



O1 – Explorative Study Executive Summary

Prepared by Meath Partnership

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Introduction to the WBL Accelerator Explorative Study

Work-based Learning (WBL) is a crucial component of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe, but educational institutions and businesses use very different concepts and languages in their approaches. In order to foster cooperation between education and businesses it is necessary to build a bridge that effectively links VET educational institutions with companies. To increase the quality of WBL and the impact of VET, the concepts of modern VET need to be widely understood, shared and followed by the people responsible for WBL within companies. The WBL Accelerator project was initiated by the project partners to help and support these target groups “to speak a common language”.

Therefore, the aim of the WBL Accelerator project is to improve the quality of WBL in VET systems in Europe through an innovative training programme and compendium of supports to enable the WBL responsible staff in companies and businesses to get familiar with the following aspects:

- VET pedagogics
- European VET standards
- European VET methodologies and instruments
- Modern WBL planning on the basis of European WBL principles and practical exercises

Each company involved in WBL has staff dedicated and appointed to be responsible for the implementation of it. It can be a staff member selected from the fore workers, company owners, HR staff, training managers, but we have to be aware of and take into consideration a fact, that in most of the cases these responsible persons are not pedagogues or educationalists, but skilled workers having practically no professional knowledge on VET system and methodological level, because they carry out completely different roles and duties within their jobs on a daily basis.

What is needed is a highly modular and fragmented training programme for WBL responsables in companies which is: focused on company values and objective, efficient, fast, based on Europe VET standards, flexible for use within European VET systems, business language based, company and business immersive, easily accessible and built on the views and concepts of companies which are the driving forces of WBL.

The need to support the development of relevant skills amongst this target group, as well as other procedures and steps to improve the quality of work-based learning and the impact of VET has been identified as part of a comprehensive research process in partner countries which is the focus of this Summary Report.

This report presents the findings from this extensive research process undertaken by project partners in Austria, Ireland, Malta, Germany, Slovenia and Spain. The full research report is available on the project website.

Aims of the Explorative Research Report

This executive summary is part of the first intellectual output of the WBL Accelerator project and provides a concise overview of the findings from the explorative research process which was led by Meath Partnership, and implemented locally in all six partner countries.

The aim of the *Explorative Research* process was to help to define the status of WBL in companies, investigate the reasons for interface challenges and incoherencies between the world of work and the world of education and to identify the “language problem” between education systems and business realities especially in relation to VET.

The research also provided a contemporary business reality driven picture of WBL in Europe from the perspective of companies and give answers to the questions, why this interface between companies and VET in education institutions is such a difficult one.

The outcomes of this Explorative Research process implemented according to the guidelines have been summarised and collated by all partners and the findings from our collective research activities will inform the future development work of, namely:

1. IO2 – Modular Training Programme for WBL responsables in companies
2. IO3 – Handbook *“Modern WBL in Europe – concepts, methods, practical applications”*

The *WBL accelerator training programme (IO2)* will be the core output of the project and it will be a flexible modular course for the people involved with WBL in companies. The WBL accelerator training programme will be aimed at giving WBL responsables the necessary competences, knowledge and practical experiences to be able to insert their WBL parts and elements into a European VET system, to plan WBL according the European VET policy instruments, strategies and methods, to achieve coherence between what is done on VET school level and what is done on WBL level in companies.

The Final intellectual output (IO3) of the project will be a comprehensive handbook about “Modern WBL in Europe – concepts, methods, practical application” that will be functioning as an extensive guideline for WBL responsables, how WBL processes in companies could be planned, implemented and evaluated. The language used in the handbook is the one used and preferred by companies and HR departments, all the VET terminology and education theory will be translated to a business terminology. Moreover, it is very important that the handbook refers to the standard activities and processes in companies and fully reflects the business realities. The final content and terminology during its development will be created building on the findings of this Explorative Research Report and recommendations of the target group shared during the Focus Group Sessions.

