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# Ensuring Quality in Work-Based Learning

Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement



[www.wbl-quality.eu](http://www.wbl-quality.eu)

# **Ensuring Quality in Work-Based Learning**

## **Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement**

# Imprint

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# Foreword

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This publication has been developed as one of the core products of the WBL-Q project, which was co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.

From 2020 to 2022, the transnational and multi-professional partnership from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia, and Spain has produced three main project results:

1. An investigation research study to identify relevant and feasible quality criteria reflecting the broad variety of work-based learning. The results are presented in a full report in English and executive summaries in all partner languages.
2. An online self-evaluation and stress test tool, which allows the assessment of the work-based learning quality inside one's own company or organisation. A detailed result report offers tailored recommendations for improvement.
3. A handbook for persons responsible for work-based learning about quality in WBL in general and how they can improve it, alongside instructions on how to implement and operate the self-evaluation tool.

Find out more about our project at [www.wbl-quality.eu](http://www.wbl-quality.eu) and try the free self-assessment tool here [www.tool.wbl-quality.eu](http://www.tool.wbl-quality.eu).

With our work, we hope to contribute further to raising awareness for the importance of work-based learning and its quality assurance systems. The following pages provide not only a lot of information on the topic itself, but also further links to official documents by relevant European institutes (see reference section).

We thank all partners for their dedication to the WBL-Q project and will continue our commitment to ameliorate work-based learning processes and quality in Europe.

*Dr. Georg Müllner & Carina Posch,  
Verein Auxilium*

# **Introduction to Work-Based Learning in a European VET Arena**

## **1.1. Work-Based Learning (WBL) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe**

Apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning (WBL) have always been seen as good means to help young learners to transition from school to the world of work all over Europe. They also support the upskilling and reskilling of adults. Therefore, they form a priority in the VET policy on the European level all the way from the Bruges communiqué (2010) to the Osnabrück Declaration (2020), resulting in almost all EU Member States to reform their present apprenticeship schemes or to introduce new ones (CEDEFOP 2022a).

The fundamental aim of work-based learning is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies in the occupational environment. Work-based learning is formal organized learning where the content is relevant for current and future jobs, can take place in the company, educational institutions or in form of simulation, and is part of a (vocational) education programme for young students or adults.

Work-based learning is often portrayed as strong means to develop workplace skills and to enhance the productivity of the work force. When companies and learners actively engage in it, they can realise the full potential of work-based learning and increase the productivity of their business (Croner-i 2017).

## WHY DO COMPANIES OFFER WORK-BASED LEARNING?

(GOVET/German Office for International Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training 2019)



### **Productivity**

WBL trainees, especially apprentices in a dual system, contribute to the productivity of a company.



### **Investment**

Companies invest in the WBL trainees to assure a high-skilled, specialised workforce in the future.



### **Screening**

During the initial training, the company can screen the WBL learner and decide if they fit into the workforce.



### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

By offering WBL, a company offers young people a great career path and an opportunity to integrate in the labour market.



### **Reputation**

Companies who showing investment in the young generation and social responsibility are usually perceived more positively by society.

Understanding the dynamics of the costs and benefits of WBL and ensuring that those are reflected in the design of WBL schemes is essential to ensure that firms provide high-quality WBL and trainees perceive WBL as an attractive career option.

Learning within the workplace offers many possibilities, but receiving a formal recognition of what has been learned can be difficult. Nevertheless, such recognition has many advantages, especially for workers looking for a new job without a formal proof of their training and competences (Croner-i 2017).

Sometimes the recognition relates to a formal programme of work-based learning – for example a work placement that is part of a postsecondary qualification. But many skills are also developed by workers as they go about their jobs, trying out

different techniques, sometimes advised by colleagues, honing their skills through experience.

To receive a realistic insight into the different career paths, young people need to participate in the world of labour. It therefore needs to be ensured that they have the chance to spend some time in workplaces.

However, work-based learning is often only the second choice while young learners and their parents prefer an academic path which is attributed with a higher value.

This results in challenges for school-based career guidance which it confronted with difficulties when providing accurate information about labour market needs. Additionally, external factors (e.g., family and social background) and internal factors (e.g., cognitive ability, aptitude, and self-esteem) influence the career choices of young people (OECD 2022a). Companies in Europe need skilled workers to secure economic growth and development.

There are very well-paid, innovative and safe jobs in the trades as well as in industry. A high quality of in-company training also leads to an improvement in attractiveness and acceptance. Often the only thing missing is the image or lack of transparency or public relations. Employers can face difficulties in finding suitable employees, while the potential employees have trouble obtaining information about available jobs, for example because they do not have access to networks of potential employers (CEDEFOP 2013).

This presents obstacles for career guidance staff in ensuring equity and supporting the young learners in making informed career choices, keeping the employers' needs in mind, while also catering to individual predispositions and preferences (OECD 2022a).

Making VET truly a FIRST choice, and transforming VET schools into schools of the future, demands more flexible pathways, greater focus on innovation, a relevant blend of soft and hard skills and deeper, more diverse, stakeholder engagement.



## EUROPEAN Skills Agenda

The objectives of the European Skills Agenda should be achieved by 2025. The EU sets a range of quantitative indicators to measure the accomplishments.



The 12 actions of the European Skills Agenda are arranged in 4 main building blocks:



**Together, let's make WBL & VET a  
★ FIRST CHOICE ★  
and not a second option!**

A clear and reliable legal framework is needed that grants mutual rights and responsibilities to all apprenticeship partners, allowing them to act effectively. These “apprenticeship partners” are the apprentice themselves, as well as the training company and the VET school or training centre (European Commission 2015).

The legal framework should contain the role of the apprentice as a learner and guarantee their right to high-quality training resulting in powerful, transferable skills. To ensure its effectiveness, the legislation needs to protect the rights and

responsibilities of the partners involved (VET providers, employers, apprentices and social partners), while at the same time consulting employer and employee representatives for apprenticeship content, assessment and certification (CECOA 2018). All this shall avoid the micromanagement of apprenticeships by the government and rather allow for a legal framework to work together (European Commission 2015).

Additionally, systemic cooperation between VET schools or training centres and companies raises the quality of the apprenticeships and should therefore be promoted. Especially SMEs with smaller administrative resources can thrive through such continuous cooperation between businesses and education partners at the local level (CECOA 2018).

Work-based learning is organised very differently in the various VET systems. In programmes such as apprenticeships, VET learners spent much of their time in companies. Nevertheless, also programmes that are based on in-school training, offer different types of work-based learning opportunities (OECD 2022b).

**There are three different forms of work-based learning in this sector:**

1. Apprenticeships (dual vocational education and training): training contents are agreed on by the company and the VET school to provide a formal education, resulting in a national qualification that is recognised all over the country.
2. School-based VET with phases of learning in the workplace: training in schools with mandatory or voluntary practical phases of different lengths at a company resulting in a formally recognised qualification.

Training people to meet their needs is a great benefit for many companies which they can achieved through offering apprenticeships. Additionally, offering apprenticeships can raise interest in training in other employees leading to a “training culture” not only in the respective company but in the entire sector. It is thus essential, that governance offers a balance of resources and benefits to support companies, providers and learners alike (European Commission 2015).

Several studies indicate that vocational education enables the entry into the labour market. This is mainly due to the fact that the training is designed in cooperation with companies resulting in a successful transition from education to work. The skills taught in VET programmes can be used on the labour market directly and fulfil its demand. Workers can thus be productive immediately after their training and can find a position nearly as easily as more experienced workers (Korber 2019).

Sustainably reinforcing work-based learning in vocational education is a cornerstone of most EU initiatives. Youth that completed dual training or at least a course with substantial dual elements is much more unlikely to be unemployed as opposed to learners with general or school-based training, according to internationally comparative studies (NA-Bibb 2017).

## 1.2. Work based learning and VET in 6 EU countries

### AUSTRIA

*prepared by Wirtschaftskammer Steiermark*

Austrian vocational education and training (VET) ranks high, as demonstrated by its differentiated offer and high attractiveness: around 70% of each age cohort follow a VET path at the end of compulsory education.

Work-based learning is central to VET, particularly in apprenticeships where learners spend 80% of their training time in a company. School-based VET is also practice-oriented, including learning in workshops, labs, training restaurants and practice firms, complemented by mandatory work placements in companies. Project and diploma assignments as part of the final exam of the 3-year VET programme (EQF 5) are often set by companies or carried out with their collaboration. Much attention is paid to the acquisition of key competences (including teamwork, digital and entrepreneurial skills). Competence-orientation is a key principle in VET.

There is a shortage of skilled workers which is mainly attributed to demographic developments and the increased attractiveness of general education. Several measures have been introduced, such as the possibility to follow part-time apprenticeship for parents and people with health problems (from 2020). The

number of apprentices (within the dual VET-track) being trained is driven by company demand.

In Austria in 2014, 35% of all apprentices were trained in companies with more than 250 employees. This means that 65% of apprentices are trained in companies with fewer than 250 employees (18% in companies with fewer than 10 employees). The training is based on a training contract between the company and the apprentice and learners need to follow a respective school-based programme. Contrary to fears, the coronavirus pandemic has, so far, not had any serious impact on the supply of apprenticeship places. However, consideration is being given to how alternative supra-company training can be expanded to bridge possible gaps in apprenticeship training places.

The company-based part of apprenticeship training is regulated in the Vocational Training Act (Berufsausbildungsgesetz or BAG, RIS 2022a). According to the BAG, the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW) is responsible for coordinating and promoting cooperation between the authorities and institutions involved in vocational education and training.

Training regulations for apprenticeship occupations are issued by BMWFW after evaluation by the Federal Advisory Board on Apprenticeship (BBAB) with the involvement of the social partners. Provisions regarding the organisation of VET schools and basic provisions regarding curricula are laid down in the School Organisation Act (Schulorganisationsgesetz or SchOG, RIS 2022b) of the Federal Government by the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (BMBF). The administration of VET schools and the specific design of the curricula are the responsibility of the provinces. At the level of the provinces the administration of the company-based part of training is also carried out by the apprenticeship offices of the economic chambers.

Quality management systems (QM systems) have existed in general and vocational schools in Austria for a long time. Following the 2017 Education Reform Act (Bildungsreformgesetz 2017, RIS 2022c), the previously separate QM systems for general education (SQA) and vocational education and training (QIBB) were unified and assigned a new focus. Starting in the school year 2021/22, the new quality management system for schools (QMS) is gradually put into practice. The content of the QMS builds on the new quality framework, which came into force as early as January 2021.

## GERMANY

*prepared by IHK Projektgesellschaft*

Vocational education and training (VET) is established in cooperation of the State, companies and social partners. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is the responsible body for VET policy issues and coordinates all training occupations (CEDEFOP 2020b).

The VET system in Germany is largely based on the dual system of apprenticeships which result in a high-quality vocational qualification, making the German system a successful model. Through the smooth transition from education to work via the apprenticeship, the youth unemployment rate is rather low: in 2019 5.8% of those aged 15 to 24 were unemployed, as opposed to 15.1% in the EU-27. About half the upper secondary school learners participate in a VET programme; with 70% of those being enrolled in an apprenticeship. More and more of them enter the programme with a higher educational degree (29.2% of apprentices starting their training in 2017) (CEDEFOP 2020b).

Dual vocational education and training is made up of an in-company part and some time at a vocational school, with the time in the company taking up about 60% to 80% while the training in school adds up to 20% to 40%. Around 90% of all dual VET programmes have their base in a company (DC dVET 2016). The apprenticeships offered by companies base on training regulations created by four stakeholders (Federal and State governments, companies and trade unions). Companies still have the flexibility to set a training plan with the apprentices. To account for fast technological and organisational changes, the training regulations are revised regularly. The contribution of social partners on several levels shall also not be diminished (CEDEFOP 2020b).

Employers – through their organisations – and trade unions have a grand influence on the content and form of Initial-VET and Higher-VET to ensure it fits the needs of the labour market. Therefore, they are part of the BIBB board and its vocational training committees on national level. At regional level, an important role is played by the chambers, especially when it comes to examinations. Social partners on the other hand mainly bring in initiatives to update or develop new occupational profiles (CEDEFOP 2020b).

