THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
*Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA***
*Registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR***

Trends and challenges in designing flexible and qualitative work-based learning: the role of QA agencies

Prof. univ. dr. ing. Cristina-Daniela Ghițulică
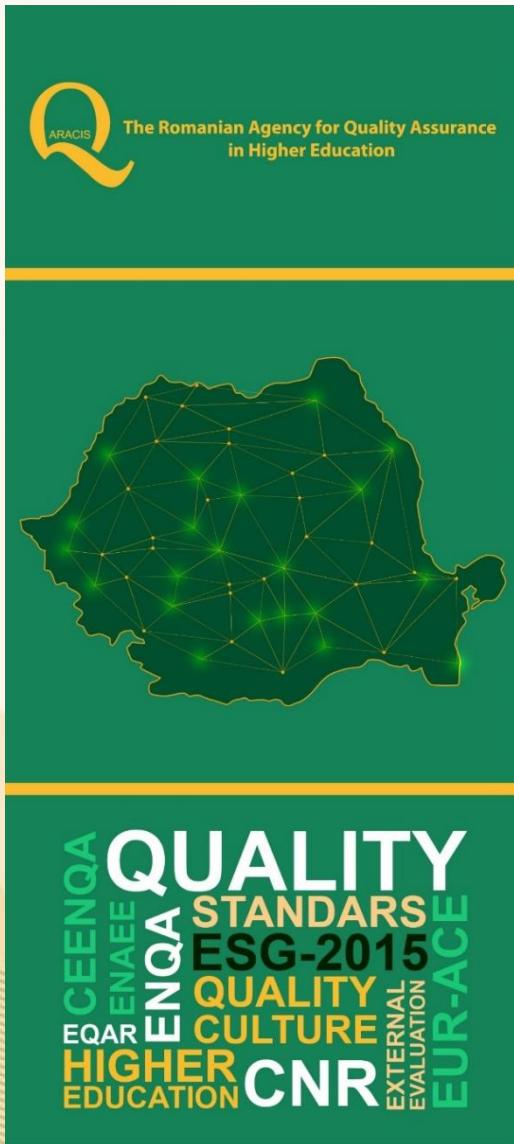Drd. Horia-Șerban Onița

INQAAHE 18th Biennial Conference 2025
The Big Bang Theory: the Quality Assurance Paradigm Shift
13-16 May 2025, Tokyo (Japan)

Contents

➤ About ARACIS

➤ General views on work-based learning

➤ ARACIS standards for dual education

➤ Questions for discussions

About ARACIS

- Established in **2005,** as a continuation of the **National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation in Romania,** founded in **1994**;

- **Autonomous public institution** of national interest, **self-financed** from evaluation fees and from projects, consultancy, monitoring, training courses, conferences, and other legally constituted sources;

- Full member of **ENQA** - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and registered in **EQAR** – The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education since **2009**.

International collaboration

Full member of:

➤ **INQAAHE** - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

➤ **CEENQA** - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

➤ **ENAEE** - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

➤ **ECA** - European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

➤ **CoARA** - Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

➤ **EUA CDE** - EUA Council for Doctoral Education

➤ **CHEA/CIQG** - Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group

➤ **GAIN** - Global Academic Integrity

Network

➤ **Collaborates with:**

➤ **ANACEC** (Republic of Moldova)

➤ **CTI** (France)

➤ **HCERES** (France)

➤ **MAB** (Hungary)

➤ **NEAA** (Bulgaria)

➤ **NAQA** (Ukraine)

➤ **PKA** (Poland)

➤ **QAA** (United Kingdom)

External Evaluation activities

- Ex-ante (provisional authorisation), ex-post (accreditation) and cyclical (periodical) external evaluation
  - Institutions
    - Institutional
    - Audit
    - Simplified evaluation
  - Short-cycle and bachelor study programs
  - Master and doctoral study domains
  - study programs for initial training of teachers (for pre-university and higher education)
  - Romanian language study programs
  - adult education study domains or at the institutional level
- EUR-ACE® Label awarding for Engineering programs

> In average 650 procedures per year
> Separate procedures if location, language or delivery mode are different
>   - On campus
>   - Distance education
>   - Part-time
>   - Dual education

External Evaluation activities

Domains of evaluation	INSTITUTIONAL			PROGRAMS/DOMAINS		
	Criteria	Standards	Indicators	Criteria	Standards	Indicators
A **Institutional Capacity**	6	11	14	4	7	8
B **Educational Effectiveness**	9	16	20	9	13	17
C **Quality Management**	8	12	21	8	11	14
TOTAL	**23**	**39**	**55**	**21**	**31**	**39**

External Evaluation activities

Domains of evaluation	INSTITUTIONAL			PROGRAMS/DOMAINS		
	Criteria	Standards	Indicators	Criteria	Standards	Indicators
A **Institutional Capacity**	6	11	14	4	7	8
B **Educational Effectiveness**	9	16	20	9	13	17
C **Quality Management**	8	12	21	8	11	14
TOTAL	**23**	**39**	**55**	**21**	**31**	**39**

