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Enhancing Employer-University Partnerships for Work-Based Learning: Policies, Perspectives and Practices

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Responding to Employers: Moving into the Mainstream
De Montfort University 11th June 2010

Coalitions in vogue?



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- New perspectives
- New practices
- New partnerships



Guardian May 12th 2010; Photograph: Lefteris Pitarakis/AP

HE Academy Report

‘Integrating employers in effective support for student work-based learning (WBL): an evidence base to inform innovative policy and practice’

McEwen, L. J., Mason O’Connor, K., Williams, C. and Higson, H. E. (2008)

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/evidence_informed_practice/integrating_work_based_learning



INTEGRATING EMPLOYERS IN
EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR STUDENT
WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL)
AN EVIDENCE BASE TO INFORM
INNOVATIVE POLICY AND PRACTICE

FINAL REPORT FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY

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Aims today



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- To enhance student WBL
- To encourage critical reflection on policies and practices to bring employers into the mainstream of Higher Education
- To share key outcomes from our research into employer engagement in WBL (e.g. good practice in planning)

Structure today

**Research
design**



Policies

- National policy context
- Institutional survey



Perspectives

- Stakeholder voices
- Examples for discussion



Practices

- Good practice in engaging employers

‘I wouldn’t want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality.....what I say ought to be taken as ‘propositions’..... they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc...’ (Foucault, 1991, pp 90-91)



Presentation interspersed with questions for immediate response and longer reflection; recognising expertise of conference participants

Research design



Caveats

- Caution about the term '**employer**' as a category (Gleeson and Keep 2004).
- Caution about '**perspectives**'
'There is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event.'
(Merriam 2009)



Stage 1:
Literature and policy
review

Stage 2:
National HEI
survey

Stage 3
Focus groups

Stage 4
Expert seminar

Stage 5
Digital stories

Methodology

- Skills agenda
- Quality Enhancement
- Widening participation
- Higher Ambitions
- New technologies
- Sustainability
- Internationalisation
- Engaged University

Mapping the policies



Skills agenda

- ‘strengthen employer voice.and better articulate employer views on skills’
- ‘a step change in liaison between employers and HEIs.’

(Leitch, 2006)



**Prosperity for all
in the global economy
- world class skills**

Final Report

December 2006

Quality Enhancement

‘Employer engagement is an area of increasing importance to the strategic development of higher education institutions’

QAA (March, 2010)

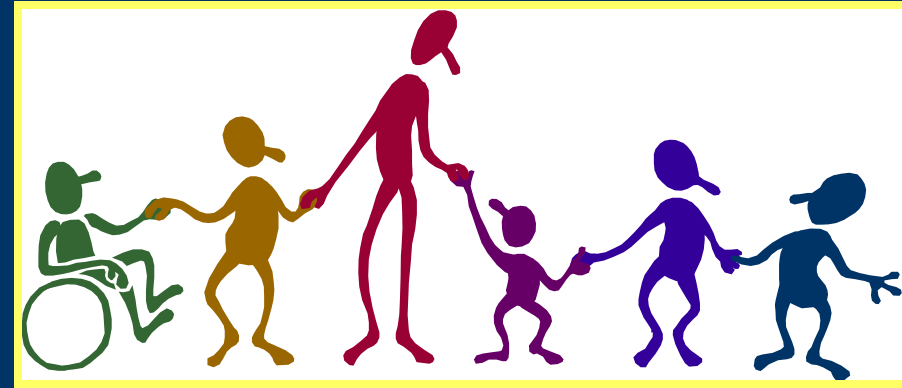


Widening participation



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‘Institutions should see work-based learning as an innovative pedagogy, not something to do with training ... or a bit of work experience,’ he said. ‘For many ... it provides an attractive option that contributes to diversity and wider participation in higher education.’ (Longhurst, Foundation Degrees Forward, in Fearn, THES May 2009)



Higher Ambitions



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‘We give priority to growing a diverse range of models of higher education. These include option such as part-time and workplace – based courses.’ (Mandelson, 2009)



'Edgeless University'