All concerned parties are combined in the new alliance for initial and further training for the years 2015 to 2018. The partners collaborated to strengthen vocational training, lower the numbers of learners leaving school without a certificate, and establish a new statistical system to assess the vocational training market. Their efforts shall result in more available apprenticeship/training positions and more companies that are encouraged to offer training. (<http://www.bmwi.de>) (European Commission 2015).

Responsible for dual vocational education and training in Germany is the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) as regulated by the Vocational Training Act (Berufsbildungsgesetz or BBiG). The two ministries create the basis for a well-regulated and standardised vocational education and training system by means of ordinances. The Federal Government eventually sanctions the new training regulations developed by experts together with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and social partners. The Länder (federal states) are in charge of the VET schools within the dual system (Länder school legislation) (DC dVET 2016). In January 2020 the new Vocational Training Act established a minimum training wage for apprenticeships, making regulated further vocational qualifications and academic qualifications more equivalent while also offering part-time vocational training to further target groups and facilitating recognition of prior learning (CEDEFOP 2019a).

In April 2020, the act on the promotion of continuing vocational training during times of structural change and further development of funding of vocational training assistance was adopted; investing in upskilling and reskilling helps to prepare for future challenges (European Commission 2020).

## SPAIN

*prepared by Fondo Formación Euskadi*

Initial VET is the responsibility of the education authorities. Continuing training is the responsibility of education and employment authorities sharing the same consultation bodies but having their own respective governance and objectives. Employment authorities are responsible for VET programmes addressing companies' and workers' (employed and unemployed) skills needs, employment-training schemes and the regulation of apprenticeships contracts. The General

Council for Vocational Training is the national government advisory body on VET policy; it comprises representatives of national and regional public authorities, employers' organisations and trade unions. Stakeholders collaborate in the design of occupational standards in all sectors of the economy and are involved in VET qualifications design.

The national system for qualifications and vocational training is the umbrella for VET programmes in and outside the education system, leading to qualifications awarded by the education authorities. VET and professional certificate programmes take as reference the occupational standards of the national catalogue (Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales, CNCP), allowing mutual recognition of some parts of the training (modules). VET programmes are modularised, allowing partial certification and re-engagement from a lifelong learning perspective, and include compulsory workplace learning at the end of, or during, studies. Learners need to pass all modules to obtain the relevant qualification.

VET programmes using online or virtual learning environments and platforms are increasing to ease access to VET. Adults may have their skills recognised or acquire a formal qualification through training. "There are common regulations for validating skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning and work experience. These procedures empower citizens to engage in further learning and acquire full qualifications" (CEDEFOP 2019b). Regional authorities can initiate public calls for validation of non-formal and informal learning depending on company needs, social partner requests or minimum qualification requirements from sectoral regulatory bodies. Key competences tests have been developed for higher VET programmes and professional certificate access.

The new education law, in effect since January 2021, not only aims to adapt the education system to digital advances but also improve access to, and the quality of, education, especially because learners' educational outcomes have not improved and regional differences persist. Another aim is to give schools further flexibility on curriculum content and put greater focus on competence-based learning. Overall participation in vocational education and training (VET) remains low and the employment rate of recent VET graduates (70.0% in 2018 to 66.0% in 2019), continues to be below the EU average of 79.1%. VET graduate tracking

is under development, with the creation of an integrated information and monitoring system, coordinated by the State Public Employment Service (SEPE).

Measures to increase the attractiveness of VET and continued VET online have been taken as a response to the Covid-19 crisis. From January 2020, the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has been responsible for all VET regulation, including initial and continuous VET. One persisting challenge in the country is the large disparity between regions, both in terms of skills and of participation in education and training. Grade repetition rates are still high (29% in Spain; EU average 13%) and are not improving (MEFP, 2019).

The most developed and elaborated implementation of learning outcomes is in VET. The VET qualification system is defined by the law on qualifications and vocational training that establishes the National catalogue of professional qualifications (Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones Profesionales, CNCP). It lists 680 occupational standards defined in competences and is continually updated. Professional modules for each qualification gather the learning outcomes and the corresponding assessment criteria that show that the qualification holder knows, understands and is able to do as expected on completion of the programme.

At the end of 2019, the Council of Ministers approved the first strategic plan for vocational training of the educational system 2019-22 aiming at having an updated national qualification catalogue (with companies taking a major role in the design of occupational standards) and a widespread training offer. The National Institute of Qualifications (INCUAL), which is responsible for defining, updating and adapting the national catalogue, focused in 2019 on designing the new occupational standards and redefining learning outcomes. The 2020 organic law on education is another important boost to vocational training as it aims to improve social recognition, make vocational training more flexible, and move towards an integrated system of initial and continuous VET, accessible and with a lifelong learning perspective. The law sets the framework for reform of the curriculum towards a more competence-based approach. In addition, according to the law, learners who pass a basic VET programme will receive the ESO (compulsory secondary education) graduate degree, which will allow them access to upper secondary education.

Therefore, basic VET programmes integrate general and vocational subjects. For those over the age of 17 – who left the education system without a qualification



– vocational programmes are organised to allow them to obtain a general education certificate or technician qualification. Integrated vocational training and dual vocational training centres are also promoted with the new law (CEDEFOP 2022b).

## IRELAND

*prepared by Spectrum Research Centre*

Ireland's education and training system is divided into four sectors: primary, secondary, further education and training (FET), and higher education. Further education in Ireland covers EQF levels 2-5 (NFQ levels 3-6) with some higher apprenticeships at EQF level 6 (NFQ levels 7/8). The main providers of VET are the 16 education and training boards (ETBs). SOLAS is the Government agency responsible for funding, planning and coordinating FET provision in Ireland.

It is estimated that 21% of school leavers are enrolling in FET and from the 2017 cohort of 33,017 FET learners, 16% progressed to higher education. VET programmes within FET include: apprenticeships - the range of apprenticeship opportunities has diversified in recent years (CEDEFOP 2019c; Mooney 2021). There are currently 58 apprenticeship programmes available, which include off the job training which spans both FET and Higher Education (EQF levels 4/5/6/7/8 with comparatively few programmes as this is a new development at levels 6, 7, and 8).

Apprenticeships are included in the following sectors: engineering, construction, motor, electrical, finance, hospitality and food, biopharma, logistics, property services, recruitment, sales and ICT; traineeship is a programme of structured training which combines learning in an education and training setting and in the workplace, aiming to improve recruitment and employment outcomes for participants (Donegal ETB 2022).

Traineeships range from EQF levels 3-5 (NFQ levels 4-6) and are predominantly focused on employment. 75 traineeship programmes are currently available; many learners enrol on a post-leaving certificate (PLC) programme (EQF levels 4/5). PLC provision has two overarching aims: to provide successful participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their employment opportunities or to facilitate their progression to additional education and training.

VET in Ireland is not usually offered within the second level system (neither lower secondary (NFQ 3, EQF 2, ISCED 244) nor upper secondary (NFQ 4/5, EQF3/4, ISCED 343/344)). Therefore, most learners are aged at least 16 or over. Active inclusion and community development have always been central tenets of the work of education and training boards and FET providers, with an extensive reach into and across local communities (SOLAS 2019). FET balances the needs of skills for work with the just as critical skills for life; supporting citizenship and prosperity across communities and developing social capital (NALA Research 2021).

The further education and training strategy 2020-24 sets out a five-year roadmap for the sector which is built around three key pillars of building skills, fostering inclusion and creating pathways; it aims at addressing the economic and societal challenges faced over the coming years (Government of Ireland 2020).

FET planning must ensure agility to respond to a large base of unemployed people, or vulnerable workers in need of upskilling and reskilling to re-join or remain in the workforce. This need is currently exacerbated by Covid-19 and the serious potential economic risks of Brexit. FET Policy responses to the challenging circumstances brought about by Covid-19 include Skills to compete – a funding initiative to support those who have lost their jobs as a result of Covid-19 in returning to the workforce – eCollege, and the apprenticeship incentivisation scheme, a current package of financial support for apprenticeship employers (CEDEFOP 2021a).

## SLOVENIA

*prepared by Chamber of Commerce and Industry Slovenia*

Vocational education and training (VET) play a prominent role in Slovenia. VET attractiveness is high, with the Slovenian education/VET system offering progression opportunities both horizontally and vertically; possibilities for work-based learning such as through intercompany training centres or recently reintroduced apprenticeship in upper secondary three-year VET; and comprehensive policies on scholarships.

Slovenia has the highest share of VET learners in upper secondary education in the EU-27, and among the lowest rates of early school leavers. Further, the importance of raising adults' levels of skills is becoming more widely accepted. Along with facing challenges of an aging population and steadily decreasing

participation in lifelong learning in the past decade, more than a quarter of workers are at high risk of seeing their job automated. A need to focus developments on strengthening digital skills and broadening opportunities for upskilling and reskilling is on the rise.

VET programmes are offered at upper secondary and tertiary level for young (full-time) and adult (part-time) learners. The VET offer in Slovenia is diversified into different programme types and delivery modes (school-based and apprenticeships), leading to different types of qualifications, and consequently offering different progression possibilities.

The purpose of VET is to provide, at an internationally comparable level, the knowledge, skills and vocational competences and abilities necessary for the pursuit of the chosen vocation and for further education (CEDEFOP 2021b; Article No 2 of Vocational Education Act 2006). Most VET programmes are offered at upper secondary education level; one two-year higher VET programme type is offered at tertiary level. All upper secondary and tertiary VET programmes are considered formal IVET programmes, leading to nationally recognised VET qualifications. They are free of charge for full-time learners, while those attending a part-time programme (adults) pay fees.

IVET upper secondary and higher VET programmes are competence-based and modularised. The completion of a specific number of vocational modules leads to a vocational qualification. VET modules describe learning outcomes to be achieved through theory learning and practical training (work-based learning, WBL) at school laboratories or workshops, intercompany training centres and at employers' companies.

For each vocational module, a catalogue of knowledge is prepared at national level. These include general objectives, vocational competences and learning outcomes to be achieved by completion of the module. More than two thirds of young VET learners are enrolled in technical VET programmes, showing learners' preferences for VET programmes that offer completion of the upper secondary level and possibility of progressing to tertiary education.

According to the VET Act (2006, amended in 2017 and 2019), quality assurance and mandatory self-evaluation of VET providers are integrated into the VET system and considered crucial to quality development. The national council of experts for VET at the education ministry approved seven national quality indicators in 2007;

they expanded it to eleven in 2017, all indicators being in line with European quality assurance in VET (EQAVET) (Cedefop, 2020c). In 2017, MIZŠ developed guidelines for the development of a common national framework for QA in pre-school, basic and upper secondary education. Four institutions have been tasked with its further development. In 2019, a common framework for QA in education was published. VET providers are responsible for following up and improving the quality of their work and monitoring and reporting on all 11 QA indicators.

## HUNGARY

*prepared by START Foundation*

The Ministry of Innovation and Technology is responsible for the management of vocational training and adult education (AL); From 2019, this will also include higher education vocational training curricula. Coordination and implementation of the policy is ensured by the National Vocational and Adult Education Office and (from 2019) the Innovative Training Support Center. The social partners develop vocational training policy through participation in advisory bodies such as regional Chambers of Commerce. Education and training providers, chambers, employers and trade unions are developing proposals to adapt vocational training programs and qualifications to labour market needs. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry is responsible for the registration and certification of apprenticeships (UNESCO 2021).

In the 2020 compilation *Spotlight on VET* (CEDEFOP 2021a), it is described that work-based learning takes place in two ways: through school or through company placements. From 2020/21, students will be able to enter into a professional employment contract with companies to complete an internship. After graduating from high school, those who are unsure about continuing their education can enrol in a one-year (optional) orientation program (ISCED 294, EQF 2).

