MAY, 2023

e W B L
WORK BASED LEARNING

NEWSLETTER #1

PREPARED BY THE eWBL-PROJECT

Co-funded by
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01 | ABOUT THE PROJECT

The importance of Work-based learning (WBL) in developing work-ready graduates has been documented by several EU-funded projects such as HAPHE (2016), WBLIC (2016), and WEXHE (2020). WBL is a powerful pedagogy to foster graduate work readiness because it is embedded in authentic work environments. As work is increasingly delivered remotely, a new and digital form of WBL has emerged recently – this is what this project calls "eWBL".

The project's main aim is to upskill educators in HE (lecturers, trainers and administrative staff) on designing and delivering high-quality eWBL to boost the work readiness and employability of graduates. To reach this goal, the project will explore how 25 WBL providers across Europe have dealt with the pedagogical and technological challenges associated with the transition from WBL to eWBL and the solutions they have developed. The investigation will result in frameworks and replicable models, a toolkit, open educational resources (OERs), capacity-building activities, and multiplier events that will help train those involved in WBL provision in HE.

eWBL
WORK BASED LEARNING

01 | ABOUT THE PROJECT

OUR WORK PACKAGES

WP1: Needs and challenges

WBL is well recognised for its capacity to foster work-readiness in students, mainly through the first-hand observation of workplace norms, routines, and language, mentorship and relationship building, and the development of transversal skills such as communication and collaboration. However, if WBL is to be delivered online, educators and organisations must envisage ways to foster those competencies through digital means. This is a crucial yet highly unexplored topic.

WP1 aims to explore the challenges met and the alternatives found by WBL providers across Europe in their shift from WBL to eWBL. This will be achieved through interviews with stakeholders of WBL providers across Europe and different disciplines.

WP2: Frameworks and models

Currently, there is little understanding and guidance on conducting high-quality eWBL from a pedagogical and technological perspective. eWBL requires new methodologies (or adapting existing ones to the new concepts), which neither companies, students, nor teachers use. What is missing is a more robust eWBL pedagogy that is: (i) concerned with fostering transversal competencies (ii) multidisciplinary and considers different national contexts, and (iii) goes beyond technology adaptation (virtualisation) and aligns technology and pedagogy. Therefore, WP2 aims to close this gap through new frameworks and models.

Based on the challenges and alternatives identified in WP1, WP2 will produce general frameworks and replicable models for providing high-quality eWBL that are useful to a broader audience. The frameworks will encompass different dimensions: a) the main programme features; b) the technology necessary; c) organisational and administrative aspects; d) critical success factors, and e) recurrent challenges.

WP3: Toolkit and OERs

Upskilling WBL teachers and trainers requires translating the outputs from the previous WPs into a trainer's Toolkit and OERs. These step-by-step guides shall facilitate producing high-quality eWBL interventions in higher education.

The project aims to inform and train the target audience on developing high-quality eWBL. Therefore, it is not sufficient to envisage frameworks and models. Trainers often need more concrete instructions, tools, and examples to design better learning interventions. As the Erasmus+ E-lead Speed project has shown, a toolkit is an invaluable tool to facilitate this process because it compiles, in one user-friendly material, a vast amount of information educators and trainers will need to design their eWBL courses. The Toolkit will also be complemented by a series of OERs, introducing the different chapters of the Toolkit.

WP4: Capacity-building

Based on the previous project outputs, WP4 aims to train the project's target audience (HE lecturers, trainers, and administrative staff) on providing high-quality eWBL. This shall be done in two steps: first, we will deliver a train-the-trainer workshop to prepare master trainers - one from each partner country, 5 in total. Then each master trainer will deliver a capacity-building course in their own country. The course aims first to provide educators with the necessary methodological knowledge and skills to design high-quality eWBL. Second, to put the strategies presented in the Toolkit into practice during the course and collect feedback.

02 | PROJECT TEAM

FH MÜNSTER UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES (FH MÜNSTER)

FH Münster is the coordinating institution of the eWBL project. In this capacity, FH Münster oversees project management and quality assurance activities. In addition, FH Münster leads project result 3 (PR3) and actively participates in the remaining project results.

FONDAZIONE GIACOMO BRODOLINI S.R.L. SB (FGB)

FGB is responsible for leading the project result 1 (PR1), which aims to explore the challenges faced and alternatives found by work-based learning (WBL) providers across Europe in their shift from WBL to eWBL. In addition, FGB provides support in remaining work packages.

UNIVERSITA CA' FOSCARI VENEZIA (UNIVE)

UNIVE is co-leading project result 1 (PR1) together with FGB. In addition, UNIVE actively participates in the remaining project results.

RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN (RUG)

RUG is the leader of project result 2 (PR2), which will produce general frameworks and replicable models on how to provide high-quality eWBL that are useful to a broader audience. Furthermore, RUG actively participates in the remaining project results.

