

Welcome to the new issue of *Higher Education Skills & Work-Based Learning*, 7.1, where you will find our usual mix of great new research, case studies and innovative practice, all focussed on areas where academia and business overlap. I am also very happy to welcome Sarah Tudor from Staffordshire University. Sarah joins the Editorial Team as an Associate Editor for Submissions.

In our first paper “Creating successful and sustainable educational administrative internship experiences” Deschaine describes how the field of education is evolving in response to new regulations, high-stakes assessment and unstable funding, whilst still trying to retain focus on improving student performance. The paper points out that school administrator preparation programmes are relatively unchanged and generally content based, in fact lacking in rigorous and real-world experiences. Because of this, Deschaine suggests, institutions are beginning to look at internships and take stock of how they are implemented. The paper reviews current literature on school administrator internships and provides examples of sound practice that will assist in meeting new standards based upon regional or national standards, regardless geographical location. The paper also offers a framework that applies theory and research-based practices.

“Professional application projects: work-based learning in the curriculum”, by Toledano-O’Farrill continues with real life practice by interrogating work-based learning (WBL). The paper looks at the impact of WBL on outcomes of education such as employability of graduates and fostering collaboration between universities and industry, and furthermore considers more recent understandings of WBL which highlight the role of the student in a triadic relationship. The author suggests that for businesses, employability is primarily related to students’ transferrable skills and work readiness and that the development of partnerships between HEIs and employers is a critical factor. The author suggests that despite this, global higher education (HE) systems have generally been slow to adapt their activities, and particularly their curricula, to WBL.

The concept of service to society is examined and from this perspective, placements and WBL are considered for enterprises, institutions and communities. Stemming from the social service perspective, projects which have a central focus on delivering planned products and services to the client organisation are also considered. Skills development is seen as a natural product of these projects and a benefit of collaboration. The paper demonstrates that for universities, the value of the collaboration can be in the form of income, collaborative or contract research, and the provision of opportunities for student projects, placements and graduate internships. Challenges around quality issues and assessment are also considered.

In our third paper, “A conceptual framework for work-applied learning for developing managers as practitioner researchers” by Zuber-Skerritt and Abraham, the global focus continues with a sharing of personal and professional experience of conducting, facilitating and evaluating work-applied action learning programs and participatory action research projects. The paper is informed by the authors’ reflections on their experiences, and the most recent literature, and introduces a conceptual framework for Work-Applied Learning (WAL) that provides a basis for the development of managers and other professionals as lifelong learners and practitioner researchers – through reflective practice, action research, action learning and action leadership, for positive organisational change. WAL is proposed as a model for developing managers as practitioner researchers, managers or other professionals who conduct research in the workplace to improve the quality of their practice, to engage in organisational



improvement or other change, to create knowledge and to make the results of their research public so that their work can be scrutinised, and can inform the understandings of others.

The authors explain how the phenomenological paradigm of knowledge creation and relevant supporting theories of learning and knowing can be applied, adopted or adapted to develop and facilitate leadership and management skills in students/managers and how the understanding of this conceptual framework aids the understanding and most effective use of the model of WAL in organisations, in a sustainable way. It is explained that to maximise the concept's potential for individual learning, team learning, organisational learning, community learning, knowledge management, WBL and change, it needs to be placed in a broader methodological and philosophical context. The authors strengthen the conceptual framework for the WAL model by placing it in terms of theory, pedagogy and methodology.

“The demand for qualified personnel: a case study on Northern Italy” by Goglio and Bertolini continues the focus on development of individuals and organisations by examining the transition to post-industrial production as an event which has made qualified human capital a key factor in national economical competitiveness. The authors acknowledge that this topic is debated by academics, with some questioning the idea that there is a knowledge economy in existence, and pointing out significant numbers of jobs in low-qualified services together with educational expansion as contributing to a situation where there are too few appropriate level jobs for too many graduates. The authors suggest that much of the empirical literature is focussed on the supply side of human capital, while the demand for university graduates has not received the same amount of scrutiny. This paper seeks to contribute to the debate on the employability of upper secondary and tertiary education graduates from the standpoint of employers by linking together literature on matching job supply and demand in Italy. The investigation is based on a case study carried out with a series of qualitative interviews and focus groups consisting of private sector employers and stakeholders in the education and training system operating in Piedmont. Writing from an area of Northern Italy known for its good economic performance, the writers point out that there are also some potential weaknesses, due to the area's traditional production system. The paper's focus is on a sub-national setting, but many of its conclusions are in line with trends found at a European level and can be generalised to include Italy as a whole.

