

Initial FlexWBL Framework and Implementation Plan in Higher Education



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| | The document describes an initial framework for Work-based Learning in higher education within the project "610072-EPP-1-2019-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP FlexWBL: Development of a flexible, innovative and practical framework for Work-based Learning in higher education of Armenia and Russia". It provides a theoretical basis on pillars for WBL-programmes describing the participating organisations, the |
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| Abstract | programme structure and the people involved. The framework takes into account that participating HE institutions in Armenia and Russia need flexible transdisciplinary approaches concerning the placement, the access to the programme, the development of curricula, the development of human, structural and organisational resources and a process-continuing-cycle-system (PCCS) to enable improvement of the programme while in progress. The principles of partnership and cooperation meet the needs for individuals, organisations and the labour market. The FlexWBL framework provides the possibility for a start of programmes on flexible and different levels of maturity. |





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Abbreviation List

CPD = Continuous professional development (system)

EQF = European Qualification Framework

EP = Educational Programme

HE = Higher Education

HEI = Higher Education Institution

PCCS = Process continuing cycle system

WBL = Work-based Learning

WP = Work place



Abstract

The document describes an initial framework for Work-based Learning in higher education within the project "610072-EPP-1-2019-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP FlexWBL: Development of a flexible, innovative and practical framework for Work-based Learning in higher education of Armenia and Russia". It provides a theoretical basis on pillars for WBL-programmes describing the participating organisations, the programme structure and the people involved. The framework takes into account that participating HE institutions in Armenia and Russia need flexible transdisciplinary approaches concerning the placement, the access to the programme, the development of curricula, the development of human, structural and organisational resources and a process-continuing-cycle-system to enable improvement of the programme while in progress. The principles of partnership and cooperation meet the needs for individuals, organisations and the labour market. The FlexWBL framework provides the possibility for a start of programmes on flexible and different levels of maturity.



The main concept of the FlexWBL framework

As lifelong education has become relevant for students, employees and market needs, frameworks for WBL programmes have become more flexible in use and provide a transdisciplinary approach and the possibility for external as well as internal students to get support from the national continuous professional development (CPD) system (Dremina et al., 2016). The development of a flexible framework must also take into account that students need support on different levels of placement of the programme (bachelor, master, PhD) and on different levels of proficiency which are defined in the 8 reference levels of the European Qualification Framework (EQF; Europass, 2005). A flexible framework requires possibilities for full-time as well as part-time students with a high amount of distance learning facilities.

The FlexWBL framework is based on the 3 basic pillars for WBL programmes (Garnett, 2005), the guiding principles of partnership and cooperation (Gallacher & Reeve, 2002) and a process continuing cycle system (PCCS) for the continuing professional development of individuals (Garavan et al. 2003, p. 3-4; Reitinger, 2016) as well as the development and improvement of HEI programmes while in progression.

The guiding principles of partnership and cooperation

In a constantly changing global market companies and employers are increasingly interested in content of training through universities related and relevant to their business needs and in well-trained, flexible, and skillful employees who take responsibility in the process of production as well as their individual life-long learning process.

In order to reach these goals companies and universities have to set principles and partnership of of cooperation that take into account what is needed to develop personal proficiency on the one hand and what is needed to intensify and boost collaboration between university and employers. According to the AQAL model (Wilber, 2006) individuals need opportunity to develop values, intellectual capital and personal goals which will become visible in habits, skills, communication, and personal health. Collective systems also need opportunity to develop common values, norms and purposes which become visible in the structures, processes, and agreements of the systems.

Accreditation

Principles of partnership & cooperation

Negotiations & agreements Responsibility & expectations Inclusive approach & safety Structured opportunities Self determination Training & support

Principles of partnership and cooperation in a flexible WBL-programme must meet the following demands. They must provide flexible structures and framework, deal with relevant business needs and they must result in the accreditation of the graduates.

Accreditation.

As WBL courses often have no unified content and material for all students to study but flexible frames which are set to fasten elements into an individual educational programme, the recognition





of prior learning and the accreditation in credit awards for learning achieved in the workplace that can also vary within the flexible frames (Morevs et al., 2020). Learning in the workplace in flexible frames nevertheless, is to be defined in learning outcomes, grouped in terms of units or modules at identified level in the curriculum (Linehan, 2016).

Flexibility

To satisfy the criteria for flexible learning in WBL programmes need to be flexible in terms of time, place, and mode of learning. HE education should be rather facilitating and supporting individual learning than delivering pre-specified programmes of study. Providing support where and when it is needed is often associated with e-learning and distance learning approaches with negotiated learning outcomes (Linehan, 2016).

