

MFHEA Scoping Report

**in preparation for the
Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Courses
that include a Work-Based Learning Component**

Prepared by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority.

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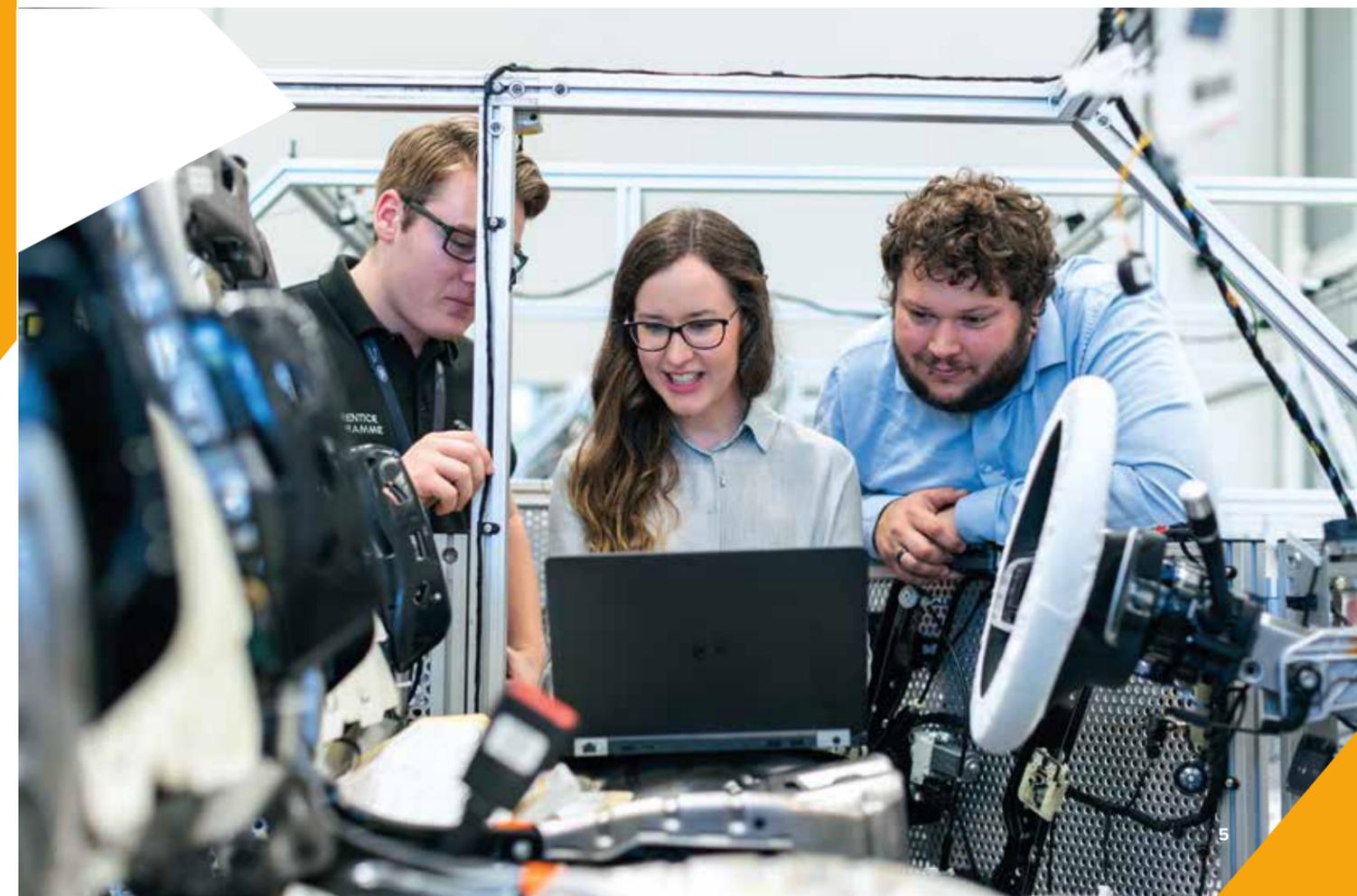
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Foreword

The MFHEA Scoping Report in preparation for the Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Courses that include a Work-Based Learning Component represents the effort of the MFHEA to support local higher education institutions in their efforts to provide high-quality education and to make such education opportunities accessible to as many prospective learners as possible. The prospective quality guidelines on work-based learning (WBL), in line with the other MFHEA quality assurance documentation, shall complement the internal quality assurance mechanisms of individual further and higher education entities while contributing to the development of a national quality culture in this area. The prospective guidelines shall refer to further, higher and adult formal education provision in both the state and the non-state sectors. A thorough consultation process following from this scoping report is envisaged to strengthen the process of producing quality guidelines for WBL programmes. The feedback received will allow for the development of formal QA guidelines for WBL programmes that best suit the needs of the Maltese context, by balancing aims, rights and duties of all the respective stakeholders, for the best possible benefits to society at large.



