



WP1- Context study report

Work based learning and apprenticeship in Italy, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, UK and Ireland

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Short Version

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INTRODUCTION

Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational policy approach that help students with real-life work experiences, where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop their employability and their professional skillset.

In the European context, the European Council has agreed that all Member States must growth the number of apprenticeships and traineeships opportunities in their countries to ensure that they represent a real opportunity for young citizens, integrating these programmes into the educational curriculum. In cooperation with the programme social partners, this form of education and development has a direct relation with the goals of increasing economic competitiveness, as well as improving individual's employability.

By 2012, all European Member States and social partners committed themselves (in the *Bruges Communiqué*) in the European agenda for cooperation in vocational education and training (VET), to include work-based learning in all initial VET courses. As mentioned in the Rethinking Education Communication and the Youth Employment Package, the value of VET - and notably of dual training systems - in facilitating youth employment is clearly acknowledged.

Part of the solution can be found in high quality vocational education and training (VET) systems, in which the active participation of employers and the element of work-based learning simplify young people's transition to work by providing the knowledge, skills and skills which they need for an effective first step into the labour market. Countries with strong and attractive VET systems, and notably those with well-established apprenticeship systems, tend overall to perform better in terms of youth employment.

Since the application and the outcomes of these programmes has been positively growing in Europe, the current project aims to increase outreach and quality of services, establish new structures, facilities and mechanisms and to enhancing transnational cooperation. VET providers and SMEs will be reached outside the partnership and will benefit from capacity building, developing their internationalization and work-based mobility's.

The general aim of Eduwork.Net is to strengthen cooperation between Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers' associations and networks, established at regional, national and European level and stakeholder organisations of the labour market.

Research Design Plan and Methodology

Objectives

The Eduwork.Net project aims at building networks and partnerships of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and the world of work, at regional, national and European level. It builds capacity at grass roots level for the effective implementation of national and European policies for work-based learning, apprenticeships and supports VET providers to organise VET students' mobility's abroad.

Specifically, the project aims at establishing a network of VET providers and facilitate exchange of knowledge, feedback and experience of policy implementation, sharing of best practices on VET excellence, improve quality of VET provision and linkage with the needs of the labour market, enhance impact and relevance of VET provision for both learners and employers and supporting transnational mobility of VET students for work placements, implementing the European VET policies for transfer and recognition of learning outcomes and using ECVET.

The objectives of this research were:

- To make all the necessary preparation for designing and managing apprenticeships, as far as context study is concerned. We wanted to understand what is put into place in the different partner countries, what do they have in common and not, and what would be considered an ideal scenario.
- To create an interconnection between learning outcomes and labour market. We wanted to understand if an increased interconnection has a relation with a better experience and what process is developed to reach this stage.
- To track VET students and interview them. To give voice to students, since they are the ones who go to in WBL experiences and what potentiates their learning process.
- To list their background in order for the apprenticeships to be as efficient as possible. To understand what differs from an efficient to an inefficient WBL experience.
- To understand the ideal interconnection between learning outcomes and work placements.
- To understand how to adapt WBL in light of the COVID pandemic

Target Groups

The main target groups of this project are:

- VET providers of all levels in the involved countries
- Employers and companies
- Policy makers
- Experts and practitioners in VET (managers of VET institutions, teachers, trainers, administrative staff and mentors)

Research Plan and Methodology

This research made use of qualitative and quantitative research strategy to balance the use of all the information available and try to avoid any potential biases.

When deciding how to approach this WP, we had meetings with the consortium to define how to proceed to have a quality research. We decided to make different templates for each research part, which were then analysed by the partners and, with the added feedback, we create the finalised version. These templates had in general two components. One, standardised themes, to guarantee that the research was coherent across countries and content, and the other, an open-ended approach so the partners could present the particularities of each context and country.

Qualitative research

Descriptive in nature, because it generally deals with non-numerical and unquantifiable things. Qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that they help reveal the behaviour and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. Data was gathered in multiple forms, such as interviews, observations, and documents, we didn't rely on only one source.

The methods used for the research were Focus Groups and Interviews. Focus Group to students, because we felt it was of the utmost importance to have their voice. Interviews to VET centre and organisations to understand exactly what they have in place regarding WBL and what would be their ideal scenario and synergy.

Quantitative research

It is the numbers-driven part of the research. The emphasis is on the collection of numerical data. The conclusion then makes inferences based on that data. Quantitative research is defined as a systematic investigation of phenomena by gathering quantifiable data and performing statistical analysis. Quantitative research collects information from existing and potential targets using sampling methods and sending out surveys, where the results can be depicted in numerical form. After careful understanding of these numbers, we will be able to understand if this research is objective. The results achieved from this research method were logical, statistical, and, to the maximum possible extent, unbiased.

Analysis of the research

For the analysis of the research of each partner and the consecution of a common model, we used a causal-comparative research method. This research method depends on the factor of comparison, which concluded the cause-effect relation it exists in each country and what differs between them.

We believe it is important to have the two types of data in the research, qualitative and quantitative, because we believe the thematic requests it. For creating a coherent and complete context study we took into account both objective and subjective data. However, the two types of research are clearly differentiated to have a coherent and concise conclusion for each topic we describe.

Research Design

The research took the following form:

- Introduction

An introduction about the research objectives and methodology used for the development of the national and consortium contexts)

- National Context and Good Practices (1 chapter per partner country)
- Summarized Results

The results of each partner country were summarized and clearly stated to give a clear and simplified version of all the recollected data and findings. The results were compared between countries.

- Conclusions and Recommendations

Structure of National Chapters

Each National Chapter includes:

Desk Research

Divided in two parts:

Mapping of work-based learning and apprenticeship – legislation and policy

This part of the desk research consisted of:

- The VET context in the partners' country.
- The current legal context for WBL in the partners' country.
- Regulatory framework: the model where and how an WBL experience can take place.
 - Written agreement: type of agreement that officialises the apprenticeship
 - Information on the relationship between the type of qualification/professional profile and WBL contracts.
 - Pathways and mobility: Definition of Learning Outcomes, insertion in a national qualification framework (include reference to the EQF). Type of access to other learning opportunities.
 - Social protection: the legal rights the trainee has while doing the apprenticeship
 - Design of the apprenticeship: who are the general decision makers when it comes to the design of the apprenticeship?

- Internationalisation in VET: What framework is put into place to promote and potentiate WBL apprenticeships? Are there any relevant provisions?
- Companies/Educational centres – apprenticeship implementation and development

Case study of one VET provider

This part of the desk research includes a case study that covers the:

- Cooperation with companies
- Quality assurance practices and the “quality culture” of the organisation
- Transnational cooperation – organisation of mobility projects for VET students.

Field Research

Partner countries were supposed to carry out 4 interviews and 1 focus group each. This objective was affected by the beginning of the pandemic and consequential lockdowns over the different partner countries. Stakeholders interviewed were VET students (focus group of 10 students), SMEs and VET providers (interviews), in order to record the needs of the labour market and to work on real-life experiences. Regarding the Field Research, it was divided in two main parts:

Focus Groups

Focus groups were a useful tool for additional data in our research. Focus group research was useful for issues identification, and to determine areas needing further research such as soft skills. We believe participants usually brought up issues and concerns that would've not happened in the prepared question path. These Focus Groups were composed by students of VET centres who had a previous WBL experience.

The students answered questions related and aiming to:

- Define an ideal WBL scenario;
- Gain information on the different WBL experiences, pros and cons, things that were done badly, things that were done well;
- Gain information on the involvement of the student in his/her WBL experience (logistics, decision power, feedback, quality assurance, evaluations);

Interviews

A series of interviews, using a mix between structured and unstructured interview. We have a set of predetermined questions and a standardised technique of recording (voice recording). We would add flexibility in questions that might arise and give freedom to the interviewee in order to collect potentially valuable information. We selected, the interviewees from VET centres and Business organisations that had WBL experiences in place.