Specific standards:
- ➤ Level of studies
- ➤ Scientific fields
- ➤ Delivery modes
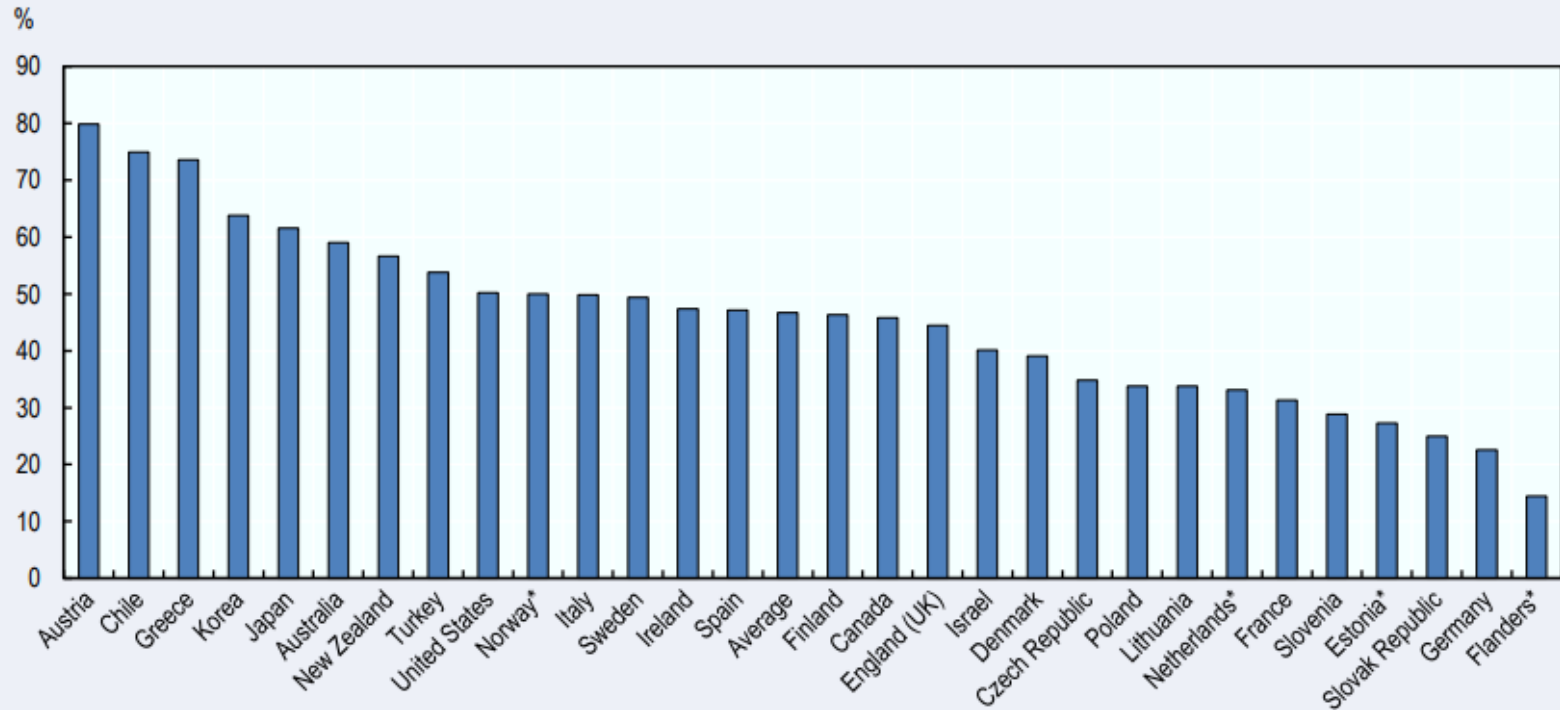
Join
Menti.com →
1763 9153

Employees of today

Proportion of employed individuals younger than 35 with higher education reporting to be unable to choose or change "the sequence of tasks" and "how to do the work" (upper secondary education = 1)

