



# 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.

Prepared by: Momentum – Educate & Innovate, Ireland.



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# CASE STUDY REPORT 5

<b>Name of the case</b>	<b>Case Study 5 - Ireland</b>
<b>Organisation(s)</b>	<b>HEI 3 &amp; a Start-Up organisation.</b>
<b>Country(-ies)</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>
<b>Disciplinary sector</b>	<b>Business Management</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	<b>Work Experience &amp; Internships Manager at HEI 3, Start-Up founder and student</b>
<b>Case written by</b>	<b>Momentum</b>
<b>Executive summary (summarise the case in 200 words)</b>	
<p>This case describes the online work placement offered to a Bachelor of Business Management student at HEI 3. It was delivered at a start-up that offers co-working facilities across Northern Ireland. This case demonstrates the pedagogical tools and technological innovations that were used by the start-up, HEI 3 and the student participant such as mentoring, VR collaboration, and course preparation. 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>	

<b>Section</b>	<b>Answer</b>
<b>1) Organisation's background</b>	<p>HEI 3 is a multi-campus university in Northern Ireland. It is the largest University in Northern Ireland with approximately 28,000 students and over 1,600 members of staff. It offers both undergraduate courses and postgraduate courses as well as online courses and eLearning courses. It offers over 200 different programs in various disciplines such as business, engineering, healthcare, and computing. Each year they conduct 2,500 student work placements across their various programs as seen in this case study for the Business Management program.</p> <p>The start-up provides freelancers and professionals with co-working facilities across Northern Ireland. Individuals can rent a desk, office space, meeting room, board room, virtual workspace, or event space across a variety of locations.</p>
<b>2) Design, delivery, and management.</b>	<p>Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, HEI 3 had to address the changes that would be required for their students to still be able to participate in work placements as it is an integral part of their studies. HEI 3 put their students through a placement preparation course with a placement tutor to help prepare their students. HEI 3 also made the students aware of changes in the labour market that were occurring due to the Covid-19 pandemic such as what opportunities were available to the students and what remote working would look like for them. HEI 3 also had to adjust the approval process that they had in place for organisations wishing to participate in a work placement to protect students from Covid-19. HEI 3 put in new guidance for the safety and well-being of students, staff, and participating organisations. HEI 3 informed participating organisations of the parameters in place regarding their practice and what adjustments would need to be made to ensure student safety.</p> <p>HEI 3 staff were able to prepare for the remote work placement and were provided with equipment such as laptops and headphones to make communication easier with students. HEI 3 staff were also gifted a 'goodie bag' at the start of the pandemic which contained a self-care book as well as other HEI 3 memorabilia.</p> <p>With the changes that organisations were making in the way they were working, HEI 3 maintained communication with them around work placements. They offered support to the organisations revolving around the student on placement. HEI 3 found that since restrictions have been lifted the work placements have taken on a hybrid model with only a small percentage of work placements now being completely remote.</p> <p>The Start-Up set out their expectations for their student intern during the interview process that happened before the work placement. Initially, the student was completely remote in the work placement with only a few face-to-face meetings occurring. The main duty of the student intern at The Start-Up was to make content for the organisation's LinkedIn page. However, they were able to become more involved in various aspects of the organisation throughout the work</p>



	<p>placement, including recruiting additional staff. The Start-Up communicated through various media such as LinkedIn, Office 365, and Zoom and used a Virtual Reality Park in the Metaverse for daily communication. While The Start-Up did not expect the student or any of their employees to have a physical presence in any of their locations there was a need for them to have a constant presence in the virtual workspace that was available to them.</p>
<p><b>3) Differences and similarities</b></p>	<p>HEI 3 made adjustments with various work placements for their students to still be able to partake within different disciplines so that students could still benefit from the experience. However, HEI 3 still had mandatory checks in place to ensure that the students were achieving their learning outcomes, but these were conducted virtually. The threshold for the quality of the student's work remained the same but an additional check was added to assess the well-being of students while on work placement. HEI 3 found that there was increased use of software applications for communication between staff and students while the students were on work placement. HEI 3 has always implemented a flexible model for assessment that was easily adaptable for remote working as it consists of a shell model that can fit each discipline within HEI 3. HEI 3 also found that there was no change in the compensation that organisations offered students whether the student was working on-site or remotely. HEI 3 did note that before the pandemic they would have students on campus to partake in workshops throughout their placement, but this did not occur due to Covid-19 restrictions.</p> <p>The Start-Up found that there was a need for trust in employees and interns when working remotely as they need to be able to trust that the student is still working despite not being physically present. The Start-Up did not offer a formal evaluation throughout the placement, but they stated that they saw a huge growth in the student. The Start-Up noted that they allowed the student to act as a representative in the initial stages of a competition application, which was something that had never been done before.</p> <p>The student participant was introduced to a Virtual Reality world during their work experience. This was used daily for meetings and collaborations within The Start-Up as well as Zoom. However, the student did note that they found the VR world to be much easier to communicate and collaborate in than Zoom. The VR world was also set up like an office, which gave the student a sense of being in an office for work. The student was also able to avail themselves of constant feedback from their employer who helped them to improve their work within The Start-Up through the VR world and Zoom. The student was also able to get general feedback from HEI 3 and communicate easily with their lecturers with any questions that they had virtually. The student found the HEI 3 modules that prepared the students for work experience to be beneficial to them and they were able to apply their course learnings to their work experience.</p>
<p><b>4) Learning outcomes</b></p>	<p>HEI 3 found that their students were resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic and embraced the move to working online and were very engaged initially. However, as the novelty of the situation wore off the engagement level also dropped. HEI 3 experienced a drop in student communication skills and student confidence levels. HEI 3 noted that with remote working there is a hindrance in the practical experience gained, especially in industries where trade skills would be required. HEI 3 saw that remote working limited students' exposure to a professional network as there were fewer opportunities for students to meet professionals face-to-face.</p> <p>When examining how the remote work placements integrated with students' courses of study HEI 3 found that a more physical and practical work placement integrates better with the study programme than a remote work placement and that it is more beneficial to the student.</p> <p>HEI 3 was unable to comment on the student's absorption of company culture and they did not put anything in place to support students' absorption of company culture.</p>