The aim of the interviews was:

- To understand the ideal WBL scenario for VET providers and Businesses;
- To gain information on the different WBL experiences, pros and cons, things that were done badly, things that were done well from the VET providers and Businesses;
- To gain information on the involvement of the organization in the WBL experience (logistics, decision power, feedback, quality assurance, evaluations);

Post-Covid Pandemic Research

After the COVID pandemic outbreak, the educational sector was severely affected by the lockdown and the general measures implemented.

With a new world-wide paradigm, we felt we needed to discuss and do research about possible futures for WBL experiences and how we VET centres could keep a quality offer in pandemic circumstances.

Although it was not established in our project, we felt that, if we didn't tackle this issue, our research could become obsolete very soon and we want all the users of EDUWORK.NET to have the insights our network has on COVID pandemic measures and what we believe are the keys to ensure WBL quality during pandemic times.

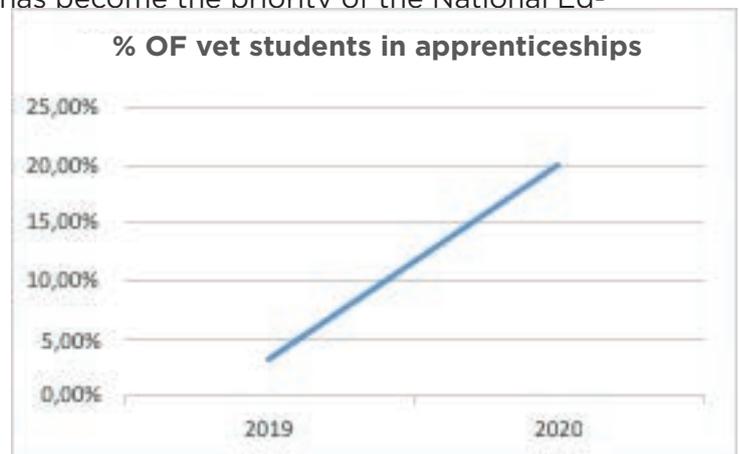
PART I. NATIONAL CONTEXT AND GOOD PRACTICES

1.1. LITHUANIA

Current Legal context for WBL

In Lithuania, apprenticeships were introduced to the public in 2013 while chairing the Council of the European Union (EU). Apprenticeship has become the priority of the National Education Strategy (2013-2022), the tool of the National Employment Program (2014-2020) and the National Reform Agenda (2014).

In 2020, the number of VET students in the form of apprenticeship in Lithuania should reach 20%. According to the Center for Strategic Analysis of the Government, in 2019 this figure was only 3.1 percent. In Lithuania, and especially in the regions of the country, small and medium-sized businesses predominate.



The Roles of VET providers is to organize vocational training in the form of apprenticeship, to appoint a vocational teacher for the practical training of an apprentice and the role of employers is to appoint the employee (s) responsible for the organization of the apprenticeship work and practical training.

Regarding agreements officialising the apprenticeship, a Tripartite Agreement is signed between VET provider, business company and an apprentice and Employment Agreement is signed between the business company and the apprentice. Only in 2020 the funds are allocated for the companies that apply for state support. If the application is approved, the companies can get 40% of the amount paid as salary to the trainee and cover hours spent by the tutor/master of business company with trainee.

As WBL does not have strong roots in Lithuania by now, the mobility experiences based of real WBL principles are not identified. VET providers are encouraged to arrange recognition of competences and qualification for the mobility visits through ECVET tool, so under favourable conditions, the situation is likely to change.

Each year more than 40 000 students are graduating formal VET programmes, yet, employers feel a huge lack of employees, especially in industry sector. Companies of that sector are the most motivated to implement any new initiatives. Tourism, transport, IT, engineering sectors are also supporting WBL implementation. During the apprenticeship, the apprentice is employed by the company and receives at least the minimum wage approved by the state. Starting from January 1st, 2020, the minimum wage makes 607 EUR/month.

In 2019 A Description of the Procedure for Organizing Vocational Training in the Form of Apprenticeship of the Republic of Lithuania was prepared and approved. Up to 2020, no Financial support for SME's (at least for salary of workplace tutor's). The state does not have incentives to encourage business companies to actively introduce the WBL form of learning. Only in 2020 the funds are allocated for the companies that apply for state support. If the application is approved, the companies can get 40% of the amount paid as salary to the trainee and cover hours spent by the tutor/master of business company with trainee.

From November 2020, funds are allocated for WBL processes - teachers in charge of WBL will be spending 2 hours /week visiting students in business companies, one company tutor will be working with 2 trainees in WBL, company tutors will have 16 hours of trainings how to arrange processes and organize WBL in the company and all those activities will be paid by the state.

1.2. ITALY

Current Legal context for WBL

The current Italian social-economic situation is positive for the implementation of work-based learning programmes. In Italy among innovative businesses, 85% have more than 250 employees, but the percentage drops to 45% in small businesses, from 10 to 49 employees.

In general terms, in Italy there are three important measures in WBL: Apprenticeship (under 25 years old), VET path (within the dual system) and internship/work experiences.

With the aim of reflecting the four directions of the European employment strategy (employability, adaptability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunity) and the goals set by OECD, Italy has reformed its job service in the past 5 years, mainly by encouraging the employment of young people and making them competitive on the professional level. In line with the policy, Italy started to be one of the best countries in Europe to offer initial VET training, consisting in courses of 3 to 4 years' duration, for young people from 13 to 17 years old.

The Working Based Learning programmes in Italy are classified and measure in apprenticeship (under 25 years old), VET path (dual system) and internship/work experiences. The apprenticeship is considered the main kind contractual typology to encourage entry to the world of work for young people between 15 and 29 years of age. The apprenticeship employment relationships from a sectoral point of view are the following: Commerce prevails (20.9% of the total), followed by manufacturing activities (18.3%) and accommodation and restaurant services (16.8%); more than 55% of the contracts are concentrated in these three sectors. With reference to artisan companies only, manufacturing activities (35.5%), services (20.9%) and construction (18.3%) emerge.

Besides the economic benefits the element that motivates the companies is also the sensibility to the training of internal resources and the success of experience. Training institutions are engaged in the creation of a “culture of apprenticeship” like an instrument for skills development and socialization at work. Through the observations made by the training center the skills, individual characteristics and the individual needs emerge that permit to design individualized courses.

Independently of the WBL program, there is a payment compensation to the apprentice during the training period. The payment must be defined as a percentage of the contractual framework level and in relation to the year of attendance of the training course for the acquisition of the relevant qualification. In the first year the remuneration must be not less than 45% (due to the contractual level), not less than 55% in the second year, not less than 65% in the third year, and not less than 70% in the fourth year.

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1.3. IRELAND

Current Legal context for WBL

In City of Dublin Education and Training Board, approximately 48-000-50,000 learners benefit annually from the Further Education and Training, which is known as VET in the European context. Over the years, Dublin has become a thriving tech hub with considerable influence, the apprenticeships and traineeships programmes in the past years are being developed to follow this tech growth.

These factors affect apprenticeships and traineeships in different ways, depending on the sector. For example, in the Commi Chef Apprenticeships, due to strong consumer spending, there is now a shortage of qualified chefs and there is now a great demand to train chefs under the Apprenticeship programme. For the Auctioneering Apprenticeship, socio economic factors that will influence it are the rates of home ownership, property market fluctuations, rate of construction, number of property lettings, developments in the property rental sector, income levels, cost of living, unemployment rate.

The apprenticeships programmes are being expanded in Ireland and are classified in two categories: first the so called “pre 2016” Apprenticeships in Construction (Plumbing, Electrical, Brick Laying, Motor Mechanic, Heavy Vehicle Mechanics and Aircraft Mechanics). Second, the 2016+ Apprenticeships (Auctioneering and Property Services, Accounting Technician, Commi Chef, Software Developer, Computer Networking and Hairdressing). Both categories have in average a duration period between 2-4 years.

