



wblchampion



# Irish National Report

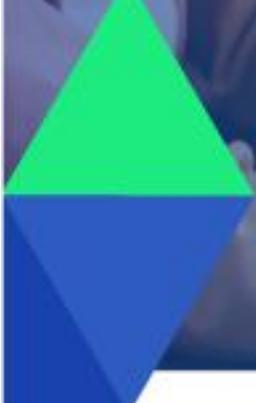
WP2: Regulatory Analysis & Curriculum Redesign

Author: TU Dublin



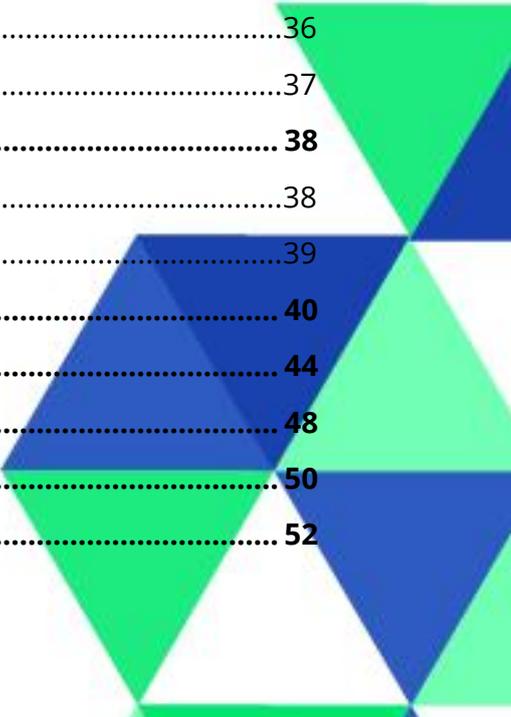
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## Executive summary

The WBL\_CHAMPION project, funded under the Erasmus+ KA220-HED program, aims to champion Work-Based Learning (WBL) as a core component of higher education, facilitating students' readiness for the labour market. The project seeks to strengthen higher education institution (HEI) staff's digital competencies, equip students with practical skills, and foster collaborative ties between education and industry.

Section 1 is the introduction to the WBL project. In Section 2, the report reviews the EU policies and Irish policies to support the implementation of WBL programmes. EU and Irish policies are identified and discussed, and compliance for WBL in the Irish education system is described. The desk research identified resources, policies, and guidelines for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector at the EU level, with limited references to resources for the Higher Education (HE) sector among the EU policies reviewed. It could be argued that many of the principles and guidelines produced could apply to both sectors; however, relevant policies should be easy to access. Also, in this section, the policies and practices in the Irish landscape supporting further and higher education are described, along with how policy development and strategic plans have enabled the development of innovative WBL practices in Ireland. It is clear that WBL is supported through the HE and VET sector through the policies defined and areas for improvement are identified. Best practice advises that relationships between universities, educational institutions, and industry are key to the success of all WBL interventions. Section 2 also describes how WBL programmes are delivered with academic integrity, ensuring compliance with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the academic policies and structures implemented across further and higher education institutions, through their own academic councils and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), thereby maintaining the integrity of the accreditation process for WBL. There is some room for interpretation due to the lack of standardisation for implementation, which could be interpreted as enabling autonomy within relationships between universities/colleges and industry or causing confusion when industry are supporting WBL across many universities / colleges.

The research described in **Section 3** provides insight into the understanding and implementation of these policies. From this research, it could be interpreted that the strength of WBL in Ireland is underpinned by:

- The rigorous accreditation process in Ireland, governed by the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), ensures that Work-Based Learning (WBL)



programmes meet the highest national standards and are aligned with the most stringent EU qualification benchmarks.

- The strong connections with industry partners, both directly and through national bodies across all sectors, ensure that education in the further and higher education sector remains closely aligned with market needs. As a result, graduates develop strong employability and transversal skills through research-informed and practice-based learning, equipping them to enter the workforce and make a meaningful impact on business and society in Ireland.

**Section 4** examines best practices in Work-Based Learning (WBL) nationally, with a review of WBL programmes in TU Dublin, an exploration of the National Apprenticeship Scheme, and a review of WBL initiatives at DCU and UL. **Section 5** delineates several challenges that require attention, including employer awareness, legal frameworks, standardised documentation, and continuity planning. This leads to recommendations in **Section 6**, such as implementing structured guidelines, fostering co-creation with industry, and enhancing student support systems to identify ways to optimise the WBL experience for future cohorts. The considered view, based on the research undertaken, is that the most effective approach to WBL is through work placements. Efforts should be made to ensure that students experience significant growth and success during their placements with the correct supports and structures.

# 1 Introduction

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, the WBL Champion project 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 is 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 will serve as the basis for developing strategies, course designs and digital tools that align with the needs of HEI instructors and student, as well as guiding the effective implementation of WBL-integrated curricula, which will be the main focus of the succeeding phase of the project.

## 2. Work-Based Learning Policies in Europe and Nationally in Ireland

This section will describe information gathered regarding EU WBL policies, Irish WBL policies, and also other relevant strategies and policies that may impact the implementation of WBL programmes nationally.

### Overview of EU Work-Based Learning policies

Key policies were identified 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 1.

The Erasmus+ programme has been a key part of EU policy to support education, training, youth and sports in Europe and has enabled much research to be carried out on WBL in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) landscape in Europe.

Tools have been developed through Erasmus+ projects to support the development of WBL across Europe and also to support the development of networks for sharing of knowledge and best practice.

The European Skills Agenda (2020), underscores the value of WBL in promoting lifelong learning and ensuring a match between skills and labour market demands. This agenda places particular emphasis on apprenticeships and traineeships as effective pathways for individuals to gain practical, job-relevant experience. These programs are integral to enhancing individual employability and addressing skill matches across sectors. The agenda also emphasises upskilling and reskilling to support workforce adaptability in a rapidly evolving labour market.

The Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (VET) (2020) further supports WBL by advocating for greater flexibility and accessibility in VET programs. This recommendation advocates for integrating WBL into national education systems to enhance responsiveness to evolving labour market needs, making it more adaptable to diverse learners and industries.

Another important policy initiative is the Youth Employment Support (YES) Package (2020), which positions WBL as a crucial strategy for addressing youth unemployment. By offering clear pathways to skill development and sustainable employment, the YES Package aims to provide young people, particularly those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), with opportunities to enter the workforce through structured learning experiences.

Table 1 Some EU available resources to support WBL

Resource	Description	Location
<b>High-Performance Apprenticeships and WBL: 20 Guiding Principles (2015)</b>	<p>Provides guidance in four main areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Governance and Social Partners Involvement</li> <li>• Support for Companies, particular SMEs, offering Apprenticeship</li> <li>• Attractiveness of Apprenticeship and improved Career Guidance</li> <li>• Quality Assurance in Work-Based learning</li> </ul>	<a href="#">High-performance apprenticeships &amp; work-based learning - Publications Office of the EU</a>
<b>European Alliance for Apprenticeships</b>	<p>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 programs.</p>	<a href="#">European Alliance for Apprenticeships - European Commission</a>

Resource	Description	Location
WBL and Apprenticeships Network (NetWBL)	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><a href="#">WBL-Toolkit: About the Work-based Learning TOOLKIT</a></p>
EPALE	<p>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”.</p>	<p><a href="#">EPALE   Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe</a></p>

Resource	Description	Location
<b>European Training Foundation</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>Such publications include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Work based learning: a handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries</li> </ul>	<p><a href="#">Work based learning - A leaflet of the Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training</a></p> <p><a href="#">Work based learning: a handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries</a></p>

The European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) emphasises the role of WBL in its first principle, "Education, Training and Life-long Learning." This principle highlights the importance of providing high-quality, labour market-aligned training through WBL, ensuring that individuals have access to education that meets current and future workforce demands. Together, these policies demonstrate the EU's commitment to strengthening WBL as a means of fostering skills development, employability, and social inclusion (Garben, 2019).