Relevance

On the one hand relevance is inseparably linked to the benefits students, HEI and employers gain from the programme and on the other hand empirical evidence shows that perceived subjective relevance makes the process of reflecting effective (Seyfried & Seel, 2005).

Principles of partnership and cooperation

Negotiation and agreements are the basis of partnership between the participating universities and the enterprise in various forms (Morevs et al., 2020). While many WBL programmes tend to focus only on guiding principles such as training and support a constantly changing market demands programmes which focus on providing learning opportunities (Erault & Hirsch, 2007) that enable to develop responsibility and self-determination. Problem solving and inquiry learning can only effectively take place in very structured learning opportunities (Reitinger, 2015; Reitinger 2016) based on trust, clearness, safety, and the focus on student centered learning (Morevs et al., 2020). An inclusive approach that accepts the variety of descriptions of WBL such as task-related, problemrelated, innovative, autonomously managed, and self-regulated, self-motivated or team-based (Linehan, 2016) is more likely to meet a FlexWBL concept that promotes a variety of learning approaches such as individual learning, distance learning, in-house learning, integrated learning, blended learning or co-delivery (Major, 2016).

The 3 basic pillars for WBL-Programmes

The 3 basic pillars for WBL-programmes are the participating internal and external organisations, a process continuing cycle structure of the programme and the people involved (Garnett, 2005).

Participating organisations

The participating organisations can be distinguished as internal or external organisations. Internal organisations are basically found within the HEI. They are responsible for ensuring the well-functioning implementation of the programme. They award qualifications, set standards, and facilitate learning. They also keep contact to the external organisations.

External organisations are also crucial in giving support to the participating organisations. External organisations are mainly expert teams as well as (national) stakeholders. Expert teams can offer know-how for the development of a framework, the design of a study or programme, provide toolkits and proficiency

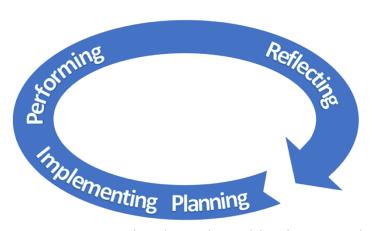




in quality assessment etc. In addition to expert teams stakeholders often initiate the possibility of starting a WBL-programme, support the process and set the general national policy in the development of human, organisational and financial resources.

The programme structure

The programme structure is based on a process-continuing-cycle-system (PCCS) which is defined by specific phases of the educational process (EP). The integrated learning process of WBL programmes takes place in real practices (outside classroom) linked with the theory (inside classroom) in accompanying university courses. Learning seems to be rather a process than simply a patchwork of learning outcomes. The learning process is started with the



planning and the implementing of the programme supported and coordinated by the external organisations. Most of the programmes are structured in "planning, implementing, delivering and review" phases. These programmes set their focus primarily on results, are less flexible and run the risk to end up in a patchwork of single pass cycles. The FlexWBL framework prefers to distinguish "planning, implementing, performing (Eraut, 2004) and reflecting (Seyfried & Seel, 2005; Rigg & Trehan, 2008)" phases. The focus lies on a continuous, changeable process-cycle-system. And the proposed programme structure is of high flexibility because it can easily be used for programmes at different EQF levels.

While performing in the WP the focus is on constant development of appropriate roles of the learners in order to learn and apply skills (Billet, 2009) in the integrated learning setting. At the end of the first cycle the process of reflection makes the difference to none-continuing-systems. Reflection is highly effective (Seyfried & Seel, 2005; Rigg & Trehan, 2008; Heyler, 2015). A reflecting process often ends up in generating new action alternatives and the decision on further steps. It therefore represents the link to the next planning phase. This link is the key to turn isolated patchwork phases into a process of development and improvement taking the outcomes of the reflecting-process into the next programme loop. It is the basis of developing the programme as well as the personal proficiency of all WBL-partners.

The people involved

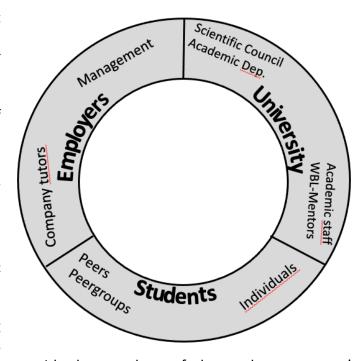
The third pillar of WBL are the people involved. First of all the main protagonists are the students. They are the reason why the WBL programme exists. They must be engaged in work activities that



are developed and designed to learn about and through work activities (Billet, 2009). They can be involved as individuals, peers or in organized peer groups in the same WP. In a FlexWBL programme the students can take part beyond the bounderies of traditional forms of education (full-time, part-time, additional training, etc.).

