

NVAO O THE NETHERLANDS

A ROUTE MAP FOR HIGH-QUALITY WORK-BASED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DIALOGUE MODEL FOR THE QUALITY
OF WORK-BASED LEARNING IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

1 APRIL 2022



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Foreword

The NVAO is pleased to present *A Route Map for High-Quality Work-based Learning in Higher Education*. NVAO has observed that in both Belgium Flanders and The Netherlands higher education institutions are working ever more intensively with the professional field, with regard to both the design and implementation of degree programmes.

Learning is increasingly taking place in the workplace. NVAO and experts in work-based learning have developed guidelines that are based on a broad review of work-based learning in general. These guidelines can be used by higher education institutions and assessment panels to safeguard the quality of degree programmes that incorporate work-based learning.

These guidelines are not part of an NVAO assessment framework, but are intended to inspire, guide and advise. They can therefore be regarded as a travel guide containing tips for travellers and, as with a travel guide, it is up to the traveller to select the information that inspires them.

NVAO would like to sincerely thank those experts from Belgium Flanders and The Netherlands who have generously contributed their time and expertise in helping create the guide: *A Route Map for High-Quality Work-based Learning in Higher Education*.

On behalf of the NVAO Executive Board,
Drs. S.P. van den Eijnden
(Chair)

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Introduction

NVAO¹ has, as regulator of the quality of higher education in the Netherlands, witnessed a shift in recent years in the design and implementation of degree programmes, which are increasingly developed in partnership with work organisations. Learning is therefore increasingly taking place in the workplace².

Education and work are however two different worlds, each with its own logic: the logic of learning and the logic of working (De Bruijn et al., 2017b; De Bruijn & Westerhuis, 2016; Nieuwenhuis & Van Woerkom, 2007). The differences between higher education and the workplace mean that the two sectors need to work together to design high-quality education that helps students³ to bridge these two worlds of learning and work (Wesselink & Zitter, 2017).

The shift taking place in higher education towards a mix of campus-based *and* work-based learning has led assessment panels in particular to wonder how they should assess such programmes. Although work-based learning has become an important part of degree programmes over the past few decades, it is difficult to demonstrate the contribution that learning in the workplace makes to a student's education. After all, participation in the day-to-day activities of a certain occupation does not automatically equip students with the professional competences required (Hoeve et al., 2021).

To answer the assessment panels' question, NVAO and experts in work-based learning have developed guidelines that are based on a broad review of work-based learning in general. These guidelines can be used by higher education institutions (HEI) to safeguard the quality of degree programmes that incorporate work-based learning. This concerns part-time, full-time and dual associate, bachelor's and master's degree programmes. The guidelines focus on the following target groups:

- assessment panel members responsible for assessing degree programmes that incorporate work-based learning;
- providers of degree programmes that are interested in developing work-based learning.

¹ www.nvao.net

² Workplace: a place in a work organisation in which a student learns.

³ The term 'student' includes anyone who is following a degree programme (associate, bachelor's or master's degree) that partly takes place in the workplace.

1 Theoretical framework

1.1 Background to the guidelines

These guidelines can be regarded as a travel guide containing tips for travellers and, as with a travel guide, it is up to the traveller to select the information that inspires them. The guidelines are therefore not part of an NVAO assessment framework, but are intended to inspire, guide and advise.

There are various definitions of work-based learning, and the term can be considered from different perspectives. Here, we consider work-based learning from a pedagogic-didactic perspective. Work-based learning gives students the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge required for a particular profession. Often, it is embedded in a series of practice-based situations that are incorporated into the degree programme. These situations give the student the opportunity to practice and independently demonstrate gradually more complex and authentic professional skills.

1.2 Definition of work-based learning

In work-based learning, students learn in the workplace by completing authentic tasks that are relevant to the profession. These are tasks that combine theoretical and practical knowledge. Students learn from, and during interactions with, professionals in the workplace while being closely supervised by lecturers from the HEI. These may be professionals with a formal supervisory role or professionals who provide informal student supervision.

Work-based learning always takes place within the student - workplace - HEI/degree programme triangle. These three parties have an investment in work-based learning based on their own interests, tasks and responsibilities. The challenge with work-based learning is to combine the degree programme, the workplace and the student perspectives in such a way that it is clear which activities the students can carry out in a particular workplace to learn what they need to learn (Timmermans & Kroeze, 2021).