The European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (EFQEA), the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), and the Youth Guarantee are key EU initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of vocational education, apprenticeships, and youth employment. These frameworks promote standardised quality assurance, skills development, and improved transitions from education to the labour market. These EU initiatives emphasise lifelong learning, labour market integration, and social inclusion by setting quality benchmarks for vocational training providers, promoting employer collaboration, and ensuring that young individuals receive tailored support to enhance their career prospects.

On review of the resources available from the EU Commission for WBL, the focus is very strong on resources, policies and guidelines for the VET sector. It could be argued that the principles and guidelines produced apply to both the VET and HE sectors and for life-long learning. All of the documentation highlights the importance of the relationship between the educator, the employer and the student (EU Commission, 2022).

In 2017 a renewed EU agenda for Higher Education was sent as a communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a renewed EU agenda for Higher Education highlighting that students should have opportunities to undertake WBL to develop skills through real-world problems and that cooperation between HEIs and employers would enable HEIs to ensure the relevance of their curricula. The communication stated:

*The Commission will:* Encourage the integration of work placements, recognised through ECTS points, into higher education programmes, further strengthen **Erasmus+ business consortia** to increase the availability and quality of work placements and support Erasmus+ **student work placements** with a **particular focus on digital skills**<sup>1</sup>.

In 2021, a working group was set-up for Higher Education for the period 2021-25 to focus on the promotion of the transformation of the higher education sector, as well as the preparation of graduates for our changing societies and labour markets, and finally, the contribution to building a stronger Europe through enhancing Europe's innovation

<sup>1</sup> See COM (2017) 228. An example is the Horizon 2020-funded 'Digital Opportunity pilot project.



capacity on the way towards a European Education Area by 2025, in line with the European Strategy for Universities. The minutes available do not provide anything that would add further to the development of WBL at this time. We will see later in this report some of the barriers that all stakeholders, academics, industry and students see in the realisation of WBL experiences being core in their educational experience.

## Laws, Policies and Regulations in Ireland

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.' In 2000 Learning for Life, Ireland's first White Paper on Adult Education, was published confirming that skill shortages would 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. Supporting the development of links between the HE, VET sectors and employers has been a key strategy for policy in Ireland for these sectors since this white paper.

WBL in Ireland is governed by a framework of national laws, regulations, and initiatives aimed at integrating education and employment to support skills 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 programs 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 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<sup>2</sup>, while Higher education in Ireland is provided by universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education<sup>3</sup>.

Tables 2 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.

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<sup>2</sup> [gov.ie - Further education](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/publication/2013-01-01-further-education/)

<sup>3</sup> [gov.ie - Higher education](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/publication/2013-01-01-higher-education/)



Table 2 Description of Further & Higher Education

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 <a href="#">Higher Education Authority</a> (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.

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. Additionally, the OECD's Skills Strategy Ireland 2017 emphasises that WBL programs 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 Europe and other countries, such as America. 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 programs, Ireland not only meets domestic workforce needs, but also aligns with European priorities for competitiveness and sustainable growth.

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).

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 2021-2023<sup>4</sup> set out the vision for the department over those three years and included 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.

The FET Strategy, 'Future FET: Transforming Learning' 2020 - 2024 emphasises lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling. This strategy 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).

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

<sup>4</sup> [gov.ie - Statement of Strategy 2021-2023](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-statements/2021-07-statement-of-strategy-2021-2023/)



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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 3 identifies the various entities that inform government departments about Ireland's skills needs and guide policy and strategic interventions required, while Table 4 lists some of the interventions implemented by the Irish government based on reports from the bodies listed in Table 3.



Table 3 Entities to forecast Ireland’s skills needs and inform policy and interventions required

Entity	Description	Hosted by
<a href="#"><u>Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU)</u></a>	Undertakes and publishes research and reports on the further and higher education sector as well as other related sectors.	SOLAS
<a href="#"><u>Expert Group on Future Skills Needs</u></a>	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
<a href="#"><u>National Skills Council (NSC)</u></a> <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/7637e6-national-skills-council/"><u>https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/7637e6-national-skills-council/</u></a>	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
<a href="#"><u>Regional Skills Forum</u></a>	There are 9 Regional Skills Fora in Ireland set up to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect people in their regions to meet their skills needs</li> <li>• Make sure employers and enterprises get the education and training responses they need</li> </ul>	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Table 4 Interventions put in place by Irish Government

Intervention	Description	How it supports WBL development / experience
<b>National Training Fund</b>	<p>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.<sup>3</sup> 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,</p>	<p>The NTF is a broad-based fund supporting Higher Education, Further Education and Training, and some programmes providing enterprise and employment supports</p>
<a href="#">Skillnet Ireland</a>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Supports learning in the workplace</p>
<a href="#">Springboard +</a>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Requires work placement as an element of the delivery for all full-time programmes.</p>
<a href="#">Human Capital Initiative</a>	<p>Human Capital Initiative Pillar 1 is funded by the National Training Fund</p>	<p>Supports WBL by enhancing skills, employability, and industry collaboration.</p>

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. The government provide the policy to support the FET and HE sectors to respond to the skills shortages and to use WBL interventions to do so. Every organisation has their own processes and works differently with industry to ensure the learners will achieve the learning outcomes. This could be perceived as enabling innovation but also could be perceived as inefficient by industry.

## Compliance Measures

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 1 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 1 QQI Global Fan (QQI, 2024)

**Qualifications Frameworks - Going Global**  
Enhancing the transparency, quality and mobility of qualifications, nationally and internationally.



- **NFQ** Irish National Framework of Qualifications
- **EQF** European Qualifications Framework
- **QF-EHEA** Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area



For further information consult: [www.QQI.ie](http://www.QQI.ie)

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In Ireland, WBL programs 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 programs. 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 certifications, including those with WBL, are recognised and transferable across EU member states, facilitating mobility and consistency in skill validation. QQI regulates the quality assurance processes for WBL programs offered in higher and further education. It requires educational providers to meet rigorous quality standards through program 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 programs with industry needs.

Under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025, apprenticeship programs 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, 'Future FET: Transforming Learning' 2020 - 2024 emphasises lifelong learning, upskilling, and reskilling. It establishes pathways, such as apprenticeships, traineeships, and vocational courses, ensuring quality by embedding compliance measures, including program accreditation and employer evaluations.

For non-EU students and workers, internships and WBL programs 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 programs 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 programs 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 programs 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 programs contribute to lifelong learning, employability, and economic growth. In the HE sector, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), including the Universities, Technological Universities and Institutes of Technologies, award qualifications on the NFQ. IN the FET sector QQI awards qualifications through the ETBs on the NFQ.

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

## 3 Research Undertaken

The following section presents the key findings from the surveys carried out for this project. The surveys aimed to gather insights from professionals across various sectors regarding their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of WBL practices. The responses provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of WBL, including familiarity with national and European policies, digital tools used to support WBL and areas for improvement.