According to payments and compensation, for apprenticeships developed prior to 2016, the employer pays the apprentice while s/he is being trained on-the-job. For apprenticeships developed in 2016 and after, the employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship. In all cases, the rate of pay is agreed between the employer and the apprentice.

There are other programmes in Ireland to ensure the continued progress related to older workers. There is the Skills to Advance programme, which is for employees in entrance or lower-level jobs, and to those currently employed in vulnerable sectors. It aims to equip employees with the skills they need to progress in their current role or to adapt to the changing job market. There is also the Skills for Work, which is a national programme to deliver training courses for full time or part time employees.

In fact, the Irish expectation by developing such programmes are that the students would have the opportunity to develop their interpersonal, personal and practical skills in the workplace and for certain awards they must have the opportunity to demonstrate skills required for the relevant

vocational areas. From the other side, the student's expectation is based on the hope that a placement will give them some insight and experience of specific vocational work areas, support their skill development and help them to make contacts for possible future employment.

On the 19th of April 2021, the Irish Government launched a new five-year Apprenticeship Action Plan aimed at significantly expanding the numbers of apprenticeship courses and people doing apprenticeships in Ireland.

The key points from the Plan are:

- Register 10,000 new apprentices every year from 2025.
- Create a new National Apprenticeship Office to drive the agenda and implement the plan.
- Extend a new financial grant for employers who take on apprentices.
- Offer additional financial supports for employers who take on apprentices from under-represented groups such as female apprentices, or lone parents, people with disabilities, or members of the Travelling community.
- Set a target of 750 new apprentices across the public sector every year during the lifetime of the plan.
- Broaden the range of apprenticeships in 18 new areas. New roles include equipment services engineer; bar manager; commercial driver; executive chef; manufacturing data integration engineer; precision machinist and quality control; software solutions architect; and stud farm assistant manager.
- Develop apprentices in green skills – in areas like retrofitting and working with electric cars.

Similarly, there will be financial incentives to provide a greater gender mix in areas which are either male- or female-dominated.

For example, more than 80 per cent of apprentices in hairdressing are women, while more than 80 per cent of apprentices in areas such as plumbing and mechanics are men.

The five-year action plan also seeks to advance plans for a single portal for school leavers which includes CAO options as well as alternatives in the further education and training sector.

This is aimed at boosting the visibility of apprenticeships as an option for Leaving Certificate students and others.

1.4. UNITED KINGDOM

Current Legal context for WBL

In 2015, the English government had made a target that by 2020 that 3 million new apprenticeships will take place, but at the end of January 2019, only 57% of this target take action. According to the government support for companies, it was analysed that if an employer as a wage bill over £3m each year, it is obligated to pay an apprenticeship levy. Nonetheless, this money is then topped up by governments funds to employers develop these programmes in their companies. For companies that are smaller than this annual wage bill, they pay 5% towards the cost of apprenticeship training and the government pays the rest (95%).

The government created The National Apprenticeship Service to support companies to set up and develop apprenticeships. It operates a National Apprenticeship Helpdesk and advertises apprenticeship vacancies on a website. In addition, the National Careers Service provides support for those who wish to pursue an apprenticeship application and provides them with professional advice on making the right choices.

The main characteristics of enterprises involved in WBL, (according to 83% of all apprenticeship

started in 2018/19) followed four sector areas, with over half in the top two areas: Business Administration and Law (30% of all starts), Health, Public Services and Care (25% of all starts), Engineering and Manufacturing Tech (15% of all starts) and Retail and Commercial Enterprise (13% of all starts).

In the United Kingdom, both “apprenticeships” and “traineeships” are formal terms that are used to describe the main WBL-based schemes that are financed and operated by government. A traineeship is a course that includes a work placement as a core aim. It can vary between 6 weeks up to 6 months and are mainly designated to help 16 to 24 years old to get ready for an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship operates more as a job, and in legal terms, the apprentices have the same status as an employee (apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 16, living in England and have no upper age limit).

According to the payment and compensations, when undertaking an apprenticeship, since the apprentice must be employed, there are rules regarding their wages. The national minimum wage (NMW) for apprentices is £3.90 per hour from April 2019 (approximately €4.40



as at February 2020). Apprentices aged 25 and over, and not in the first year of their apprenticeship, will be entitled to the National Minimum Wage (currently £8.21, or €9.70). The Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2016 estimated the average gross hourly pay received by apprentices in Great Britain was £6.70 an hour for level 2 and 3 apprentices, which is equivalent to nearly £14,000 per year.

In conclusion, there are a number of statistics that point further to the challenges of the UK education and skills system in terms of meeting the ambitions that the government states it has for it. These include: The share of pupils dropping out of UK schools without a diploma was 10.6% in 2018 (Education and Training MONITOR, 2018); More than 30% who start apprenticeships do not complete them and that situation is getting worse every year (Skills Commission UK); Apprenticeships - 98,000 aged under 19 started an apprenticeship in 2018 (including those not at College), a decline from 123,000 in 2016, etc.

1.5. SPAIN

Current Legal context for WBL

In Spain, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes are under the responsibility of the national education and employment entities. The General Council for Vocational Training is the national government advisory body on VET policy; it comprises representatives of national and regional public authorities as well as the social partners (enterprises and trade unions). Stakeholders are involved in designing and updating VET qualifications in line with labour market needs.

The Spanish VET system is modular allowing recognition and transfer of (units of) competences gained in one VET programme to another, shortening its duration. Units of competences may also be acquired through validation of prior learning. CVET includes a wide range of courses designed for different needs and skill profiles, allowing people to upgrade their skills and acquire a (partial) professional certificate.

The Spanish demographic reality is contributing for the impact of the VET programmes. The population has slightly decreased in the past years and is getting old, and the medium-term forecasts indicate that an important proportion of job openings will mainly come from the need to replace workers retiring or changing occupations, which will require qualified people through VET. Also, the unemployment rates in Spain are increasing over the years (13.9% in 2018), and such circumstance can be correlated with education attainment.

In Spain, the term used for “apprenticeship” is “dual vocational education and training”. It is

defined in legislation as “training actions and initiatives, combining employment and training, that aim at workers’ professional qualification in a regime that alternates work activity in a company and vocational education and training delivered by the education system or the employment system”, i.e. respectively the Ministry of Education (central o region departments) or the Ministry of Employment (central o region departments).

The VET programmes include a wide range of courses designed for different needs and skill profiles, allowing people to upgrade their skills and acquire a (partial) professional certificate and it may be financed through public funds. Training is offered by private and public institutions accredited by labour authorities as providers of professional certificates and by other VET training centres (Adults can also enrol in the same VET programmes).

From sectorial point of view, WBL experiences in Spain are: 19% manufacturing, 16% Commerce,



12% IT and Communications, 11% construction, 7% scientific activities, 7% other services, 6% Education, 6% Health and social services, 3% Finance, 3% transport, 3% Hostelry and 2,5% Administrative and auxiliary.

To be successful in the implementation of such programmes, it implies a strong involvement between the company, the government and the social partners (public and the private sector), willingness of the private sector to accept quality control of its education and training activities

a fundamental Vocational Education and Training Act which regulates the roles of the stakeholders and a strong cooperation between secondary school and companies.

1.6. GREECE

Current Legal context for WBL

In Greece there is a network of 131 Institutes dedicated for VET programmes and they are mainly focused on professional training for ages above 18 years old, offering more than 90 areas of specialization. Both VET Institutes and Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (EPAL) participate in apprenticeship and/or in internship (the two types of learning in Greece).

The Greek skill system was generally ill-equipped and struggled to meet even the most moderate levels of skills demand. The latest years the attainment, to the Greek VET system, has increased but there are concerns that the education and training system, is not sufficiently aligned with labour market needs. And the Greek VET system is characterized by low attractiveness and remains, until 2020, relatively poorly placed to meet current labour challenges.

Now the new policies have changed Apprenticeships. They focus on hi-tech skills needs. The rapid technological changes are the main reason for this change. There is a legislative framework on apprenticeships to make Apprenticeship more attractive on the employers' side. We live in a world of work in transformation. We can adopt and build new learning methods. We can thrive together in this new world.