1.3 Parties involved in work-based learning

Work-based learning always involves some form of cooperation between the student, the workplace and the HEI. How intensive this cooperation is depends on how the workplace and the degree programme design the work-based learning.

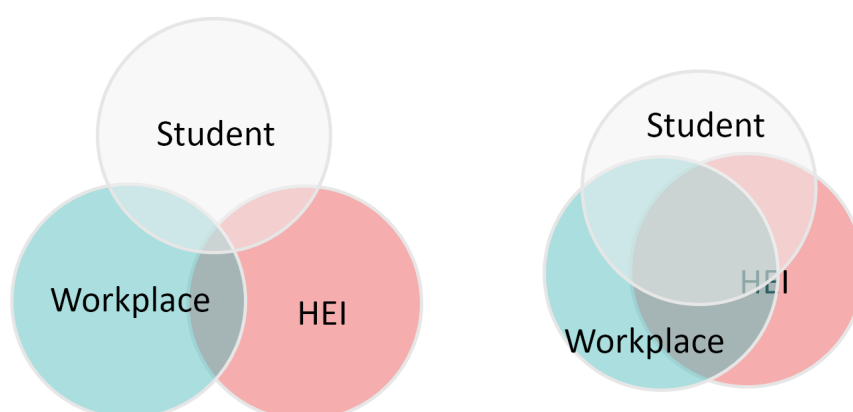


Figure 1: Intensifying the collaboration between the work-based learning parties.

However, the fact that the parties are all responsible does not mean that they are equal partners. Students cannot be regarded as equal to the other parties, because they depend on the workplace (e.g. to allow certain activities) and on the degree programme (e.g. on a lecturer who has the final say in a student's assessment) (Dochy et al., 2011).

1.4 Tasks and responsibilities of the parties

Learning in the workplace (Billett, 2006) is achieved through a combination of the opportunities provided by the learning environment (degree programme and workplace) and the capacity of the student to recognise and use these opportunities. The opportunities provided by the learning environment include all the factors beyond the control of the student that facilitate or impede learning. Important questions in this regard are: which activities are offered in the workplace and on the degree programme, who is available to learn from, and which settings are available?

As far as the student is concerned, it is not just about their capacity to benefit from the opportunities available, but also about their ability to adapt to these opportunities or even to create opportunities or adjust them to meet their own needs (Hoeve et al., 2021). It is important therefore that students are supervised by mentors and lecturers both in the workplace and on the degree programme. This supervision provides students with the confidence they need to be able to develop their own learning strategies. Note that student learning and self-direction cannot be taken for granted, but that the education and work organisations must consider this in their design of work-based learning.

1.5 The four quadrants of work-based learning

Work-based learning can be organised in several different ways. This is explained in these guidelines by placing work-based learning on two axes: one representing 'workplace setting designed for learning' to 'authentic work setting in the workplace' and the other representing 'little collaboration' to 'intensive collaboration' between the workplace and the degree programme. These two axes form four quadrants.

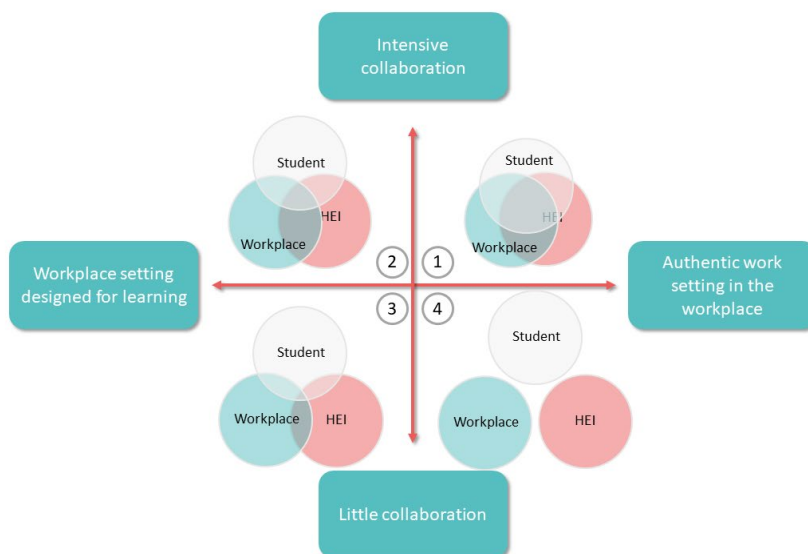


Figure 2: The four quadrants of work-based learning.