Abbreviations

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EaFA	European Alliance for Apprenticeships
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESTS	Extended Skill Training Scheme
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUPA	European Union Programmes Agency
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IfE	Institute for Education
ITS	Institute for Tourism Studies
MCAST	Malta College for Art, Science and Technology
MCCEI	Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MSE	Medium-sized Enterprise
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NRP	National Reform Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UOM	University of Malta
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-based Learning

Definitions

Apprenticeship: Training that engages learners on programmes that include school-based learning at a licensed educational institution and work-based learning with a registered sponsor. Apprenticeships lead to a recognised vocational qualification or award at MQF Level 3 or Level 4. The learner is linked to a sponsor with a training agreement along with the educational institution. ECTS credits are allocated and assessed by the educational institution for learning outcomes achieved during the work-based period. Apprenticeships formally combine and alternate work-based training (periods of practical work experience at a workplace) with school-based education (periods of theoretical/practical education delivered in an educational institution), and lead to a nationally recognised qualification/award upon successful completion.

Assessment: The methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, skills and competences) of an individual, leading to certification.

Award: The title of certification of learning achieved through courses that do not have the required number of credits, in line with the Malta Qualifications Framework, to be considered as a full qualification.

Blended learning: A formal education programme in which learners engage at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction, with some element of learner control over time, place, path and/or pace, and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location with face-to-face interaction away from home. The ratio between online and face-to-face learning is decided by the educator and/or the requirements of the programme on the basis of the related pedagogical principles and the programme's requirements, but both modes are complementary in the programme.

Certification: The process of awarding a certificate to somebody as proof of satisfactory completion of a course of study.

Competence: The demonstrated capacity to perform. The possession of behaviours and attitudes required to carry out an occupation and conform to the Occupational Standards.

Curriculum: The content of an organised programme of study in an educational institution indicating the topics taught, the time allotted to each, and their sequence.

Demonstration: The process of teaching by showing somebody how to do something: a practical exhibition or explanation of something.

Educational institution: An individual or body corporate which acts as the administrator of work placements, apprenticeships and internships by providing educational programmes at further

education or higher levels, and which is licensed by the MFHEA in accordance with the Education Act or approved by international qualification structures recognised by industry.

European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET): The system that allows credits earned for knowledge and skills acquired in different systems and countries, to be validated, recognised and aggregated to count towards qualifications or awards.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): A standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of learners of higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries.

European Qualifications Framework: The translation tool that helps comparison between qualifications systems in Europe.

Experiential learning: Learning through the experience of doing something, rather than being told about it or reading about it.

Further and Higher Educational Institutions: Non-compulsory educational institutions that allow learners to obtain a national qualification classified at MQF level 5 or above, or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

Further Educational Institutions: Non-compulsory educational institutions that allow learners to obtain a national qualification classified at MQF level 4 or below, or a foreign qualification at a comparable level.

Internship: Training that engages learners on programmes that include school-based learning at a licensed educational institution and work-based learning with a registered sponsor (work-place provider). Internships lead to a recognised qualification/award at MQF Level 5 or above. The learner is linked to a sponsor with a training agreement signed by the educational institution, the sponsor and the learner. ECTS credits achieved during the work-based period are allocated and assessed by the educational institution for specified learning outcomes.

Learners: A learner engaged in training programmes from MQF Level 1 upwards.

Learning outcomes: Knowledge, skills and competences necessary to carry out a Skilled and Technical Occupation. Learning outcomes reflect the Occupational Standards set by the MFHEA.

Logbook: A reflective work-based document which presents a systematic record of activities conducted during the periods of work-based learning in accordance with the programme learning outcomes.

Malta Further and Higher Education Authority: The Maltese authority that accredits Vocational Education and Training providers and their programmes, as established by virtue of article 3(1) of the Further and Higher Education Act.

Malta Qualifications Framework: A referencing tool that describes and enables comparability of both national and foreign qualifications to promote quality, transparency and mobility of qualifications in all types of education. It is aligned to the European Qualifications Framework.

Trainer: An experienced supervisor who provides guidance and support in a variety of ways and acts as a role model, guide, tutor, coach or sounding board for a learner joining a new

organisation. They are designated by the sponsor to train the learner during the work-based learning period of a training programme.

Occupational Standards: The standards set by the MFHEA through the Sector Skills Units as stipulated in the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning Regulations. These standards describe what an individual in a particular occupation should know and be able to do in order to be formally recognised as competent in a given occupation. Occupational Standards determine the learning outcomes required from persons undergoing training to be able to carry out a Skilled and Technical Occupation.

Online learning: A form of education in which teachers and learners are physically separated. Communication between the educator and the learner occurs via synchronous/asynchronous telecommunication. Email correspondence between a supervisor and learner or a video/audio conference call between the two to discuss research methods and provide feedback constitutes e-learning.