Apprenticeships in Greece have a dual learning system, that is defined as a system in which learning alternatives occur between the workplace and the educational institute. In order to promote a professional specialization to apprentices, the employer must provide a learning programme based in a specific area, pay a remuneration or allowance (under applicable law) and cover the apprentice insurance. There are different entities responsible for the VET programmes, and the duration vary between 6 months to 3 years, within different levels of specialization.

The other alternative to gain some work experience is by enrolling an internship position inside a company. This is the alternative to the apprenticeship and graduates seem to prefer this type of education, since they can start after the end of the second semester, and they can more easily manage their schedule. The duration of the internship is 960 hours of work and the internship learners don't receive any salary. They have only health insurance coverage if an accident happens in the work environment.

For apprenticeships developed in 2019-2020, the apprentice receives compensation in the 75% of the legal national minimum wage of the unskilled worker. This is an amount of 21.78€ per day. This amount comes from the resources of the operational program "Human Resources Development, Education and Life Lifelong Learning" for the implementation of the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) in Greece. An apprentice has social security (health insurance and count as a period of employment for pension purposes).

Both VET Institutes and Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (EPAL) they can both participate in apprenticeship and/or in internship. Due to expert advises, this policy would help the Greek Economy and would aim at bringing together the worlds of employment and education to establish a new era on how employability could attract more jobs in the labour market. SMEs are the biggest percent of the labour market in Greece.

PART II. INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Introduction

Partner countries carried out interviews and focus groups. Stakeholders interviewed were VET students (focus group), SMEs and VET providers (interviews), in order to record the needs of the labour market and to work on real-life experiences. Regarding the Field Research, it was divided in two main parts: focus groups and interviews.

To set up the research design each partner answered to initial questions and filled in a brief questionnaire. On this basis we designed research template and guidelines for interviews and focus groups to assure a common ground.

In this part of the research, the following work was developed:

Italy:

- 2 Focus Groups (10 and 8 participants respectively)
- 6 Interviews to different organisations

Ireland:

- 1 Focus group with 21 participants
- 4 interviews to different organisations

England:

- 4 interviews with all different stakeholders

Spain:

- 1 Focus Group with 7 participants
- 3 interviews to different organisations

Greece:

- 1 Focus Group with 10 participants

In total, the field research for WP1 gathered the opinion of 56 students and of 17 organisations, both companies and VET centres.

The analysis of the focus groups and interviews focused on understanding what was the current situation of WBL for the different stakeholders, the level of cooperation so far and what

they believed to be the ideal scenario. It revealed that the companies here analysed have been implementing working-based learning programmes for more than a year and in general terms, they are satisfied with the outcomes. The open mindedness of the young people was argued by the companies to be an opportunity for innovation, and from the students' perception, they felt that the assigned company met their expectations and the tasks assigned were relevant with the study path. The salary and the compensation associated with these programmes, even differing between countries, seemed to be an important aspect for the students, since it is an important way for them to feel one of a kind inside the company. These are some of the introductory remarks we felt relevant, our conclusions extend these remarks and add other important and relevant conclusions.

ITALY

Italy - Main Findings from the Interviews

Italy has conducted 4 interviews with different stakeholders, namely: Pompetravaini SpA, Nove25 Srl, TOP1 SRL and Impianti Elettrici Dabraio. In general, all companies have been using WBL for a few years and is satisfied with the use of this tool, which allows them to train human resources that it hardly finds on the job market.

Young people are integrated into the company with extra-curricular internship or apprenticeship contracts, after a pre-selection made by the training institution to identify the figures sought by the company and are accompanied on the training path by a company tutor. The WBL experience offers young people a great opportunity for personal growth, in terms of learning and socializing at work, and easy adaptation in the production area of the territory. No apprentice has interrupted the WBL experience.

These companies are working in close collaboration with some local technical and professional institutes to organize company visits, project work, traineeships, apprenticeships etc. The organizations cross-refer all the information necessary for the start and success of the WBL experiences and, in this perspective, companies had also made a specific agreement with the schools to adopt a particular time modulation of the WBL.

The **ideal organization would be to be able to weave a close synergy with proactive and organized professional training institutes** which, **with their openness to dialogue with the world of work**, represent the primary interlocutor **for the training of young professional figures**, trained to benefit a fast and responsive company. **For the trainee / apprentice, the**

ideal follow-up is to understand what the world of work really is and to integrate into an organization with a conscious choice and personal satisfaction.

It was noted that **a compensation system between companies and schools should be created in order to guarantee the best training for young people, maintaining constant relationships that allow the school to update itself by creating attractive figures on the market and companies to keep the contacts and the circulation of information alive.** The follow-up the company has not expressed, believing that it is the responsibility of schools or employment centres. Lastly, he points out that one of the greatest critical issues encountered by staff resources is increasingly the lack of care and correctness of the CVs that are sent and the lack of originality, especially today in a digitized and branded way.

Italy - Main Findings from the Focus Group

Italy has conducted 2 focus group with different stakeholders, namely: CIOFS-FP VENETO and CIOFS FP Lombardia. In general, all members were included by the training school in the companies where they carried out internal training and was noticed that the presentation phase to the company accompanied by the tutor stage was very important. The difficulty of managing school and work emerges from both groups, companies often change their working hours for internal needs and students have found themselves in difficulty with both study and travel times, the intervention of the stage tutor of the school in order to better organize working hours. **The totality of the participants in the focus groups declared that they have chosen the correspondent business provider because there was the possibility of doing the dual path.** In fact, **they were looking for a school with more practice and less theory** that would give them the concrete opportunity to enter the world of work. **The students were satisfied with the work on soft skills done at school and in parallel with work.**

Each participant exhaustively described their experience during the apprenticeship and everyone works in medium or small places: bars, restaurants, pizzerias and small or medium shops, characterized by informal and often family-run locations. Most of the apprentices were directed towards the training by their own VET teachers, instead someone proposed himself to the VET centre responsible. For each of them the curricular internship undertaken in previous years was fundamental: the outcome of this experience and the positive judgment of companies, together with the proactive intervention by VET operators, they have made it possible for all the guys to stay and train in companies already known thanks to the school-work alternation but with a different way of collaboration (apprenticeship).

The ideal scenarios in both focus group were diverse. Students felt guided and supported by both teachers and the Directors. The only weak point was the lack of clarity in explaining to the company and apprentices what internal training and the composition of the final payroll consisted of. This fault, caused by an “organizational” reason within the VET centre made them feel disoriented for a few weeks. The problem subsided with the arrival of the new representative who remotely tried (given the coincidence with the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 disease) to build a sincere and trustworthy relationship with apprentices and companies. None of them complained about the salary but rather about the difficulties in understanding the payroll and its peculiarities. Two suggestions were made: increase general knowledge hours during the lessons at the centre in order to be more appropriate in the interaction with customers, consumers, colleagues, suppliers and supervisors and increase their involvement within the class by providing for activities to be carried out together with their classmates.

IRELAND

Ireland - Main Findings from the Interviews

Ireland has conducted 2 interviews with different VET Centre and Business stakeholders, named correspondingly: Ballsbridge College, Ballyfermot College, Realtime Technologies Ltd and St. Vicens Catering. In general, the interviewed explained that they had a positive overall image of the outputs. Although the positive outcomes explained, it was also discussed about the first negative perceived, which was the poor engagement to the programmes by the employers.

The type of synergy established between the VET Provider and the Business is under constant development and evaluation. The companies are involved in a pre-schedule module development, they reviewed the modules and give feedback, in order that the quality assurance of the programmes meets the industry standard. There is also a consortium leading out the national apprenticeship and there are representatives of employers on this. They will play a role in the review of the programme.

