the orientation on learning outcomes and transferable credits that are key dimensions of an integrated curriculum for WBL.

Bowers (2006) sees an integrated curriculum relating to the use of evidence from teachers, students and others in the design and development of curriculum. For others it involves working across faculties and disciplines to challenge pedagogy to create a new curriculum (Carlsson, 2010). A truly integrated curriculum can be seen as the intentional and coordinated overlap/interdependence in courses (including assessment and evaluation) and field experiences at the programme level and the requirement of Faculty staff to collaborate with each other to ensure alignment of
integrated programme components (Hardman, 2009). The employer and workplace dimension is highlighted by Athavale et al. (2008) who suggest that an integrated curriculum involves providing students with a better understanding of the integrative nature of business organisations. He defines an integrated curriculum as, ‘an innovative method of business education with a broad-based, multidisciplinary, organisation-centric approach’ (p.295).

For many, an integrated curriculum refers to the role that employers’ play in designing and implementing student based activities. In UK and elsewhere, universities are increasingly being asked by government and related agencies to engage employers in curriculum development (Com 2010). The Quality Assurance Agency in the UK called for employers to play a central role in identifying market demand for graduates, to contribute directly to programme design, and to participate actively in learning assessment. Universities are being asked by the government to benchmark their curricula and syllabuses against employer standards (e.g. those established by employers’ associations or professional bodies) to improve employability and to meet employer needs (Bennett and Kane, 2009).

Overall, an integrated curriculum can be developed and implemented using a variety of approaches. For some this means that skills and knowledge should first be learned at university through for example, comprehensive case studies based on a real world industry setting that can be supported by appropriate software packages (Sassan et al., 2003). For others it means that university-based simulated learning should then be followed up through experiences while on placement in real life situations (Markulis, 2005). Martin et al. (2010) suggest that integration involves the student taking what he or she has learned in the workplace, and relating it to, or incorporating it into, the next phase of academic learning when they return to the university after completing a work placement. For Korhonen-Yrjänheikkia et al. (2007) it is about programme content delivered mainly by real-life project work, which is supported with lectures, selected readings, examples from industry, group work and special workshop sessions. For others, an integrated curriculum follows the entrepreneurial path for new product development where for example, students develop a comprehensive business plan for a new consumer product idea (Athavale et al. 2008). Information and communications technology and a virtual learning environment with for example applied Wiki pages and blogs can provide the possibility for co-creation and peer-to-peer sharing during the programme and can be a feature of an integrated curriculum. All of these characteristics of curriculum pose
challenges to traditional ways of course design and delivery and those seeking to research them.

The literature suggests that the dominant approach to achieve integration is through work placement and ‘reflection’ using for example, reflective journals and assignments (Bowers, 2006). The incorporation of work experience into any curriculum requires students to receive learning support throughout the programme of study so that they might engage in the process of ‘reflective learning’ (Fidgeon, 2010). An integrated curriculum needs to balance vocational interests in terms of, for example skills, attitudes and knowledge that are judged to be important for the world of work and the higher level critical thinking skills associated with academic learning. Adopting a ‘learning outcomes' or competencies based approach when developing curricula, valuing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process is seen by many European countries as an effective way to enhance employability and promote active learning and inclusive teaching (Cedefop 2010b).

4.2 A changing curriculum

The way in which curriculum is understood and theorised has altered over many years and it still remains contested territory. The concept of curriculum has become broader, increasingly changing from a static document indicating the subject knowledge to be acquired at the completion of an academic year, towards a dynamic comprehensive framework embracing occupational standards and defining learning outcomes, assessment procedures and teaching and training methods. This evolution explains why today there is little agreement on where curriculum ends and education, learning and training begin (Psifidou, 2009 in Cedefop 2010b).

Two major trends are apparent in curriculum reform across Europe (Cedefop 2010b). The first is ‘enrichment’ of curricula, meaning that the number of parameters addressed by curricular is increasing. Whereas curricula traditionally tended to be similar to syllabuses, reflecting in an objective way the body of knowledge to be transmitted, they are now increasingly perceived as policy instruments setting the framework for education and training stakeholders, including not only lecturers and learners but other stakeholders in society. A key aspect of WBLIC is the direct involvement of employers in curriculum design, development and implementation. Employer involvement can range from hosting a period of work experience to delivery of higher level education in the workplace. Whilst much WBL is informal, some
proponents suggest that WBLIC associated with higher education should be associated with an academic qualification or at least an industry recognised credential as it affords those in employment the opportunity to update and improve their higher level skills by obtaining credits for negotiated learning undertaken predominantly in the workplace.