Young people and adults must take a final exam after completing a vocational training program. A system of accredited professional examination centres is currently being developed, and the new system should be operational by 2025. The VET Scholarship Scheme is available to all VET students in vocational secondary and higher vocational education (including internships in school workshops). Under the vocational training employment contract, students seconded to companies receive a monthly salary (60% of the minimum wage or

more, depending on performance). There is also a start-up grant, in lump sum, for obtaining your first vocational qualification (EUR 420-840, depending on the result of the exam). Companies providing traineeships can compensate (reduce) the mandatory financial contribution by providing dual vocational training (theory and / or practice) (CEDEFOP 2021a).

The government formed in Hungary in 2010 wanted to increase participation in vocational training and the prestige of the professions. Vocational training should include more on-the-job learning, with more in-company training (inspired by countries with a strong dual training practice system such as Germany). The Prime Minister and the President of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK) signed a framework agreement in November 2010, in which the MKIK will play a key role in the vocational training tasks currently performed by the state. The management of vocational training remains a public task (European Commission 2015).

# 2

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## Quality Assurance in Work-Based learning

### 2.1. Importance of Quality Assurance in WBL

Why is it so unavoidable to promote work-based learning as a high-quality training modality?

There are several reasons for this, starting with the educational and employment situation of the active population and continuing with the benefits that it would bring to those who establish it.

*"Work-based learning is an example of a win-win situation, and notably when the learning takes place in a company"* (European Commission 2013).

On one hand, more than half of European employees consider that their work does not coincide with their skills or qualifications, thus warning of the difficulties and problems that it entails.

In the same line, the Companies that generate employment also note the discrepancy between training and the skills to be developed on the job: *"four out of 10 employers in the EU said in 2013 that they had difficulties finding the right skills when recruiting"* (CEDEFOP 2018).

The level of training is increasing, but it is verified later in companies and organisations that the training does not correspond to what the labour market requires, resulting in a skills mismatch. This skills mismatch arises when the required skills are not available in the workforce, for example, due to technological advancement. Over- or under-qualification occurs when people do jobs for which they have too much or too little experience and competence (CEDEFOP 2018).

This skills mismatch is reflected not only in employers and employees, but also in that part of the unemployed SOCIETY that cannot adjust their skills to the positions that are currently required.

Work-based learning is configured as a training and educational solution that allows recipients to combine theoretical training with professional practice in the same work environment. This will allow them to develop in a more significant way their basic, digital and transversal skills with the consequent improvement of their labour insertion and optimisation of employability (Pérez Manzano 2018).

*“Organisations have a crucial role to play in achieving better skills utilisation and have an interest in maintaining a healthy balance between shifting skill requirements in jobs and workers’ skills. Providing training – in cooperation with training providers – and supporting on-the-job learning are effective means that organisations can use to ensure the desired balance when jobs become increasingly complex”* (CEDEFOP 2018).

On the other hand, the possible benefits that the establishment of work-based learning would have by keeping quality standards for its participants are, in addition to economic incentives, other more pedagogical/socio-humanistic benefits.

As stated by Pérez Manzano (2018), the quality assurance in WBL allows your COMPANY to:

- ▶ Create a practical tool for selecting and recruiting staff and saving on human resource costs, because when a learner is recruited their education, skills and abilities are already known.
- ▶ Have qualified people tailored to your company, since it will train the learner in those skills that are most necessary in the company.
- ▶ Retain staff and increase job satisfaction.

- ▶ Recognise the role of the employer as a training agent.
- ▶ Improve the corporate image and create a commitment to the environment that is reflected in the Corporate Social Responsibility policy.
- ▶ Reduce the distance with educational institutions, especially if you are an SME.
- ▶ Obtain a rapid response to the need for professionals in a way that allows adjusting to the labour market and addressing skills mismatches.
- ▶ Encourage continuous updating and adaptation of the educational system to the socio-economic one.

The quality assurance in WBL allows the **LEARNERS** to (Pérez Manzano 2018):

- ▶ Promote the toughest skills, technical expertise, and tacit knowledge.
- ▶ Train adapted personnel in specific processes and business culture.
- ▶ Acquire valuable professional experience in the job market.
- ▶ Orient the studies to the requirements of the business reality, promoting entrepreneurship.
- ▶ Greater motivation to continue training.
- ▶ Training in transversal skills (through the figure of the WBL mentor) in teamwork or conflict resolution issues.
- ▶ Obtain a recognised qualification while building a professional project.
- ▶ A progressive integration into the responsibilities of the company.
- ▶ An entry into the job market in the best conditions.

Regarding the **SOCIETY**, the quality of WBL allows to (Pérez Manzano 2018):

- ▶ Prepare young people for future professions.
- ▶ Integrate young people into the work field and generate quality employment.
- ▶ Anticipate the age of insertion to the labour market for those who want to enter this world and not follow the academic path.
- ▶ Promote economic development and business competitiveness.



## 2.2. Implementation of Quality Assurance in WBL

It is up to each agent involved in WBL to promote the values and commitments for quality practices.

Quality does not only depend on whether the VET centre of origin of the learner proceeds appropriately, nor that only the company offers a valuable training to the learner, but that each of the parties adequately fulfils its mission within the framework of the WBL. For the WBL to be considered "quality", all parties must make a series of commitments in the performance of their role in the process: companies and WBL mentors; the VET centre and the academic mentors, as well as the learners themselves.

**At the European level**, the *High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles* (European Commission 2015) regulates the most important challenges when talking about WBL together with the **QUALITY PRINCIPLES** that should govern it.

The document states four policy challenges in relation to the promotion of apprenticeships and similar work-based learning opportunities:

- national governance and social partners' involvement;
- support for companies, in particular SMEs, offering apprenticeships;
- attractiveness of apprenticeships and improved career guidance; and
- **quality assurance in work-based learning.**

Focusing on this last challenge, the quality assurance in work-based learning, the quality principles that a company should follow to respond to these challenges are:

- ▶ **PRINCIPLE 16:** Providing a clear framework for quality assurance of apprenticeship at system, providing and company level ensuring systematic feedback.
- ▶ **PRINCIPLE 17:** Ensuring the content of VET programs is responsive to changing skills needs in companies and the society.
- ▶ **PRINCIPLE 18:** Fostering mutual trust and respect through regular cooperation between the apprenticeship partners.
- ▶ **PRINCIPLE 19:** Supporting the continuous professional development of in-company mentors and improve their working conditions.

- **PRINCIPLE 20:** Ensuring a fair, valid and authentic assessment of learning outcomes.

Another approach to ensure the quality of work-based learning is based on the identification and agreement on **ETHICAL AND QUALITY PRINCIPLES** that are present in the development of the WBL within the company (CRUE 2019).

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLES



### **Equality**

WBL is a valuable learning experience and as such requires equal access without discrimination for any reason. This learning experience, as part of VET, contributes significantly to equal opportunities and social justice.



### **Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility**

VET training and employment represent a strategic measure of social and economic transformation, so its management must be governed by ethical values that seek a balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of any activity, as marked in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. WBL is an opportunity to promote and implement a sustainable culture among the different participating stakeholders.



### **Commitment**

The value of commitment means recognising that the WBL is a very important training activity since it increases the practical training of learners through a real experience in external organisations.



### **Respect**

Respect means treating all people with fairness, deference and consideration. It implies, therefore, not to discriminate against people for reasons beyond their merits, applying rationality in evaluations, avoiding prejudices as much as possible.



### **Responsibility**

Responsibility implies honestly assuming one's own duties and obligations, favouring the fulfilment of the purpose of the WBL. Likewise, it implies being willing to render accounts to whoever corresponds about the mutual performance of the parties.

## **QUALITY PRINCIPLES**



### **Information and Transparency**

The management of the WBL must be governed by an adequate level of information and transparency, in such a way that each of the parties, especially the learners, have all the necessary information before accepting and carrying out the WBL. Both the company and the WBL mentors must be able to offer all the information related to the WBL, as well as the conditions in which it is carried out and the regulations and procedures that support it.



### **Design and Fulfilment of the Training Project**

The last purpose of the WBL is the practical learning of the learner, so the training project is positioned as the essential element that justifies any other element of the management of learning practices. A quality WBL must ensure an adequate definition of the learning objectives and ensure the fulfilment of the training project.



### **WBL Conditions**

The stay of a learner's WBL in the company must be carried out in the appropriate conditions, motivating their participation and learning, without this implying the homologation to an employment relationship and the substitution of a job. However, learner safety must be guaranteed during the WBL, especially in those environments that by their nature involve greater risks, implementing training and preventive measures that guarantee their safety.



### WBL Monitoring and Evaluation

The special nature of the WBL that takes place mainly in a work environment, requires a high level of monitoring and evaluation, including permanent monitoring of it during the stay of the learning practices, as well as the final evaluation and the degree of compliance with the training / educational objectives.

The **dissemination** and **awareness** of a series of recommendations derived from the ethical and quality principles of the WBL within the company among the involved actors (learners, mentors, companies), also affect an improvement in the quality of WBL and the development of an ethical and excellence culture. These recommendations include the preparation of informative materials aimed at the agents involved, the organisation of events aimed at learners, the compilation of testimonials from real cases, whether learners or employers, that reinforce the usefulness of the WBL in professional development and more.

Specifically, and as a summary, **companies** should abide by the following **PRINCIPLES OF ACTION** to ensure the quality of the WBL process (CRUE 2019):

- ▶ The tasks to be carried out by the learner will allow the application and complementation of the theoretical knowledge acquired and will be adjusted to the competences and objectives described in the training project.
- ▶ In some countries, WBL learners do not have the obligations of an employment relationship, nor can the content and development of the WBL tasks lead to the substitution of jobs. In these cases, productivity is not the main value of the training period. Other countries such as Austria and Germany have a long history of apprenticeship systems, in which the WBL learner is integrated fully in the company and contributes to the business revenue. In these dual systems, the WBL learner shifts between the VET school learning setting and the productive phases in the apprenticeship company, where they gain real experience by working fully on the job.
- ▶ The company will have qualified personnel for the mentoring of the practices in order to supervise the activities, guide and control the development of the WBL, with a relationship based on mutual respect and commitment to learning.

- ▶ The ratio between the number of workers and WBL learners should guarantee an effective mentoring and accompaniment during the development of the WBL.
- ▶ The learner will be informed about the organisation and operation of the organisation/company, the regulations of interest and the regulations for safety and prevention of occupational hazards.
- ▶ Establish schedules that facilitate the compatibility of the WBL with the learner's theoretical work load provided by the VET school. In general, it is necessary that the working hours and days for WBL comply to the legal regulations, which may differ from country to country.
- ▶ In some cases, the WBL mentor within the company coordinates with the learner's mentor at the VET school for the development of the activities established in the training project, as well as the resolution of possible incidents that could arise during its development.
- ▶ Ensure that the stay during the WBL is not burdensome for the learner. The existence of a scholarship will make it easier for those with fewer resources to be accepted in a quality WBL program.
- ▶ Facilitate attendance at exams and representative activities of the learner at their university.
- ▶ Provide complementary training and the necessary materials to the learner for the proper development of the WBL.
- ▶ Facilitate and stimulate the contribution of proposals for innovation, improvement and entrepreneurship by the learner.
- ▶ Maintain confidentiality in relation to any information that he/she knows about the learner as a result of the activity as a mentor.
- ▶ Collaborate in the WBL evaluation process, maintain a fluid relationship with the academic mentor and by issuing the report or memory required by the learner's training entity.

# 3

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## Grasping Quality – Quality Criteria for Work-Based Learning

To improve the quality of work-based placements, organisations should spend time planning for the arrival of their learners, setting out and establishing a range of goals and objectives based on the strengths of their learners, and implementing a range of strategies that can help them to achieve these collective goals. However, across Europe, some organisations remain unprepared for the arrival of learners and implement sub-standard training provisions, as they remain unaware of the importance of developing quality work-based placements.