Overview of the Explorative Research Process: Methodology

The working research methodology implemented in each partner country comprised the hosting of two *focus group meetings* with 12 participants in each group reaching a total of 144 persons across the partner countries. The participants in the focus group sessions included people within companies that are responsible for all and any type of work-based learning and included company owners, HR personnel, training personnel, line managers, team leaders, shop stewards, apprenticeship counsellors, etc.

Why Focus Groups? One of the aims of the partners to be reached by the implementation of the Explorative Research was to activate and engage the target group members. As a focus group involves organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic, application of this research method was identified as the most effective way of obtaining several perspectives about the project topic.

Questions identified by the partners were aimed at gaining a better understanding and knowledge of the WBL in all the partner countries and to find out why companies prefer to apply WBL in practice, what is the legislation framework of this process, what are the procedures and processes applied in the partner countries and also what support is offered to the WBL responsables by their management.

In addition, the partners also explored the current challenges faced by WBL responsables in their companies; captured their level of knowledge about VET and understood what (if any) relationship existed with the local education institutions.

The last set of questions focused on mapping the needs and identifying the next steps, supporting further professional development of WBL responsables. The diversity of the composition of each group has greatly contributed to the specifications of the skills and abilities of the ideal WBL responsible.

The finalisation of the exploration research process was decisive as partners were able to plan and design an effective training plan, by identifying the skills and abilities expected from the WBL responsible, to be able to support the apprentices' professional development to the greatest extent possible.

The data from both focus group sessions in each country were analysed and summarised by the project partners with the main findings provided in short Country Research Report which are also available on the WBL Accelerator project website.

These Country Research Reports created the basis for a development of this Explorative Study Report and Executive Summary.

Findings from Explorative Research Process

This research process was undertaken by partners in Austria, Ireland, Malta, Germany, Slovenia and Spain in January, February and March 2019, with a composition of participants from different fields and different positions taking part on Focus Group meetings.

Partners had to tailor the initial plan to organise two Focus Group with 12 participants per group, in several countries to the needs of the target groups and to the level of their interest, resulting in organising several meetings to meet the goals set within the project, on different days and places, and also in some instances held personal, one to one meetings, mainly with representatives of small businesses in some of the partner countries.

The composition of the Focus Groups was rather diverse across the partner countries. Representatives of both SMEs and large enterprises were involved in the sessions. Different sectors were represented in the groups, as follows:

- In Austria, they were representatives of IT, Manufacturing, Gastronomy;
- In Germany representatives of Business Consulting, Legal, Tax, HR, IT, Travel, VET Training, Regional Business Development;
- In Spain representatives of Services, Catering, Hotel Management, Socio-Sanitary, Computing;
- In Ireland representatives of Electrical, Plumbing and Mechanical Services, Construction, IT, Insurance, Hairdressing;
- In Slovenia representatives of Joinery, Hotel Services, Gastronomy, Masonry, Tool Making, Stone-Cutting, Mechanics, Paper Industry;
- In Malta representatives coming from the Engineering, Transport, Community Services, Agribusiness, Business and Commerce backgrounds.

In order to obtain comparable and evaluable information, we asked the participants in each country 3 questions, that were identified by the partners as the most significant in terms of mapping the overall WBL process in each country, obtaining information about corporate motivation to apply WBL in practice, or what support they provide to WBL responsables and apprentices themselves.

STATUS QUO

The **first question** aimed to find out why companies got involved in work-based learning (WBL) and what makes it attractive to them. The answers to this question were almost equal in each of the partner countries.

The most important reasons why companies prefer to apply WBL in their daily practises identified by the participants were:

- **Talent capture**

Many of the participants consider this option to be the most relevant, as employing a young person while acquiring basic knowledge and tracking his or her development at the workplace can help to reveal and evaluate the talent and potential of the person.

Revealing the talent in the initial phases ensures the possibility to provide the apprentice with the support and attention needed to achieve better results. A common practice phenomenon is, that some of the apprentices have developed into leadership positions and are also able to do their job at a very high standard and with great commitment.