Skills of tomorrow

Exhibit 10

Skills of today vs skills of tomorrow: technological, social and emotional skills will become even more important.
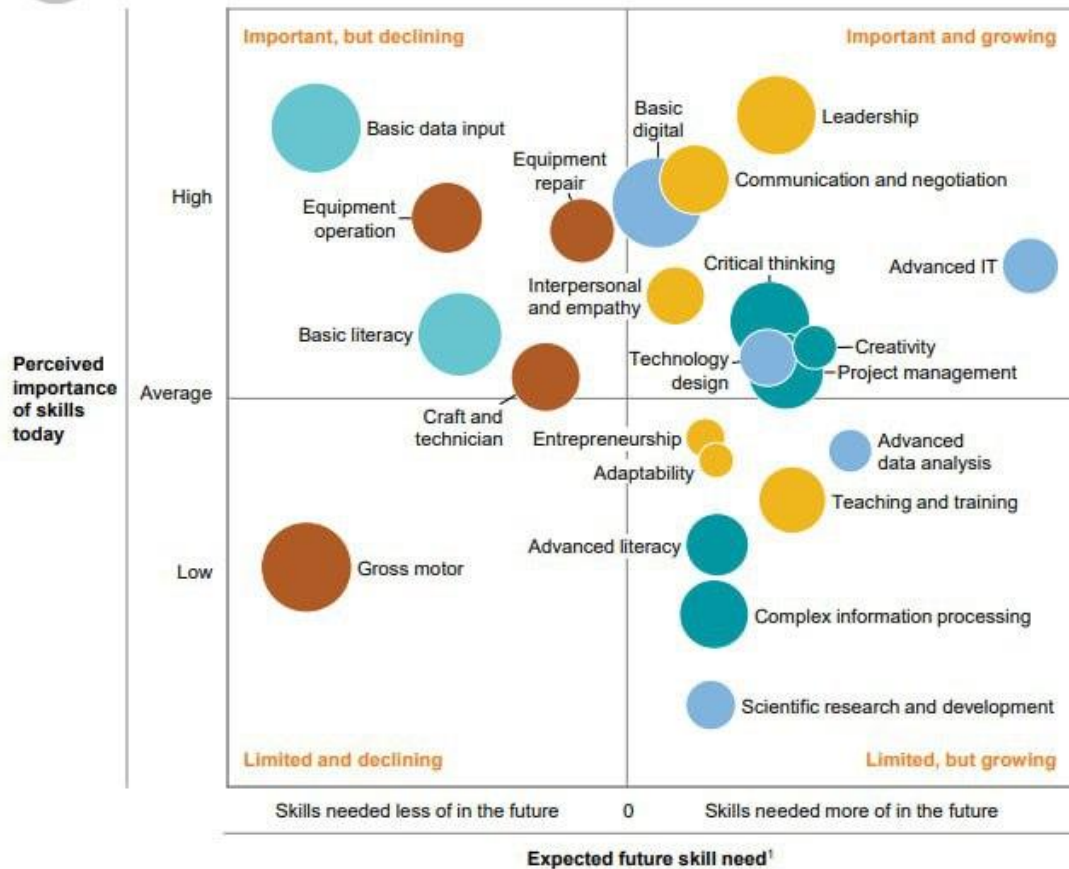
Based on McKinsey Global Institute workforce skills executive survey, March 2018
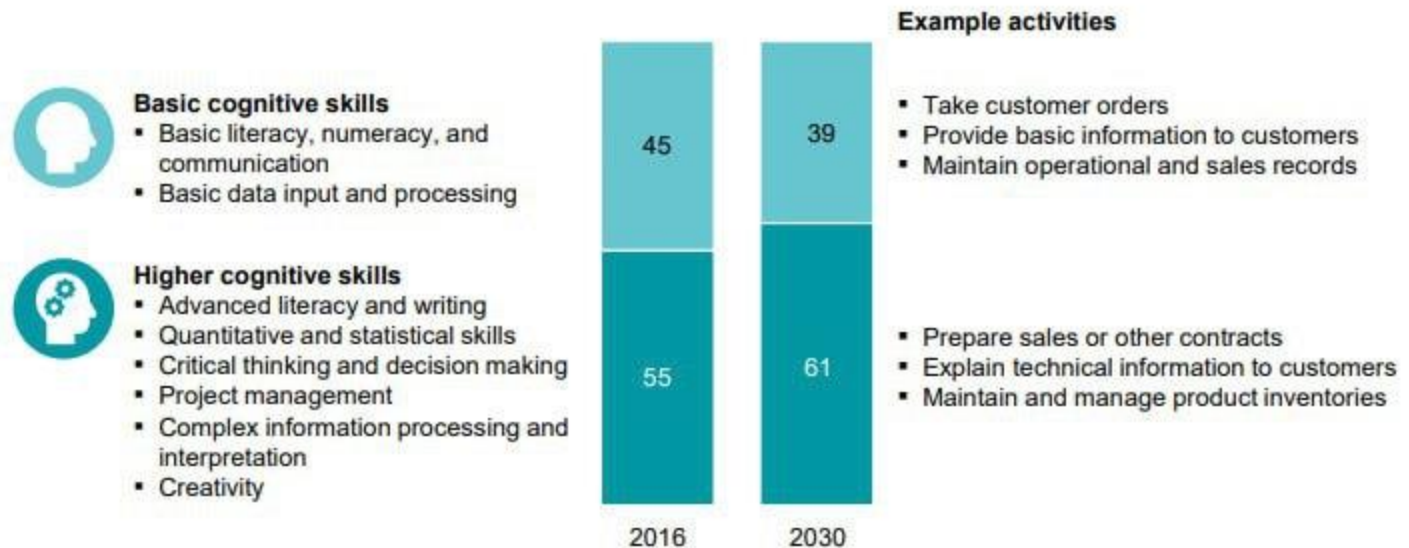
Types of skills of tomorrow

Exhibit 6

Higher cognitive skills are increasingly displacing basic cognitive skills across occupations.