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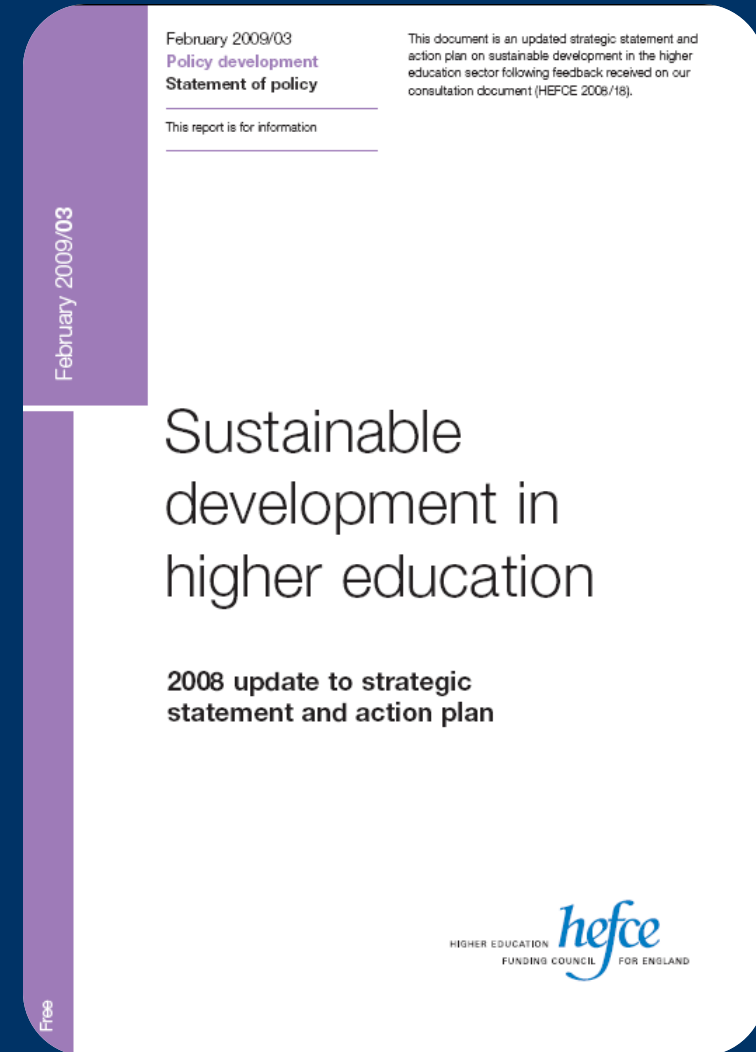
'Current ways of working are unsustainable. We are entering a period of critical change in which UK institutions will need to adapt to survive.' (Demos, 2009)

the edgeless
university
why higher
education
must embrace
technology

Peter Bradwell

Sustainability

‘HE makes the country more competitive by supporting a knowledge economy. By supporting workforce development, universities and colleges work in partnership with employers to develop skills and qualities that they and their employees need to build business success and wider economic productivity and growth.’ (HEFCE, 2008)





Internationalisation

‘Internationalisation.....
underpins a number of
other agendas, in
particular, employability,
mobility, lifelong learning
and curriculum
development.’



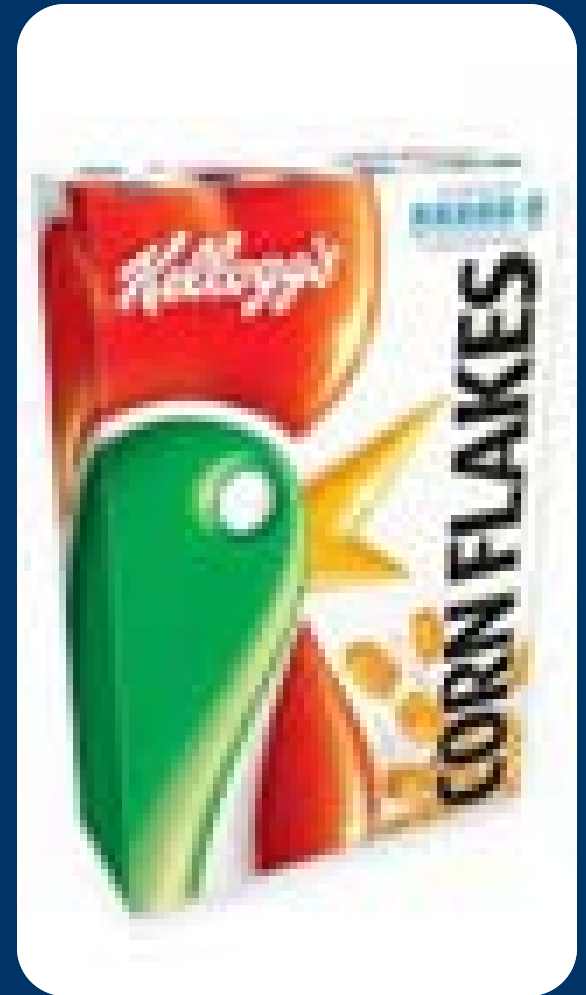
Sheppard and Bellis (2009) *The Bologna Process: Supporting the Internationalisation of higher education in the UK.*

‘Engaged’ University



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‘Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity.’
(Kellogg Foundation, 1999)



HEI Institutional policies



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- key findings

- 54 UK HEIs completed questionnaires (39% response rate).
- 54.7% considered that they were engaged in well developed WBL activity in a range of areas across their institution
- 39% of institutions have discipline-based policies on WBL. More than half either do not know (17.8%) or do not have (35.7%) discipline-based WBL policies.
- 20% indicated that their institutions do not provide support for employers.