Adopting a learning outcomes approach when developing curricula, valuing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process is seen by many European countries as an effective way to avoid potential supply and demand mis-matches and promote active learning and inclusive teaching. For HEI providers and employers, outcome-oriented curricula can offer a valuable platform for bridging the worlds of education, training and work, providing a common language between competences acquired in learning and the needs of occupations in the labour market. To assist achievement of learning outcomes determined in a participatory process, guiding principles in teaching and assessment and concrete examples or ‘best practices’ are provided in the curricula.

The second trend is enhanced flexibility, which is intended to open up more individualised learning paths contributing to a more learner-centred system. Learning outcomes increase flexibility through modularisation of curricula and the autonomy granted to educators to develop and implement learning programmes. Curricula focussed on outcomes represent a new approach to public management contrasting with the former regulation of learning processes via inputs (such as content, duration and methods of teaching) and a focus on outcomes-based quality assurance. These two trends can be observed to varying degrees in countries across Europe. Different approaches can be traced back to the particular aims of curriculum reforms and the specific structure, aims, traditions and values of national VET systems.

Research by Cedefop (2010b) reveals a trend towards a more demand-driven VET system, in which modularisation is a key element in increasing learner opportunity to select learning pathways and programmes according to their preferences and needs. Besides this institutional dimension of a learner-centred system, changes in teaching and learning methods also reveal a tendency to put the learner at the centre of the learning process. Active learning methods are increasingly promoted through written curricula. This shift from teaching to learning is supported through the prescription of compulsory learning arrangements (e.g. interdisciplinary projects, work-based learning periods) through regulations concerning assessment methods, and through guidance and support materials for lecturers and trainers. However the pace of
change towards this type of employer or labour market provision is gradual and mixed within and between countries.

4.3 Role of regulation and legislation

To take this policy agenda forward, there is a strong need for flexible, innovative learning approaches and delivery methods to improve quality and relevance of provision while expanding student numbers to widen participation and reduce drop out and the legal frameworks adopted at the national level create the preconditions for the implementation of WBL through flexible higher education studies (Cedefop, 2012). This commonly means that legislation expressly enables higher education institutions to provide programmes under flexible study arrangements related to for example part-time study, modes of delivery and/or accreditation of prior learning. In Finland for example, Universities of Applied Science (UAS) commonly offer e-learning possibilities as well as opportunities for evening or week-end tuition. UAS have a regulatory obligation to engage with industry. In several countries (e.g. England, Poland) the decision to offer part-time provision and accreditation of prior learning is left to the discretion of individual HEIs which can choose to connect with employers to varying degrees. Similarly in most countries in Europe, employers have discretion and only very limited legal obligations associated with the offer of continuing education and training of their employees.

The regulatory environment associated with part-time study, APEL and collective measures to encourage employers to support the education of their workers are explored below.

4.3.1 Part-time study

Alongside the status of a full-time student, the majority of countries formally recognise at least one additional student status. In countries formally distinguishing between full-time students and students with other statuses, the most common alternative student status is the status of a part-time student. However, countries that formally recognise a part-time student status do not necessarily define it in the same way. Most commonly, the definition of a part-time student status is based on the workload of students, often measured in ECTS credit points. The identification of part-time students can also be expressed in study hours/weeks, rather than in ECTS credit points. National policy documents related to higher education expressly refer to the possibility to offer part-time studies, but it is up to individual higher education
institutions to define requirements related to the part-time student status. It is likely that this also applies to several countries, where the formal part-time status exists, but no definition is provided.

On the demand-side, study leave provided by employers is an additional scheme to support adults who want to embark on formal education and training while in employment. In several countries, adult learners benefit from specific provisions for study leave. One of the basic differences in the provision of study leave amongst EU countries is the categories of employees (full time/part-time/temporary) who are covered. The length of study leave varies significantly across Europe. For example in Austria, employers and employees may agree on a period of study leave lasting between three and twelve months. Finland allows employees to take time off work for educational purposes for a total of two years within a period of five. However, the employer is entitled to postpone the study leave if the start time chosen by the employee would seriously disadvantage the employer’s.

4.3.2 Recognition of prior learning

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is referred to under a variety of different names and abbreviations – experiential learning, assessment of prior (and experiential) learning, validation of learning through experience, recognition, validation & accreditation all of which reflect and mirror the slightly different conceptions behind them.