Based on McKinsey Global Institute workforce skills model

United States and Western Europe
% of time spent on cognitive skills

Basic cognitive skills
- Basic literacy, numeracy, and communication
- Basic data input and processing

Higher cognitive skills
- Advanced literacy and writing
- Quantitative and statistical skills
- Critical thinking and decision making
- Project management
- Complex information processing and interpretation
- Creativity

Example activities

- Take customer orders
- Provide basic information to customers
- Maintain operational and sales records

- Prepare sales or other contracts
- Explain technical information to customers
- Maintain and manage product inventories

	2016	2030
Basic cognitive skills	45	39
Higher cognitive skills	55	61

NOTE: Western Europe: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Numbers may not sum due to rounding.

SOURCE: McKinsey Global Institute workforce skills model; McKinsey Global Institute analysis
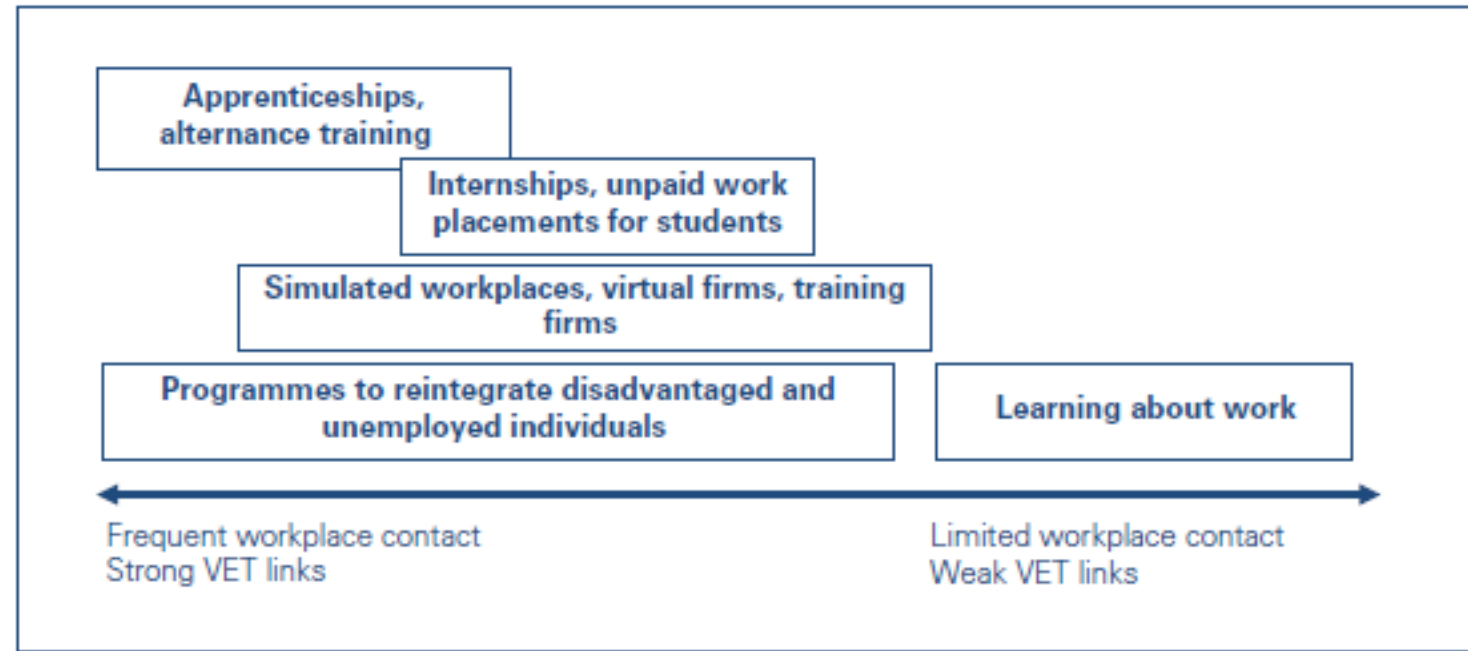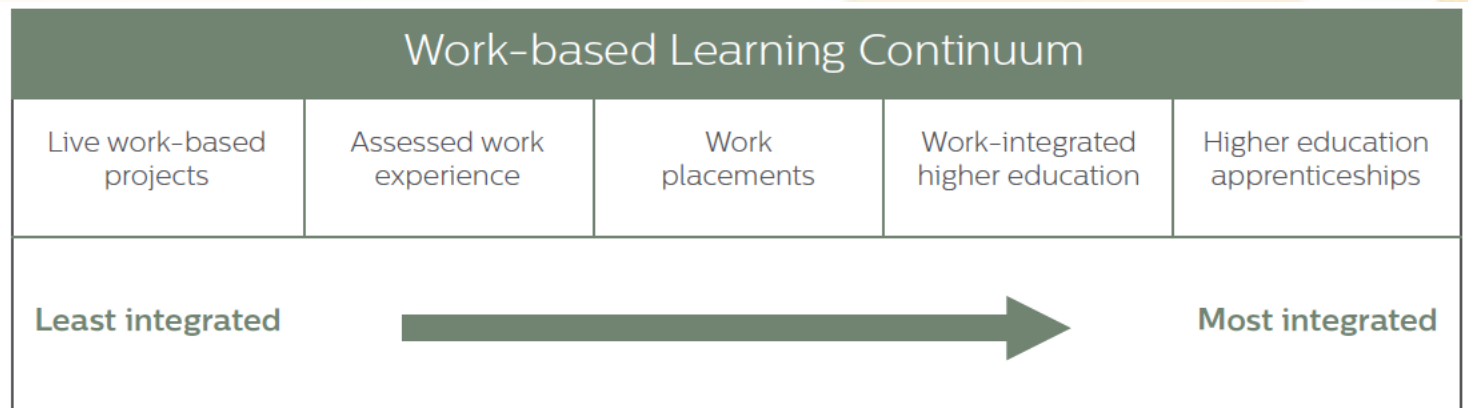
Work-based learning: What it is