Next there are the WP tutors and members of the company managements. They are mainly responsible for the communication and performing process in the WP.

Last but not least, there are the academic staff members of the HEI (teaching, mentoring, administrative & technical). They are responsible for establishing strong relationships with external partners



(development teams) and keep the contact with the members of the study programme's overarching expert teams. The guiding principles of partnership and cooperation for the people involved consist of the concepts of partnership, flexibility, relevance and accreditation by Gallacher & Reeve (2002) and of the principles of an inquiry learning process such as trust, self-determination, clearness, safety, structuring the process and the concept of personalization (Reitinger, 2015; 2016).

The FlexWBL framework model

These components put together form the *centre of the FlexWBL framework model* (Fig. 1). The basic components of the model represent the principles of partnership and cooperation for the internal and external institutions as well as all the people involved in the programme, and a programme structure which can ensure a continuous cycle system of development and improvement.

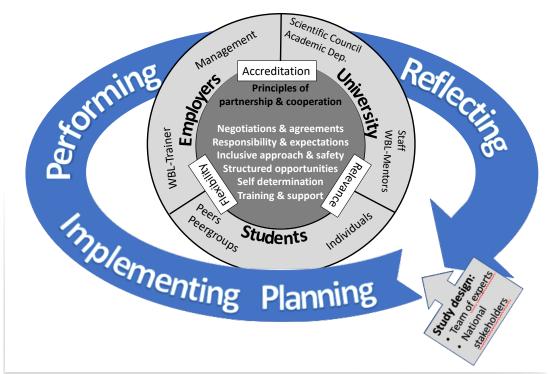


Fig. 1: FlexWBL Basic Components of the Framework Model (Nausner, 2021).

The principles of partnership and cooperation are closely connected to the concept of EQF with its 8 levels of proficiency and its central level indicators of responsibility and autonomy (EQF; Europass, 2005). The 8 reference levels of proficiency describe learning outcomes with increasing depth of knowledge and understanding (Webb, 1997, 2007) from the first to the last level, as well as the task performance and personal development from work under direct supervision to self-management when developing new ideas or processes at the forefront of work (EQF; Europass, 2005). The 8 EFQ levels also represent one dimension of the 3 dimensional FlexWBL framework.

The 3 dimensional process continuing cycle system for the development of proficiency and programme development

In order to complete the FlexWBL framework model the principles of partnership and cooperation and the 3 basic pillars of the FlexWBL framework model have to be integrated into a 3 dimensional process continuing cycle system to ensure a proper placement of the programme and individual as well as collective and institutional development. According to the AQAL-model collective evolution manifests itself in common values, negotiations and agreements, and development of resources which can be human, structural, organisational and financial resources (Wilber, 2006).

The 3-dimensional FlexWBL development model

As mentioned above the process continuing cycle system is three dimensional (Fig.2).

- Dimension of placement and level of EQF
- Dimension of individual continuous professional development





Dimension of development of institutional resources

The first dimension defines the placement of the programme in the institutions educational programme (bachelor, master or PhD level) and the corresponding level from the 8 level EQF. In addition the access to HE is to be defined for internal as well as external students (Bacigalupo et al., 2016).

The second dimension describes the level of individual continuous professional development (CPD) as proposed in dimension one with a shift from training to inquiry learning (Reitinger, 2016; Erault & Hirsch, 2007) and gradually taking more responsibility, developing autonomy, self determination and emotional intelligence beyond disciplinary bounderies, although disciplinary literature still remains a resource for the learning and reflecting process (O'Sullivan, 2003). Around the continuing development of proficiency dimension learning FlexWBL programmes will group the learning outcomes which have to be defined in the curricula. These learning outcomes can describe task performances (speed, fluency, range of skills etc.), awareness and understanding (of colleagues, of contexts and situations, of self-organising, of problems and risks etc.), personal development (self-evaluation and -management, learning from experience etc.), teamwork (collaborative work, joint plannings, problem solving etc.), role performance (leadership, supervisory role, delegation, crisis management etc.), academic knowledge and skills (assessing formal knowledge, research-based practice, theoretical thinking and using knowledge sources), decision making and problem solving (dealing with complexity, group decision making, conditions of pressure etc.) and judgement (quality of performance, output and outcomes, priorities, value issues etc.) (Eraut, 2004).