RPL refers to the recognition of previous/current experience of learning outcomes as a valid form of learning by HEIs which may count towards the recruitment criteria or particular units associated with a learning programme. It is an essential part of an effective lifelong learning system. The objective to increase the number and diversity of the student population goes hand in hand with the need to create an institutional environment that values the recruitment of non-traditional learners and pays particular attention to student retention in the higher education system.

According to the Bologna Process Implementation Report, twenty higher education systems in Europe have reached relatively developed national procedures, guidelines and policies in RPL whilst sixteen have not commenced any systemic activities or developed them in a very limited way (Eurydice 2012).

Legal frameworks in nation states regulate APL in different ways and to a different extent. In some countries, legislation refers to alternative access to higher education
in a relatively open way, i.e. it does not refer to any specific categories of non-traditional learners or to any approaches to be used in alternative admission procedures (e.g. Finland). Regulatory frameworks can also be more prescriptive and provide further details relating to various aspects, including the categories of learners who are eligible or methods and approaches that should be used when evaluating the knowledge and skills of non-traditional applicants (e.g. Germany and Spain).

There are also countries, where legislation does not specifically refer to the validation of prior non formal and informal learning in the field of higher education (e.g. UK, Poland). In these countries APL is often at the discretion of individual HEIs (EC 2011). In the UK support has been provided to boost the implementation of alternative entry routes into higher education through the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which has published a code of practice, specifying a range of evidence that may be considered in judging the potential of a prospective non-traditional student. According to the document, the evidence might include all prior learning of candidates, including that achieved in the workplace.

4.3.3 Legal obligations for continuing education and training

In many countries, employers have only very limited legal obligations for the continuing education and training of their employees. Therefore, any contribution employers make is usually down to company policy, industry/business sector initiatives or agreements between the employer and the employee. However, in the majority of countries, if the employer has requested the employee to undertake a specific education or training programme, the employer must usually meet the costs. In some countries, companies must make mandatory contributions to collective funds for the continuing education and training of adults. The funds collected through these contributions are often used to finance not only non-formal education and training activities, but also formal programmes.

4.4 Establishing a baseline

The evidence base to assess the progress of WBL in Europe, and vocational education more generally is in need of considerable development (CEDEFOP 2008).

4.4.1 The supply side

Whilst there are lots of examples of HEI engagement with WBL (e.g. Cedefop 2011a), baselines and benchmarks are difficult to establish at the European level. In
terms of WBL as a means of access to Higher Education it would seem to play a minor role in most European countries. Alternative pathways into higher education generally account for a small proportion of all entries (up to 5%) in most European countries (Eurydice 2011). Only the United Kingdom (England) reports a significantly higher proportion of those who enter higher education through non-traditional entry routes (around 28% of all entries). The role of APEL appears to be mixed and relatively small scale. The majority of access routes to higher education rely on traditional academic routes and qualifications. Recent research (Eurostudent, 2011) reports that most European countries do not provide any systematic opportunities to enter higher education without a standard upper secondary school leaving qualification.

Comparisons between nations should be undertaken with caution however Eurostudent research reports several countries with few if any part time students and a small number of countries with more than a quarter of students reported as being part-time (Eurydice 2012).

Auzinger et al. (2012) draw on information provided by partners in the Erasmus funded WBLIC project to review the state of play of Work-based learning in Europe. They conclude that WBL in Higher Education is at very different levels throughout Europe. The extent of WBL is highly variable and difficult to quantify both within and between member states. In some member states work based learning in higher education appears to be emergent (as in Spain) or re-emerging (as in Czech Republic and Poland). In others such as Austria, England, Finland and Germany it has become established relatively recently (last couple of decades)².

In several countries a distinction between traditional HEIs and more recently formed universities (those formed in the last 20 years) is identified. Discourse is influenced by an elitist view of education which tends to see WBL as an inferior form of education. Work based learning integrated into curricula is most frequently found in the more recently formed Universities (e.g. Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria and Finland, post-92 universities in England) rather than the more traditional universities where the emphasis of education retains a strong academic focus.