- **Training of apprentices according to the company's requirements and needs**

Each company has its own procedures and requirements that are applied in practice on a daily basis. Employing apprentices is a great advantage, as the future potential workers are trained on the basis of these requirements. Having the required skills and knowledge, the need for retraining and/or training of the employee prior working for the company is eliminated.

- **WBL offers an opportunity to sustain the company's workforce into the future**

Another finding of the research is, that ensuring the right working conditions during the WBL, the relationship between the employee and the employer is established, linked and trusted. In the event, that the employer provides the employee with suitable conditions and environment, employees often reward the employer for their efforts by remaining loyal and form a strong employee base for the company in the long-term perspective.

- **WBL is a cheap, risk-free source of labour**

Employing an apprentice in a company can deliver a most cost-effective workforce compared with full-paid regular employees, but this is also a guarantee of maintaining this workforce for a certain period of time, as practicing during study is a necessity to achieve the qualifications. In addition, students are constantly supervised by well-trained staff with years of experience and knowledge. This also eliminates the risk of accidents or injuries as well as other forms of potential harm working in the company.

In addition to these observations, focus group participants in Malta also mentioned the opportunity to train employees and minimise disruption, while in Austria the companies think that the WBL offers also an opportunity to bring research students with new ideas and innovation into companies.

Answers to the **second question** revealed the regulations and policy in place to regulate WBL in the partner countries, who is typically responsible for it and how is the whole process

managed within the companies. We also got a better insight into the number of the apprentices the companies support via WBL on annual basis.

The findings regarding different procedures by countries are as follows:

GERMANY

There is a long tradition of apprenticeship structure all across Germany (Berufsausbildung, entsprechend Berufsbildungsgesetz). It includes normally a three-way-partnership between:

- the private company taking on an apprentice (Ausbildungsbetrieb)
- the Chamber of Trade and Commerce, or Chamber of Skilled Crafts (Industrie- und Handwerkskammer oder Handwerkskammer) and
- the vocational college (Berufsschule).

Normally vocational schools are administered by the state. But there is also the possibility, that a Chamber of Trade & Commerce or Chamber of Skilled Crafts (Industrie- und Handwerkskammer oder Handwerkskammer) authorises a private vocational college, or that the National Employment Agency (Agentur für Arbeit) subsidises these private vocational schools in accordance with Chamber of Trade & Commerce or Chamber of Crafts (Industrie- und Handwerkskammer oder Handwerkskammer).

In some vocations it is also possible, that the student qualifies at a vocational college, including an internship (e.g. Pharmazeutischer Assistent/PTA). This is a non-academic vocational qualification (training period: 2 to 3 years).

An apprenticeship structure in the vocational training (Berufsausbildung) system involves sharing time between practical experience in a private company and theoretical learning at the vocational colleges. Policy and structure for apprenticeships are centrally managed by the IHK (Chamber of Trade and Commerce) or HwK (Chamber of Skilled Crafts) in cooperation with private companies and the Vocational Colleges (according to the local or regional IHK or HWK). However, the apprenticeship plans are often flexible, but always in line with the educational regulations (Ausbildungsverordnung) according to each vocation and profession. In each private company there has to be certified ADA trainers (ADA = Ausbildung der Ausbilder, in English: train the trainers) according to the trained vocation who are responsible for the practical training of apprentices.

AUSTRIA

In Austria overall, every company, which offers apprenticeship, is legally obliged to follow the existing guidelines and laws. Namely, the BAG (Berufsausbildungsgesetz, translated as Vocational Training Act; RIS 2019) compiles all laws related to the vocational training in Austrian companies in the framework of apprenticeships. The Austrian Economic Chambers is actually a consultant for companies with regards to the compliant implementation of work-based learning in Austria and offers a variety of supporting documents for businesses and HR responsables (WKOÖ 2011; WKO 2016).