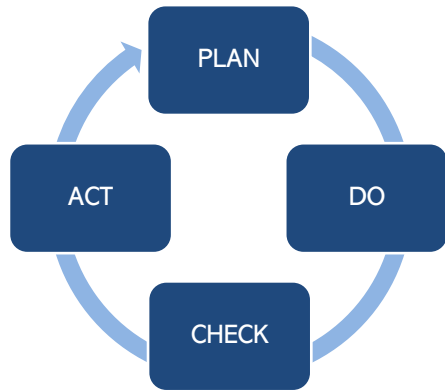
This chapter aims to examine how organisations can implement the Plan-Do-Check-Act (**PDCA**) framework and the relevant building blocks of the EQAVET frameworks into their practices to ameliorate the quality of WBL.

### 3.1. The PDCA Cycle

During the 1950's, Dr. W. Edward Deming proposed the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) framework (Moen & Norman, 2006) during educational lectures in Japan. The PDCA framework has since been used by organisations across the world as a model to support change and improvement within organisations. The framework permits organisations to effectively plan and identify a wide range of challenges that they are currently facing, implement solutions that can ameliorate these challenges, effectively analyse and assess the overall effectiveness of these solutions, whilst simultaneously considering future changes or adaptations that

can be made. The PDCA framework is an effective tool that can be used by stakeholders within work-based learning practices to measure the quality of the programmes and to improve their effectiveness.

Successful organisations reflect upon the practices that they have conducted and implement learning opportunities when possible. By partaking in this continuous cycle, organisations can grow, develop and improve their quality; which are crucial elements for their overall success. Therefore, the aim of this section is to examine how organisations and WBL responsible persons within organisations can use the PDCA cycle in a responsible and efficient manner, to improve the overall quality of WBL and to ensure the survival, reputation and continued growth of the organisation providing WBL.



## PLAN

As the common rhetoric describes, “Failing to plan, is planning to fail”. WBL responsible persons and learners that fail to plan ahead, ultimately fail in the long term. According to Thornton (2020), the planning stage of the PDCA cycle should take approximately 75% of the allocated time and should ultimately consider the status of WBL responsible or the WBL learner, their goals and objectives and consider how these will be achieved.

To ensure a high-quality work placement is achieved, the planning stage should commence prior to the placement of the learner. The first step of the Planning Stage of the PDCA cycle is therefore to effectively identify the problem(s) that are being faced within the organisation. To effectively plan for the work-based placement and to ensure a high-quality placement is achieved, the organisation and the VET provider should establish regular communication channels with one another before the arrival of the learner.

The organisation should identify challenges that they are currently facing, such as an inability to reach customer demands, supply channels being restricted, internal processes stagnating, or even mounting complaints being received which the company cannot address alone. VET providers should examine their WBL candidates and correctly match the skills of the learner to the organisation, to ensure that these demands can be met by the WBL learner.

However, in research undertaken by the WBL-Q consortium, companies across Europe face skills mismatch, between the skills of the learner and the skills required by the organisation.

Once the WBL learner has been successfully matched to the organisation, both the learner and the organisation should identify their own goals and objectives for the work placement period and discuss how they would like to achieve these. To support this step of the planning process, Thornton (2020) recommends that a wide range of supportive tools are used to formally recognise these objectives, such as brainstorming activities; pareto charts; check sheets; histograms; cause and effect fishbone diagrams; Gantt charts and tree diagrams.

The quality of WBL can be ensured by organisations through the identification and recognition of SMART goals – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound – which are identified by both parties. By taking time to formally consider the goals and objectives, David Garvin of MIT Sloan School of Management (1998) identifies that these tasks can be transformed into outputs and organisations and WBL learners can begin to work on their collective goals.

As part of investigative research undertaken by the WBL-Q consortium between December 2020 and January 2021, one of the major challenges that organisations across Europe face with regards to ensuring the quality of the work-based programme is ensuring that there is commitment to the process at all levels of the organisation. By taking the time to well-document the process, clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both the work-based learner and the work-based provider, and adequately allocate resources to support the facilitation of WBL, organisations can ensure a smoother implementation of work-based practices.



## DO

The second stage of Deming's PDCA cycle – Do - encourages the WBL learner and the organisation to implement the plans and the solutions that they have collectively agreed upon during the planning stage. A well-defined and documented 'Plan' stage can support a seamless transition for all parties to the 'do' stage, which encourages all parties to work towards the achievement of the predefined goals and objectives.

Research undertaken by the WBL-Q consortium between December 2020 and January 2021 highlighted that there is an 'image-problem' attributed to the provision of VET across Europe. This image problem could be attributed to failure by all parties involved to successfully complete the 'do' stage of Deming's cycle.

A failure to expose learners to real-life work experiences during the WBL period, by highly skilled, trained and experienced WBL supervisors, could result in a negative cycle that is tainted by an inability to conduct the predefined and allocated tasks. Therefore, it is imperative to support both staff and learners in partaking in this step.

A myriad of challenges are faced for both the WBL learner and the organisation in terms of ensuring that the plans that have been predefined, are followed and stuck to. However, there are a wide range of tools that can support this step to measure agreed upon targets and to meet milestones, such as Gantt Charts; tree diagrams and check sheets.

## CHECK

The third stage of the PDCA cycle is 'Check'. During this stage, there is an emphasis on ensuring that there are effective measures and procedures in place to facilitate communication and feedback loops within the organisation, to continuously drive learning and development opportunities for both the organisation and the WBL learner. Through the 'check' stage, organisations and learners can identify opportunities for their own self-growth and can kickstart another PDCA cycle for further growth and development.

The first step to successfully conducting this stage is to review and evaluate the SMART goals and objectives that were determined during the plan stage. Both the WBL learner and the organisation should identify the actual results that were

noticed, considering what knock-on consequences may have resulted from this. It is inevitable that during the work-based programme, both organisations and learners will face unforeseen circumstances.

A common example of this includes learners having a basic training in the usage of equipment but needing specialized or advanced training to complete a task. Additionally, the WBL responsible person within the organisation may not have adequate time to continuously monitor the work of WBL learners, resulting in an inability to check the predefined goals and objectives.

The check stage is crucial for the continued growth and development of both the WBL learner and the organisation, as it requires self-reflection on both parties to consider their contribution during the previous two stages. There is an onus on all parties to reflect and consider what learning opportunities they can derive from the previous two cycles. As the PDCA cycle can be used continuously, in a cyclical nature, failing to consider this as a learning opportunity could result in learning opportunities being missed and further growth opportunities becoming redundant. In research conducted by the WBL-Q consortium, organisations identified that the check stage of the PDCA cycle often fails when satisfaction levels are not monitored and learning opportunities have not been determined nor actioned upon.

## ACT

The final stage of the PDCA cycle – Act – is the last opportunity for the organisation to improve and standardise their policies and operating methods. Up until this point, the PDCA cycle encouraged planning and implementing a series of solutions to improve the challenges currently being faced within the organisation. During the Act stage, companies must begin to adjust their behaviours based on the findings that have occurred as a result of their actions.

As the PDCA cycle is cyclical in its nature, it is important to ensure that there are opportunities available to reflect over the results of the check stage. Learning from failures is an excellent way to ensure the quality of the cycle. This provides for opportunities to standardise the learning and development opportunities within WBL.

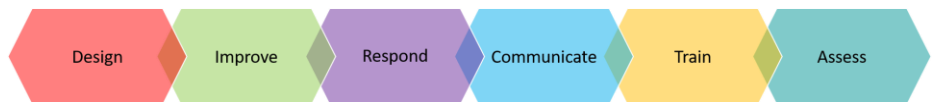
Overall, the PDCA cycle is an excellent tool which can be used by organisations to measure the quality of Work Based Learning. The PDCA cycle works well when organisations regularly implement the cycle, irrespective of whether they have used the cycle before, have hosted work-based learners in the past, or if this is a new stage for their organisation. Through the PDCA cycle, all stakeholders should be involved in the PDCA cycle in order to improve the overall quality of WBL within organisations.

### 3.2. The EQAVET Framework and Its 6 Building Blocks for Company WBL

In 2009, the European Union introduced the EQAVET Framework – the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training Framework – with the aim of improving issues related to quality and quality assurance across vocational education and training in Europe. Although these guidelines have been in force for over 15-years, they have failed to reinforce themselves within WBL practices, and mainly are used by VET providers when delivering quality work-based placements. This framework is useful for VET providers that provide apprenticeship schemes, on-the-job training or integration and simulation assignments (EQAVET 2012).

The EQAVET framework is essential to the development of quality training programmes and, ultimately, the success of learners in vocational education and training.

As part of EQAVET, there are 6-building blocks, which examine how the training is designed to how it is delivered and assessed. As an organisation providing work-based placements to learners, it is important to be mindful towards the QA measures that are in place for the educational providers towards their learners. These building blocks act as a ‘call-to-action’ and support best practice activities in the delivery of high-quality VET across Europe.



The 6-building blocks can be defined as (1) Design; (2) Improve; (3) Respond; (4) Communicate; (5) Train; (6) Assess. For the VET providers who connect the WBL learner to the organisation offering placements, these building blocks provide a solid framework through which quality can be assured and measured.

## DESIGN

The first building block – Design – focuses on the ability of partnerships to work together to create high-quality training that provides learners with the opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge in work-based settings. Through effectively planning the training from the early stages of the partnership, organisations can deliver high-quality placements that address the needs of all parties. Additionally, VET providers can stand over the quality of the learning opportunities afforded to their learners.

Across the EU, the WBL-Q consortium identified that many organisations are not correctly matched to their learners, which results in challenges in providing high-quality training. In order to enhance the quality of the training provisions, the partnerships should come to a collective agreement prior to the commencement of the training. This can involve formal agreements being signed between the learner, the VET institute and the organisation which all parties identifying their needs and objectives of the training period. Alternatively, this could involve buy-in from senior WBL responsible persons within organisations to ensure that high-quality training is delivered to the learner.

The quality of the design building block can be continuously improved provided that all parties are provided with the opportunity to evaluate and review their relationships and to identify areas for improvement.

## IMPROVE

The second building block – Improve – places an onus on the hosting organisation to consider how they will effectively monitor and evaluate the performance of the WBL learner during their work-based placement. High quality training provisions are evaluated on a continuous basis with the aim of identifying how they can be further ameliorated considering the future needs of the learner and of the organisation. To do this, organisations are advised to reflect over data within their organisation or at a national level, to determine how the quality of their programmes can be improved.

Organisations can further improve their programmes by identifying key members of staff within the organisation that can become responsible for the training of work-based learners. Across Europe, countries such as Germany and Austria

provide training for these members of staff to ensure that they have the adequate skillset to deliver high quality and effective training for WBL learners; however, in Ireland and Spain for example, this training is not available at present. Alternatively, organisations can identify and potentially improve upon how much time is spent with the WBL learner during the placement.

## RESPOND

The third building block of the EQAVET framework – Responding to the needs of learners’ – encourages VET providers and organisations to work collectively to support the challenges that learners may face during their placement. Each learner will have different learning abilities and needs, so it is important for them to be supported and encouraged to thrive in their placement. Continuous communication between all of the relevant parties can support the learner to feel more secure about their placement.

Quality within the Respond Building block can be improved by providing the learner with opportunities to voice their needs and concerns to a WBL responsible person within the organisation, who has received training to support them in their role. Through enabling the learner to continuously provide feedback based on their experience, the learner can feel more relaxed, engaged and encouraged to continue their placement as not to drop-out of their placement.

## COMMUNICATE

The fourth building block – Communicate – encourages learners to have a voice in their own learning, providing them with the opportunity to speak up and identify areas which they would like to improve. Additionally, this block enables organisations to discuss performance related concerns or to identify additional training opportunities. Regular consultations between the VET provider and the WBL organisation should occur to support collaboration and the achievement of strategic objectives for both parties. As part of research undertaken by the WBL-Q consortium, communication between all relevant parties should be improved.

Frequent updates through communication channels via informal chats, emails or video conference platforms support real-time communication between all parties involved. These channels should be identified at the start of the placement so that all parties are aware of how they can contact one another during the placement.

## TRAIN

The fifth building block – Train (the Staff) – encourages organisations to reflect and consider the qualifications and experience of the staff that are directly involved in liaising with WBL learners to ensure that they are prepared and highly trained for their roles. Organisations should identify the staff who are directly working with the learner and should collectively identify the skills that they possess, that will support the learner to achieve their skills.

