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Quality assurance considerations of
employer-responsive provision

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Features of employer- responsive provision

- units of learning
- designed to meet an employer(s) needs
- work place is the site of learning – (partially/ wholly)
- part time mode of study (earning and learning)
- units/ programmes can have short “shelf life”

Roles and responsibilities for standards and quality of learning opportunities

Depends whether you are:

an HEI

a college

an employer

a private training provider

the learner

Roles and responsibilities for standards and quality of learning opportunities (cont)

and /or whether you are:

- the validating body in a consortia
- directly involved in delivery/ assessment
- accrediting in – house training delivered by another learning provider
- accepting credit from another HEI and aggregating units into an award
- designing and delivering discrete units of provision which may/ may not be aggregated to a full award
- organising placements

Standards and Quality

- General points
 - All academic awards should be subject to the same rigour and level of scrutiny
 - Principles of quality assurance should be the same as traditional provision

'It is essential that the QA [quality assurance] of employer responsive provision is equally rigorous in order to maintain academic standards.'

but:

Processes adopted may need to be modified

“Quality assurance policies, processes and systems should be the same across all provision but should be adaptable to scale. The main difficulty is fitting in points at which scale and fitness for purpose can be considered and adapted without a perceived undermining of the whole.”

Quality assurance processes

Considerations

- Responsiveness
- Proportionality

QA processes

- QA processes work to employers timescales
- Effort is commensurate with the complexity of the provision

considerations

- Responsiveness
- Proportionality

Need to consider:

Risk



Risk based approach

Oversight of academic standards

- Risks to institutional reputation
- Financial risk
- Risks to academic standards in multiple partnerships
- Risks to academic culture
- Risks to academic quality – if workplace not fit for purpose

considerations

- Responsiveness
- Proportionality
- Risk

Weight



Weight of quality assurance

- The volume of the provision
- The type of arrangement
- What is being quality assured
- Who is involved in delivery and assessment
- The extent to which partner is new / established
- Geographical distance
- Partner understanding of higher education delivery and assessment

QAA Statement July 2008

“QAA is keen to stress that while it is essential that all UK HE awards meet the relevant standards set out in the Academic Infrastructure, irrespective of the way in which learning is achieved and assessed, quality assurance arrangements should be proportionate to risk, relevant, and meet a reasonable ‘fitness for purpose’ test.”

- “Where an HEI is acting alone in employer-related HE provision, its own quality assurance arrangements will be guided by the relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure. Effective quality assurance does not require that all detailed aspects of the Academic Infrastructure should invariably be included, irrespective of their applicability within particular contexts and to specific situations. For example, in the accreditation of employer-based training it is reasonable to expect that priority will be given to those dimensions of the Academic Infrastructure that have a bearing on academic standards, because these, unlike the quality of learning opportunities, are under the direct control of the awarding body. “

- “Where programmes are made up of components (modules or units) that have been validated and assessed by different HEI partners under their own separate arrangements, it is reasonable to expect that a student receiving an HE award will have demonstrated achievement of the overall (programme) learning outcomes required by the awarding institution; but this does not mean that every component that contributes to its award must necessarily be revalidated by the awarding institution”

- “Each awarding HEI is ultimately responsible for the standard of any award made in its name, and it is for them to decide what evidence they will accept to enable them to determine their general confidence in partners’ contributions. Such evidence may include the outcomes of audits and reviews undertaken by external and independent bodies.”

Other considerations

Assessment

Employer
involvement

External examiners

Curriculum
design

Balancing
academic
knowledge with
competence

Coherence of the
award

Balancing academic knowledge with professional competence

- *'There is a potential conflict between the provision of training and the delivery of education leading to a qualification. The product needs both to provide the training and skills which will benefit practice but also to deliver learning and achievement which will meet the expectations of HE qualifications as described in the Academic Infrastructure''*
- *'There is a challenge to meet employer needs for specific skills development but within a programme that provides academic coherence and the development of higher level skills required at each level.'*
- *'...justifying higher level of skills such as critical evaluation skills. There can be level issues and re-articulating what employers do into HE is not straightforward. It has to be negotiated. Employers are not always happy with the outcomes, for example the amount of credit not being enough.'*

External examining

- *'...size and duration mean it may not be realistic to involve external examiners always. Shell awards tend to encourage generic learning outcomes where standards are harder to interpret and compare.'*
- *'External examining is an issue for institutions to square...how can work done on placements or in the workplace be considered by examination boards and given meaningful scrutiny. The Subject Centre has created a register of external examiners.'*

Assessment

- *the need to ensure that there is a direct relationship between the institution and those conducting the assessment, and that the institution has direct oversight of assessment decisions*
- *the need for consideration by, and agreement from, all partners of the type of assessment strategy that is appropriate (for example, examinations may not be the most appropriate way of testing achievement in a workplace situation)*
- *a recognition of competing priorities in the workplace and flexibility in managing assessment deadlines. This may require the institution to amend its assessment regulations to ensure that this does not lead to unfairness to other students*
- *the need to ensure a balance between the assessment of academic knowledge and professional competence.*

- *'It would be helpful if there was more time spent on designing appropriate assessment for the work base which could enable the learners to demonstrate their achievement using the appropriate means rather than imposing a general assessment strategy on the learner that may not be fit for purpose. This would then allow subject departments to really engage with the WBL site as a site of learning.'*
- *'Employers' involvement in assessment could bring problems of consistency, comparability of standards, etc.'*
- *'Mentors and work-based supervisors provide input to assessment, but the final summative judgement is the responsibility of the University (in collaboration with partner colleges for franchised FDs).'*

Reference:

- Employer-responsive provision survey:

A reflective report

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/effectiveprovision.pdf>

- July 2008 Statement from QAA

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/employers/QAAstatement.asp>