In every company there has to be at least one person, depending on how many apprentices the company has, who is supervising them. The person responsible could be the company owner or another person who has the professional competences, pedagogical-methodological

competences and legal knowledge, which all has to be verified and evidenced. These competences could be acquired in a 40-hour training course or validated by already acquired supporting documents. In either case, a test has to be passed in order to become the apprentice supervisor (WKO 2016) (there is one exception, which is explained later under question 5). Depending on the size of the company and personal supervising style of the responsible person, the implementation scope of the guidelines differs. In some companies, there are folders with plans and checklists, which are updated regularly and on which the training of the apprentice(s) is based on, in others there is only the official job description according to which the apprentice is trained. These job descriptions are often either too basic or too specific and do not necessarily correspond with the competences mentioned in the standardised job descriptions or Learning Outcomes of the VET schools and thereby of the educational world. In most cases, the person who is responsible for the apprentice(s) has this task only as a side-task and is not primarily an apprentice trainer. This opportunity to focus on the pedagogical tasks is only possible in large companies, where there might even be apprentice trainers with assistants, but this is the exception. Due to this reason, there are not enough time resources for most WBL responsible person to focus on the apprentices and their work-based training.

IRELAND

The national apprenticeship system is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act. The legislation sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for as well as the responsibilities of apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. There is an Apprenticeship Code of Practice and all organisations who employ apprentices work to these standards.

The larger companies had processes and structures in place which included follow through from recruitment to the end of apprenticeship. There are regular meetings with the apprentices and the apprentice is often assigned a mentor and is given guidance and feedback from the mentor. The mentor is also the person who liaises with the VET institution.

Overall there is a difference between the craft apprenticeship companies and the new apprenticeship companies. Companies who have new apprenticeship schemes have strong structures and processes in place. The SME craft companies that may have less than 5 employees have less structured processes with more than one person being responsible for the apprentice dependent on who is free at the time. It would be usual for the apprentice to work directly with the owner who is a qualified practitioner.

The number of apprentices supported via WBL varied from 1 per annum to 200 per annum, again related to the size capacity of the company.

SLOVENIA

Each company offering apprenticeship or work-based learning must comply with the existing legislation (most importantly with the Apprenticeship Act and Vocational Education Act). There is a consultant employed at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia who works

with both companies, VET schools and parents of the students/apprentices on daily basis, answering their questions and advising on different issues regarding the implementation of the apprenticeship. Mentors (with the support of the HR departments) are those that are mostly responsible for the implementation of the apprenticeship. According to the Apprenticeship Act, companies must be able to provide the apprentice with a mentor for the duration of practical work-related training (at least one person, depending on the number of apprentices' company has). The mentor must have:

- at least secondary professional education, pedagogical and andragogical qualifications and at least three years of work experience;
- or a master or managerial title in the field for which the apprentice is trained.

Exceptionally, a mentor may also be a person with a secondary level vocational education and at least five years of work experience in the field of activity (branch) or profession for which the apprentice is trained and pedagogical-andragogical qualifications.

A mentor cannot be a person who is prohibited from entering into an employment relationship or performing work in the field of education in accordance with the law governing the organisation and financing of education. In general, most of the participants in the focus groups confirmed the findings of the preliminary survey which was conducted during the desk-research phase, that apprenticeships are included in companies' long-term strategy or goals as a way of recruiting new employees (i.e. talent capture).

Since apprentices in Slovenia still have student status and are enrolled in VET schools, companies and schools (and chambers as intermediaries) closely cooperate on the development of the apprenticeship plan for each apprentice (based also on the Catalogue of practical work-related training which was developed by the national VET institute). These apprenticeship plans are the core documents for the implementation of apprenticeships.

SPAIN

There are differences between large and small companies. While in the large companies (IKEA, Miranda Foundation, Igurco) there is a policy of WBL management, have a welcome procedure, people responsible for tutoring and guidance, resources, etc. and WBL is recognised by General Management (CEO) as a very good tool for personnel selection, in the small companies there are not any concrete processes; the manager (usually) is the one who deals with the students and the resources are lower.

