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Bridging Work-Based Education and the Labour Market

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Abstract of Keynote Speech

Higher education (HE) institutions has an important and proactive role in society. They participate in creating new knowledge, in transferring it to students, re-training employees in companies, and can be fostering service and product innovations. Thus, the HEIs cannot work isolated from the surrounding world. In concrete collaboration between labour market and HEs takes place at different levels in HE: policy, institutional and individual.

At policy level the collaboration between HE and businesses refers international and national strategy papers. In EU the HE – world of work -collaboration has been in the EU's Agenda for "Modernising Higher Education" (Healy, Perkmann, Goddard, & Kemp-ton 2014). The EU policy paper reaches the level of individual by referring the importance of pedagogical skills and the development of courses relevant to social and labour market needs (High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education 2013). At institutional level, collaboration refers to an impact on graduates' employability and to making the studies more working life relevant, by producing competent workforce. This asks for identifying the strategical clients and partners and making the contracts between the partners indicating the collaboration actions and benefits for both sites. In the individual level cooperation is embedded in various pedagogical practices and curriculum solutions developed by teachers in collaboration with labour market actors (Kallioinen 2008). Griffiths and Guile (2003) have analysed cooperation between HE and enterprises related to the curriculums. They found four forms of collaboration and concluded to present an ideal fifth form as a solution. Characteristic to this fifth form, which can be called 'partnership', is continuity, trust, mutual aims, boundary-crossing and the development of shared activities. In this form all the actors share the same aims and work towards them together, by using their own skills and competences as in a Community of Practice –model developed by Lave and Wenger 1991. For students, study processes that timeliness intertwine school-based and work-based learning, are motivating, while they can test and assess theories in practice, practice complex skills and develop deep conceptual understanding together with participating into the communities of practice.

This paper describes three separate surveys analysing the collaboration between HE and labour market. And according to the results, discusses the benefits and practices of the collaboration especially from the social and health care education aspect.

The data in all the surveys were collected by using internet poll and were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. First survey was sent to the members of a trade union, who were graduated from the universities of applied sciences (UAS) Finland (N=5405) (Väänänen, Laitinen-Väänänen, & Vanhanen-Nuutinen 2013) as part of a national development project. This survey indicated that collaboration with social and health care is mainly based on internship and thesis-processes and the collaboration with HE helps to recruit new employee, gain new knowledge and competences. However, the alumni's role in supporting the collaboration was minimal.

Second survey focused on analysing the entrepreneurs' opinions on the collaboration between companies and the UASes in Finland (N=1488) (Vanhanen-Nuutinen, Laitinen-Väänänen, & Ahmaniemi 2013). The results showed that the UASs have a positive impact on regional competitiveness, employment and entrepreneurship. In addition, the UASs strengthened the regional appeal and improved recognition and development of the business sector in the region. Compared to the respondents of small companies, micro-companies and sole entrepreneurs, the medium-sized companies had more experience and a larger variety of cooperation. The third survey focused on the analysing the current situation in collaboration between universities and business world in Russian (N=548) (Laitinen-Väänänen, Shashkin, Aristova & Shishkina 2014). It was conducted as a baseline study in larger EU-funded project aiming at improving the collaboration in four university. The survey revealed that more typical collaboration partner was a private company instead of public organisation or non-governmental organisation. Furthermore, the survey indicated that students and alumni were not as satisfied on the collaboration as teachers and working life respondents. Accordingly, there seemed to be a need for increasing the joint projects between universities and regional companies according to both the teachers, the last year students and the world of work.

Even though, the presented results are not comparative due the selected samples and variation among the survey questionnaires, it can be concluded that collaboration between HE and labour market exists.

Still, it can be asked that is the collaboration strategically directed and are the teachers aware of various kinds of pedagogical methods and do they own skills to implement the collaboration into the teaching and learning practices.

In addition, it can be argued that is the labour market aware enough of the possibilities the HE can offer in renewing the services and practices especially in the field of social and health care.

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