No universal definition

Work – based learning includes authentic **structured opportunities** for learning which are achieved in a workplace setting **or** are designed to meet an identified workplace need (…) being designed to meet the **learning needs of the employees**, developing their knowledge, skills and professional behaviours **and** also meeting the workforce development needs **of the organisation.** It involves learning **through** work, learning **for** work and/or learning **at** work (QAA, 2018).

Not a new phenomenon, but having an increased importance, especially from a structural point of view within a study programme

New names, old concepts – variation in between

Work-based Learning Continuum

Live work-based projects	Assessed work experience	Work placements	Work-integrated higher education	Higher education apprenticeships

Least integrated ⟶ Most integrated

Apprenticeships, alternance training

Internships, unpaid work placements for students

Simulated workplaces, virtual firms, training firms

Programmes to reintegrate disadvantaged and unemployed individuals

Learning about work

Frequent workplace contact
Strong VET links

Limited workplace contact
Weak VET links

New names, old concepts – variation even within

Dimension	Variation				
Status of individual	Seeking entry to HE (initial or later stages)	Full-time student, as pre-entry to labour market	Part-time student of taught courses and employed		Full-time employed (paid/unpaid) in the labour market
Focus of overall higher education curriculum in which WBL figures	Discipline based (ranging 'hard pure', 'soft pure', 'hard applied', 'soft applied')	Vocational general	Vocational specific		Individual personal development, plus job-specific project, plus on-line job learning
Control and content of curriculum for WBL	Determined by HEI		Determined by regulatory body/ HEI/employment provider		Determined by individual/employment provider/HEI
"Status" of assessment of WBL within overall HE curriculum	Pass/fail but no contribution to classification of award	Pass/fail for technical skills (leading to licence to practise) plus contributes to classification	Leads to separate award of HEI	Used for evidence towards units of VQs	Contributes fully to classification, and used for evidence towards units of VQs
Who supports learner in WBL	Primarily HEI		Primarily employment provider		Primarily employer plus other learners

Brennan & Little, 1993

Choosing what WBL gets integrated

Types of WBL depend on elements such as:

- **target group** of learners
- **cultural factors** (e.g. working students)
- **structure of the labour market and employers**
- **legislation** on types of contracts and worker rights
- **strength, articulation, permeability with VET and non-tertiary education** and the positioning of WBL between academic – VET – professional HE
- **incentives, especially for companies** (duration, financial contribution, equipment, risks vs added value in productivity, condition for future employment, fiscal facilities)

All of these have an **impact on the context** of the WBL, as well as its benefits and limitations.

Different types of WBL **can co-exist**. Usually **the 'least' intense option** (which is, in the end, a pedagogical paradigm) would always be present, in co-existence **with others**.

QA of work-based learning

The **quality** of WBL can be approached in three steps:

- The **substance (learning outcomes)**
- The **environment (e.g. facilities, tutoring etc)**
- The **process/overarching framework** (e.g. choice of methods and intensity, partnership arrangements and enhancement, contingency plans)

From quality to QA:
- Does assuring the Q of work-based learning differ from delivery in higher education generally? If so, are there differences in criteria for assessment?
- From a conceptual and practical point of view, which principles of Q(A) would need to be adapted (e.g. flexible learning pathways)?
- In EHEA, the Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG) serve as the broad umbrella for all HE, therefore also WBL. How about VET standards?

Learning outcomes

For every competence there is a body of knowledge, its mastery (skills) and its application in practice (autonomy and responsibility). LOs encompass these three divisions.

Q1: Which developed where?

Q2: Coordination within and between disciplines
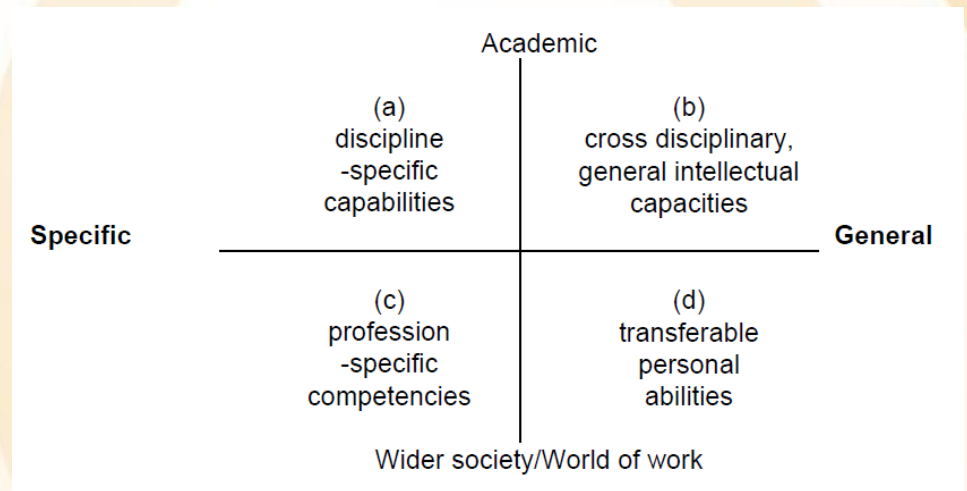
Barnett, 1992