The survey gathered responses from three key stakeholder groups: academics, industry partners, and students. By analysing their perspectives, we aim to gain a well-rounded understanding of the current WBL landscape, including challenges, policy awareness, and the role of digital tools. The survey was agreed in advance by all the partners in the project and was also passed through the ethics committee in TU Dublin for ethical clearance.

To ensure clarity and comparability, the results will be presented separately for each group in the subsequent sub-sections. Various visualisations, including graphs, radar charts, and other data representations, will be used to illustrate key trends and insights from industry partners, academics, and students.

It is important to recognise that limitations were identified with the research carried out:

- While the target numbers for responses were achieved, the number of responses received were disappointing versus the number targeted.
- The timing of the survey may have impacted the number of responses received. Before Christmas is a busy time for students and academics due to exams and assessments for industry due to year end processes.
- Respondents were asked to categorise themselves as either academics, industry or students / graduates. No further categorisation was requested.
- As this survey was taken without any intervention or further clarification, questions asked were interpreted by the respondents based on their own frame of reference.

## Summary of Results

### Category of Respondents

Overall, there were 49 respondents to the survey, 22 academics, 6 industry partners and 21 students. Considering the number of survey recipients from each target audience and the follow-up efforts, the number of results was disappointing, although it did meet the required target numbers. There are possible reasons why people did not respond to the survey, which include:

- The time of year the survey was sent. The survey was sent out before Christmas, a busy time for academics and students due to exams and assessments and a busy time for industry as they come to year end. For this reason, the time to respond was extended into the new year and people were followed up directly.
- The priority of the topic for individual's vs their own workload. In discussion with some of our industry stakeholders they advised that while they would like to assist with such surveys, they do not have the time to do so.
- Students and staff in universities are continuously getting requests to participate in research studies and thus do not prioritise such activity.

### Involvement in WBL

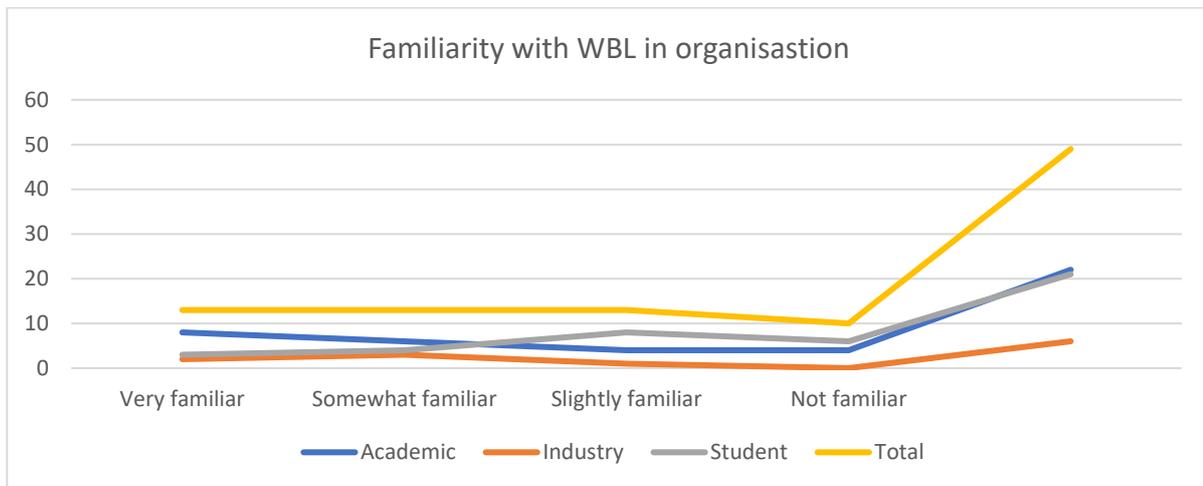
82% of the respondents advised that they had been involved with WBL either from the University, the Industry or as a student. They advised involvement in WBL as programme coordinators, academic managers, supervisors, employers or participants. 81% of students/graduates advised involvement and 82% of academics and industry advised involvement.



## Familiarity with WBL Processes in the Organisation

80% of the respondents advised varying levels familiarity with WBL processes. 86% of industry and academic respondents showed varying levels of familiarity with 71% of students and graduates declaring varying levels of familiarity. 20% of the overall respondents declared no familiarity of WBL practices in their organisation, with 14% of academic and industry respondents declaring no familiarity and 29% of students and graduates showing no familiarity within their organisation.

Figure 2 Familiarity with WBL in the Organisation



## EU and National Policies supporting WBL

35% of the respondents declared that they were familiar with EU or National policies supporting WBL, with 77% of these familiar with the policies being academics and industry.

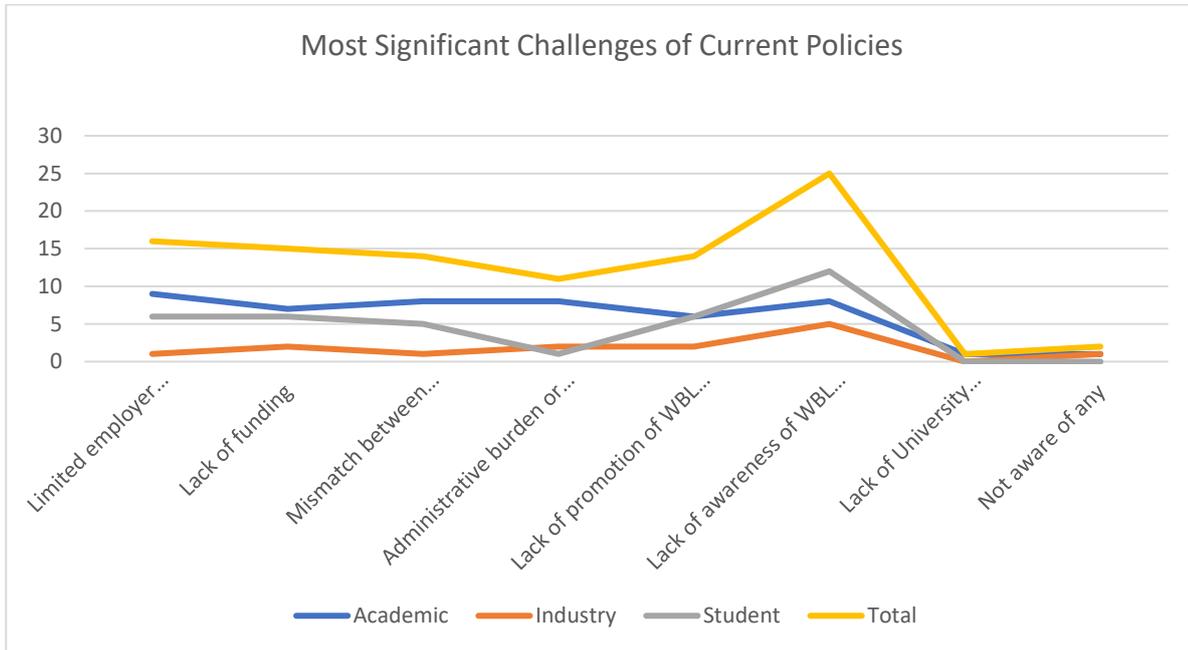
Of those familiar with EU or national WBL processes, 76% of the respondents rated the effectiveness of National or EU policies at supporting WBL in their country as either 3 or 4 from a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = very ineffective; 5 = very effective) with 0% of the respondents rating the policies as very ineffective.