As part of research undertaken by the WBL-Q consortium, across Europe, there are different standards and requirements for WBL responsible persons. Some staff are highly trained, supported by CPD opportunities, whereas, in other countries, these requirements are not necessary.

## ASSESS

The sixth and final building block – Assess (the learners) – encourages the VET provider and the organisation to certify that the learner undertook a period of work-based training. Wiliam (2017) recognises the importance of assessing the learners to identify what the learner has learned through their learning experience. Predefined learning outcomes, competences and skills should be used to assess the learners in order to support them to successfully complete their work-based placement.

Closer cooperation between the VET institute, the learner and the organisation can improve the quality of work-based programmes across Europe. Through clearly defined building blocks, the EQAVET framework provides stakeholders with a standardised and Europe-wide framework through which they can improve the overall quality of their programmes.

Through effective implementation of the PDCA cycle and the EQAVET Framework, the quality of work-based learning can be ameliorated across Europe. Failing to consider regular feedback and communication loops, and implementing solutions based on feedback received throughout the cycles, could result in the overall quality of work-based learning stagnating, and not improving as desired.

# 4

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## Identifying Gaps and Potential in the Company's WBL Process

This chapter provides an overview and some practical advice and tools, tips and tricks for identifying gaps and potentials in one's own work-based learning process.

To assure the quality of the work-based learning process and assess its impact on the company, monitoring and evaluation of the process are encouraged. To be able to measure the impact, key performance indicators (KPIs), both quantitative and qualitative, should be defined. Follow-up is very much encouraged - all the steps and the activities and their impact at different levels, as evaluation provides evidence on why KPIs are or are not being achieved. Measuring the impact of the process is very helpful for identifying the gaps and potential and can lead to the maximisation of the impact, i. e. of the added value of the WBL provision for the company. Hence the importance of defining KPIs in the initial design of the WBL process - there must be a clear picture from the start of the roles, responsibilities, and milestones within the process.

There are a variety of methodologies and tools available for monitoring and evaluation of different processes. In the following subchapters some selected and adapted tools are presented to make the assessment of the WBL process more comprehensive, but not overwhelming, since work-based learning is a complex, multi-stakeholder process. In the subchapters 4.1-4.3, some insights and tools are offered to help the company implement the "audit" of their WBL process - to visualise and analyse the current state of WBL in their company. Subchapter 4.4



provides a template for the widely known and used SWOT analysis, focusing on the WBL process, which eventually leads to the subchapter 4.5, focusing on the identification of concrete actions for improvement of one's own WBL process by providing a simple tool for specifying these actions.

## **4.1 Quality assurance of WBL processes - contextualisation**

In the last decades, importance and participation in work-based learning has been increasing. There are some targets and priorities for work-based learning confirmed at European level, while WBL policies at national level are quite diverse and encompass a variety of different WBL practices. Very often WBL is an integral part of the system of vocational education and training (VET), and in some countries, such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland, there has been a long tradition of WBL. In many countries, such as Ireland, Netherlands, Finland, France, Slovenia, WBL has been high on the policy agenda in recent years. There are still some countries where WBL is not yet an integral part of VET provision.

Regardless of the difference of the VET systems and the provision of work-based learning, many efforts have been made to achieve a common understanding and common standards of the quality of work-based learning. As stated in the European Training Foundation's Working Paper *Promoting Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training: the ETF Approach* (ETF 2015), "a common understanding of quality is 'being of value' and this makes quality relative: of what value; value for whom and value for what?" Therefore, the fundamental question for each company providing work-based learning should be what is the added value of this provision for the company.

Companies providing work-based learning, especially SMEs, who do not have the same resources as the large companies or enterprises, are often struggling with assuring the quality of the WBL process. Although a lot has been done in recent decades on assuring the quality of work-based learning processes on policy level, there is still a "language barrier" when translating this to the operational level.

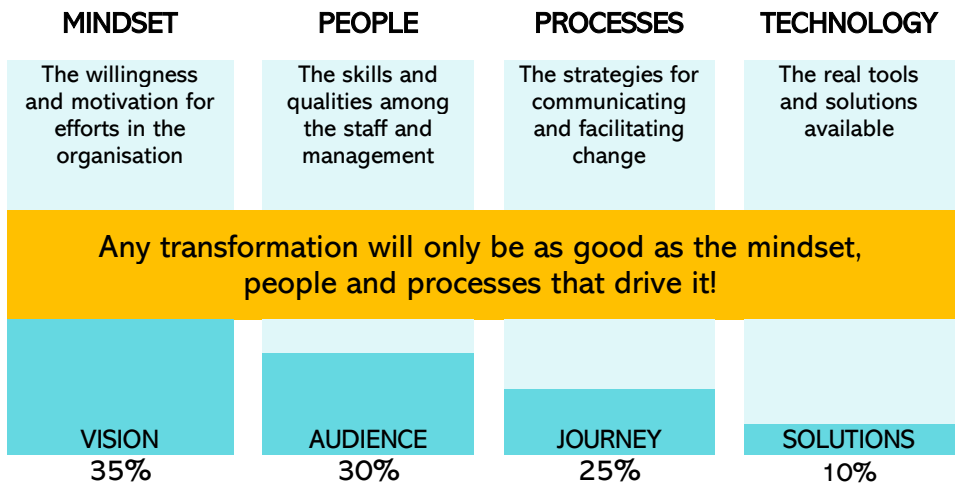
## 4.2 Linking with other processes

To fully assure the quality of the WBL process, it would be ideal if a company providing WBL would have a WBL vision and WBL strategy. How this vision is communicated with the rest of the company is even more important than having it “just declared”. The same goes for the strategy. It is commendable if a company has a WBL strategy, but it needs to be aligned and embedded in the overall company’s strategy. Furthermore, it is important to identify the level – is the WBL strategy long-term oriented, is it focused only on the organisation of the WBL resources and processes, or merely on the management of individual learning placements. These are all factors to be considered when evaluating the quality of the WBL process, identifying gaps and opportunities.

Organisational culture is formed by the managers and leaders. With the WBL vision and looking in the future, the management of the company should be aware that the WBL process quality is important and that it directly and indirectly affects the business. However, even if the top management has strong WBL vision without the support of the middle management and heads of departments who are living that vision and align their mindset to it, there could not be appropriate culture for WBL processes quality. Leaders on every level influence the employees, even if they are not aware of that. If they have a negative attitude towards proper compliance with WBL quality procedures, the employees will perceive this from their words and actions (Yiannas, 2009).

Considering the above, ask yourself how the WBL vision and strategy are supported by the organisational culture of your company? A positive and apative mindset is the most important asset in this process. By leaning on the ideas about a future-ready workplace of Averbok (2018) and his digital equation for success (2021), four pillars of WBL quality assurance can be deducted and weighted (Taylor 2019):

## The Four Pillars of WBL Quality Assurance



### 4.3 Identification of roles and stakeholders

All of the key stakeholders involved in the WBL process should be aware of their role. When it comes to companies providing WBL, they should be able to recognize the benefits of the provision, they should know how to establish the appropriate relationship with learners based on mutual trust (ensuring psychological safety through transparent communication and mirroring the company's organisational culture and) and they should have a system in place assuring the knowledge transfer. Ideally, these are all established processes, thus assuring quality.

Although the world of work-based learning consists of a plethora of different stakeholders and actors which still do not speak the same language, quality assurance for a company providing WBL is of utter importance since companies in different sectors are facing the same challenge - that of a lack of skilled workers. In the world of work-based learning, different stakeholders are pursuing the same common goal – competence-based economy and society.

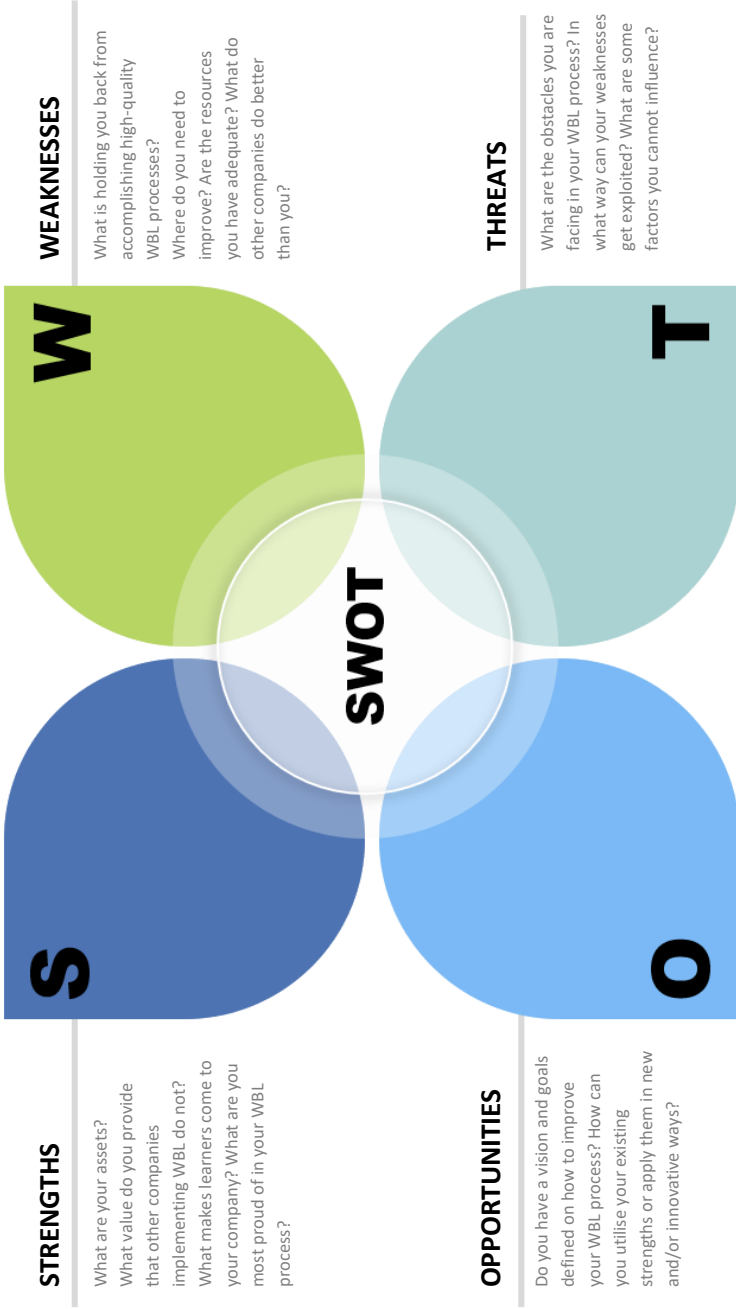
In this sense, a network of feedback loop and evaluation must be established and a culture of continuous improvement should be developed.

How do we get there? We can start by reflecting on the following questions:

- WBL process (how “mature” is your company's WBL process?)
- WBL structure (how is WBL organised in your company?)
- WBL resources (what level of resources does your company have (time, budget, people, etc.; is there anything that is missing?))

#### **4.4 SWOT Analysis of own WBL process**

The classic SWOT diagram is already equipped with some questions focused on guiding you in analysing your WBL process and identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The template will eventually lead you to the identification of the added value of the WBL provision. It will help you identify the assets upon which to build and improve your WBL process.



## 4.5 Identification of goals (desired state) and actions for improvement

Based on the steps and hints proposed in the previous subchapters, this subchapter offers a simple, yet comprehensive tool to identify and write down the concrete actions you can start to implement already tomorrow, as well as assess the feasibility of the identified actions. The simplified scheme presented below could represent a tool to reflect upon the steps implemented through the exercises from the subchapters above.

To be able to identify the gaps and the potential of your WBL process, you should identify 3 opportunities for improvement (see the template below). Based on the SWOT analysis, select three key challenges within your WBL process, possible solution and its feasibility – meaning what resources (human, time, financial) do you have and when can you start with the implementation of the identified opportunities.

Identify 3 opportunities for improvement. Based on the SWOT analysis, select three key challenges within your WBL process and possible solution.