Paradigms in 'competence'

epistemology	operational competence know how	academic competence know that
situations	defined pragmatically	defined by intellectual field
focus	outcomes	propositions
transferability	metaoperations	metacognition
learning	experiential	propositional
communication	strategic	disciplinary
evaluation	economic	truthfulness
value orientation	economic survival	disciplinary strength
boundary conditions	organisational norms	norms of intellectual field
critique	for better personal	for better cognitive
	effectiveness:	understanding of
	understanding of	concepts, ideas, evidence
	operations, professionals'	theories
	knowledge-in-use	

Barnett, 1992

Dual education in Romania

- **Law 193/2023** introduced **dual higher education** as a typology of WBL-based programmes in HE, at **all HE NQF levels.**
- Part of a **wider approach towards dual education** - creating school-HE dual campuses through NRRF – EUR 799 mil, together with companies* and local authorities

- Considerations:
  - i) offers **HE-level opportunities** for those seeking quicker access to labour market;
  - ii) improve the **employability of graduates**;
  - iii) promote **better incentives for companies** to get engaged (with potential positive spill-over effects).

According to Eurograduate, in RO completing internships has a positive impact on employment (+6%), on first earnings (+15%) and are predictive for assessing one's communication, problem-solving, and planning skills (could also be a sorting effect?).

External QA of dual education

- Pursuant to the law, the Ministry adopted a **methodology for dual studies**
- ARACIS developed **Specific Standards for Dual Education**, which are applied together with the cycle-level standards and the QA Methodology

- ARACIS evaluated so far **29 dual bachelor programmes** for authorisation,

  - Dispersed across all historical regions

  - Majority of them for 240 ECTS (four years)

  - Most in STEM fields, especially Engineering, but also IT, Trade, Environment Studies, Agronomy, Culinary Arts

  - Most from dual consortia (link with school level)

Standarde de calitate specifice pentru forma de organizare dual a programelor de studii universitare de licenţă/masterat

Cadrul legal

În conformitate cu **art. 32** din *Legea Învăţământului Superior nr. 199/2023*, cu modificările şi completările ulterioare, ARACIS elaborează **standarde de calitate specifice** centrate pe rezultatele învăţării privind modul de desfăşurare a activităţilor aferente programelor de studii universitare, diferentiate pentru formele de organizare, si în raport cu domeniile de studii, precum si cu ciclurile de
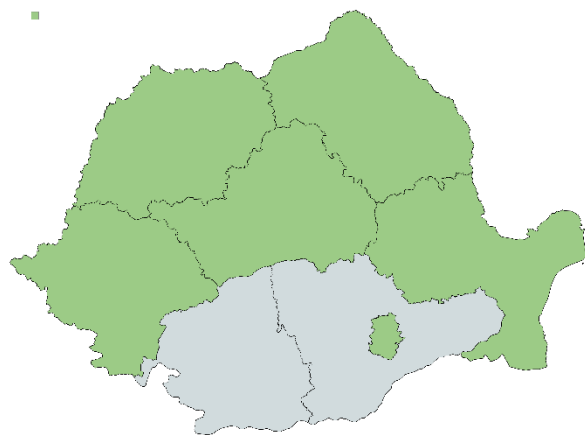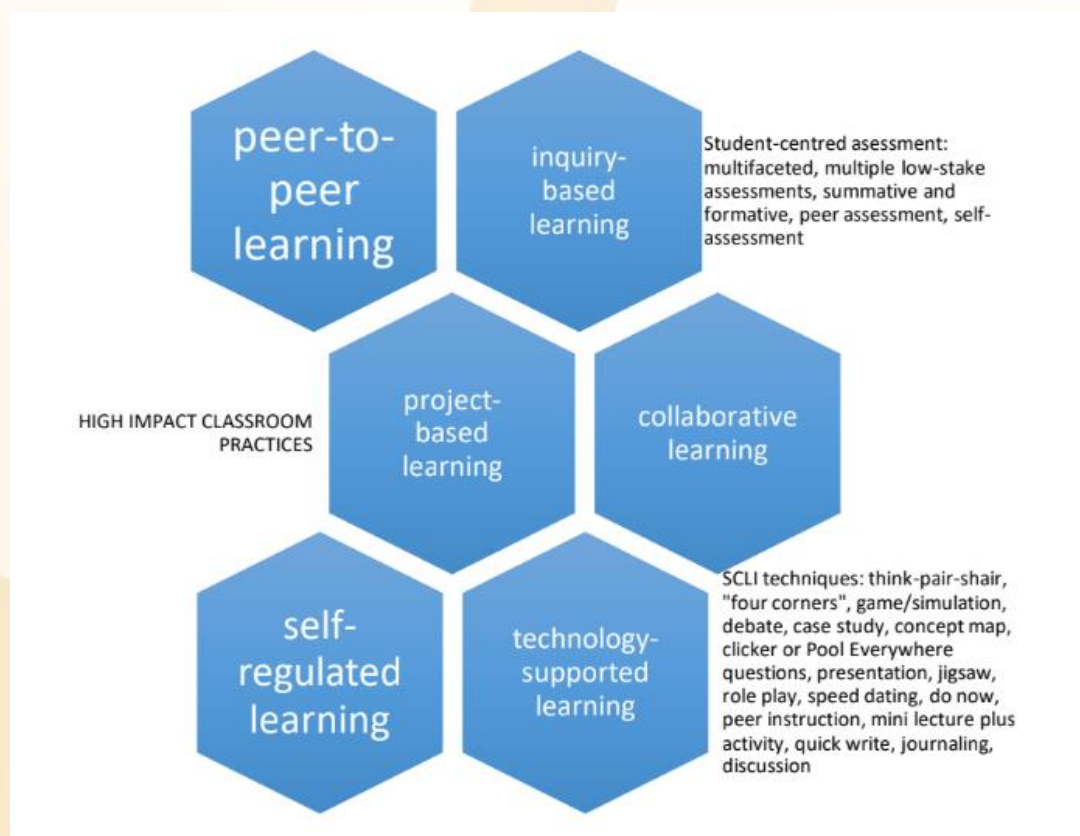
Division of responsibilities