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI (UL)

UL is the co-leader of project result 2 (PR2) together with RUG. In addition, UL actively participates in the remaining project results.

MOMENTUM MARKETING SERVICES LIMITED (MOMENTUM)

MOMENTUM leads project result 4 (PR4), which aims to train the project's target audience (HE lecturers, trainers, and administrative staff) on how to design and deliver high-quality eWBL. Furthermore, MOMENTUM actively participates in the remaining project results.

03 | PROJECT NEWS

KICK-OFF MEETING

28 JANUARY 2022

The eWBL project kick-off took place on 28 January 2022. The kick-off meeting was organised by the Science to Business Marketing Research Centre (S2BMRC) of FH Münster University of Applied Sciences as the project lead partner. Delegates from all partner institutions also attended: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (the Netherlands); Momentum Business Consulting & Marketing Services Limited (Ireland); Univerze v Ljubljani (Slovenia); Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (Italy); and Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini S.r.l. SB (Italy). The FH Münster and the S2BMRC were represented by Jun.Prof.Dr. Sue Rossano-Rivero, Acting Director at the S2BMRC and Habtamu Garomssa, project coordinator and Luise Henßler, project assistant. The meeting was organised in three parts: Part 1 focused on the presentation of the partner's profile and their project team members. In the second part, the detailed presentation of the main work packages (needs analysis, framework development, toolkits & OERs, and capacity building) was presented and discussed by all partners. Finally, the last part of the meeting covered the topics of project management, quality assurance and dissemination. The meeting was highly efficient and productive as it allowed partners to present their respective work packages and the next steps in the project.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The eWBL project builds on a combination of primary and secondary data in order to achieve its objectives. As such, research activities are integrated to a varying degree in all four main project results of the project. The most comprehensive research activity is undertaken as part of project result 1: eWBL needs and challenges. Under project result 1, multiple case studies are developed from each of the five partner countries involved in the eWBL project. The cases were derived from interviews that were conducted with the three key stakeholders of eWBL (HEIs, companies and students). In total, 27 case studies were produced, which were then converted into five national reports and one synthesis report. The case studies summarised the experiences of HEIs, companies and students, as well as the solutions they developed in their transition from in-person to hybrid or fully online work-based learning.

In addition to project result 1, eWBL project also draws on the literature to find existing models and frameworks in producing project result 2 and practical tools and guidelines for producing project results 3 and 4.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT AT THE DAAD HEADQUARTERS IN BONN

12-13 OCTOBER 2022 I BONN

The progress of the ERASMUS+ cooperation partnership project eWBL was successfully presented at the thematic monitoring of all ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnerships and Cooperation Partnerships projects organised by the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst). The thematic meeting took place from 12-13 of Oct 2022 in Bonn, Germany, at the Wissenschaftszentrum.

The event combined expert presentations on data protection with thematic monitoring. Moreover, all project coordinators presented their projects' progress via poster presentation sessions and received feedback. The eWBL project was received positively by the event participants.

The eWBL project focuses on how students' transversal skills, such as collaborative problem-solving and interpersonal communication, can be fostered in a digital environment. To this end, the project partners took the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced educators to offer work-based learning in an online environment, as an opportunity and conducted 79 interviews with key stakeholders (students, educators, and supervisors). Those 79 interviews were then converted into five national reports representing the project partners' countries (i.e., Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, and Slovenia).

03 | PROJECT NEWS

SECOND TRANSNATIONAL MEETING
29-30 NOVEMBER 2022 | GRONINGEN

The second transnational partner meeting of eWBL (Work Based Learning) project was hosted by the University of Groningen from 29-30 November. After more than ten months of working online, the project partners had the chance to meet in person for the first time in the beautiful city of Groningen.

The meeting brought representatives from FH Münster University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini S.r.l. SB (FGB) (Italy), Ca'Foscari University of Venice (Italy), and Momentum (Ireland).

The meeting represented a milestone for the project as it marked the successful completion of the first work package which included an extensive interview of over 79 work-based learning stakeholders (i.e., university admin officers & educators, company supervisors & mentors, and students) who participated in an online or hybrid work-based learning activity.

The interviews that were translated into the five national reports representing the partner countries and one overall synthesis report summarised all the major findings.

The partners discussed the major insights from the large-scale study as well as how best to disseminate the five national reports and the final synthesis report across the EU. Furthermore, during this meeting, the remaining three work packages i.e., eWBL framework development, eWBL toolkit & OERs development and capacity building program design, were discussed.