² [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=--pAkpqgL8Sc&pg=PA38&lpg=PA38&dq=Work+based+learning+OECD&source=bl&ots=wyGnxxHKMj&sip=yVyHkt6PqYhuOTvwVcTv2dRQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=qKA4UZ7MGcLKPb2YgdgJ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwADgK#v=onepage&q=Work%20based%20learning%20OECD&f=false] OECD table on % young in work and education
In Germany ‘work integrated learning’ in Higher Education is considered ‘extremely rare, or probably almost absent’ (Hartmann and Light 2010, p34). However, both Germany and Austria provide a relatively broad array of dual studies which are offered by Vocational Academies and Universities of Applied Science (UAS). These typically consist of blocks of theoretical studies and practical training, each block lasting several weeks. In Germany, there are between 700 and 900 dual study courses (3 year Bachelor’s degree programmes) offered by Vocational Academies and UAS. In Austria, work placements are mandatory for students of Bachelor’s and diploma degree programmes at Austrian UAS. Enterprise projects (e.g. for Bachelor and Master theses) are increasingly common.

It appears that amongst the WBLIC partners, an integrated curriculum is least developed in Spain, where WBL activity has largely focussed on student placements. There is little evidence of joint curriculum design or delivery. The national regulatory context invariably inhibits or supports WBLIC. For example, new Higher Education Legislation in Czech Republic is expected to promote the division of HEIs into research and non-research universities and to increase the involvement of employers in university education (e.g. through mandatory work placements). New national regulation in Spain places an increased emphasis on placements and their quality assurance however only a few take into account that this can be followed through new learning methods with a special focus on WBL (Auzinger et al., 2012).

A national regulatory framework supports or incentivises partnerships between employers and HEIs in a variety of ways beyond work placements. For example, national regulations guide a highly structured communication processes in Austria in order to ensure that education and training services adapt and reflect developments in the labour market. This communication process is based on a permanent dialogue with relevant stakeholders. In Finland, national regulations dictate that about 25% of the curriculum should include work-based learning (e.g. work placements, work-place problem solving activities, simulation and thesis work) in UAS.

Among WBLIC partners, WBL as an integrated curriculum appears to be most prevalent in England where HEIs have the freedom and flexibility to develop their own programmes. However, it would appear to remain a relatively small part of the whole Higher Education system in England.
4.4.2 The demand-side

A recent report on learning and enterprises in Europe (CEDEFOP 2012) provides some indication of learning activity in organisations on a pan European level. However, the analysis is limited for the purposes of our study of accredited learning in Higher Education as the research adopts an inclusive definition of workplace learning which embraces both off the job training and informal learning in the workplace at a range of levels. Whilst this captures the richness of workplace learning through for example job rotation, coaching, challenging work tasks as well as more formal training, it does not isolate and report on accredited learning provided through Higher Education Institutions. Nevertheless the report draws some conclusions of considerable relevance namely that ‘although research suggests that there are positive relations between work organisation, workplace learning and innovation, awareness and use of these relations seems to be low in many European countries’ (Cedefop 2012, p.95).

The proportion of enterprises providing some kind of training is a key indicator of the contribution of the workplace to learning. According to the latest available published data (Cedefop, 2011) the countries with the highest share of enterprises providing continuing training were Denmark (85%), Austria (81%), Sweden (78%), and Finland (77%). A North-South/West-East divide in terms of enterprise commitment to training is identified, with Greece (21%), Bulgaria (29%), Italy (32%) and Poland (35%), among the lower performers. Although the share of enterprises providing training was in general lower in Eastern Europe, some of the newer Member States’ companies had started to shape human resources strategies, slowly acknowledging training as an important business development factor, partly influenced by training models of transnational companies in these countries.

Employers make a considerable investment in continuing and professionally-oriented upgrading of already achieved higher education qualifications across Europe although there is little evidence of the scale and scope of such activity. Eurydice (2012) reports that at least half of the EHEA countries make a direct reference to continuing professional development of those working in regulated professions (e.g. teachers, medical doctors, etc.). Other types of activities include tailor-made provision for industry/companies and other external partners, however relatively few countries are involved in this type of provision.
Overall in most European countries, enterprises invested less in training, as a share of total labour cost and per employee, than five years before (Cedefop 2011). In Western and Northern Europe, lower expenditure in training, together with a deterioration of training indicators, such as participation by employees and intensity of the training provided in terms of hours, calls for action at policy and sector levels to ensure that investment in human capital is advanced. However, other research findings give a less pessimistic picture of employer investment in training. According to the first results of the 5th European working conditions survey, training funded by employers reached its highest level in the last 15 years, with 34% of employees participating in training within the 12 months prior to the survey (Eurofound, 2010). The negative trend observed between 2000 and 2005 was reversed, with an increase in on-the-job training from 24% in 2005 to 30% in 2010.