According to the information shared between organizations, colleges haven't shared trainee results with the employer. As part of the preparation for their first work placement the a few trainees created profiles on LinkedIn and those LinkedIn profiles including sample work that the students had or whatever is relevant and appropriate was shared with the po-

tential employers. So, **the employers could effectively view the students and select which ones they thought most suitable for them using LinkedIn.**

According to the follow-ups offered to the trainees, **companies mainly give feedback on the trainee to the college after the traineeship ends.** However, if the trainee has been very suitable for the company, they offer them a job at the end of the traineeship. According to dropouts, only one trainee left, citing personal reasons for leaving.

A lot of people are still unaware of this Apprenticeship because it is new. **When the Apprenticeship model is more established, ideally, they think they will have a deeper relationship with the employers. Maybe to increase the number of visits to the company and for the companies to understand more their roles and responsibilities. Another suggestion was to develop an alumni association and track the apprentices with a destination survey. Keeping contact because they will be in the industry. In the future they could come in and give guest talks to future apprentices too.**

According to the type of follow-up offered to the trainee, this college don't have any established processes yet because they are facing the first group. They are scheduling to first have an exit interview with apprentices and contact the related industry and old pupils who said before that are looking for someone. We've always done that. Industries that knock on our door or phone or looking for a graduate.

Ireland - Main Findings from the Focus Group

Ireland has conducted a single focus group with the City of Dublin ETB Partner. Very Positive Feedback from their Work Based Learning Experience. **Discovered the apprenticeship through a range of different avenues - through friends, online adverts, sending a CV to an Employer.** The Apprenticeship will last 4 years and was assigned to them. The majority never thought of dropping out. Only 2 of the group did due to the amount of work required. Some knew of people who had dropped out due to the better money being offered by different employers.

Their Experience with City of Dublin ETB has been very positive. However, their particular Training Centre was chosen for that as that is how Apprenticeships are run in Ireland. **They find the centre to be very good and well run and find the balance between theory and practical work to be fair and well balanced.** They described the process of getting into the Apprenticeship. They are hired by the employer who register the Apprentice with Solas (National FET Agency). Solas allocates a place in one of the training centres.

Excellent feedback from their experience with Employers. They all got to choose their employers. They all felt able to practice their training and gain more knowledge. Helped them understand a lot more about what they were doing in finer detail. Majority were briefed on what are job was all about through all different aspects of the job. **They each had individual mentors to guide them and had a tools and a safety course. 2 did not as 1 worked with in a very small company and the other stated “I just reported to site every day and got told what to do on a day to day basis.” In all cases the job description and/or the training agreement matched the duties they were given.**

Some suggestions were for more breaks, longer lunches, better training centre equipment. One of the focus group felt each training phase should be longer than 22 weeks as everything was being rushed to get done. **Some suggested a more variety of the work they were given by the Employer and be given options for further training after the Apprenticeship was over.** The majority of the group think they could improve their role in the process by working harder and pushing themselves to achieve better results.

ENGLAND

England - Main Findings from the Interviews

England has conducted 4 interviews with different VET Centre and Business stakeholders, named correspondingly: Planet Planit, Sarah Kettle, Freelance Consultant JJ Goodman, The London Cocktail Company and Katlin Halop. It can be a never-ending issue for both colleges, universities and VET and employers to align requirements, as there is always a gap between what education provides and what employers want. It can be the case that employers are disconnected with the curriculum in VET or education and therefore the expectation is that the student or the apprentice reaches the workplace with all the skills and competence needed to work effectively from day one. So, this need for people to be 'ready for work' from the VET environment is unrealistic.

In the UK, it is important to say that synergy is really all about what goes on at a local level, especially in terms of relationship building and how keen both sides are in doing something together. If both parties are pro-active and reactive it tends to work, especially when there are good relationships and the collaborators are networked. Otherwise, it is a case of being too fragmented, which is what we see a lot within the industry. Overall, there is no one model that the industry can look to, copy or adapt.

Then, **there needs to be the framework – business networks, mapping and resourcing, looking at a local and wider context and the future, and future-planning in terms of how the curriculum can change to address industry changes, and how ‘training labs’ can be developed or businesses that can provide an experiential learning in emerging areas can offer skills exchanges. All of this of course needs a culture change right across the industry and within the business from bottom to top.**

In general, the ideal scenarios would be to have more communication; a monthly newsletter; more visibility about who the apprenticeship collaborations/who the employer and the apprenticeship provider are, etc. It is necessary to develop a relationship with a VET/VET provider – one that is sufficiently proficient in administering training and qualifications, and of course, it would be necessary for us to work with these providers to ensure that these would be aligned to a good work-based-learning environment.

There has to be people who are hands on and eyes on – by that they mean that the person(s) involved have to be ‘on the shop floor’ – listening, looking, inter-acting and ‘feeling’ the environment and understand the impact of the reality of the operations of the business – e.g. having training available within the working hours of the industry – they need to be in the same zone and on the same time zone.

SPAIN

Spain - Main Findings from the Interviews

Spain has conducted three interviews, 2 with VET Centres, named: EFA La Serna and CIFA-SA, and one with a company that works with EFA La Serna. Their internship system consists in a dual format, the dual VET based on the EFAs alternation system, which consists in students during their academic training period having theoretical and practical learning modules in the VET centre and in companies, throughout the different academic years. With this dual FP, not only do they have the compulsory module of FCT (“Training in Work Centres), but also during the courses they are studying and having internships in companies on different dates, with a specific objective or the centre of interest.

For the dual vocational training, each course has limited periods depending on specific centres of interest of the companies. The student who opts for the dual system, receives a double degree: the qualification of their training cycle and the Dual certificate, where the number of hours of the practices and the evaluation criteria are evidenced. **The effective-**

ness of the process seems to have as a key factor being local organisations and having a long term relation.

According to the selection process (is free), any student who wants to enrol in the dual FP and meets the conditions can do so. Companies award them based on academic results and student behaviour. Sometimes students want to choose the company, and the VET centres facilitates the process and get in touch with that company. In the event that a student has some kind of relationship with the employer, whether for reasons of proximity to his home, etc. Between organizations, there are various types of synergies. **In several cases, teachers go to training courses for companies to continue their training. In these cases, several professionals are known and students are placed there for internships or job placements with a better in situ knowledge.** Many **professionals also come to teach master classes at educational centres.** Beyond the establishment of an apprenticeship, the interviewed explained that there are professionals who consider themselves part of the centre's family. There are professionals, with a lot of experience, who teach courses in different countries, and they go to the educational centre because they want to, without any financial compensation.

The ideal scenario of the interviewed for the relation between these VET Centres and the companies, **is that both actors are in line with what is the fundamental objective of the experience.** It must be clear for both sides, that the objective of the practices is to train students and complement their training. The interviewed also argued that it is also very important not to forget that a trainee student is still a student at the centre, so **a more continuous follow-up is needed. Ideally, create a strong link between the student, the tutor and the company.**

Spain – Main Findings from the focus group

Spain has conducted 1 focus group with 7 VET students, with experience in WBL. Margarita worked in two different places, which helped her gaining experience in 2 types of cuisine: in Paradores and in a Michelin Star restaurant. The first year of her internship, she did not know where to go, so EFA assigned her a company that they believed could enhance her qualities. Patricia – in the first year she did the internships at the Almagro Elder Centre, a very enriching experience where she could enhance her qualities of taking care of people and solving problems. All the theoretically knowledge acquired during the course was developed practically during the practices. We summarize here the different cases according to their sector:

Gonzalo – His first role was as a kitchen assistant. In his case, he always gave the option to the centre to choose his internship companies, because the centre knows better than he did

when deciding where he should go and where he could enhance his qualities. Duration: In the 1st experience he spent 1.5 / 2 months. In the 2nd experience he spent 3 months. In the 3rd experience he stayed 2 months, then he remained there to work. In the 4th experience he spent 1 month.

Tamara - The first year she did it in a private company in Bolaños and the second in the General Hospital of *Ciudad Real*. She highly appreciated the change from private to public. In the private sector, she only had an assistant role, however, in the public sector, she had more freedom as well as more responsibility.