Opportunity 1	Opportunity 2	Opportunity 3
<b>Key Challenge</b> <i>What is the current challenge you are facing?</i>	<b>Key Challenge</b> <i>What is the current challenge you are facing?</i>	<b>Key Challenge</b> <i>What is the current challenge you are facing?</i>
<b>Possible Solution</b> <i>What could you implement tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.?</i>	<b>Possible Solution</b> <i>What could you implement tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.?</i>	<b>Possible Solution</b> <i>What could you implement tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.?</i>

# 5

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## Self-Evaluation and Stress Test for WBL

### 5.1 The WBL-Q Evaluation Approach

In general, measuring and grasping quality in education and training is always a methodological challenge. Looking at the several quality assurance and measuring instruments developed and introduced for e.g. the school-based education systems and offers shows that a lot of thoughts have been made on this topic, however, there are always questions about reliability, validity and objectivity of such instruments and approaches. Nevertheless, there is agreement that a kind of continuous monitoring and assessment of quality of offers for continuous improvement is not only something for industrial companies but also for education and training offers.

On the level of work-based learning this is even more complex since WBL is the situation where car building and education and training are combined. Assessment of the quality of the WBL offer of a company is therefore always a combination of quality of education and training as well as company internal processes and products / services developed. For this reason, the measuring of quality within WBL contains additional challenges and it has to leave a pure quantitative measurement of indicators (e.g. how many mentors for how many apprentices in a company) but enter a broad and solid level of qualitative indicators to allow the identification of improvement potentials.

Envisaging these challenges of quality assessment in WBL in front of a need for broad selection of quality criteria and at the same time considering the company realities for a quality assessment process (e.g. shortage of time and resources, competition challenges, profit making approach etc.) has been influencing and in fact defining the WBL-Q evaluation approach. Right from the beginning it was decided to aim for an easy online based self-evaluation process which reflects all these existing challenges and factors. The self-evaluation approach offers a quite confidential and private evaluation action with company-internal deduction of improvement factors etc. At the same time the WBL-Q evaluation approach also wants to show that the single company based WBL approach is of course not disconnected from general societal and modern developments. For this reason, the WBL-Q evaluation approach also offers the possibility of assessment of the own WBL offer against some general megatrends to show how fit the current system is against some broad and in fact unavoidable trends in the near and middle future.

The main target group for the WBL-Q self-evaluation tool are all persons with responsibilities for a companies' WBL programme (may it be longer apprenticeship training programmes offered or also shorter internship and practical training offers). These are for instance company owners of smaller companies who are directly involved in and responsible for WBL training programmes, HR responsible persons of middle and larger companies, WBL staff e.g. mentors, trainers, fore workers etc. who play a crucial role in WBL processes in companies. All these persons would be able to make direct use of and benefit from the WBL-Q self-evaluation tool. As mentioned, the WBL-Q evaluation approach builds on a very broad set of influencing factors for the quality of company-based work-based learning, this also means that a single person using the self-evaluation tool does maybe not have all the information at hand which is needed to answer one or the other question raised in the evaluation tool. For this reason, the tool offers the possibility to pause the assessment if additional information is needed from other persons or units. However, the partnership of the WBL-Q project is convinced that only a very broad assessment of influencing factors on WBL quality in a company leads to a complete picture and a solid evaluation result. This could then be taken as a basis for the deduction of improvement potentials and steps which will also be suggested by the self-evaluation tool itself.



The identification of relevant and reliable quality indicators and criteria is always the biggest challenge when building a quality assessment instrument. Only if it is possible to collect and implement a series of credible and clear indicators in such an instrument, the product will be considered relevant and results will be accepted by users. For this reason, the partnership of the WBL-Q project applied a three-step quality indicator identification process for the development of the self-evaluation tool. In a first step a broad questionnaire survey with WBL experts, trainers, mentors, HR responsible persons but also learners in WBL was conducted to be able to identify relevant quality sections / items for WBL quality which in a second step have then be weighed against each other to be able to identify the most relevant items. In a third step the partnership then developed the relevant assessment questions for the quality criteria identified and applied a complex credit-based weighting system in the back of the self-evaluation tool to balance the importance of questions.

All this was permanently pre-tested and reflected within the partnership but also with a small group of external experts and reference panels to be able to provide a reliable collection of questions and quality indicators. In a final step the whole collection of criteria and questions, structured along the 6-building blocks of the EQAVET quality assurance system, have been put into an online self-evaluation system which forms the core output of the WBL-Q project.

## **5.2 The WBL-Q Self-Evaluation and Stress Test Tool**

The WBL-Q Self-Evaluation and Stress Test Tool is designed for persons responsible for the work-based learning processes in their company. The online tool is free and easy to use at [tool.wbl-quality.eu](https://tool.wbl-quality.eu) and it is available in English, German, Spanish, Slovenian and Hungarian.

## QUALITY CRITERIA PER BUILDING BLOCK

DESIGN	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a clear commitment to work-based learning at a senior level (statement of intent).</li> <li>2. Resources are allocated to facilitate work-based learning.</li> <li>3. Work-based learning is part of HR &amp; talent management strategy.</li> <li>4. A work-based learning policy is present.</li> </ol>
IMPROVE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Skills profiles of WBL learners are established prior to placement.</li> <li>6. The recruitment of WBL learners is based on company needs.</li> <li>7. The onboarding of WBL learners is facilitated.</li> </ol>
RESPOND	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Relationship between company and VET system.</li> <li>9. An appropriate matching of the WBL learner to the work-placement provider is established.</li> <li>10. Productivity return of WBL learners.</li> <li>11. Satisfaction levels of the company, learner, and VET representatives are monitored and measured.</li> </ol>
COMMUNICATE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Time is allocated for support and supervision between WBL learner and mentor.</li> <li>13. Internal communication and feedback loops are established.</li> <li>14. Communication is structured between the company and VET provider - feedback, problem solving, etc.</li> </ol>
TRAIN	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. WBL learners are exposed to real-life work experiences.</li> <li>16. Roles, responsibilities and authority are clearly defined.</li> <li>17. Supervisors of work-based learning are trained and experienced.</li> <li>18. Occupational health and safety requirements are established.</li> </ol>
ASSESS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Retention rate of WBL learners</li> <li>20. Regular (annual) audits and review of work-based learning processes are conducted.</li> <li>21. Improvement opportunities are determined and actioned.</li> <li>22. Work-based learning training programme is relevant to the labour market and the VET system.</li> </ol>

## Step 1: Register as user

**Name \***

User Name

**Email \***

User E-Mail Address

**New password**

**Repeat Password**

**Country \***

Austria

**How many persons are employed in your company? \***

1-9

**What is the average number of WBL learners (interns, trainees, apprentices, work-placements) in the company per year? \***

1-5

**How many persons are directly responsible for WBL processes (trainers, mentors, HR staff, etc.)? \***

1-5

**For how many years have you been offering WBL in your company? \***

1-5

In the registration, the user is asked to indicate not only the desired log-in data, but also some descriptive key information about their company. This information serves the purpose of creating benchmark groups that allow users to compare their score to peers of similar size and WBL tradition. In the drop-down bars, users can select the country, number of employees, average number of WBL learners per year, number of responsible persons for WBL, number of years of offering WBL. To facilitate the benchmarking and registration, the values are grouped and predefined. The table below shows the possible answers:

Users are also asked to agree to the terms and conditions as well as the data regulations, which are both linked in the registration form.

After the registration and the automatic email verification, users can instantly log-in the WBL-Q online tool, where they can change their user information at any given time.

Number of Employees	Number of WBL Learners	Number of Responsible Persons	Number of Years offering WBL
1-9	1-5	1-5	1-5
10-24	6-10	6-10	6-10
25-100	11-20	11-20	11-20
100-250	21-50	21-50	21-50
More than 250	More than 50	More than 50	More than 50

## Step 2: Starting the first assessment

Upon first log-in, users are welcomed in the dashboard with descriptive messages and an overview of the self-assessment building blocks. They can click on the “Start Self-Assessment” button or click on individual building blocks. In the top bar, the user can easily access their profile as well as the FAQ section, which is also promoted below the building blocks. In the footer, users can access the terms and conditions, data regulations, imprint and a bug report form. Users can also change the language at any given time.



[Dashboard](#) [FAQ](#) [My Profile](#) [Logout](#)

Dashboard



[▶ Start Self-Assessment](#)

### Building blocks

**i** The self-assessment is split into the following six building blocks. You can jump to and fill each one individually.

[Design](#) ☐

[Improve](#) ☐

[Respond](#) ☐

[Communicate](#) ☐

[Train](#) ☐

[Assess](#) ☐

**i** Find out more about:

- the theory behind these building blocks of WBL quality
- the origin and development of this tool
- how you can utilise the results

[Frequently asked questions](#)

### Welcome to your first assessment!

Start your first self-assessment to estimate the current state of your work-based learning system based on the six building blocks of WBL quality. This will be your first benchmark to which you can compare your progress in the future!

Answer the questions in each block and click save. The blocks can be saved individually, so you do not have to complete the assessment in one go.

It may happen that you do not know all answers right away. Try to find out the missing information (by looking up the relevant documents or asking a colleague) or give a neutral answer for now.

You will be able to re-assess all blocks separately in the future. Your saved answers will be visible for you later as well, so you can build on your previous assessment easily.

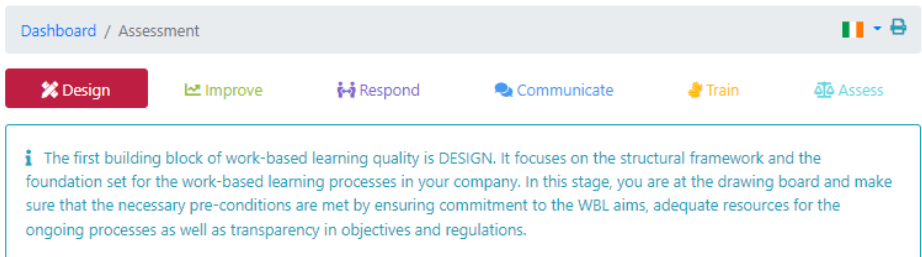
Please note that your scores are only complete once you have answered every block.

[Terms and conditions](#) | [Data privacy](#) | [Imprint](#)

[Bug report](#)

### Step 3: Self-evaluation process

When starting the self-evaluation, users are directed to color-coded subpages for each building block, where they find 9-12 questions with different answer choices. Below the navigation panel, an info box provides more information about the currently active building block.



At the bottom of the page, the answers of each building block can be saved individually. By allowing this, users have the freedom to either answer all building blocks in one session or only partly. This may be necessary if they have to research some additional information before answering confidently (e.g. questions about budgeting).

The self-evaluation can be repeated as many times as the user wishes, because it is intended to show how the WBL quality improves after implementing the recommendations provided in a later step. Again, each block can be answered individually, hence if there is improvement in one area, this can be documented easily.


### Step 4: User dashboard

As soon as at least one building block is answered and saved, the dashboard changes its appearance.

The building blocks which have been completed are displayed in full colour on the left and on the right the welcome message is replaced with a spider net visualisation of the scores for each building block. In the spider net graph, users can see their current result and compare it to their first result (if applicable) and

to the benchmark of similar companies. A number in brackets shows how many companies build the benchmark group.

Two buttons below the score section offer users the opportunity to download a detailed PDF result report as well as a certificate. Upon clicking the buttons, users can insert the name of their company, their own name and – if they want to brand the PDFs – their company logo. This data is not saved but only used temporarily for creating the PDFs, which are exclusively for the user (more details about the PDFs are described below).



[Dashboard](#)
[FAQ](#)
[My Profile](#)
[Logout](#)

Dashboard

▶ Start Self-Assessment

Building blocks

*i* The self-assessment is split into the following six building blocks. You can jump to and fill each one individually.