These four quadrants are described below.

Quadrant 1

In the case of work-based learning in quadrant 1 – ‘intensive collaboration’ and ‘authentic work setting’ – the degree programme and the workplace collaborate so closely that a new practice is formed with characteristics of both the degree programme and the profession (Bouw, 2021; Designs based on hybridisation).

Quadrant 2

In the case of work-based learning in quadrant 2 – ‘intensive collaboration’ and ‘workplace setting designed for learning’ – part of the training setting is incorporated into the workplace, or vice versa. Students may practice aspects of the profession in a simulated setting in the HEI, or they may learn to deal with real customers in a regulated setting. Students can also follow just-in-time theoretical education or practice professional activities under supervision in the workplace (Bouw, 2021; Designs based on incorporation).

Quadrant 3

In the case of work-based learning in quadrant 3 – ‘little collaboration’ and ‘workplace setting designed for learning’ – students alternate between the school setting and the workplace. Activities such as preparation for apprenticeships, review days and progress meetings ensure alignment between the workplace and the degree programme (Bouw, 2021; Designs based on alignment).

Quadrant 4

In the case of work-based learning in quadrant 4 – ‘little collaboration’ and ‘authentic work setting’ – the student learns in the workplace, but there is no alignment between the workplace and the degree programme. As we assume in these guidelines that work-based learning always takes place within the student - degree programme - workplace triangle, we do not discuss this quadrant any further here.

2 Guidelines for high-quality work-based learning in higher education

2.1 Description of the quality features

The guidelines consist of two phases and five quality features:

1. The design phase:

The workplace (or preferably in this phase, the work organisation) and the degree programme are together responsible for developing the work-based learning. Students have no direct responsibility in this, although they do participate in decision-making concerning the design of work-based learning within the programme committee of the degree programme: quality feature I.

2. The implementation phase:

The workplace, the degree programme and the student are together responsible for the implementation of student learning in the workplace: quality features II, III, IV and V.

2.2 Quality features

Central to these guidelines is the question: How can the three parties work together to develop high-quality work-based learning?

This central question is answered by addressing five sub-questions that together underpin these guidelines:

- How is a degree programme that includes work-based learning designed?
- How is learning designed and set out in agreements in the preparatory phase?
- How is student supervision designed and set out in agreements?
- How is student assessment designed and set out in agreements?
- How are continuous improvements made to the work-based learning?

These questions have been translated into five quality features in the guidelines:

- I. Design
- II. Prepare
- III. Guide
- IV. Assess
- V. Improve quality

Quality feature I: Design

Description of the quality feature

This feature concerns the design of the degree programme, including the work-based learning. Work-based learning requires close collaboration between the degree programme and the workplace (as representatives of the professional field). In this way, the logic and goals of each party are clear, there is alignment between and a clear description of the tasks, and work-based learning is properly embedded in the curriculum. The quality of work-based learning depends on how opportunities for learning in the workplace are designed, and the challenge is to develop work-based learning programmes that achieve the desired learning outcomes in different workplace settings.

Roles and responsibilities

Workplace and degree programme

- Is there a shared vision of work-based learning? This could be a vision of the profession, of learning about the profession, of how to train students, or of the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge.
- Is this shared vision set out in a vision document?
- Is there a single, coherent learning programme for which the degree programme and the workplace are jointly responsible and that is aligned in such a way that the learning outcomes are the same in different workplace settings?
- Does the work-based learning consist of clearly structured opportunities for learning? Do the degree programme and the workplace generally agree on this structure and on collaboration between the organisations?
- Is there a sufficient variation in learning opportunities and learning contexts, both on-campus and in the workplace?
- Is learning in the workplace and on-campus organised in such a way that theory and practice complement each another?
- Are the learning activities sufficiently authentic? Important aspects are: do they support the learning outcomes, are skills learned in context, do they have an open character (to provide room for student input) and do they allow for teamwork?
- Are flexible learning pathways possible, so that there are opportunities for personalisation and differentiation?

Workplace

- Does the workplace meet the required conditions to ensure optimum student learning? Important questions in this respect are: are the learning opportunities sufficiently challenging, is the workplace sufficiently complex for the required learning activities and is there sufficient variation in workplace settings?
- Do the workplace supervisors have the required position, recognition and support?
- Is the workplace organised in such a way that students can learn about the ethical issues and the standards and values of the profession?