## Challenges of National WBL Policies

The respondents overall identified the largest challenge being the lack of awareness of WBL policies as the major challenge, as shown in Figure 3 below. 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 Academics agreed that the 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.



Figure 3 Most Significant Challenges of Current Policies

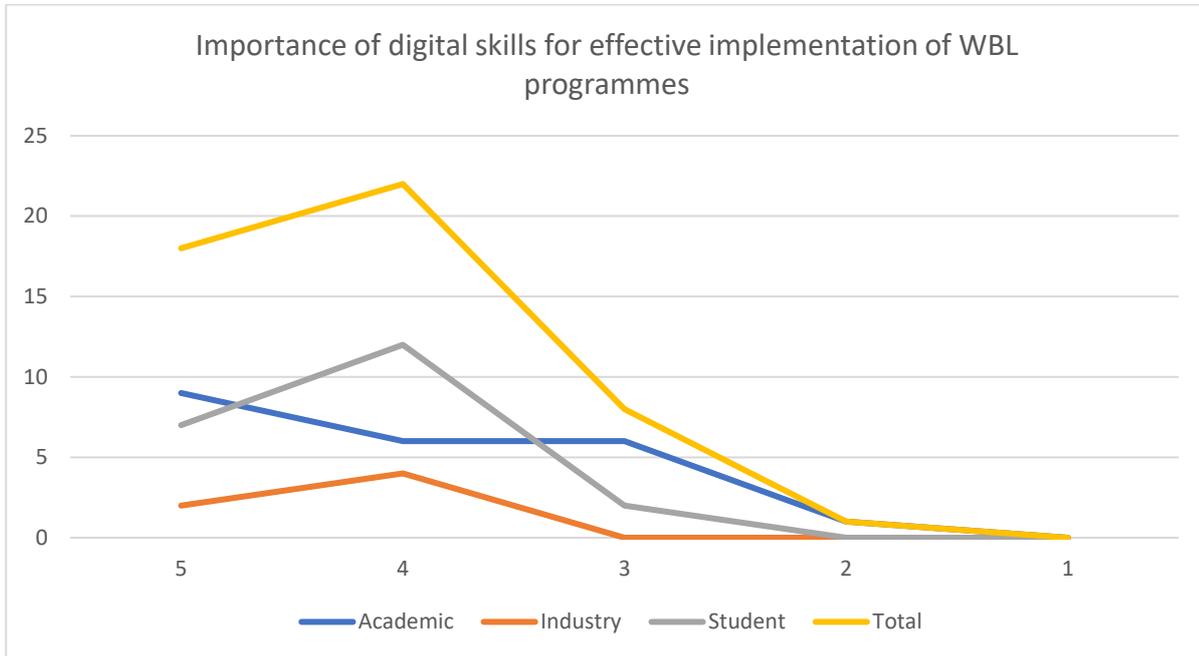


Only 2% of the respondents indicated in their opinion that the EU policies did not support WBL in Ireland, 22% indicated that they were not aware of the policies, while 76% of the respondents indicated strong support, support or neutral to the support of the EU policies for WBL in Ireland.

### Digital Skills

On a scale of 1 -5 (1 = not important; 5 = extremely important), all respondents gave a rating of 3 or above regarding the importance of digital skills for the implementation of WBL programmes, with 82% rating the importance at 4 or 5 of which 100% of industry rated the importance at either 4 or 5. The same is depicted in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 Importance of Digital Skills for effective implementation of WBL Programmes



### Examples of Successful WBL Practices

All parties were able to advise of examples which were dominated by apprenticeship examples, and also the work placement of a 12-week / 3-month immersive experience. Examples also included the non-standard apprentice example, such as that for the insurance industry in Ireland, and also industries which have regulated work placement in Ireland, including in the area of social work.

### Recommendations to Improve WBL Practices

Areas of how WBL practices could be improved could be discussed under three headings, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Areas of Improvement for WBL

Area of focus	Activity
Marketing	Communicating the benefits for all parties
	Advertising the opportunities
	Communicating success and building evidence for WBL
	Incentivise employers to engage
Communication	Use of Digital Platforms for the management of the WBL opportunities
	Partnership between all parties involved and clear communication
	Expectations for all parties' roles and responsibilities to be clear and agreed from the beginning
WP Experience	Curriculum Development from year 1 to enforce employability skills (including digital skills)
	Interdisciplinarity of work placement
	Tri-partite collaborative approach for stakeholders

## Results from Academics

22 academics responded to the survey, 36% of academics declared a high level of familiarity with the WBL practices as is depicted in the below bar chart.

Figure 5 Familiarity with WBL practices in the organisation



The level of involvement in the programme ranged from an educator, supervisor and researcher. 50% were involved as an educator/academic. The same is presented below in Table 6.

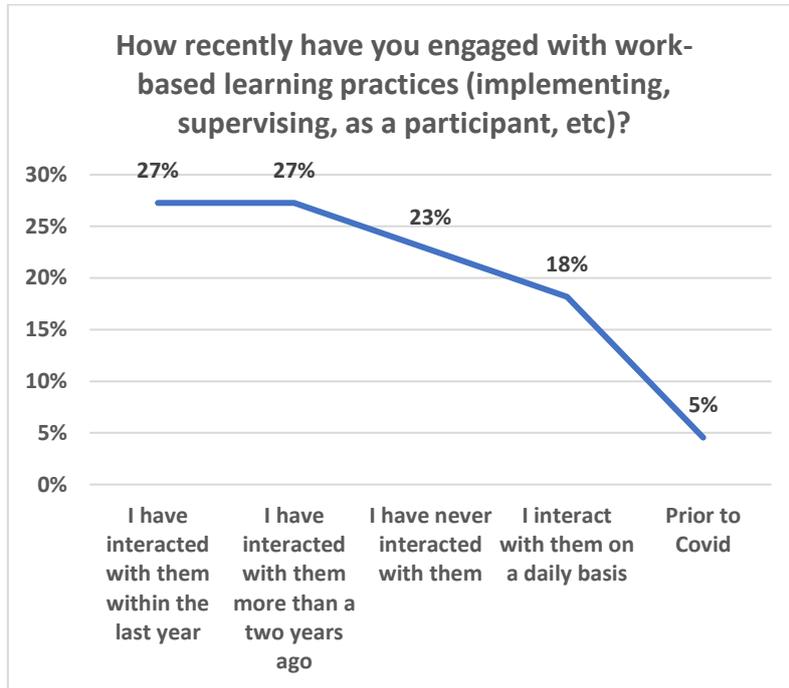
Table 66 Nature of Involvement in WBL

Nature of Involvement	% of those involved
As an educator/academic;	50%
As a supervisor; As an educator/academic;	5%
I have never been involved in WBL in any form;	23%
As a supervisor; As an educator/academic; As a programme coordinator; As a researcher	5%
As a supervisor; As an educator/academic; As a programme coordinator;	5%
As a researcher; Workplace Academic Mentor; As a policy maker; As a supervisor;	5%
As an academic manager in a department that provided mandatory work placement;	5%
As a programme coordinator; As an educator/academic; As a supervisor;	5%

A majority of the respondents had engaged with WBL in the last year. The same is presented below in Figure 6.