Programme specifications: A document detailing the minimum requirements for a training programme as set by an educational institution in line with the appropriate guidelines. This document includes details related to: learning outcomes, course duration, timetables, assessments, credits, certification, equivalence, recognition, labour legislation, social security legislation and other regulations. This document sheds light on specific rights and obligations fulfilled by the educational institution, the sponsor/s and the learner.

Qualification: An education and training certificate that proves the attainment of a level of knowledge and skill that confirms a person achieved specific learning outcomes. Qualifications conform to the local or foreign regulated Qualifications Framework.

School-based learning: Education and training which takes place within an educational institution (as opposed to a workplace).

Skill Standards: Statements developed by industry specifying the competences required by workers for each sector of the workforce.

Skill: The ability to perform a particular mental or physical activity which may be developed by training or practice.

Skilled and Technical Occupations: Skills, trades, crafts or other occupation or section thereof required to develop a work force. Related training programmes need to be developed in line with them.

Sponsor: An organisation or individual approved by educational institutions to host learners and deliver the work-based learning component of a training programme that leads to a qualification or award forming part of the local or locally recognised regulated Qualifications Framework.

Teachers: Persons whose function is to impart knowledge, skills and competences to learners in an education or training institution. In VET institutions there is a focus on knowledge, skills and competences required for particular occupations or, more broadly, in the labour market.

Training agreement: The agreement entered into by the VET provider, the sponsor and the learner with respect to a training programme.

Training plan: A document showing the specific requirements of a training programme set by the educational institution, that provides detailed information on learning outcomes, duration, timetables, examinations, credits, certification, equivalence and recognition.

Training programmes: Accredited learning programmes administered by an educational institution aligned with the National Occupational Standards and addressing the needs of one or more Skilled and Technical Occupation, which includes work-based learning delivered by a sponsor and school-based learning delivered by an educational institution. The duration of a training programme leading to a formal qualification or award is set in accordance with the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Training: The development of knowledge, skills and competences through instruction and practice.

Vocational Education and Training (VET): Education and training which aims to equip learners with knowledge, skills and competences required for employment. Such education and training are designed to equip learners following programmes at MQF Levels 1 and above with knowledge, skills and competences required to enhance their employability.

Work-based learning (WBL): An on-the-job course component that provides a learning experience aimed at helping learners acquire the knowledge, skills and competences with direct relevance to the labour market. Learning occurs mainly through experience, practice, mentoring and demonstration. Learners get the opportunity to apply academic and technical knowledge, skills and competences and develop their employability. Work-based learning can take the form of a work placement, an apprenticeship or an internship.

Work-based learning system: A set of interrelated structures, rules and procedures underpinned by a legal framework, which regulate WBL provision and make it work as a unitary whole.

Work placement: A period of unpaid work undertaken by learners with a registered sponsor as part of their course of education in an educational institution which is characterised by the structured nature of the learning. It is aimed at gaining work experience leading to a recognised qualification or award at MQF Level 1 or Level 2. The learner is linked to a sponsor with a training agreement compiled by the educational institution. ECTS credits are allocated and assessed by the educational institution for learning outcomes achieved during the work-based period.

Report Overview

Following the Forward, a list of abbreviations and a list of definitions, this report includes a brief description of its background and purpose. It then provides a summary of the approach to work-based learning (WBL) within the 2016 NCFHE Referencing Report. It also provides an overview of relevant EU policy documentation on work-based learning. The report then continues by providing a picture of the current situation in relation to work-based learning in Malta. In this section, we give a brief overview of WBL at the University of Malta, MCAST, the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the Institute for Education (IfE) and JobsPlus.

Section Ten outlines important lessons from the most recent peer-reviewed research published in relation to work-based learning.

The final section outlines Quality Priorities that educational providers would need to focus on when developing and administering training that includes WBL in their programmes of studies. It is being suggested that these Quality Priorities address the following areas: effective workplace learning governance, the collaboration between educational institutions and sponsors, the assurance of worthwhile work placement experiences, an effective student support system, a balanced curriculum, valid and reliable assessment systems, and expert assessors for the workplace component.



Background and Purpose of this Scoping Report

The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) is aware of the many potential benefits of including work-based learning components into learning programmes. Thus, the MFHEA aims to provide clear guidelines to ensure that courses that include a work-based learning component, being extensive or limited, genuinely prepare prospective learners well for their professional futures in the long term.

This report draws upon the guidance within the 2016 NCFHE Referencing Report, extensive EU and international policy documentation on the subject matter, internationally published academic peer-reviewed research, Maltese policy documents and current practices within Maltese institutions.



Directions on WBL within the 2016 Referencing Report

This scoping report recommends that any future guidelines issued by the MFHEA in relation to work-based learning remain in line with the directions provided in the 2016 Referencing Report.

As outlined in the NCFHE Referencing Report (2016), there are a number of principles underpinning work-based learning to ensure that learners are provided with a genuinely educational experience. Guidelines of the Report on WBL are summarised below. The final Quality Priorities being proposed in this scoping report are aligned with these directions.

