wblchampion

Overall Report

2025

WP2: Regulatory Analysis & Curriculum Redesign
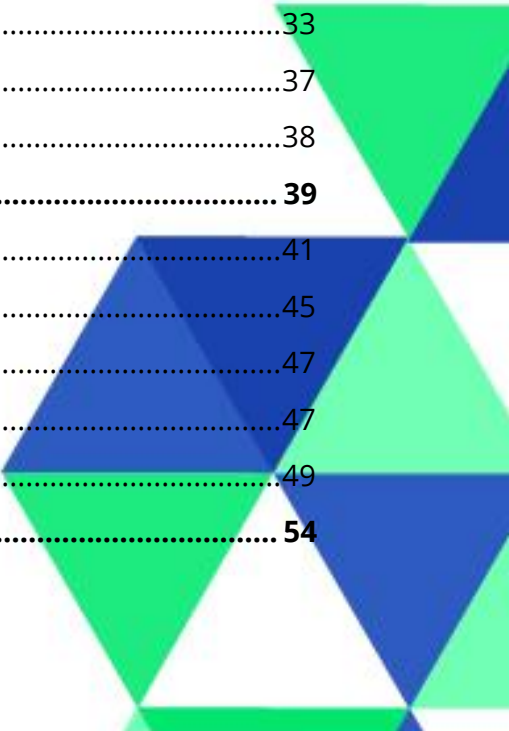
Table of contents

Executive summary

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of Work-Based Learning (WBL) policies and practices across four EU countries: Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Portugal. It examines the challenges faced by educational institutions, students, and employers in implementing WBL programs, evaluates the effectiveness of national and EU policies and offers actionable recommendations for improving WBL across Europe. The research shows that there is a significant gap in awareness of WBL policies and practices, with many stakeholders who responded to the survey, including educators, employers and students, advising there is a challenge around the awareness of WBL opportunities. Furthermore, respondents indicated in their opinion there is insufficient employer engagement, especially from SMEs, which could be seen to limit the quality and quantity of available WBL placements. While policies aimed at supporting WBL are in place, their perceived effectiveness varies across the countries analysed. Furthermore, a clear gap exists in the digitalization of WBL processes. The integration of digital tools to manage placements, track progress and provide feedback was identified as essential for improving the efficiency and accessibility of WBL initiatives.

Several recommendations were made by questionnaire respondents. These included targeted communication strategies to raise awareness of WBL policies and opportunities, creation of public campaigns, open days and workshops, providing incentives for SMEs and enhancing collaboration between universities and businesses, adoption of more structured approaches to incorporate WBL into HEI curricula, with dedicated WBL offices, clear standards and support systems for students and employers. Investment in digital platforms for coordinating WBL placements, digital literacy programs, increased funding for WBL initiatives and simplifying the administrative processes associated with WBL placements were also suggested, as a way to increase accessibility.

The report highlights that while WBL policies are making strides in connecting education with the labour market, there is significant room for improvement. By enhancing communication, fostering deeper employer collaboration, integrating digital tools, and ensuring financial and institutional support, WBL can be more effectively implemented across Europe. These changes will not only improve the quality of WBL programs but also better prepare students for the workforce, bridging the skills gap and contributing to long-term economic growth and social inclusion across the EU.

Introduction

Project Overview

The Work-Based Learning Champion (WBL_Champion) project seeks to elevate Work-Based Learning (WBL) as a leading methodology within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by developing a structured framework for effective implementation of this practice across the EU. Recognizing that WBL bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry needs, this project aims to enhance the integration of real-world experiences within educational curricula, ensuring students acquire job-relevant skills and greater job readiness. Although WBL policies exist within EU´s educational frameworks, inconsistencies in quality and implementation in the various countries of the Union hinder widespread adoption in HEIs. To address this, WBL Champion will carry out a regulatory analysis of WBL policies, redesign HE courses that are currently lacking WBL practices, develop a quality assurance toolkit and design three Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses to support HEI staff and industry mentors. Additionally, an online platform will foster collaboration among WBL practitioners and pilot testing in partner countries will validate the effectiveness of redesigned curricula with embedded WBL methodologies. The project´s main targets are HEIs academics, students and staff, as well as companies and industry mentors that will be engaged with the project to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of WBL practices.

The project outlines 3 key objectives:

Objective 1: Enhance the digital competencies of HEI professionals, as a way to integrate digital tools into WBL practices, which will, in turn, support the digital transformation in Education. This will empower educators to effectively incorporate technology within WBL programmes, aligning with EU priorities for digital readiness.

Objective 2: Provide accessible, innovative tools for HEI staff, students, companies and industry mentors. By developing user-friendly resources, this project will ensure that all participants in WBL programmes can confidently engage with digital tools, fostering a streamlined approach to WBL across institutions.

Objective 3: Redesign six existing HEI courses to incorporate WBL within curricula, directly addressing the labour market's demand for graduates with practical experience. By embedding WBL in partner HEIs, this project will facilitate transitions for students into the workforce and strengthen the alignment between HE and VET programmes.

Through these objectives, the WBL Champion project will create a unified framework and tools to support HEIs and industry leaders, thus driving a more systematic and impactful use of WBL in higher education.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives the project is divided into Work Packages, each with their specific set of objectives. The project will begin by establishing a strong

foundation for enhancing WBL practices within higher education by analysing existing WBL policies in EU partner countries (Malta, Italy, Portugal, and Ireland) and at the European level and applying these insights to the redesign of HEI courses. This Work Package, hereinafter referred to as WP2, is essential to ensure that HEIs effectively integrate WBL into their curricula, thereby improving learning outcomes, fostering relevant skill development and aligning educational programmes with labour market demands.

The project´s first main deliverable is the report on "Identification of National and EU WBL policies". It will be a core output of the project´s WP2 and it will provide detailed insights into existing WBL policies and practices across partner countries, as well as identify best practices that are currently being used in both HEIs and companies. This report is crucial for the project as it will serve as the basis for developing strategies, course designs and digital tools that align with the needs of HEI instructors and students, as well as guiding the effective implementation of WBL-integrated curricula, which will be the main focus of the succeeding phase of the project.

Scope of the report

This report focuses on the identification of Work-Based Learning policies, best practices and the analysis of gaps and challenges in the 4 countries represented in this project´s consortium: Ireland, Italy, Malta and Portugal, as well as presenting a set of related recommendations for the improvement and further uptake of WBL practices.

Methodology

The report is based on both in-depth desk research and field research.

Desk Research focused on a review of relevant literature, academic papers, government documents and case studies on WBL, in the 4 countries represented by the consortium, mainly focused on publications published in the last 8 years. Case studies of successful WBL programmes within different industries and regions were collected and analysed to showcase specific examples of effective implementation and management of WBL practices in the countries of the consortium. In addition, databases and publications from national bodies regulating WBL practices were analysed.

Field research methods were used to engage and receive information directly from the key target groups - academics, companies, as well as research organisations and students - via an online questionnaire. The key elements and findings have been integrated throughout the report. Interviews with experts were also organized to successfully complement the gathering of information obtained in both desk and field research, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of National and European programmes governing WBL practices, in addition to the entities accountable for overseeing the quality and implementation of these practices.

Definition of WBL

To establish a shared starting point, the partners agreed on a common definition of Work-Based Learning for the project. Based on the extant literature base (Boud and Solomon, 2001; Linehan et al., 2008; Sweet, 2018; Sheridan and Linehan, 2013; Jackson, 2017; Aprile and Knight, 2020) and for the purpose of this project, the definition of WBL used throughout this report is:

"an educational strategy that integrates academic learning with practical workplace experiences, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. Through structured engagement with authentic work environments, students develop knowledge, skills, and competencies. WBL activities include those activities and experiences which are directly relevant to the students' fields of study and future careers, are linked to specific learning outcomes and are assessed for learning."

Table 1 outlines experiences that are considered included or excluded within WBL, focusing on whether they enable learning outcomes to be assessed in a workplace-like environment.

Table 1 Experiences included / excluded in WBL

Included	Excluded
In WBL, included activities are those where students' progress and skills are assessed based on predefined learning outcomes in real or workplace-like environments. Example- Accredited placements	Conversely, excluded activities are those that may support skill development but lack a direct, assessable link to predefined learning outcomes in a real or simulated workplace environment. These activities often focus on theoretical or observational learning without active, assessable participation in real-world tasks. Example- Tasters/experiences that are not linked to learning outcomes and are not assessed as part of the academic programme
Vocational training employment: On-the-job learning assessed for competence and outcomes.	Case studies and reflective work: Useful for conceptual understanding but lack practical, real-world assessment.
Internships that support the assessment of learning outcomes	Simulations or role-plays that do not occur in a real workplace environment
Industry project which includes structured work assignments which might be evaluated against academic criteria.	Volunteering experiences that are not formally linked to learning outcomes or assessed for academic credit
Temporary work that supports the assessment of learning outcomes.	Job shadowing that is observational and lacks formal assessment tied to learning outcomes
Employment as part of vocational training that supports the assessment of learning outcomes	Online-only projects or virtual experiences not linked to real-world environments or assessed for workplace relevance

Importance and benefits of WBL

WBL directly addresses the disconnect between academic learning and the demands of the labour market. By integrating practical experience with theoretical knowledge, WBL provides students with a comprehensive learning experience that prepares them for real-world challenges in their respective fields.

As underscored by the European Training Foundation, WBL offers significant benefits across various stakeholders, enhancing education, employment, and policymaking:

Companies benefit greatly from WBL as it fosters environments where continuous learning is encouraged, leading to increased innovation and productivity. This not only improves product quality and customer service but also reduces employee turnover by making jobs more engaging and thereby reducing recruitment and training costs.

For learners, WBL transforms educational programmes by making them more relevant and directly connected to the workplace. This practical approach not only makes learning more interesting but also significantly improves job prospects by equipping students with work-relevant skills and establishing direct connections with potential employers. This is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged groups, helping to expand opportunities and increase social inclusion in the labour market.

Employees also see substantial benefits from WBL. It makes their work more engaging and offers opportunities to learn new skills, which can lead to further professional development and career advancement. The dynamic nature of WBL ensures that employees continually adapt and remain competitive within their fields.

Policy makers and public institutions recognize WBL for its ability to produce high-quality, relevant skills that are more in tune with current workplace demands than traditional classroom-only learning. WBL strengthens the cooperation between educational institutions and businesses, which helps align educational outcomes more closely with the real demands of the labour market. Moreover, involving employers in the design and management of vocational education and training (VET) increases their confidence in the VET system and makes economic sense as it shares costs between employers and government.

Educational institutions benefit from integrating WBL as it helps in developing essential soft skills such as teamwork and problem-solving, in addition to instilling basic work habits like punctuality. Showing students the practical application of their courses increases their interest in their studies and can be particularly important for increasing participation and improving outcomes among disadvantaged students.

Overall, the wide-ranging advantages of Work-Based Learning make it a cornerstone for modern education and employment strategies. It enhances the linkage between

education and the labour market, making graduates more adaptable and skilled. This not only benefits individuals in terms of employability and career progression but also enhances the competitiveness and innovation of businesses, ultimately contributing to economic growth and social stability.

Overview of National and EU Work-Based Learning policies

The existing literature highlights several key policies related to WBL in the European Union. These policies reflect a commitment to fostering skills development, employability and social inclusion through structured, practical learning experiences and are discussed in detail in this section.

In the European Union, WBL has been classified under 3 main headings:

- Apprenticeships (in some countries referred to as the dual system)
- On-the-job training for periods in companies
- WBL integrated in a school-based programme (European Commission, 2015).

The European Commission has developed many resources to inform EU and national policies supporting WBL and to support the development of WBL, some of which are captured in Table 2.

Table 2 Some EU available resources to support WBL

Resource	Description	Location
High-Performance Apprenticeships and WBL: 20 Guiding Principles (2015)	Provides guidance in four main areas of: ● National Governance and Social Partners Involvement ● Support for Companies, particular SMEs, offering Apprenticeship ● Attractiveness of Apprenticeship and improved Career Guidance ● Quality Assurance in Work-Based learning	[High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning - Publications Office of the EU](#)
European Alliance for Apprenticeships	As part of the World Skills 2013 in Leipzig, the European Commission launched the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) with a joint declaration of the European social partners and the chair of the EU Council. A concluding explanation from the European Employment Council reinforced the significance of the initiative: As a core element of the "EU Youth Guarantee", it aims to help reduce youth unemployment in Europe, in particular by increasing employability. 22 member states in the initiative committed to implementing high-quality apprenticeships and vocational training programmes.	[European Alliance for Apprenticeships - European Commission](#)
WBL and Apprenticeships Network (NetWBL)	From 2013 to 2016, 29 national agencies in Europe joined forces to form the network Work-based Learning and Apprenticeships (NetWBL). They worked together on making the contents and work of the projects concerning WBL visible and, above all, useful for everyone. The core product of the network is the WBL TOOLKIT, the first European web-based platform which provides comprehensive materials and transferable instruments for WBL. Politicians, social partners, institutes of higher education, and stakeholders of relevant educational sectors can use the platform to learn more about and implement WBL in their company, educational institution and in their country. The WBL TOOLKIT consists of three elements: an introduction to WBL, practical guidelines, tools and other resources. The central part, the database of a total of 90 tools, offers instruments, models, methods and examples for WBL. A variety of additional resources complements the offer: a bibliography with up to date 300 electronically available publications in multiple languages, a collection of case examples on implementing WBL, a glossary of relevant specialist terminology as well as the list of projects which supplied the tools and products.	[WBL-Toolkit: About the Work-based Learning TOOLKIT](#)

EPALE	EPALE is "a European, multilingual, open membership community of adult learning professionals, including adult educators and trainers, guidance and support staff, researchers and academics, and policymakers".	[EPALE | Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe](#)
European Training Foundation	The European Training Foundation provides publications and resources which are informed by research and practice, including a WBL handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries. Such publications include: ● Work based learning: A leaflet of the Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training, where The Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (IAG-TVET) was convened by UNESCO in 2008 to ensure a good coordination of activities by the key international organisations involved in the delivery of policy advice, programmes and research on TVET ● Work based learning: a handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries	[Work based learning - A leaflet of the Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training](#) [Work based learning: a handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries](#)

Legal Frameworks and Modalities of Work-Based Learning in Ireland

WBL in Ireland is governed by a framework of national laws, regulations, and initiatives aimed at integrating education and employment to support skill development and economic growth. Central to this framework is the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, which established 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) responsible for delivering Further Education and Training (FET). These boards coordinate apprenticeships, traineeships, and other WBL programmes to align training with labour market needs. The Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020-2024 supports the development of WBL through various pathways, such as vocational courses, apprenticeships, and traineeships. The focus is on lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling to meet labour market demands (SOLAS, 2020).

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science funds creates policy for the higher and further education and research sectors in Ireland.

Further Education in Ireland is education and training that happens after second level school and is not part of the third-level system, while Higher education in Ireland is provided by universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education .

Table 3 describes the different elements of Further and Higher Education to provide readers of this report an understanding of the particular parts of the Irish Further and Higher Education System that are relevant to this study.

Literature underscores the importance of WBL in fostering economic resilience and social equity. Ireland's approach to WBL is shaped by a blend of national policies, legal frameworks, and alignment with EU directives. These measures aim to foster economic resilience, address skills shortages, and promote lifelong learning. For example, research by Gruber et al. (2018) highlights that strong collaboration between employers and educators is critical to effective WBL implementation, a principle echoed in Ireland's dual-education models. Additionally, the OECD's Skills Strategy Ireland 2017 emphasises that WBL programmes tailored to industry need to enhance employability and support lifelong learning. By aligning national strategies with EU policies, Ireland ensures a coherent and progressive approach to skills development that supports its economy while adhering to European standards for education and workforce integration.

As a highly connected EU member, Ireland plays a pivotal role as a leader in technology and biopharma industries, leveraging its strategic position as a stepping stone between North America and Europe. This unique connectivity allows Ireland to attract multinational corporations, foster innovation, and provide a critical link in global supply chains. By embedding these strengths into its WBL programmes, Ireland not only meets

domestic workforce needs but also aligns with European priorities for competitiveness and sustainable growth.

Table 3 Description of Further & Higher Education in Ireland

Further / Higher Education	Title of Unit	Description
Further Education	Education and training boards (ETBs)	The 16 education and training boards are responsible for delivering primary, post-primary and further education.
Further Education	Solas	SOLAS works with the ETBs to support the development of further education and training programmes and curricula. It also works with the ETBs to look for involvement in further education and training from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.
Higher Education	Higher Education Authority (HEA)	The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The Authority has wide advisory powers across the third-level education sector. In addition, it is the funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and other designated higher education institutions.
Higher Education	Universities and Technological Universities, Institutes of Technology	All of these Higher Education Institutes deliver programmes from level 6 (Higher Certificate) to level 10 (PhD) on the National Framework of Qualifications while also been involved in research and innovation for higher education. Technological Universities are new entities in the Irish HE sector and have developed under the Technological Universities Act 2018, providing clear progression pathways from the ETBs. In comparison to traditional universities, the Technological Universities are more practice-based, working closely with industry.

WBL will always be strongly shaped by local or national institutional contexts in forms and content, and it only turns into education as soon as there is some kind of curricular formalisation and/or acknowledgement (Grollmann, 2018).

According to Article 14 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, 'Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.' Learning for Life (2000), Ireland's first White Paper on Adult Education, confirmed that skill shortages continue to threaten Ireland's economic prospects, a view endorsed by all stakeholders, who also agreed on the priority status of the skill shortage issue. Furthermore, the EURES Labour Market Information for Ireland (2024) indicates that the Irish labour market remains extremely tight, with an unemployment rate of 4.3% as of January 2024. This

tightness underscores the ongoing need for a skilled workforce to support economic growth.

Most providers of programmes that include at least an element of WBL make a distinction between learning at work i.e. in the workplace OR learning through work i.e. learning while working OR learning for work i.e. doing new or existing things better OR learning from work i.e. using the experience of work (Linehan et al, 2008).

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Statement of Strategy (2024-2026) sets out the vision for the department over the next three years and includes the ambition to:

- Reform skills training and invest in upskilling and reskilling opportunities in areas of economic growth, including in the area of green and digital skills
- Overhaul the Apprenticeship system and develop a new plan to increase apprenticeships to 10,000 every year.

Ireland's WBL policy is closely aligned with the goals of the FET 2020 strategy, with a specific focus on ensuring that every student has some form of WBL experience by 2025. This policy aims to address skills gaps in the economy, enhance employability, and provide a more seamless transition from education to the labour market.

The Apprenticeship Act (1959), although foundational, has been modernised to reflect evolving industry needs under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship (2021–2025), which broadens the scope of apprenticeships to sectors beyond traditional trades. Further emphasising the importance of apprenticeships, the Programme for Government released on 15 January 2025 reaffirms the commitment to expanding apprenticeship opportunities. The government plans to increase the number of new apprentices to 12,500 annually by 2030, with a focus on ensuring that two-thirds of these positions are in the craft and construction sectors. This initiative includes strengthening the connections between education providers and the industry to meet the growing demand for skilled labour.

Additionally, the National Skills Strategy (2025) emphasises lifelong learning and collaboration between education providers and employers, outlining goals for increasing participation in WBL. This has been part of the government strategy even back in 2011 when the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 was published highlighting that all 'undergraduate students should be encouraged to spend some time in a work or service situation and formally acknowledge such work through accreditation or inclusion in the student's Diploma Supplement' (Higher Education Strategy Group, 2011).

Legal Frameworks and Modalities of Work-Based Learning in Italy

In Italy, work-based learning (WBL) is governed by a combination of specific laws, regulations, and policy frameworks and alignment with EU directives and guidelines, designed to enhance the employability of young people and address the skills gap in the Italian labour market.

In Italy, the young people's transition to work is a priority, since the country has been facing high rates of youth unemployment and inactivity for a long time. Moreover, the ratio of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is among the highest in Europe. In this context, several measures have been taken by the Government and public authorities to promote youth employment, including tax incentives and subsidies for employers who hire young people, work-based learning programmes and measures to facilitate job readiness (skills certification systems, continuous vocational training, school-work experience, internships, apprenticeships); and support for self-employment.

Italy has implemented a series of labour market reforms that have followed since 1997 with the Treu Law (Law 196 of June 1997) and later replaced with the Biagi Reform (Legislative Decree 276 of 2003), up to the so-called "Jobs Act" (2014) and "Good School" Law 107 of 2015. Active labour market policies in recent years have often 'crossed' with school reform policies. Therefore, common areas of intervention for development have emerged in which the centrality of training, understood in its broadest sense, has taken on profound significance with a view to both employability and the training of the subject-learner-worker (Marcone, 2017).

This marked the beginning of the development of an Italian Dual System, the learning approach that combines classroom-based training (at an educational institution) with practical training in workplace settings (at a company or organisation). This model supports transition policies between education and employment, helping young people navigate the labour market, develop marketable professional skills, and reduce the time required to transition from education to professional experience.

Starting in 2021, with the adoption of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Mission 5 - Component 1 - Investment 3, "Dual System"), reinforced efforts were aimed at aligning education and training systems more closely with labour market needs, promoting youth employability, and fostering the acquisition of new skills. This initiative sought to strengthen the dual system by expanding its reach to a broader audience of beneficiaries.

School - Work alternance

Historically, the Italian secondary school education system was designed around a sequential approach, with educational pathways from secondary to higher education characterised by a strong emphasis on theoretical learning. Teaching curricula, particularly in high schools, were predominantly classroom-based and followed a

classical model in which students focused on academic studies first and entered the workforce only after obtaining a diploma or degree (Marcone, 2017).

With the "La Buona Scuola" - Law No. 107 of 2015 , this approach changed as the Italian government introduced significant reforms in the Italian education system, including the mandatory implementation of the so-called "Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro" (School-work alternation) programme in 2015, later renamed "Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento" (PCTO) requiring students in upper secondary education to engage in work-based learning activities.

School-work alternation combines practical experiences with classroom learning, allowing students to solidify their knowledge and apply their skills in real-world settings. This approach enhances education while helping students shape their academic and career paths through curriculum-aligned projects. It is a mandatory component for all high school students in their final three years, including those in lyceums, reflecting the principle of the 'open school'. Students are required to complete at least 400 hours of work-based learning in technical and vocational schools and at least 200 hours in lyceums over the three-year period.

With this reform, Work-based learning (WBL) has finally been introduced across all schools, including pathways traditionally considered unsuitable for such experiences, such as the Lyceum. This approach moves beyond the traditional division between knowledge-based learning and practical training by integrating theory with practice and aligning knowledge with experience to prepare students for specific tasks or occupations. It represents a cultural shift where schools and enterprises, despite their distinct roles, are required to collaborate with greater educational and social co-responsibility to enhance students' personal and professional development, fostering sustainable and inclusive growth. The key features that are aligned with the ECVET are (Bonacci, 2017):

- Practical Learning Environment: Part of the qualification is intended to be completed in a practice or work environment, enhancing the student's personal attitudes and creativity.
- Units of Learning Outcomes: Specific units of learning outcomes are identified for development during practical work experiences.
- Flexible Educational Offerings: Enterprises and organisations provide flexible, customised learning pathways to accommodate individual needs.
- Competence Enhancement: Experiences within organisations contribute to the development of entrepreneurial skills (such as turning ideas into action) and other key competencies including creativity, innovation, risk management, and ability to manage projects, which are connected with European Recommendation 2006/962/EC (Key competences for lifelong learning).
- Accumulation of Learning Outcomes: Learning outcomes are accumulated over a three-year period, facilitating progressive skill development and qualification achievement.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships were first introduced in Italy in 1955 as an employment contract for young people. It was reformed several times in the following decades, with major changes from the late 1990s, when youth employment measures started to be conceived and designed in connection to education and training policies. In 2003, apprenticeship took on the current structure of 3 apprenticeship types it still has today (CEDEFOP, 2017, p.14). With the "Jobs Act" - Legislative Decree No. 81/2015 (implementing decree of the Delegated Law 183/2014) the apprenticeship system in Italy was reformed with the aim to enhance their effectiveness as a tool for entering the labour market. It consolidates and simplifies the rules related to different types of apprenticeships, including conditions regarding the duration, compensation, and conditions of apprenticeships.

As an open-ended employment contract aimed at training and employing young people, apprenticeships facilitate their transition into the workforce. It allows young workers to gain professional skills specific to a job or company role while being employed under a regular contract. For companies, apprenticeships offer tax incentives and flexible salary management. A key aspect of apprenticeships is training, which must be integrated with work activities and is mandatory for the apprentice. Apprenticeships are an important part of work-based learning in Italy, with three types available:

- Type 1 Apprenticeships (Apprendistato di Primo Livello) focuses on young people aged 15-25. It targets students who pursue vocational diplomas, upper secondary education diploma or higher technical specialisation certificates (IFTS) that consist of medium or high level technical-professional skills or highly operational practical skills.

  These schemes are regulated by the regions and autonomous provinces through specific State-regions conference agreements. Content, which is divided into theoretical and practical learning, the specific qualifications offered, and the number of training hours are established by the regions and autonomous provinces according to minimum standards agreed at national level.

  These apprenticeship schemes last three or four years and offer the possibility to acquire qualifications at operator or technician level - professional operator certificate (EQF 3) or professional technician diploma (EQF 4). These qualifications are part of the national qualifications register. After obtaining the operator certificate, apprentices may proceed to the fourth year to obtain a technician diploma, in the same occupation. Access to university is possible after successful completion of secondary education and an additional one-year course at an education institute. Apprenticeships for a higher technical specialisation certificate (EQF 4) lasts a year and target young people who have fulfilled their right/duty to education and training.

- Type 2 Apprenticeships (Apprendistato Professionalizzante) are for individuals up to 29 years old, providing the skills necessary for a specific occupation. Training comprises two parts: a) acquisition of key skills (120 hours over a three-year period) regulated by the regions and autonomous provinces and provided by training centres and award a regional qualification; b) acquisition of vocational skills for specific occupation areas provided directly by companies. The occupation areas and training content are defined by collective bargaining agreements. These programmes have a maximum duration of three years (exceptionally five years for the crafts sector).

- Type 3 Apprenticeships (Apprendistato di Alta Formazione e di Ricerca) combine training and research for higher education students and graduates.

  This scheme leads to an array of qualification levels encompassing European qualifications framework levels 4-8. It targets 18 to 29-year-olds and fulfils various purposes. Learners can acquire qualifications that are normally offered through school-based programmes, in higher education or at universities, including a doctoral degree. Apprentices can also engage in research activities in private companies or pursue traineeship required to access the liberal professions (lawyer, architect, business consultant); the latter has not yet been regulated by collective bargaining. In agreement with the social partners and public education and training centres, the regions and autonomous provinces decide the duration of contracts and the organisation of programmes and ensure they are compatible with fully school-based curricula. They also define higher education credits learners obtain at schools, universities or training centres and the skills to be acquired through on the job training at a company. In the absence of a regional regulation, ad hoc arrangements between training institutes and companies are possible. Training cost allocation is defined by local authorities, based on national, regional and European social fund regulations.

Type 1 and Type 3 apprenticeships are designed to lead to the attainment of a degree or diploma, forming part of a dual education system that combines institutional training with on-the-job training at an enterprise. In contrast, the Type 2 apprenticeship is not tied to earning a degree but focuses on providing a professional qualification.

Apprenticeships distinctly position apprentices as full-fledged employees who receive a salary and gain practical experience, addressing a common barrier to employment.

The criteria and compliance measure for apprenticeships are regulated in the related legislative documents and align with the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) in some key aspects. These include the necessity for a written contract, an individual training plan (particularly for type 1 and 3 apprenticeships which

involve both the training institution and the company), a minimum duration of six months, and mandatory social security and insurance provisions. The apprenticeship contract must outline the roles, responsibilities, terms, and conditions explicitly, including details like probationary periods, occupation tasks, wage progression, entry and final grade levels, and the qualification aim. Both the contract and the training programme must be signed by the employer and the apprentice. As employees, apprentices are entitled to a comprehensive range of insurance benefits covering job injuries, occupational diseases, aging, disability, maternity, household allowances, and, since 1 January 2013, labour social security insurance. Moreover, the Italian government supports apprenticeships through incentives like contribution relief for small employers and hiring mandates for larger companies, ensuring a sustainable integration of apprentices into the workforce.

To emphasise the importance of apprenticeships, it is worth noting that the Italian government has intervened in crisis situations to support and encourage companies to enter new contracts. In 2020, for example, employers with 9 or fewer employees who have entered first-level apprenticeship contracts were able to take advantage of a 100% contribution relief for the contribution periods accrued in the first three years of the contract. Companies hiring with an apprenticeship contract can benefit from numerous concessions. To avoid abuses in the use of this type of contract and to be able to hire new apprentices, companies with more than 50 employees must hire at least 20% of the apprentices at the end of the training in the last three years.

State of implementation of apprenticeships

Despite its advantages, apprenticeship is not experiencing a phase of widespread use (Marcone, 2017). The 22nd Report on Apprenticeship in Italy highlights a slight increase in overall apprenticeship employment for the year 2022 compared to 2021. The number of contracts signed during the year amounts to 569,264 (INAPP, Infante/Vaccaro, 2024). 98% of these are professionalising apprenticeships (type 2), while the remaining schemes involve significantly fewer participants: type 1 (vocational diplomas or higher technical specialization) contracts include 11,775 participants, and type 3 (higher education) contracts have 1,307 participants (D'Agostino & Vaccaro, 2025).

Despite efforts to modernise apprenticeships to better meet the needs of companies and young people, in 2023 they accounted for only 14.5% of employment activations for individuals aged 24 and under, and 6.5% for those aged 25 to 34 (MLPS, 2023). Moreover, just one in five apprentices participates in short off-the-job learning activities (INAPP, Infante/Vaccaro, 2024). As a result, apprenticeships currently represent a limited share of young people entering the labour market. Drawing on experiences from other European countries, apprenticeships could play a larger role in facilitating school-to-work transitions and supporting adults in navigating changes across companies, occupations, and sectors throughout their careers (D'Agostino/Vaccaro, 2025).

As outlined by (Marcone, 2017), the core element of apprenticeship is training, which must necessarily be integrated with the work activity and must be compulsorily provided to the apprentice. The main problem with this contract lies precisely in the insufficient valorisation of the training component, which often fails to adequately develop the worker's skills, thus limiting his or her potential for professional growth during learning and work.

Traineeships

Introduced in Italy in 1997, traineeships are « an orientation and training period carried out in a work context and aimed at integrating young people into the work context. It is not configured as an employment relationship ». There are two different types - curricular and extracurricular traineeships.