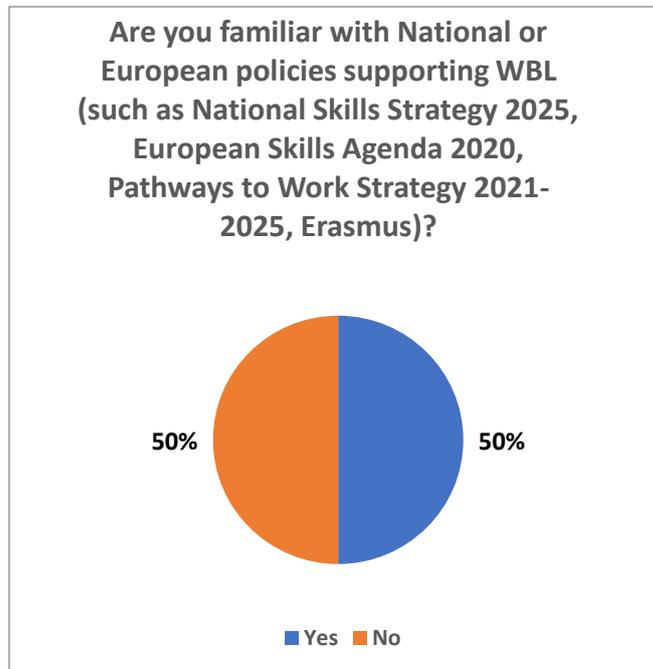


Figure 6 Last Engagement with WBL



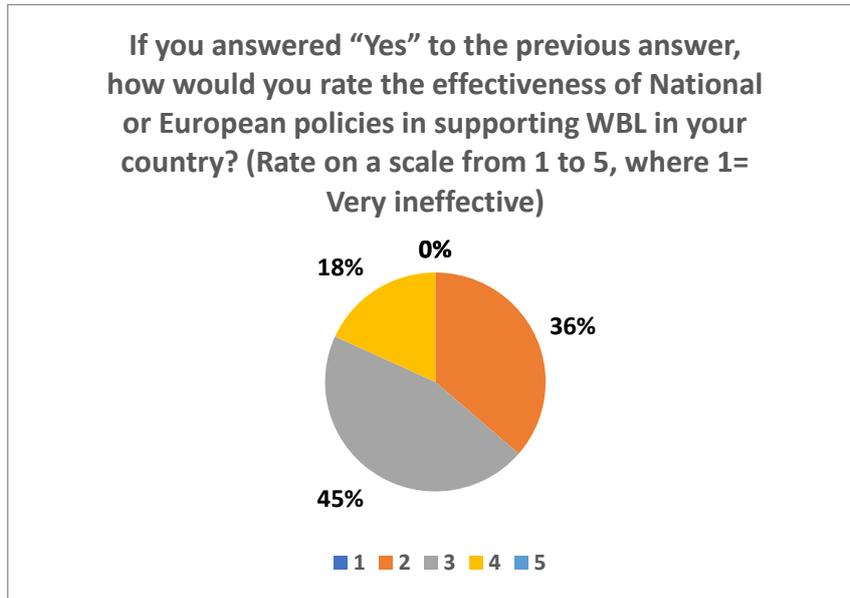
In terms of familiarity with national and European policies, 50% were familiar, and 50% were not familiar. The same is presented below in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Familiarity with National / EU Policies



A majority of participants rated the effectiveness of the policies as neutral (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Effectiveness of the Policies



Thereafter, participants discussed certain policies which they were aware of, which are presented in the table below.

Table 7: 7Policies

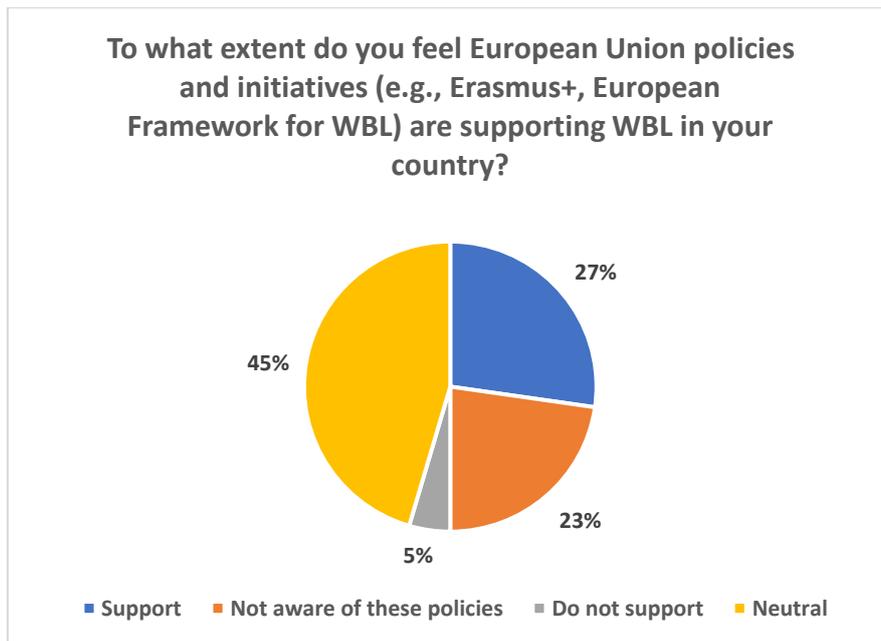
Policies	% Awareness
Erasmus, Apprenticeships	7%
National Skills Strategy 2025, European Skills Agenda 2020, European Framework for WBL, The eWBL Framework, Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025, Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025, Guide for Practitioners: the Erasmus Skills project.	14%
Not familiar	7%
Too many to mention	7%
National Skills Strategy 2025	20%
No	7%
Erasmus	7%
None	7%
Apprenticeship Policy	7%
Erasmus+	7%
National Skills strategy, Pathways to Work, National Framework for Lifelong Guidance 2023 (from OECD Skills Strategy)	7%
Bruge Communiqué - Riga conclusions - influence of professional bodies and regulation in particular areas, e.g. HSE Ireland	7%

A majority of the respondents (9%) said that the most significant challenge in the current national policies (such as the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025, Pathways to Work

Strategy 2021-2025, Erasmus) are limited employer engagement, lack of funding; mismatch between educational curriculum and labour market needs; administrative burden or complexity.

A majority of participants (45%) gave a neutral response when asked about the extent to which the EU policies are supporting the WBL in their country. The same is depicted below in Figure 9.