- a) WBL can only make up a component of a training course, whereby any training course leading to a qualification must have a significant component of school-based teaching and learning.
- b) All learning outcomes and credit value for WBL must be clearly specified.
- c) A learning agreement that clearly specifies the learning outcomes and assessment modes is to be signed so that the employer is obligated to provide work experiences that lead to the development of the identified learning outcomes.
- d) The educational provider must monitor the work environment experienced by the student and ensure that it is conducive to the respective course learning outcomes.
- e) The educational provider is solely responsible for overseeing the assessment process.
- f) The employer must provide supervision of the student at the workplace. This includes a designated trainer who guides and supports learners at work while ensuring that they are not allowed to perform tasks for which they are not trained.

It is our view that these guidelines are serviceable and an excellent way forward. Any future quality assurance guidelines issued by the MFHEA in relation to work-based learning can be based on these.

EU Policy Directions on Work-Based Learning

Interest in WBL has been steadily increasing in recent years. In fact, several initiatives related to work-based learning at European level have been promoted over the years (Borbély-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2014; UNESCO, 2013; ETF, 2014; Cedefop, 2014; Cedefop, 2021). A review of recent policies issued on the matter clearly indicates that WBL is given priority at European level. Work-based learning has been promoted due to its potential for achieving specific educational, social and economic aims.

Interest in WBL is evident in the adoption of the indicators developed for the Education and Training Strategy 2020 (Council of the European Union, 2009). The ET2020 strategy set standards for a range of priority areas, including educational attainment, lifelong learning, graduate employability and labour mobility.

WBL facilitates the attainment of each one of these targets, hence the interest to promote it. These policy initiatives were aligned with the OECD recommendations found in the *Learning for Jobs* document (OECD, 2010) which emphasises that those entering the labour market need “competences that will enable them to handle changing jobs and career contexts and to sustain their learning capacity” (OECD, 2010, p. 14). The *Learning for Jobs* document argues that WBL can play an important role since workplaces can be excellent learning environments and a “blend of school and workplace learning is a powerful and effective method of preparing young people for jobs” (OECD, 2010, p. 14).

A European policy milestone relating to the promotion of WBL is *The Bruges Communiqué* (2010) which renewed the European agenda for adult learning by urging cooperation in vocational education and training and by encouraging Member States to commit themselves to the inclusion of WBL in vocational education. The *Communiqué* listed specific deliverables for both EU Member States and EU Agencies – it emphasised the dual objective of vocational education, that is, boosting employability for economic growth and promoting social cohesion. The *Communiqué* highlighted the role that VET plays in economic prosperity and social equity, declaring that “work-based learning is a way for people to develop their potential” and that the work-based component contributes to boosting professional development and self-esteem of those who would probably otherwise fail (European Commission, 2010, p. 3). Additionally, WBL’s contribution to social equity is highlighted by recognising that earning while learning contributes to social cohesion.

The *Bruges Communiqué* prioritises the promotion of WBL as a means of advancing job skills and broader transferable skills (Council of the EU, 2011, p. 5) and providing the flexibility to enable more students to enter education while helping students to develop their potential (Council of

the EU and European Commission, 2010, p. 10; Council of the EU, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, WBL is commended as a tool that can achieve a wider range of policy goals, such as narrowing the skills gap (when the unemployed are unable to access available jobs because they do not have the right skills). It is understood that this skills mismatch is particularly acute for vulnerable groups (Borbély-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2014) and WBL is seen as an important policy tool for addressing social equality.

The *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs: A European Contribution towards full Employment* also promoted WBL, advising that employers invest in “the activities of Educational Institutions to facilitate the provision of work-based learning” and reap the benefits (European Commission, 2011).

In 2012, the European Training Foundation (ETF) published a policy document which identified the advantages of work-based learning for all stakeholders as:

- ▶ Developing expertise and craftsmanship
- ▶ Developing other knowledge, skills and competences
- ▶ Improving career management skills and career awareness
- ▶ Improving self-confidence and motivation

The document also identifies potential benefits for trainees including, “smoother school-to-work transitions” (ETF, 2012, p. 16) and “enjoy[ing] wage returns” (ETF, 2012, p. 18). Benefits for employees are also mentioned, which include:

- ▶ WBL as an effective way to acquire expertise
- ▶ Improved quality of work
- ▶ Improved career progression
- ▶ Recognition of learning gained in the workplace

ETF posits that employers gain from the implementation of WBL policies by having higher levels of productivity and a positive recruitment impact through “enabling employers to recruit from a wider pool of applicants” (ETF, 2012, p. 24). Employers benefit, also, from cultivating a better image since “participation in enterprise-based training enhances the company’s reputation” (ETF, 2012, p. 25) while addressing skills gaps to find the employees they need more easily. Lastly, the ETF document lists how WBL benefits society at large, by positively impacting on youth employment rates (ETF, 2012) and supporting social cohesion (ETF, 2012).