Inhibitors to effective employer engagement

- financial constraints (costs)
- credibility (demonstrable value to employer and employee)
- student support in the workforce
- lack of HEI flexibility and responsiveness (too slow, too static)
- complexity (complicated systems and bureaucracy)

(see HEFCE, 2008)



Inhibitors to effective employer engagement

- lack of relevance
- lack of a common language and understanding
- employers' perceived outdated nature of the curriculum
- time (unrelenting pressures of change means that employers do not necessarily have time to create and sustain a stronger climate of learning in the organisation)

(see HEFCE, 2008)





- *What forms of employer 'support' would be most effective in your institution?*
- *How would you judge effectiveness?*

Employer



Perspectives



Student



HEI
staff

From 'support' to 'engagement'



1. Effective employer engagement
2. Effective HEI engagement
3. Effective student engagement
4. Ensuring communication
5. Managing expectations
6. Exploring value

Key
themes

Perspectives on 'effective employer engagement'



*'Everyone else is getting performance appraisals within the company but because I was a placement student I didn't seem to get that kind of review but I thought if I'm part of the organisation surely ...It wasn't till like my last day that my manager said "**you've done a great job during this year**". Knowing that right at the end was great but think what else could I have done in that time if I was mentored properly?'*

Perspectives on 'effective employer engagement'



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It is great when they do something that would actually help the employer (in their dissertation or project). We tried it with some of our students, some of our events management students... something that actually shows some benefit for the employer.'

It would just be good to see what exactly it is (HEIs) are doing... it would be good to get a real insight into what you do and the sort of students you are working with and perhaps see how we can help you and you can help us to target those students that we are looking for.'

Perspectives on 'effective employer engagement'



Perspectives on 'managing expectations'



'My boss didn't even know we were allowed time off to do the essay – apparently we were allowed two days... I got an email from my tutor saying I really need to see you, you are going to have two days and my boss didn't know anything about, and my boss said I had to take it out my annual leave when the university had put it in the booklet.'

Perspectives on 'managing expectations'



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'I think employers want to know what they're expected to do with students.

They want to know what level of contact to have with them that sort of stuff....perhaps we could specify that more closely and tie it in with the competencies framework that we have.'

'Universities need to get a lot more specific about the objectives of what they want students to achieve, what the university is expecting to get out of it and about what the student should expect to get out of it – e.g. core skills and core competencies, critical thinking et cetera.'

Perspectives on 'managing expectations'



Perspectives on 'value'



'The impact on your learning as well... I've learnt more this year than I've done over the whole of the first two years ... the clarity of things, it's just a lot clearer. I've actually felt like I've learnt it and not just been assessed ... I feel like I understand it completely. I think if I hadn't gone on placement... I might have done ok but not understood it to the level I do now.'

Perspectives on 'value'



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*When students come back,
they are transformed in terms
of confidence and maturity and
so on...'*

... they do a really great job and they bring in some really good new ideas to people like me that have been doing this a few years – a fresh pair of eyes does a lot of good.'

'(there is a) huge cost to organisations that in this day and age do not have huge spare capacity so everyone is stretched doing their day job to actually give up time to actually help placement students. It is a "big ask" whether it's small or large (employers).'

Perspectives on 'value'