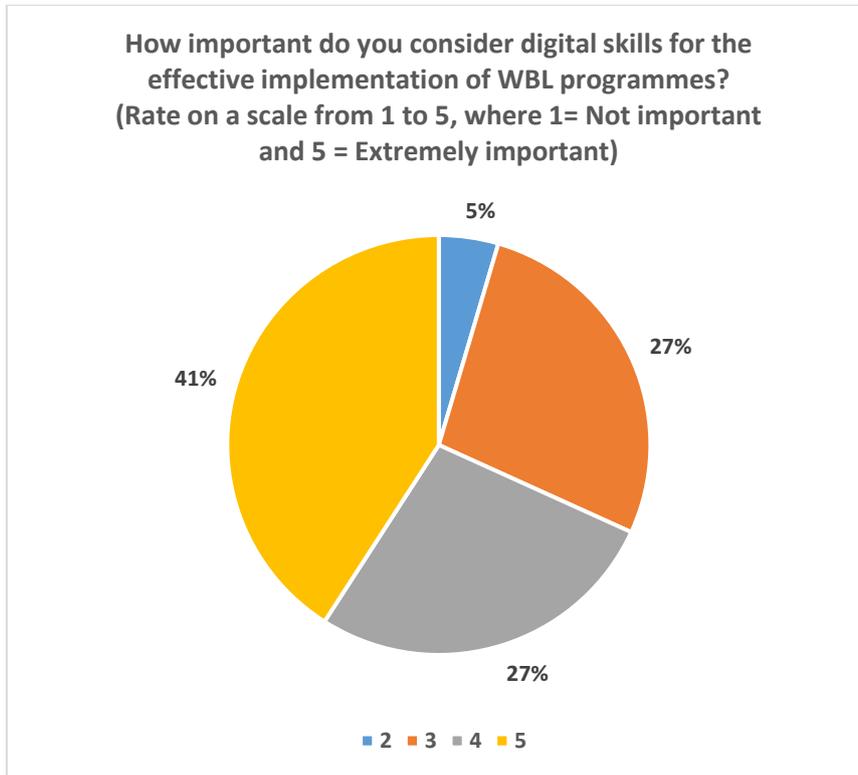
Figure 9 Policies Supporting WBL



As per the respondents, several aspects of European Union WBL policies could be improved. Key areas for enhancement include funding and partnership agreements, and the facilitation of international placements across member states through a central recruitment hub. There is a strong need to incorporate global business competencies into WBL programs and establish partnerships with multinational corporations. Additionally, embedding advanced digital business tools into WBL curricula, providing specific funding mechanisms and training resources for SMEs and startups, and creating cross-border placement opportunities would significantly benefit the sector. Including sustainable business practices in all WBL programs, integrating industry-recognised certifications such as Google Analytics, HubSpot CRM, and financial modelling, along with closer collaboration between universities and businesses to co-design WBL programs, would further enhance their effectiveness. Moreover, increasing awareness within the community about these initiatives is essential to maximise engagement and impact.

Thereafter, respondents were asked to rate digital skills for the effective implementation of WBL programmes. A majority of participants (41%) considered the digital skills to be very important which is presented in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10 Importance of Digital Skills for WBL

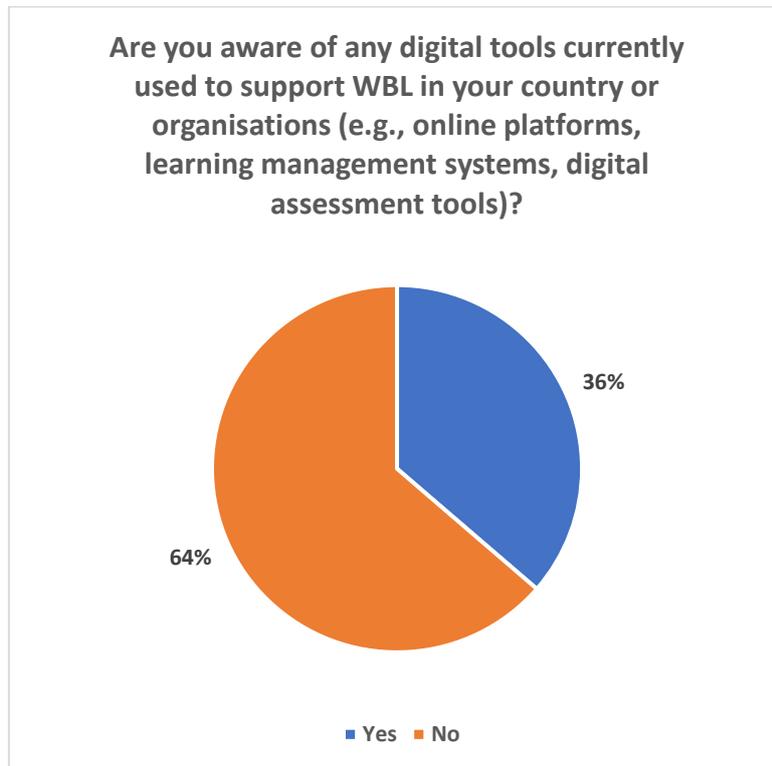


To effectively implement WBL, digital skills play a crucial role in aligning education with industry demands. Participants highlighted various perspectives on the importance of digital skills in WBL.

With rapid technological advancements shaping the modern workplace, employees need more than just basic digital skills to progress in the employment market. Some respondents noted insufficient focus on key digital tools and platforms such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) tools, and digital marketing analytics. Embedding advanced digital business tools into WBL curricula—such as training on Salesforce, SAP, Tableau, and digital advertising platforms—would ensure that learners are well-prepared for the digitalised global business environment. Given the crucial role of digital skills in employability, it is essential that they are placed at the core of WBL.

Then, respondents were asked about their current level of awareness of the digital tools. 64% said that they are aware of the digital tools which are currently being used to support WBL in their country.

Figure 11 Awareness of Digital Tools



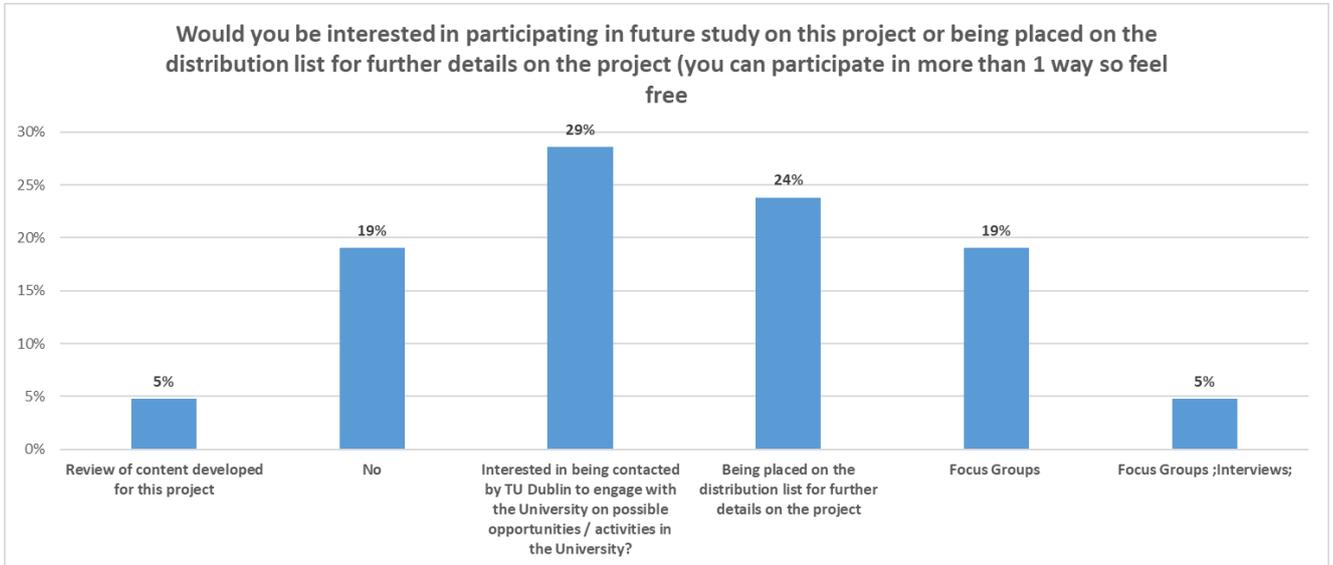
When asked to name some of the digital tools, most of the participants said Brightspace and Moodle. One of the respondents said Rotman Market Simulation Challenge and AmplifyME’s simulations under the 'Explore' subscription tier.

Some of the challenges that academics face whilst implementing WBL include 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 use digital platforms effectively; 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.

When asked to share specific examples of successful WBL practices, respondents described the successful traditional apprenticeship model, new forms of apprenticeship, work and learn, work-based projects, part-time learning, and immersive learning. They also said that the list goes on. There are multiple forms of WBLs.