In 2013, the European Commission established the *European Alliance for Apprenticeships* (EAfA), of which Malta is a member. The aim of this initiative is to strengthen the quality and supply of the apprenticeships by bringing together key stakeholders, such as governments, business associations, companies, social partners and educational institutions, to work on WBL. Also, through the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 which established the *Youth Guarantee*, EU Member States pledged to ensure that citizens under the age of 25 are provided with employment, continuing education or an apprenticeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 3). The Recommendation invites Member States to prioritise both youths who are or who are not formally registering for work, in spite of the fact that they are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs).

Another WBL policy document issued by the European Commission, *Work-Based Learning in Europe: Practices and Policy Pointers* (2013), still serves as a reference guideline for policymakers in EU countries to promote “work-based learning elements in vocational education and training”. It clearly states that creating opportunities for WBL lies at the heart of European education policies

since “a lack of workplace experience and the related skills and competences is one of the factors contributing to the ‘skills gap’ in the EU” (European Commission, 2013, p.4). Indeed, the skills gap issue has been identified as one of grave concern by both the European Council and the European Commission, and that WBL initiatives have been identified as a possible solution (Borbély-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2014, p. 14).

Most interestingly, this policy document portrays effective WBL as a system that has strong a) governance, b) emphasis in quality, and c) partnerships. It advises that in a given course of study, the work-based element and the school-based element must complement each other. Secondly, there should be in place, “a specific regulatory framework that clarifies the responsibilities, rights and obligations of each party” (European Commission, 2013, p. 11). The policy suggests that social partners should be involved and that incentives should be provided for employers to engage in WBL (European Commission, 2013, p. 13). Also, it is recommended that at-risk groups, such as early school leavers, are provided with support for their engagement in WBL opportunities.

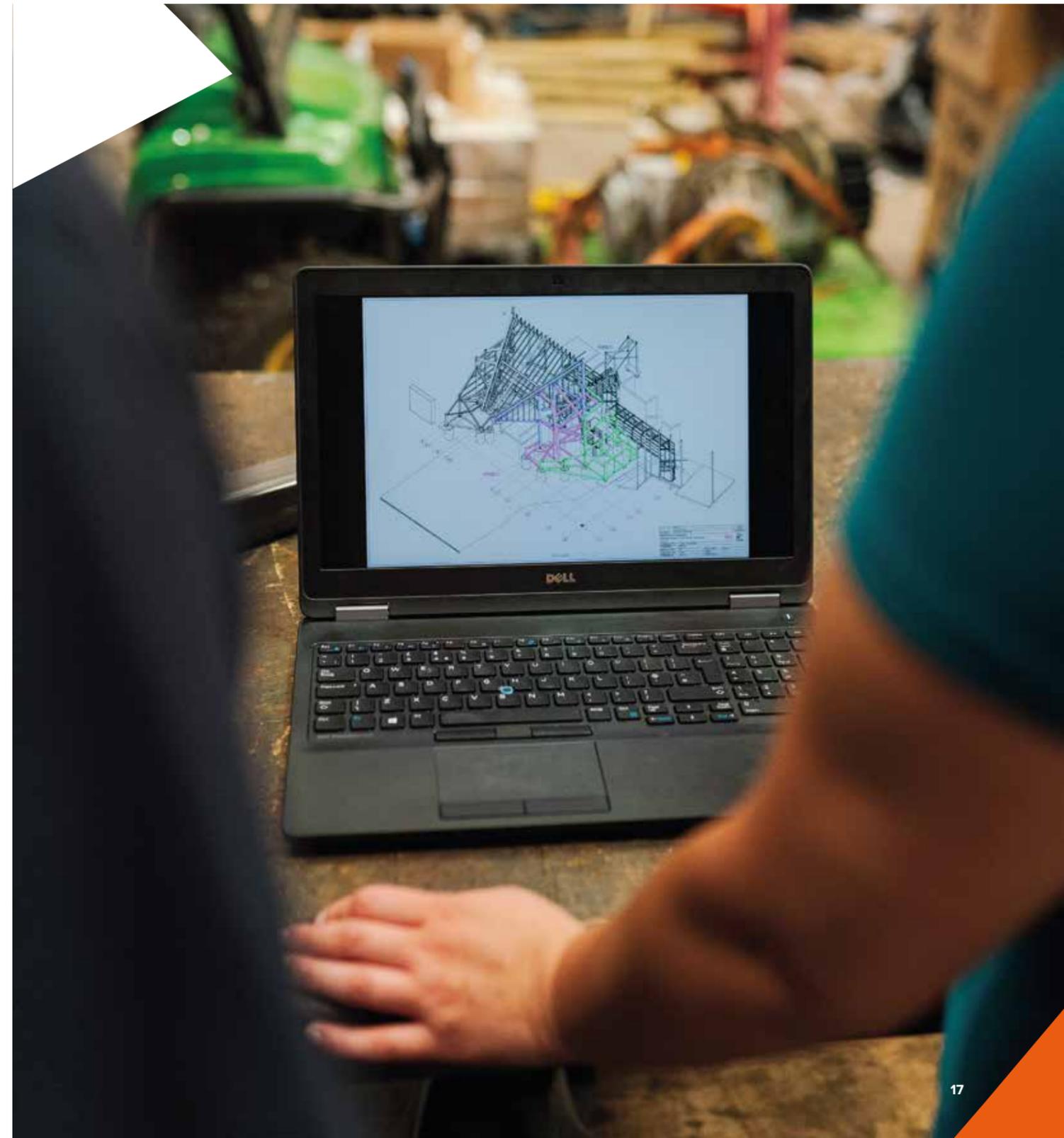
With regard to the emphasis on WBL quality, the policy document advises that programmes are designed to cover a broad range of knowledge, skills and competences so that learners receive an enriching learning experience “to develop a full understanding of a professional field”. A truly successful training course is one that prepares a learner for an ever-changing world. Therefore, training programmes “should be broad enough to embrace a profession in a holistic manner and give learners the basis for not only immediate transition to employment but also future evolutions” (European Commission, 2013, p. 16). Furthermore, this core quality policy requires that *all* on-the-job learning experiences have clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment methods. Effective WBL initiatives should include specific training support to course participants to help them in their search for a host company (sponsor) at which to complete their training. Such support can take the form of career guidance and mentoring on interview skills and job skills. It is also recommended that teachers, trainers and mentors be provided with high-quality professional development to help them understand how to fulfil their role effectively (European Commission, 2013).

