



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

Case Studies – Ireland (WP1)

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

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CASE STUDY REPORT 1

Name of the case	Case Study 1 - Ireland
Organisation(s)	Irish HEI 1 & a Cybersecurity organisation
Country(-ies)	Ireland
Disciplinary sector	Cybersecurity
Contacts	Industry Placement Manager, Organisation board member, 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 Business student from an Irish HEI. It was delivered at a pro bono organisation for supporting the cybersecurity industry in Ireland. The work placement was delivered entirely online. The case demonstrates the different pedagogical tools and technological innovations that were used by the organisation, the HEI, and the student participant such as daily virtual meetings, mentoring, and the Reach initiative. The case also examines the drivers and barriers of eWBL, the learning implications of eWBL, and the recommendations given by case participants for the future of eWBL.</p>	

Section	Answer
1) Organisation's background	<p>The HEI 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 work placement as part of their studies.</p> <p>The organisation encourages the advancement and capacity of women involved in the Irish cybersecurity sector. It aims to empower women and close the gender gap while also creating a support system. They are made up entirely of volunteers who put their time and effort into supporting women in the cybersecurity sector.</p>
2) Design, delivery, and management.	<p>Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the HEI implemented a rapid response to adapt to e-working. Students adapted to studying remotely for their courses before participating in their work placement. Since then, students have had the opportunity to work in a hybrid model for studies. HEI staff prepared the students going on remote work placement by conducting remote mock interviews, helping students to become more familiar with the technology that they would be using such as MS Teams and providing dedicated coordinators for the remote work placements to assist students. They introduced the 'Reach' initiative to give additional support to students on work placement by providing them with a mentor.</p> <p>To prepare for remote work placements HEI staff on the work placement team came together to examine the potential issues that may affect the students such as insurance and Covid-19 health and safety within the partner organisations. The HEI had to maintain their relationships with their partner organisations by keeping in constant contact with the organisations through virtual means i.e., online meetings and phone calls. It also worked closely with the organisations involved and ensured that they conducted efficient interview processes and that students were applying themselves to their work placements.</p> <p>Within the volunteer organisation, the students on work placement were treated as though they were part of the team and new to the organisation. The organisation used Slack for communication and the students on work placement were introduced to Slack and everyone involved in the organisation through this platform. The work within the organisation was distributed through Slack according to people's strengths. They prepared for the students by informing all those involved with the organisation about the students and by providing the students with a mentor.</p>



	<p>Due to Covid-19, the eWBL remained remote throughout the entire placement and there were no face-to-face interactions due to those involved with the organisation being spread across the country. However, the students were able to interact with professionals virtually and build on their professional networks.</p>
<p>3) Difference and similarities</p>	<p>The HEI noted differences and similarities between online and face-to-face WBL. Before the pandemic, students went on-site for interviews which were disruptive to lectures and learning whereas now they can attend interviews remotely which is less disruptive. The HEI provides clinics and guest speakers to prepare students for work placement which can now be conducted online and have much higher attendance than previous in-person events. It noted that with the onsite quality assurance it is easier to detect when issues are present as it is easier to see face-to-face. Whereas with remote work placements, students can hide behind a screen. The HEI also noted that with remote working there was no face-to-face socialisation and that individuals tended more to have their cameras off and muted during calls.</p> <p>For the HEI there was no huge change in the assessment of students on WBL as the students were still assessed on criteria set by the HEI and this was done remotely instead of face-to-face. The most notable change to their assessment of their students on remote work placement is that instead of providing written reflections throughout the work placement the student conducted a virtual presentation.</p> <p>The placement organisation has always operated remotely and does not have an office. It noted that with remote working they are more productive as there are no office distractions and that they can see what work is being done. With the students, the organisation was able to assess the student's work virtually and give feedback quickly. They were able to provide constant feedback to the students on the work that they were doing. They communicated solely through video calls during the work placement instead of face-to-face. The host organisation provided an evaluation at the end of the student's work placement, and this was done through a virtual meeting.</p> <p>The student participants were tasked with the organisation's first-ever diversity project throughout their work placement. All aspects of their participation were conducted remotely such as the research process, distribution of a national survey, and analysis. The student was able to use their own personal laptop throughout the placement and platforms Slack and Square Space for communication and website creation. The student noted they had no face-to-face contact with others within the organisation, but they kept in constant contact through MS Teams, Zoom, and Slack. This is where the majority of their socialisation and networking occurred. The organisation held a daily meeting to touch base and distribute work. The student also had a mentor within the organisation to provide them with assistance and a placement manager to whom they would present their weekly work to and receive advice and feedback. This placement manager was also in constant contact with the student's placement lecturer.</p> <p>The student's weekly meeting with their placement manager was part of their assessment during their work placement. Their placement lecturer also met with them a month into the work placement to assess how they were doing and to present their final workings.</p>
<p>4) Learning outcomes</p>	<p>The HEI students were able to develop their professional networks while on a remote work placement. The HEI provided them with workshops to improve their LinkedIn accounts. However, they noted that students did need to apply more effort in creating a professional network through eWBL than what they would have done through WBL.</p> <p>The HEI found that students struggled to embrace company culture and that it was lacking due to them not being on-site. Students that were on remote</p>