In large companies (IKEA, KIABI, for example) there is a pre-selection of WBL students undertaken by the HR department, using their CV (studies developed). The HR department designates them towards the corresponding company departments/sections. The HR department, or the same tutors, do a weekly follow-up of the WBL students to verify how they feel, what are their needs or requirements, etc. In case the apprentices have an inquiry, they can talk directly with the tutor in the company, who look after the apprentice and offers him the appropriate support. In KIABI, in particular, apprentices have in addition an access to a portal (*Wink*) for training and promotions.

In large companies, employees with more experience in certain field (in each department or

section) are identified, so they can act as a tutor/counsellor with a WBL trainee. Young people are rotating and are mentored by different members of the staff depending on the job or task carried out.

In small companies, the manager (or other responsible person) is responsible for guiding the apprentice through diverse jobs or tasks, although the students have lower possibilities of job rotation than in large companies.

MALTA

Malta's leading vocational college, the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) is the VET institution responsible for governing and managing the Apprenticeship system at national level in Malta, and has been working to raise the quality of apprenticeships so as to strike a balance between theoretical and on-the-job training and hence enable the apprentice to remain employable in the long run on the basis of transferable and regularly updated expertise. Furthermore, with regards to collaboration with Industry, MCAST participates as an important stakeholder: to provide feedback on courses delivered at MCAST at various levels, from MQF1 to MQF7 (Masters Degrees). Throughout the year the different MCAST Institutes organise seminars in which they invite people from particular industry sectors pertinent to each institute in order to get feedback from them about MCAST courses, their relevance, courses that need updating and new courses that need to be opened. This is followed up by other consultation seminars throughout the year and will also be part of the periodic cyclical review of MCAST courses across Institutes and levels.

MCAST is also in the process of appointing Industry Advisory Groups which will include social partners and employers. The main objectives of these groups are:

- Identify and review competences;
- Inform MCAST about latest trends and changes in the labour market;
- Propose changes to existing programmes;
- Strengthen link between VET and Industry.

The Industry Advisory Groups will work together with MCAST to:

- Evaluate existing programmes;
- Design and develop new programmes;
- Strengthen QA structures;
- Identify and evaluate industry specific market needs;
- Train in-company trainers and MCAST supervisors and
- Attract new students from other education institutions through ERASMUS+

Most of the participants in both focus groups were aware of the recent changes and have welcomed the effort made by MCAST in providing quality-based apprenticeship programmes including continuous collaboration and partnership with the local industry sectors. Nearly all participants have had a positive relationship with the Work-based and Apprenticeship Department within MCAST and have praised the efficiency, availability, readiness and assistance offered by the Department. Furthermore, on many occasions they are also satisfied with the monitoring carried out by technical staff from MCAST.

The majority of companies in Malta are small or micro ones and hence, the employer is also the trainer/mentor to the apprentice. However, for the medium sized companies, there are dedicated people working in the fields of either HR or as education managers. This facilitates the integration, training and mentoring of the apprentice. Furthermore, in such companies, there are also other dedicated technical people who ensure that the apprentice is acquiring the necessary skills and competences. Training is also provided in the medium sized companies, either in house or else through customised training programmes provided by educational institutions. In such companies, the persons involved in either HR or training are also given the opportunity to attend conferences and seminars organised by educational institutions, chambers and employers' trade unions related to education and training.

Overall conclusion: Austria, Germany and Slovenia all have regulations and laws in place that govern apprenticeship schemes and their implementation (appointment of mentors) while in Malta, Ireland and Spain there is a difference between the procedures for larger companies and SMEs/Microenterprises. The number of apprentices differs and depends on the size of the companies. Focus Group meetings included participants from companies employing from 1 to over 200 apprentices per annum.

*The **third question** of the survey was aimed to find out, what support do the WBL responsables receive within their companies to oversee the WBL.*

As different legislation applied in each of the partner countries the responses to this question also varied by country. The responses also depend on the size and industry of the company. One feature in common, mentioned by the participants was, that the support from the company management tends to come in the form of both formal and informal meetings, seeking updates on whether the apprentice programme is successful or not and what changes should be made to increase the effectivity of the WBL process.