The curricular traineeship is designed for young individuals enrolled in an education or training programme, with the goal of integrating academic learning with practical work experience. These internships are offered as part of a formal education or training curriculum, focusing on enhancing the learning and development process rather than directly promoting job placement. The educational content of the internship must align with the student's academic or training pathway.

This type of internship is governed by the Institute or University Regulations and is promoted by schools, universities or accredited training bodies, which define all the aspects relating to internship agreements with companies, the promotion of internships and their formative recognition. The general reference legislation that schools and universities must comply with is art. 18 of Law 196/97 and its implementation regulation (Interministerial Decree 142/98). The curricular internship, unlike its extracurricular counterpart, does not oblige host organisations to provide payment for these internships, as they enable students to earn academic credits toward their university degrees although the company can, at its discretion, reimburse any expenses.

Extracurricular traineeships focus on training while aiming to increase young people's awareness of the working environment and support their career choices without constituting an employment relationship. These internships can be initiated by graduates within 12 months of graduation and are activated through a "training project" contract, signed by the intern, the host, and a promoter (a third party responsible for ensuring the quality of the internship, monitoring the training process, and evaluating learning outcomes. The extracurricular internship is a widely disseminated and applied active policy training measure.

Although extracurricular traineeships are regulated by the Regions and Autonomous Provinces, common national standards are outlined in the "Guidelines on Training and Orientation Internships" (State-Regions Agreement of 25 May 2017) . These standards define qualifying elements such as the intern's activities, minimum allowances, and the purpose of internships as active policies to connect trainees with hosts, enrich their

knowledge, develop professional skills, and facilitate employment or reintegration into the workforce.

Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, in partnership with INAPP (the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies), has issued the "Trainee's Manual," a practical guide for extracurricular internships, ensuring common national minimum standards.

Criteria and compliance measures for traineeships

To start an internship, an agreement must be concluded between the educational institution and the public or private employer. For each traineeship, a training plan must be drawn up, specifying the objectives and the way in which the traineeship must be carried out, ensuring consistency between the student's academic pathway and the training activity carried out at the host organisation. The training project must also contain the names of the tutor appointed by the promoting body and of the company manager; the identification details of the insurance; the duration and period of the placement; the company sector of placement. Promoters must ensure the presence of a tutor as the organisational manager of the activities while hosts must indicate the company responsible for the placement of trainees to whom they refer.

Promoting organisations are obliged to insure trainees against accidents at work with the National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL), as well as with an appropriate insurance company for third-party liability.

Internships (both curricular and extra-curricular) have a maximum duration:

- no longer than six months in case the beneficiaries are unemployed workers or unemployable persons including those registered in mobility lists.
- no longer than six months in case the beneficiaries are students of State professional institutes, of vocational training courses, students attending post-diploma or post-degree training activities, also in the eighteen months following the completion of the training;
- no longer than 12 months for university students, including those attending university diploma courses, research doctorates and specialisation schools, also in the 18 months following the completion of their studies.

There is a limit to the number of interns that can be placed in a company in each period. This limit depends on the activity of the company and the number of permanent employees. For example: companies with no more than five permanent employees can have only one trainee, whereas if the number of permanent employees is between six and nineteen, the company can take on up to two trainees at the same time. Regulators introduced this legal limit to ensure that a proper learning experience is provided to the intern and that companies do not take advantage of the internship programme to replace employees or compensate for staff shortages. Under Legislative Decree 81/2008 and subsequent amendments, as well as the State-Regions Agreements of 21/12/2011 and

07/07/2016, during the internship period students must therefore receive adequate training on health and safety in the workplace.

State of implementation of internships

As outlined by (D'Agostino, 2025), in 2022, nearly 313,000 traineeships were initiated, marking a decline of over 16,000 compared to the previous year. About 44.5% of traineeships led to an employment contract one month after completing the experience. Over time, this percentage increases, with the employment rate rising to 51.2% within the first three months and reaching 55.9% after six months. In nearly seven out of ten cases (69.5%) where a traineeship is followed by an employment contract within one month, the former trainee is hired by the same employer who hosted the traineeship. However, this percentage drops to 55.6% six months after completion. For medium-high and high-skill level occupations, 54% of completed traineeships result in job placements within one month, with this figure increasing to 65% after six months. In contrast, for low-skill occupations, the job placement rate after six months is only 34%. As mentioned above, the current legal framework relies on the definition of minimum standards at national level, established through agreements between the state and the regions and inspired by the European Traineeship Quality Framework, and based on further regulations issued by the regions.

Work-based learning in Higher Education

In Italy, work-based learning is predominantly integrated within vocational education and training. Our desk research revealed that information on integrating WBL at the higher education level, beyond internships, is somewhat limited, especially concerning the collaboration between higher education institutions and companies in curriculum design and delivery. At HE level, WBL is implemented through curricular traineeships, Type 3 apprenticeships, and industry collaboration projects.

Curricular Traineeships

Traineeships are widely practiced and often a mandatory component of academic programmes. They are typically available to students pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees and are governed by both national and regional laws. Fields such as business, engineering, architecture, and health sciences place particular emphasis on internships to connect academic learning with practical, real-world experience. More than half of graduates declared that they have completed a traineeship during their degree (D'Agostino, 2025).

Type 3 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships represent another form of work-based learning (WBL) in Italian higher education, although they are less common than internships. These programmes, also known as Type 3 Apprenticeships (Apprendistato di Alta Formazione e Ricerca), integrate part-time work in a company with university studies, allowing students to earn a salary while completing their master of doctoral degree. This type of apprenticeship presents

significant benefits, such as tax breaks, reduced labour costs, and, in some regions, specific financial incentives. It also allows companies to build stronger partnerships with higher education and research institutions, fostering innovation and increasing their competitiveness. Additionally, companies that hire individuals under the age of 30 who have completed a research apprenticeship within six months of obtaining their qualification can benefit from full exemption from social security contributions. This exemption is capped at €3,000 per year and applies for up to 36 months.

Legal Frameworks and Modalities of Work-Based Learning in Malta

The Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018) is the primary legislative instrument regulating WBL in Malta. This Act provides a structured legal basis for apprenticeships and WBL arrangements, defining key terms, establishing the roles and responsibilities of host organisations, and outlining learner protections. It also mandates the development of quality assurance standards and encourages employer-educational institution partnerships.

The Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) further supports the WBL landscape by classifying qualifications across eight levels and linking formal learning to learning outcomes, including those attained through work experience. It ensures national qualifications are comparable to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), enabling learner mobility and cross-border recognition of learning.

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) acts as the national regulatory body overseeing the quality of WBL programmes. It is empowered to accredit institutions, review programme content, ensure quality assurance practices, and issue guidelines.

MFHEA's 2023 Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Courses that include a Work-Based Learning Component provide a structured approach for institutions embedding WBL into academic courses. These guidelines define the requirements for planning, monitoring, mentoring, and assessment of WBL within formal qualifications, and serve as a reference for ensuring quality and relevance.

Other national mechanisms include the Internship and Placement Scheme (IPS) coordinated by the Malta Public Service, and the Investing in Skills Scheme administered by Jobsplus. These offer financial and structural support to both learners and employers in facilitating high-quality WBL and apprenticeship placements, especially within the public and private sectors.

Academic institutions such as the University of Malta (UOM) and the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) also maintain internal WBL frameworks, governed by institutional internship regulations and supported through partnerships with industry.

Notably, MCAST's recent involvement in the EU4Dual Alliance underscores its strategic commitment to WBL at both national and European levels.

Legal Frameworks and Modalities of Work-Based Learning in Portugal

Work-based learning in Portugal is administered through various legal frameworks, with the Labor Code serving as the primary legislation (*Portuguese Parliament*, 2009). This code regulates employment relationships, including work-based learning modalities such as those related to apprenticeships and vocational training. Portugal's existing educational system emphasizes autonomy and curricular flexibility, guided by foundational documents such as the Student's Profile at the End of Compulsory Education (*Directorate General for Education*, 2017), the Essential Learnings (referenced and updated in multiple dispatches in the Portuguese Government´s Official Gazette), the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (*República Portuguesa XXI Governo Constitucional,* 2017) and others that may be applicable.

In addition, Portugal has specific legal frameworks that apply to the various aspects of work-based learning/training.

> ➤ Apprenticeships (training modality with double certification developed according to the references/standards of competences and training associated with the qualifications included in the National Catalogue of Qualifications) were first introduced in Portugal during 1984, as part of a dual education system. Nowadays, the frameworks regulating this system were consistently updated and are currently regulated by Ordinance nº 70/2022 (*Ministries of Education and Labour, Solidarity and Social Security,* 2022). Apprenticeships, in Portugal, are separated in both apprenticeship programmes (applied to the upper secondary level) and apprenticeship+ programmes (applied to the post-secondary level, but not including the tertiary level) and the entity responsible for regulating these programmes is the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (*Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional - IEFP*).

> ➤ Vocation Education Training (VET) in Portugal integrates two major components: Initial Vocational Education Training (iVET) and Continuous Vocational Education and Training (cVET). The Portuguese VET system operates under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and is managed by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (*IEFP*) (*Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security*, 2017). In addition to IEFP, the Directorate-General for Schools (DGEstE), also oversees vocational programmes offered in secondary schools. The main difference between iVET (initial Vocational Education and Training) and cVET (continuing Vocational Education and Training) lies in their purpose, target audience, and timing within a person's education and career lifecycle. In summary,

iVET is about preparation for the workforce, while cVET is about adaptation and progression within the workforce. iVET plays a vital role in equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need to enter the labour market, in Portugal. This dual education system contributes significantly to reducing youth unemployment and school dropout rates by offering a practical and alternative route for young people who may not thrive in traditional academic settings, as well as help fill the skills gap in various industries, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for the needs of employers.

➢ Double Certification is a type of initial or continuous vocational training included in the National Catalogue of Qualifications (*Ministries of Labour and Social Security, Education and Science, Technology and Higher Education*, 2009), carried out by a certified training entity or by an education/training establishment recognised by the competent ministries, awarding both an educational and a professional certification. Several vocational education and training modalities offer double certification in Portugal, such as: Professional Courses (*Cursos Profissionais*), initial training courses aimed at training of young people and favouring their insertion into active life, conferring level 4 of the NQF (*Ministries of Education and Labour, Solidarity and Social Security*, 2018); Apprenticeship Courses (*Cursos de Aprendizagem*), initial vocational training for young people, in a dual system, favouring their insertion into working life and allowing them to go on to further studies by conferring level 4 of the NQF (*Ministries of Labour and Social Solidarity and Education*, 2008); Specialised Artistic Courses (*Cursos Artísticos Especializados*), initial training courses conferring level 2 or level 4 of the NQF, for the initial training of young people, oriented towards the dual perspective of integration into the world of work and further study (*Ministry of Education*, 2018); Hotel & Catering and Tourism & Leisure Courses at Turismo de Portugal (*Cursos de Hotelaria e Restauração e de Turismo e Lazer do Turismo de Portugal, I.P.*), which are initial training courses that confer level 4 of the NQF, taught by the hotel and tourism schools of Turismo de Portugal, which are aimed at professional integration in the tourism sector (*Ministries of Economy and Digital Transition, Education and Labour, Solidarity and Social Security*, 2020); Youth Education and Training Courses (*Cursos de Educação e Formação para Jovens*), initial vocational training courses that provide level 2 or level 4 of the NQF aimed that young people who have left or are at risk of leaving the regular education system (*Ministries of Education and Social Security and Labour*, 2004).

➢ Adult Education and Training Courses (*Cursos de Educação e Formação para Adultos*) are initial training courses aimed at individuals aged 18 or over, who are not qualified or without adequate qualifications, for the purposes of insertion, reinsertion and progression in the labour market and who have not completed basic or secondary education. They can be initial or continuing training, with

school, professional or dual certification and confer level 2, 3 or 4 of the NQF (*Ministries of Economy and Employment and Education and Science*, 2011).

➢ Technological Specialisation Courses (*Cursos de Especialização Tecnológica*) are initial training courses that confer level 5 of the NQF, which aim to award a qualification based on specialised technical training (professional certification) (*Presidency of the Council of Ministers*, 2022). These courses can be administered by multiple entities, including secondary schools and qualified training centres.

➢ Higher Vocational Technical Courses (*Cursos Técnico Superior Profissional - CTeSP*) are non-degree higher education programmes with a duration of 2 years which award a diploma of higher professional technician. These courses can only be administered by polytechnic higher education institutions, and they facilitate progression to university degrees. The decree-laws that regulate these courses were initially created in 2006 and have undergone several updates, the most recent being Decree-Law No. 27/2021 of 16 April (*Presidency of the Council of Ministers*, 2021).

➢ Other examples of professional training modalities in Portugal that incorporate WBL include Modular Training courses (short-term training units included in the National Catalogue of Qualifications), Action Training courses (continuous training courses aimed at companies and based on the provision of integrated training and consultancy services) and Initial and Continuous training activities carried out by companies as part of innovation and modernisation of Public Administration sector (Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, 2010). Aside from the above-mentioned modalities, the NQF integrates the Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences acquired throughout life in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, including those obtained through work-based learning. This system represents an integrated framework of structures, tools and methods in VET, designed to enhance basic education and professional development in alignment with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This system is under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, with implementation managed by the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP, IP).
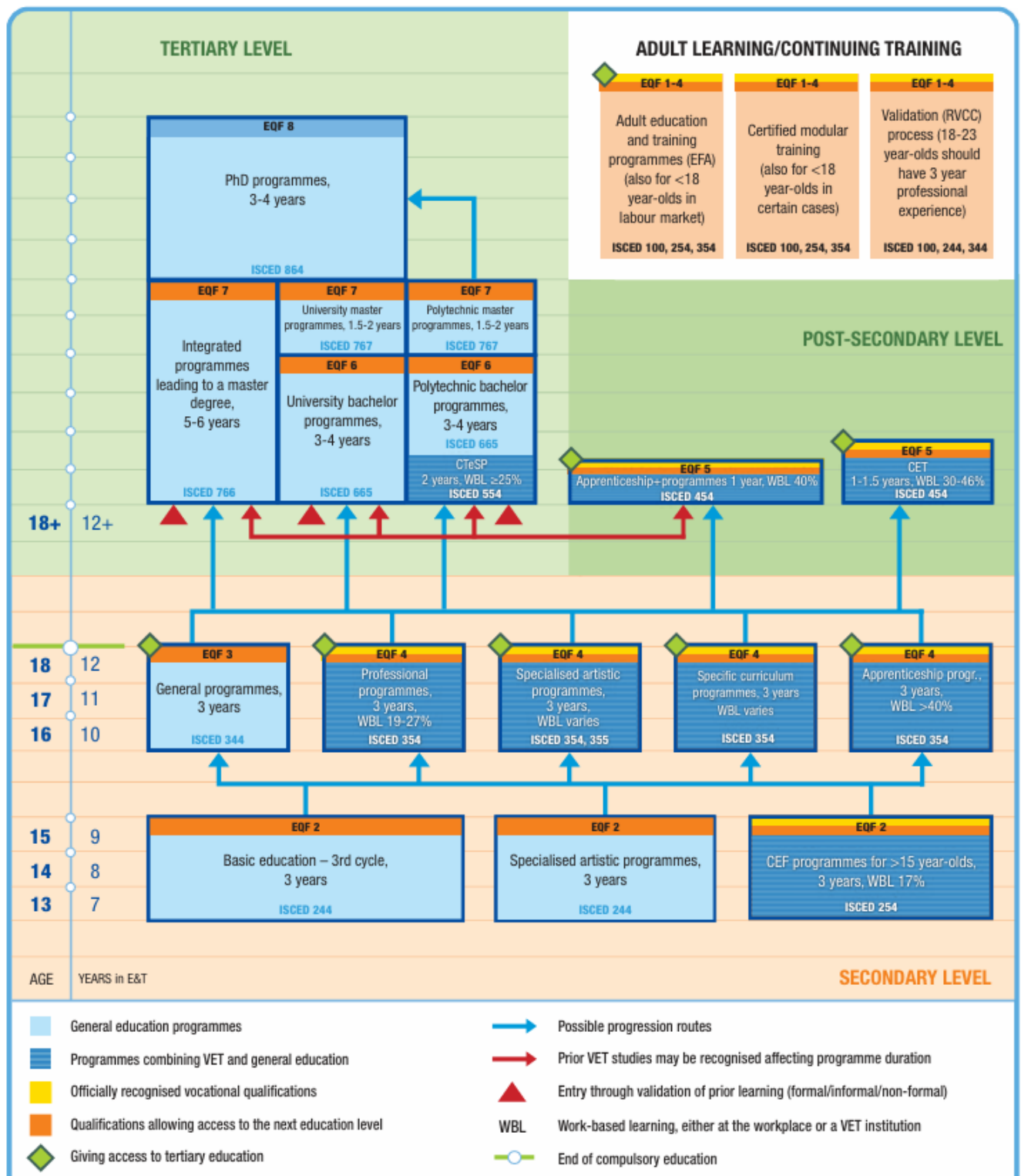
Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: Complete description of education and training system chart: Portugal. Information refers to ISCED-P 2011 classification system. Source: Cedefop, & Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations (DGERT). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Portugal: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions.

Figure 1 presents the complete description of the education and training system chart as it currently stands in Portugal. It provides a special emphasis on the types of teaching in

which WBL is an integral part of education and the share of work-based learning provided by schools and companies.

A summary of WBL is integrated into the Portuguese educational system can be found in the report "Vocational education and training in Europe – Portugal: system description" (Cedefop & Directorate-General of Employment and Industrial Relations (DGERT), 2023), as outlined below:

- **Education and training programmes for young people (CEF) leading to EQF level 2 (ISCED 254):**
  - Learners must be aged 15 or more and without a lower secondary education qualification.
  - WBL Share: 17%
  - Type: In-company practice and practical training at schools.

- **Professional Programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 354):**
  - Learners need to be between 15 and 18 years old (with exceptions foreseen by legislation) and to have completed lower secondary education.
  - WBL Share: 19% to 27%
  - Type: Apprenticeships, in-company practice foreseen in an agreement between the school and the enterprise and has a minimum duration of 600 hours up to a maximum of 840 hours.

- **Specialised Artistic Programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 344, 354):**
  - Learners must be at least 15 years old and have completed the third cycle of lower secondary education (9th year of schooling).
  - WBL Share: Varies by field.
  - Type: Work-based learning through internships in artistic fields. The work-based component includes in-company practice foreseen in an agreement between the school and the enterprise and has a minimum duration of 600 hours up to a maximum of 840 hours.

- **Specific Curriculum Programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 344, 354):**
  - Learners must be at least 15 years old and have completed the third cycle of lower secondary education (9th year of schooling).
  - WBL Share: Varies according to the study field and school.
  - Type: Work-based learning in companies or organisations.

- **Apprenticeship Programmes - Initial VET programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 354):**
  - Learners up to 29 years old.
  - WBL Share: More than 40%
  - Type: In-company training (apprenticeships).

- ➢ <u>Technological Specialisation Programmes (CET) leading to EQF level 5 (ISCED 454):</u>
  - o Learners must have:
    - ● an upper secondary education or equivalent; hold a level 4 qualification of the NQF/EQF;
    - ● have completed all the subjects of the 10th and 11th years of schooling and have been enrolled in the 12th year of schooling or legally equivalent qualification without completing it;
    - ● a technological specialisation certificate or a higher education degree and wishing to have a professional requalification.
  - o WBL Share: 31% to 48%
  - o Type: Work-based learning in companies.

- ➢ <u>Higher Professional Technical Programmes (CTeSP) leading to EQF level 5 (ISCED 554):</u>
  - o Learners must:
    - ● an upper secondary qualification (EQF level 3 or 4);
    - ● succeeded in the special contest for those who want to attend higher education and are over 23 years old;
    - ● a CET or CTeSP diploma (EQF level 5) or a higher education degree, if they wish a professional requalification.
  - o WBL Share: At least 25%
  - o Type: Internship in companies.

- ➢ <u>Apprenticeship+ Programmes - Initial VET programmes leading to EQF level 5 (ISCED 454):</u>
  - o Learners up to 29 years old, who want to complete lower or upper secondary education and/or obtain a professional qualification
  - o WBL Share: More than 40%
  - o Type: In-company practice.

This data makes it clear that WBL in Portugal is restricted to VET and other vocational courses. Traditional general education programmes, such as those focused on subjects like humanities, maths and sciences, don't usually include WBL as part of their curricula. These are more centred on academic learning without direct involvement in practical work experience.

Regarding WBL in Portuguese higher education, the incorporation of this practices is not compulsory for all study cycles. However, there are specific programmes, such as the Higher Professional Technical Courses (CTeSP), which require the inclusion of WBL as an integral part of their curriculum. As mentioned previously, these are non-degree higher

education programmes, mainly taught by polytechnic institutes, which correspond to level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework. These courses have a strong practical component and compulsorily include a professional internship lasting one semester, with the aim of providing direct experience in the labour market and making it possible to continue studying for a degree.

When it comes to degree programmes, such as bachelor's and master's degrees, the inclusion of WBL is not obligatory by law and varies according to the course and the higher education institution. Universities and polytechnic institutes, within their study plans, are free to integrate internships or other forms of WBL, depending on the profile and needs of the course. Some courses, especially in the areas of technology, health or education, can integrate internships or other forms of WBL into their curriculum, but this depends on the specific guidelines of each institution.

Work-Based Learning Quality Assurance in Ireland

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. They advise the Government on national policy regarding quality assurance and enhancement in education and training, and are responsible for promoting, maintaining, developing and reviewing the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NFQ is a 10-level system used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system. It lists the main qualifications awarded at each level and pathways from one NFQ level to the next, and shows how general education, further education and training, and higher education awards are mapped against the 10 levels of the framework.

Figure 2 illustrates the mapping of the NFQ against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).
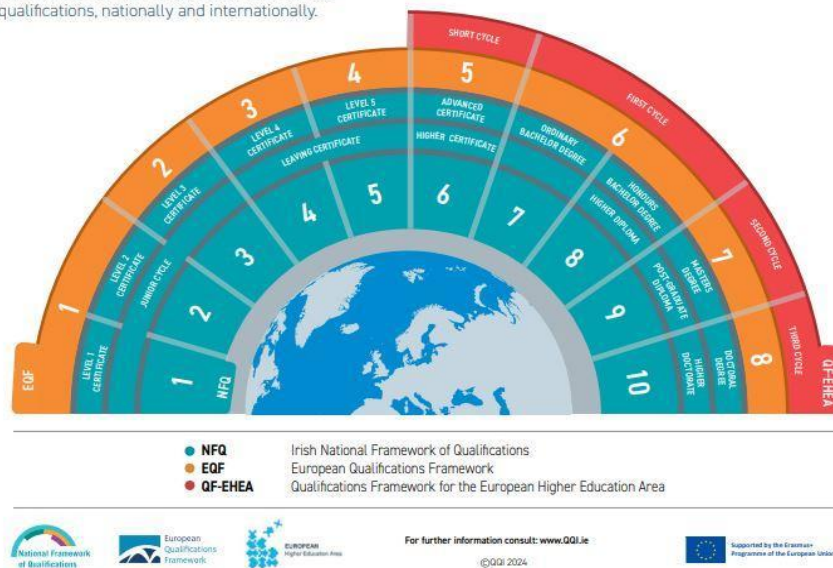
Figure 2: QQI Global Fan (QQI, 2024)

In Ireland, WBL programmes are governed by robust compliance measures and quality standards to ensure their effectiveness, alignment with industry needs, and equitable access. These measures include certifications, agreements, and regulatory frameworks that involve collaboration among educational institutions, employers, and national authorities.

The NFQ serves as the backbone of quality assurance in WBL programmes. It standardises qualifications, ensuring they align with established academic and professional criteria. By integrating with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the NFQ guarantees that Irish WBL certifications are recognised and transferable across EU member states, facilitating mobility and consistency in skill validation. QQI regulates the quality assurance processes for WBL programmes offered in higher and further education. It requires educational providers to meet rigorous quality standards through programme validation, monitoring, and periodic reviews. QQI also ensures that qualifications comply with national and EU educational objectives, fostering credibility and trust among employers and learners.

The Education and Training Boards Act 2013 established 16 ETBs, which play a pivotal role in coordinating WBL initiatives. They manage agreements between employers and educational institutions to ensure training meets labour market demands. These boards facilitate collaboration in designing curricula, assessing training outcomes, and aligning programmes with industry needs.

Under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025, apprenticeship programmes are formalized through agreements between employers, apprentices, and educational

providers. These agreements outline the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each party, ensuring structured and accountable WBL experiences.

The FET Strategy emphasises lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling. It establishes pathways, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, and vocational courses, ensuring quality by embedding compliance measures, including programme accreditation and employer evaluations.

For non-EU students and workers, internships and WBL programmes are regulated under these Acts to ensure alignment with employment laws. Employers offering WBL opportunities must comply with legal provisions regarding fair compensation, safe working conditions, and adherence to visa requirements.

WBL programmes in Ireland often culminate in certified qualifications that are part of the NFQ. These certifications assure both learners and employers of the quality and relevance of the training. For instance, apprenticeships lead to nationally recognized qualifications that meet industry standards.

Ireland's adherence to the Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the European Skills Agenda ensures that WBL programmes align with EU quality benchmarks. These frameworks encourage the use of flexible, learner-centred approaches and emphasise high-quality standards across all WBL initiatives.

Ireland's compliance measures and quality standards for WBL programmes ensure they are robust, relevant, and equitable. By combining national frameworks like the NFQ and QQI with collaborative agreements and alignment with EU standards, Ireland has created a system that fosters trust, promotes skill development, and meets the evolving needs of the labour market. This regulatory approach ensures WBL programmes contribute to lifelong learning, employability, and economic growth. In the Higher Education sector Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) including the Universities, Technological Universities and Institutes of Technologies award qualifications on the NFQ. In the Further Education sector, QQ awards qualifications through the ETBs on the NFQ.

The NFQ enables strong compliance for accreditation of programmes supporting WBL.

Work-Based Learning Quality Assurance in Italy

Work-based learning governance in Italy is a collaborative effort involving multiple institutional actors at national and regional level and by the important role of the social partners, each playing an important role in its implementation and success.

Government Ministries and Regions

In Italy, the government plays a central role in promoting WBL as a regulator, ensuring a structured connection between education and the labour market. Primarily coordinated

by the Ministry of Education and Merit, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, WBL programmes are governed by a legal and institutional framework and State-Regions agreements that adapt these programmes to local needs. The Ministry of Labour works with Regions, Autonomous Provinces, and training institutions to define national standards for internships, apprenticeships, and orientation courses.

The regions and autonomous provinces are responsible for the planning, programming, organisation and implementation of interventions provided for within the scope of vocational education and training pathways, higher technical education, higher technical education and training, post-vocational education and training pathways, and post-university education for most types of apprenticeship-based training and for publicly-funded continuing training interventions.

Additionally, the government has leveraged funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to promote reforms and investments aimed at strengthening WBL pathways and enhancing the link between education and employment. Through these initiatives, the Italian government ensures WBL is effective, standardised, and aligned with labour market demands.

Social Partners

Social partners in Italy play an advisory role in the formulation of training policies and contribute to their interpretation into the pathways that then constitute the training offer. They also play a key part in promoting in-company, sectoral and territorial training programmes funded by the regions or realised thanks to joint interprofessional funds for continuing training; they help to elaborate and organise active policies in the labour market. Beyond their advisory role at national and local levels, social partners play a crucial part in professional apprenticeship regulation.

They advocate for the rights and interests of students and workers, ensuring that WBL programmes are fair, equitable, and beneficial for all participants. They work to guarantee that WBL experiences are properly recognised and valued, contributing to their overall quality. Social partners also strive to ensure that students receive adequate training and that their work-based experiences are protected from exploitation. Moreover, they collect feedback from students and workers to assess programme effectiveness and propose improvements, ensuring policies and practices remain relevant and responsive to sectoral needs. The main "social partners" are the employer organizations (Confindustria) and the three main trade union federations (CGIL, CISL, and UIL) who engage in collective bargaining and other forms of social dialogue.

National Institutes:

The National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP) is a public research institution supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy that carries out the analysis, monitoring and evaluation of labour and employment services policies, education and

training policies, social policies and, more in general, the policies which impact the labour market.

The institute is the national reference point for EQUAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training) and carries out the following activities: promotion, implementation and development of the European Quality Assurance Framework; carrying out research and studies related to quality assurance provisions; adoption of new quality assurance tools such as self-assessment and peer review. The National Reference Point is supported by a National Board, which includes representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces, INVALSI, School Heads Association, social partners, training experts, and representatives of vocational education and training providers.

Furthermore, INAPP is Italy's national partner institution for the CEDEFOP ReferNet project, to provide information on Italy's vocational education and training (VET) system and policies.

In addition, INAPP promotes the professional training of students, apprentices, young graduates, teachers, trainers and operators through internship and job shadowing experiences abroad, InterAlia through Stage4eu. Particular emphasis is placed on innovation and the digital transformation of education and training systems aiming both at the development of work-based learning models and at transnational mobility and cooperation to acquire skills required by the job market.

A tool promoted by INAPP is 'the Atlas of Work', which emerged from research-intervention work in support of the Technical Group formed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, ANPAL, the Coordination of Regions and the Regions, with the technical assistance of Tecnostruttura delle Regioni (Interministerial Decree of 30 June 2015). It constitutes a detailed map of work and qualifications, organised in three sections: Atlas Work, Atlas and Qualifications and Atlas and Professions. The tool serves as a support for the permanent learning system and employability services.

The National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE) has been the point of reference for educational research in Italy for 100 years. Since 1925, it has been investing in training and educational innovation, supporting school improvement processes. The Institute develops new didactic models, experiments with the use of new technologies in education, and promotes the redefinition of the relationship between learning and teaching spaces and times.

In addition, it deals with the training of teaching, administrative, technical and auxiliary staff and school managers and has been involved in some of the most important e-learning experiences at European level.

Together with INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training system) and the inspectorate of the Italian Ministry of Education, INDIRE is a part of the

National Evaluation System for Education and Training. In this field, the Institute develops actions to support educational improvement processes to raise teaching quality and pupils' achievements.

INDIRE observes and documents the development of technical and vocational education and training curricula, and school-to-work transition, by means of quantitative and qualitative monitoring, data banks and research reports.

The National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI) plays a crucial role within Italy's national evaluation system. Its primary objective is to ensure the functional coordination of the national evaluation system, which implements quality assurance in the education and training system, from primary school to upper secondary school.