The third element for effective work-based learning experiences requires a strong collaborative partnership between educational institutions and sponsors. Research cited has shown that educational institutions which collaborate effectively with employers are more likely to succeed in enabling companies to host learners. It is easier to maintain a good-quality learning framework with employers who have well-established relationships with educational institutions than with those who offer one-off placements (European Commission, 2013, p. 17). This policy document identified a series of initiatives and guidelines to support work-based learning, namely, improving integration of WBL into school-based practices, innovating existing WBL practices, aspects of planning, implementation and assessment as well as identifying and reviewing areas for improvement (European Commission, 2013, p. 19).

The European VET ministers underlined the increasing need to promote WBL in the Riga Conclusions (European Commission, 2015b) where specific deliverables were agreed. The first deliverable focused on WBL within vocational education provision, saying that Member States are to “promote work-based learning in all its forms, with special attention to apprenticeships, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and Educational Institutions, as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship” (European Commission, 2015b, p. 4). Concrete policy options included boosting the share of WBL in VET programmes, the integration of apprenticeships under national youth guarantees in national VET provision, establishing a regulatory framework for WBL, enhancing intermediary support structures between the world of work and education, assisting educational institutions to find training places, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in providing apprenticeship places.

In 2015, the key policy document entitled *High-performance Apprenticeships and Work-based learning: 20 Guiding Principles* was published (European Commission, 2015a). It outlined 20 principles for successful WBL implementation. These 20 principles have been taken into consideration when developing the Quality Priorities in the final section of this scoping report.

Interest in vocational education, the attainment of skills and the use of work-based learning at European level is high. The announcement by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, that 2023 shall be the European Year of Skills, is yet another indication of the European interest in this matter.



Work-Based Learning in England

Arguably, the concept of WBL in higher education came about and developed at the beginning of the 20th century, mainly at universities in the UK (Slowey, 2000). The past 25 years saw rapid growth of WBL in English-speaking countries due to the emergence of a new industrial structure and a service knowledge economy. The European experience using the WBL concept, unlike the UK, was more focused on vocational education and training (European Commission, 2013).

UK public policy supports and encourages the acquisition of higher education (Level 4 and above of the National Qualification Framework) and the further acquisition of vocational skills in the workplace. The value of such skills is declared by various government acts (Building Britain's Future, 2009). These documents encourage higher and vocational education institutions to not only train employees to be capable of carrying out production activities at existing jobs but also to prepare employees for jobs and skills of the future. Long-standing and completely new industries in such areas as reducing carbon concentration in the atmosphere, manufacturing laboratory equipment for pharmaceuticals and medicine, microbiological technologies, digital communications, etc., require employees with a qualitatively different, higher level of training.

The emergence of WBL in UK higher education has been based on various initiatives funded by the Department of Employment since the early 1990s (Brennan and Little, 1996). Thanks to the support of the Department of Employment, UK universities have significantly increased their uptake of WBL-related initiatives, since there is a correspondent increase in employment opportunities for graduates and qualified personnel with higher education (Mumford and Roodhouse, 2010).

The UK Government documents emphasise the need for continuous development of labour resources through radically new forms and types of training, especially in the fields of science and technology. However, the Government also takes into account areas of education that contribute to the formation of citizens as progressively minded, creative, entrepreneurial, socially oriented individuals. In fact, WBL is seen as an approach for widening access to higher education for learners who had previously not gone to university or had to extend their learning while at work (Nixon et al., 2006).