The most common forms of support in each country were:

- Professional training;
- Feedback loops;
- Progress reporting; supports from HR depts. in terms of recruitment, selection, insertion and follow up.

The language of ECVET was not well known by focus group participants; its irrelevance, non-compatibility and practical value to real life workplace operations was highlighted through many of the reports.

CHALLENGES

Based on the comments of focus group participants the challenges have been divided into two basic groups:

1. Challenges in general
2. Challenges in connection with managing, supervising and planning the WBL

Challenges in general

Most focus group participants reported that there is well-established cooperation between VET providers and companies. However, they still believe, that there is a space for improvement in the following areas: the VET providers effort to promote certain trades; Knowledge needed for the day-to-day practical training in the workplace (participants identified a major disconnection and lack of knowledge in this field); Promotion of the apprenticeships to university drop-outs as a viable alternative; Positive promotion of the VET to young people and their parents; Lack of information about the structure of placements (block release) having a negative impact on company processes; Better established and more intensive contact of larger companies with VET compared to the SMEs, as they are considered by the VET institutions as more valuable customers and finally the availability and suitability of apprentices for certain companies and opportunities.

Challenges in connection with managing, supervising and planning for WBL

The main challenges the participants are facing during WBL are how to motivate apprentices and especially how to find “good” apprentices – motivated with a good work ethic, committed to the placement as the skills or motivation of the apprentices measured against the expectation of employers often do not match.

According to the findings, the companies would prefer to have a possibility of having an online marketplace for apprentices. The companies also highlighted a need to ensure a consistent approach of supporting apprentices, as individual traits/skills of the mentor may vary and also that the attitude and/or the age of the mentor can have a major impact on the relationship between the mentor and the apprentice resulting from a “generation gap”. There is also a need for more robust tools to monitor progress other than learning diaries/journals and in connection with this process the participants also identified as a challenge, that the assessment methods vary across companies in terms of the practical exercises for the interim and final examination.

In relation to the training available for the WBL responsables in smaller companies, the participants considered a lack of trainings available as a great challenge, they would prefer to have a more sophisticated induction and follow up training in place as well as a WBL toolkit they could benefit from to support their students during the learning process. Availability of apprentices which often match the school timetable rather than the company timetable – especially within the services industries is also one of the major challenges faced by the companies and WBL responsables themselves.

Findings to inform the development of the WBL Accelerator Training Programme

In connection with the development of the WBL Accelerator Training Programme, we were first and foremost curious about what are the requirements connected with the role of the Mentor that are considered to be the most important by the focus group participants.

Through collective discussions we came to the conclusion, that in order to ensure effective work-based learning, participants considered important to select a mentor, having the necessary knowledge and skills to maintain contact with the VET institution, as well as the professional and personal skills and adequate approach to the apprentice during practical training within their organisation or company.

Based on this, divided into two main groups, the following specific professional and personal skills of a mentor were recommended:

Skills and ability in connection with VET institutions

The mentor should have the following skills and ability to:

- Participate in the selection process;
- Successfully implement the WBL planning and company induction;
- Transfer the knowledge to the apprentice;
- Maintain contact with the VET centre;
- Perform monitoring, give feedback and solve the potential problems;
- Offer guidance and coaching to the apprentice;
- Evaluate the student with the VET centre;
- and who is also familiar with the legal/regulatory requirements of WBL/ apprenticeships

Skills and ability in connection with the placement and support of the apprentice within the company:

- Professional and knowledgeable about their field;
- Ability to teach, i.e. possess pedagogical skills;
- Empathy and patience;
- Ability to facilitate learning;
- Good communication skills including IT skills;
- Team management skills;
- Conflict management skills;
- Desire to take on the role of mentor;
- Understanding of the student; and
- Ability to function as a Role Model and to be motivating.

Acquiring these skills and knowledge will ensure, that the WBL responsible will be able to perform their function efficiently and professionally, both in terms of collaboration with VET institution, but also in day-to-day practice providing expert supervision of the apprentice in the company.

