Evaluating Learning Outcomes with regard to employability –
Some finding from an IIEP research on Internal Quality Assurance

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Defining the terms: What is meant by “employability”?

“A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more employable and successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”, M. Yorke (2006)

Employability is not only about ‘getting a first job’, but also about coping with future jobs throughout one’s working life, J. Brennan (2016)
Evaluating Learning Outcomes – Why focusing on employability?

Rapid expansion of enrolments in higher education sector

No simultaneous adaptation of economies and labour market

Mismatch between skills required in the labour market and graduates profile

Increased share of unemployed people who have tertiary education*

*Considering *World Development Indicators* data on the proportion of unemployed people who have tertiary education (World Bank), in 46 of those countries where data is available this share increased between 2007 and 2013.
Evaluating Learning Outcomes – Why focusing on employability?

- More pressure on Higher Education Institutions to adapt their education and training to labor market needs.
- Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) is expected to enhance the relevance of Learning Outcomes.
- When discussing employability, IQA collects data from different stakeholder perspectives: graduates, employers but also academics and students.

IIEP research programme on Internal Quality Assurance:
- Analysis of existing IQA practices and their effects
- International survey in 2015/16
- Eight universities located in four continents participated

How do universities integrate employability concerns in their IQA practices?
IIEP’s research project: selection of eight case universities

Europe:
- University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany
- Economics University of Vienna, Austria

Asia:
- Xiamen University, China
- International American University of Bangladesh

Arab region:
- University of Bahrain

Anglophone Africa:
- Daystar University, Kenya
- University of the Free State, South Africa

Latin America region:
- Talca University, Chile
1. Universities view the link between employability and IQA differently

The context matters:

- Priority of employability?
- Priority of academic quality?

Strategic orientation

- National policy context (e.g. level of unemployment, Bologna process)
- Type of institution
- Orientation of academic offer

- Varying views between universities
- Varying views between faculties and academic subjects
2. The role of IQA in enhancing the link between Learning Outcomes and employability

• Overall, IQA was seen as having a positive influence on graduate employability, in general.

• *Indirect* link between IQA and employability
  ▪ IQA practices enhance university’s reputation and graduate employability as a consequence.

• *Direct* link between IQA and employability
  ▪ IQA helped to build a strong interaction between academics and labour market representatives, and thus helped to revised Learning Outcomes.
3. Existing IQA tools to enhance the link between Learning Outcomes and employability

Overview:

1. Graduates can be surveyed through *tracer studies* at specific intervals.
2. *Employer satisfaction surveys* can be conducted to collect information on employer’s appreciation of graduates.
3. Involving *employers, professionals and alumni* in the development and review of academic programmes and curricula.
4. *Monitoring of internships* can help to analyse the fit between academic programmes and the labour market.
3. Frequency of IQA Tools to enhance the link of Learning Outcomes and employability

Universities where asked about the kind of tools and processes they use to enhance employability:

Curriculum development involving professionals (79%) followed by curriculum review (75%), monitoring the quality of internships (72%) are the more popular tools.
4. What are effective IQA tools to enhance employability?

**Graduate tracer studies**

- Most commonly used IQA tool for the analysis of graduate employability
- Surveys conducted among graduates to investigate the process of job market integration, employment conditions, fulfillment of knowledge/skill requirements.

- Frequency of tracer studies varies from annual to multi-annual.
- Administered by an external body, a university unit or a college.

- Graduate tracer studies were perceived as an effective tool to enhance employability by case universities.
- Credibility was sometimes reduced because of low response rates.
- Results were not always shared with the academic community.
5. What are effective IQA tools to enhance employability?

**Employer satisfaction surveys**

- Employer satisfaction surveys measure the extend to which employers are satisfied with graduates in terms of competencies and skills in the workplace.

- Employers are asked about the strengths and weaknesses of individual graduates in comparison with other university graduates or in reference to a specific academic programme.

- Data remains often with university management and administration instead of being widely shared.

- Difficulty: Survey those employers (persons) directly in contact with the university graduates

- Employers find it difficult to anticipate the training needs of the future
6. What are effective IQA tools to enhance employability?

Employer involvement in study programme development and revision

- During the review and development process of programmes and curriculums, employer’s suggestions are taken into account.
- They are usually engaged through participation in standing or ad hoc committees within academic programmes.
- Employer involvement proved to be very effective in some universities, in particular when employers were part of the consultative structure.

Examples: IQA processes for employability at University of Bahrain’s and University of Duisburg-Essen
In order to take account of employer’s needs at the development stage, each programme at UoB established a quality assurance committee. Each committee included a programme sub-committee composed of alumni, employers and other external stakeholders.

Programme advisory committees:

- Seeks out for opportunities to obtain feedback from external stakeholders to validate the relevance and effectiveness of its programmes.
- Employer/alumni surveys and annual meetings are arranged, where modifications are made based on the department council’s decision.
- Market research and analysis are conducted to identify changes in, for instance, employer’s expectations or labour market standards.

- The procedure was perceived as helping to integrate the knowledge and skills desired by employers into the outcomes and objectives of programmes.
- However, it was seen as problematic that employers in the committee - mostly from leadership positions - are not best-fitted to make suggestions for improvements, because they are normally not the ones supervising UoB graduates during internships.
Focus on: University of Duisburg-Essen’s use of data for quality dialogue

- Annual QA conference / day of teaching
  (within responsibility of faculties)

- Data set

- Module evaluation (optional)
- Workload evaluation (optional)
- Students’ panel surveys during course of study

- Key performance indicators & statistics

- Course evaluation
- Graduate tracer studies

- Every 3 years
  Target agreements
  - Development plan
  - Target & measure chart current year
  - Target & measure chart previous cycle

- Every 6 years
  Institutional evaluation
  - Self-report
  - Peer review & external report
  - Reflection & follow-up
Conclusion

- The effects of increasing student numbers provide good reasons to regard employability as a major learning outcome of higher education.
- However, contextual factors influence the perceived importance of employability of universities.
- Employability can be viewed in different ways and with different foci.
- Involving external stakeholders formally or informally in programme reviews is a good strategy to enhance employability.
- However, a balance between demands for specialized skills (for the short term) and the concern with soft skills (for the medium and long term) is necessary.
- Tensions remain when it comes to making decisions on the revision of learning outcomes to enhance employability. HEIs will need to balance these tensions.
Any questions?

Thank you for listening!

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