A survey of more than 1000 individual workers across several European states explored learning and skills development at work (Brown et al. 2010). The findings show the breadth and depth of activity relevant to WBL (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you acquire your knowledge and skills to perform your current or last job? Please tick all that apply (in percentages) (n=1148)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your studies or initial training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional training in your current work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed /self-initiated learning inside or outside the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through work by carrying out challenging tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through life experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning from others at work</td>
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<td>Learning from networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Learning through self-directed or self-initiated learning inside or outside the workplace was highlighted by more than half of the respondents. Studies and initial training are identified as a source of knowledge and skills by almost three quarters of respondents.
The survey and the literature review conducted for the study (Brown et al., 2010) emphasised how developing a proactive approach to career development is associated with employees being given encouragement, time and space to engage in self-directed learning and critical reflection, although the role of the employer is implicit and largely absent in the analysis. Whilst acknowledging the value of learning while working, a number of survey respondents also realised that such learning was an insufficient basis for personal professional development. Brown et al. conclude that a more systematic and substantive approach to WBL such as those offered through accredited higher education is required to lead to transformative change in career trajectories.

The development of WBL challenges traditional models and metrics associated with the Quality Assurance of Higher Education. Research³ by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education reports variety and dynamism as distinctive features of the European system. The accreditation and evaluation of programmes are the most common approaches adopted followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions. No single model for external quality assurance in European higher education is in place let alone a system for the external quality assurance of WBL.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The European policy context is favorably disposed towards WBL at this time given the significant role that higher education systems are seen to have to play in the transition towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. However the analysis contained in this report suggests that the nature and prevalence of WBL at the European and national levels is difficult to capture. This is partly due to the fact that WBL is seldom reported on as a distinct entity in strategic policy documents at the European and national levels. Where WBL does feature it does not allow a full understanding of its nature in the higher education context nor its incidence or funding.

Cross country comparisons are also fraught with difficulty given the conceptual ambiguity and methodological complexity in this field. There is considerable variation in the legislative and regulatory frameworks governing HEIs in different member states and this impact’s on the development and implementation of WBL. WBL in HE
appears most prevalent where the legislative framework provides HEIs with the autonomy necessary to develop and accredit higher education programmes at the institutional level.

Despite conceptual differences in understanding WBL within and between member states, some forms of it (notably work placements) have been a critical element of the higher vocational education syllabuses for several years and are becoming increasingly more prevalent. However, the extent to which the work placements are developed to accommodate new learning methods associated with WBL is contested. Furthermore, in order to gain a picture of the scale and scope of WBL activity, data relating specifically to different types of work placement (e.g. nature, duration) and other forms of WBL (such as bespoke provision) in the HE context is in need of further development at the national and European levels.

At the heart of the distinctive nature of WBLIC is the role of the external organization (e.g. employer or labour market intermediary organisations) as a partner with the HEI and the individual learner in the planning of learning activities that are responsive to the needs of a specific workplace. This contests the supremacy of the role of the HEI in curriculum design and validation of knowledge and challenges conventional approaches to education to varying degrees within and between countries. In some countries regulation is in place to support partnership working between HEIs and industry and curriculum development. In other countries a voluntary system is in operation and HEIs often face considerable challenges in engaging employers in curriculum development and delivery.

A key first step in enhancing the flexibility of higher education is the development of part-time provision. The research reports that the majority of member states have established an official student status other than a full time student. However, the incidence of part-time study is variable between member states with some countries reporting no part time students and others reporting more than a quarter of all students as part-time. The evidence suggests a different age profile for part-time students with mature students more likely to pursue this type of learning and this makes a positive contribution to the culture of lifelong.

A further aspect of flexibility in HE is the RPL. The research suggests that a large number of EHEA countries have developed a relatively well established system of

RPL. At the same time, a similar proportion has not yet started their activities in this field. A relatively small number of countries are at an intermediary stage. This would appear to suggest that despite considerable policy attention to RPL, further work is required to develop and embed it in many national contexts.

The development of WBL challenges traditional models and metrics associated with the quality assurance of higher education. However, no single model for external quality assurance at the European level is in place and variety and dynamism characterizes the approach across Europe.

This review has identified major information gaps associated with WBL in Europe. There is a need for a common framework to capture the incidence of essential characteristics of a range of forms of WBL. WBL (or flexible learning or whichever label is agreed) holds the key to unlocking the potential of HEIs to make a greater contribution to a smarter, more inclusive Europe and investment in the evidence base to monitor its development and implementation over time should be a policy priority for governments at the national and European levels.

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6 REFERENCES