For hostelry related students, EFA gave to all the interviewed the opportunity to study cooking from Basic VET, and this has motivated them to continue their training in a Higher Education Degree. Between theory and practice, everything is important, but EFA was highly appreciated by the interviewed since gave them the opportunity to put into practice everything they've learned.

Regarding Cooking and Kitchen apprentices, in general they were given the freedom to play in all areas of the kitchen, which was very important for the learning process. The preparation of the companies to receive them were quite good and the responsibilities that they were going to have vs. those that she really had were very aligned. There was also a VET provider that has given the apprentice supporting in the training. But in other cases, the same does not happened and the preparation was less. In general terms, all apprentices were well located inside the companies and were treated like a regular employee.

Argued by all apprentices, **the ideal scenario would be to have a more consistent follow up, which for them was considered to be the way to have a positive and a consistent learning curve.**

GREECE

Greece - Main Findings from the Focus groups

Greece conducted 1 focus group with the partner PANEDDIEK. The age range of people taking part in the focus group were between 20 and 35 years of age and all of them had completed their studies in Vocational Training Institutes in Athens Metropolitan Area. More precisely the half of them completed their training studies in “Computer Applications Technician (Multimedia/ Web Design-Developer/Video Games)” Specification and the other half completed their studies in “Computer Technician (Hardware)” Specification.

More than the half were unemployed. They are maintained and financed by their family. Only two of them earned some money from their work. One from the six members of the group worked part time as musician and one other as freelancer programmer. Excluding their experience through the work-based learning program they have taken part; they do not have any other work experience in their training subjects except the freelancer programmer.

The participants trained in WBL experience did an Apprenticeship program. The duration of this program was six months. **They noticed that most workplaces were not ready to help the participants in their learning process. They did not get the opportunity to learn new things or apply knowledge from their studies.** Also, **they have emphasized that the lessons in the VET Provider sometimes were more advanced than the requirements of their job and they would like to have advanced workplace requirements, too.**

The participants, all of them come from the current Apprenticeship period, did not learn in VET provider laboratories, but they have studied from their home the lessons, due to COVID-19. **They have stated that the e-learning process did not cover their learning needs. Especially from the technician of Computer, stated that studying from distance did not give them the opportunity for a real practice or a real interaction with their learning process or with the other learners and the digital machines. They reject this learning approach for future applies.**

Their ideal scenario for the Apprenticeship is a process where they have been informed for everything about this experience before the application. They want more digital communication, for any document, including attendance or other certificate or application. **Some of them said that they prefer to start the apprenticeship from the first days of their studies.** And **others believed that a more long-term apprenticeship program with more than one workplace would be ideal.** And **all of them wanted to receive their full salary from the beginning of this process.** Their training would include the most modern machines or technologies and less time for training inside the VET provider. Open laboratories for practice and a rotation to different workplaces.

PART III. POST-COVID PANDEMIC RESEARCH

Interactive session with all partners

To assess the post-covid WBL approach, the partnership convened for a specific review in order to assess the core results of the study, with a specific focus on the need to revisit the current paradigm in the light of the implications and impacts of COVID-19 on WBL and international mobilities.

The session centred on four main points, with each of the respective questions put to all partners to respond to in real time and to discuss interactively.

The structure followed was:

- The usefulness of the report – to identify and understand different ways to make this deliverable useful for our stakeholders.
- Missing information from the report – to understand if we should tackle with more depth particular parts of the report.
- New needs in light of COVID – after one year of Pandemic, what needs have emerged for WBL experiences?
- The future of WBL – brainstorming how could this new situation affect the future of WBL and its modus operandi.

The usefulness of the report

- How will you link your contributions to, and the findings of, the report to your development plans in Eduwork.net?

Regarding this question, partners felt that:

- Since we are a network of networks, our plans should be to **use the report's data for our actions of internal dissemination** and **present** these European **best practices and findings to policy-makers** on how to improve overall policies in the field of education/formation.
- That **emphasising the importance of mentoring and tracking mechanisms at the workplace** should be reinforced - mentoring that fosters 'soft skills', working culture, learning about workplace requirements and employer expectations.

- The use of this report will also **support our networks to present to companies the programmes available and the advantages and best practices** of the same. We believe that showing companies how other companies are using WBL experiences as a competitive advantage is key to push further adoption.

- Who do you envision to be the target user of the report?

There were different targets defined by the partners, they were:

- The networks of each partner.
- VET providers - it was the target group highlighted the most.
- Policy-makers.
- Businesses
- EACEA

- What would be the ideal use of the report?

Partners mentioned:

- **Exploitation of the Erasmus programme** for linking VET and industry through WBL.
- To **improve internal policies and to export best practices**, to give the opportunity for teachers and students to go abroad and to learn best practices.
- For **VET providers** who want **to improve their practices**, also for the functions of the **HR offices** in companies **to be familiar with the current status and prospects in Europe**.
- To **make policy recommendations on national and EU levels**; recommendations for VET providers on WBL in Europe and to stress the importance of European mobility.
- To **raise awareness on WBL potential**.
- To **use as a reference guide to inform key stakeholders** on the most up to date situation.

Missing information from the report

- From the report, which specific measures should the project undertake to link transnationality (through mobilities) and work-based learning?

Partners felt that, to enrich the link between transnationality and WBL we should:

- **Create a VOOC platform for WBL in conjunction with Erasmus Pro.**
- **Maximize opportunity through the unique approach of the network of networks** that the project promotes.
- **Identify intercultural competencies that are required in the modern workplace - and how WBL can contribute to them.**
- Create a transnational workshop between VET providers to exchange good practices.
- Are there any areas that are relevant to your work in Eduwork.net that did not fully emerge in the report and would benefit from further enquiry?

In general, this question was answered by all partners in a similar fashion, the need to understand the impact of COVID and how can WBL adapt to it.

New needs in light of COVID

- How have you, or your members, had to adapt your objectives in promoting WBL in the light of Covid-19?

This part is where we started to understand the real impact COVID had in the different partners. The changes and adaptations defined were the following:

- The **sudden digitalisation process forced by the pandemic was a general problem for all partners**, mainly used to provide offline classes.
- Generally, the cooperation remained with businesses that were already active in WBL and were familiar with the concept, but **it has been difficult to attract new companies**, especially in programmes where a personal approach is needed to get matters underway. Promotion is otherwise not achieving results and the objectives need to be revised.
- **The partnership generally tried to promote the activation of internships and continually update key stakeholders on government decisions on physical presence in companies and health insurance.** Many partners tried to sensitize companies to take young people in internships remotely, enabling them to work at home, with some particular attention to “welcome practices” to introduce the young people to companies and colleagues.

- To organise remote learning and teaching in different ways. **Both students and teachers changed the way they do theoretical and practical lessons and WBL was stopped for the majority of specialisations.** There was a forced shift to migrate all the work and functionalities online, thus changing the way VET centres operate.
 - **The changes depended considerably on the sector**, from the Hospitality sector (which was completely shut down) to the Construction sector, which remained operative throughout most of last year.
 - **Many activities were postponed; however the situation also provoked but new and 'out of the box' thinking, which partners considered to be a positive note in a worrisome time.**
- What implications COVID-19 had for WBL experiences in your country? (Please write your country before answering).
 - **In Italy and Spain, we saw different approaches depending on the region**, depending on the spread of the pandemic in particular areas and the decisions of regional authorities. **Regarding WBL, educational systems offered, as an alternative to WBL for students to develop a work study.**
 - **In the UK, the transition to online environments was considerably accelerated, despite there being an inequality of resources between students and VET centres to apply good virtual environments.** The adapted approach using online learning and project-based approach was, however, a poor substitute by way of reflecting the benefits of a WBL experience.
 - **In Ireland, one of the biggest implications was that the WBL offer was greatly reduced.** It was also mentioned that businesses and VET centres will have to adapt when subsidies given because of COVID end, which will unavoidably make unemployment rise and potentially affect WBL experiences and the attention companies put into training.
 - **In Lithuania WBL was cancelled in most cases, where only remote programmes (e.g. IT) were able to proceed.** It is also reported that there is no action plan in place to understand how to proceed.
 - **In Greece, all WBL stopped, with a very high number of students seeking WBL experiences to enable them to finish their studies.** The only WBL experiences maintained were in IT.