The institute is responsible for proposing evaluation protocols and organising visits to schools by external evaluation units. It also develops indicators of efficiency and efficacy to pinpoint schools and training institutes that require priority support and external evaluation. Moreover, INVALSI creates tools to facilitate evaluation-related actions for schools and training facilities. It defines indicators specifically for evaluating school directors and is involved in selecting, training, and managing the registry of experts for external evaluation units. Additionally, INVALSI compiles periodic reports on the state of the education and training system and represents Italy in international surveys and other evaluation-related initiatives, contributing to a comprehensive understanding and continuous improvement of educational standards.

Work-Based Learning Quality Assurance in Malta

WBL governance in Malta is distributed across several entities:

- MFHEA: Regulatory authority responsible for accreditation, quality assurance, and implementation of WBL guidelines.

- Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR): Sets national strategies such as the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023–2030, which integrates WBL as a pillar for inclusion and economic development.

- Jobsplus: Public employment agency responsible for WBL-related funding schemes like Investing in Skills.

- Educational Institutions: Design and deliver programmes with embedded WBL components, often co-developed with employers and supported by institutional policies and placement offices.

Coordination among these entities remains key to sustaining and scaling effective WBL models in Malta. However, challenges persist in achieving full policy coherence and ensuring consistent employer engagement.

Work-Based Learning Quality Assurance in Portugal

The framework for vocational qualifications in Portugal is set by the National Qualifications System (SNQ) which is managed by the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (*Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional -* ANQEP). ANQEP implements this system to guarantee that qualifications are aligned with labour market needs and European standards, including those with a focus on WBL. The SNQ governs the structure and content of vocational training programmes, including apprenticeships and professional courses that integrate WBL (ANQEP - Instruments of the National Qualifications System, 2017). This system defines the standards for VET qualifications and ensures that WBL is integrated into relevant vocational programmes.

Quality assurance of work-based learning practices is also regulated through formal contracts, assessment of learning outcomes and accreditation/certification of providers. Apprenticeship programmes in Portugal are governed by formal contracts between students, training providers and companies, outlining the roles and responsibilities of each party, which in turn ensures that the practical components of the training are closely integrated with real-world work environments. When it comes to assessment of learning outcomes of WBL practices, the responsibility is divided among institutions, depending on where these practices are being employed: the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) is responsible when it comes to VET programmes; the Directorate-General for Schools (DGEstE) oversees vocational programmes offered in secondary schools and ANQEP oversees the overall quality and effectiveness of the system and ensures alignment with national and Europeans standards. When it comes to accreditation and certification of WBL providers, the Directorate for Quality and Accreditation Services (DSQA), a core organic unit of the Directorate-General for Employment and Labour Relations (DGERT), has the specific responsibility for managing the Certification System for Training Entities. The certification of training providers is enshrined in Council of Ministers Resolution no. 173/2007, which approves the Vocational Training Reform (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2007).

Alignment with EU policies and frameworks

Several EU policies and frameworks support the development of WBL in member states, such as:

➢ The Erasmus+ Programme (2021-2027) is the EU's flagship initiative for education, training, youth, and sport. It is focused on expanding opportunities, promoting inclusion, supporting the green and digital transitions and enhancing Europe-wide cooperation in lifelong learning. Erasmus+ integrates WBL into its core priorities for both VET and HEIs in several ways. One of its key initiatives is supporting cross-border mobility for apprentices, interns and both VET and HEI students, allowing them to gain hands-on experience in real-world settings in other EU countries. This international experience enhances employability and skill development in a variety of fields. Additionally, Erasmus+ funds partnerships between educational institutions and industries, which are essential for creating WBL programmes that reflect real labour market needs. The programme is also focused on developing digital and green skills, preparing participants for future-focused careers, and ensures that WBL is inclusive and accessible by offering financial support and resources to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and with fewer opportunities.

➢ The European Skills Agenda builds upon the ten actions of the European Commissions' 2016 Skills Agenda. Updated in 2020, the Agenda sets objectives to be achieved by 2025 and sets out to enhance skills development across the EU, aligning with the European Green Deal and Digital Strategy priorities. It emphasizes upskilling and reskilling to address emerging labour market demands through WBL, promoting initiatives that support digital, green and foundational skills. The key objectives of the European Skills Agenda include improving lifelong learning, fostering quality VET and strengthening partnerships with industry. It supports programmes like the European Education Area and the European Pillar of Social Rights, aiming to build a highly skilled workforce and increase employability in the EU. The Pact for Skills is one of the flagship actions of the European Skills Agenda, aimed at fostering upskilling and reskilling across industries. It is a partnership model that supports companies and organizations to offer high-quality apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities, fostering cooperation among businesses, training providers and public authorities.

➢ European Education Area (EEA), which was introduced in 2020 with the goal of being fully established by 2025. This initiative replaced the former framework known as Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020). While ET 2020 served as a valuable foundation for cooperation in education and training across EU Member

States, the EEA builds on this framework with updated priorities, including a stronger emphasis on digital transformation, inclusion, green transitions, and fostering a common European identity. The EEA aims to create a unified, high-quality education area where learning and skills recognition are seamless across borders, adapting to the evolving needs of the EU education landscape. EEA promotes WBL by integrating it into its priorities for quality education, employability, and skills development across the EU.

➢ Introduced in 2021, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, focusing on fair working conditions, equal opportunities, social protection, and inclusion. The plan outlines specific targets to be achieved by 2030, such as having 78% of the EU's working-age population employed, providing training for at least 60% of adults annually, and reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million. This Action Plan aligns with key EU initiatives, including the European Green Deal, the European Skills Agenda and the EEA, ensuring that social rights are a core part of the EU's post-pandemic recovery and long-term growth strategy.

➢ The EU's Youth Guarantee was launched in 2013 and reinforced in 2020 with the Youth Employment Support initiative. Its goal is to ensure that all young people under 30 receive a good-quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship or traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. The Youth Guarantee is fundamental to European efforts to combat youth unemployment and promote successful transitions from education to the workforce across Member States.

➢ The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) was established in 2013 and continues to operate under the broader goals of the EEA and the European Skills Agenda, focusing on improving the quality, availability, and attractiveness of apprenticeships across the EU. EAfA remains instrumental in fostering public-private partnerships, aligning training with labour market needs, and promoting apprenticeships as an effective form WBL. This initiative also establishes collaborations with governments, businesses, social partners, chambers of commerce and VET providers to offer apprenticeships that enhance youth employability, reduce skills gaps and support lifelong learning opportunities. In recent years, EAfA has also expanded to include digital apprenticeships and green skills training, aligning with the EU's priorities.

➢ The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) was adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2018 and provides guidelines and criteria to ensure high-quality apprenticeships across EU Member States. The framework focuses on improving both learning and working conditions for apprentices, setting out criteria such as fair remuneration, clear learning outcomes, and structured support. EFQEA is implemented and continues to be relevant within broader EU initiatives like the EEA and the European Skills Agenda, as it supports the EU's commitment to quality WBL. This framework also plays a

key role in the EAfA and other EU-level programmes that aim to bridge the skills gap and enhance employability across the region.

➢ European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) emerged in 2009 from a recommendation of the European Parliament and Council. It is a European wide framework to support continuous quality assurance (QA) and improvement in VET across the EU by helping Member States develop and improve QA systems within their VET programmes. EQAVET also supports the implementation of the 2020 recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness, and resilience. This VET Recommendation describes how EQAVET can be used to strengthen the quality of initial and continuing VET and presents the complete EQAVET Framework.

Ireland: Alignment with EU policies and frameworks

Ireland's WBL strategy aligns with the broader European Union policy landscape, particularly the European Skills Agenda (2020) and the Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness, and Resilience (2020). These frameworks emphasise the importance of high-quality VET systems and the need for flexible pathways between education and work. Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which integrates with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ensures that WBL qualifications are transparent and transferable across EU member states, facilitating mobility and recognition of skills within the European labour market.

The Pathways to Work Strategy 2021–2025 presents a comprehensive and promising approach to addressing youth unemployment and enhancing workforce skills in Ireland. It supports young people in accessing WBL opportunities, which helps to reduce youth unemployment. A cornerstone of this strategy is the relaunch and expansion of the Youth Employment Charter in collaboration with employers, designed to promote the recruitment of young unemployed individuals through *Intreo*, the Irish public employment service. This initiative reinforces the government's commitment to creating equitable opportunities for young people to enter the labour market and gain meaningful employment.

A key highlight of this strategy is the ambition to increase the number of new apprenticeship registrations to at least 10,000 annually by 2025, demonstrating a proactive response to industry demands and skill shortages. This target not only aims to address existing gaps in the labour market but also ensures the development of a highly

skilled workforce that aligns with national and EU priorities for vocational education and training (Labour Market Advisory Council & Martin, 2023).

Additionally, the provision of 50,000 further education and training (FET) places underscores Ireland's dedication to lifelong learning and skills enhancement. By expanding access to high-quality FET opportunities, the strategy aligns with broader European Union goals such as those outlined in the European Skills Agenda and the Council Recommendation on VET for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness, and Resilience as well as in the Programme for Government published on 15th January 2025. These measures collectively affirm the government's commitment to creating a robust and inclusive system of WBL that not only meets current workforce needs but also supports long-term economic and social development.

The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), an EU initiative, has influenced Ireland's expansion of apprenticeship models, encouraged employer engagement and ensuring quality. The SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy 2020–2024 further operationalise these EU principles at the national level, promoting inclusion and innovation in FET and WBL systems. Furthermore, the Employment Permits Acts (2003–2014) govern internships and work placements for non-EU students, ensuring alignment with employment laws and international mobility frameworks.

Table 4 below identifies the various entities that inform government departments about Ireland's skills needs and guide policy and strategic interventions required. Table 5 lists some of the interventions implemented by the Irish government based on reports from the bodies listed in Table 4.

Table 4 Entities to forecast Ireland's skills needs and inform policy and interventions required

Entity	Description	Hosted by
Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU)	Undertakes and publishes research and reports on the further and higher education sector as well as other related sectors.	SOLAS
Expert Group on Future Skills Needs	Advises Government on future skills requirements and associated labour market issues that impact on the national potential for enterprise and employment growth. Membership includes Government Departments, Enterprise Development Agencies, Business, Unions, Further Education and Training and the Higher Education Authority.	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
National Skills Council (NSC) https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation -information/7637e6-national-skills-council/	The NSC acts as a platform for strategic engagement with industry and social partners to ensure that the Minister and Government are provided with a broad perspective in the formulation of skills and workforce development policy. The Council works independently to provide the government with the necessary strategic advice to adapt and evolve its policies quickly and in tune with the fast-shifting skills requirements of society and the labour market.	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
Regional Skills Forum	There are 9 Regional Skills Fora in Ireland set up to: ● Connect people in their regions to meet their skills needs ● Make sure employers and enterprises get the education and training responses they need	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Table 5 Interventions put in place by Irish Government

Intervention	Description	How it supports WBL development / experience
National Training Fund	The National Training Fund (NTF) was established by the National Training Fund Act, 2000. It is a dedicated fund to support the training of those in employment, those seeking employment and to support lifelong learning. The Act allocates funding for research to provide information on existing and likely future skills requirements of the economy.3 The Act requires that any surplus funding remain in the NTF account to provide for reinvestment into eligible training activities. The NTF is funded by a levy on employers,	The NTF is a broad-based fund supporting Higher Education, Further Education and Training, and some programmes providing enterprise and employment supports
Skillnet Ireland	Skillnet Ireland works in partnership with industry and the education and training sector to provide upskilling programmes to enhance business competitiveness, through 70 Skillnet Business Networks.	Supports learning in the workplace
Springboard +	To provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy. Springboard+ is co-funded by the Government of Ireland, via the National Training Fund, and the European Union.	Requires work placement as an element of the delivery for all full-time programmes.
Human Capital Initiative	Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1 is funded by the National Training Fund	Supports WBL by enhancing skills, employability, and industry collaboration.

This section has shown that the Irish government has in place good structures to support further and higher education and also to advise on policy. Organisations will implement WBL based on market ability to respond and based on the available resources.

Italy: Alignment with EU policies and frameworks

In Italy, the Ministry of Education and Merit (Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito - MIM) and the Ministry of University and Research (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca -MUR) in collaboration with the regions, where applicable, are aligning Italian education policies with the broader goals set by the European Union, including enhancing educational opportunities, fostering mobility among students and teachers, and improving the quality and inclusiveness of education across all levels. Both ministries have several bodies and agencies that operate at a national level with representative, consultative, monitoring, and evaluative functions. These include the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education System (Istituto Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema di Istruzione - INVALSI), the National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa – Indire), and the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research Systems (Agenzia Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca – ANVUR). The management of the Erasmus+ Programme is entrusted to three national agencies with different areas of expertise: the National Institute of Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa) INDIRE for school education, higher education and adult education; the National institute for the analysis of public policies (Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche) INAPP for vocational education and professional training; and the Italian Youth Agency - Agenzia Nazionale per la Gioventù for the youth sector and sports. Erasmus+ funding is managed through two types of actions, one at a national level, through the National Agencies of the countries participating in the Programme, and the other managed by the European Commission though the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the Research Executive Agency (REA).

The management and coordination of initiatives aimed at enhancing upskilling and reskilling in Italy are primarily overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education and Merit and Regional Governments. In addition, many actors, such as businesses, workers, education and training providers, national, regional and local authorities, chambers of commerce and employment services are among those who contribute to achieving their objectives. These entities work collectively to ensure the alignment of skill development initiatives with Italy's strategic objectives for economic recovery and workforce resilience.

In 2020, Italy launched its National Strategy for Digital Skills, a key part of the Digital Republic initiative aimed at reducing Italy's digital divide with Europe and addressing internal disparities. The strategy targets four main areas: Higher Education and Training, Active Workforce, Specialist ICT Skills, and Citizens, each focused on enhancing specific digital skills. This approach seeks to boost nationwide digital competencies and inclusivity.

Furthermore, within Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan ([Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza)](link) one objective is to establish a national system of lifelong learning accessible to all, regardless of employment status, with the aim of reaching the European target of 50% of adults participating in training activities at least once every 12 months by 2025. This goal, in addition to promoting social inclusion and cultural development, represents a structural requirement for a transition towards a sustainable and digital economy.

The Youth Guarantee in Italy is managed through close collaboration between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Regions, the Job Centres and accredited private bodies. Previously funded through the National Operational Programme for the Youth Employment Initiative (PON IOG), the Youth Guarantee measures continue and are also included in the [National Programme for Youth, Women and Work 2021-2027,](link) funded through European Social Fund (ESF) and national funds. Specifically, the programme's priority 1 focuses on facilitating young people's entry into work. It aims to reach, involve and motivate young people between the age of 15 and 34, especially those furthest from work, and to offer them concrete opportunities through a personalized path, which starts with the reception at the regional offices, passes through specialized orientation, accompaniment and ends with an offer of work, apprenticeship, internship or training.

In Italy, the implementation of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) focuses on strengthening and promoting apprenticeships as a key tool for improving the transition of young people from education to work. On 26 and 27 June 2023, the 10th anniversary celebration event of the European Alliance for Apprenticeship (EAfA) took place in Brussels, bringing together leading experts, policy makers and stakeholders, including Emilia-Romagna, who signed up to the Alliance on that occasion. The region is committed to promoting the various types of apprenticeship as a privileged channel of access to the world of work for young people. EURES Puglia, acting on behalf of the competent department, has also submitted a project proposal to become a member of the alliance and make use of the apprenticeship tool in the local area.

In Italy, the implementation of EQAVET is carried out through a structured system to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of vocational education and training programmes. It is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Merit and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, which work closely with the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces. The latter play a

fundamental role in the management and regulation of vocational training courses. To facilitate implementation, a National Reference Point has been set up to link the national and European levels, promoting the dissemination of good practices and tools developed within the European framework. As mentioned above, the The National Reference Point for Italy has been based at INAPP since 2006.

Malta: Alignment with EU policies and frameworks

Malta actively incorporates European principles into its national WBL policy framework. The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) informs many of the MFHEA quality guidelines, particularly in relation to learning outcomes, structured learning plans, and assessment criteria. Furthermore, participation in the Erasmus+ Programme enables Maltese learners and institutions to benefit from EU funding and collaboration for transnational WBL experiences.

Malta's WBL structure is supported by a comprehensive legal and institutional framework, with strong alignment to EU strategies. However, awareness and perceived effectiveness vary, indicating a need for enhanced policy visibility, capacity building, and streamlined governance. Increased stakeholder engagement and inter-agency collaboration will be crucial in further embedding WBL as a mainstream component of education and training in Malta.

Portugal: Alignment with EU policies and frameworks

Agência Nacional Erasmus+ Educação e Formação is responsible for overseeing the Erasmus+ Programme in Portugal, ensuring that the country's institutions can take advantage of international WBL opportunities, exchange programmes to strengthen students' capabilities and international partnerships.

In Portugal, the implementation of practices associated with the Pact for Skills is the shared responsibility of multiple organisations. The Ministry of Planning manages the national governance of initiatives aiming to enhance upskilling and reskilling efforts in line with Portugal's recovery and resilience objectives, promoting initiatives focused on WBL.

Additionally, ANQEP plays a significant role in supporting vocational education and training, aligning with the goals of the Pact for Skills. ANQEP collaborates with various stakeholders to implement upskilling and reskilling actions across the country.

The Portuguese Ministry of Education, through its various departments, works in collaboration with other national bodies such as the ANQEP and the "*Direção-Geral da Educação*" (DGE), to align Portugal's education policies with the European Education Area's objectives.

Organizations such as the of Ministry of Education, ANQEP, IEFP, DGE and *Confederação Empresarial de Portugal* (CIP) – a key representative of employers in Portugal – collaborate to ensure that Portugal´s national policies are in line with the objectives set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights, with a particular focus on improving access to education and training, enhancing job quality, as well as promoting and supporting WBL in Portugal by integrating it into vocational training, education and employment programmes.

Portugal has established a robust Plan to Implement the Youth Guarantee strategy (Council of Ministers, 2013) and a dedicated [Youth guarantee website](#) was launched in January 2014. The portal allows participants to sign-up in order to be registered for the Youth Guarantee and presents information on the scheme and the services/offers available. Organisations can also register to join the network of providers. *Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional* (IEFP) plays a central role in coordinating this programme in Portugal, offering support to young people through various employment and training opportunities. The initiative also involves collaboration with other entities, including regional and local authorities, educational institutions and companies.

Portugal's commitment to the EAfA is reflected through its active participation in the alliance and its alignment with the initiative's objectives. Portuguese institutions, including IEFP and ANQEP, actively engage in EAfA activities. Their involvement includes organizing events, sharing best practices, and collaborating with other European countries to enhance apprenticeship systems.

Furthermore, according to the European Commission's EAfA page, 475 organisations throughout Europe have pledged to improve their apprenticeship offerings, with 24 of them being portuguese institutions.

Since 2018, Portugal has made significant progress in the implementation of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA), including the full implementation of criteria such as written contracts, pay/compensation, workplace components, social protection and quality assurance. Challenges remain in areas like financial support for companies and flexible pathways for apprentices. Notably, IEFP will fund international mobility for apprentices in the 2021-2027 period, aiming to strengthen apprenticeship quality and ensure greater graduate tracking. Additionally, the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment (CITE) proposed, in June 2020, tools to combat gender segregation in vocational choices by challenging gender stereotypes (European Commission, 2021).

Key developments in Portugal include:

- o The "Learning Gives Employment" project, which is expanding to other sectors like automotive, construction, and textiles.
- o IEFP's commitment to enhancing apprenticeship quality through measures such as creating the Network of Excellence Partners for Apprenticeships and promoting apprenticeships via campaigns.
- o ANQEP launched a public tender in June 2020 to update the national qualifications catalogue, impacting future reforms in the apprenticeship system.

In Portugal, the implementation of the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) framework is overseen by the Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional (ANQEP). As the National Reference Point (NRP) for EQAVET, ANQEP ensures that vocational education and training (VET) institutions align with European quality assurance standards by providing guidance, tools, and support for their application.

The EQAVET framework is embedded in Portugal's national policies and legislation. The Decree-Law No. 92/2014 and its amendments establish the governance framework for VET, integrating EQAVET principles into the National Qualifications System (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014). This ensures that all VET providers, including apprenticeship courses and other vocational programmes, implement internal quality assurance mechanisms based on EQAVET indicators. The implementation of EQAVET in Portugal involves a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation. ANQEP collects and analyses data on student progression, completion rates and employability of graduates, ensuring that vocational training programmes effectively prepare students for the labour market. The Quality Assurance System for Professional Schools further ensures compliance with EQAVET standards by conducting regular audits and assessments of VET institutions.

A key aspect of EQAVET in Portugal is continuous improvement and stakeholder involvement. ANQEP collaborates with employers, social partners, and education providers to refine VET programmes, ensuring they meet evolving labour market needs. Portugal is also actively engaged in international collaboration and EU reporting under EQAVET. ANQEP participates in peer reviews and best practice exchanges with other European countries, ensuring that the Portuguese VET system aligns with European developments. Additionally, the agency reports to the European Commission on progress and measures taken to improve quality assurance in vocational education.

Comparison between countries

The available data and literature positions Work-Based Learning as an essential component of vocational education and training systems, and each of the four countries—Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Portugal—has developed its own approach to integrating WBL into its education and training frameworks, specially in HEI (more information about this in the next section). The

policies and structures in place reflect the varying needs and socio-economic contexts of each country while aligning with European Union directives and frameworks.

Governance:

- **Ireland:** The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science creates policy for Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE) and Research Sectors in Ireland. In the Higher Education Sector the Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development body for the HE sector. The HE Sector in Ireland is comprised of Universities, Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology all of which award qualifications on the NFQ for their programmes of study. In the Further Education and Voluntary Education Sector SOLAS supports the Education Training Boards to provide WBL opportunities to their learners. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency promoting quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's provides guidelines and guidance to all education sectors aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), thus ensuring that all qualifications are recognised nationally and internationally. In the HE sector the Higher Education Institutes are the awarding bodies for all programs with WBL whereas in the FE Sector QQI is the awarding body.

- **Italy:** The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education and Merit, regional governments, the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (INDIRE), the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis (INAPP) and the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (INVALSI) govern WBL, with regional authorities playing a key role in planning and implementing programmes.

- **Malta:** The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) and Jobsplus are responsible for WBL governance and quality assurance.

- **Portugal:** WBL is overseen by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP) and the Ministry of Education.

Key Policies:

- **Ireland:** Policies impacting Further Education include the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020–2024, SOLAS 'Transforming Learning Strategy 2022-2024' and the Apprenticeship Action Plan which focus on increasing apprenticeship registrations and lifelong learning. In Higher Education policy development is impacted by the National Strategy for HE to 2030, the National Skills Strategy 2025, Skills and Engagement policies implemented through initiatives such as the Human Capital Initiative, Springboard+, the Technology Advancement Sector Fund.

- **Italy:** Italy's National Recovery Plan, the Dual System and the [National Programme for Youth, Women and Work 2021-2027,](#) aim to enhance youth employability, vocational education and the matching of education and training with work.

- **Malta:** The Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018), MQF, and national strategies like the National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023–2030 guide WBL policies.

- **Portugal:** Portugal's Apprenticeship Act, the Pact for Skills, and vocational education reforms focus on improving access to work-based learning and ensuring alignment with the European Skills Agenda.

EU Alignment:

- **Ireland:** WBL policies align with the European Skills Agenda, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), facilitating skills mobility across EU countries.

- **Italy:** Italy follows the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) and participates in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, integrating EU policies on apprenticeships and vocational education.

- **Malta:** Malta adheres to the EFQEA and Erasmus+ guidelines, ensuring WBL practices meet EU quality standards and support cross-border learning opportunities.

- **Portugal:** Portugal actively engages in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), EQAVET and aligns with the European Skills Agenda to enhance vocational education and training standards.

Quality Assurance:

- **Ireland:** Quality assurance for all programmes including WBL programs or those incorporating WBL is manged by the relevant awarding body; in Higher Education this is the University, Technological University or Institute of Technology, in the FE Sector quality assurance is managed through QQI, the state agency responsible for promoting the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's further and higher education system. All qualifications are mapped to NFQ ensuring they are recognised nationally and internationally.

- **Italy:** INAPP as the EQAVET National Reference Point, carries out the promotion, implementation and development of the European Quality Assurance Framework; research and studies related to quality assurance methodologies and the adoption of relevant quality assurance tools such as self-assessment and peer review.

- **Malta:** The MFHEA oversees WBL quality assurance through the 2023 Guidelines, ensuring that WBL is monitored, mentored and assessed according to EU standards.

- **Portugal:** ANQEP ensures the quality of vocational training, including WBL, through adherence to EQAVET and national legislation that integrates quality assurance mechanisms into training programmes.

Sectoral Focus:

- **Ireland:** WBL is focused on sectors including technology, biopharma, green skills, digital skills including AI and application in an enterprise setting, ICT skills conversion sustainable built environment, renewable offshore wind energy, financial sector and other enterprise areas such as marketing or supply chain management, aiming to meet industry demands and improve employability.

- **Italy:** Italy targets youth employment and vocational education, with particular emphasis on reducing youth unemployment and enhancing skills to foster the transition to the labour market; and integrating WBL through the dual learning system.

- **Malta:** WBL in Malta is focused on enhancing digital and green skills, addressing the country's transition towards these sectors.

- **Portugal:** Portugal's WBL system prioritizes vocational training, particularly in green skills, and aims to support sustainable development through practical learning experiences.

Challenges:

- **Ireland:** Implementation of WBL programs can vary as no standard approach is agreed for the implementation and therefore the effectiveness of WBL interventions is impacted by engagement and by capacity by the parties involved (industry and HEIs or FETs).

- **Italy:** There are challenges with skills gaps, alignment between educational curricula and labour market needs, effective use of traineeships and underutilization of apprenticeships.

- **Malta:** The effectiveness of WBL is affected by stakeholder engagement and a need for capacity building within educational and employer institutions.

- **Portugal:** Financial support for companies, particularly small employers and ensuring gender equality in vocational education remain ongoing challenges.

In conclusion, each country's approach to WBL aligns with EU directives but is shaped by its unique socio-economic context. Ireland focuses on work placements, internships, apprenticeship and lifelong learning, Portugal focuses on lifelong learning and apprenticeship schemes, Malta prioritizes collaboration with employers and educational institutions, and Italy's reforms aim to address youth unemployment and create pathways into the labour market

through dual education models. Quality assurance frameworks like EQAVET and EFQEA are critical in maintaining high standards across all countries, ensuring that WBL remains relevant and effective in developing the skills needed for future economies.

Best practices in WBL

For the purpose of this research, at least 3 cases of best practices in WBL practices in each country of the consortium were identified. Here is the overview of each best practice:

Best practices identified in Ireland

1. **TU Dublin Work Placement Programmes (Faculty of Business).** Work Placement opportunities are delivered to thousands of students annually in many programmes in Technological University Dublin and many of these undertake WBL opportunities in the Faculty of Business. Students undertake a work placement in year three of their four-year honours degree (Level 8 on the NFQ). Students undertake work placement lasting from 15 weeks to 6 months on programmes including honours degrees such as BSc (Hons) in Marketing, BA (Hons) Digital Marketing, BBS (Hons) International Business, all level 8 programmes on the NFQ. The objective is to equip students with practical workplace skills, enhance employability, and establish strong industry connections.

   Key Practices and Their Impact
   Pre-placement
   ➢ Core to the preparation of students in advance of the work placement is a pre-placement module, supported by various resources and services with support from the careers office designed to develop students' WBL skills, such as interview skills and CV preparation. The pre-placement module, in many cases, is a pre-requisite that students must pass to progress into their placement. AI-driven tools for mock interview preparation are included in some programmes including the Digital Marketing programme, ensuring students gain experience and confidence. Additionally, industry interaction before placement is emphasised to familiarise students with the broader industry context and secure more placements in advance.
   ➢ Starter Pack: The lecturer distributes A starter pack to students who would go on the placement. This pack includes a module descriptor, program information, and ECTS requirements for WBL.
   ➢ Mindfulness sessions provided by TU Dublin have proven effective in helping students manage stress and anxiety before and during placements.
   ➢ Engaging Past Students as Mentors and Role Models: As a best practice, students who have previously completed WBL placements are invited by lecturers to share their insights, experiences, and lessons learned with current students who are about to embark on their own placements. This enhances student preparation for the placement and motivates them, thereby reducing uncertainty.

Placement
- ➢ Employment Contract & Logbook:
    a. An employment contract is signed between the student and employer to formalise responsibilities and maintain placement accountability
    b. A logbook is completed during the placement by students, enabling lecturers to identify issues early and track student progress.
- ➢ During placements regular check-in calls (especially in weeks 2 and 3 of the placement) allow lecturers to assess student progress and address early challenges.
- ➢ Tripartite Meetings- Some programmes include a tripartite meeting, which is a structured meeting between the student, university supervisor, and workplace mentor to set expectations and to evaluate the overall learning experience.
- ➢ Industry Engagement & Showcase Presentations: Industry partners are encouraged to return at the end of placements to evaluate students' contributions, fostering stronger academic-industry relationships. Showcase presentations allow students to present their work on-site and offline, reinforcing learning and industry linkages.
- ➢ Performance Evaluation & Professional Etiquette: Students undergo performance evaluations from their employers. Additionally, they are encouraged to send a thank-you message to their managers, facilitating long-term professional connections. This is highly encouraged across all programmes at TU Dublin.

2. **University of Limerick Co-Op.** Undergraduate work placement at the University of Limerick (UL) is managed through a central unit called the Cooperative Education & Careers Division at UL and is called the co-operative education programme, referred to more normally as the 'Co-op'. The Co-op is well established and understood to be core to the educational philosophy of UL. It has a central approach for placements ensuring that placement is a managed efficiently as an integral part of the student experience and their academic progress. Placements operate on a minimum of 6 months and are academically accredited for 60 ECTS credits. The Co-op places over 2,000 students from 56-degree programmes across business, science, information technology, engineering, arts, humanities, social sciences and the performing arts.
Benefits of the Co-op include established organised links between the University and Industry and an efficient, cost-effective management of work placements across academic programmes and leads to strong graduate outcomes (University of Limerick, 2025).
Dublin City University (DCU) INTRA (INtegrated TRAining) Office is set-up also in a similar way and manages DCU's internship programme. It provides an integrated approach to work placement to providing a real-world experience enhancing graduate employability skills (DCU, 2025).

3. **National Apprenticeship Scheme.** Apprenticeship is a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre. This model is well established and understood internationally. A snapshot of the apprentice programme in Ireland as of December 2024 can be seen in Figure 3. The apprenticeship scheme in Ireland has now been expanded to include apprentices in non-traditional areas including and not limited to industries such as insurance, digital marketing, accounting, finance and sales.

