



Harmonising Approaches
To Professional Higher
Education In Europe



DEFINITION and CHARACTERISTICS of PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION



PHE – Towards comprehension / understanding

Scope, context, principles

The higher education landscape throughout Europe has changed dramatically over the past few decades. In order to respond to societal, technological and cultural developments higher education has moved from being elite to mass to universal. It has substantially diversified in terms of access of different age cohorts studying indifferent ways at a variety of levels of advancement and a variety of institutions. Yet, the purposes of higher education still remain largely those defined by the Council of Europe's 'four purposes' of higher education: "preparation for sustainable employment, personal development, preparing students for active citizenship, and creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation".



There has appeared a diversity of different but equally recognised approaches to the way in which these tenets of the Council of Europe's 'four purposes' are implemented by different institutions providing a wide range of institutional missions, values, objectives and provisions in terms of curriculum design and delivery, levels of qualifications, research, development and community engagement. More emphasis is placed towards responsiveness to the societal requirements, employability characteristics amongst graduates, as well as enhancing the role of higher education within the life-long learning concept and affiliation with corresponding structures. In the recent period higher education systems have witnessed blurring the borders amongst formerly set types of higher education institutions. Despite the diversity of approaches at every level of higher education, the issue of quality remains central if all the different types of higher education are to remain different but equal to the various stakeholders.



EURASHE is concerned with higher education that is avowedly focused on the preparation of graduates for a smooth integration into the world of work, research that is market oriented/user inspired and community engagement that is deeply rooted in the communities (local, regional, national or international), whether provided at the institutional, faculty or department level. The following definition and specific, key characteristics should serve as guidelines to better understanding this particular type of higher education, respecting its mission, integration within higher education systems and promote its development and evaluation irrespective of the institutional background and provisions.



Definition of Professional Higher Education (PHE)

Professional Higher Education is a form of Higher Education that offers a particularly intense integration with the world of work in all its aspects, including teaching, learning, research and governance and at all levels of the overarching Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

Its function is to diversify learning opportunities, enhance the employability of graduates, offer qualifications and stimulate innovation, for the benefit of learners and society.

The world of work includes all enterprises, civil society organisations, and the public sector. The intensity of integration with the world of work is manifested by a strong focus on the application of learning achievements. This approach involves combining phases of work and study, a concern for employability, cooperation with employers, the use of practice-relevant knowledge and use-inspired research.



PHE Characteristics Framework

The framework supplements the definition by clarifying how the professional nature of HE expresses itself through various characteristics of Higher Education. The characteristics do not attempt to describe a professional HEI, but rather are applicable to units of education, most typically courses or programmes within HE.

The framework is made up of three variables:

- **Characteristic:** this is simply the name of the indicator
- **Description:** this merely describes what is meant by the indicator
- **Core Criterion:** This sets out the minimum requirement the educational experience must adhere to, so as to be considered professional higher education.



Policy and Strategy

How is PHE embedded and represented in the overall policies and strategic framework of higher education institutions?

Characteristics	Description	Core criterion
Policy and Strategy Integration	Integration of the world of work into policies and strategic framework	Institutional policies and strategies are defined in collaboration with the world of work.
Objectives and Outcomes	Main objectives in relation to the outcome of PHE	PHE specifically focuses on enhancing job related skills and competencies with a view to raising the employability of students. The emphasis is on learning outcomes and use-inspired research.
Regional Integration	Engagement with its regions and contribution to their development	PHE is strongly embedded in regional partnerships with the world of work.



Teaching and Learning

How is teaching and learning influenced through the specific characteristics of PHE?

Characteristics

Description

Core criterion

Methods of Curriculum Development

The process of design and development of:

- learning outcomes
- curricula
- methods of learning and assessment

Curricula are developed by academia in collaboration with stakeholders, in particular from the world of work, taking into account the future needs of the practice and context of employment.

Learning Outcomes

What a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do as the result of a process of learning

The learning outcomes reflect essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the specific professional requirements, but should not be limited to this.

In addition, students acquire professional and life skills which enable them to act successfully, in an innovative and self-organised way in a changing work environment.

The involvement of students in research, development and innovation activities leads them to better professional practice.



Characteristics

Content for Teaching and Learning

Description

The content comprises:

- syllabus and other materials
- practice examples
- working methods

Core criterion

The learning content is productively integrating theory and practice as the basis for complex problem-solving in real work situations.

The content is informed by the latest research, trends and references from both the world of work and academia.

Learning Methodology

The learning methodology comprises:

- the learning design
- the assessments needed to achieve the learning outcomes

The learning methodology comprises methods of active, collaborative and self-organised learning and while focusing on experience based learning methods including but not limited to simulation based learning (SBL), scenario based learning (SceBL), problem based learning (PBL), or any other authentic learning situations.

Both formative and summative assessments should reflect the nature and methodology of the specific PHE learning environment.



Characteristics

Description

Core criterion

Learning Environment

The surroundings and conditions in which learning takes place

The learning environment includes experience within Institutions as well as outside, in the world of work.

Significant practice phases and/or job experiences serve to reflect theory in a practical context.

Programme Team

All persons involved in the design, delivery and assessment of learning, including visiting lecturers, professionals and support staff

At the programme level, the team shows a combination of academic background and relevant experience from the world of work.



Research, Development and Innovation (RDI)

How are RDI integrated as part of a sustainable PHE, recognising that they might differ from level to level?

Characteristics	Description	Core criterion
RDI Agenda	The scope of the RDI activity	The RDI agenda is informed by the world of work in order to meet the needs of society and of the world of work.
RDI Process	The way RDI meets the needs of society and the world of work	Researchers seek and provide input from and to the world of work and value stakeholders' requests and contributions. The RDI process respects the nature of the inputs and can include various types of research activities and scholarship.
RDI Outputs and Outcomes	The expected result of RDI	RDI outcomes aim to be relevant to the world of work, and society. In addition to traditional outputs, such as licenses, patents and publications, RDI outcomes are solution-oriented with tangible benefits for the world of work and society.



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Lifelong
Learning