	<p>work placement could only recite facts and figures about the company but not report on the culture. However, they did gain some aspects of the company culture through meeting with the organisation virtually.</p> <p>The host organisation noted that the students developed skills such as teamwork and interpersonal through the remote work placement and that they used various methods such as brainstorming and collaborative work. They also noted that with remote working a tolerance must be gained due to the possibility of other people being around while working from home or children running around.</p> <p>The organisation consists of cybersecurity professionals operating as volunteers and as such were able to help the students to develop their professional network. In this case, the student has gone on to obtain a summer internship with one of the volunteers. The organisation nominated one of the students for an award which they then won and got to feature her name in a national paper. All of which improve her CV and be more employable in the future.</p> <p>The host organisation did note that as they are a voluntary organisation and those involved were all volunteers and therefore interested and interactive with the organisation that the students on work placement did pick up on that enthusiasm and the company culture.</p> <p>The student participant noted that they gained teamwork and communication skills through their placement and had to learn how to further adapt these skills through working online. They also learned how to produce presentations as they had to give a presentation each week. The student got practical experience through creating a website which they had no prior experience with. The student also gained knowledge of the cyber industry and why there are low levels of women in the STEM industry. They developed their professional network, particularly in the cyber industry and this was through the distribution and sharing of a national survey and research.</p>
<p>5) Pedagogical innovations</p>	<p>Participants mentioned various pedagogical innovations introduced by the organisation and the HEI. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Reach Initiative</i>: Introduced by the HEI to give students additional support during their remote work placement by providing them with a mentor. - <i>Daily meetings</i>: Organisation had daily meetings online to touch base and distribute work. - <i>Mentoring</i>: Organisation provided a mentor to the interns to provide advice and feedback on the work they had completed.
<p>6) Technological innovations</p>	<p>The students were introduced to Slack as a means of communicating within the organisation. The students were also introduced to Squarespace as a platform for website creation for the organisation.</p>
<p>7) Drivers and barriers to eWBL</p>	<p>The HEI recognised that high motivation and support from themselves was a key driver in eWBL for their students. It tried to keep their engagement high with the students on work placement and provide all the necessary supports that they needed. It finds that the work placement is an invaluable opportunity for their students. It was also able to get students that have completed work placements before to talk to students that will be going on work placement to share their experiences positively. The HEI did advise that it is important to have supports in place for students doing eWBL that are there for them every step of the way.</p> <p>The HEI did note that a barrier to eWBL was that in some cases students have to share technology and this would have impacted their engagement with the work placement. Another barrier was that some students would have technological issues due to living in rural parts of the county.</p> <p>The organisation found that students didn't know how to use some</p>

	<p>technology at the start of the work placement such as Slack and that time had to be dedicated to teaching the students how to do various things within the organisation such as academic research before, they could complete their projects. The host partner advised that organisations that were providing eWBL to students should provide a mixture of teamwork and individual work for the student to complete, to identify their strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>The student participant noted various barriers such as initial communication being difficult to navigate, and that miscommunication was possible due to it being based online. The student found it difficult to see how others were progressing in their work and this would lead to them being unmotivated. Another barrier that the student faced was that their introduction to the company and individuals with the company was slow due to it being remote. However, the student participant did note some drivers for eWBL such as them being able to improve their professional network as they had more access to employees that they would not have if they were onsite. They found that they had broader access to tools and platforms within the organisation and that they had extra support from the organisation as they had a person assigned to them throughout the remote process. The student also remarked that because they had no one there to watch them work they needed to work harder to stand out more and they found that this motivated them to work harder.</p>
<p>8) Long-term impacts of eWBL</p>	<p>The HEI believes that the hybrid model is the future of work placements and work. They believe that it is important for the student to go onsite at some point during their placement to fully connect with the organisation and absorb the company culture. Meetings could remain online as well as some pieces of work that are transactional but more participative pieces of work would need to be done in the office.</p> <p>The organisation favours the future of remote working and eWBL as it enables individuals to be hired nationwide/globally. It is beneficial for students as they are not restricted by location or finding housing.</p> <p>The student participant believes that eWBL will be a huge benefit in their future career due to businesses becoming more inclined to remote work since the pandemic. They also believe that their remote experience in the cyber industry has given them a broader knowledge of diversity in the area.</p> <p>Going forward, the student advises that future participants in eWBL should try to make a strong connection with as many of their colleagues as they can because this can lead to future work opportunities and provide high-quality work in the remote work placement to impress the company. The student participant suggests that the organisation and the HEI should make the introduction of the intern as detailed as possible and outline their expectations so that the intern should know what is expected of them and this will motivate them to work harder.</p>