THE GERMAN NATIONAL REPORT ON eWBL PROJECT IS PUBLISHED

07 FEBRUARY 2023

The report summarises the findings of 6 case studies that were undertaken in Germany as part of our Erasmus+ project eWBL. The German study aimed to explore how work-based learning can be offered effectively in the absence of a conventional physical work environment. To this end, the study focuses on the experiences of companies and higher education institutions (HEIs) that were offering online or hybrid work-based learning opportunities to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each individual case involved the perspective of three key stakeholders within the context of work-based learning: students, companies and HEIs. This national report particularly reflects on the experience of German institutions. The German educational system is characterised by a strong focus on using the workplace as an environment for learning. Work-based learning experiences are offered in various formats, including a vocational education training system, internships, dual study programs, and traineeships. The result of the German report shows that the impact of eWBL on the learning outcome of students has been mixed. On the one hand, improved presentation skills increased productivity and time management skills, and increased practical knowledge were reported. On the other hand, teamwork was found to be more demanding for leaders and supervisors online. With respect to the future directions of eWBL, both companies and students stated they are aware of the special advantages of online work-based learning, such as flexibility and autonomy in deciding time & place and improved digital competencies.

Read full German national report
Read case study reports from Germany

03 | PROJECT NEWS

THE eWBL (WORK-BASED LEARNING) CO-CREATION SESSION WAS HOSTED IN LJUBLJANA

14 FEBRUARY 2023

Researchers from the University of Groningen and the University of Ljubljana met on 27 January for a co-creation session to discuss the draft guideline for HE trainers and the industry for implementing high-quality eWBL. The meeting was hosted by the University of Ljubljana. The results of the discussion indicated that while there are some disadvantages and challenges of implementing WBL remotely, there are also several solutions available that could offset some of the challenges. The work package leaders stated that "with the support of the framework that they are developing, they aim to highlight not only the advantages of eWBL (flexibility, lower costs, digital competencies) but also the ways in which the disadvantages can be minimised". The framework divides eWBL into five stages: design, preparation, onboarding, delivery, and assessment. Each stage is filled out with several theoretical and practical recommendations from literature and data collected in work package 1. The framework will be available for download on the project website once it is finalised. As remote work is becoming more popular, there is an increasing need for a robust pedagogical and technological model for "eWBL" that meets all the criteria for qualitative implementation and the delivery of the eWBL. It is within this context that the eWBL framework is being developed.

THE IRISH NATIONAL REPORT ON eWBL PROJECT IS PUBLISHED

21 FEBRUARY 2023

This report summarises the findings of five case studies that were undertaken in Ireland in 2022 as part of our Erasmus+ project eWBL. The study focuses on the experiences of companies and higher education institutions (HEIs) that offered online or hybrid work-based learning opportunities to students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland. The Irish educational system is characterised by a strong focus on using the workplace as an environment for learning.

Work-based learning experiences are offered in a traditional format, offering students the opportunity to work in a company for a fixed time. Usually, students work for 3 to 6 months in a company or organisation, although the duration can vary. In Ireland, it usually takes place in the third year of undergraduate studies for a variable number of weeks, but usually not less than 12 weeks. Before the onset of Covid-19, the Irish HEIs implemented WBL as an educational tool that provides students with skills and attitudes they cannot learn in the classroom.

Before the pandemic, only two of the five eWBL organisations interviewed in Ireland had offered WBL to students. For two of the other organisations that were already operating remotely, it was the first time that they had engaged in eWBL with a student. In the five Irish case studies, the eWBL was implemented to a high-quality allowing the students to develop their skills and understand the world of work.

[Read full Irish national report](#)
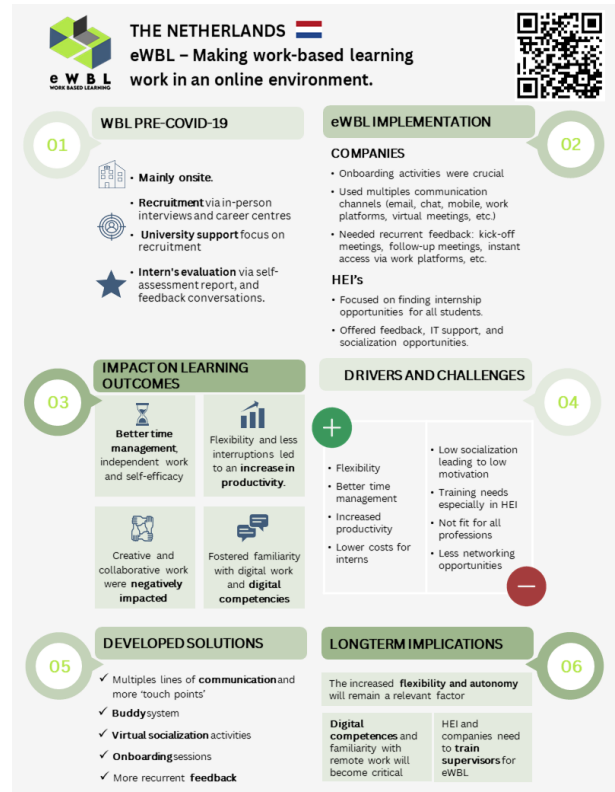[Read case study reports from Ireland](#)