Figure 3: Snapshot of Apprenticeships in Ireland Dec 2024 (Solas, 2024)

Enabling students to undertake different pathways to employment has been an achievement and an example of taking best practice in traditional apprenticeship areas and applying the process to business areas successfully.

4. **Learn and Work Model TU Dublin.** TU Dublin's Learn+Work course in Process Instrumentation and Automation provides a pipeline of skilled, in-demand, work-ready talent into STEM industries through industry partnership.
   - The programme blends the strength of a university education with apprenticeship-style work placements. This course is designed specifically to create work-ready university graduates in the shortest possible time frame.
   - Each year, students divide their time between full-time study blocks in the university and significant periods of paid work placement with industry partners.

Table 6: Course Structure Learn + Work

Year	Sept-Jan (Sem 1)	Feb – May (Sem 2)	May – Aug (Sem 3)
1	College 5 days per week	College 5 days per week	Industry Placement 5 days per week
2	College 5 days per week	College 1 day per week; Industry placement 4 days per week	Industry Placement 5 days per week
3	College 5 days per week	College 1 day per week; Industry placement 4 days per week	Industry Placement 5 days per week

Industry Partner feedback:

"We have access to graduates who come with a high level of industry experience from day one. Through their three-year placement with us, they're already embedded in the culture of our organisation, understand how we work and what it's like to work in a challenging environment."

Annex 1 has a detailed table about the best practices identified in Ireland.

Best practices identified in Italy

1. **"Dual Apprenticeship: Higher Education and Research"**, this best practice consists of a dual apprenticeship for higher education and research developed by the engineering faculty of the University of L'Aquila (UnivAQ) and Enel. Founded in 1962, Enel is the largest electricity company in Italy, and it has always contributed to its economic and social development**.** A selection of 11 students attending the second year of a master's degree in electrical engineering are hired by Enel with an apprenticeship contract to gain direct experience in the field of electricity generation and distribution. UnivAQ and Enel created an integrated curriculum with notions that meet the current needs of the manufacturing world, the energy transition and the digitisation of work processes. The programme alternates between lectures and classroom study and technical-professional training carried out directly in the factory and students will be supported by a tutor from UnivAQ and one from Enel as well. Starting from the academic year 2023/2024, 15 second-year students of the master's degree course in Electrical Engineering alternate lessons and study with technical and professional training in the company.

   The main objective of the first edition was to develop a practical and in-depth understanding of processes and technologies in the energy sector which is highly competitive and very dynamic. For Enel the initiative aims to impart new skills but also aligns with the Group's commitment to provide quality training. Enel wants to inspire young people with greater awareness of the countless opportunities in the energy sector and to attract the best talents. The objective of the second edition is, in fact, to obtain a university degree enriched by highly professionalising educational content.

   No challenges were encountered in the implementation of the programme. The only critical aspect concerns the fact that the number of participants decreased from 15 to 11 compared to the first edition of the project which took place in 2023. Enel's reputation may be considered a facilitator in the implementation of the practice since its attractiveness as an employer. The primary impact observed is that students acquire practical knowledge in their field of work before completing their studies. Enel, on the other hand, has been able to attract and select excellent resources that have already been trained with specific skills**.**

   In October 2025 the third edition of the experimental programme of Higher Education and Research Apprenticeship will be released. Enel will offer 15 students the opportunity to start a working relationship as apprentices at the same time as they complete the final year of their Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering. The apprenticeship programme is developed through the alternation between attending lessons at the

University and being present at the Company for technical-professional training and to simultaneously start a work experience consistent with the studies carried out, in a dynamic work context, which allows the acquisition of skills that can be immediately used at work.

2. **"Eunice - European University"**. The University of Catania is part of the project Eunice - "The European University of Customised Education", financed by the Erasmus+ programme from 2020 to 2023 (first call) and then from 2023 to 2027 (second call). The consortium is made up of ten European universities, including, in addition to the University of Catania, Brandenburg University of Technology (Germany), Polytechnic University of Hauts-de-France (France), Poznan University of Technology (Poland, Coordinator), University of Mons (Belgium), University of Cantabria (Spain) and University of Vaasa (Finland), the University of Peloponnese (Greece), the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (Portugal) and Karlstad University (Sweden).

The main objective is the establishment of transnational alliances of higher education institutions from all over the EU that come together for the benefit of students, lecturers, public bodies and companies. The University of Catania joins the new 24 European Universities, transnational alliances of higher education institutions from all over the EU that come together for the benefit of students, lecturers, public bodies and enterprises. The funding obtained will enable the implementation of actions aimed at facilitating the insertion of students in the world of work and encouraging their international projection.

Main purposes of the first call were:
o Establishment of the foundations: the long-term strategy where quality education meets research, innovation, society and industry;
o Create a EUNICE campus: a unique, inter-university space where students and staff are inspired by the mobility, customised (student-oriented) curricula and work-based tasks;
o European identity based in cultural and linguistic diversity;
o Create bridges between students, researchers, industrial partners and society actors: through industrial research and challenge-driven training.

The second call has innovative aspects. EUNICE will continue developing its activities and fostering:
o The development of [EUNICE Key Competencies](#) and [experiential learning](#);
o [Communities of practice](#): among employees in key areas of activity to enable joint problem solving;
o Reviews of academic and administrative policies and processes to enable innovation across institutions in terms of enrolment, mobility and programme development;

- o Enhance [regional engagement](#) so our universities have a positive impact on education but also on transferring knowledge and answering the needs of society.

The University of Catania, with the aim of facilitating the insertion of young people into the world of work, has designed the "EIIP - Eunice International Internship Portal", encouraging mobility and international projects. The opportunities are open to university students, undergraduates and graduates but also to young people enrolled in high schools, in order to introduce them to the context of cooperation between academia and business. Among the 200 companies registered on the portal, the University of Catania is associated with: the Municipality of Catania, the Chamber of Commerce, Confindustria, Distretto Tecnologico Sicilia Micro e Nano Sistemi, INFN, CSFNSM, CNR, STMicroelectronics, Enel Green Power, Fidia Farmaceutici, SIFI, Medivis, Sasol and Parmalat. In addition, thanks to the "EUNICE - International Thesis Portal", the service also extends to the possibility of international mobility related to PhD research projects. More than 100 professors and researchers from various fields of study have already indicated their willingness to host Bachelor's, Master's and PhD students.

3. **"Engineering Stage In STMicroelectronics"**. In 2021, the University of Catania signed an agreement with STMicroelectronics concerning training and research activities in power electronics. ST is a global high-tech company creating semiconductor technologies with more than five thousand employees in the city of Catania. In 2024, the company announced an investment of 5 billion euro for the construction of a new production plant that will be operational from 2026 and is expected to employ around 2,700 new workers.

The aim of the collaboration is to foster the academic and professional training of students in the organisation of multidisciplinary courses and the coordination of research projects, dissertations and post-graduate internships in the field of power electronics. The joint activities are aimed at researching new types of applications and developing new power devices using innovative methodologies on both currently used and new materials. In addition, the company financed 12 study prizes, each worth EUR 8,000, to 6 male and 6 female students from the University of Catania enrolled in the Master's degree course in Electronic Engineering for the academic year 2023/2024. In addition to the prize, mentorship by STMicroelectronics' technical staff is being provided for the duration of the studies. The winners take part in training meetings, follow a specific individual plan to be agreed upon with the company contact persons, and will be able to carry out their degree thesis and/or an internship in the offices and laboratories of STMicroelectronics.

4. **"STAGE4EU"** is a project implemented by INAPP in 2019, as a natural evolution of the experience gained with the 'Internship Handbook in Europe'. It is a mobile app and a website offering a free service that publishes advertisements for internships in national and international public institutions and entities, internationally recognised organisations and multinational companies. The Stage4eu project is co-financed by the national 'Youth, Women and Work ESF+ Programme 2021- 2027'. Its target group is composed mostly of University students or recent graduates, between 20 and 30 years old, but it may also include younger or older people. No challenges were encountered in the implementation of the programme. The main impact is to allow students to acquire professional skills in an international context, acquiring soft and hard skills, such as the spirit of enterprise, the ability to adapt by confronting different cultural and organisational models and, last but not least, learning to speak a foreign language fluently. In addition, it is very likely, depending on the obligation in some countries, that the traineeship is paid or compensated with benefits such as accommodation, public transport passes, meal vouchers, etc. Also, companies will have qualified and trained staff from a different country.

Annex 2 has a detailed table about the best practices identified in Italy.

Best practices identified in Malta

1. **KNIGHTS (formally known as Central Mediterranean Business School)**
   KNIGHTS stands out as a leading example of institutional excellence in Work-Based Learning (WBL) implementation in Malta. At KNIGHTS, WBL is not treated as an ancillary experience, but as a central, structured, and intentional component of academic delivery. The school defines WBL as a form of learning that takes place in the workplace and is formally integrated within its accredited academic programmes. This pedagogical model is built on the belief that the workplace itself serves as an extension of the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world environments while developing core technical and professional skills.
   WBL is embedded across a broad range of KNIGHTS' undergraduate and postgraduate offerings, particularly at MQF Level 6 (Bachelor's) and Level 7 (Master's). Depending on the structure of the programme, WBL typically constitutes between 15 and 30 ECTS credits. Students alternate between classroom-based learning and practical placement, with flexibility to accommodate both full-time students and working professionals. Placements may be scheduled either concurrently or consecutively to meet both learner and employer needs, supporting the school's inclusive and adaptable approach to higher education.
   KNIGHTS collaborates with employers across Malta's key economic sectors, including finance, accounting, business consultancy, ICT, hospitality, and marketing. Strategic partnerships with leading employers such as EY Malta are developed and sustained through shared learning outcomes, joint evaluations, and structured feedback

mechanisms. Employers are viewed as co-educators, actively involved in defining learning expectations and assessing learner performance throughout the placement cycle.

A core innovation introduced by KNIGHTS is its Sites of Learning model, which formally recognises the workplace as an active site of academic instruction. This model ensures that employer input is central to curriculum design and delivery, while maintaining academic integrity through well-defined learning outcomes, reflective assignments, and dual supervision from both academic tutors and workplace mentors. Learning outcomes are explicitly aligned with the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) descriptors and mapped against industry expectations, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for the labour market.

Assessment of WBL is triangulated, involving student reflections, employer feedback, and academic evaluation. Students are typically required to submit reports, logbooks, or work-based projects, which are assessed by faculty members. Employers contribute through structured feedback forms, which are used during both mid-point and final reviews. This method promotes alignment, transparency, and a deeper engagement between academic institutions and industry partners.

KNIGHTS has also addressed common challenges in WBL implementation, such as inconsistent employer readiness and limited placement availability in niche sectors, by developing strong employer training and mentorship practices. The school leverages digital tools to monitor learner progress, support remote placements, and facilitate ongoing communication between all stakeholders. Special consideration is given to adult learners already in employment, with placements adapted to validate and extend their professional experience within an academic framework.

Looking forward, KNIGHTS is prioritising the expansion of WBL opportunities in emerging sectors such as sustainability, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship. The institution is also enhancing its internationalisation efforts, including participation in Erasmus+ partnerships, and is investing in digital platforms for placement tracking and performance feedback. KNIGHTS aspires to play an active role in shaping a national WBL framework and contributing to the broader policy dialogue on education and industry integration in Malta.

As a holistic model that combines academic rigour, workplace relevance, and institutional adaptability, KNIGHTS exemplifies best practice in WBL delivery and serves as a replicable case for other institutions across Malta and the EU.

2. **EY Malta** represents a strong model of employer-led WBL in Malta. Its approach is firmly rooted in the belief that WBL bridges academic knowledge and real-world professional readiness. At EY, WBL is defined as a structured, practical learning experience embedded directly within the firm's operational environment. Students participating in EY's WBL programmes are not observers; they are treated as active team members, contributing

to client engagements while developing technical and soft skills essential to thriving in the professional services industry.

A standout initiative is EY Malta's collaboration with KNIGHTS on the MQF Level 7 ACCA Accelerated Work Study Programme, in which students simultaneously pursue a BSc in Accountancy and Finance and complete their ACCA qualification while working within EY. This dual-track model ensures academic excellence and practical application occur in tandem. EY also offers formal internships and graduate schemes across departments such as tax, audit, financial reporting, and advisory services. These placements cater to students from business, IT, and finance backgrounds, with participants treated as junior professionals from day one.

What distinguishes EY's model is its multi-layered mentorship and feedback system. Each WBL student is assigned a counsellor responsible for regular check-ins and performance tracking, complemented by daily supervision from engagement team members. Progress is monitored using EY's global performance management tools and aligned with the ACCA Practical Experience Requirements (PER). This ensures learners are evaluated against professional benchmarks in areas such as problem-solving, ethical judgement, communication, and teamwork.

EY's collaboration with academic institutions like KNIGHTS is built on mutual curriculum alignment. The firm is directly involved in shaping programme content, determining work placement duration, and ensuring academic assessments reflect practical industry needs. This co-design ensures that students gain the competencies required within EY's service lines while maintaining academic integrity.

WBL students are seen as a valuable addition to EY's teams, bringing fresh perspectives and contributing meaningfully to client delivery. Many transition into full-time roles after graduation, already familiar with EY's culture and performance standards. For EY, WBL also supports its long-term talent development pipeline, helping the organisation identify and shape future professionals who align with its values.

Despite the success of the model, EY acknowledges challenges, particularly balancing training needs with client-facing demands during peak periods. These are addressed by ensuring that WBL students are placed in adequately resourced teams and receive gradual exposure to complex tasks. EY also maintains consistency in mentorship through counsellor training and structured onboarding processes.

EY Malta continues to innovate in response to evolving work environments. The firm utilises digital tools like Microsoft Teams and EY's global learning platforms to support hybrid placements, especially post-COVID. Furthermore, EY is expanding WBL into emerging fields such as ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), AI-driven audit technologies, and sustainability advisory. This aligns with both national priorities and EY's global transformation goals.

Overall, EY Malta's approach stands out as a best practice due to its depth of integration, commitment to mentorship, alignment with both academic and professional frameworks, and forward-looking innovation. It offers a replicable employer model for

other countries seeking to bridge the gap between education and employment through structured, impactful WBL experiences.

3. **JA Malta** exemplifies a dynamic and inclusive model of WBL grounded in youth entrepreneurship and experiential education. As a non-profit organisation focused on preparing young people for the world of work, JA Malta defines WBL as a structured approach that integrates classroom learning with hands-on experiences in real or simulated work environments. This philosophy underpins the organisation's core programmes, which aim to equip learners with practical skills, entrepreneurial mindset, and workplace readiness.

   Central to JA Malta's WBL model is its flagship Company Programme, where secondary school students form and operate their own mini-enterprises over the course of an academic year. In this programme, students take on different roles, from managing production to marketing and finance and run their companies as real businesses. The experience is supported by volunteer mentors from the business community who guide student teams through brainstorming, planning, operations, and financial decision-making. This mentorship not only builds technical skills but also reinforces confidence, resilience, and leadership.

   JA Malta also organises Leaders for a Day, an initiative where students shadow senior executives in various industries to observe leadership and decision-making up close. This immersive exposure to professional environments adds depth to the students' understanding of workplace dynamics and executive responsibilities. JA Malta is currently working to scale this initiative nationally to ensure wider access across schools in Malta.

   Additionally, JA Malta contributes to European WBL efforts through its participation in the Skills4Retail project, a cross-border initiative addressing the evolving needs of the retail sector, with a focus on digital and sustainable practices. As part of its contribution, JA Malta supports the development of practical WBL experiences for learners and partners with businesses to deliver internships and training aligned with sector-specific demands.

   A key strength of JA Malta's approach is its collaborative model, which treats WBL as a shared responsibility among educators, industry mentors, and the organisation itself. Professionals are involved not only as guest speakers, but as co-creators of programme content, facilitators of skill-building workshops, and long-term mentors. Educators play a crucial role in embedding WBL experiences into formal education, while companies contribute access to internships, real-life challenges, and mentorship.

   The impact of JA Malta's WBL initiatives is evident in the personal and professional growth of its participants. Students emerge with stronger communication skills, entrepreneurial thinking, teamwork, and confidence. Their development is tracked through tools such as the Entrepreneurial Skills Pass, an internationally recognised certification measuring both soft and technical skills acquired during the programme.

Inclusivity is a cornerstone of JA Malta's practice. The organisation makes targeted efforts to involve students from diverse backgrounds, including those supported by Learning Support Educators (LSEs) or from socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts. JA Malta also engages parents and guardians to ensure a supportive learning environment for all participants. Programmes are continuously improved based on feedback from students, educators, and industry partners, ensuring relevance and impact.

JA Malta's WBL strategy aligns closely with both national and EU priorities. At the national level, its activities support Malta's National Education Strategy 2024–2030, particularly in fostering inclusive, skills-based education. At the EU level, JA Malta's programming reflects the goals of the European Year of Skills 2023, especially in advancing digital, green, and entrepreneurial competencies.

Looking ahead, JA Malta aims to scale its initiatives and deepen partnerships across the education and business sectors. Strategic goals include expanding the Company Programme and Leaders for a Day, widening the scope of internships, and establishing a Centre of Excellence in partnership with the Ministry for Education and HSBC Malta Foundation to embed financial and entrepreneurial literacy across schools nationally.

JA Malta's holistic and inclusive model of WBL makes it a standout best practice. Its programmes offer transformative learning experiences that are scalable, socially responsive, and aligned with national and European educational goals.

4. **MFHEA.** The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) plays a central role in shaping, regulating, and promoting WBL in Malta. As the national regulator for post-secondary education, MFHEA defines WBL as a structured and formally recognised learning process that occurs within real work environments and forms an integrated part of accredited qualifications. The Authority views WBL as a key pillar in Malta's national education and skills strategy, with the goal of enhancing graduate employability, aligning learning with labour market needs, and responding to sectoral skills gaps.

   MFHEA's commitment to WBL is anchored in its robust regulatory framework. Accredited programmes that include WBL components must comply with the National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) and the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). Providers are expected to demonstrate clear and measurable learning outcomes, ensure supervision from both academic and industry mentors, and align assessments with programme-level credit structures. Essential standards include adherence to health and safety regulations, data protection requirements, and formal partnership agreements with host organisations.

   The publication of MFHEA's 2023 Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Courses that include a Work-Based Learning Component further reinforces Malta's commitment to structured, high-quality WBL. These guidelines offer detailed expectations for WBL

design, implementation, and assessment, and are designed to help institutions maintain academic integrity while embracing industry collaboration.

To ensure that WBL provision remains relevant and responsive, MFHEA regularly engages with providers, employers, industry associations, and public bodies. Through consultation processes during programme accreditation, national working groups, and labour market monitoring, MFHEA actively promotes WBL in emerging sectors such as digital innovation, artificial intelligence, and green technologies. Providers are encouraged to involve employers at the earliest stages of curriculum design, fostering alignment between educational outcomes and workplace realities.

MFHEA also supports the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a powerful complement to WBL. Through its RPL guidelines, the Authority enables individuals, particularly mature learners and professionals, to convert informal and non-formal work experience into academic credit. This process expands access to qualifications and supports lifelong learning by validating real-world experience.

In response to evolving delivery formats, MFHEA ensures that virtual and hybrid placements meet the same quality standards as traditional WBL models. Providers are required to clearly demonstrate how remote mentorship, progress monitoring, and engagement will be maintained. This protects the learner experience and ensures that innovations in digital learning do not compromise quality.

At the European level, MFHEA aligns Malta's WBL ecosystem with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) through its MQF framework, ensuring comparability and mobility of qualifications across EU member states. MFHEA actively participates in European policy forums such as EQF advisory groups, ENQA, and Erasmus+ initiatives, thereby contributing to international cooperation, benchmarking, and shared learning.

From MFHEA's perspective, a best practice WBL programme is characterised by structured supervision, clearly defined and assessed learning outcomes, meaningful employer involvement, and flexibility to accommodate diverse learner needs. Such models enhance employability, deliver real value to employers, and contribute to national economic resilience by addressing current and future skill shortages.

Looking ahead, MFHEA envisions a nationwide WBL framework that formally integrates WBL into all relevant post-secondary qualifications. While current expectations are embedded within the broader accreditation system, MFHEA recognises the value of a dedicated national WBL strategy. Such a framework would bring greater standardisation, offer structured support to providers, and increase clarity and confidence among employers and learners.

In its role as both a regulator and policy driver, MFHEA exemplifies best practice in WBL governance, ensuring that quality, relevance, and learner-centred design remain at the forefront of Malta's education and training systems.

Annex 3 has a detailed table about the best practices identified in Malta.

Best practices identified in Portugal

1. **"Programa de Estágios Curriculares em Contexto Empresarial (ECCE)"** is implemented by the University of Porto (U.Porto), specifically in the Faculty of Science (FCUP). The programme operates at the company and regional levels, fostering collaboration between academia and businesses. It was launched in 2006 and remains active.

   The ECCE programme aims to facilitate the integration of FCUP graduates into the labour market by providing them with practical experience in real-world work settings. It encourages trainees to apply their technical and scientific knowledge in professional environments while improving teamwork, time management, communication and professionalism. Another objective is to promote the skills and training of FCUP graduates within the business sector.

   It connects students from U.Porto with companies through internship placements, allowing them to gain hands-on experience while applying their academic knowledge. It also strengthens university-business collaboration by fostering innovation and professional development opportunities. The key actors involved in the implementation include University of Porto, Faculty of Sciences (FCUP) and SMEs and large companies that provide internship placements. The primary beneficiaries of the ECCE programme are master's students from FCUP.

   The programme is implemented through internship placements, collaboration between academic institutions and businesses and structured support and mentoring for students throughout their internships. Its success has been facilitated by strong institutional backing from U.Porto, established partnerships with industries that ensure diverse internship opportunities and active engagement of students and companies.

   One of the main challenges has been securing enough internship placements to meet student demand. This issue has been addressed by expanding industry partnerships and ensuring that both students and companies benefit from the internship experience. It has had a significant impact by improving the employability of FCUP graduates, strengthening connections between academia and industry and enhancing collaboration on innovative research and projects between U.Porto and participating companies.

2. The **"SIQRH - Formação Empresarial Individual – Clusters programme"** is a business training initiative implemented by certified training entities and funded by COMPETE 2030. It operates at a national level and was launched in 2023, with ongoing activities.

   The programme aims to promote the qualification of entrepreneurs, managers and workers while increasing the productivity and competitiveness of companies within specific industry clusters. It achieves this by implementing targeted training actions designed to foster innovation and improve business processes.

The key actors involved in the initiative include the Portuguese government, which provides funding through COMPETE 2030, certified training entities and companies operating within specific clusters. These clusters include Footwear and Fashion, Automotive, Architecture Engineering and Construction (AEC), Sustainable Habitat, Textile Technology and Fashion, Produtech and Engineering & Tooling. The primary beneficiaries of the programme are entrepreneurs, managers and workers within these sectors.

The training is delivered either in person or online and consists of classroom-based interventions, simulated practices or practical training in a work environment. The successful implementation of the programme has been supported by financial backing from COMPETE 2030, the involvement of certified training entities and the clear identification of training needs within the participating clusters.

A key challenge in implementing this initiative was identifying the specific training needs of each cluster. This was addressed through detailed diagnostics and close collaboration with participating companies to ensure relevant and impactful training.

It has had a positive impact by improving the skills of the workforce, increasing the competitiveness of companies in the target clusters and strengthening cooperation between businesses and training providers.

3. The **"INNOVATIVE CAR HMI programme"** is a collaborative initiative between the University of Minho and Bosch Car Multimedia Portugal aimed at developing advanced Human-Machine Interface (HMI) systems for the automotive industry. It operates at both the regional and national levels within a corporate network. The programme started in 2015 and remains active.

   The initiative focuses on developing integrated solutions for automotive HMI systems, fostering technological advancements for "zero accidents" mobility and investing in innovative areas such as vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V), vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) and vehicle-to-pedestrian (V2P) communications, sensors and intelligent vehicle software. The collaboration between the University of Minho and Bosch enables the development of cutting-edge automotive technologies, including new systems for vehicle communication, entertainment and user interfaces.

   The key actors include the University of Minho, Bosch Car Multimedia Portugal and over 400 researchers and engineers working on 30 projects related to automotive HMI. The target groups for this initiative include researchers, engineers, automotive industry professionals and students in automotive-related disciplines.

   It is implemented through collaborative research and development, an industry-academia partnership and technological prototyping and testing. Its success has been

supported by a strong partnership between academia and industry, financial backing for R&D activities and a high level of expertise in the automotive sector.

A major challenge in implementing the programme has been integrating diverse technologies from multiple sectors, including automotive, telecommunications and software. This challenge was addressed by fostering effective collaboration between academic researchers and industry engineers and focusing on cross-disciplinary training.

The programme has contributed to significant advancements in automotive HMI technologies, strengthened Portugal's global competitiveness in the automotive sector and supported the formation of a highly skilled workforce specializing in innovative automotive technologies.

Annex 4 has a detailed description of the best practices identified in Portugal.

Analysis of gaps and challenges

In order to identify gaps and challenges faced by students, teachers and policy makers in accessing, implementing and enforcing WBL initiatives in the 4 countries analysed during this research activity, an online questionnaire was provided and interviews with relevant stakeholders were conducted.

In total 125 responses were collected, surpassing the target number of 100 responses set by the consortium.

The following is an analysis of the results to the responses to the 18 questions from the online questionnaires and includes both a description of the results obtained and a comparative analysis between the 4 countries.

Limitations were identified with the research carried out.

- The survey was sent out before Christmas, which was identified as a busy time for students and academic staff due to exams and assessments and a busy time for industry due to year end.
- In following up with industry stakeholders, they advised that while they would like to partake in such research, they do not have the time to do so.
- Responses were different depending on how those being surveyed interpreted the questions being asked.

wblchampion

1- Which category best describes you?

PT

- 68%
- 16%
- 12%
- 4%

IT

- 47.6%
- 23.8%
- 4.8%
- 4.8%
- 9.5%
- 9.5%

MT

- 30.1%
- 26.8%
- 10%
- 3.3%
- 3.3%
- 3.3%
- 13.3%
- 3.3%
- 3.3%

IE

- 46.2%
- 40.1%
- 7.9%
- 3.9%
- 2%
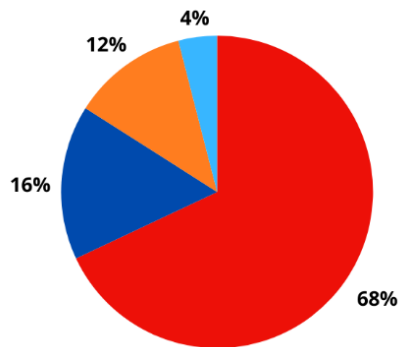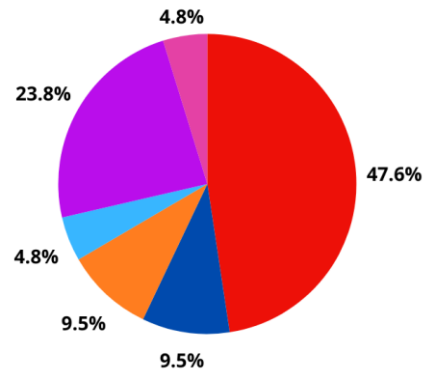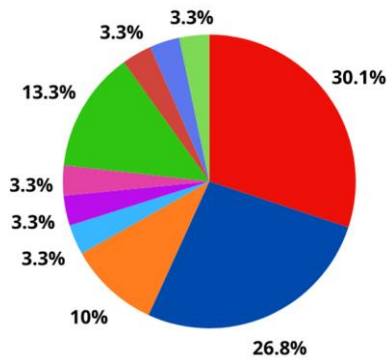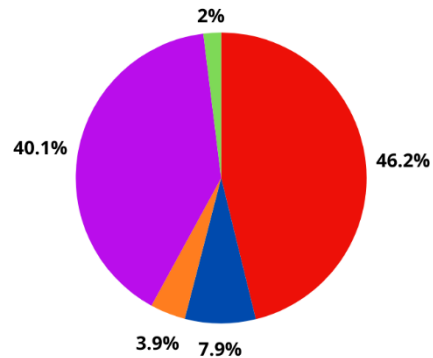
- 🔵 **Company Representative**
- 🔴 **Higher Education Staff**
- 🟠 **Vocational Education and Training Professional**
- 🟢 **Policy Maker**
- 🟣 **Student or Recent Graduate**
- 🔵 **European Union Public Administrator**
- 🩷 **Business Representative**
- 🟢 **HR and Organisational Learning Consultant**

2- In which sector/industry do you primarily work?

The Portuguese questionnaire had 25 answers, with 17 answers from higher education staff, 4 company representatives, 3 VET professionals and 1 scientific investigator. When asked in which sector/industry Portuguese participants work in, most answers stated it to be higher education, in areas such as energy, education, corporate training, football, packaging, engineering, textiles, media and healthcare being identified by the participants.

Regarding Portugal when asked in which sector/industry participants work in, most answers stated it to be higher education, in areas such as energy, education, corporate training, football, packaging, engineering, textiles, media and healthcare being identified by the participants. This data is proved by the graphic showcased on question nr.1, in which is visible that most participants belong to the category "Higher Education Staff" (68%). The next category with most participants (16%) was the one belonging to the Company Representatives.

The Italian survey included 21 participants from various sectors. The majority (47.6%) of participants work in higher education, with 7 out of 10 employed by universities 23.8% were students or recent graduates. 9.5% were both vocational education and training professionals and company representatives. The sectors of work vary from ICT and research and development to commercial, cultural and legal.

Data shows that participants from Malta present a high diversity on the sectors/industries they work in. Nevertheless, there is a predominance of 30.1% from the Higher Education Staff sector and 26.8% from Company Representatives.

In Ireland, there were 49 respondents to the survey, 22 academics, 6 industry partners and 21 students. This data is proven by the graphic on question nr.1 that shows a 46.2% incidence of participants from Higher Education staff and 40.1% of students.