According to these findings, the partners have deduced the following framework to support the development of the WBL Accelerator Training Programme:

1. INDUCTION TO WORK BASED LEARNING FOR MANAGEMENT AND WBL RESPONSIBLES

- What is WBL
- The company's role in the WBL process
- Comparability structural level in relation to the EQF, ECVET etc.

- Glossary of terms translated to business language
- Europass for employers
- WBL best practices

2. PLANNING, MONITORING AND RECOGNITION OF WBL

- Planning WBL
- Monitoring/Assessing WBL
- How to hire apprentices from abroad
- Recognition and transferability of WBL on a European level

3. ROLE OF THE MENTOR

- Daily life of mentors
- Profile of mentors in relation to their roles and main attributes
- Different pedagogic methods
- Mentoring and counselling
- Core tasks of a WBL mentor

4. YOUTH CULTURE AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH APPRENTICES

- Introduction to generation X, Y, Z
- Who are the employees of the future?
- Interpersonal communication
- Communication using digital tools
- Talent capture
- Mobilities to develop skills including introduction to EURES and other EU mobility instruments supporting skills development

Findings to inform the development of the WBL Accelerator Handbook

The proposed content of the third intellectual output, a comprehensive handbook: “Modern WBL in Europe – concepts, methods, practical application” aimed toward company owners, HR staff, fore workers, jobs stewards, line managers, apprenticeship trainers etc. to support them in their tasks to plan and implement different kinds of WBL processes was presented to the participants as follows:

- Introduction to WBL in a European VET arena;
- WBL processes in a business reality;
- The added value of WBL for business values;
- Planning of WBL in front of business realities and European VET principles;
- Core European VET instruments, methods, strategies and their added value for WBL in company;
- Case studies and practical examples from the business world;
- Documents, checklists and further material for planning and implementation of WBL in companies on the basis of European VET strategies.

The participants considered a development of such a handbook as very useful. The recommendation in connection with the handbook was to ensure a digital or online version that would be available as an open resource for both companies and apprentices. From the companies' perspective it was considered very important that a handbook would include relevant information and address issues identified by the companies, so this resource will have a potential to reach the key stakeholders, to support further improvements and change in the policies and practices supporting WBL in the partner countries. Moreover, it is important that the handbook refers to the standard activities and process in companies and fully reflects modern day business realities.

Following the findings of the research it is crucially important that the language used in the handbook is one that companies are familiar with and that VET terminology and education theory are translated to a business terminology.

Participants also expressed their interest in testing the handbook and giving feedback to the partners regarding its content to ensure its highest potential for usability and transferability.

Recommendations

Participants from all the partners countries identified a significant need to develop and deliver training for WBL responsables in companies, formulated in a business-related language that is easily understood and relevant so that they gain a better understanding of the VET processes, standards and terms used in education to further support WBL in their companies. To increase the effectiveness of the process, there was a strong recommendation to develop the soft skills of the WBL responsables.

Further recommendation and suggestions of the participants in connection with the improvement of the WBL process included:

- The training programme should include presentation of examples of what is meant by WBL – full family of opportunities available and associated benefits;
- Make the language of ECVET relevant to business;
- The training programme to be presented in a blended format with face-to-face training presented as an opportunity for networking;
- Time is a major factor for all participants – training needs to be short and highly practical;
- It should include a short induction for management as to the complexities of hosting apprentices/WBL;
- Offer an online or telephone support for mentors – FAQs section as a minimum;
- A centralised website sourcing ECVET information would be welcomed;
- Online Interactive learning platform on qualification frameworks including a learning platform that might integrate a chat function, where information can be downloaded and questions can be raised for discussion with participants would be welcomed;
- A Handbook for business including ECVET information;

Conclusion

Work-based learning as a methodology to acquire professional experience and access employment is increasingly accepted and valued by employers and young jobseekers at the same time. The companies recognise, that the benefit of WBL are mutual, although to ensure the efficiency of the process and progress there must be in place an appropriate interaction with the VET institutions and adequate support for WBL in companies. This support should take the form of trained mentors are in a position to maximise the efficiency of the learning process for the apprentice.