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WBL Champion concludes: two-year Erasmus+ project delivers a shared European framework for Work-Based Learning in higher education

The WBL Champion project (Work Based Learning Champion), a two-year Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership in Higher Education, formally concluded on 31 August 2026. Bringing together two higher education institutions and two SMEs across four EU member states: **VITECO** (Italy, coordinator), **Knights College** (Malta), **Technological University Dublin** (Ireland) and **INOVA+** (Portugal), the project set out to make Work-Based Learning (WBL) a mainstream, quality-assured feature of higher education, addressing a long-standing gap between graduate preparation and labour market needs.

Work-Based Learning has long been standard practice in vocational education and training, but higher education has been slower to adopt it, a gap the consortium argued has contributed to a persistent skills mismatch between graduates and employers. Over its two years, WBL Champion set out to close that gap: strengthening higher education staff's digital competencies, providing free and practical tools for educators, students and industry mentors, and embedding real workplace experience into academic curricula.

Six finalised outputs

Over its two years, the project delivered its full set of committed outputs:

- **The Final Country Report on National and EU WBL Policies**: a comparative regulatory analysis across Malta, Italy, Portugal and Ireland, combining desk research with a survey and expert interviews that reached over 750 stakeholders and collected 125 questionnaire responses, against a target of 100.
- **The Quality Assurance (QA) Toolkit**: an assessment framework and best-practice guidelines enabling higher education institutions and employers to implement and assess WBL programmes to a consistent standard.
- **Three CPD courses**: developed and piloted for the people who make WBL work in practice: academic supervisors, industry mentors, and academic coordinators and administrative staff — piloted by 19 professionals in total, against a target of nine.
- **Six redesigned higher education curricula embedding WBL**: three at Knights College (the MBA in Educational Leadership, the MBA in Finance, and the Work-Based Learning MBA, developed in consultation with Malta's Further and Higher Education Authority, MFHEA) and three at Technological University Dublin (the Bachelor of Business Studies (Hons), the Bachelor of Business in International Business (Hons), and the BA in Sports Management and Coaching (Hons). The redesign involved 75 academics and over 40 companies, and was validated by 169 students, over 95% of whom considered the changes beneficial for their future careers.
- **The free, multilingual WBL Champion Online Learning Platform** (platform.wbl-champion.eu): hosting the CPD courses and QA Toolkit, and serving as the project's public website throughout its lifetime.
- **Pilot testing of four redesigned micro-credentials** with 111 students across Malta and Ireland: well above the original target of 30 — with structured feedback used to refine the resources before final release.

A closing summit with European reach

The project's culminating public event, the WBL Champion Education Summit, "From Insights to Impact: Pioneering Work-Based Learning and Digital Transformation", was held on 28 May 2026 at The Brewhouse, Central Business District, Malta, hosted by Knights College. Its keynote address came from Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, alongside Malta's Minister for European Funds, Hon. Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi, the CEO of MFHEA, James Perry, and a range of academic, industry and policy speakers. The summit drew over 80 in-person attendees, with industry representatives making up more than 60% of participants, and was covered by two features in the Times of Malta.

Throughout the two years, the consortium met in person three times: the kick-off meeting in Catania, Italy, followed by meetings in Portugal and Malta, supplemented by monthly online coordination calls to keep the partnership's environmental footprint low while maintaining close collaboration.

Carrying the results to the people who can use them

Between July and August 2026, all four partners ran coordinated national dissemination campaigns across Malta, Italy, Portugal and Ireland, each adapting a shared methodology and messaging framework to reach SMEs, employer representatives, workplace mentors, HR and training coordinators, higher education institutions and professional networks. Across the project's central social media channels, the campaign drew over 81,000 Instagram views (12,900 reach), more than 507,000 Facebook views and over 21,700 LinkedIn impressions in the final reporting period. These coordinated efforts helped raise awareness of WBL Champion's resources and encouraged their wider use among the stakeholders best placed to apply them in educational and workplace settings.