THE DUTCH NATIONAL REPORT ON eWBL IS PUBLISHED

02 MARCH 2023

This National Report offers an overview of the five Dutch cases regarding eWBL implementation. The implementation occured largely without a strategic plan from companies or HEIs. This is because it was developed as a response to the unexpected occurence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But despite the initial chaos, eWBL implementation followed a similar standard in all Dutch cases. Results from the case studies show that the main driver for eWBL is flexibility. This encompasses both the geographical (work in different cities or countries) and time management (adapting work schedules to one's preferences) factors. Another driver is productivity. Eliminating the commuting time and the distractions typical of office life increased work outputs significantly. However, working from home also creates barriers. The most relevant is the lack of socialisation. Interns feel less motivated to work, the routine becomes too repetitive, opportunities for network and teamwork are reduced, and they often miss the company culture. Aware of the challenges of online work, companies and HEIs designed several alternatives to circumvent these issues. As for the long-term implications, all indicate that we are moving towards a hybrid form of WBL. The productivity and flexibility gains of remote work are too relevant to be overlooked. Likewise, there is a well-recognised issue of socialisation that, at the present moment, cannot be circumvented with tools such as virtual coffee breaks. Therefore, some in-office time is indispensable. What remains open is the exact balance between online and face-to-face time.

Read full Dutch national report
Read case study reports from the Netherlands

THE ITALIAN NATIONAL REPORT ON eWBL PROJECT IS PUBLISHED

17 MARCH 2023

The report studies the shift from work-based learning (WBL) to online mode (eWBL) that arose in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the Erasmus + project eWBL.

In the case of Italy, researchers assessed 06 case studies comprising different areas of expertise and 03 institutions in internships developed between October 2020 and February 2022. Although the Italian higher education system gained full autonomy after the Bologna Process implementation in 1999, the Ministry of Education has a prominent role in guaranteeing the efficiency of this system, encouraging HEIs to strengthen their connections with the labour market and its needs and improving students' employability.

Regardless of these initiatives, there is still substantial heterogeneity in the Italian HE system today, both in the institutions' size and geographic location, which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic surge, when each region established its own set of rules and regulations to carry the training out remotely, mirroring the enormous disparity already present in Italy and consequently impacting eWBL practices in the country. Within the context of the need for companies to adapt quickly to the conditions that arose, the case studies addressed both the difficulties encountered in the process, the solutions found, and the impact of this change on developing trainees' skills.

Read full Italian national report
Read case study reports from Italy

THE SLOVENIAN NATIONAL REPORT ON eWBL PROJECT IS PUBLISHED

15 MAY 2023

The report summarises the results of five case studies conducted in Slovenia (University of Ljubljana) as part of our Erasmus+ project eWBL. The aim of the study was to investigate how the University of Ljubljana deals with the pedagogical and technological challenges associated with the transition from workplace-based learning (WBL) to the online environment (eWBL) and what solutions it has developed. In each case, the perspective of three key stakeholders in the context of WBL was included: students, employers, and university.

In these study cases, some significant differences were found, mainly in terms of WBL management, quality assurance and assessment/evaluation process, and learning outcomes compared to the on-site WBL. Some of these differences were seen as drivers, but also as barriers.

In particular, the challenges lie in communication and adapting to new learning processes using online technological tools. In some situations where only eWBL was conducted, students did not gain comparable experience to WBL conducted face-to-face. From the students' perspective, fewer soft skills and less communication were noted. On the other hand, many students also see technological aspects as the main driving force - new online tools or upgrades to the tools they were previously using, and students were able to quickly adapt.

Going forward, HE needs to take a more active role in providing adequate equipment and space for students. The focus should be on further developing the quality of online tools, taking into account the psychological and socialisation effect.

Read full Slovenian national report
Read case study reports from Slovenia

04 | UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

THE eWBL SYNTHESIS REPORT
Expected date: 24 May 2023

THE eWBL FRAMEWORK
Expected date: 7 June 2023

THE eWBL TOOLKIT AND OERS
Expected date: October 2023

THE THIRD TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT MEETING
Host: MOMENTUM

Location: Ireland

Expected date: between November 2023 and December 2023

THE eWBL TRAIN THE TRAINER'S WORKSHOP
Expected date: between November 2023 and December 2023

THE eWBL CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM
Expected date: between February 2023 and July 2024

THE FOURTH TRANSNATIONAL PROJECT MEETING
Host: FGB/UNIVE

Location: Italy

Expected date: September 2024

THE eWBL NATIONAL EVENT
Expected date: between October 2024 to November 2024

https://www.ewbl-project.com/

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