Although partners pointed out different topics, **most of the points mentioned are transversal between all partner countries.**

- What needs emerged from the business side for WBL in light of COVID? Please define from 1 to 3 needs.
 - **Provide a real work experience virtually**, which at the moment is hardly comparable to a normal WBL.
 - **Quality assurance measures to counteract the need to do remote working.**
 - There is an obvious **financial need given COVID**, this affects the number of WBL experiences offered but also the possible quality of the ones offered, if companies think of WBL as a cheaper alternative to a training experience.
 - **Less bureaucracy.**
 - **To be regularly updated on Government decisions** which changed considerably from the beginning of the pandemic.
 - To have **clear guidance on how to support WBL students, on different alternatives if their workplace is affected by COVID pandemic**; how to assure that WBL students are working and doing things properly if they cannot be supervised every day.
- What needs emerged from the VET Centres perspective for WBL in light of COVID? Please define from 1 to 3 needs.
 - The need **to create more interactive classes and ways of teaching to engage students virtually.**
 - Measures from Governments, **clarity on which bureaucratic and institutional scenarios centres should operate in.**
 - **To be equipped and resourceful in applying anti-COVID measures and the different technological resources** needed to have a good digitalisation process.
 - **Training VET centre staff in digitalisation and skill-sharing.**
 - **Quality Assurance for the delivery of the curricula virtually.**
 - **Finding companies available for doing WBL experiences.**
- What needs emerged from the student side for WBL in light of COVID? Please define from 1 to 3 needs.
 - **Support for remote learning**, including free internet available, pc and all tools related to informatics technologies.
 - **Knowledge of remote learning.**

- To have **training content ready for remote learning**.
- **To be supported by a mentor** in the companies.
- **To be supported to deal with potential problems** (e.g. isolation, mental health, loss of confidence).

The future of WBL

- How should national and international WBL programmes adapt to these new circumstances?
 - **Reshape the structure, form and requirements for WBL curricula** after discussions with VET and business.
 - Important to **understand different legal requirements in countries when mobilities start again**.
 - Capture the way technology has been used as a positive practice and not only as an unavoidable substitute. **Capitalizing on the potential of virtual environments for building transnational networks, shared learning spaces and experiences**. If all the right resources are in place, then virtual environments can offer great equity in terms of accessing courses, learning resources and opportunities.
 - Provide **more funds, technologies and learning resources**.
 - To have **online material for all VET specialisations online**. Curricula need to move to more “digital” content.

DIGCOMP – A framework to reinforce digital competencies

One of the main topics discussed during the interactive session between partners was the difficult transition during COVID from in presence to virtual learning. Regarding this matter, we talked about DigComp because we considered it a key framework to potentiate digital competencies learning for all stakeholders.

With this sudden shift away from the classroom in many parts of the globe, some are wondering whether the adoption of online learning will continue to persist post-pandemic, and how such a shift would impact the worldwide education market.

In this line of thought, education and training programmes across the world have been interrupted as a result of COVID-19, and Work-Based Learning programmes such as appren-

ticeship, internship, and technical education are no exception. We believe the adoption of “The Digital Competence Framework” highlighted by the European Commission is of great importance towards the Work-Based Learning scenario and is the major method to follow in the present in order to avoid more programme interruptions and delays (for the sectors for which it is possible).

The European Digital Competence Framework, also known as DigComp, offers a tool to improve citizen’s digital competence. Today, being digitally competent means that people need to have competences in all areas of DigComp and even if WBL is meant to be a ‘fully present’ activity, the reality is that all educational sectors must adapt to it. Digital competence is one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning identified by the European Commission. It is a transversal key competence, which, as such, enables the acquisition of other key competences.

The development and adoption of these competences towards Work-Based Learning practices, are considered to us as a key objective that was accelerated during the lockdown period, and that can help to make effective WBL experiences virtually. Virtual placements are just one of the ideas that would enable students to offer help and support to organisations, whilst at the same time giving them an opportunity to develop important skills that are both relevant and career-enhancing.

The competences of DigComp are divided in 5 areas with a total of 21 competences:

• **Information and data literacy**

- Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content.
- Evaluating data, information and digital content.
- Managing data, information and digital content
- Communication and collaboration
- Interacting through digital technologies
- Sharing through digital technologies
- Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies
- Collaborating through digital technologies
- Netiquette
- Managing digital identity
- Digital Content creation

- Developing digital content
- Integrating and re-elaborating digital content.
- Copyright and licenses
- Programming

- **Safety**

- Protecting devices
- Protecting personal data and privacy
- Protecting health and well-being
- Protecting the environment
- Problem solving
- Solving technical problems
- Identifying needs and technological responses
- Creatively using digital technologies
- Identifying digital competence gaps

Reinforcing this framework across stakeholders would surely facilitate WBL virtual experiences. If these competences are taught well, we believe other ways of facilitating WBL will appear organically, and, when it is possible to go back to a full functional normality, different virtual experiences will be maintained. From day-to-day, new full remote companies are appearing, this could be relevant for WBL as well.

CONCLUSIONS

Generally, Partner countries describe their economies as well disposed towards work-based Learning (WBL) and while **apprenticeships** are common to all Eduwork.Net Partner countries, other forms of work-based learning include **traineeships** and **internships**. Spain, Italy, the UK England and Greece also refer to the dual system whereby Initial Vocational Education and Training (VET) may be the chosen route of younger students in second level and through Vocational High schools. It covers the age of compulsory schooling and provides a qualification to students who choose this route.

	WBL Measures	Courses Duration	Students Age Range	Sectorial Focus	Financial Compensation	EQF based
Italy	- Apprenticeship - Internship	Up to 3 to 4 years	From 15 to 29 years old	Commerce, Manufacturing and accommodation prevails	Yes	Yes
Ireland	- Apprenticeship	2 to 4 years	Ranging from youth to adulthood	Technology	Yes	Yes
England	- Apprenticeship - Internship	6 weeks to 6 months	From 16 to 24 years old	Business Administration and Law prevails	Yes	Yes
Spain	- Apprenticeship	1 to 3 years	From 16 to 25 years old	Manufacturing and Commerce prevails	Yes	Yes
Greece	- Apprenticeship - Internship	6 months to 3 years	For students after completing high-school	Technology	Yes	Yes
Lithuania	Apprenticeship	2 months to 4 years	Ranging from youth to adulthood	Industry sector	Yes	Yes

Ideally, **WBL integrates the provider's learning curriculum with the workplace, merges theory with practice and aspires to provide education programmes which meet the needs of the economy on a national, regional or local basis.** WBL has been described a win-win scenario for all stakeholders – the learner, the employer, the education provider and society – hence the drive towards increasing participation in vocational education and training and adjusting programmes to meet the needs of 21st century labour markets.

In all Partner countries, and in line with EU/OECD and national Government policy, **Apprenticeship is underpinned by a robust legislative framework, is focussed on providing specific qualifications (EFQ) and is Quality Assured.** National skills policy, employment programmes, education strategies and reform agendas are driven largely towards encouraging the employment of young people through apprenticeship and other forms of WBL. Formal procedures exist for organising VET as do Registers of Studies, Training Programmes and Qualifications while England has a National Apprenticeship Service and National Apprenticeship Helpdesk for the benefit of employers and potential trainees.

