



eWBL – Making work-based learning work in an online environment

Case Studies – Ireland (WP1)

27/01/2023

Exploring the challenges met and the alternatives found by WBL providers across Europe in their shift from WBL to eWBL.

Prepared by: Momentum – Educate & Innovate, Ireland.



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CASE STUDY REPORT 2

Name of the case	Case Study 2 - Ireland
Organisation(s)	Irish HEI 1 and large retailer
Country(-ies)	Ireland
Disciplinary sector	Marketing
Contacts	Lecturer & Industry Placement Manager, Resourcing Partner at a retail organisation and a student.
Case written by	Momentum
Executive summary (summarise the case in 200 words)	
<p>This case describes the online work placement offered to a Bachelor of Marketing student at an Irish HEI. The placement was delivered at a large food retail, wholesale, and food service company. This case demonstrates the pedagogical tools and technological innovations that were used by the company, the HEI, and the student participant such as mentoring, pop-in sessions, and the WorkSmart Initiative. The case also examines the drivers and barriers of eWBL, the learning outcomes of eWBL, and the recommendations given by case participants for the future of eWBL.</p>	

Section	Answer
1) Organisation's background	<p>HEI 1 is a multi-campus technological university. It consists of six campuses, with 18,000 students and over 2,000 staff members. It offers over 140 courses and programmes in various disciplines such as business, accounting, bioscience, and engineering. Students in their third year can participate in a 15-week-long work placement as part of their studies.</p> <p>One of Ireland's leading food retailers, wholesale, and foodservice company's participated. They support thousands of retail and foodservice family businesses.</p>
2) Design, delivery, and management.	<p>Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a sudden move to remote working, and this occurred while the HEI students were already on placement. Due to these some HEI students' placements were disrupted and ended suddenly due to the partner organisations being unable to support the sudden change. The HEI had to come up with a contingency plan instead of the weeks that the students missed of their placements ending where the HEI gave the students work to do in conjunction with the employers.</p> <p>However, in this case, the student was remote working throughout the placement. The HEI staff posted on the student's information platform to keep the students up to date while assessing the situation regarding the move to remote working. The HEI has a 'Learning Community' for their placement managers which came together in finding solutions for remote working for their students during this time. While at a wider level higher management came up with various strategies for remote working for students across different departments. The HEI put in the effort and time to work with the companies and organisations involved so that students would be able to continue their work placements.</p> <p>In preparing their students for remote working the HEI provided online classes on remote working on topics such as taking regular breaks and teaching the students how to set up their desks correctly. HEI staff made themselves available 24/7 via phone and email to the students to assist them with remote working as well as posting regularly on the learning platform regarding remote work placements. HEI staff also host a weekly 'Pop-in' session where students can join and ask questions during their work placement. The HEI introduced 'Jam Board' to students where they could post an anonymous question regarding their work placement if they did not wish to ask it during the 'Pop-in' sessions.</p> <p>The HEI found that smaller partner companies needed more support from them on remote work placements than larger companies. Also, some students were in what were considered to be essential places of work during the</p>



	<p>Covid-19 pandemic and the HEI gave them the option to not partake in that particular work placement if they did not feel safe or comfortable. The company implemented an induction plan for the students on work placement, so they had some basics in working remotely. The company HR liaised with the hiring managers to ensure that the interns are organised before they start by equipping the students with hardware and software that they would need such as a laptop, desk, and chair. The interns have a virtual meeting ensuring that everything is set up correctly for them and are taught how to navigate the employee's homepage 'Connect.' They also meet the team they will be working with and some stakeholders in an informal, gentle introduction. The company has an eLearning academy available to all their employees and interns, which was available before Covid-19, where employees can learn how to use software like Excel and develop their soft skills.</p> <p>Due to Covid-19 and the move to remote working the company introduced 'MusFlex; where a team sits down with key stakeholders and interviews them regarding company organisations and then provides updates to all staff within the company. It also altered its 'BeWell WorkWell' programme to suit remote needs by providing its newsletter online and by hosting online yoga sessions and webinars.</p> <p>As Covid-19 restrictions lifted the company implemented a WorkSmart Initiative where staff only came into the office with a purpose such as collaborative work and brainstorming sessions. This initiative also led to the avoidance of back-to-back meetings for staff and ensured that there was a 5–10-minute break between meetings and no meetings on Friday afternoons unless they were business critical. The company implemented hotdesking where an employee must book a desk in advance when coming to work.</p> <p>The student participant prepared for their remote work placement by attending virtual classes with the HEI on remote working and attending the induction with the company. The student partook in introductory courses with the company eLearning Academy and an IGD Learner Starter Skills course online. During their placement in the Marketing department, they were provided with a mentor where tasks were distributed through a weekly shared worklist that is split between the mentor and the student. The student's tasks were then checked by the mentor before approval. The student was also introduced to new software such as 'Circular' which helps build email templates for marketing.</p> <p>The student was able to socialise with others within the company through MS Teams. There were biweekly coffee meetings, a weekly team meeting on Fridays, and core check-ins twice a week. The student was provided with a mentor with whom they were in daily contact and had a weekly meeting catch-up.</p> <p>The student was assessed by the HEI through a weekly learning journal and by completing an action plan Excel sheet where students would grade their skills and the mentor would also grade them. At the end of the placement, the student gave a virtual PowerPoint presentation. From the company's perspective, the student is given a 3-month progress form as part of their internal assessment.</p>
<p>3) Difference and similarities</p>	<p>The HEI prepares students in advance for their work placements with the difference being additional learning in terms of remote working. In the Marketing department, there were similarities in the work due to a lot of marketing being conducted virtually.</p> <p>The HEI found a difference in their ability to contact the student online about their work placement instead of travelling to the work placement itself. It was difficult to assess how the student was managing their placement remotely as there is a better sense of what is happening when you meet the students in person. The HEI also found it difficult to assess the quality of the</p>