The medium-term European forecast (CEDEFOP, 2018) until 2030, which even today, after leaving the European Union, continues to be guided by Great Britain, reflects the above aspects in the context of pan-European development. The European Union's "New Skills for New Jobs" initiative (European Commission, 2016) focuses on the future needs of the labour market and the need for stable professional growth for workers, which is ensured by job-related training.

The European educational community responded to this declaration by trying to withdraw higher education from university audiences, making it more problem-oriented and practical, associated with any real production process (Nixon et al., 2006). Enterprises initiated the creation of corporate universities and began to actively develop various training programs at the workplace. Classical British universities, in turn, undertook large-scale development and implementation of fully-fledged higher education programs in the format of work-based learning.



Work-Based Learning – The Maltese Context

In line with European guidelines, Malta has been increasingly interested in reaping the benefits of work-based learning. In 2009, a policy document entitled *Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020: Recommendations of the National Commission for Higher Education (2009)* was issued by the National Commission for Higher Education. It unambiguously recommended a review of the apprenticeship schemes known as TAS and ESTS which were managed by the Employment and Training Corporation (now JobsPlus). The aim was mainly to understand how such learning options “can serve to enrol those of age 16-18 already in employment to attain post-secondary level skills (within part-time or full-time modalities) whilst working”. It contended that “the potential of these schemes is underestimated” and that such opportunities “could possibly offer a partial solution to reach current school leavers to attain a post-secondary qualification” (NCHE, 2009, p. 37).

The *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024* advocated exploring the full potential of WBL since the country needs to start a process of “updating the existing learning programmes and modes of assessment in both general and vocational and training education” and that there was a need to “support apprenticeship, traineeship, work-based and workplace learning initiatives, in the context of lifelong learning” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b).

This scoping report and the guidelines to follow form a tangible contribution in this precise direction. In the meantime, the MFHEA has also been working on another recommendation focusing on the “accreditation and certification of experiential and work-based learning” through the accreditation of programmes of studies with a WBL component.

The *National Employment Policy*, which was published in 2014, stated that 83 companies across various economic sectors, including manufacturing, gaming and hospitality, were on board with the initiative to roll out new apprenticeship and traineeship schemes (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014c). The policy confirmed Malta’s participation in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships with the aim to develop high quality apprenticeship-type training, work-based learning in VET and partnerships for dual learning systems.

An updated National Employment Policy was published in October 2021. The new Policy makes a series of recommendations involving WBL. Recommendation 11 states that participation in apprenticeship and traineeship programmes should be fostered and that it was important to engage as many students as possible with internship opportunities through “a centralised internship and management system which is proactive and linked to industry” (Ministry for Finance and Employment, 2021, p. 234).

In 2015, a National Strategy was published with the aim of creating an enabling framework for lifelong learning. The Strategy listed prerequisites which must be recognised, including one which focuses on “the modernisation of education and training systems, including lifelong learning, vocational training and work-based learning schemes, with a view to enhancing skills performance” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015a, p. 9). This reaffirmed the view that “young people with vocational education and training (VET) qualifications, which include a significant amount of work-based learning, have higher employment rates compared to those who come from general education or from fully or mainly school-based VET” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015a, p. 24). The Strategy specifically suggested the setting up of “formal partnerships between educators, enterprise and trade unions to develop work-based learning environments” and establishment of “an eventual collaboration framework between educators, enterprise and trade unions aimed at nurturing work-based learning environments” (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 50).

The *National Youth Policy: Towards 2020 - A Shared Vision for the Future of Young People* proposed two mutually reinforcing strategies and a series of associated action plans. Action Plan 3 specifically addressed work-based learning, with the aim to “develop and implement initiatives with a view to enhancing young people’s participation in the labour market and their future employment, occupational and professional prospects” (Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015, p. 17). The Action Plan posited that “young people will be informed/ advised and supported to access training, apprenticeships and other labour-market oriented opportunities” (2015, p. 17). The latest youth policy (2021-30) does not refer directly to WBL, although Strategic Goal 3 includes an action for the state to “provide and facilitate a culture of lifelong learning to increase young people’s prospects of job mobility” (Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing, 2021, p. 29) which cannot be achieved fully without WBL initiatives.

2015 saw another important policy document, the *National Vocational Education and Training Policy*, which identified WBL initiatives as a constitutive part of future VET education. It proposed a review of relevant legislation, apprenticeship and other WBL schemes with setting up a new regime of quality-assured apprenticeship schemes, assistive services to encourage micro and small businesses to take on apprentices/interns, accreditation and promotion of WBL schemes, and training those involved in mentoring and monitoring for WBL. The recommendations made at the end of this scoping report are in line with this national policy.