3- How familiar are you with WBL practices in your organisation?
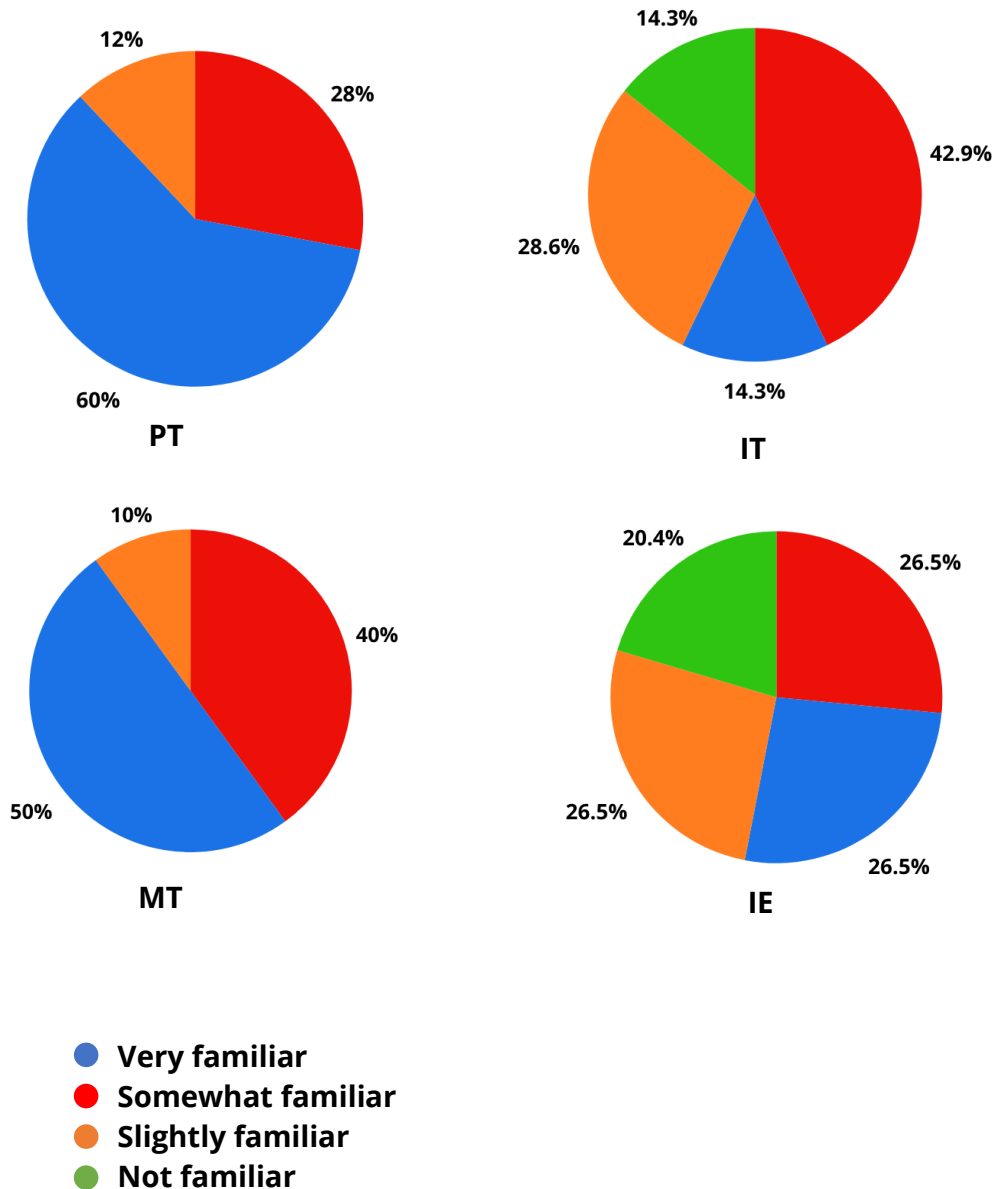
When asked about their familiarity with work-based learning practices in their organisations, most Portuguese respondents (15) stated that they are highly familiar with them, 7 stated to be somewhat familiar with these methods and a few (3) have little familiarity.

The Italian survey reveals that a large portion of participants, 85.7%, report some level of familiarity with WBL practices within their organisations. Specifically, 42.9% of respondents indicated they were "somewhat familiar," 28.6% were "slightly familiar," and 14.3% described themselves as "very familiar." Despite this relatively high awareness, 14.3% of respondents

admitted to having no familiarity with WBL practices in their organisations. These results underscore a diverse range of familiarity levels among respondents, although it is evident that more than half of respondents are familiar with WBL practices.

Survey data from Malta suggests that stakeholders in Malta have high levels of familiarity with WBL practices in their organisations. Half of respondents stated to be very familiar with WBL

Results from Ireland show that 20% of the overall respondents advised no familiarity with WBL practices being applied in their organisation. The other 80% respondents showed varying levels of familiarity, with the same number of people stating to have low, average and high familiarity levels with WBL practices in their organisation.

Analysis: In countries like Portugal and Malta, most participants are familiarised with WBL practices in their organisation. On the other hand, in Ireland and Italy, although the big majority of participants showed that they are familiar with WBL practises in their organisation, there was a number of participants that showed they are not familiar with WBL practices. The varying levels of knowledge of WBL practices in their organisation which could suggest that organisations could look at how to improve the dissemination of this information.

4- **What is/was the nature of your involvement in WBL programmes or initiatives (e.g.: apprenticeships, internships, dual education systems, others)? (multiple answers can be chosen)**
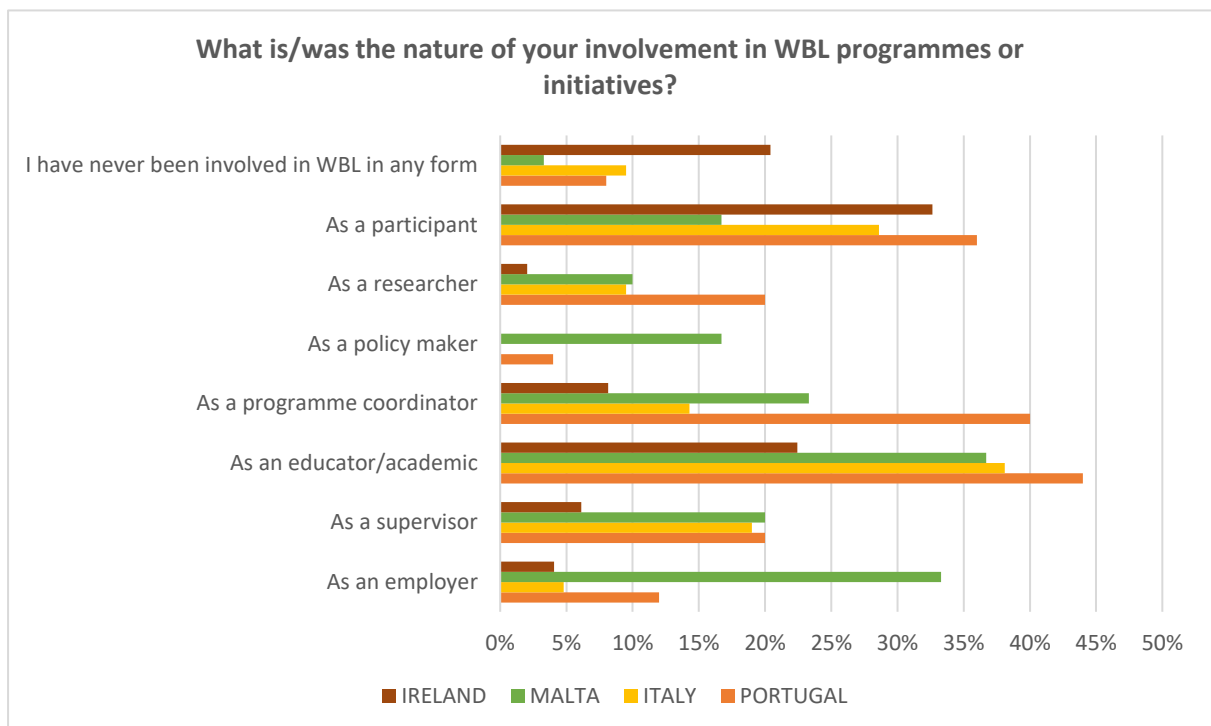
Participants were also asked about the nature of their involvement in WBL. From the Portuguese multiple answers provided, 11 have worked or currently work as educators/academics, 10 as coordinators of WBL programmes, 9 as participants, 5 as WBL supervisors, 5 as investigators in WBL projects, 3 as employers in companies that have WBL programmes, 1 as political decision maker, 1 as responsible for the organization of WBL programmes in their company and 2 have stated to never have contact/involvement in WBL practices.

Regarding Italian participants and their involvement and direct experience with WBL programmes or initiatives, such as apprenticeships, internships, or dual education systems, most respondents were engaged as educators or academics (40%), followed by participants (28.6%), supervisors (19%), and programme coordinators (14.3%). In contrast, only a few participants served as employers or acted as intermediaries between companies and educational institutions. Furthermore, 9.5% of respondents indicated they had no direct involvement with WBL in their organisations, underscoring potential participation gaps among different stakeholder groups.

From Malta the biggest percentage of people, when asked about their involvement in WBL programmes and initiatives, answered that they belonged to educator/academic group (36%), followed by employers (33%), programme coordinators (23%) and supervisors (20%). Only around 3% claimed they have never been involved in WBL in any form.

Regarding Irish participants and their involvement and direct experience with WBL programmes or initiatives, most participants were involved as participants (33%) and followed by educator/academic (22%). They were also the country that presented the highest number of participants that had never been involved in WBL in any form (20%).

Analysis: From all the options available the ones with more votes from participants shows that, in all 4 countries, the nature of their involvement in WBL programmes or initiatives is as educators/academics, as programme coordinators and as participants. Other answers were pointed out by participants like, for example, being involved as EU Projects or mentoring.

5- How recently have you engaged with work-based learning practices (implementing, supervising, as a participant, etc)?

PT

IT

MT

IE

- 🔵 I interact with them on a daily basis
- 🔴 I have interacted with them within the last year
- 🟠 I have interacted with them between 1and 2 years ago
- 🟢 I have interacted with them more than two years ago
- 🟣 I have never interacted with them
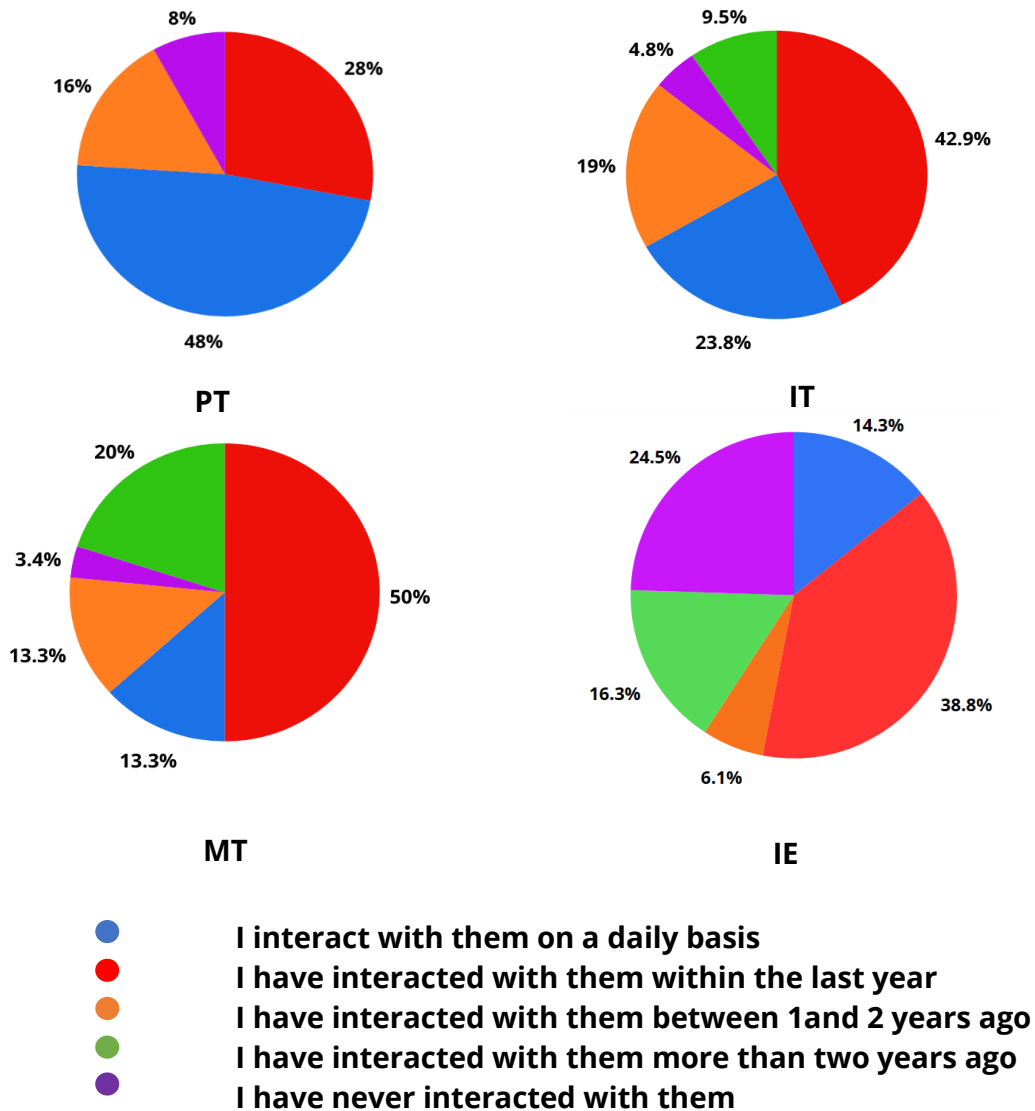
When asked about the recency and frequency of their involvement with WBL methodologies, a significant number of Portuguese participants stated that they interact with WBL practices daily (48%), while others have engaged within the last year (28%) or between one and two years ago

(16%). As stated previously, 2 participants do not recall ever participating in WBL practices, neither as supervisors, coordinators, participants, or other possible roles.

Most Italian participants, 66.7%, reported recent or frequent engagement with WBL practices, either within the last year (42.9%) or daily (23.8%). Additionally, 19% stated their last involvement was between 1 and 2 years ago, while 9.5% interacted more than 2 years ago. Only 4.8% of the respondents indicated they had never engaged with WBL practices. These findings suggest that WBL is an active component of professional and educational landscapes for most of the respondents, highlighting its importance and the value placed on practical, experiential learning models. The data suggests a need for continued support and possibly updates for those who have been out of touch with WBL for over two years, to ensure all professionals remain equipped with the most current and effective practices.

From all the Maltese answers registered, half of the participants (50%) have engaged with WBL practices within the last year. Only 13.3% interact with WBL practices on a daily basis and the same percentage of participants have interacted between the 1 and 2 years ago. Only a small percentage (3.4%) stated that have never interacted/engaged with WBL practices.

Regarding the answers from Ireland, 24.5% of the participants have never engaged with WBL practices. On the other hand, the other big majority of participants (38.8%) have interacted with them within the last year.

Analysis: In countries like Portugal, most participants have been interacting with WBL practises regularly. In the case of Italy, Malta and Ireland many participants have been interacting with WBL practises within the last year. On the other hand, a high number of respondents from Ireland report that they are yet to have any experience or contact with WBL practices.

6- Are you familiar with National or European policies supporting WBL?
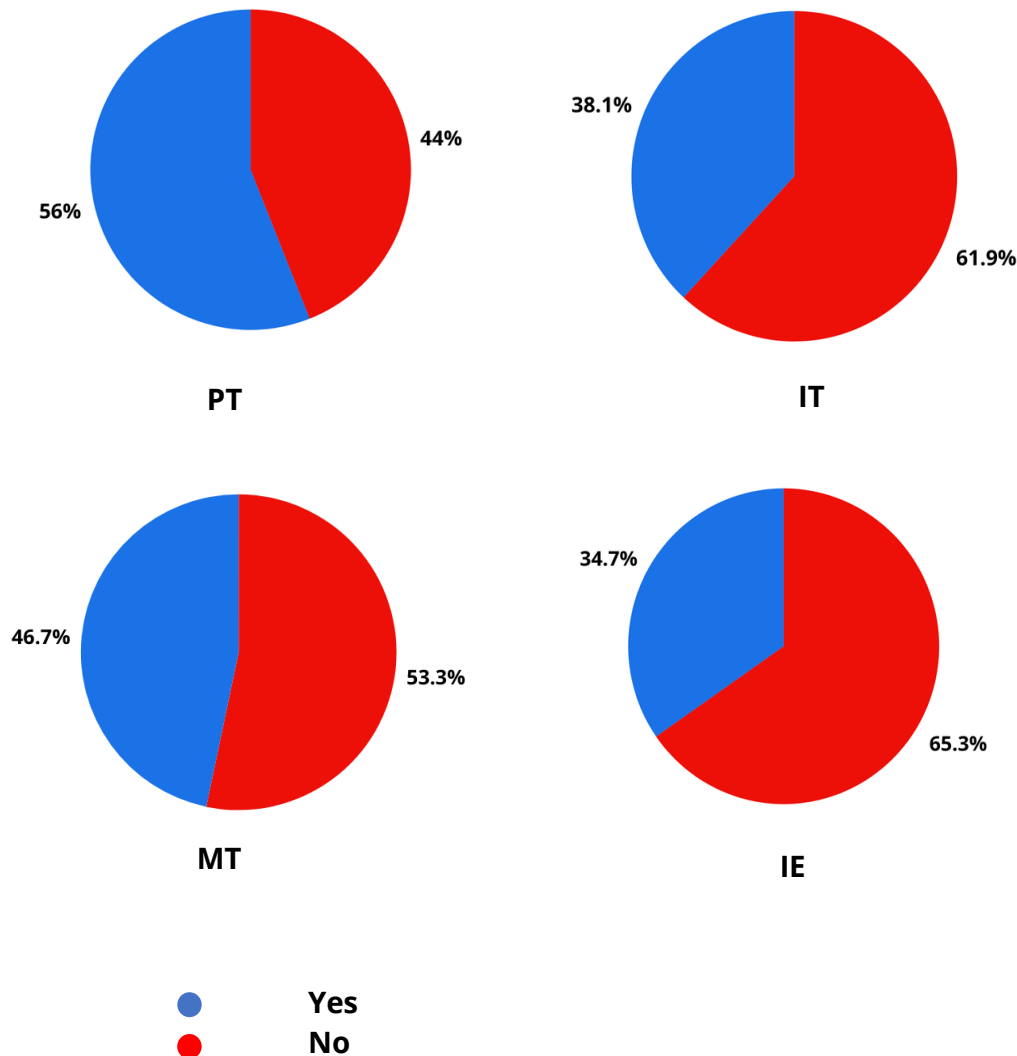
Regarding familiarity with national and European WBL policies, more than half of the Portuguese respondents are aware (56%), while the others are currently not familiar with national and European WBL policies.

Regarding the Italian participants, only 38.1% of participants are aware of them. This highlights a significant gap in awareness and understanding of existing frameworks or initiatives that aim to support WBL programmes.

From the participants of Malta only 46.7% of respondents reported being aware of national or EU WBL policies, while 53.3% indicated a lack of familiarity—highlighting a clear need for greater visibility, clarity, and dissemination of relevant frameworks.

From the Irish participants analysis, 35% of the respondents advised they were familiar with the European or National policies supporting WBL while the majority (65%) of them are not familiar with these policies

Analysis: In countries like Italy, Malta and Ireland most participants are not familiar with National or European policies supporting WBL. Only in Portugal the majority of participants are familiar with these policies.

7- **If you answered "Yes" to the previous answer, how would you rate, from 1 to 5 (1-very ineffective; 5-very effective), the effectiveness of National or European policies in supporting WBL in your country?**
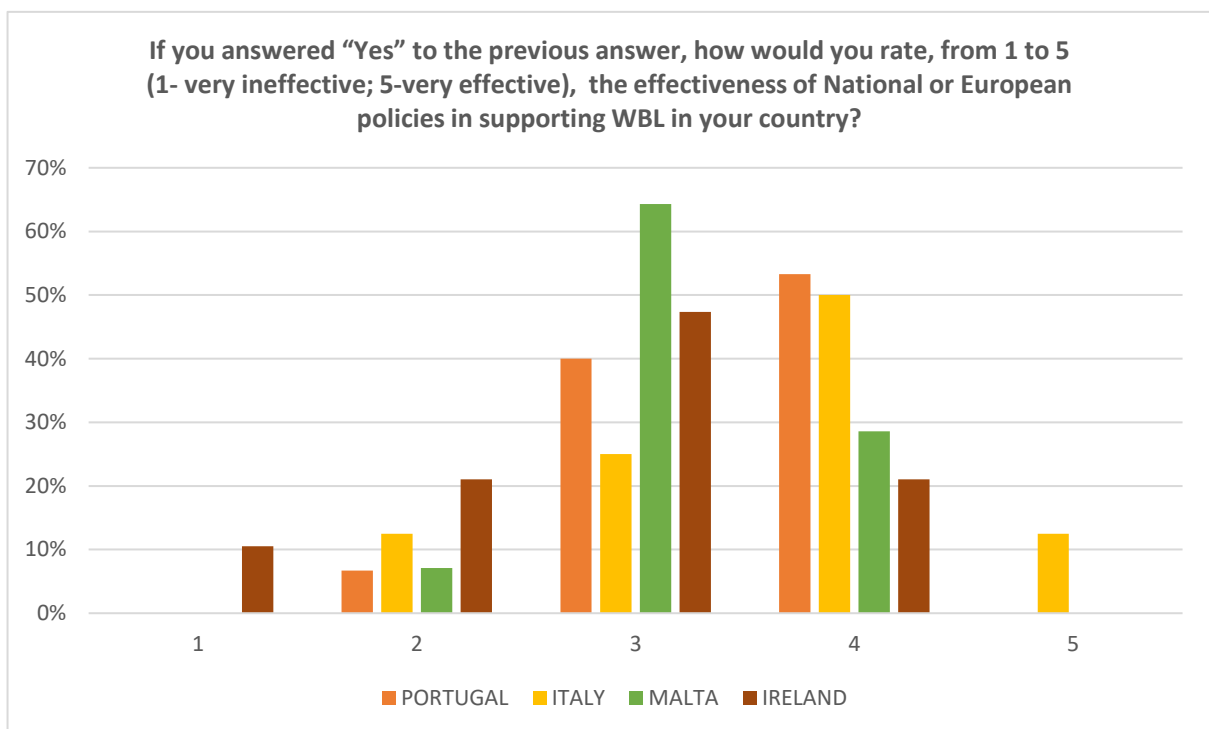
From the Portuguese participants that responded affirmatively in the previous question, we inquired them about the effectiveness of these policies (in a 1-5 scale) and most rated them as moderately effective (53,3%), while others were more neutral (40%), and 1 respondent believes that the policies lack effectiveness.

From those Italian participants who answered yes to the previous question, more than 60% gave a positive outlook and rated national or European policies effective in supporting WBL in Italy.

For Malta, the effectiveness of these policies in supporting WBL was rated moderately, with 64.3% of those familiar with WBL policies rating them as "3" on a scale from 1 to 5, and 28.6% giving them a "4" rating.

Analysing the data from Ireland, we can state that most participants (47%) rate as "3" the effectiveness of National or European policies in supporting WBL in their country. Interestingly, around 10% rate it as very ineffective. Interestingly, none of those who advised they were aware of the policies, rated the policies as very ineffective.

Analysis: In all 4 countries most votes of participants are located between classifications "3" and "4". This could mean that they consider the National and European policies supporting WBL in their countries could be more effective in design or implementation.

8- Can you name the policies with which you are familiar?

PORTUGAL
ERASMUS+ Programme
European Social Fund (FSE)
Portugal 2020
Compete 2020
Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships
Qualifica Programme
21st Century Skills ERASMUS+ Project
Teachers' Continuous and Initial Training
CTESP Traineeships/Internships

ITALY
ERASMUS+ Programme
Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships
Dual system in vocational education and training.

MALTA
ERASMUS+ Programme
Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships
MCAST and UOM internships
Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)
Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018)

European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA)
Institute's placement programme
Public service IPS scheme
WBL Act

IRELAND
ERASMUS+ Programme
Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships
National Skills Strategy 2025
European Skills Agenda 2020
European Framework for WBL
Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025
Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025
Guide for Practitioners: the Erasmus Skills project.
Cedefop

Analysis: In Portugal, these include the ERASMUS+ Programme, European Social Fund (FSE), Portugal 2020, Compete 2020, and initiatives like Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships, the Qualifica Programme, the 21st Century Skills ERASMUS+ Project, and Teachers' Continuous and Initial Training. Additionally, CTESP Traineeships/Internships play a key role in Portugal's vocational training landscape.

In Italy, the policies primarily focus on the ERASMUS+ Programme, the Dual System in vocational education and training. and Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships as central initiatives.

Malta has policies such as the ERASMUS+ Programme, Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships, and initiatives by MCAST and UOM internships. Malta also has the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018). The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA) and national programmes like the Institute's Placement Programme and the Public Service IPS Scheme are also key to supporting work-based learning.

In Ireland, the policies include the ERASMUS+ Programme, Employment Center Training and Professional Traineeships/Internships, and strategic initiatives such as the National Skills Strategy 2025, European Skills Agenda 2020, and the European Framework for WBL. Ireland is also guided by the Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025 and the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025. Other important resources include the Guide for Practitioners: the Erasmus Skills Project and Cedefop as tools for enhancing skills development.

9- What do you consider the most significant challenges in the current national WBL policies?

What do you consider the most significant challenges in the current national WBL policies?
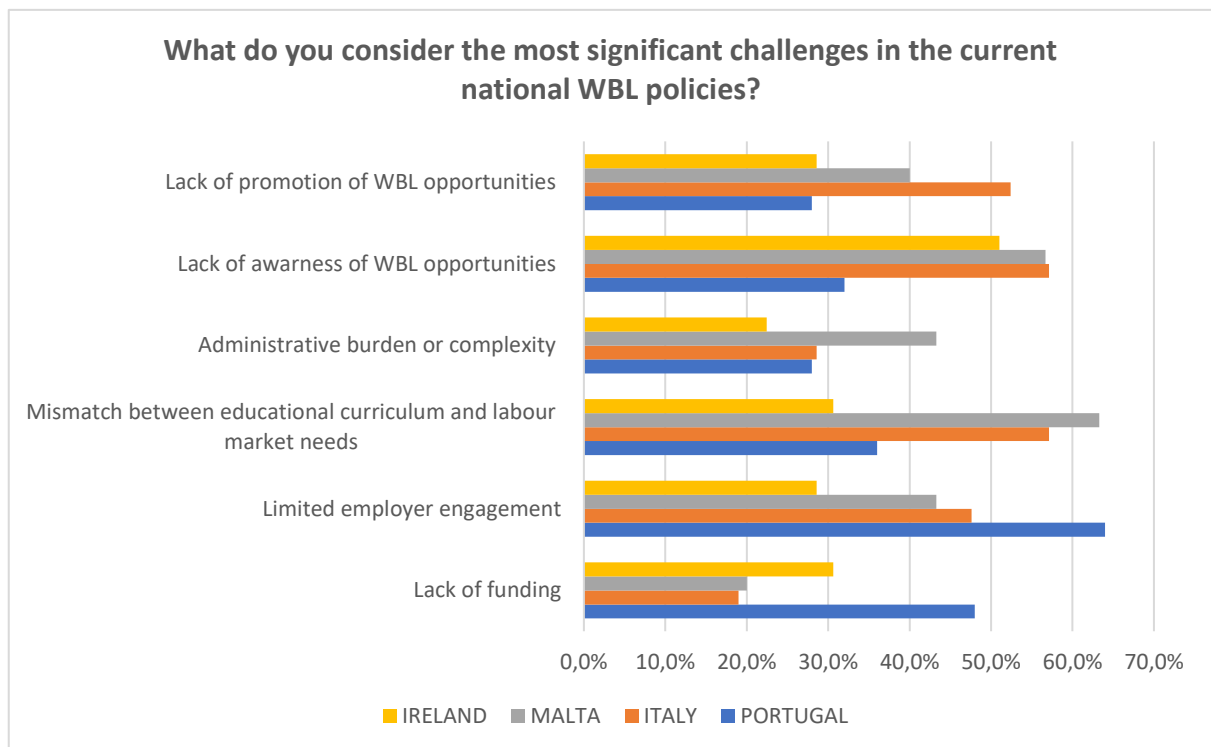
Everybody that answered the Portuguese questionnaire was asked to identify which are the most significant challenges in the current national WBL policies. Limited involvement from employers was identified as the major issue (64%), while lack of awareness about WBL opportunities (56%), lack of dissemination of WBL opportunities and lack of funding were the other major problems identified (both with 48% of selections). Other challenges were considered less significant, such as, differences between the curriculum and labour market necessities (36%), administrative expenses or high complexity (28%). Lack of participation from employees was deemed to be the less significant challenge.