Again within a localised area, Felce's case study “The Hub in a Pub: University of Wolverhampton Apprenticeship Hub”, offers insights which can be adopted widely. Higher Apprenticeships were introduced in English HE in 2011, and degree apprenticeships, where an honour's or master's degree is included, were only introduced in 2015. Historically, intermediate and advanced apprenticeships have been delivered by Further Education Colleges and private training providers; Felce questions how HE can position itself alongside existing providers to meet the local, regional and national workforce development needs. The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) offer higher and degree apprenticeships as an alternative route to HE, and to provide opportunities for apprentices to progress from intermediate and advanced apprenticeships in order to drive up skills levels in the region, to support economic growth and to create new demand. Discussions with local employers, from SMEs through to large corporates, confirmed a strong interest in higher and degree apprenticeships and a growing need for identified progression routes from intermediate and advanced apprenticeship programmes. The University is confident that such provision will help create employment for young people as well as up-skill existing employees. This short case study sets out the innovative approach taken by the UoW to create an Apprenticeship Hub which is also a physical presence (a well-known former public house) that is a focal point for employers, prospective apprentices and their families, teachers, careers advisors, apprentices, other providers and the University staff.

“Work-based learning for the creative industries – a case study of the development of BA (Hons) web design and social media”, by Riley is a paper which presents a further case

study, this time detailing the insight and knowledge gained throughout the process of integrating WBL into sometimes fledgling but rapidly expanding creative industries, such as web media production and social media, it provides insight into the development of WBL in creative and vocationally orientated subjects relating to content creation and digital media practices by sharing both the advantages and the challenges of the process. As higher-level degree apprenticeships continue to develop across England, this is crucial work. The paper explores a UK university sector institution specialising in the fields of design and digital media, developing a WBL degree. As this activity attracted funding they also needed to be mindful of their funder's requirements in this process; in addition to WBL provision, the course should be offered as a two-year fast-track degree.

The development and composition of the WBL model was adapted from an existing and successful three year, traditionally structured, BA (Hons) Web Media Production course. This resulted in a course that adopts a model whereby partnerships between external organisations and educational institutions are established through a contractual agreement. The employers felt this provided them with an appropriately skilled workforce, addressing the technical and digital skills gap. However, while these responses were encouraging, a number of practical issues and academic challenges occurred that need careful scrutiny and these are shared in the paper.

In "Professional competency based analysis of continuing tensions between education and training in higher education", Perera, Babatunde, Pearson and Ekundayo explore the education and training of construction graduates and find it highly influenced by the HE institution and the relevant professional bodies, which set the competencies that guide both academic and industrial learning. Construction is a practice-oriented collection of professions, therefore, this research focussed on the Quantity Surveying (QS) profession that is responsible for cost control and management of construction projects, and accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The purpose was to identify and analyse the expected level of competencies attained by QS graduates, assess the industry perception of the achievement of competencies by QS graduates, and the ranking of competencies in the order of perceived importance. The research findings included revealed unrealistically high expectations by the construction industry of QS graduates and significant levels of dissatisfaction with the expected level of achievement of mandatory, core and optional competencies by the QS graduates. The research provides a benchmarking tool for curricula alignment for the construction degree programmes in HE.

Finally, for this issue Irons offers us "Reflection on higher degree apprenticeship development", a case study on the development and first time delivery, for one UK university, of a Higher Degree Apprentice programme. The paper shares the experiences of development, implementation and the initial year of operation and provides an evaluation of the experience from the viewpoint of a range of stakeholders – students, employer and university (both central and academic staff). The initial findings from the case study review suggest that providing a higher degree apprenticeship programme is a positive experience for the Department and for the apprentices – students who normally would not have come to University are engaging in University learning and applying their learning in the workplace. However, reflection on the development and initial year of operation indicate that a great deal of time and effort is required to establish a higher or degree apprentice programme within a university, to develop suitable collaboration with employers and to provide suitable curriculum and learning opportunities for students.

I hope you enjoy the papers in 7.1 and please do feel free to send us your own research, I am very happy to discuss ideas and abstracts as well as completed work.

Ruth Helyer