Degree programme

- Does the degree programme meet the required conditions to ensure optimum student learning? Important questions in this respect are: is preparation for and reflection on the work-based learning incorporated into the programme?
- Is the programme designed in such a way that students have the opportunity to develop a professional identity?

Quality feature II: Prepare

Description of the quality feature

This feature concerns the individual student's learning pathway in the workplace. It therefore focuses on the student's learning. Students should feel that they have room to develop their own learning pathway. In the preparation phase, students and their supervisors (on-campus and workplace) agree on what the student needs and want to learn by selecting learning and work activities and determining which learning outcomes these activities lead to.

Roles and responsibilities

Student, workplace and degree programme

- Are the learning programme and activities aligned with the student's personal development, together with the supervisors?
- Do students receive sufficient support from the workplace and the degree programme in the choices they make so that they are able to develop their own learning pathway?
- Is there clarity regarding alignment between the student's start qualifications and the content of the programme?
- Do all parties agree that the learning programme and activities to be completed by the student meet the requirements of the degree programme and the workplace?
- Have specific workplace settings and tools been selected and are clear agreements in place concerning the attendance and productivity of the student and how learning is to be facilitated?

Student

- Do students have input into the design of their own learning pathways?

Workplace

- Has the workplace designed a challenging and appropriate setting for the student, so that the student can learn through interaction with professionals in the workplace?
- Are the resources available to facilitate student learning in the workplace? Is there someone to meet students when they arrive, do they have a contact person?
- Does the student's individual learning pathway meet the requirements of the workplace?
- Has the workplace provided supervisors to support and guide the student during the work-based learning?

Degree programme

- Does the student's individual learning pathway meet the requirements of the degree programme?
- Has the degree programme provided supervisors to support and guide the student during the work-based learning?

Quality feature III Guide

Description of the quality feature

This feature concerns the pedagogical-didactic support provided for the student: support before, during and after the work-based learning to ensure that the student achieves the learning outcomes and to ensure a satisfactory learning experience. The supervision provided by the workplace and degree programme is coordinated, transparent for the student and other parties, and aligned with the specific needs of the student.

Roles and responsibilities

Student, workplace and degree programme

- Have all parties agreed what form the student supervision will take? Does this sufficiently take into account the student's current skills and competences?
- Will the student receive adequate guidance from a supervisor in the workplace, in close cooperation with the HEI?
- Will the student receive appropriate and sufficient feedback and support? Does the student have an appropriate level of autonomy in the supervision?
- Have appropriate supervisors been selected, based on the learning requirements of the student?
- Are the supervisors sufficiently expert in training, guiding and assessing students? Important aspects in this respect are: expertise in guiding self-directed learning, the development of a professional identity and the solution of problems in the workplace based on knowledge.

Student

- To what extent is the student responsible for arranging their own supervision? Important questions in this respect are: is the student proactive in communication with the workplace and the degree programme? Does the student take the initiative, for example by requesting supervision and more complex tasks?

Workplace

- Are there enough qualified supervisors?
- Has it been agreed at what point a student has reached a level of competence that they can carry out professional activities independently?
- Is the workplace organised in a way that students are part of a community of professionals who are available for formal and informal supervision?

Degree programme

- Is the supervision arranged in a way that indirect student supervision is possible? Important questions in this respect are: does the degree programme have indirect influence on the supervision: through preparation of the student; through support of the workplace supervisor (formal/informal); through review and (collective) reflection moments; through the organisation of feedback (backward and forward)?

Quality feature IV Assess

This quality feature concerns the assessment of work-based learning. The student, the HEI assessor and the assessor in the workplace together translate the requirements of the degree programme into a set of assessment criteria for the student's performance in the workplace.

Roles and responsibilities

Student, workplace and degree programme

- Do the degree programme and the workplace have clear agreements in place concerning their roles, tasks and responsibilities relating to student assessment?
- Is it completely clear to the student what the implications of these agreements are for their training (on-campus and workplace)?
- Does assessment take place in authentic settings and is it clear which knowledge and skills could be assessed in the workplace?
- Does assessment take into account the workplace context?
- Do assessment tools allow room for differentiation?
- Has an assessment plan been agreed on for the student?

Student

- To what extent is the student responsible for organising their own assessment? Important questions in this respect are: is the student proactive in communication with the workplace and the degree programme?