*How does your course/ institution hear/
learn from employers?*

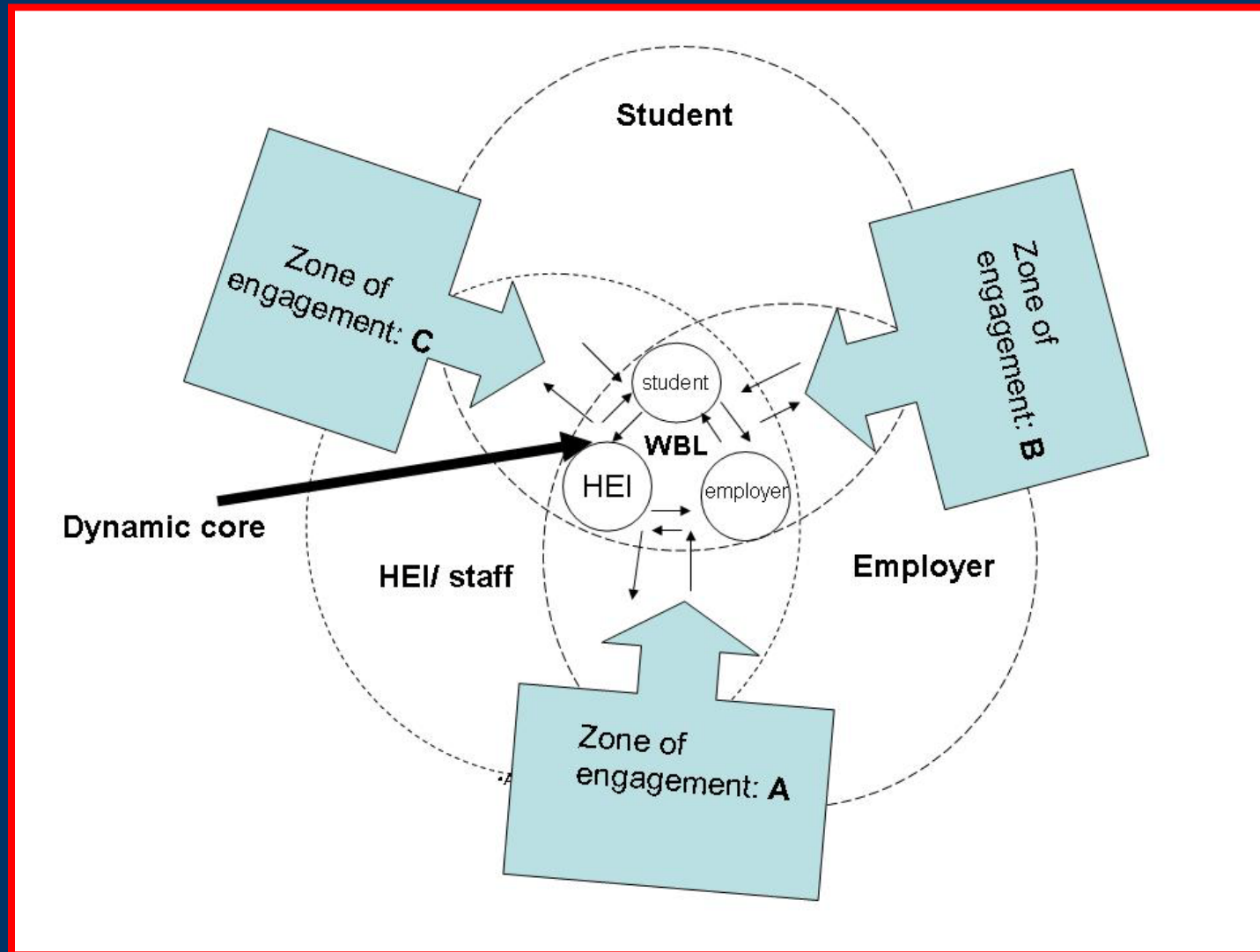
Practice



'Zones of engagement'



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Looking at the three 'zones of engagement', what strategic and operational activities provide a backdrop to WBL in your institution?

Employer engagement: planning for good practice



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1. Planning collaboratively
2. Planning structurally
3. Planning for expectations
4. Planning informed by values
5. Planning for responsibilities
6. Planning for meaningful learning
7. Planning aimed at 'best fit'
8. Planning for student preparation
9. Planning for reflection
10. Planning for entitlement

Towards a Baseline Entitlement for Employer Engagement in WBL

Employers :

1. Having the opportunity for involvement in academic courses
2. Receiving clear guidance on how WBL element fits with wider academic programme
3. Being entitled to opportunities for dialogue
4. Being involved in the HEI tutor visit of WBL students
5. Agreeing with HEIs their precise responsibilities to students
6. Knowing key HEI contacts and responsiveness times

Baseline entitlements (cont.)



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7. Receiving information about a student's prior learning achievements
8. Having opportunities for training and updating shared with the HEI (e.g. working with student diversity/special needs; new approaches to learning and teaching; developing reflective practice and new learning technologies)
9. Receiving and discussing formal assessment feedback from HEIs and WBL students
10. Having opportunities to help the student to reflect on their WBL/placement experience and learning objectives.

Enhancing Employer-University Partnerships for Work-Based Learning

Borrowing from principles of Maddison and Laing (2007) about community engagement.

Employer engagement:

‘nationally and globally has some common elements, it takes a particular form, and is context-dependent – arising for institutions from their individual histories and locations, and from their view about their strategic position.’





We offer two possible propositions (planning guidelines and baseline entitlements for employers)



We propose these as: 'game openings' where those who may be interested are invited to join in (Foucault, 1991).

- *My placement was a life changing experience and it was worth more than the mark I got from the essay that I had to write.’ (student)*
- *‘Handing over the Placement booklet is not enough!’ (HEI staff)*
- *‘It’s not so much about guidance; I think it’s just about engagement. I think its about the dialogue continuing.’ (employer)*

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