In all Partner Countries Vocational Training/Apprenticeship Contracts exist. VET providers are responsible for providing theoretical training, assessment and for appointing a vocational mentor/supervisor appointed to work with the apprentice and the company mentor/supervisor. Employers are responsible for providing practical training, adequate training conditions, engaging in the assessment process and for appointing an employee or professional master to monitor the apprentice and liaise with the VET provider. The partnership between the VET provider mentor and company supervisor is designed to focus on an individual education plan for the apprentice. Generally, apprenticeships are an option:

- for Learners from 16 to 24/25 years of age (our research indicates apprentices starting later and no upper age limit)
- are of 2-4 years duration (England and Greece can be as short as 6 months)
- are provided on a modular as well as full qualification basis and
- are offered at different levels e.g. certificate, advanced certificate and craft card levels equivalent to EFQ Levels 4 and 5.

Apprenticeship patterns have changed in recent years and Ireland draws the distinction between pre-2016 Craft and post 2016 Non-Craft Apprenticeships. Specific skills shortages, rapid technological change, high levels of unemployment, youth unemployment and ageing populations are among the factors that have influenced the drive towards developing apprenticeship provision as well as other forms of WBL.

VET is largely financed by public funds. It involves training by private and public institutions and is accredited largely by National Awarding Bodies and Labour Authorities. Italy, in common with other Partner countries, describes its training institutions as positively disposed and actively engaged in the creation of a “culture of apprenticeship” but experience has varied across the six countries involved and national targets have not all been achieved.

Where figures were provided: **Lithuania's recent plans for a 20% increase in WBL by 2020 fell far short – only a 3% increase by January 2019 and similarly in the UK where only 57% of a 2015 target of 3 million new apprenticeships by 2020 were realised. This situation is likely to be mirrored elsewhere and all Partner countries share difficulties to a greater or lesser extent.**

Apprenticeships and other forms of WBL require both financial and human investment and employer participation is likely to be greater among bigger firms with a high financial turnover (circa €50m) and a large labour force (over 250 employees). Some of the issues cited by our research include:

- **Pre-dominance of small to medium sized enterprises in Italy, Lithuania, Ireland, Spain and Greece where financial and human costs per trainee are high and constitute a disincentive to apprenticeship training and to other forms of WBL.** Clustering initiatives in WBL have provided a regional approach to supporting SMEs where VET providers and companies form networks which provide training specialisms to companies within a particular region.
- **Government financial incentives to employers are available across all Partner countries but they vary considerably in terms of benefit to employers and their subsequent impact on apprenticeship** take up. Furthermore, details are not always easily available and administration costs of apprenticeships may discourage employers.
- **Lack of information for employers and potential learners/trainees e.g. Lithuanian partner refers specifically to the situation prior to 2019 where there was no single institution or platform through which people could access apprenticeship training information regardless of the target audience**
- **Negative perception/attitudes towards VET and the apprenticeship route** prevent the development of quality partnerships between VET institutions, employers and future apprentices/trainees in some countries – cited by Lithuania and Greece
- **Mismatch of skills to jobs where, despite increased investment in VET, education and training is not sufficiently aligned to labour market needs**
- **Often it is the VET provider, not employers, that is proactive in setting up apprenticeship programmes whereas quality partnerships and greater commitment by providers/employers**, in conjunction with government policy, might contribute to more job specific VET provision and better serve the needs of all stakeholders. Most Partners indicated the need to strengthen relationships between providers and employers in order to promote greater

integration of curricular provision and on-the-job training and to create ‘Ambassadors’ of WBL.

Besides the differences above mentioned and the pros and cons of applying these programmes, **the implementation and the analyses of the focus groups/interviews has brought new insights to the project.** In general terms, the majority of the stakeholders here analysed have talked about the implementation of the programmes with a positively and general satisfaction. In the following table, there is a briefing of the results analysed from the focus groups and interviews.

The stakeholders (according to the focus groups and interviews)		
WBL Context	Connection VET-Businesses	Ideal Scenario
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies analysed are implementing WBL for more than a year and they argued that they are satisfied with the general outcomes. • The open mindedness of young people was argued by some companies to be an opportunity for innovation. • In general terms, students found that the assigned company met their expectations and the tasks assigned were relevant with the study path. • Despite the adaptive and initial difficulties, all students felt appreciated and valued while they were working at the company. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies are making efforts to work in collaboration with local technical and professional institutes to organize company visits, project work, traineeships and apprenticeships. • Companies refrained the importance of the tutor in the process, and to be one of the most important stakeholders to the success of the apprenticeship. • In general terms, students considered the institution in line with their expectations and able to offer them the tools to test themselves with the labour market. • Students appreciated the work on soft skills done at school and in parallel with the workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies would like to have a closer synergy between the educational centre, since all stakeholders will effectively benefit from it. • A few companies proposed a portal that connects companies and schools without intermediaries that slow down communication • A few students felt the need for more cooperation between the business world, the school and the teaching world. • A few students felt that would be useful to also introduce the assessment on personal attitudes, different needs and emotional aspects, and not only evaluate the apprenticeship in a traditional way.

The implementation of such programmes were classified with positive outcomes from the majority of the stakeholders and efforts are being made for them to prevail alongside European countries. The apprentice gets his valuable work experience and starts to get good contacts in the industry or sector that can help him start a career. **The goal of these programmes have a dual outcome:** first, **the student is empowered by achieving employment, working skills and economic self-sufficiency**, and second, **the companies have young people working alongside the business learning and providing a fresh outlook**, while their wages can be financially supported by their own government. In general terms, the implementing of WBL has been bringing positive insights and outcomes to young European citizens, to the job market, and to all the countries that implement such programmes, since they are implemented according to national needs.

Despite general positive feedback, **there are still practices that have to improve in many ways to offer an ideal WBL experience.** There is still a **lack of monitoring for the students, mismatch between the curricula and the real tasks of the WBL experience and lack of mentoring.** **From the business side, there is still a lack of knowledge regarding WBL, not only from the knowledge on how to apply to it, but also from the real objective of an WBL experience.** Many businesses see this as an extra-worker opportunity, which is far from true.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As **recommendations and insights based on this research**, we have found:

- An **increased synergy between organisations** and VET centres **correlates positively with the general satisfaction** of all actors involved (VET centres, Business Organisations and students).
- For most business organisations interviewed, **WBL experiences have provided** them more **space for innovation and open-mindedness**, which in turn is a **competitive advantage** for the organisation itself.
- **Having a mentor in the company for the students'** WBL experience generally proved to be, for the participants in this research, a **very important action to the success of the WBL experience**.
- **Having an assigned tutor from the VET centres** in charge of **following-up** the students' WBL experience generally proved to be for the participants in this research a **very important action to the success of the WBL experience**.
- **Soft Skills development is important for the students before, during and after the WBL experience**.
- A **redefinition of the evaluation process** is explicitly sought by some students. Many feel that it is **important to incorporate into the evaluation process an assessment on their personal attitudes, different needs and emotional aspects, rather than** a sole focus on the evaluation of traditional or **'hard' skills**.

As **proposals** for facilitating an improvement on the WBL experiences development, from our research we were able to define:

- **A portal that connects companies and schools without** intermediaries – which can otherwise slow down communication. **Many companies do not organise WBL experience for two main reasons; bureaucracy and lack of knowledge**. The ones that do are generally satisfied with the experience itself. We found that in some partner countries many companies do not pursue this path because of lack of knowledge. We believe we can assume that there are companies all across Europe that do not have knowledge of the possibilities WBL offers. We also found that bureaucratic processes derail the pursuit of WBL for different

organisations. **The proposal for a Portal that acts as an intermediary would facilitate the process and highlight the advantages of WBL.**

- **A standardized tracking mechanism** which monitors the trainee during and after the WBL experience. Partners feel that the process of mentoring lacks presence both from the VET and Business side. **A standardized procedure would facilitate the modus operandi of both perspectives to understand the development of the WBL experience through its duration - but also to track the students afterward**, to understand the long term impact and to create further synergies.
- **A revision of the evaluation process.** The labour market places increasing importance on the soft skills of its workers and this should be reflected in the evaluation of the WBL experience. Soft Skills are considered key nowadays and should be evaluated as such.

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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union