- **Responsibilities** for carrying out learning, teaching, applicative, research and evaluation activities **are shared** between the accredited higher education institution and companies.

  - The higher education institution organizes and delivers learning and teaching and evaluation activities,

  - Companies organize work-based learning activities and participate in their evaluation.

  - Applicative and research activities can be carried out both at the higher education institution and companies.

The workload specific to learning-teaching and work-based learning activities is equal.

Division of responsibilities

- **Responsibilities** for carrying out learning, teaching, applicative, research and evaluation activities **are shared** between the accredited higher education institution and companies.

HIGH IMPACT CLASSROOM PRACTICES

peer-to-peer learning

inquiry-based learning

Student-centred asessment: multifaceted, multiple low-stake assessments, summative and formative, peer assessment, self-assessment

project-based learning

collaborative learning

self-regulated learning

technology-supported learning

SCLI techniques: think-pair-shair, "four corners", game/simulation, debate, case study, concept map, clicker or Pool Everywhere questions, presentation, jigsaw, role play, speed dating, do now, peer instruction, mini lecture plus activity, quick write, journaling, discussion

Definition of dual education delivery mode

- Work-based learning is achieved through **work activities** that take place at the company and can lead to the production of real goods and services.
- Work-based learning activities allow students to **experience real work contexts**, in which they can apply knowledge and skills acquired in academia, applied or research activities carried out in the university environment.

⮊ students develop **additional skills relevant to employability**, such as: communication, learning ability, leadership, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, consistency, time management, initiative, organizational ability, autonomy, technological skills, computing skills, workplace ethics, conflict resolution.

Standards for dual education delivery mode

- **Content and organisation**

  o **Companies are involved in designing the curriculum, in the admission, delivery, regular assessment and the final examination**

  o A **joint committee** is established, involving HEI and companies' representatives, to implement the partnership and decide, among other, how **learning outcomes will be divided/attained** sharing the responsibilities; The division is based on a **common analysis, considering personnel, teaching method, facilities** etc

  o The activities carried out in HEIs and at the companies are **correlated**, so as to form a **unitary and complete learning experience**; the work-based learning should materialize the theoretical foundations obtained in academia;

  o The assessment of learning outcomes acquired in work-based learning usually involves a p**ractical test in which students demonstrate that they can perform** activities that lead to the outputs for which they are trained.

Standards for dual education delivery mode

- **<u>Students</u>**
  - Are benefiting from **full labour law protection** as workers;
  - Have the **right to be offered the opportunity to be hired** by the companies, in the case they fulfill the requirements set in advance;
  - **Might benefit from scholarships** from companies, on top of public grants.
  - Have the right to be **trained for WBL**
  - Are supported by **tutors**, which should have qualifications on par with the study programme and at least 2 years of experience in the position
  - Can redo the work-based learning activities if LOs are not attained

Standards for dual education delivery mode

- **Tutors**

  - Tutors are **trained by the HEI, coordinated by a staff member** and benefit from **guidance;**

  - Tutors are being **evaluated by the students**, and the HEI can ask for their replacement if irregularities are identified;

  - Tutors are **waived income tax**

Different roles for the tutors

FUNCTION Focus	MENTORING	LINE MANAGING	COUNSELLING
Educative - autonomy and self esteem	*Enable* the worker to learn, develop and move forward	*Enable* the worker to deliver and perform	*Enable* the person to change and move forward
Supportive - holistic, values the person	*Help/support* the worker to learn	*Help/support* the worker to be good at the job	*Help/support* the person to cope and to be in control of self
Managerial - accountability	*Ensure* the worker understands and can handle situations	*Ensure* the work is of at least adequate quality	None