✂ Design ☒

📈 Improve ☒

👥 Respond ☒

💬 Communicate ☒

👉 Train ☒

📊 Assess ☒

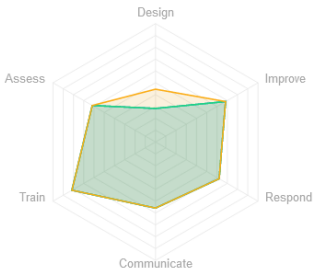
*i* Find out more about:

- the theory behind these building blocks of WBL quality
- the origin and development of this tool
- how you can utilise the results

🔍 Frequently asked questions

Your score

*i* Your scores in each block are visualised in this spiderweb diagram. The closer your score is to the edge of the web, the higher/better is your score.



● Your current scores ● Your first benchmark ● Your first benchmark (B)

*i* Compare your current score with the average score of companies of similar size and tradition.

📄 Show report

📄 Download certificate

## Step 5: Stress test results

The WBL-Q stress test is implemented behind the scenes of the self-assessment. All questions are allocated to specific quality criteria of work-based learning and depending on the user's answers and scores in the criteria, it is estimated how resilient their WBL system is against relevant future megatrends. In the tool, 5 megatrends have been chosen and by clicking on the "i" icon, a brief explanation is shown.

In the visualisation graph, the stress level for each megatrend is shown on an intuitive scale. Red indicates a high stress level, meaning the WBL system is not ready for the named megatrend and needs to improve. Green indicates low stress level, showing that the company is ready for this future trend.

### Megatrends

**i** Your company is faced with changes and new developments in many areas. Your answers in the self-assessment have been correlated with 5 main megatrends that may affect your work-based learning in the future. More details are available in your result report.

#### Demographic Change **i**

As the older generations are nearing their retirement age, more employees from younger generations will enter your company. It is important to prepare for this shift in the workforce and to facilitate intergenerational communication.



#### Digitalisation **i**

Technological advancements are constant accelerators of economic competition. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that work-based learning needs to find strategies to happen in virtual settings too.



#### Inclusion & Diversity **i**

The social, ethnic, educational and generational backgrounds of your workforce are more diverse than ever. And especially the younger generation is expecting more individualised approaches in their social and professional environment.



#### Attractivity of VET **i**

Work-based learning offers are a great way for a company seeks to assure a skilled workforce. To draw in potential learners, it is important to play the field and be approachable and attractive for candidates.

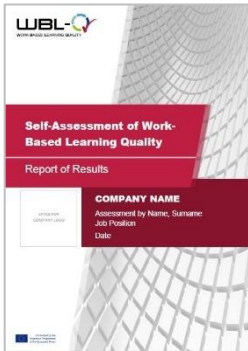


#### Sustainable and Solidarity Future **i**

Today's workforce aims at a feasible work-life balance, self-expression and fulfilment. Physical and mental health issues are as relevant as caring for the environment by making green, sustainable choices.



## Step 5: Result Report & Certificate



The result report PDF is automatically generated by clicking the respective button in the dashboard. It can be personalised by indicating the company name, the name of the person who implemented the self-assessment and the company logo. The date of the report generation is also shown. Both, date and company name are also shown in the header of all following pages.

The result report consists of the following chapters:

### 1. Introduction

Basic background information about the WBL-Q project & tool

### 2. Overview of results and quality building blocks

The results are presented in the spider net graph as well as in percentages per building block. Furthermore, the comparison to the own first score and the peer benchmarks is included.

### 3. Detailed results and recommendations

In this section, the results are presented per building block and their subordinate quality criteria. Users are provided with specific recommendations how to improve their scores and WBL quality.

### 4. Megatrends

Explanation of megatrends and their related quality criteria.

### 5. More information

Imprint and further links



When users are satisfied with their results, they can generate a personalised PDF certificate (A4 format), which they can print or utilise further, for example for promotional purposes.



## 5.3 Putting the Evaluation Results into Practice

The most important step of the WBL-Q self-assessment is to utilise the results in a professional context. For this reason, the result report provides tailored recommendations in each of the 22 quality criteria that are allocated to the six building blocks that guide the user through the improvement process of their WBL quality.

The results for each criterion can be in one of four ranges: excellent score (more than 90%), good score (61% - 89%), average score (31% - 60%) and room for improvement (less than 30%). Naturally, the lower the score, the more and complex recommendations are provided. An excellent score can hardly be improved; hence, the user is congratulated to the excellent quality of their work-based learning processes. The report is intended to be used as reference and to-do list (see example on the right). It is suggested to use it as a digital or printed basis for analysing the recommendations in a meeting with other responsible persons and/or the superiors, in which concrete steps for implementation can be deducted.

### Communicate

#### 4.1 Time is allocated for support and supervision between WBL learner and mentor.

The relationship between the WBL learner and their mentor is essential for the quality of WBL in your company. They need to establish trust, set clear expectations and good communication. Therefore, it is important that the learner has a dedicated contact person within the company that accompanies them throughout their whole WBL experience. They need to have specifically dedicated time to work together to manifest the relationship and to enable good communication. Additionally, teaching and learning something new needs to have allocated time slots to ensure quality.

You have reached a good score in this WBL quality criterion. This shows that the basis for good time management in WBL is well established. There are small things you can do to improve. Try the following:

- ☐ Talk to the persons responsible for the WBL process and see if you can match them with the learners to provide an individual mentor.
- ☐ Evaluate your time table and check if you can dedicate specific time slots to cooperation between the WBL learner and the mentor.

Ideally, the WBL-Q result report supports the responsible persons to find weak points in their system and further define the steps to improvement, including milestones, time plan as well as more detailed and specific checklists for related tasks. In some cases, it may be necessary to get in touch with relevant stakeholders

and other involved persons, such as representatives of the VET system and – of course – the WBL learners.

After the steps for improvement are implemented, the WBL-Q self-assessment can and should be done again – either for one particular quality building block or for multiple blocks at once. If the recommendations have been put into practice, the user can be delighted with a new and improved score!

The handy benchmark system allows the company to compare their quality progress with their first results – online in the tool and in the result report. This feature allows to monitor and document transparently how much the WBL quality has improved in each building block as shown in the spider net graph as well as percentage scores. Additionally, the benchmark system allows to compare the own score (first and current) with the average of other WBL offering companies. To ensure that the comparison is meaningful, only the scores of peer companies are included in the calculation of the average. The peers are defined by same country, number of employees, number of WBL learners, number of WBL responsible persons and the number of years the company is offering work-based learning. To really make this benchmark relevant, the WBL-Q tool is pilot tested over several months in all partner country with at least 50 companies, which lays the base pool of these peer groups. Through this comparison, the company can deduct in which building block they have the most pressing need to improve in comparison to their peers, which are maybe also rivals. At the same time, the company can see in which aspect of quality they are at the same or even on a better level than their peers, which allows them to use this information for promotional purposes.

Figuring out where the company stands in relation to peers is critical information, but it is also interesting to see where they stand in regards to future socio-economic developments. Therefore, the WBL-Q self-assessment goes hand in hand with the megatrend stress test. The scores of all building block criteria are allocated to certain future megatrends: demographic change, digitalisation, inclusion and diversity, attractivity of vocational education, sustainable and solidaric future. By showing at a glance if the company is “in the green zone” or “in the red zone” for each of the trends, they can deduct where they have the most need to prepare accordingly. The bold and simple visualisation should serve as an aid in planning meetings with superiors at senior level to initiate and facilitate changes where they are needed.

# 6

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## Case Studies and Practical Examples from the Business World

This chapter introduces best practice examples in terms of their high quality of work-based learning. There are a great number of companies within and outside the EU with excellent work-based learning, however, it is only possible to showcase a tiny selection of role model companies. This chapter presents a selection of Austrian and Hungarian companies, which have very different preconditions due to the strongly differing national systems and regulations. The core points and strengths of each company are presented. The participating Austrian companies were each awarded for their WBL quality within Austria's dual apprenticeship system.

The following companies will be presented:

- |                         |                |         |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------|
| • <b>GartenZauner</b>   | Garden Design  | Austria |
| • <b>Maischön</b>       | Hairdresser    | Austria |
| • <b>SSI Schäfer</b>    | Intralogistics | Austria |
| • <b>PGG Trilak</b>     | Paint/Coating  | Hungary |
| • <b>Legjobb Vagyok</b> | NGO            | Hungary |

## GartenZauner

	<p>Garden design company</p> <p>Upper Austria, Austria</p> <p>~30 employees</p> <p>7 learners</p> <p><a href="http://www.gartenzauner.com">www.gartenzauner.com</a></p>
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The education of employees has been in a special focus for more than 20 years and it has been a long process to establish a well-functioning system successfully. Work-based learning is a prominent part of the organisation. Since the shortage of skilled workers is already a big challenge, the company finds it crucial to educate employees and train skilled workers themselves.

For becoming a learner at GartenZauner it is not about grades in school, but about passion, social competences and manual skills. It is important to bring a high motivation and to fit into the team. Most of the learners stay in the company after their education. The staff turnover in the company is very low, which is a sign for being an attractive employer.

### Cornerstones

The company tries to make an attractive offer to their learners: Cornerstones are the yearly projects of learners, in which learners are responsible to build their own garden landscape from the beginning themselves and the weekly classes, which are held additionally to the obligatory VET school attendance. Further, the company offers apprenticeships abroad, trainings with internal and external experts in relevant fields and areas such as social competences, personality development, project management, which are likely to be less taken into account otherwise.

The desire of employees for work-life balance is acknowledged as well. There are already employees, who have a four-days-week. Further benefits appeal to the youth: A benefit of the sector in general is to work in and with nature, to protect the environment and pay attention to biodiversity.



GartenZauner as a small craft business pays attention to digitalisation as well: every learner gets a tablet at the beginning of their education in order to be able to attend the weekly inhouse lessons and have access to learning materials. Further, it is recognised that learning apps replace flash cards, especially in the field of plants.

The yearly employee appraisal is also implemented with learners. In the course of the appraisal, goals are set, the development and progress of each learner

is monitored and there is room for feedback and evaluating employee satisfaction.

If a learner is not confident to speak about any issue directly with their supervisor, they have a spokesperson to represent them. This is always a plus and particularly important in the beginning, when learners do not yet feel confident.

### **How does the company attract learners?**

It is crucial to actively recruit learners. This means for example to visit school classes, present the job profile and inspire pupils for the job. After years of building up a proper WBL system and actively recruiting learners, the company GartenZauner is already known as an attractive employer in its region and has no difficulties in getting learners. It needs to be highlighted that the WBL system is time consuming and expensive, but it pays off when looking at the company's competent, motivated team despite the presence of the skills shortage in this sector.



## Maischön

maischön  
...mir zuliebe

Hairdressing and beauty salon

4 locations in Vorarlberg, Austria

~ 54 employees

13 learners

<https://maischoen.at>

Maischön is an award-winning hairdressing and beauty salon with four locations in rural Austria, employing 54 people, including 13 apprentices. For their work-based learning, they built up an own Apprenticeship Academy recently to have room capacities and a good setting to educate learners properly besides daily business. For the next few years, they aim to hold larger learning sessions at the academy in blocks instead of training learners there once or twice a week.

### Cornerstones

*"At maischön you will find an environment where you can earn more than just a paycheck. You get the chance to build a career and work with friends."* - Birgit Nöckl, CEO & head of WBL

To meet the needs of the learners, they restructured their WBL-system. Instead of structuring the learning content in years and teaching all learners the same content in the same time, as is common, they have built a modular system in which each learner can choose which module to complete next and how much time to spend on each module until it is completed. After each module, learners take an exam and from then on can apply their knowledge in practice in the company. This system allows for an individual learning pace, which means that fast learners are much faster than before and slower learners have enough



time to repeat the learning content again until it is consolidated. They are keen to empower their learners and encourage their independence. This system encourages learners to take personal responsibility and increases their motivation enormously. In addition, slower learners are motivated by the fact that they look up to the faster ones.

The company noticed that all profited from this modular system. Fears that learners would choose modules that require a lot of prior knowledge have proven to be unfounded. Learners not only choose modules based on current motivation, but are very strategic about it, taking into account their current level of knowledge, their needs and even the needs of the salon.