The top challenges identified by Italian participants include a mismatch between educational curriculum and job market needs, and a lack of awareness about WBL opportunities, each cited by 57.1% of respondents. These challenges highlight a critical disconnect between educational offerings and labour market demands and suggest that many potential participants or stakeholders are not fully aware of the existence or advantages of WBL programmes, which impairs their adoption and effectiveness. Additionally, over half of the participants (52.4%) pointed out that WBL opportunities are not promoted sufficiently, indicating a gap in marketing these programmes/learning modalities to potential beneficiaries like students, employers, or educators. Furthermore, 47.6% of respondents noted limited employer engagement as a significant obstacle, reflecting difficulties in fostering collaborations between educational institutions and the business sector, which are essential for effective WBL. Other concerns included administrative burdens and complexity (28.6%), which may deter involvement,
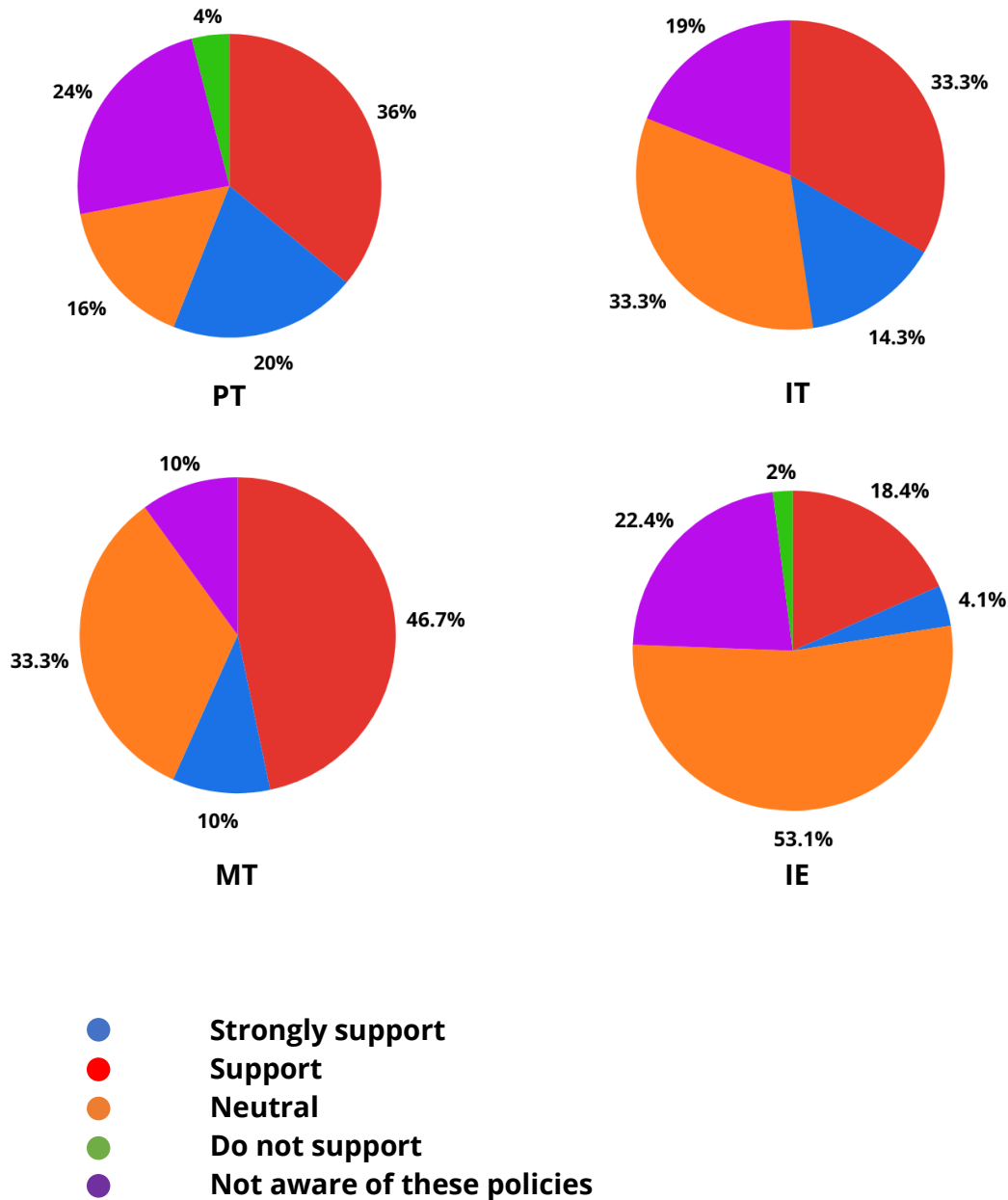
particularly from small or medium enterprises, and a lesser emphasis on funding issues (19%), suggesting that financial constraints are not perceived as the primary barrier. A small percentage (4.8%) of respondents also mentioned more specific challenges such as improving the integration of education with the workforce, enhancing the quality of WBL experiences, addressing regional disparities in programme availability, and facilitating access for vulnerable groups.

Regarding answers from Malta, drawing responses from 30 stakeholders across education, industry, and the public and NGO sectors, the survey aimed to capture views on policy awareness, structural barriers, digital integration, and stakeholder engagement in WBL initiatives. The most significant challenge, reported by 63.3% of respondents, was the ongoing mismatch between educational curricula and labour market demands. Closely following this issue, 56.7% of respondents highlighted a lack of awareness and visibility of WBL opportunities. A further 43.3% of respondents cited limited employer engagement as a major barrier. In addition to low awareness, 40% of respondents indicated that WBL is insufficiently promoted at a national level. A particularly notable finding relates to the digitalisation of WBL systems. While 90% of respondents considered digital skills to be either "important" or "very important" to the effective delivery of WBL, only 30% reported awareness of any digital tools or platforms currently supporting WBL in Malta. This striking discrepancy reveals a critical gap between perceived importance and practical implementation.

The Irish respondents overall identified the largest challenge being lack of awareness of WBL policies as the major challenge. All three groups of respondents also agreed that challenges arose due to the lack of funding and the lack of promotion of WBL opportunities. Students and Academic agreed that lack of employment engagement and the mismatch between educational curriculum and labour market needs are also challenges, while academics also saw the administrative burden or complexity as being a major challenge. 51% of the respondents were neutral regarding whether EU policies support WBL nationally, with 24.5% indicating that they do support, and 24.5% stating that they do not support WBL nationally.

Analysis: Overall, all options were highly chosen from participants from all the 4 countries, but some countries had more incidence in certain options. For Portuguese participants, lack of funding and limited employer engagement were stated as what they consider to be the most significant challenges in their current national WBL policies. For Italy is the lack of awareness of WBL opportunities and the mismatch between educational curriculum and labour market needs. These two last options were also the most voted for Maltese participants. In the case of Ireland, the most significant challenge is the lack of awareness of WBL opportunities. Other answers were registered in the questionnaire, but these 6 ones were the most voted.

10- To what extent do you feel European Union policies and initiatives (e.g., Erasmus+, European Framework for WBL) are supporting WBL in your country?

PT

IT

MT

IE

- 🔵 **Strongly support**
- 🔴 **Support**
- 🟠 **Neutral**
- 🟢 **Do not support**
- 🟣 **Not aware of these policies**

When assessing EU support for WBL, most Portuguese respondents (36%) believe these policies provide some level of assistance, while 24% do not know how EU policies and initiatives support WBL programmes in Portugal. Only 20% of respondents believe that EU policies and initiatives strongly support WBL in Portugal, while 16% had a neutral opinion and 1 respondent believe that European initiatives do not support implementation of WBL in Portugal.

Italian participants have a generally positive perception of EU policies and initiatives like Erasmus+ and the European Framework for WBL, with nearly half of the participants expressing support, However, a significant portion of respondents either remained neutral (33.3%) or were not aware of these policies (19%), pointing to a need for increased awareness and clearer communication about EU efforts in supporting work-based learning. A smaller group (14.3%) expressed strong support, indicating they believed EU policies were making a notable positive impact on WBL in their country.

Malta's survey responses also indicated that 46.7% of respondents feel that EU policies such as Erasmus+ and the European Framework for WBL support WBL initiatives, while 33.3% remain neutral, and 10% are unaware of these policies.

Around 25% of Irish participants indicated that in their opinion policies supported or strongly supported WBL in Ireland with 75% choosing that they were 'neutral to the support of the policies and 22% indicating they were unaware of the policies with only 2% indicating their opinion was that the policies did not support WBL in the county.

Analysis: In countries like Portugal, Italy and Malta, people overall believe that European Union policies and initiatives support WBL in their countries. On the other hand, in Ireland, most participants stand neutral on this matter.

11- **How important do you consider digital skills for the effective implementation of WBL programmes, from 1 to 5 (1- not important; 5- extremely important)?**
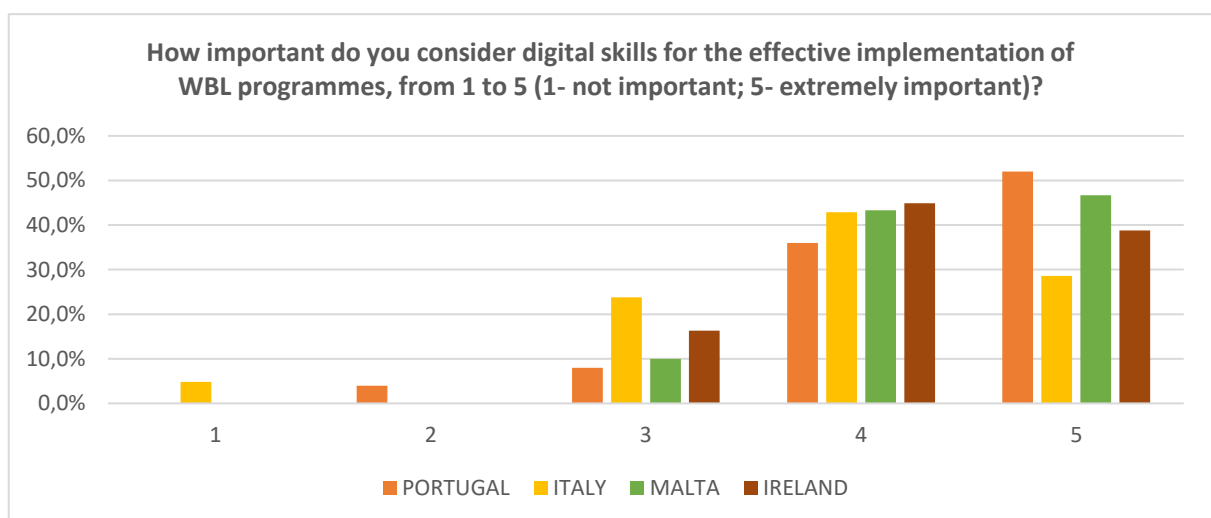
Application of digital skills and tools in WBL programmes are also an important topic of discussion in the WBL Champion project, so participants were asked about the level of importance that digital skills have in the implementation of WBL programmes. The Portuguese responses highlight that, overall, participants consider them to be highly important, with only 2 participants having a neutral opinion and 1 expressing that these skills are not very relevant.

Italian participants rated digital skills as crucial for implementing WBL programmes, with most participants rating their importance highly—42.9% scored them 4 out of 5, and 28.6% gave the maximum score. However, the survey revealed a need for targeted digital training for both students and staff to meet the demands of an increasingly technological labour market. Challenges such as navigating university portals and the poor usability of WBL-related websites were also identified.

For Maltese participants 90% of respondents acknowledged the importance of digital skills in WBL.

For the Italian participants 71.5% (scores of 4 and 5) of participants view digital skills as highly important, demonstrating a strong consensus on their importance. The data highlights the significant role digital skills play in enhancing the efficiency of WBL initiatives, with most participants assigning them a high importance.

When Irish respondents were asked to rate digital skills for the effective implementation of WBL programmes most participants (82%) considered the digital skills to be very important.

Analysis: Results show a predominance of all 4 countries participants' votes to be located between classifications 4 and 5. We can conclude that in all 4 countries, as a general rule, participants consider as very important the use of digital tools for the implementation of WBL programmes.

12- Please explain the reasons for your choice of rating in the previous question.

PORTUGAL
To adapt the programmes to the needs of the modern labour market, as well as to ensure that students are prepared for the technological and innovative challenges they will encounter in their future careers.

Just because they are fundamental to any vocational training.

For me, it's of little importance, as my target group of trainees are people with a low academic level who don't even have a chance of doing activities that involve digital skills.
The digital transition is not an option, as it is the main path of development today for peripheral societies like Portugal.

In order to get the most out of it, you need digital skills.

More effective implementation.

Providing better and continuous monitoring and integration.

Because of the assessment methods and because they are mostly online courses.

Digital competences are fundamental to employability and there is a lack of training for employers, educators and students.

Digital skills are extremely important for the effective implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes, especially in the current context, where digital transformation is reshaping the way organisations operate and how professionals develop.

Facilitating integration into the workplace.

Boosting Online and Hybrid Learning.

Accessing and managing information.

Efficient communication.

Developing Autonomy and Responsibility.

Fostering Innovation and Creativity.

Strengthening competitiveness in the labour market.

Better monetisation and performance evaluation.

Digitalisation is a constantly evolving phenomenon that must always be taken into account in any training.

ITALY
The skilled labour market is increasingly oriented towards digital technology and its applications and potential. Both the practising PTA and the student population should be able to easily find and use the knowledge available on the Internet, apply it, and communicate via digital channels. At the same time, basic information on university websites is often difficult to find, and the student population often complains that the websites related to the mentioned opportunities are not easily navigable nor well indexed. I have been in the organisation for a year now, and perhaps we lecturers (although not directly involved in the procedures) should also receive outreach and training to properly orientate learners. Digital skills are now indispensable to do any kind of work. Greater fluidity and transparency of implementation procedures. Students are often digital natives but little informed about how the platforms they use every day work. They are losing familiarity with the basic working programmes. The demand from companies is very strong. To facilitate learning and training also at a distance and in agile mode. It is necessary to know how to use digital tools to be able to adapt to today's to the world of work. Specialised skills can be acquired during the implementation phase of training.

I consider digital skills of paramount importance in any sector nowadays.

They are essential in almost any job. Especially in the case of roles performed remotely or in hybrid mode.

Digital skills are now a constitutive element in the implementation of WBL programmes and, more generally, an essential condition for access to the labour market.

Digital skills are needed as transversal skills

They constitute an administrative facility

MALTA

IT is important into today's work environment.

Technology helps to avoid time consuming transportation.

Required especially to be in sync with labour requirements and acquisition of transferable skills.

The digital skills are essential for the promotion, effective implementation and management of WBL programmes. Collecting and analysing related data using the digital tools is also imperative to measure the effective, practical outcome of WBL initiatives.

Digital skills and literacy are a horizontal competency needed in any career.

Digital skills should be at the forefront of learning due to the ever-changing educational landscapes and technological advancements.

Digital skills are important for the effective implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes due to their role in enhancing communication, learning, assessment, and employability.

For Students/Mentors to Access to Learning Resources and Support.

To streamline communication, evidence of learning, assessment and feedback.

For data driven decision making.

Preparation of students for digitally driven workplaces.

Potential remote/virtual WBL opportunities.

Digital machinery has become commonplace in many areas.

Digital skills are crucial for work-based learning as they enhance productivity, adaptability, and collaboration in modern, technology-driven workplaces.

WBL can take place in various settings and don't necessarily rely heavily on digital skills.

Essential for online interaction and better engagement with content just to mention at least 2 reasons.

For Accessibility, Collaboration & Communication.

Digital Skills are cross-sectional skills which are present in all aspects of life, work and industries.

Demographics of workforce.

They enhance accessibility, align with industry needs, and support remote or hybrid work environments while ensuring learners are equipped for the future workforce.

I believe that human effectiveness is more valuable in WBL.
Digital skills can enhance the engagement and optimisation of opportunities; however, personal and interpersonal skills need to complement digital capabilities.

Every area of the business can be supported through digital tools so students being prepared with digital skills will ensure they keep up with the ever-developing tools available.

For efficiency and effectiveness, a WBL programme should be managed on a digital platform.

Digital Skills make WBL more accessible and easier to penetrate.

Most learning is now online.

Some skills are beyond digital applications - how to work in a team is arguably more critical than digital literacy. A willingness to learn is everything.

WBL programmes are largely digital and as such require the trainee to be proficient in digital skills.

All jobs include an element of digital skills.

IRELAND

Digital skills is essential because the demand for technology is very high now.

It's more accessible to everyone at any time.

It's a huge part of day-to-day life now.

Everything is done digitally in the modern day, so a good grasp of digital skills is very necessary.

Technology is being used in every work sector and most internships require the use of computers.

Most jobs in my course in terms of internships and work in general require a good understanding of things such as excel and other technological understandings.

I chose my answer because realistically, online is where most of the information comes from

As the digital economy continues to grow, there should be a greater emphasis on incorporating digital skills and competencies into WBL programs to prepare the workforce for the future.
Students are not taught relevant skills and the use of digital tools are villainised in education (like a calculator was) yet are expected to be used daily in work.

It is important to have efficiency in technology and how to use it in most working jobs e.g. General knowledge on excel.

There is insufficient focus on the specific digital tools and platforms dominating global business practices, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) tools, and digital marketing analytics.

Embedding of advanced digital business tools into WBL curricula, training students on platforms like Salesforce, SAP, Tableau, and digital ad platforms, would ensure learners are well-equipped for the digitized global business environment.

There is often an over-emphasis on 'digital'. Soft skills are just as important.

Students undertaking WBL are expected to have industry levels of Word, Excel, Adobe Acrobat etc...

Very useful to track progress and create a dialogue with participants on an ongoing basis and keeps a record of performance.

It is a must in communication within industry and between partners of the programme.

Digital literacy is integral to communication and coordination between employers, educators and trainees. It can also be an enabler for some elements of remote training.

All employees need to have more than just basic Digital skills in order to be able to progress the employment market.

As digital skills are crucial for employability it is extremely important that they are at the core of WBL.

Digital literacy is a requirement since a lot of the tasks at work and in daily life are digitally based.

Digital skills are essential but at the chore, other skills matter.

I would imagine digital skills would be necessary in terms of designing and delivering content perhaps through virtual learning environments, learning management systems or other platforms.

In terms of collaboration and communication and in terms of providing feedback to different stakeholders., administration and monitoring.
Important as the curriculum needs to be devised and shared via digital sources/ platforms.

I coordinate work placements for both MSc students on the Masters in Digital Content & Analytics (Tu325A) and 4th year BA students on the BA in Digital Marketing Technologies (TU921) and the digital skills are front and centre for both effective admin as well as digital marketing support.

Opportunities to use GenAI and to be AI native to explore WBL opportunities.

Digital Skills are broad - there are basic skills such as an ability to use Microsoft Office, but there are specific skills not all necessarily digital.

Digital competency is key skills required.

Technology is part of everyday life now, so an awareness and knowledge of digital skills is essential.

It is an important skill to have in general - not necessarily more or less in line with the programmes discussed here, in my opinion.

The future workforce is highly dependent on digital literacy, and a lack of digital skills equates to a lack of opportunities.

Analysis: In Portugal, adapting programmes to the modern labour market is crucial, especially in ensuring that students are prepared for the technological challenges they will face in their future careers. Digital skills are fundamental to any vocational training, particularly as the digital transition is essential for peripheral societies like Portugal. The digitalization of society is ongoing and cannot be overlooked in any training programme, as it significantly impacts workplace integration and enhances online and hybrid learning. Competencies in digital tools are necessary to ensure the effective implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes, fostering employability, autonomy, and innovation. These skills promote efficient communication, information management, and the overall competitiveness of workers in the labour market. Furthermore, digital skills support the continued tracking and evaluation of performance, ensuring the long-term success of WBL initiatives.

In Italy, digital skills are becoming indispensable due to the increasing demand for skilled labour in technology-driven sectors. Both practitioners and students must be capable of using and applying digital knowledge, yet many students face challenges navigating university websites and accessing information effectively. The digital landscape is constantly evolving, and understanding how digital tools and platforms work is crucial for adapting to today's work environment. Digital skills are necessary for successful Work-Based Learning (WBL) implementation and access to the labour market, especially in remote or hybrid roles. In particular, specialized digital competencies can be developed during the implementation phase of training programmes, ensuring students are equipped with the skills required in the digital age.

In Malta, digital skills are pivotal in the work environment, particularly in ensuring alignment with labour market demands and facilitating the acquisition of transferable skills. The effective implementation of WBL programmes relies on these skills, especially for communication, learning, assessment, and employability. Digital tools help streamline communication, evidence

of learning, and feedback, making them indispensable for data-driven decision-making and preparing students for digitally driven workplaces. Digital skills also enhance accessibility and collaboration within WBL programmes, supporting remote and virtual learning opportunities. While human effectiveness remains a critical aspect of WBL, digital skills play a key role in optimizing engagement, productivity, and adaptability in modern, technology-driven workplaces.

In Ireland, digital skills are crucial as technology is increasingly integrated into all sectors of the workforce. With the growing digital economy, it is essential that Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes incorporate these competencies to prepare students for future career opportunities. Digital tools are fundamental for tasks such as communication, administration, and collaboration, making them integral to both the delivery and management of WBL programmes. While digital skills like proficiency in Excel and other software are essential, there is also a need to focus on more advanced tools used in global business practices, such as CRM systems and digital marketing analytics platforms. The emphasis on digital skills should be balanced with the recognition of soft skills, which are equally important for success in the workplace. Additionally, digital competencies enable remote learning and improve the effectiveness of educational and training programmes, helping students remain competitive in an increasingly digital job market.

13- Are you aware of any digital tools currently used to support WBL in your country or institution?

28%
72%
PT

14.3%
85.7%
IT

30%
70%
MT

26.5%
73.5%
IE

● **Yes**
● **No**

94
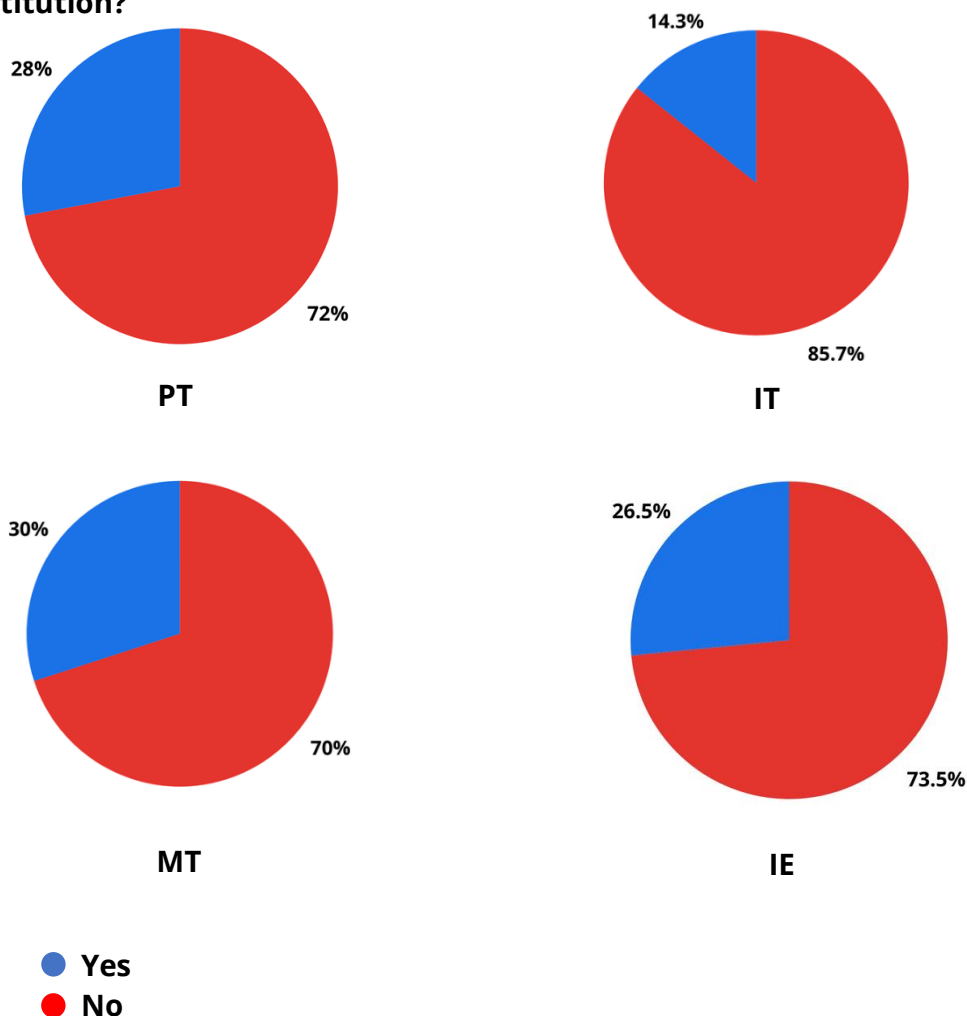
Only 28% of Portuguese participants are familiar with digital tools to support WBL in Portugal and in their institutions, such as LMS (Learning Management Systems) tools, Moodle, Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams, Padlet for learning diaries, Miro for structuring ideas, NAU as a national training platform, SIGA as an academic management system, LinkedIn Learning and Google Forms. In terms of preference for digital tools for WBL methodologies, respondents expressed a preference for online platforms, learning management systems, digital assessment tools, collaboration platforms like Teams and Trello, mobile applications and augmented reality and virtual reality systems.

Despite the importance of digital skills, only 14.3% of Italian participants were familiar with digital tools relevant to WBL in Italy, such as SELFIE and Stage4eu. Participants found e-learning platforms like Moodle and Trello, programme management software, and platforms connecting universities and companies to be the most useful. However, many reported facing technical difficulties and administrative resistance when using these tools, highlighting barriers to their effective implementation.

The role of digital tools in WBL emerged as a critical consideration for Malta participants. While 90% of respondents acknowledged the importance of digital skills in WBL, only 30% were aware of digital tools currently supporting WBL initiatives in Malta, with a majority (70%) unaware of such resources. This reflects a need to integrate digital platforms more effectively and educate stakeholders on their availability and benefits. Recommendations such as the development of centralised digital platforms for tracking, managing, and assessing WBL progress could address this gap.

When respondents from Ireland were asked about their current level of awareness of the digital tools, 73.5% said that they are not aware of the digital tools which are currently being used to support WBL in their country.

Analysis: In all 4 countries, most participants are not aware of any current digital tools to support WBL in their countries.

14- If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, can you share the name and main functionally of said tool?

PORTUGAL
They facilitate communication between academic institutions and companies: SIGA (Integrated Academic Management System); Instituto Superior de Engenharia do Porto Internship Platform. Communication: Teams; Google Classroom. Competence Management and Learning Systems: Moodle; LinkedIn Learning. *NAU* platform - training at the learner's pace and certified. Digital platforms for distance learning Teams Moodle, GOOGLE Workspace, Microsoft Teams, Google forms *CIÊNCIAVITAE* Any LMS; Padlet for learning diaries; MIRO which allows you to innovate, create, structure and present in WBL.

ITALY
SELFIE SELFIE for Teachers European portal for young people, is a platform where internships and jobs available in member countries are listed. Inapp provides several tools to support the WBL: Stage4eu (platform for students and graduates wishing to do an internship in Europe), the Atlas of Jobs and Qualifications, the inter-institutional platform Skills and Work, the Occupations Portal etc.

MALTA

TEAMS

VLE platforms like Moodle, OTIS and learning management systems like CLASSTER. Other Communication platforms/tools like MS Teams are very important as well.

Various LMSs

Learning Management System (LMS) - Moodle and Microsoft Teams/Sharepoint

Moodle for education, Trello for team collaboration

SELFIE for work-based learning, Europass Certificate Supplement, Shireburn

Moodle

Platforms like Zoom and MS Teams are providing easily accessible sources for WBL

IRELAND

Canva, Gamma AI app

Apart from Brightspace

Rotman Market simulation challenge, AmplifyME's simulations. he entry level subscription tier is called 'Explore' which provides your students with the following per academic year: - 18 simulations events across the three pathways of Banking, Global Markets and Quant finance; - 4 Careers Masterclasses; - Together this totals over 60 live taught contact hours; - Additional on demand content and job application support; - Simulations are delivered in an online or hybrid format by AmplifyME industry practitioner

Brightspace.

Pharmacology use extensive tools for tacking students

My experience would be limited to VLEs like Moodle or Brightspace and LMS like Banner but no doubt there are others.

TU Dublin link with- career set- AI to provide support with CVs, cover letters etc, careers connect- shares job opportunities
MS Office suite (for admin), Meta platforms and Canva (for Digital Marketing), MS Power BI (for Analytics), Adobe suite (for design work)

Zoom, Teams, Moodle

Analysis: In Portugal, various digital platforms are used to facilitate communication and learning. SIGA (Integrated Academic Management System) and the Instituto Superior de Engenharia do Porto Internship Platform streamline connections between academic institutions and companies. Communication tools such as Teams and Google Classroom are frequently used, while platforms like Moodle and LinkedIn Learning support competence management and learning systems. For learners, the NAU platform offers training at their own pace with certification. Additional tools like Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams, Google Forms, and CIÊNCIAVITAE are also used to enhance learning experiences. Moreover, tools like Padlet for learning diaries and MIRO for creating and presenting in Work-Based Learning (WBL) further enrich the educational process.

In Italy, several platforms are utilized to support Work-Based Learning (WBL). SELFIE for Teachers is a tool that allows for the reflection and development of digital competences. The European portal for young people is an important platform listing available internships and job opportunities in member countries. Additionally, INAPP provides several tools, such as Stage4eu, a platform for students and graduates seeking internships across Europe, as well as the Atlas of Jobs and Qualifications, the Skills and Work inter-institutional platform, and the Occupations Portal.

In Malta, a variety of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and digital platforms are used for WBL. Teams is a commonly used platform, alongside Moodle, OTIS, and other LMS such as CLASSTER. These platforms are essential for managing educational content and supporting collaboration. Communication tools like Microsoft Teams and other platforms such as Zoom are widely used to enhance accessibility and facilitate remote learning. The SELFIE tool for WBL, the Europass Certificate Supplement, and Shireburn are also important resources for enhancing the WBL experience.

In Ireland, various digital platforms and tools are used to enhance learning and WBL. Canva and the Gamma AI app are used for digital marketing and design work, while platforms like Brightspace and Rotman Market Simulation Challenge provide simulations for students in areas such as banking, global markets, and quantitative finance. AmplifyME's simulations offer entry-level students' exposure to real-world financial scenarios, complemented by careers masterclasses and job application support. Additionally, Zoom, Teams, Moodle, and MS Office (for administration) are commonly used in various educational and professional settings. TU

Dublin integrates AI through platforms like Career Set to assist students with CVs and job applications, further supporting career development.

15- What kind of digital tools would you find most useful for supporting WBL programmes (e.g., online platforms, learning management systems, digital assessment tools)?

PORTUGAL
Online platforms
SIGA; LMS (learning management systems); Teams; Zoom; Trello
I think it's important for FCT programmes to include a variety of digital resources, be they platforms, LMSs or others, but which are appropriate to the training taking place.
Communication platforms
Simplified systems for beginners
Online platforms
Moodle
Digital assessment, quizzes in digital format
Mentoring tools and augmented and virtual reality systems.
Mobile applications

ITALY
Online platforms
Work organisation tools (e.g. Trello) learning platforms (e.g. Moodle)
Self-evaluation
Learning management systems and digital assessment tools
E-learning platforms
Software programming training platforms

LMS (Learning Management System) Online screen-sharing and remote desktop platforms (e.g. AnyDesk)

MALTA
Online work assessment tools Online platforms All the above could be useful, as well as mobile applications All the digital tools including the above are essential in today's implementation of WBL courses. Learning Management tools and digital assessment tools Digital competence assessment tool that calculates competence at the start and monitors development till the end of the programme. Tool should identify weaknesses and strengths, and such report should be used for further improvements Online e-learning platforms especially for legislative related training for required training, such as GDPR, H&S training so that all 'sing from the same hymn book.' AI tools. Mentor-Mentee-Supervisor Platforms Virtual Reality /Augmented Reality Tools; Performance Tracking and Analytics Tools; Video Conferencing Platforms; Performance Tracking and Analytics Tools Google Forms Online reviews and gamification tools

IRELAND
ChatGPT, Copilot AI
Digital assessment tools
Brightspace, outlook
Digital learning
Online platforms for open communication
Social media
Learning management systems to encourage the growth of your learning
MS Teams
Learning Management Systems (LMS): Platforms like Moodle, Blackboard, and Canvas can help manage and deliver educational content, track learner progress, and facilitate communication between learners and instructors.
Groups to show how you can implement digital skills into work placements
Webinars or tutorials to explain them
VR/AR platforms can enhance the efficiency, accessibility, and impact of WBL programmes in global business. Additionally, platforms that foster cross-border collaboration, data-driven insights, and mentorship are essential for equipping learners with the skills and experiences necessary for thriving in the international business landscape. An integrated ecosystem of these tools would ensure a seamless, engaging, and competency-focused WBL experience for learners and employers alike.
Brightspace
Tracking self-reporting tools
Careersportal.ie
Use VLE (BrightSpace) for the students to log their reflective work placement blogs
Zoom, Teams, Moodle

Analysis: In Portugal, a variety of online platforms are used to enhance learning and facilitate communication within training programmes. These include platforms like SIGA and various LMS (Learning Management Systems), such as Moodle, Teams, and Zoom for video conferencing. Trello is also used for work organization. For effective learning, it is important for FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology) programmes to incorporate a range of digital resources, ensuring they are appropriate for the training being offered. Digital assessments, quizzes, and mentoring tools like augmented and virtual reality systems are also key components of the learning experience. Mobile applications play a crucial role in modern training, providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities.