Standards for dual education delivery mode

- **<u>Companies</u>**

  o Are expected to contribute to **ensuring the necessary resources**, including funding academic facilities;

  o **Receive fiscal benefits**

Challenges in practice

- Activating **joint committees** for the consortia

- Determining **minimum performance standards** for WBL-based courses

- **Appeals procedures** for WBL-based courses

- **Training tutors and preparing staff** for articulating LOs division

- Lack of **RPL practices** in Romania

- **Reliability, validity and fairness** if more than one company would be involved

- **Marketisation and communication**

Challenges in practice

- Creating conducive, enabling frameworks between education and labour policy: new short cycle (level 5) introduced
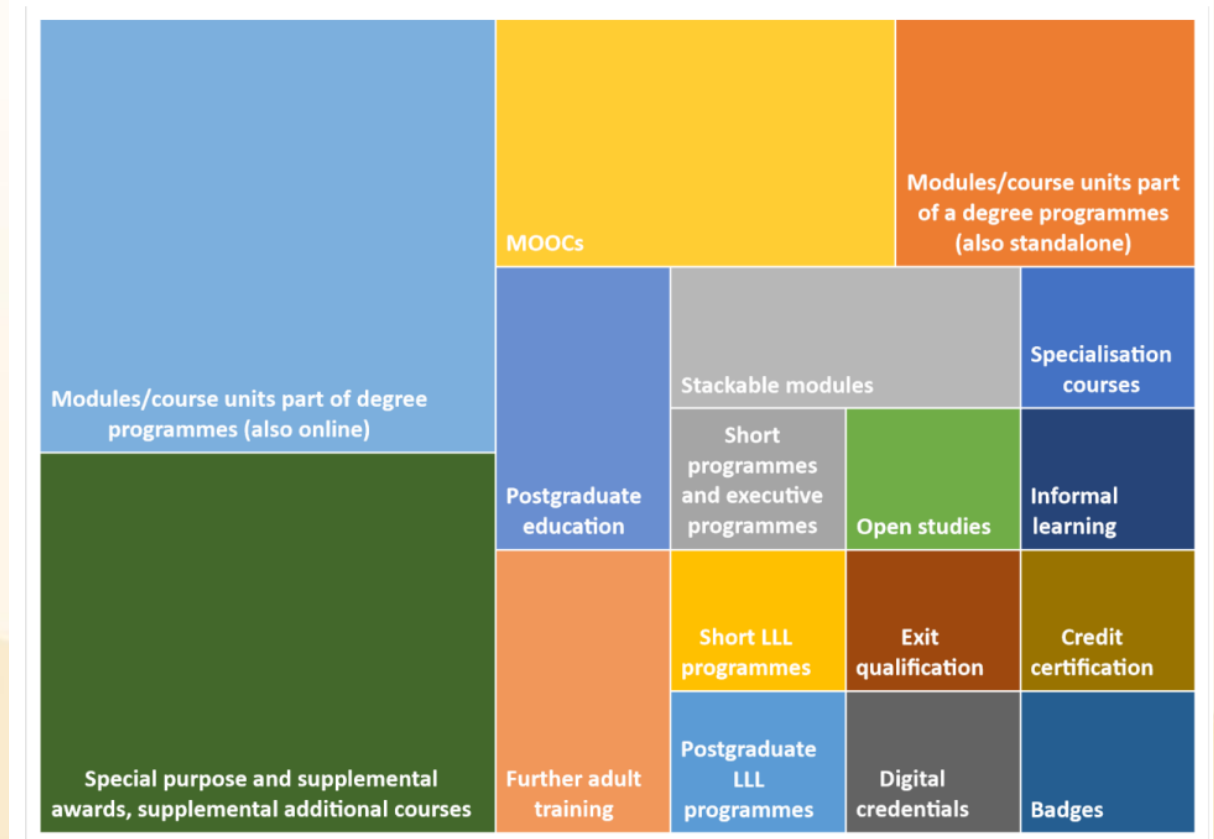
Group work

Q1: Do you have any examples of good practice for WBL?

Q2: What are the main challenges facing WBL in your system?

Q3: Which challenges could be tackled through QA and how?

Please choose a rapporteur ☺

Some takeaways

- Improving engagement of companies require both **structural and cultural approaches**;

- Clear **division of responsibility** is needed, preferably clarified in partnership agreements even if it would be easier to postpone it

- WBL intensive study programme requires **transformative approaches, not just adapting** existing study programmes

- Diverse **toolbox of pedagogical approaches** still needed

- Difficult to **imagine (yet) a transnational** component, but European University Alliances could support?

- **Intensity of WBL is not a given**, it is a choice as well (but not always – e.g. RO)

- **Role of industry stakeholders** in EQA equally important

THE ROMANIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER
EDUCATION
*Member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - **ENQA***
*Registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - **EQAR***

Thank you for your attention!

www.aracis.ro

https://www.facebook.com/ARACIS.RO

https://www.linkedin.com/company/aracis/