The third dimension describes the development of institutional resources. These resources can be human, structural, organisational and financial resources. They are based on the individual and collective values defined in the principles of partnership and cooperation (Wilber, 2006) and depend on the achieved level of proficiency (EQF). In other words: the higher the level of individual proficiency the more development of human, structural, organisational and financial resources is required.

Students of a high EQF level who are supposed to develop collaborative skills need best trained and qualified WP-tutors and HEI-mentors or HE-lecturers to support them. Further on structures have to be installed such as regular meetings, WP-teams, peergroups, feedback and control tools and control groups to enable students of a high level of proficiency to lead and develop team processes. Installing qualification trainings for WP-tutors and HEI-staff is always a matter of financial resources as well. The same is true for teams that focus on the process continuing cycle development of the programme such as change management teams, advisory committees for all participating partners and joint planning workshops.

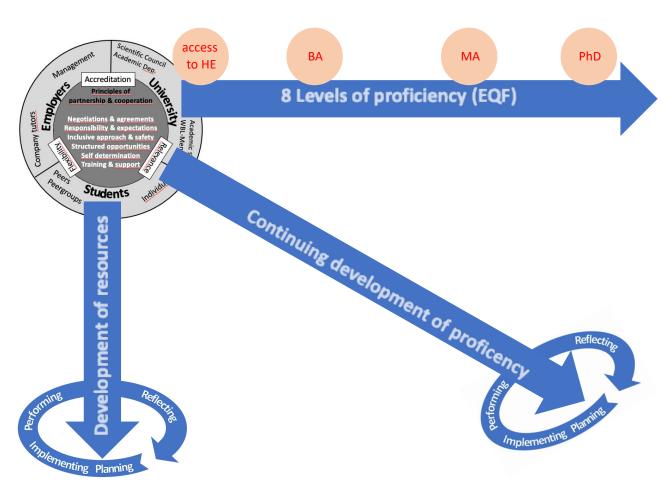


Fig. 2: FlexWBL 3-dimensional Development Model (Nausner, 2021)

The 3-level development model for FlexWBL resources

Depending on the placement, the level of proficiency of the participating students and the development of human, structural, organisational and financial resources FlexWBL programmes can reach 3 different levels of maturity: foundation, intermediate and advanced level (Fig. 3).

The components of effective development differ in the phases of the process structure of the programme. The planning process requires other components than the implementing, performing and reflecting processes.

| Foundational Maturity Level | basics to run a FlexWBL programme that meet the leading principles defined | |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Intermediate Maturity Level | focus on higher responsibility by students and problem solving focus on increase of self-planning, -directing, -assessment workshops and training courses for all participants focus on joint planning and performing | |
| Advanced Maturity Level | focus on self-determination and inquiry learning focus on team processes and leadership | |



joint visions, and developing and improving processes
(joint) scientific research projects (economy-based, applicability)

Tab. 1: The Three Maturity Levels of FlexWBL Programmes

Foundation: This level describes what is desirable or necessary for the running of any WBL programme. There must be a curriculum with the definitions of the qualification for access to HE, the learning principles and outcomes, the contents of university courses and WP-learning, assessment and recognition. You will also find internal and external support teams, a commitment of collaboration and the installation of a change management team in the foundational level.

| | Planning | Implementing | Performing | Reflecting |
|----------------|---|---|--|--|
| - Foundation | WBL Advisory Committee meeting workshops (project plans, agreements, etc. = foundation toolkit) WBL-accompaning courses change management (improving/changing of courses) | WBL-curriculum (prior learning assessment/recognition) service support department (support for students, tutors, administration) WBL-university courses & programmes change management committee | regular meetings provide information paket on WP (safety, guidelines etc.) communication & contact high level of guidance/support (frequent progress checks) support of peergroup feedback on/during work | reflecting&analysing process with focus on support, implentation, performing in HEI and WP feedback (WP-team = students, WP&HEI-supporters) define subjective relevant conditions, processes etc. to reflect on |
| – Intermediate | feedback of reflecting process (intermediate toolkit) qualification trainings for WP-tutors and HEI-supervisors meeting workshops (joint plannings) effective use of ICT (blended learning, etc.) meet for joint plannings (WP-tutors, HEI-supervisors and – instructors, students) | qualification trainings for WP-tutors and HEI-supervisors (focus: from supervisor to facilitator of learning) adopted learning courses (integrated model) provide a variety of approaches to WBL self-assessment guidelines | WP-challenges for WP-teams (problems, success & mistakes) independent work of students (focus: responsibility) = self directing learning integrate theory in problem solving, process improvment, etc. = experimental learning | reflect on curriculum, assessment and recognition complete WBL Activity Evaluation reflect on WBL project if it fulfils the measurement criteria of validity and reliability identify, utilise and measure the performative value of knowledge |
| Advanced | (advanced toolkit) inquiry learning self determination of students personalization team processes | coaches/teams for inquiry learning and self determination structures for inquiry learning | independent work of students (focus: self determination) = inquiry learning control/design team processes entrepreneurship/leadership | develop a written improvement plan in WP-team modify improvement plans lay down visions of future WBL-projects in writing |

