

Quality Assurance, Qualifications, and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Sub theme 1: New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: how to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and constant change.

Topic: Combined academic and work-based learning: Dual learning assessment in the Basque University System.

Author(s): Eva Fernández de Labastida, Carla Beltrán de Guevara, Idoia Collado, Estibaliz Etxebarria, Eva Ferreira, and Aitor Zurimendi.

Organization of the author(s): Unibasq - Agency for Quality of the Basque University System

Abstract:

In the dual learning (combined academic and work-based learning) model, the distance between classical education and reality disappears and, as a result, highly qualified graduates are trained for the professional world. It is a model that maximizes the relationship with the company/organization. It allows overcoming the existing contradictions between knowledge and competencies or between theory and practice, since this learning model allows students to focus their learning objectives in great detail. At the same time, companies are aware of the type of professional experts they will have in the future. In the framework of the Basque University-Business Strategy, Unibasq mapped the university-business links in all the bachelor degrees - from dual learning approaches to internships- in the Basque University System. In addition, Unibasq developed a methodology to award a specific label on dual learning and the outcomes of the first call are presented.

Key words: Dual learning, work-based learning, Basque University System, university-business cooperation

Introduction

Unibasq and the Basque University System

Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System – is a public entity governed by private law and accountable to the Basque Government department in charge of universities.

Unibasq’s mission is to help improving the Basque University System by promoting quality for the benefit of the various stakeholders involved in higher education. Its purpose is the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System, in accordance with Spanish and international standards. It may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities outside the Basque Autonomous Community based on prior agreements signed with relevant external entities.

To achieve this, Unibasq carries out primarily activities that:

- Contribute to improving the quality of the Basque University System, in the aspects of teaching or learning, research and management;
- Provide information and opinions to public administrations and universities in their decision-making processes;
- Offer information to society on the work and results of the Basque University System.

The Basque Country is among the Spanish autonomous regions with the highest income per capita, thanks to its traditions of entrepreneurship and solid professional training and its highly-diversified economy, based on a strong network of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). As a result, the Basque Education System

is very close to the needs of the Basque Country, with strong local roots in industry and society. The Basque University System is built on a well-established tradition of education and training. It comprises three multi-campus higher education institutions (HEIs) which have their main seat in the Basque territory. Each of them features a different kind of ownership:

- Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU) is the only public university in the Basque Country; it operates as a single university “system”, with three campuses located in each of the three provinces of the Basque Country: Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba.
- The Universidad de Deusto (Deusto University) is a private, non-profit HEI of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). It has two campuses in the Basque Country: in Bilbao and San Sebastian, and a Business School division in Madrid.
- Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Mondragon University) is a private, non-profit HEI that is organised as a cooperatively owned entity created in 1997 by means of the merger of previously existing education and training institutes.

In the following table information regarding the size and scope of the Basque University System is shown.

Table 1. Size of the universities in the Basque University System.

University	Bachelor students	Bachelor programmes	Master students	Master programmes	PhD students	PhD Programmes	Academic staff
UPV/EHU	35492	68	3325	109	3570	65	5663
Deusto University	8643	22	1498	32	347	7	770
Mondragon University	4087	15	577	15	140	3	436
Total	48222	105	5400	156	4057	75	6869

Source: Universities’ official data (2017-2018).

Dual learning in the Basque Country

Dual learning (learning system that combines learning at a HEI and at a working environment) is a well-known tool to enhance skills for employability. In Spain, dual learning is regulated at Vocational Education and Training (VET) level, but there is no regulation for dual learning activities at university level. The Basque Country is known for the successful implementation of dual learning at VET level and for its close relationship with industry and businesses. That is why the Basque Government, in collaboration with different stakeholders (HEIs, companies and the Basque Business Confederation – Confebask) and taking into account the priorities set in the Communication from the European Commission on a renewed agenda for higher education (2017)¹, approved the I. Basque University-Business strategy 2022 (I. Estrategia Vasca Universidad-Empresa 2022 (EVU-E2022))². Its main two objectives are to create and to transfer knowledge related to excellent research and to its applicability to businesses and to train human resources with high capabilities and with an applied component adapted to the needs of employers. This is totally in line with what the aforementioned Communication from the European Commission on a renewed agenda for higher education (2017) established “*Higher education should also allow students to acquire skills and experiences through activities based around real-world problems, include work-based learning and, where possible, offer international mobility. Cooperation with employers can allow HEIs to increase the relevance of their curricula and deliver them effectively, and increase opportunities for students to access high quality work-based learning.*”

The objectives set in I. Basque University-Business strategy 2022 will be achieved through different actions, some of which are already being developed through the higher education institutions’ strategic plans or through the Basque University plan 2015-2018³, and some others which are specifically appointed to Unibasq - the Agency for Quality of the Basque University System:

- Drafting a map of the relationships among study programmes and businesses in the Basque University System.