Workplace

- Are there enough qualified assessors?
- Is the student's assessment plan appropriate to the context of the workplace?

Degree programme

- Does the assessment plan reflect the requirements and required learning outcomes of the degree programme?
- Is the role of the exam committee of the degree programme in assessing the student in the workplace clear?

Quality feature V Improve quality

This feature focuses on how the degree programme and the workplace ensure continuous improvement of the quality of work-based learning. An assessment should be made of whether objectives concerning the quality of work-based learning are being achieved, and the parties work together to improve the programme to ensure optimum learning in the workplace.

Roles and responsibilities

Student, workplace and degree programme

- Does collaboration take place between the student, work organisation and degree programme with the aim to improve the quality of work-based learning?
- Are systematic improvements made to work-based learning?
- Are the lessons learned used as input at the beginning of the cycle, to ensure the continuous improvement and development of work-based learning?

Student

- To what extent is the student responsible for the continuous improvement and development of work-based learning?

Workplace

- Is there alignment with the quality assurance system in place in the workplace?

Degree programme

- Is there alignment with the quality assurance system in place in the degree programme?
- Does coordination take place with the programme committee of the degree programme?

Improve quality

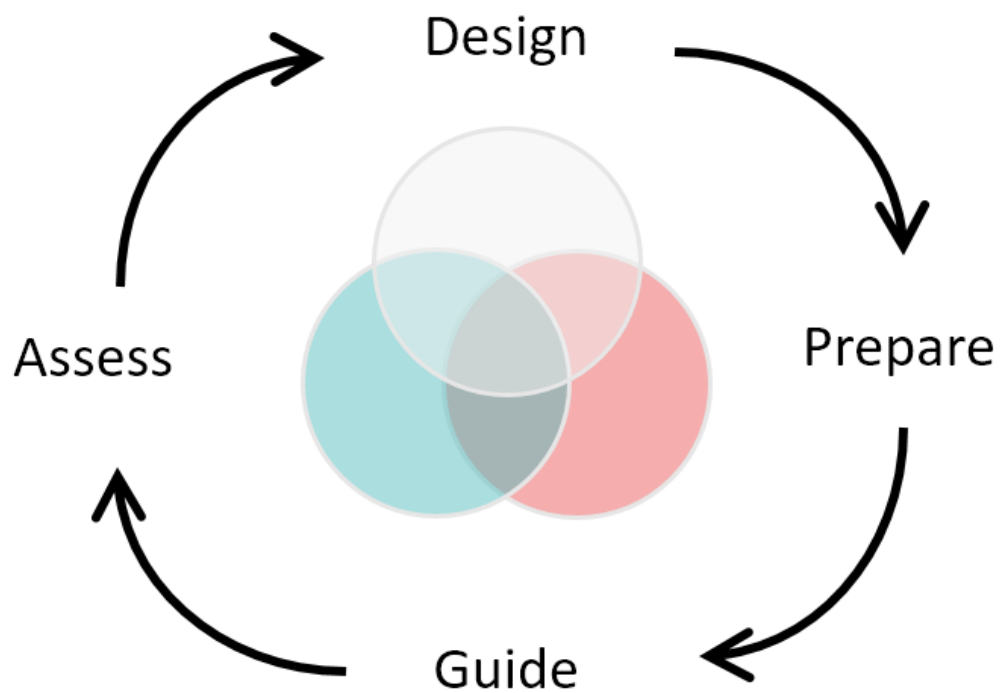


Figure 3: The quality features.

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4 Group of experts

- Dr L. Nieuwenhuis: senior lecturer in workplace pedagogy (HAN) and professor in the Faculty of Educational Sciences (Open Universiteit). Loek Nieuwenhuis is also part of the broad group of experts in the Netherlands and Flanders involved in developing the guide. Expertise: university and university of applied science education, education and healthcare domains.
- Dr D. Dolmans: professor in the field of innovative learning environments (Maastricht University). Expertise: university education, healthcare domain.
- Dr C. Kroeze: lecturer (HAN). Expertise: university of applied science education, education and teacher training domains.
- Dr S. Corporaal: senior lecturer in human capital (Saxion University of Applied Sciences, TechYourFuture expertise centre). Expertise: university of applied science education, technology domain.

The expert group was supported by Irma Franssen and Yvonne Overdeest, senior policy officers at NVAO.