In Italy, various online platforms and tools are used to support Work-Based Learning (WBL) and training. Work organization tools, such as Trello, and learning platforms like Moodle are central to the learning experience. Self-evaluation and digital assessment tools are important for tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement. E-learning platforms and software programming training platforms help provide specialized learning experiences. Additionally, tools like AnyDesk for screen-sharing and remote desktop management are used to enhance communication and collaboration during training and internships.

In Malta, the implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) courses heavily relies on a range of online tools. Online work assessment tools, learning management systems (LMS), and digital assessment tools are essential for effective programme delivery. The digital competence assessment tool tracks progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses to guide improvements. For legislative training, online e-learning platforms are used for required courses, such as GDPR and Health and Safety training, ensuring consistency across the board. AI tools, mentor-mentee-supervisor platforms, and virtual/augmented reality tools are also utilized to enhance learning. Performance tracking, analytics tools, and platforms for video conferencing, such as Google Forms, provide valuable feedback and encourage engagement. Additionally, online reviews and gamification tools are integrated to make the learning experience more interactive.

In Ireland, digital tools are widely used to support learning and work placements. Platforms like Brightspace, Outlook, and MS Teams are essential for communication and learning management. ChatGPT and Copilot AI offer cutting-edge tools for enhancing student learning and assessment. Learning management systems (LMS), such as Moodle, Blackboard, and Canvas, are utilized for managing educational content, tracking learner progress, and fostering communication between learners and instructors. Platforms that encourage the growth of digital skills in work placements, such as webinars, tutorials, and social media, are also integral. VR/AR platforms are used to enhance accessibility and efficiency, fostering a more engaging WBL experience. Tracking self-reporting tools and Careersportal.ie help monitor students' progress, while tools like Zoom and Teams support communication and collaboration during internships and work placements.

16- What challenges have you encountered (if any) when trying to integrate digital tools into WBL practices?

PORTUGAL
Resistance to change, lack of infrastructure and digital training.
I've been doing everything manually
Resistance from employers.
Lack of computers in certain groups of people
Being more developed in terms of UX Participants' lack of training in digital platforms
Digital illiteracy of trainees.
High implementation and maintenance costs; integration with other systems; technological heterogeneity of users; resistance to change.
Expensive programmes, applicability to the work context and target audience that doesn't have many digital skills
In the case of *CiênciaVitae*, include the field of continuous pedagogical training
Density of information and the use of a single language

ITALY
Unfamiliarity
Technical and financial difficulties
Poor digital skills
The objective was (and is) to create and implement useful, concrete and user-friendly tools, tailored to the real needs of the target audience.
No standard is used
Resistance from administrative staff

MALTA
More capacity and knowledge is required

Lack of physical interactivity

Acceptance of the tools from a wider audience and the initial complexity of the tool in the first days of use.

They would need to be tailored so a lot of investment would be needed

Not all students were familiar with these practices
My understanding is that digital tools need to be customised to address the specific needs of those units within our entity that deal with WBL programmes and facilitate their work processes

Students may still revert to manual.

Lack of tech infrastructure

Lack of tools, knowledge and skills.

Lack of engaging online methodologies

Integrating digital tools into WBL programmes presents several challenges, including unequal access to technology (the digital divide), insufficient digital literacy among learners and educators, and resistance from employers and institutions to adopt new methods. There is also a lack of adequate training for educators, difficulty in ensuring tools align with industry needs and struggles to maintain engagement in remote or hybrid settings. Data privacy and security concerns, inconsistent use of tools across platforms, and the high implementation costs further complicate the process, hindering the effective integration of digital tools in WBL.

The most challenging was the fact that I work with the Public Services and its practices are quite different than those in the private sector

The set up is critical. The challenge is time, making the time to make use of the platforms in the best possible manner.

Availability of content and expertise and cost to develop it when not readily available to setting up of such a platform requires a lot of funds and personnel who have the skills to develop it |

Knowledge on the use of IT systems and patience to sit through online usually boring courses

Lack of awareness

Excessive administration and reporting, low quality of translation of tools

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IRELAND

Digital literacy

Website crashes

Not enough links

Internet Connection

Technical Issues: Problems such as lack of reliable internet access, outdated hardware, or software compatibility issues can hinder the seamless integration of digital tools

Not enough info or teaching of it in college

Access to the necessary hardware, software, or internet connectivity, interoperability of tools, collection and sharing of learner data, limited technical support or expertise within educational institutions; employers, educators, or even learners may resist adopting digital tools; cost and resource constraints; differing expectations among educators, employers, and learners; translating hands-on, experiential learning into digital formats; Learners, educators, and mentors may lack the necessary skills to effectively use digital platforms; digital tools are designed for generic learning scenarios and lack features tailored to global business; assessing soft skills (leadership, negotiation) or practical competencies in digital environments; coordinating virtual placements and mentoring across different time zones, etc.

Overly complicated and very little face to face support.

Skills required to implement the tools

Coordinator reliance in the 'way we always do it'

Availability

Human commitment

I would imagine there might be the potential for technical issues in terms of access and tech support. Depending on the learner or indeed the educator there might be digital literacy challenges or training needs to be addressed too.

Integrated all in one place- system 'career portal used in TU Dublin is not the most user friendly. Integrated system- exploring careers and choices, supports forms and quizzes

Lack of integration between excel, teams I am currently using email to contact employers, MS Forms for data collection and excel for data management - no integration

Challenges in trying to get e-portfolios to integrate into VLE

Need to provide training for the digital tools to be used - online and other - need to make adoption of tool as easy as possible

Analysis: In Portugal, several challenges arise when integrating digital tools into Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes. These challenges include resistance to change, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient digital training. Some participants continue to rely on manual methods, while others face barriers like digital illiteracy and a lack of training in using digital platforms. There is also resistance from employers to adopt new tools, and certain groups face issues like limited access to computers. The high implementation and maintenance costs of digital platforms, along with the integration difficulties and technological heterogeneity among users, further complicate the process. Some programmes, like *CiênciaVitae*, are hindered by the density of information and the use of a single language. Additionally, there are concerns about the expensive nature of some programmes and their applicability to the target audience, many of whom lack digital skills.

In Italy, challenges to digital integration in WBL programmes include unfamiliarity with the tools and technical and financial difficulties. The population often suffers from poor digital skills, which hinders their ability to fully utilize digital platforms. One of the main objectives has been to create user-friendly, concrete, and useful tools that are tailored to the real needs of the target audience. However, there is also resistance from administrative staff, and no standard is yet in place to streamline digital processes.

Malta faces multiple challenges related to the use of digital tools in WBL programmes. These challenges include a lack of physical interactivity and the need for greater capacity and knowledge to use digital tools effectively. Many students are not familiar with these digital practices and may revert to manual methods. Additionally, lack of tech infrastructure,

knowledge, and skills among students and staff adds to the difficulties. Resistance to adopting these tools from employers and institutions is also an issue. The initial complexity of the tools and the need for customization to meet specific needs can require significant investment. There are concerns about unequal access to technology (the digital divide), and insufficient digital literacy among both learners and educators. Additionally, maintaining engagement in remote or hybrid settings proves to be challenging. High implementation costs, data privacy concerns, and the lack of adequate training for educators further complicate the integration process. In public service environments, practices differ significantly from those in the private sector, creating additional barriers to implementing digital tools effectively.

In Ireland, digital literacy remains a significant barrier to successful integration of digital tools into WBL programmes. Technical issues, such as website crashes, internet connection problems, and outdated hardware, can impede the effectiveness of digital platforms. Many students have limited exposure to digital tools in college, and there is a lack of training on how to use these tools in professional settings. Additionally, challenges like the interoperability of tools, limited technical support, and resistance from both educators and employers complicate the adoption process. The lack of integration between tools like Excel and Teams, and the need for better coordination across different systems, further hinder smooth operation. Issues like overly complicated systems, limited face-to-face support, and the need to ensure easy adoption of digital tools remain pressing challenges. The coordinator's reliance on traditional methods and the lack of system integration also contribute to the difficulties in adopting digital tools effectively. To overcome these challenges, there is a strong need to train users and simplify the adoption process of digital platforms.

17- **Please share any specific examples of successful WBL practices in your country or organisation (please provide links, if possible).**

PORTUGAL
ISEP/IPP - Erasmus+: https://www.ipp.pt/internacionalizacao/menu-internacional/erasmus; https://www.isep.ipp.pt/Page/ViewPage/MOBILITYSTUDENTS The FCT at my institution is related to initial teacher training, which is regulated by specific legal diplomas. https://portugal2030.pt/2023/11/23/aviso-do-compete-2030-para-formacao-empresarial-individual/ Partnership between *IEFP* and *Efacec* Scholarships

Excel training, occupational health and safety training, labour law training

Erasmus +

Link me Up (Polytechnic of Leiria) _ https://www.ipleiria.pt/link-me-up-1000-ideias/;

IEFP paid professional internship programme; Specialised Higher Technical Courses (CTeSP)

Participation and problem-solving, as well as product management and development.

https://alumni.uminho.pt/pt/news/Paginas/_07_Jul_Noticias/bosch.aspx

In our company, on-the-job training is carried out by observation and recording on an attendance sheet. We then assess its effectiveness

In 2024, the FCT recorded a total financial outlay of 833.3 million euros, representing an increase of 42.2 per cent compared to 2023.

Femst Project https://erasmusfemst.com/

ITALY
http://erasmusplusols.eu/it/ Company visits to gain an insight into the working reality within companies Vocational Apprenticeship Training Erasmus exchange programmes and Erasmus+ projects I am familiar with those provided by my organisation in my area of research, which are as follows: Change: Decarbonising culture which involves two weeks of job shadowing after online classes (https://www.fondazionesantagata.it/change_corsoformativoperlasostenibilita/); and Green Culture which involves a period in a cultural organisation (https://www.fondazionesantagata.it/aree-tematiche/articoli-transizione-equa/green-culture-percorso-di-formazione-per-supportare-la-transizione-ecologica-nel-settore-culturale/). University internships Confucius Institute of Macerata https://confucio.unimc.it/it https://cesie.org/project/seasonready/

Erasmus+ internships

Maeci Crui Conventions

Internships

Job-shadowing activities

As one of the tools to support young people wishing to do an internship in Europe, Inapp has developed the Stage4eu platform, a website and mobile app where you can find information, news, testimonials, useful tips and the most interesting internship opportunities in Europe in multinational companies and international organisations (www.stage4eu.it).

Internships in professional firms, public administrations, companies, etc.

Training and work placements from the world of education

MALTA
Teleworking

Teleworking

My organisation offers opportunities for internships, placements, Erasmus+ mobilities, etc.

The WBL programmes managed by MCAST in various economic sectors mainly in engineering, applied sciences, business, creative arts, IICT and community services.

Summer internships

https://mcast.edu.mt/mcast-work-based-learning/

MCAST courses have an element of WBL practices to improve capabilities of students and to understand learning outcomes. Students are exposed to the work that is associated with their sector.

We currently offer a work-based learning Accountancy & Finance programme where students study with us for three day and work at one of the big four organisations for two days. In three years, they can obtain a degree, ACCA qualification and become a warranted accountant.

Institute for European Studies placement programme - students have found employment in same or other entities

Teaching practice for prospective teachers; practicums for prospective Learning Support Educators; mentorship of newly recruited teachers

The microplacement in the industry forming part of our Bachelor in Education has been very well evaluated by participants - https://ife.edu.mt/work-integrated-learning/

Most of our students who go on a WBL assignment are then offered employment by the same employer.

Emerging Leaders Training & Development programme - https://mdinapartners.com/solutions/leadership-development/

Work-based MBA by CMBS, specifically the Entrepreneurial Bootcamp.

While CMBS does not directly link to its WBL programmes on its website, its business and industry partnerships reflect the importance of integrating work-based learning into its educational approach. This integration ensures that students are gaining theoretical knowledge and equipped with practical skills that employers value.

Internships and traineeships

ITS

The Apprenticeship Scheme managed by MCAST

Host Interns coming from the Institute for EU Studies

Erasmus and interns via Metis - where we give good work experience in a diverse work environment

https://e-learning.taproom-project.eu - An Erasmus+ Project which enabled amateur/trainee brewers to learn the A to Z of producing and marketing craft and organic beer within micro and small breweries in Europe.

https://publicservices.gov.mt/en/institute/Pages/IPS-Traineeship-Scheme.aspx

IRELAND
Business studies TU Dublin (931/3) work placement
Great software programme with Brightspace
Erasmus support was excellent and graduate job pop ups have been helpful
Erasmus, work placement
Excel sheet of grad roles
Internship programmes
I was in an accredited placement and here I had the support for all learning outcomes
Online learning
Internship opportunities are done quite frequently in TUDublin and in Ireland in general.
Moodle and Brightspace
Collaborative Talent Development Community of Practice (CoP): TU Dublin's Enterprise Academy has established a Community of Practice aimed at enhancing university-enterprise engagement. This initiative brings together academic staff, professional services staff, business leaders, and policymakers to share successful practices, address challenges, and develop strategies for talent development1. One notable event focused on "Unlocking Potential through RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning)" in the screen industry, showcasing how accredited WBL and RPL can transform career pathways
Accounting programme (TU Dublin) and AmplifyME's simulations
Case Studies, Work Placement

Industry Project on BA Advertising and Marketing communications year three delivered on TU Dublin tallagh campus

I run Practicum module which has worked very well in respect of WBL.

Traditional apprenticeship model, new forms of apprenticeship, work and learn, work-based projects, part-time learning, immersive learning. There are multiple forms of work-based learning.

Year 3 BBS International Business placements across member programme running successfully for 6 years.

Students teaching in schools and coaching kids in local area schools

My only experience is in the social care sector where practices are well established.

I believe the Apprenticeship programme for the insurance industry has been particularly successful. https://earnandlearn.ie/

https://tudublin.targetconnect.net/unauth- you need to sign up to access- prepares students for their WBL with CV and cover letter AI system support, intern opportunities, psychometric testing, option to book an appointment to see careers team

Successful WBL practices include open communication via email between Work placement co-ordinator and employers. Employers are typically good at completing student evaluations when the evaluation is a short MS Form that can be submitted digitally.

30 credit alternatives to work placements that simulate a work placement where students are given a real-world project to deliver as part of a cross-faculty university student team. Some students are not ready for a work placement and these initiatives give the student a structured work placement experience. Students are given the opportunity to experience an alternative to work placement that is run by the university with an academic mentor and an industry mentor. An example of a project like this in TU Dublin is the Global Innovation Internship Development Programme. It is a 6-month programme that aims to equip students with a set of skills which will prepare them well for working life and to have a successful fourth year in college. It is like a capstone programme bringing together their academic learning, real world project experience and, identifying and addressing areas for personal development during the programme.

WBL module as part of a Higher Certificate in Business implemented in place of work. Practice placement programmes at place of work and nationally Ireland - CORU regulated - Department of Education

> The longer the WBL practice takes place for the better - more immersive experience
>
> We work with a lot of campuses in Ireland to hire Industrial Placements which are tied to the student's course /degree. We have also worked with academics to provide students with business challenges which they then consult on to impact our business and their practical learning.

Analysis: In Portugal, several programmes and platforms support Work-Based Learning (WBL). ISEP/IPP participates in Erasmus+ through its various international mobility programmes, offering internships and learning opportunities for students. The FCT at the institution focuses on initial teacher training and is governed by specific legal diplomas. One notable programme is the Link Me Up initiative by the Polytechnic of Leiria, which provides career-oriented activities. The IEFP paid professional internship programme and Specialized Higher Technical Courses (CTeSP) offer opportunities for internships, specialized training, and workforce development. The Femst Project is another example of international cooperation under the Erasmus+ framework. For company-specific training, organizations like Efacec and IEFP offer training in areas such as Excel, occupational health and safety, and labour law. On-the-job training is also practiced within companies, typically through observation and attendance records, followed by evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the training.

In Italy, WBL is supported through a variety of Erasmus+ projects and internships. The Stage4eu platform provides internship opportunities in multinational companies across Europe. One key project, Change: Decarbonising Culture, offers a job-shadowing programme after online classes. Another initiative, Green Culture, supports the transition to sustainable practices in the cultural sector through internships in cultural organizations. Companies also offer internships and job-shadowing activities, providing students with hands-on experiences in professional environments. Confucius Institute of Macerata and the Maeci Crui Conventions further support the international mobility of students, while platforms like CESIE offer career development opportunities through various Erasmus+ internships. Vocational apprenticeship training is also an integral part of the WBL model in Italy.

In Malta, MCAST offers various WBL programmes in engineering, business, applied sciences, creative arts, and community services. One notable programme is the Accountancy & Finance programme, where students work with major accounting firms while pursuing their studies, obtaining both a degree and ACCA qualification. The Institute for European Studies provides placement programmes that help students gain employment within the same or other entities. Additionally, teaching practice and practicums for prospective educators are key parts of the WBL curriculum. Emerging Leaders Training & Development Programme and the Work-based MBA by CMBS focus on developing leadership skills and entrepreneurial training. Programmes like the Microplacement in Industry for the Bachelor in Education are well evaluated by participants, providing real-world exposure and feedback.

In Ireland, TU Dublin offers numerous opportunities for students to engage in work placements, with specific programmes like the Global Innovation Internship Development Programme that help students integrate academic learning with real-world projects. Moodle and Brightspace are commonly used platforms for managing the learning and WBL experience, while other tools like AmplifyME's simulations provide hands-on practice in global markets and finance. The Erasmus+ programme and work placement schemes like those in business studies ensure that students gain practical experience in their fields. The Collaborative Talent Development Community of Practice (CoP) facilitates university-enterprise engagement, and the Career Set tool offers AI-driven support for students with CVs and cover letters. In the Insurance Apprenticeship Programme, students gain practical experience while completing their education. Traditional apprenticeship models are also in use, alongside newer methods such as immersive learning and part-time learning, with a strong emphasis on alternative forms of work-based learning, like real-world projects and internships.

18- What recommendations would you give to improve WBL programmes in your country or across Europe?

PORTUGAL
Diversify opportunities, promote continuous monitoring; encourage international mobility; promote digitalisation; align internships with the market; include soft skills; make FCT accessible to all students, with financial support; strengthen partnerships The FCT at my institution is related to initial teacher training, which is regulated by specific legal diplomas. Visits should be made to workplaces to better understand the real training needs of each sector. Attaching more importance to these courses Better sensitisation of employers and training institutions. More clear information I have no knowledge of the subject Promoting dissemination, including the results of the programmes with the establishment of indicators

More diversity of training programmes, workers end up doing the same thing over and over again.

More follow-up and monitoring after implementation.

No information

Wider dissemination.

Strengthening Partnerships Between Institutions and Companies, involving industrial associations and technological clusters to facilitate the identification of competences in demand in the market.

Integrate Digital Tools, including functionalities such as internship monitoring, continuous assessment and feedback.

Offer flexible options, such as part-time internships or remote work, for students with other responsibilities.

Support students financially

Greater collaboration between education and companies

Focusing on results and reducing bureaucracy and excessive concern with 'cosmetics' (appearance or superficial details) is a strategic approach that favours efficiency and objectivity.

More publicity

Reduce the administrative and bureaucratic burden associated with project applications and reports.

Improve dissemination and be supported by AI for translation

ITALY
More dissemination, and more coordination in Europe on how to recognise these activities at curricular level. The problem of equivalence of activities, including work activities, is still quite pronounced. If each of us does not know how certain work activities are evaluated in other countries and we do not decide on a common line, there is a risk that the WBL experience will not then be recognised as added value at CV level. Also, in the case of Italy, more networking between universities or companies and other student service providers. For example, not only providing a scholarship but also housing opportunities for all.

Students must meet companies not only during internships but also beforehand to understand the challenges of the present and the future and then be able to develop the appropriate skills.

More development of digitalisation; more funding for companies

Increased awareness of programmes through open days for professionals and young people.

Salary and greater possibility of employment in the institution where you do your internship since you are trained according to the needs of that workplace.

More practical recommendations

Strengthen the dialogue between public institutions, policy makers, beneficiaries and companies.

More publicity

Greater dissemination

More promotion

To train company mentors in mentoring

To implement policies aimed at: further nurturing the interaction between the education system and the labour market; guaranteeing adequate quality standards of WBL experiences; increasing the diffusion of quality WBL experiences and facilitating their access to weak individuals; reducing territorial inhomogeneities.

To establish networks and partnerships actively involving the various actors in different capacities involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of WBL experiences.

Economic support for initiatives

Creation of standard instruments for recognition.

Greater dissemination

MALTA
More promotion and incentives for employers are required. Telework need to be monitored and measured. Recommendations are to make use of funding available to enhance the impact of these programmes I do not have enough experience with WBL to offer informed recommendations. Constant meetings with the industry leaders and reviewing of the WBL programmes every 3 years or earlier according to the needs of the particular economic sector. Collaborative approach with academia Less bureaucratic burden Enhance Mentor and Supervisor Training Introduce a centralised digital platform for WBL management, enabling real-time communication, progress tracking, and reflective journaling. Improving WBL in Malta requires a strategic, collaborative effort. By focusing on partnerships, mentor training, competency frameworks, digitalisation, and quality assurance, Malta can strengthen its WBL programmes and enhance both student outcomes and national workforce development. Increase financial incentives for both educational institutions and companies; more mentoring and coaching done as part of WBL programmes. I think that all Bachelor's Degrees (or equivalent) should have an element of WBL (e.g. 20%) so that students get the practical experience to complement the theory learnt in lectures. Focus on strengthening industry-education partnerships to make WBL a more integral part of all courses. Strengthening collaboration between providers of similar educational programmes would be useful in supporting cross-border take up of WBL opportunity supported by Erasmus+ KA1 mobility for traineeships. It is difficult to identify and vet potential traineeship providers in other countries. Collaborating with other education institutions and providing access to each other's network of traineeship collaborators could be a way forward of supporting both WBL and international mobility at the same time. It could also provide capacity building by learning from good practice and sharing resources.

More awareness for employers to participate. The awareness programmes are to emphasis on the benefits to both parties.

A National Entity for Apprenticeships, Mentor programmes for employers/HR, along with better Educator/CPD training.

Lobbying with employers, innovative and engaging online content.

To improve WBL programmes in Malta and across Europe, it's essential to strengthen industry-education partnerships to align curricula with real-world needs, increase digital integration and access through technology and training, and support SMEs with incentives to offer placements. Enhancing support for employers in mentoring roles, promoting WBL for lifelong learning, and establishing standardised recognition for skills gained through WBL will also boost its impact. Additionally, increasing student awareness, offering interdisciplinary opportunities, regularly monitoring programmes, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement will help ensure that WBL remains relevant and effective in developing the skills required by today's labour market.

Increase WBL awareness

Further training on how these opportunities can be accessed.

More collaboration with industry using the experience and knowledge of seasoned professionals

To widen WBL programmes to the compulsory educational sector

Amending legislation to make WBL more accessible for Private Educational Institutions

Open up free access to a learning platform in various subject matter

More focus on hands-on and job shadowing.

More awareness and promotion, a closer connection between labour market needs and academic institutions

Simplify processes and give due importance to learning other than that which is academic and formal

IRELAND
Make sure you're paying your employees on time
More WBL opportunities in other courses
More communication and advertise
Provide more courses on the digital platforms and servers
Worked well for me
More exposure
More connections and support with people who are unsure about their future
The internship was a great learning experience
More awareness, let the manager of the internship know the student is starting fresh and has no prior experience as this will let the manager know they need to be trained appropriately from the ground up.
To make it as understandable as possible
Partnerships
More classes on computer skills
More support from university board leaders
Highlighting them so that people at least recognise them. That would be where I'd start
Advertising on social media platforms and student union should be more vocal and advocate
For Global business: 1) include topics like sustainable business practices, cross-border compliance, and digital marketing; 2) cross-border placements, focusing on SMEs and underrepresented groups; 3) develop digital platforms to facilitate virtual WBL opportunities with international companies, overcoming logistical and financial barriers to mobility; 4) design WBL programmes that allow learners to experience roles across various industries, such as combining business with technology, finance, or logistics; 5) integration of emotional intelligence training; 6) implement systems to award micro-credentials for specific competencies, such as project management, global trade analysis, or CRM system proficiency; 7) long-term evaluations to track the career progression of WBL participants and gather insights for future improvements;

8) Simplify enrolment and reporting processes for employers and learners through digital platforms At the country level: 1) establish collaborative platforms where businesses, educational institutions, and policymakers can co-design and monitor WBL programmes; 2) offer tax breaks, subsidies, or grants to encourage employers, especially SMEs, to participate in WBL programmes and host apprenticeships; 3) include ESG (environmental, social, and governance frameworks, circular economy strategies, and ethical supply chain management in all WBL programmes. EU level: Standardize the recognition of WBL qualifications across EU countries to ensure portability and enhance the employability of learners; 2) international resource hub creation.

More incentives and support for the employing organisations.

More resources, more employer knowledge, easier and continuous engagement between the three parties (industry provider, student, university)

More supports for staff and time allowances for engaging in this type of activities Increased communications of success to date

Seek to make it a pivotal component of the third level curriculum.

There needs to be reinvigoration of vocational training pathways, as having merit in themselves.

More tracking and assessment and evidence/portfolio building.

Increased promotion of placement to stakeholders and online. Harnessing of senior management industry contacts.

Need for greater awareness for staff and students - what options are available to them

I would suggest implementing these programmes from an early stage in any programme since it is a great way of enhancing education

Run pilot projects and use templates of successful practices

I think we could strengthen and/or expand industry partnerships and continue to involve industry or increase industry involvement in programme design. Delivery modes could be more flexible and inclusive to increase access, but this would need proper support (digital infrastructure etc)

University wide approach, one digital platform/system, supported fully by career guidance- integrated not separate teams.

More promotion and awareness of the benefits of WBL to prospective work placement employers

Funding and support for alternatives to industry-based work placements.

Communication and collaboration between academia - training - industry

Less cumbersome for employer and candidate - make process clear, easy, smooth - easy to access - make information available easily e.g. who is available - a portal to share positions and candidates CVs etc...; having internal tools to support WBL internally; commitment from both sides - applicant and company commit to it being beneficial

A more prolific partnership between academics and employers to implement industry-based learning into course module.

As most platforms exist in English, the option for non-native speakers to translate instructions etc. for greater understanding would possibly be beneficial.

Analysis: In Portugal, several key recommendations are aimed at improving Work-Based Learning (WBL) opportunities. There is a need to diversify opportunities, promote continuous monitoring, and encourage international mobility for students. Internships should be aligned with the market demands, and digital tools should be integrated to facilitate internship monitoring, continuous assessment, and feedback. Soft skills should also be included in training, and programmes should offer financial support to ensure that FCT (initial teacher training) is accessible to all students. Strengthening partnerships between institutions and companies is essential, along with involving industrial associations and technological clusters to better identify market needs. It's important to offer flexible options like part-time internships or remote work for students with other responsibilities. Reducing bureaucracy and improving publicity about WBL programmes will make them more accessible, and using AI for translation could support wider participation. Visits to workplaces should be promoted to better understand the real training needs of each sector, while monitoring and follow-up should be part of the post-implementation process.

In Italy, the focus should be on greater dissemination of WBL opportunities and better coordination across Europe to ensure the recognition of these activities on a curricular level. There is a need to address equivalence of work activities across countries and improve networking between universities, companies, and other student service providers. Increasing awareness through open days for professionals and young people would also help promote the value of these programmes. Mentoring programmes for company mentors should be implemented to enhance the overall quality of the WBL experience. Economic support for

initiatives, along with the creation of standard instruments for recognition, would also help in ensuring the effectiveness of WBL programmes. Strengthening the dialogue between public institutions, policymakers, beneficiaries, and companies is crucial for fostering a stronger relationship between the education system and the labour market.

In Malta, there is a need to promote and incentivize employers to participate in WBL programmes, with telework needing closer monitoring and measurement. It is also essential to enhance mentor and supervisor training, especially for those overseeing WBL students. Introducing a centralized digital platform for WBL management would streamline communication, progress tracking, and reflective journaling. Financial incentives for both educational institutions and companies would encourage further participation. There should be a push to make WBL a compulsory element in all Bachelor's degrees, aiming for 20% of the curriculum to be dedicated to practical experience. Moreover, cross-border collaboration supported by Erasmus+ can help increase access to international WBL opportunities. Public awareness campaigns targeting employers should emphasize the mutual benefits of participating in WBL programmes. Regular meetings with industry leaders to review programmes based on sectoral needs should be encouraged. Reducing bureaucracy and increasing financial support will ensure the continued success of these initiatives.

In Ireland, there is a call for increased awareness and promotion of WBL opportunities. More communication and advertising are needed to make students and employers aware of the potential benefits of WBL programmes. Providing more support for students, especially those entering internships with little prior experience, would improve the overall experience. The integration of digital platforms for job shadowing, cross-border placements, and virtual internships is recommended to overcome logistical and financial barriers. More industry partnerships are needed to develop interdisciplinary WBL opportunities, such as combining business with technology, finance, and logistics. Long-term evaluations and the awarding of micro-credentials for competencies like project management and CRM system proficiency should be part of the WBL model. Simplifying processes, reducing administrative burdens, and centralizing communication through a unified platform would ensure that WBL programmes run more efficiently. At the EU level, standardizing the recognition of WBL qualifications would ensure portability and improve employability across Europe.