¹<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=EN>

²http://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/uni_estrategia_universidad_emp/es_def/adjuntos/Estrategia_Vasca_Universidad_Empresa_2022_c.pdf

³http://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/uni_planes_universitarios/es_def/adjuntos/plan_uni_2015_2018_c.pdf

- Definition of labels regarding University-Business links for Bachelor, Master and Doctorate programmes – Dual learning labels.

Methodology

To start with the appointed tasks, Unibasq reviewed the university-business links in all bachelor degrees - from dual learning approaches to internships with a diversity of intensities. Unibasq technical staff reviewed the available information regarding each bachelor degree offered in the Basque University System (desk-based research) in order to see the intensity of the relationships among universities and companies or organizations.

The summary of the outcomes of this review can be seen in Figure 1.

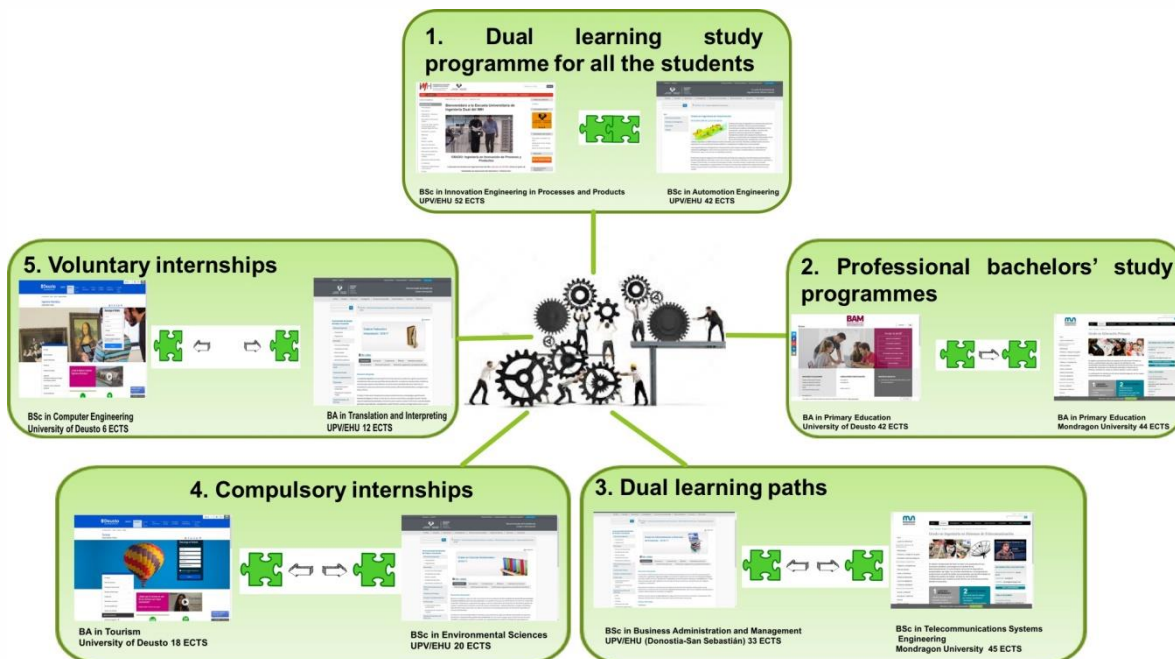


Figure 1. Type and intensity of the university-business cooperation in the Basque University System's study programmes at Bachelor level.

The main features of each category are:

1. Dual learning study programmes.

- All the students are enrolled in a combined learning system at a HEI and at a working environment.
- There is an agreement between the university and the company.
- There is a legal bound between the student and the company.

2. Professional study programmes.

- Study programmes that allow the graduate to access a regulated profession as lawyers or teachers.
- The link between the university and the company/organization is established in a specific regulation.

3. Dual learning paths.

- There is a specific path in the study programme where some of the students are enrolled in a combined learning system at a HEI and at a working environment.

4. Compulsory internships.

- There are agreements with the companies for the internships. All the students must do these work placements in order to get their qualification.
- The company is not involved in the design, planning or review of the study programme.

5. Voluntary internships.

- There are agreements with some companies giving the option to do some internship. The students do not need to do these work placements in order to get their qualification.

Once this analysis was done, Unibasq developed the methodology for reviewing “Dual learning”, following the models in place in Germany, France and Norway. The evaluation criteria consider, among other issues, the number of ECTS credits gained at the company (related subjects, learning and evaluation methodologies), skills developed at the company, the type of collaboration between the university and the company, student support systems and the profile of the company supervisors (if specific training is provided).

The following table summarizes the review criteria gathered in the procedure for the recognition of dual training for official bachelor and master degrees available in Spanish and Basque at Unibasq's website⁴.

Table 2. Criteria for evaluation of dual learning.