Voices from the consortium

> *"It has been a great pleasure to coordinate the WBL Champion project and to work alongside such a professional, committed and collaborative partnership. Together, we have made a strong and tangible contribution to advancing Work-Based Learning, especially in Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Malta, while creating approaches, tools and resources that can be transferred and adapted across Europe. I am especially proud that our work contributes to raising the quality, visibility and recognition of Work-Based Learning across European higher education, strengthening the connection between education and employment and helping to shape a more relevant, responsive and future-ready learning environment for students across Europe."*
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> **Nadja Dokter, Senior EU Project Manager, VITECO (project coordinator)**

> *"Work Based Learning has been in the Knights College DNA since day one. Being the first private education provider in Malta to build workplace learning into the curriculum with our regulator, and piloting the micro-credentials and CPD courses under WBL Champion has confirmed what we've always believed: education works best when built with industry, not alongside it. As we expand globally, we're taking that philosophy with us, thinking global while staying local, working closely with government, industry and academic partners, but never losing sight of the students it's all for."*
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> **Morgan Parnis, CEO & Chancellor, Knights College**

> *"Quality was non-negotiable throughout this project. Bringing four institutions across four countries together meant agreeing not just on what good Work-Based Learning looks like, but on how to prove it, through the QA toolkit, the redesigned curricula, and the CPD we delivered to our own tutors and supervisors. That cross-institutional discipline is what let us properly bridge the academic and industry worlds, rather than pay lip service to it. At Knights College, that bridge now runs through how we teach, assess and support every WBL student, and translating this European collaboration into lasting institutional practice is, to me, the real measure of the project's success."*
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> **Kristina Galea Borg, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Knights College**

> *"The WBL Champion project truly embodied the collaborative spirit of European cooperation, bringing together dedicated partners who shared a strong commitment to advancing work-based learning and strengthening the connection between higher education and the labour market. Through the research carried out during the project, we gained a deeper understanding of the different approaches and practices across participating countries, while identifying valuable practices that can be adapted within our own organisations and shared with our clients and collaborators. I am honoured to have contributed, even in a small way, to an initiative that helps build a Europe where higher education is more closely aligned with the evolving needs of the world of work. I have no doubt that the project's outcomes will continue to inspire collaboration and create lasting value for students, educators and employers."*
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> **Márcio Couto, European Projects Manager, INOVA+**

> *"Over the past two years, TU Dublin has been proud to collaborate with partners across Europe through the Erasmus+ WBL Champion project. This initiative has demonstrated the power of European collaboration,*

bringing together higher education institutions, public and private organisations to strengthen work-based learning. The project has created practical resources and tools that will support the future development of work-based learning across Ireland and the EU, while also establishing a lasting network of partners committed to driving innovation, sharing best practice, and creating new opportunities for learners and employers alike."

Assumpta Harvey, Head of School, Technological University Dublin

Not an ending, but a handover

WBL Champion's funded period has closed having delivered its full set of committed outputs, but the four partners are not treating its conclusion as a full stop. Each institution has committed to continuing to embed Work-Based Learning within its own practice beyond the life of the funded project, including in how it engages government bodies, other higher education institutions, and SMEs and industry partners. The relationships built over the project's two years, with MFHEA, Malta's Ministry for European Funds, the National Skills Council, the Malta Digital Innovation Authority, Deloitte, Konnekt, Eurochambres, the Malta Business Bureau, EduAlliance, the University of Malta and Dublin City University, among others, continue beyond the grant.

The consortium also intends to explore further EU funding to scale this work beyond the current four partner countries, and to publish the Final Country Report's findings as a peer-reviewed article in the near future, building on the desk and field research already carried out across all four countries.

All of the project's outputs: the Final Country Report, the QA Toolkit and the three CPD courses, remain freely available at platform.wbl-champion.eu.

About WBL Champion

WBL Champion (Work Based Learning Champion) was a two-year Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership (KA220-HED, project number 2024-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000245540) bringing together VITECO SRL (Italy, coordinator), INOVA+ – Innovation Services SA (Portugal), Knights College, operating as Central Mediterranean Business School Ltd (Malta), and Technological University Dublin (Ireland), with Malta's National Skills Council as associated partner. The project championed Work-Based Learning as a route to closing the skills gap between higher education and the labour market, producing a shared policy framework, a Quality Assurance Toolkit, three CPD courses, six redesigned higher education curricula and a free online platform for WBL practitioners across the EU. All resources are available on the WBL Champion website -https://wbl-champion.eu/ and Online Learning Platform - https://platform.wbl-champion.eu/ .

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Media contacts

Nadja Dokter, Senior EU Project Manager, VITECO (coordinator) — epo_34@jogroup.eu

Michele Agius, Manager, International Partnerships & EU Funding, Knights College — michele@knights.edu.mt

Assumpta Harvey, Head of School, Technological University Dublin — Assumpta.Harvey@tudublin.ie

Márcio Couto, European Projects Manager, INOVA+ — marcio.couto@inova.business

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