	<p>student's work initially but after proper structures and communications had been put in place between all stakeholders the quality is the same.</p> <p>The HEI also found it easier for struggling students to contact their lecturer via email and the accessibility has increased and benefitted students.</p> <p>The HEI assessment of their students on work placement has slightly changed with remote working with the final presentation being done online instead of in person.</p> <p>The company found that with remote working they are unable to see how the student is getting on unlike in the office. Also, due to remote working the student is not able to pick up on information through osmosis in the office. With remote working, they found they had to be constantly checking in with the interns and an extra step had to be taken to ensure that the interns are okay. The company found that the students adapted well to the technology that was being used by the company, sometimes better than some managers already within the company.</p>
<p>4) Learning outcomes</p>	<p>After partaking in remote work placements the HEI is noticing that students are more nervous about interacting and entering the physical workplace and that there is limited development of soft skills among the students. However, the student's development of practical experience is subject to the company they complete their work placement with. Also, if the company has successfully implemented remote working, then the student can gain better practical experience. It has also been found that networking is nerve-racking for students due to them not being able to attend in-person networking events. Students are encouraged to interact with more senior staff within companies to get direct contact with skilled professionals. The HEI is finding that remote work placement is integrating with the study programme as the student is gaining the necessary experience for their course, but they are missing the development of their soft skills with the HEI favouring a more hybrid approach for the development of soft skills and the mental health of students.</p> <p>Regarding the students gaining aspects of company culture, the HEI found that it was dependent on the company with multinational companies having the ability and resources to include the student more and place a larger emphasis on the ethos of the company while smaller companies struggle to convey the company culture.</p> <p>To aid the students learning, the company gives the students projects while on the work placement with autonomy and supports available to them. The student on work placement can gain practical experience through the projects that they work on but there was no opportunity for them to work in an office within an office environment due to lockdown restrictions. The company can expose the student to professional online meetings and negotiations with suppliers as well as show them how company departments interact with one another and other partners. The company strives to introduce their culture to interns through the support they convey, the one-on-one coffee calls, and the family culture it is built upon.</p> <p>The student found that during their remote work experience they developed their soft skills such as communication and teamwork through team calls and presentations that they conducted. They felt as though they gained practical experience through the tasks and projects that they worked on during their work placement. The student was also able to see how their college course linked to their work experience. The student was able to see how more experienced staff operated within the organisation and dealt with queries. The student felt as though they were able to develop a professional network through the retailers and suppliers that they interacted with during the placement. The student also felt as though they were able to acquire the company culture through the interactions they had within the company and</p>

	through the induction they gave at the start of the work placement.
5) Pedagogical innovations	<p>Participants, in this case, mentioned various pedagogical innovations introduced by the HEI and the company. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Pop-in Sessions</i>: This was where once a week the HEI hosted a virtual call where students on placement could join to ask questions about work placement. - <i>Jam Board</i>: This was an online platform where students could post anonymous questions about their work placement that would be answered by the HEI staff. - <i>eLearning Academy</i>: An online platform that provided educational courses for company staff - <i>Mentor</i>: the company provided a mentor to their interns to give advice and feedback. - <i>IGD Start Skills course</i>: An online course that the student took as part of their introduction to the company. - <i>Regular meetings and check-in sessions</i>: The student partook in regular meetings and check-in sessions with the company to assess how they were doing at the company.
6) Technological innovations	During the placement, the student was introduced to various platforms such as the company's homepage, and 'Circular' which assisted the student in drafting email marketing templates. The student was provided with a laptop for their work placement that had software already set up.
7) Drivers and barriers to eWBL	<p>The HEI noted that the main driver for eWBL is that it opens up opportunities for students to do their work placement in a different area than where they are based as they are not restricted by geographic location.</p> <p>The barriers to eWBL that the HEI found were that students' motivation and engagement would taper off, particularly when the placement was unpaid and if there was a lack of support from the company. Another barrier that they found was that there were technical issues with some students' laptops not being compatible with the company's software and that initially, some students struggled to efficiently manage their calendars.</p> <p>The HEI advised that going forward HEIs should have clear guidelines for partner companies, regular check-ins with students, have a placement manager available to students, and implement a buddy system with the students so that they do not feel as though they are alone during the placement.</p> <p>The company found that the student not being able to learn from in-office interactions is a barrier to eWBL as students are unable to gain experience this way, but the company did try to negate this by allowing the interns to join in many meetings.</p> <p>The company advised that in the future organisations should have user-friendly software to ease the student into the work placement and that organisations should provide the student with a supportive background with key points of contact to go to when the student has a problem.</p> <p>The student participant noted that the main drivers for eWBL are the support they receive from the company as well as the ease with which their setup and introduction within the company occurred.</p>



<p>8) Long-term impacts of eWBL</p>	<p>The HEI believes that eWBL opens opportunities for students as the student is not limited geographically. Also, there are fewer costs involved with remote working due to there being no travel costs. However, there is a social impact due to limited socialisation occurring during the work placement. Also, there is a loss for the student in developing their soft skills and professional network. The HEI recommends a hybrid model for work experience so that there is more opportunity for the student to develop their soft skills. The company believes that there will be a move towards a hybrid model of working as it opens up the geographic area and talent that they can hire. The student participant encouraged eWBL as it helped them to develop their skills and taught them about the world of work. The student advised that eWBL should be in an area that the participant is interested in so that they remain motivated and engaged.</p>
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