	<p>The Start-Up found that the student participant was able to develop their skills throughout their work placement. Particularly the student developed their communication skills such as the tone of voice they used in professional settings and communicating efficiently online. The Start-Up aimed to give the students professional experience during their work placement by teaching the student how to structure text professionally, giving them confidence, and teaching them professional etiquette.</p> <p>The Start-Up expressed that it was a keen interest of theirs to help the student to develop their professional network and tried to introduce the student to as many connections as possible. The Start-Up also tried to get the student to embrace the company culture from their involvement within the organisation.</p> <p>The student participant found that the work experience helped to build on their existing skills particularly their teamwork skills due to the collaboration that they were involved in. Through the work experience, they were able to learn punctuality and professionalism. Their confidence level improved from their involvement in the work experience projects. The student was able to build a professional network by being involved in events and meeting new people. From working closely with their employer, they witnessed how connections were made and maintained professionally. The student felt as though they embraced the company culture by working closely with their employer. Their relationship was built on openness between them, trust, and honesty.</p>
<b>5) Pedagogical innovations</b>	<p>Participants, in this case, mentioned various pedagogical innovations introduced by HEI 3 and The Start-Up. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>VR Collaboration:</i> The Start-Up and the student got to socialise and work together in a virtual reality world.</li> <li>- <i>Mentor:</i> The student's employer at The Start-Up acted as the student's mentor and provided advice and feedback.</li> <li>- <i>Course preparation:</i> HEI 3 conducted modules to help prepare students for work experience and adjusted the materials to fit remote working.</li> </ul>
<b>6) Technological innovations</b>	<p>During the placement, the student was introduced to a new Virtual Reality platform to communicate with The Start-Up. The Start-Up would have provided the student with a laptop or other equipment if requested, however, the student used their laptop and equipment throughout the work placement.</p>
<b>7) Drivers and barriers to eWBL</b>	<p>HEI 3 found that the main driver for eWBL comes from within the industries that are offering eWBL to the student. However, HEI 3 finds that there are more barriers to eWBL such as the student not being able to develop a professional network, not getting the full value of work experience, and not fully building on skills and its impact on students' professional engagement and confidence. HEI 3 advises other universities to listen to what the relevant industries want in terms of the student experience.</p> <p>The Start-Up found the ease of communication virtually to be a driver of eWBL. However, being unable to physically socialise is a barrier to eWBL. Also, the main barrier to eWBL that The Start-Up found was technological issues such as Wi-Fi dropping and the students' camera not working at times. The Start-Up highly advocates for other organisations to get involved in providing work placements to students but to give them a hybrid model of working. They particularly emphasize the opportunity where the employer gets to work closely with the student.</p> <p>The student found the experience of working remotely to be unique and a driver for eWBL, particularly in this case working in the VR world was a new experience. However, the student did struggle to ask questions initially of their employer to fully understand what they were doing. They also struggled at times to get in contact with their employer as they were not available online to them at all times.</p>
<b>8) Long-term impacts of eWBL</b>	<p>HEI 3 believes that the expectations of employees have changed due to the increased flexibility that is being offered. HEI 3 has seen that the way of work</p>

has changed as there is an increased reliance on technology. This leads to cost savings as there are fewer travel costs involved but there is a huge social impact as there is a loss in social connection from working online. Going forward, HEI 3 believes that there will be a hybrid way of working for eWBL, especially with digital collaborations remaining online.

The Start-Up believes that remote working opens opportunities for students in the distribution of jobs and knowledge, where individuals can access jobs that they would not be able to do without remote working. In the future, The Start-Up believes that there will be a move towards working within the Metaverse as the technology involved improves but, in the meantime, there will be increased use of software such as Zoom and Office 365, to help people in their work.

The student participant found the remote work experience to be a unique experience for their first experience in the workplace. The student believes that in the future eWBL should not be 100% remote, but a hybrid model should be implemented to gain the best experience for the student.