A majority of the participants were highly interested in being contacted again for future studies related to WBL. The same is presented in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12 Future Studies



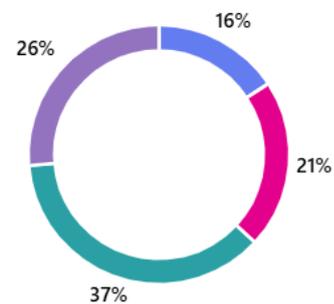
## Results from Students

A total of 19 students responded to the survey, and when asked how familiar they are with WBL policies in the university, a majority were slightly familiar, and some were not familiar.

Figure 13 Familiarity with University Policies

How familiar are you with WBL practices in the University?

Very familiar	3
Somewhat familiar	4
Slightly familiar	7
Not familiar	5
Other	0



A majority of students had not interacted with WBL and were not familiar with the National or European WBL policies.



Figure 14 Familiarity with National or EU Policies

**Are you familiar with National or European policies supporting WBL** (such as National Skills Strategy 2025, European Skills Agenda 2020, Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025, Erasmus)?



Lack of funding and lack of awareness of WBL opportunities were considered by the students as the most significant challenges in the current national WBL policies.

When students were asked about aspects of European Union WBL policies that should be improved to better address the needs of their sector, they highlighted the need for greater advocacy and increased awareness, along with more opportunities for engagement. They also emphasised the importance of aligning course content with the skills required for future careers, as there can sometimes be inconsistencies, particularly in relation to placements and internships. Ensuring better synchronisation between academic curricula and industry expectations would enhance the effectiveness of WBL programs and better prepare students for the workforce.

## 4 Best Practices in WBL

In this section 4, we will examine some of the best practices in WBL within business programmes nationally. We will examine WBL programmes in detail, as delivered in the Faculty of Business at TU Dublin. We will also examine the National Apprenticeship Scheme and WBL programmes at DCU and UL.

### 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. 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. These WBL interventions range from 15 ECTS credits to 30 ECTS credits of their full programme of study. The objective is to equip students with practical workplace skills, enhance employability, and establish strong industry connections.

## Key Practices and Their Impact

### Pre-placement

1. 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.
2. **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.
3. **Mindfulness sessions** provided by TU Dublin have proven effective in helping students manage stress and anxiety before and during placements.
4. 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

1. **Employment Contract & Logbook:**
  - An employment contract is signed between the student and employer to formalise responsibilities and maintain placement accountability
  - A logbook is completed during the placement by students, enabling lecturers to identify issues early and track student progress.



2. 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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.

## 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 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).

## 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 15. 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 15 Snapshot of Apprenticeships in Ireland Dec 2024 (Solás, 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.

## 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 8 Course Structure Learn + Work

Year	Sem 1 (Sept – Jan)	Sem 2 (Feb – May)	Sem 3 (May – Aug)
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.”*

## 5 Analysis of gaps and challenges

The following sub-section explores the identified gaps in Ireland’s national WBL legislation and practices, highlighting key issues such as inconsistency in the quality of placements. It also examines challenges related to limited access to WBL opportunities for students, inequities in participation, and systemic constraints. Drawing on insights from desk and field research, the subsection provides a detailed discussion of the obstacles faced by employers, educators, and students in implementing and engaging with WBL programs, offering a comprehensive analysis of the factors that impact the effectiveness of these initiatives.

### Strengths of WBL in Ireland

- The robust compliance of the accreditation process in Ireland through the NFQ ensures that WBL programmes are accredited to the highest standard and that this accreditation is mapped not just to the standards but also to the highest EU standards
- Strong connections exist with industry partners directly and with national bodies in all sectors ensuring that education in the further and higher education sector remains close to the market and graduates have strong employability and transversal skills, where they have



experienced research-informed and practice based learning preparing them for the workforce and to make an impact to business and society in Ireland

- Many programmes in Ireland offer students flexibility in integrating work experiences, with part-time study options that allow for continuous work experience during their degrees, and this is supported through educational policy.

Table 9 Comparison of some Universities in Ireland

University	Strengths	Weaknesses
TU Dublin	Strong industry ties, flexible learning pathways, focused on vocational areas	WBL not available in all fields.
DCU	Mandatory work placement (INTRA), strong support structure, broad industry engagement	Employer participation variability.
UL	Long-standing Co-op model, international focus, covers a wide range of disciplines	Geographical limitations, some placements not fully aligned with specialisation.

## Gaps in WBL in an Irish Context

Having reviewed the primary and secondary research undertaken in this project, the following gaps have been identified and categorised in the areas below.

### Communication

- Awareness of WBL opportunities
- Promotion of WBL opportunities or policies supporting WBL
- Standard terminology for WBL interventions to be understood by all parties.

### Policy and Funding

- Awareness of policies supporting WBL, either national or EU policies
- Gap in funding models to support WBL
- Funding to support international WBL interventions outward and inward.

### Implementation of WBL Interventions

- Administrative burden or complexity
- Standard templates / boiler plate templates for implementation
- Difficulty for small companies to support based on administrative or financial burden
- Inconsistency in the quality of WBL interventions depending on the size of the company
- Lack of contractual agreements in place between student / industry / university



- Inefficiency due to lack of standardisation within universities in delivery of WBL interventions
- Training for staff in the University supporting WBL interventions (academic and administrative staff) or in companies for mentors / supervisors for the WBL interventions
- Preparation of students pre the WBL intervention
- Awareness and understanding of digital tools that could support WBL.

### **Accreditation**

- Standards for the WBL intervention to enable ECTS credits to be allocated e.g. standard Learning Outcomes
- Agreed standard for the assessment for accreditation
- Agreed standard pre-requisite requirements for student to undertake WBL interventions
- Choice for students where lack of access to WBL interventions onsite with industry are available
- Clarity on options for students if they do not pass the WBL interventions.

## **6 Recommendations**

Based on the review of the strengths and challenges of WBL policies and practices the following recommendations are proposed. By addressing these areas, Ireland's and Europe's WBL system can be strengthened, making it more accessible, equitable, and relevant for a wider range of students and industries.



Theme	Gap	Recommendation
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Awareness of WBL opportunities</li> <li>➤ Promotion of WBL opportunities or policies supporting WBL</li> <li>➤ Standard terminology for WBL interventions to be understood by all parties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop a communication plan to increase awareness of WBL policies and practices</li> <li>➤ Connect with industry and society partners in designing, developing and delivering such programmes, thus fostering deeper, long-term partnerships with employers to ensure the quality and relevance of WBL programmes and interventions</li> </ul>
Policy & Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Awareness of policies supporting WBL, either national or EU policies</li> <li>➤ Gap in funding models to support WBL</li> <li>➤ Funding to support international WBL interventions outward and inward.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A communication plan to be developed to increase awareness of national and EU WBL policies and how they can be accessed</li> <li>➤ The communication plan to include policy and process for international WBL interventions</li> <li>➤ Identify ways to support industry to provide WBL interventions enabling the development of graduates with skills that will benefit the economy and society</li> <li>➤ HEIs and FETs should leverage their alumni networks to provide mentorship and WBL opportunities. Alumni can play an important role in connecting students with companies and industries.</li> <li>➤ Communication between HEIs/ FETs and industry supported by public bodies can enable development of WBL interventions to support development of skills to meet specific employability challenges and also to support national Equality, diversity &amp; Inclusion (EDI) agendas</li> <li>➤</li> </ul>



## Implementation of WBL Interventions

- Administrative burden or complexity
- Standard templates / boiler plate templates for implementation
- Difficulty for small companies to support based on administrative or financial burden
- Inconsistency in the quality of WBL interventions depending on the size of the company
- Lack of contractual agreements in place between student / industry / university
- Inefficiency due to lack of standardisation within universities in delivery of WBL interventions
- Training for staff in the University supporting WBL interventions (academic and administrative staff) or in companies for mentors / supervisors for the WBL interventions
- Preparation of students pre the WBL intervention
- Awareness and understanding of digital tools that could support WBL.