Fig. 3: FlexWBL 3-level development model (Nausner, 2021)

Intermediate: Intermediate levels may also provide (self-)reflecting and improving tools, training courses for all partners and joint planning teams/workshops. As students have a higher level of proficiency and are expected to take over more responsibilities and work more self directed they need more tools to support their learning process such as experimental learning, problem solving and self-assessment guidelines.

Advanced: In advanced programmes the focus is set on the developing of inquiry learning, self determination structures in the EP, the leading of team processes and the developing of joint visions by a joint WBL team. Therefore, more structures can be found that help to initiate inquiry learning, control and design team processes, to develop improvement plans and to modify plans and projects. Another focus is the transdisciplinary approach to economy-based scientific research projects that result in applicable findings.

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The components in Fig. 3 are only a small number of suggestions for the 3 levels. They represent structural and organisational development of programmes (regular meetings, training and qualification courses of WP-tutors and HEI-supporters etc.), learning opportunities (work in peergroups, planning activities, inquiry learning etc.) and human resources (WP-tutors, HEI-supervisors etc.) which are involved in the programmes.

The levels are not to be mixed up with the 8 EQF levels although they lay the basis for individual development in providing essential resources and learning opportunities to achieve the targets of the EQF levels.



Set of implementation

The development of the FlexWBL framework has comprised the following steps:

- 1. A literature review of existing concepts, national policies harmonized with EU best practices (Morevs, et al., 2020).
- 2. A research based methodological guideline on WBL in HE WP 1.1 (Morevs, et al. 2020).
- 3. A draft version of a FlexWBL framework and its presentation (Nausner, 2021).
- 4. Expert meetings on the FlexWBL framework draft.
- 5. An expert workshop, where tools of a draft version of a manual to the FlexWBL framework were presented and worked with in working sessions held by Danièle Hollick and Ernst Nausner.
- 6. The development of a document on a methodological framework on implementing WBL in HE by Nadezhda Bedenko and Ernst Nausner. WP 2.1 (Bedenko et al., 2021)
- 7. The development of a draft manual to the FlexWBL framework with tools that can help with the placement of the programme and help to develop curricula and resources in the process-continuing-cycle-system (Nausner, 2021).

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Conclusion

To enable improvement of an institutional implementation of WBL in HIE flexible transdisciplinary approaches in terms of the placement, the access to the programme, the development of curricula, the development of human, structural and organisational resources and a process-continuing-cycle-system (PCCS) are inevitably needed. The institutional conditions and WBL concepts, that have already been implemented e.g. in the UK and EU, vary from nation to nation (Morevs et al., 2020, p. 13-17). In addition to that still a huge number of people already working in production face the problem of improving their skills and require support from the national continuous professional development (CPD) system (Dremina et al., 2016). These essential requirements are assured by the development of a flexible, innovative and practical framework for WBL in HIE. FlexWBL is a concept that delivers a framework which can be applied autonomously to different educational offers for WBL at Universities and independent of the nation in order to meet international requirements and standards.

The development of WBL in a certain university institution involves and affects the University, the employers as well as the students as the main protagonists. This demands an intensive and well-organised cooperation and collaboration to guarantee WBL of high quality, continuity and benefits for all players involved. FlexWBL offers guidelines and tools for the planning, implementing, performing and reflecting WBL on three levels of development or rather maturity (foundation, intermediate, advanced. Besides the basic pillars (1) participating organisations, (2) people involved (3) and the programme structure (Garnett, 2005), it is based on the (1) guiding principles of partnership and cooperation (Gallacher & Reeve, 2002), (2) a PCCS for the continuing professional development of individuals (Garavan et al., 2003; Reitinger, 2016) and (3) the development of HIE programmes while in progression.

In the Appendix templates and examples can be found for the planning, implementing, performing and reflecting WBL in University.





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