Criteria	Aspects to consider
1. Description of the study programme	Complete study programme / path – number of students % ECTS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor level: 25-50% • Master level: 40% or at least 30 ECTS • Final project should be included in this percentage.
2. Justification of the study programme	Interest and relevance of the dual methodology for skills achievement Level of involvement of the companies in the study programme (design, delivery,...) Creation of a university-business commission
3. Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes to be achieved at the university/company (way of achieving them) – coordination of activities
4. Students	Students distribution in the different companies Public information Student-company bond (contract or similar to support them) Recognition of previous work experience or internships, only if approved by the university-business commission
5. Planning and organisation	Study programme organisation at the university and at the work placement (subjects, chronogram, activities, review system, ...)
6. Academic staff	Profile of the academic staff and the supervisors at the work placement (training received)
7. Material resources and services	List of companies and agreements signed. In the agreements the training for the supervisors should be established.
8. Quality Assurance System	Procedures regarding the design and planning of dual learning, the monitoring of this dual learning regarding stakeholders' satisfaction and identification of needs and expectations and continuous improvement considering the outcomes.

Eventually, last November 2017 Unibasq opened a call to the Basque universities to award a specific label on dual learning. The target was to evaluate the Bachelor's and Master's Degree study programmes' proposals to obtain recognition of "Dual Learning". The aforesaid recognition may extend throughout the whole study programme, or a part of it (a path or itinerary). All degrees in the Basque University System registered in the Registry for Universities, Centres, and Degrees (RUCT) may apply for this recognition. This is now part of a new initiative included in the new Basque Decree 274/2017 of December 19th, regarding the implementation and closure of official study programmes (Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees

⁴ https://www.unibasq.eus/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Protocolo_DUAL_Unibasq_CA_09_10_2017.pdf

and Doctoral Studies)⁵ where it is established that the Basque official study programmes will be classified in different levels under these categories: 1. Innovative methodologies based training; 2. Internationalisation; and 3. Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations. The methodology for reviewing “Dual learning” is linked to the last of the categories “Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations”.

Regarding the review methodology, it was a desk-based review of the documentation sent by the universities regarding the specific issues established in the criteria for recognition of dual learning. Each application was reviewed first by an academic and a professional expert and then the corresponding evaluation committee (by knowledge field, with a composition of academics, students and professionals) took the final decision.

Outcomes

The reviewers highlighted that this was an innovative model at university level and that the interaction between professional and academic peers enriched the discussions. In addition, they found that there were excellent ideas to align the university degrees to the needs of the companies and thus improving the employability of the graduates. Nevertheless, the experts wanted to make clear that this model should guarantee the rights of the students and that a legal framework should be developed to support the contracts for dual learning.

The degrees that got the “dual learning” recognition in the first call can be found in the following table and the review reports are available on Unibasq’s website (<https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-dual/>).

Table 3. Outcomes of the first call.

⁵ <https://www.euskadi.eus/y22-bopv/es/bopv2/datos/2017/12/1706261a.shtml>

	<p>10 Bachelor's degrees: 9 paths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanical Engineering • Industrial Design and Product Development Engineering • Industrial Organisation Engineering • Industrial Electronics Engineering • Computer Engineering • Energy Engineering • Eco-technology in Industrial Processes Engineering • Biomedical Engineering • Business Administration and Management <p>Full degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechatronic Engineering 	<p>5 Master's degrees: 5 paths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Product and Service Design • Industrial Engineering • Embedded Systems • Energy and Power Electronics • Biomedical Technologies
	<p>4 Bachelor's degrees: 2 paths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Administration and Management • Human Resources and Employment Management <p>2 full degrees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automotive Engineering • Innovation Engineering in Processes and Products 	<p>3 Master's degrees: 1 path:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded Systems Engineering <p>2 full degrees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multimedia Journalism • Digital Manufacturing
	<p>1 Bachelor's degree: 1 path:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources <p>1 full degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital Industry 	<p>1 Master's degree:</p> <p>1 full degree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automotive design and manufacturing

Conclusions

After the first call, a clear success case can be seen for the whole system and especially for Mondragon Unibertsitatea who achieved 15 labels due to its close link with the professional world and its practical orientation. Nevertheless the three higher education institutions are making a clear bet on the dual learning approach and new study programmes to join this approach are expected for the next years.

The presentation of the outcomes of this initiative in different fora has already fostered international cooperation in this field and a project proposal called “Quality assurance enhancing confidence in work-based learning” is being developed with partners from several countries in Europe. The aim of the project is to define the key elements to enhance confidence in work-based learning (for society, students, world of work, world of education...), focusing on criteria for quality assurance/assessment. Project partners were chosen according to their expertise in the area and taking into account different perspectives: Quality Assurance Agencies (Unibasq, NVAO – the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), EU network organisations (ECA - European Consortium for Accreditation, EURASHE - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), Student associations and Higher Education Institutions from different regions.

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