Recommendations

Participants were asked to indicate what aspects, if any, of European WBL policies they considered that are needing upgrades to better answer the necessities of their sector, as well as provide general recommendations to improve WBL programmes at both a national and European level. Here is the list of the recommendations obtained:

1. Communication and Awareness

- Develop a communication plan to raise awareness of WBL policies and practices

- Increase awareness of WBL programmes through outreach to companies and SMEs

- Foster active engagement in WBL practices to dispel misinformation and enhance understanding

- Host open days to increase awareness among students and professionals

- Improve national awareness of digital tools for WBL

2. Industry Collaboration and Employer Engagement

- Collaborate with industry and society partners to design and deliver WBL programmes

- Leverage alumni networks for mentorship and WBL opportunities

- Develop sector-specific WBL programmes, especially for tech, healthcare, and renewable energy

- Improve employer incentives for SMEs to participate in academic WBL

- Invest in mentorship training for employers to enhance WBL supervision

- Create paid internships to ease students' transitions into the workforce

- Promote international mobility through Erasmus+ and scale exchanges

3. Strategic Approach to WBL

- Adopt a strategic, structured approach to WBL with continuous improvement

- Strengthen coordination between key stakeholders, aligning educational curricula with labour market needs

- Establish a WBL office to facilitate coordination between students, faculty, and employers

- Set minimum standards for WBL delivery, including credit allocation, student eligibility, and industry requirements

- Develop flexible WBL options for part-time and mature students, and recognize current work experience

- Incorporate structured reflection on WBL experiences to enhance learning

- Set clear assessment criteria for WBL to ensure fairness and consistency

- Develop templates defining roles, responsibilities, and communication

- Strengthen collaboration between universities, companies, and student services

4. Programme and Placement Quality

- Create a pre-placement module to prepare students for work placements

- Extend curricular internships and strengthen apprenticeships

- Extend the duration of internships to provide students with sufficient time to develop professional skills

- Address territorial disparities to increase access for vulnerable groups

- Create a structured "training pathway" from school to university to allow progressive skill development

- Provide financial support to improve the quality and accessibility of WBL

5. Digitalization and Tools

- Identify digital tools to support WBL processes and improve implementation

- Develop a centralised digital platform to improve WBL coordination and tracking

- Increase digital skills among students and staff for effective WBL implementation

- Promote better awareness and integration of existing digital tools for WBL

6. Funding and Support

- Increase funding and salaries for WBL initiatives

- Expand public and EU funding for WBL delivery and simplify access

- Provide financial support for initiatives that improve the quality and accessibility of WBL

7. International and Cross-Border Opportunities

- Expand international WBL opportunities through programmes like Erasmus+

- Promote international mobility and European collaboration in WBL

- Develop and strengthen international partnerships to boost WBL opportunities

8. Regulatory and Structural Support

- Strengthen the link between corporate activities and education systems

- Create a regulatory body for WBL oversight in Portuguese higher education

- Streamline administrative requirements for employers and providers

- Facilitate stakeholder workshops and communities of practice

In conclusion, the recommendations provided by participants highlight the need for comprehensive upgrades to European Work-Based Learning policies to address sector-specific demands and enhance the effectiveness of WBL programmes. Key areas identified for improvement include strengthening communication and awareness, fostering deeper collaboration with industry and employers, adopting a strategic and structured approach to WBL and enhancing programme quality. Additionally, recommendations emphasize the importance of digitalization, securing adequate funding, expanding international opportunities and improving regulatory and structural support. By addressing these areas, WBL can be better aligned with labour market needs, improve student outcomes and facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce.

Conclusion

The findings from the Work-Based Learning Champion project's research provide critical insights into the current state of WBL practices in Ireland, Italy, Malta and Portugal. The project highlights the importance of integrating WBL into higher education curricula, fostering closer collaboration between educational institutions and industries and promoting digital skills to ensure students are prepared for the demands of the modern job market. The research identified several challenges, including limited employer engagement, inadequate dissemination of WBL opportunities, and a need for more financial support. These challenges underscore the necessity for greater awareness of the benefits of WBL and the inclusion of both digital competencies and soft skills in the curriculum.

The report offers a comprehensive analysis of existing WBL frameworks, their alignment with national and EU policies, and the challenges faced by students, educators, and policymakers in effectively implementing WBL programmes. The findings also highlight several key gaps and provide actionable recommendations to enhance the integration of WBL into higher education systems, improving both the quality and accessibility of such initiatives.

Key Research Findings

The research reveals significant discrepancies in the level of familiarity with WBL practices across the four countries. In Portugal and Malta, a majority of respondents indicated a solid understanding of WBL policies, though a considerable portion in Malta was unaware of the relevant national and EU policy frameworks. In contrast, Ireland and Italy demonstrated more mixed familiarity levels, with around 25% of participants in both countries indicating limited or no familiarity with WBL practices at all. This points to a critical need for increased communication and awareness campaigns to ensure that all stakeholders are informed and equipped to engage with WBL initiatives effectively.

The research highlights that despite the widespread engagement in WBL programmes, a notable number of respondents had never participated in or supervised WBL initiatives, particularly in Ireland. This gap underscores the importance of creating more opportunities for educators and industry professionals to engage with WBL methodologies firsthand, which would further strengthen the quality of these programmes.

While there is a general understanding of national and EU policies related to WBL, the effectiveness of these policies varies significantly across the countries. In Portugal, the majority of participants rated WBL policies as moderately effective, with some viewing them as impactful but needing improvement in areas like employer engagement and policy dissemination. Italy, by contrast, reported a higher perception of effectiveness, with over 60% of respondents rating national and EU WBL policies as effective in fostering WBL opportunities. In Malta and Ireland, while many acknowledged the policies' intent, there was a common sentiment that these

frameworks need to be more visible and better promoted to encourage broader participation across sectors. Particularly in Ireland, 47% of respondents rated national policies as only moderately effective, reflecting the need for more targeted interventions to ensure these policies lead to tangible improvements in practice.

A significant challenge identified across all four countries is the mismatch between educational curricula and the labour market's needs. Many respondents pointed to the lack of alignment between what is taught in educational institutions and the skills required by employers. This was most pronounced in Italy, where over 50% of participants highlighted this issue. In addition, limited employer engagement emerged as a recurring theme, particularly in Portugal and Italy, where respondents noted that many companies, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), were either unaware of WBL opportunities or lacked the capacity to participate meaningfully. Furthermore, both Portugal and Italy identified the lack of awareness among students about available WBL opportunities as a significant barrier, while in Malta, the need for improved policy coherence and inter-agency collaboration was stressed.

The rapid digital transformation of the labour market has made it essential for WBL programmes to integrate digital tools and competencies. Across all four countries, there was a unanimous agreement on the need for better digital resources to support WBL practices. While Malta and Portugal are advancing in this area with policies aimed at fostering digital skills, Ireland and Italy still face challenges in fully integrating technology into their WBL frameworks. This highlights an urgent need for investment in digital infrastructure and tools that facilitate the coordination, delivery, and assessment of WBL placements.

Key Recommendations for Improvement

To address the gaps in familiarity with WBL policies, it is essential to develop and implement comprehensive communication plans that target all stakeholders, including students, educators, employers, and policymakers. These plans should focus on raising awareness about the benefits and opportunities of WBL, using multiple communication channels, including online platforms, seminars, and workshops. It is especially important to make national and EU policies more accessible, ensuring that they are widely understood and easily navigable for all parties involved.

Furthermore, employers must be more actively involved in the design and implementation of WBL programmes. Recommendations include fostering deeper, long-term partnerships with industry and society partners, particularly SMEs, to ensure that WBL placements are relevant and aligned with current industry needs. This can be achieved by offering targeted incentives to employers, such as financial support or tax breaks, to encourage their participation in WBL schemes. Likewise, developing sector-specific WBL programmes, particularly in high-demand fields such as technology, healthcare and renewable energy, will ensure that WBL initiatives are directly aligned with labour market trends.

To maximize the impact of WBL, universities and higher education institutions should adopt a strategic approach to integrating WBL into their curricula. This includes redesigning courses to embed WBL components systematically, ensuring that students gain practical, real-world experience alongside their academic studies. Universities should establish dedicated WBL offices to coordinate these initiatives, set clear standards for WBL delivery and provide support for both students and employers. This could be further enhanced by offering flexible WBL options, such as part-time placements or virtual internships, to accommodate a wider range of students, including those with work or family commitments.

As digitalization continues to shape the workforce, it is critical to ensure that both students and educators are equipped with the digital competencies required for success in modern work environments. Recommendations include the development of digital platforms for managing WBL placements, the integration of AI-driven tools for mentorship and feedback, and the incorporation of digital literacy modules into WBL curricula. Additionally, universities should offer training programmes to help staff integrate digital tools into their teaching and mentoring practices, enabling a more streamlined and effective WBL experience.

To make WBL more accessible, especially for SMEs and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is important to increase financial support for both employers and learners. This could include funding for placements, travel, and accommodation costs for students, as well as financial incentives for employers hosting WBL participants. Furthermore, reducing the bureaucratic burden associated with WBL implementation will make it easier for employers, educational institutions, and students to participate in WBL programmes. Streamlining administrative procedures, including standardizing contracts and agreements, will reduce barriers to entry and ensure that WBL becomes a more widely adopted and effective educational practice.

In conclusion, the WBL Champion project presents a clear path forward for improving work-based learning practices in higher education systems across Europe. The recommendations from the research emphasize the importance of collaboration, increased financial and institutional support and the integration of digital tools to enhance the quality and accessibility of WBL programmes. By addressing the challenges identified and implementing the suggested improvements, the project aims to foster a more effective and impactful WBL framework that aligns education with the evolving needs of the labour market, contributing to economic growth and social inclusion across the EU.

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Annex

Annex 1: Analysis of WBL best practices - Ireland

Title of the best practice	Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) Level 8 (3 month long placement)
Type of entity implementing	Technological University Dublin-Aungier Street Campus
At what level is/was it being applied:	University level
Year of starting	September (with the start of each academic term)
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- To equip students with essential employability skills before placement. - To ensure students receive support and guidance throughout their placements. - To strengthen academic-industry relationships and reinforce student learning.
Brief description of best practice	A pre-placement module is offered, focusing on CV preparation, interview skills, and industry interaction. AI-driven mock interview tools are used to give students a good exposure. TU Dublin provides mindfulness sessions to students to enhance their well-being during work placements. BBS Level 8 students sign agreements outlining expectations and responsibilities. The logbook system is an essential part of the process. Lecturers conduct check-in calls (especially in weeks 2 and 3) to assess student progress and provide support. DMKT students have structured meetings with their university supervisor and

	workplace mentor to evaluate that learning outcomes are being met.
Key actors involved	TU Dublin Faculty of Business Lecturers, Careers Office, Students, Industry partners
Target group(s)	Students from Level 8
Sources	https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/business-studies-tu931/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Experiential learning, reflective practice, and structured industry engagement
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice)	Strong academic-industry partnerships, university support structures, access to digital tools
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Challenge: Limited availability of WBL in all sectors Solution: Diversified partner base and flexible placement models
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Enhanced student employability, stronger employer engagement, and improved alignment between academic learning and industry needs

Title of the best practice	International Business Level 8 – One-Semester Industry Placement (30 ECTS)
Type of entity implementing	Technological University Dublin-Tallaght Campus

At what level is/was it being applied:	University level
Year of starting	September (with the start of each academic term)
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- To provide practical exposure in international business settings - To integrate academic learning with real-world business experience - To prepare students for global employability
Brief description of best practice	A semester-long work placement is a core part of the curriculum for International Business students. Students receive structured pre-placement support, including skills workshops, professional development sessions, and employer panels. During the placement, students maintain reflective logs and receive academic supervision to ensure they meet learning goals.
Key actors involved	TU Dublin Faculty, Placement Officers, Students, Industry Partners
Target group(s)	Students from Level 8
Sources	https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/international-business-tu916/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Innovative Research & Development, Bridging Industry & Academia
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	Curriculum integration, dedicated placement teams, industry demand
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Challenge: Securing placements across diverse international business sectors Solution: Early engagement with industry and flexible work arrangements

What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Increased graduate employability and stronger industry-university collaboration

Title of the best practice	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Digital Marketing TU920-Semester-Long Work Placement (30 ECTS)
Type of entity implementing	Technological University Dublin Blanchardstown Campus
At what level is/was it being applied:	University level
Year of starting	September (with the start of each academic term)
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- To develop industry-relevant digital marketing competencies - To ensure students apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments - To foster meaningful professional networks within the digital sector
Brief description of best practice	The pre-placement module provides comprehensive preparation for all students, including CV development, AI-driven mock interviews, and personalised guidance from the Careers Office to enhance their readiness for the workplace. During placements, students are matched with companies aligned to their skill sets. During the placement, structured meetings are held between university supervisors and workplace mentors. Students maintain reflective journals and

	participate in post-placement presentations to consolidate learning.
Key actors involved	Faculty of Digital Marketing, Careers and Employability Office, Employers, Students
Target group(s)	Level 8 Digital Marketing students
Sources	https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/digital-marketing-tu920/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Project-based learning, reflective writing, mentor feedback
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	Strong employer links in the digital sector, academic flexibility, use of tech tools
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Challenge: Matching students with roles that align with course outcomes Solution: Enhanced employer vetting and digital skills profiling for students
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Improved student confidence, readiness for the digital economy, and employability outcomes

Annex 2: Analysis of WBL best practices - Italy

Title of the best practice	**Dual Apprenticeship: Higher education and research (Partnership between Enel and the University of L'Aquila)**
Type of entity implementing	University of Aquila (UnivAQ) https://www.univaq.it/ in collaboration with Enel Italia S.p.A**.** , a multinational power company and a leading integrated player in the global power, gas, and renewable energy markets. It is headquartered in Rome, Italy, and was originally established as a state-owned entity in 1962. Over the decades, Enel has grown to become one of the largest players in the European energy sector and has expanded its operations across North America, South America, Africa, and Asia. https://www.enel.it/
At what level is/was it being applied:	National level
Year of starting	2023
Is it still ongoing?	Yes New call for the academic year 2025/2026 can be found here: https://www.ing.univaq.it/studenti/doc/Apprendistato_Enel_Bando_studenti_UNIVAQ_2025_26.pdf
Key objectives	The aim of the course is to obtain a university degree enriched with highly professional training content.

	Students develop a practical and in-depth understanding of processes and technologies in the energy sector which is highly competitive and very dynamic.
Brief description of best practice	Enel Italia S.p.A. and the University of L'Aquila have signed a protocol to launch an experimental programme of Higher Education and Research Apprenticeship (Art. 45 of Legislative Decree 81/2015): starting from the 2023/2024 academic year, 15 male and female students in the second year of the master's degree course in Electrical Engineering were involved, who alternated lectures and study with technical and professional training in the company. Students who participated in the Dual Apprenticeship were offered a study curriculum called 'Energy', which, in addition to offering the consolidated training in Electrical Engineering provided by the University of L'Aquila for more than 50 years, was enriched with additional content, defined and developed jointly by the University and the company and responding to the current needs of the productive world, related to the phase of energy transition and technological and digital transformation of work processes, in particular for activities related to power generation and electricity networks. The integration between classroom learning and work experience was supported and facilitated for each 'student-apprentice' by a company tutor and a university tutor. The Higher Education and Research Apprenticeship resulted in the achievement of a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering within the duration of the course of study. In the second year, 11 students participated and currently (March 2025), the third call has been published for the academic year 2025/2026 to take in another batch of 15 students.
Key actors involved	● University Tutor

	- Company Tutor - Student-Apprentice
Target group(s)	Students from the master's degree in electrical engineering of UnivAQ
Sources	https://www.ing.univaq.it/cdl/apprendistato-ingegneria-elettrica.php https://www.ing.univaq.it/studenti/doc/Apprendistato_Enel_Bando_studenti_UNIVAQ_2025_26.pdf https://corporate.enel.it/carriere/notizie/2024/05/seconda-edizione-apprendistato-duale-ingegneria-elettrica-univaq
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	The two partners develop an integrated curriculum with notions that meet the current needs of the manufacturing world, concerning the energy transition and the digitisation of work processes.
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	No challenges were encountered in the implementation of the programme.
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Students gained practical knowledge in the work field before the completion of their studies. Enel has been able to attract and select excellent resources that have already been trained with specific skills.

Title of the best practice	**Partnership between the engineering faculty of the University of Catania and ST Microelectronics.**
Type of entity implementing	University of Catania
At what level is/was it being applied:	University level and post graduate, national and regional level
Year of starting	2023
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	Foster the academic and professional training of students in the organisation of multidisciplinary courses and the coordination of research projects, dissertations and post-graduate internships in the field of power electronics.
Brief description of best practice	Planning of multidisciplinary courses; Coordination of research projects and dissertations; Post-graduate internships in the field of power electronics; 12 study prizes for students enrolled in the Master's degree course in Electronic Engineering.
Key actors involved	University of Catania (engineering faculty)
Target group(s)	Students, potential students of electronic engineering, researchers in power electronics

Sources	https://www.unict.it/it/didattica/master-universitari/2024-2025/power-electronics-devices-and-technologies https://www.unict.it/it/didattica/news/stmicroelectronics-assegna-12-premi-iscrittie-unict
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	The company is directly involved in the academic system, offering training courses and the possibility of internships and post-graduate work at their facilities
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	The direct collaboration with the University of Catania, the availability of the company and the funds it offers.
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	No significant challenges identified
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Encouraging students

Title of the best practice	Eunice - "The European University of Customised Education"
Type of entity implementing	It is a project financed by the Erasmus+ Programme implemented by the University of Catania
At what level is/was it being applied:	University and Regional level

Year of starting	2020 (first call), 2023 (second call)
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	Main **objectivess** of the first call were: ● Establishment of the foundations: the long-term **strategy** where quality education meets research, innovation, society and industry; ● Create a EUNICE **campus**: a unique, inter-university space where students and staff are inspired by the mobility, customised (student-oriented) curricula and work-based tasks; ● **European identity** based in cultural and linguistic diversity; ● Create **bridges** between students, researchers, industrial partners and society actors: through industrial research and challenge driven training. The second call has **innovative aspects**: ● The development of EUNICE **Key Competencies** and **experiential learning**; ● **Communities of practice**: among employees in key areas of activity to enable joint problem solving; ● Reviews of academic and administrative policies and processes to enable **innovation** across institutions in terms of enrolment, mobility and programme development; ● Enhance **regional engagement** so our universities have a positive impact on education but also on transferring knowledge and answering the needs of society.
Brief description of best practice	Establishment of **transnational alliances** of higher education institutions from all over the EU that come together for the benefit of students, lecturers, public bodies and companies.

Key actors involved	The consortium is made up of **ten European universities**, including, in addition to the University of Catania, Brandenburg University of Technology (Germany), Polytechnic University of Hauts-de-France (France), Poznan University of Technology (Poland, Coordinator), University of Mons (Belgium), University of Cantabria (Spain) and University of Vaasa (Finland), the University of Peloponnese (Greece), the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (Portugal) and Karlstad University (Sweden).
Target group(s)	Students, teachers, public bodies and companies
Sources	https://eunice-university.eu/project/eunice4u/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	Cooperation through a solid network of crossed interactions between educational institutions, industry and business partners, as well as other social, cultural, artistic and sports stakeholders.
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	No challenges were encountered in the implementation of the programme.
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	The University of Catania, with the aim of facilitating the insertion of young people into the world of work, has designed the "EIIP - Eunice International Internship Portale", encouraging mobility and international projection. The opportunities are open to university students, undergraduates and graduates but also to young people enrolled in high schools, in order to introduce them to the context of cooperation between academia and business.

Title of the best practice	Stage 4 EU
Type of entity implementing	Stage4EU is a mobile app and a website offering a free service implemented by INAPP, as a natural evolution of the experience gained with the 'Internship Handbook in Europe'.
At what level is/was it being applied:	University level
Year of starting	2019
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	To offer young university students or recent graduates the opportunity to do traineeships abroad
Brief description of best practice	It is a service that offers vocational training to students, which satisfies the needs both of young people as they specialise in a field and enjoy experience abroad, and of multinational companies that train valuable personnel experienced in the sector. In addition, it is very likely, depending on the obligation in some countries, that the traineeship is paid or compensated with benefits such as accommodation, public transport passes, meal vouchers, etc.
Key actors involved	Companies and Youths
Target group(s)	Mostly university students or recent graduates, between 20 and 30 years old
Sources	https://stage4eu.it/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	The programme uses a practical methodology, offering students the possibility of working abroad, which allows for the development of many skills.

Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice	Clarity of the website, much positive feedback from students involved in the project, direct correspondence with an INAPP employee working on the initiative.
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	No challenges were encountered in the implementation of the programme.
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	The impact that mainly emerges is the students' acquisition of professional skills in an international context, acquiring soft and hard skills, such as the spirit of enterprise, the ability to adapt by confronting different cultural and organisational models and, last but not least, learning to speak a foreign language fluently. Also, companies will have qualified and trained staff from a different country.

Annex 3: Analysis of WBL best practices - Malta

Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):	Sites of Learning Model – KNIGHTS
Type of entity implementing (Public school, Private school, Center of training of teachers/schools, High-Education institutes or Universities, Teacher's career management centres, Ministry or Department of Education, or Other) Please be specific here	Higher Education Institute – KNIGHTS (formerly CMBS)
At what level is/was it being applied: (School level, company level, corporate network, local level, regional level, National level, European Level, other – please specify)	University level
Year of starting (month/year)	September 2019
Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).	Yes
Key objectives	To integrate WBL formally into academic qualifications and align learning with labour market needs.
Brief description of best practice	KNIGHTS embeds 15–30 ECTS of WBL in MQF Level 6 and 7 programmes. Students alternate between theory and practice, with dual supervision and reflective assignments. Employers are engaged as co-educators through structured feedback.
Key actors involved	KNIGHTS faculty, employers (e.g. EY), students, academic and workplace mentors

Target group(s)	Undergraduate and postgraduate students
Sources (website, links, documents)	https://cmbs.edu.mt
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Experiential learning, curriculum co-design, dual supervision, reflective assessment
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	Academic-industry partnerships, digital monitoring tools, adaptable placement models
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Limited placements in niche sectors; resolved by employer mentorship training and hybrid formats
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Enhanced student employability, strengthened academic-industry links, flexible and inclusive WBL delivery

Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):	**Accelerated Work Study & Internships – EY Malta**
Type of entity implementing (Public school, Private school, Center of training of teachers/schools, High-Education institutes or Universities, Teacher's career management centres, Ministry or Department of Education, or Other) Please be specific here	Private Sector – EY Malta
At what level is/was it being applied: (School level, company level, corporate network, local level, regional level, National level, European Level, other – please specify)	Company level
Year of starting (month/year)	October 2017

Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).	Yes
Key objectives	To provide professional work exposure, integrate academic content with client delivery, and develop early talent.
Brief description of best practice	Students work on real client projects in tax, audit, and advisory while completing their academic programmes. A dual mentorship structure and global evaluation tools ensure competency development and performance alignment.
Key actors involved	EY HR, service line leads, KNIGHTS academic mentors, students
Target group(s)	Students in accounting, business, and IT disciplines
Sources (website, links, documents)	https://www.ey.com/en_mt/careers
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Work-integrated learning, continuous feedback, professional standards benchmarking
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	Mentorship system, structured onboarding, collaboration with KNIGHTS
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Staffing limitations during peak periods; addressed through resource allocation and mentor training
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Improved talent retention, high graduate employment rates, scalable employer-led WBL model

Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):	**Company Programme & Leaders for a Day – JA Malta**
Type of entity implementing (Public school, Private school, Center of training of teachers/schools, High-Education institutes or Universities, Teacher's career management centres, Ministry or Department of Education, or Other) Please be specific here	NGO – JA Malta
At what level is/was it being applied: (School level, company level, corporate network, local level, regional level, National level, European Level, other – please specify)	School level (national reach)
Year of starting (month/year)	October 2005
Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).	Yes
Key objectives	To build entrepreneurial skills, confidence, and workplace readiness among youth.
Brief description of best practice	Students form and run mini-companies and shadow executives. Programmes are supported by educators and industry mentors, focusing on real-world responsibility, innovation, and leadership.
Key actors involved	JA staff, secondary educators, industry mentors, students
Target group(s)	Secondary school students
Sources (website, links, documents)	https://jamalta.org

What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Project-based learning, experiential simulation, mentorship
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	Cross-sector partnerships, inclusive access models, national support
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Expanding access and mentor supply; resolved through strategic partnerships and funding
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Stronger employability skills, equity in WBL access, national engagement in youth entrepreneurship

Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):	Quality Assurance Guidelines for WBL – MFHEA
Type of entity implementing (Public school, Private school, Center of training of teachers/schools, High-Education institutes or Universities, Teacher's career management centres, Ministry or Department of Education, or Other) Please be specific here	Regulatory Body – MFHEA
At what level is/was it being applied: (School level, company level, corporate network, local level, regional level, National level, European Level, other – please specify)	National level
Year of starting (month/year)	June 2023
Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If	Yes

completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).	
Key objectives	To ensure high-quality, learner-centred, and labour market-aligned WBL across accredited education providers.
Brief description of best practice	MFHEA issued QA guidelines mandating supervision, formal agreements, learning outcomes, and RPL recognition for WBL programmes. These promote academic integrity and standardisation while enabling innovation.
Key actors involved	MFHEA, education institutions, employers, QA stakeholders
Target group(s)	Higher education providers and learners
Sources (website, links, documents)	https://mfhea.mt
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	Policy consultation, framework alignment, structured QA process
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	Legal authority, EU frameworks (EQF), institutional collaboration
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	Inconsistent practices; addressed through guidelines, templates, and stakeholder engagement
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	Greater WBL clarity, national alignment with EU standards, increased trust and participation

Annex 4: Analysis of WBL best practices - Portugal

Title of the best practice:	**Programa de Estágios Curriculares em Contexto Empresarial (ECCE)**
Type of entity implementing:	High-Education Institutes or Universities: University of Porto (U.Porto), specifically Faculty of Sciences (FCUP)
At what level is/was it being applied:	Company level / Regional level
Year of starting	2006
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- Facilitate the integration of FCUP graduates into the labour market; - Challenge the trainee to apply technical and scientific knowledge in a real work context; - Improve teamwork, time management, communication and professionalism skills, time management, communication and professionalism skills in a real-life environment; - Disseminate the training and skills of FCUP graduates in the business world.
Brief description of best practice	The ECCE programme provides students from U.Porto with internships in companies, allowing them to apply their academic knowledge in real-life work environments. The programme also aims to foster collaborations between the university and businesses, enhancing innovation and professional development.

Key actors involved	- University of Porto (U.Porto) - Faculty of Sciences (FCUP) - SMEs and large companies offering internships
Target group(s)	- Students from U.Porto (mainly Master's students from the Faculty of Sciences)
Sources	https://info.fc.up.pt/fcup/ecce/?f_id=408
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	- Internship placements - Collaboration between academic and business sectors - Structured support and mentoring for students
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	- Strong institutional backing from U.Porto - Established partnerships with industries - Active engagement of students and companies
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	- Securing sufficient internship opportunities for all students. Overcome by actively engaging with a broad network of companies and ensuring mutual benefits from internships
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	- Improved employability of students - Strengthened ties between academia and industry - Increased collaboration on innovative research and projects between U.Porto and companies

Title of the best practice:	SIQRH - Formação Empresarial Individual – Clusters

Type of entity implementing:	Certified training entities Business Training Programmes funded by COMPETE 2030.
At what level is/was it being applied:	National
Year of starting	2023
Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- Promote the qualification of entrepreneurs, managers, and workers. - Increase the productivity and competitiveness of companies in target clusters.
Brief description of best practice	This initiative implements training actions for entrepreneurs, managers and workers in companies within specific clusters, with a focus on innovation and process improvement.
Key actors involved	- Portuguese government, funded via COMPETE 2030 - Companies participating in specific clusters (I.Footwear and Fashion Cluster II. Automotive Cluster III. AEC Cluster - Architecture, Engineering and Construction IV. Sustainable Habitat Cluster V. Textile, Technology and Fashion Cluster VI. Produtech Cluster VII. Engineering & Tooling Cluster) - Certified training entities
Target group(s)	- Entrepreneurs - Managers - Workers in companies within the target clusters
Sources	https://portugal2030.pt/2025/02/07/apoio-para-formacao-empresarial-individual-e-conjunta-em-clusters-de-competitividade/

	https://www.compete2030.gov.pt/avisos/siqrh-formacao-empresarial-compete2030-2023-04/
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	- In-person or online training. - Classroom interventions, simulated practices, or practices in a work context.
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)	- Financial support from COMPETE 2030. - Active involvement of certified training entities. - Clear identification of training needs within the target clusters.
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	- Identifying specific training needs within each cluster. Overcome through detailed diagnostics and close collaboration with participating companies.
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	- Improved skills of the workforce. - Increased competitiveness of companies in the target clusters. - Strengthened cooperation between companies and training entities.

Title of the best practice:	INNOVATIVE CAR HMI programme
Type of entity implementing:	High-Education Institutes: University of Minho in collaboration with Bosch Car Multimedia Portugal
At what level is/was it being applied:	Regional level and National level Corporate network
Year of starting	2015

Is it still ongoing?	Yes
Key objectives	- Develop integrated solutions for automotive Human-Machine Interface (HMI) systems. - Foster technological advancements for "zero accidents" mobility. - Invest in innovative areas like V2V, V2I, and V2P communications, sensors, and software for intelligent vehicles.
Brief description of best practice	The INNOVATIVE CAR HMI programme is a collaboration between the University of Minho and Bosch to develop cutting-edge automotive technologies, including innovative systems for vehicle communication, entertainment and user interfaces.
Key actors involved	- University of Minho - Bosch Car Multimedia Portugal - Over 400 researchers and engineers involved in 30 projects
Target group(s)	- Researchers - Engineers - Automotive industry professionals - Students in automotive-related disciplines
Sources	https://green.fibrenamics.com/newsletter/bosch-innovative-car-hmi?utm_source=chatgpt.com https://www.eng.uminho.pt/pt/investigareinovar/projetoscomempresas/Paginas/programainnovativecarhmi.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com
What methodology was used in the application of this BP?	- Collaborative research and development - Industry-academia partnership - Technological prototyping and testing
Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional,	- Strong partnership between academia and industry - Financial backing for R&D activities - High level of expertise in the automotive sector

economic, social, and environmental)	169
Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?	- Integrating diverse technologies from multiple sectors (automotive, telecommunications, software). - Overcome by fostering effective collaboration between academic researchers and industry engineers, focusing on cross-disciplinary training.
What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?	- Significant advancements in automotive HMI technologies. - Strengthened global competitiveness of Portugal in the automotive sector. - Formation of a skilled workforce specializing in innovative automotive technologies.