It is important to Maischön to have continuous communication with their learners. They are in almost daily exchange with their learners. They also have weekly tasks to do and a weekly "potential day" where there is room to discuss bad situations but also highlights. Half-yearly, the parents of underage learners are invited to a meeting together with the learner and mentor to discuss goals and progress. This helps to involve the parents, establish contact between mentor and parents and to win them over as multipliers as well. Ongoing communication is time-

consuming, but results in a good personal relationship, a good relationship to the company and a very low employee turnover. Although recruiting qualified staff is difficult in the sector, Maischön has no problems finding skilled workers because they train them.



When training employees it is noticeable that the range of learners in terms of characteristics such as age or performance increases. The company finds it crucial to recruit a good mix of learners, for example younger ones, older ones, fast learners and slow learners. This mix should allow for a good collaboration within the learners. Disabled people (e.g. wheelchair user and spastic) also work in the company and carry

out certain activities (not yet in their trainee programme). This is very important for the personality development and social competence of the employees. In the beginning, there was a fear of contact, which was completely overcome.

The company set up two online platforms. One of them aims to provide digitised training material to colleagues in other companies. On this platform, trainers of other companies can download training content to take over this learning system in their companies. The second online platform was set up for the learners. Their homework and assignments were digitised, giving Maischön a big advantage when the lockdowns caused by Covid-19 were implemented.

An open feedback culture is supported as well. Therefore, the company established an online tool to implement an informal and anonymous survey biannually. This questionnaire asks about satisfaction, wishes and problems of their employees. This helps not only in responding to the employees' wishes or solving major problems between them, but also in discussing minor difficulties even before they become problems. This is crucial for learners in particular because they might be afraid to be treated unfairly or do not know about the company's error culture.

### **What is their biggest challenge?**

As a hairdressing and beauty salon, Maischön is highly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns. Even though they were prepared for distance learning because they set up their learning platform years ago, they had great difficulties due to the pandemic and the resulting restrictions. They reported troubles in getting learners back to a daily routine, especially after the first lockdown. In addition, some learners are afraid of losing the training time lost due to the closure, as their time as learners will not be extended because of this. Nevertheless, the company has set up a good online communication structure to support learners as best as possible. All in all, Maischön acts very learners-oriented and successfully trains learners with innovative ideas. Because of their innovative work-based learning system, they are not yet negatively affected by megatrends such as lack of skilled workers or changing demands through digitalisation.



## SSI SCHÄFER Austria



Multinational company in the field of intralogistics

~1900 employees in Austria

40-50 learners in Austria

[www.ssi-schaefer.com/en-at](http://www.ssi-schaefer.com/en-at)

SSI SCHÄFER is an internationally operating company headquartered in Germany with more than 10,000 employees. In this section, SSI SCHÄFER Austria as part of SSI SCHÄFER is introduced.

As SSI SCHÄFER Austria is a technical company, most learners work in production. The company trains its learners through a job rotation system that allows them to get to know more work areas in a shorter time. This way, the learners are not only in the production department at the beginning. They have customer contact not only in the third year, but already in the first year, which leads to a more diverse field of activity.

Since it is difficult to recruit qualified workers due to the shortage of skilled workers, it is essential to train the future skilled workers in the company itself. SSI SCHÄFER Austria concentrates on school visits to introduce the company and attract future learners. In an upcoming project, it is planned to introduce the company to primary school pupils already and bring them into contact with technology and technical professions.

### Cornerstones

The goal of their WBL-system is to train employees and take over as many as possible. And most of them do stay in the company. The company has introduced a six-month retention period where learners stay with the company after passing their final exams. During this time, mentors continue to be responsible for their learners to ensure good follow-up and allow learners to choose another

department if they are more interested instead of leaving the company. The company considered it a challenge to always have competent and motivated staff as mentors for the learners. In fact, it is a challenge when a mentor leaves the company and needs to be replaced.



In the beginning of the learners' last year, the company discusses individual career opportunities with their learners. Therefore, two to three relevant departments present themselves to the learners. Before the learners are taken over by the company, each learner must apply again for their desired job to provide an incentive and raise its value.

Unlike other companies, SSI SCHÄFER Austria does not just take on new learners twice a year, but throughout the year. Most new recruits during the year are adults who have found their way to the company and want to become learners in their training system.

### **Taking on responsibility**

Many practices of SSI SCHÄFER Austria lead to the encouragement of learners. A central part of their WBL-system is their buddy programme, which encourages older learners to care for the younger ones and is supervised by an external company. Older learners accompany new learners during their first three months in the company and have to accomplish tasks together such as interviewing an employee or doing another company tour. This buddy programme helps to make new learners more comfortable and gives older learners the possibility to take on more responsibility.

The company carries out projects with their learners on a regular basis. Some of them are social projects, e.g. involvement of and cooperation with companies

working with disabled people, for which SSI SCHÄFER was awarded. Further, they introduced a programme where disabled can reach a partial qualification.

SSI SCHÄFER Austria offers their learners to gain work experience abroad. Younger learners can work abroad through the Erasmus programme, while learners over aged 18 can go on assembly abroad, where they stay for four weeks. An assembly abroad is a great way of gaining new skills and valuable experiences.

Further offers for learners include:

- An inhouse training programme for school leaving examination and
- Premiums for good school grades and good final apprenticeship exams.

In addition to the training at the vocational school, the company has its own academy for its learners. The courses on offer range from in-depth technical knowledge to social skills and are taught either by internal staff, external trainers or associations. Every Friday, learners have to attend such a training.

The digitalisation of education was supported through the COVID-19 pandemic, its restrictions and difficulties. This led to an improvement of e-learning in a more interactive and playful way. The learners are integrated into the development process of new e-learning.

The company SSI SCHÄFER Austria also involves its learners in its strategy for environmental and social sustainability. This led to the project idea to organise an internal flea market every six months where employees can buy still usable items from the company instead of throwing them away. The proceeds will be donated.

Basic requirements for recruiting new learners are politeness, friendly manners and ability to work in a team. For the recruiting process of learners, the company considers



school grades and has a small general test, but the most important criterion is the three-day internship, which must be done before starting the apprenticeship. As the company found that other learners had a good observation and assessment of the (future) performance of the applicants, it started to include the learners' spokesperson's opinion in its decision.

### **Feedback & communication**

The company has different opportunities of giving feedback in place. For learners, they have regular feedback-talks. Each quarter, a big meeting with all mentors and learners takes place. In general, it provides yearly employee surveys, internal mailboxes and implements not only recruitment interviews, but also offboarding interviews to collect feedback from employees or learners leaving the company.

## PPG Trilak Hungary



Multinational Coating company

The Hungarian factory was founded in 1907

~200 employees

<https://ppgtrilak.hu>

The company has a modern HR policy, including an established education and WBL program.

Work-based training is important for a company because it needs a highly skilled workforce. They produce high-quality products, such as automotive paints, which require a high degree of expertise.

The biggest challenge right now is to continue the internship in WBL. The Covid situation often makes it difficult for learners to participate in training.

Many companies report that they cannot find an intern or cannot find a suitable intern. What is the situation in your company? Are you taking any measures to mitigate the impact?

Our professionals are in contact with vocational schools. Every year, we introduce learners to the opportunities offered by our company through presentations. We offer an attractive career path. In addition, we offer a number of benefits to learners, such as meal allowance and work clothes.

### **How much does digitization affect your WBL system?**

Very seriously. We are prepared for digital education; we can already teach certain processes and skills online.

### **Is sustainability and the green economy a topic in your organisation?**

Yes. Our company only manufactures environmentally friendly products and we place great emphasis on teaching environmentally conscious thinking. Therefore, related materials were incorporated into WBL processes.

## What is the relationship between your company and vocational training (schools)?

We maintain good relations with vocational training institutions, as it is in the interest of both sides to get a well-trained workforce out of the training process. We are also cooperating in the development of the training protocol.

Learners are satisfied with the quality of the hands-on training we provide, so skipping is minimal. Most learners continue to work for us after graduating from school.



### Legjobb Vagyok Tehetségmentoráló Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft.

**Legjobb vagyok**

Non-profit organisation Hungary

2 employees

4 learners

<http://legjobbvagyok.hu>

<https://ppgtrilak.hu/>

The company is a non-profit organisation. It was founded in 2010 with the aim of launching a talent development program for young adults. In addition, they provide several other services to companies and individuals such as coaching, organisational development, HR services, career counseling.

As the main target group of the talent development program is disadvantaged learners in vocational schools, they have a very good view of the situation of the WBL from the perspective of all stakeholders. They know the situation of vocational training, the problems of the learners, but they also have an insight into the practice of their corporate partners.

They employ 4-6 trainees a year who attend a vocational school. Trainees are selected on the basis of an entrance examination. The curriculum of the internship is agreed with the sending school, and great emphasis is placed on developing learners' competences and nurturing talent.

The company places great emphasis on developing digital competences. Trainees have access to tools (laptops, cameras, software) so they can do creative tasks in addition to their normal workflows. They have the opportunity to create media materials, use their language skills to communicate with foreign partners, and occasionally work remotely.



The company will no longer employ trainees this year as the Vocational Training Act has changed to impose unfulfillable requirements on employing companies.

## **Summary**

To summarise, the introduced companies each provide very specific training and offers to their learners, whereas the companies' offers are very different. Some provide experiences abroad; others offer job rotation. Regardless of their size, they have in common that they make a high effort to recruit and train their learners and have the goal to take over the learners after completing their education. An important part of their WBL system is self-directed learning and empowering the learners. This is becoming increasingly important, of which there are many different variations. Examples of this are the selection of learning content based on the learner's interests or introducing a buddy-programme, which empowers both, older and younger learners.

Implementing a high quality WBL system takes high effort, but it pays off. Especially facing megatrends such as a lack of skilled workforce through

demographic change, or change in education because of digitalisation etc., it is important for the continuity of a company to keep up to date and to offer a modern, state-of-the-art WBL system. Paying attention to learners and their training supports companies in overcoming current and future challenges.



## Conclusion and Outlook

With the current handbook Ensuring Quality in Work-Based Learning we were aiming to emphasise two critical issues which so far have not been considered enough in the European VET arena.

- a) Work-based learning especially in initial VET but also as part of continuous VET is of crucial importance as considerable part of Europe's VET offer and as a basis for developing the skilled workforce of tomorrow
- b) Quality assurance in work-based learning is important as this has also so far not been considered sufficiently and at the same time has to follow company-, or business-oriented processes other than school-oriented approaches

The WBL-Q project together with its main outputs and especially also with the current handbook has been focusing centrally on these two core issues. From a discussion of the state-of-the-art in work-based learning in Europe we tried to build the most actual background for quality discussions which led into a reflection about the “why” and “how” of quality assurance first on a general level. In these reflections it is clearly visible that a solid quality assurance and management approach also for work-based learning on company and organisations' level is of utmost importance for a high-quality VET offer in Europe.

In a next step, the authors tried to focus on the issue of quality assurance in work-based learning in particular by introducing the two well-known quality management and assurance principles, the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) circle as well

as the EQAVET model of six building blocks for quality in work-based learning. This finally led into the reflections of how to identify gaps and improvement potentials in work-based learning quality on company level and the introduction of the WBL-Q self-evaluation tool for quality in work-based learning. With a selection of case studies and good practice examples of modern work-based learning approaches the authors made the link to the general importance of work-based learning in the European VET arena.

Overall, quality in work-based learning is an issue which so far has not been considered sufficiently in discussions, developments and innovation, however, one must not forget that work-based learning is the basis for the training of skilled workforce which turns out to be one of the most important factors to tackle the shortage of skilled workforce problem in nearly all economic sectors. For this is it is certainly not enough to focus on and apply quality assurance methods and approaches on school level (even if this includes VET schools), if we do not manage to also provide a suitable and coherent model for quality assurance for the work-based VET training part (which is always a crucial if not the main part of every skilled work and professional training programme) of our VET programmes, the picture is not complete.

The WBL-Q project, the self-evaluation tool developed as well as the current handbook provided are meant to play an important role in this process. Our work does not stop now and we will continue contributing to improving the WBL system, processes and quality in the European VET arena.

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