HEIs and FETs are recommended to agree a strategic approach and where possible and appropriate to have standard templates / processes in place to maximise efficiency. As part of this strategic approach the academic organisation should identify if a central office is required to support WBL interventions such as work placement and manage industry interventions centrally

Develop templates for use by the relevant stakeholders, including identification of responsibilities, roles and communication with a glossary of terms so that common language is understood and clear to all parties involved. These templates should be co-developed with other stakeholders

Involve industry and society partners in the design of the WBL interventions to ensure the interventions support academic requirements, meet academic integrity requirements and standards and are aligned to support the development of skills appropriate to the labour market needs

Co-development of agreements to support WBL interventions to reduce administrative burden

Academic curriculum to be developed to support students to be prepared for the WBL interventions and how to maximise the opportunity and should include all areas of placement from pre-placement to post placement

Training to be developed for academic staff to understand their role as academic supervisors during WBL interventions, ensuring consistency of delivery, understanding of the intervention and expectation for delivery and should include all areas of placement from pre-placement to post placement

Training to be co-developed with industry to understand the role of industry, a common understanding of the expectations for the intervention and the role of the industry mentor / supervisor and should include all areas of placement from pre-placement to post placement

Identification of digital tools to support WBL interventions



Theme	Gap	Recommendation
		<p>Develop a community of practice across the organisation to share practices and identify minimum standards that should be accepted, enabling learning and networking among parties involved to reach a point of excellence</p> <p>Since different sectors have unique needs, HEIs and FETs could develop sector-specific WBL programs, particularly in industries like tech, healthcare, and renewable energy. Tailored programs ensure that WBL aligns with industry trends and needs.</p>
<b>Accreditation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Standards for the WBL intervention to enable ECTS credits to be allocated e.g. standard Learning Outcomes</li> <li>➤ Agreed standard for the assessment for accreditation</li> <li>➤ Agreed standard pre-requisite requirements for student to undertake WBL interventions</li> <li>➤ Choice for students where lack of access to WBL interventions onsite with industry are available</li> <li>➤ Clarity on options for students if they do not pass the WBL interventions.</li> </ul>	<p>In the HE sector HEIs to ensure they work with their Academic Affairs or equivalent function to ensure accreditation of the WBL interventions is clear and consistent, meeting national standards and aligned to international standards appropriately to ensure that it is aligned for national and international implementation; for the VET sector the FETs or equivalent should work with the awarding body to ensure national standards and international standards are maintained.</p> <p>Minimum standards should be developed in the HEI or FET for WBL delivery, including credit allocation, student eligibility criteria, and industry requirements for WBL providers.</p> <p>Develop a strong pre-placement module to support the preparation of students towards work placement</p> <p>Where possible, develop flexible WBL options, particularly for part-time and mature students, enabling equality of access</p> <p>Learning outcomes for WBL interventions should enable the development of skills for graduates to contribute both to the economy and society.</p> <p>A clear, innovative, consistent assessment strategy should be developed for WBL interventions, with clarity on options instead of the intervention and also on repeats</p>

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# Appendix 1

<b>Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):</b>	<b>Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) Level 8 (3 month long placement)</b>
<b>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</b>	Technological University Dublin-Aungier Street Campus
<b>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))</b>	University level
<b>Year of starting (month/year)</b>	September (with the start of each academic term)
<b>Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).</b>	Yes
<b>Key objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To equip students with essential employability skills before placement.</li> <li>• To ensure students receive support and guidance throughout their placements.</li> <li>• To strengthen academic-industry relationships and reinforce student learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Brief description of best practice</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>Key actors involved</b>	TU Dublin Faculty of Business Lecturers, Careers Office, Students, Industry partners



<b>Target group(s)</b>	Students from Level 8
<b>Sources (<i>website, links, documents</i>)</b>	<a href="https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/business-studies-tu931/">https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/business-studies-tu931/</a>
<b>What methodology was used in the application of this BP?</b>	Experiential learning, reflective practice, and structured industry engagement
<b>Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (<i>institutional, economic, social, and environmental</i>)</b>	Strong academic-industry partnerships, university support structures, access to digital tools
<b>Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?</b>	Challenge: Limited availability of WBL in all sectors Solution: Diversified partner base and flexible placement models
<b>What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?</b>	Enhanced student employability, stronger employer engagement, and improved alignment between academic learning and industry needs



## Appendix 2

<b>Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):</b>	<b>International Business Level 8 – One-Semester Industry Placement (30 ECTS)</b>
<b>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</b>	Technological University Dublin-Tallaght Campus
<b>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))</b>	University level
<b>Year of starting (month/year)</b>	September (with the start of each academic term)
<b>Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).</b>	Yes
<b>Key objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide practical exposure in international business settings</li> <li>• To integrate academic learning with real-world business experience</li> <li>• To prepare students for global employability</li> </ul>
<b>Brief description of best practice</b>	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.
<b>Key actors involved</b>	TU Dublin Faculty, Placement Officers, Students, Industry Partners
<b>Target group(s)</b>	Students from Level 8



Sources ( <i>website, links, documents</i> )	<a href="https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/international-business-tu916/">https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/international-business-tu916/</a>
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 ( <i>institutional, economic, social, and environmental</i> )	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





# Appendix 3

<b>Title of the best practice (if there is no specific title write a short description):</b>	<b>Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Digital Marketing TU920-Semester-Long Work Placement (30 ECTS)</b>
<b>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</b>	Technological University Dublin Blanchardstown Campus
<b>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))</b>	University level
<b>Year of starting (month/year)</b>	September (with the start of each academic term)
<b>Is it still ongoing? (In case the practice is still ongoing, please put "Yes". If completed, please indicate the last year of implementation).</b>	Yes
<b>Key objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop industry-relevant digital marketing competencies</li> <li>• To ensure students apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments</li> <li>• To foster meaningful professional networks within the digital sector</li> </ul>
<b>Brief description of best practice</b>	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.
<b>Key actors involved</b>	Faculty of Digital Marketing, Careers and Employability Office, Employers, Students
<b>Target group(s)</b>	Level 8 Digital Marketing students





<b>Sources (website, links, documents)</b>	<a href="https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/digital-marketing-tu920/">https://www.tudublin.ie/study/undergraduate/courses/digital-marketing-tu920/</a>
<b>What methodology was used in the application of this BP?</b>	Project-based learning, reflective writing, mentor feedback
<b>Elements that facilitated the implementation of the best practice (institutional, economic, social, and environmental)</b>	Strong employer links in the digital sector, academic flexibility, use of tech tools
<b>Main challenges encountered in delivering this best practice, and how were they overcome?</b>	Challenge: Matching students with roles that align with course outcomes Solution: Enhanced employer vetting and digital skills profiling for students
<b>What was the overall impact of implementing this practice?</b>	Improved student confidence, readiness for the digital economy, and employability outcomes





# wblchampion