WBL featured in local policies related to early school leaving. The 2012 *Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta* and the 2014 *Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta* both referred directly to WBL. The 2012 Strategy urged authorities to consider “the enhancement of work-based learning so that the point of entry is set at an appropriate level to attract those with minimal or no qualifications” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 70). The 2014 Strategic Plan categorically recommended that MCAST and ITS “...further explore the possibilities of offering hybrid courses that are partly carried out on their campuses and partly on the workplace” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a, p. 46).

WBL is regularly present in Malta’s National Reform Programmes (NRPs) which are presented annually to the European Commission. NRPs are policy documents prepared by Member States to enable the collective monitoring of policy challenges and reforms. Almost all eleven NRPs refer to WBL as an educational opportunity for students. Most of the NRPs take the same view that WBL, including apprenticeships, have the potential to reduce early school leaving and equip young people with valuable occupational and social skills required to pursue their employment pathway (Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment, 2011).

In 2017, the NRP hailed the National Apprenticeship Scheme as a way to facilitate the progression from education to employment with over 1,000 beneficiaries (Ministry for Finance, 2017, p. 36). The 2019 NRP confirmed that the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act came into force in March 2018. This Act was a major milestone for WBL since it provided a legal framework for the development of effective work placements, apprenticeships and internships. The 2019 and 2020 NRPs refer to the development of a Quality Assurance framework specifically for WBL. This scoping report is a precursor to this framework.

Now, the entire WBL process is regulated by a law which provides the necessary specifications to engender high-quality WBL experiences. The Act is clear on what counts as high quality work-place opportunities and eligibility for work placements, internships and apprenticeships (school-leaving age). It is the responsibility of educational institutions to set the entry requirements for respective training programmes which are subject to the standard MFHEA accreditation processes.

The Act specifies that each course of study must include a clear “training programme plan” that would need to form part of the training agreement. This plan is meant to include specific requirements as indicated in the law, including clear learning outcomes and credits for school-based and work-based learning. At the same time, the signed training agreement shall form the backbone of any form of WBL. It is binding throughout the duration of the programme. Schedule 2 of the Act provides a detailed list of constitutive elements for the training agreements for work placements (MQF Levels 1 to 4), apprenticeships (MQF Levels 3 and 4) and internships (Levels 5 and above).

The Act obliges sponsors who offer work-based learning opportunities to:

- ▶ pay a remuneration to the learner in accordance with the rate established by the relevant legislation
- ▶ provide an experience that allows for the achievement of the course learning outcomes in line with the programme of studies specifications
- ▶ provide premises and equipment, including health and safety equipment, and public liability insurance and vehicle insurance, where appropriate
- ▶ allow learners to attend school-based learning and to participate in international exchanges.

Sponsors must ensure that learners have a designated competent lead-trainer available on the work premises for the whole period of the training programme. The WBL and Apprenticeship Act (2018) also requires that while learners have the overall obligations to perform tasks entrusted to them as part of their work-based training, they are required to abide by the instructions given, attend both the work-based and the school-based learning components, update the training logbook regularly and to notify the educational institution if the sponsor is not adhering to the training agreement.

The Act makes it clear that the educational institution is fully responsible for the development, coordination, control, training agreement, assessment, certification, learner well-being, suitability of sponsors, and quality assurance of both the school-based and the work-based components of the training programme. The educational institution is also fully responsible for maintaining a register for their training programmes and submitting an annual report to the MFHEA containing specific data as per the Act. In addition, the educational institution is responsible for setting up a WBL Operational Board and a Board of Examiners for each training programme in support of a valid and reliable assessment process.

9.1

Work-Based Learning at the University of Malta

The University of Malta (UM) has been offering several courses with work placements for a long time. For example, the Bachelor of Education degree course used to include four placements, one for every year. Courses in the medical field also include extensive placements. The current Strategic Plan 2020-2025 aims to expand the role of WBL in curricula. The first Strategic Theme (Learning and Teaching) entitled *Engaging in Work-Based Learning*, specifically refers to this. In fact, it states:

We will continue to encourage professional placements, specifically tailored apprenticeships and work-based learning, locally and abroad, as these add value to the overall educational experience. We will also seek to facilitate a seamless transition between the time spent at the University and entry into appropriate employment. The University operates work-based learning programmes in several fields, including those of medicine, health sciences and pharmacy. We will provide support systems to increase the development of practical-learning units across other subject areas. Study programmes with work-based learning components would be supported by mentoring and would include assessments and accreditation. (University of Malta, 2020, p. 13)

The initiatives to be taken to reach this aim are clearly indicated (p. 17) as follows:

- ▶ Engage in tailored work-based learning that adds value to the learning experience
- ▶ Encourage integrated work-based learning curricula
- ▶ Provide guidelines for the development of work-based study-units, learning outcomes and assessment
- ▶ Provide training for academics and mentors engaged in work-based learning
- ▶ Create an administrative infrastructure to support work-based learning
- ▶ Uphold guidelines and regulations for work-based learning

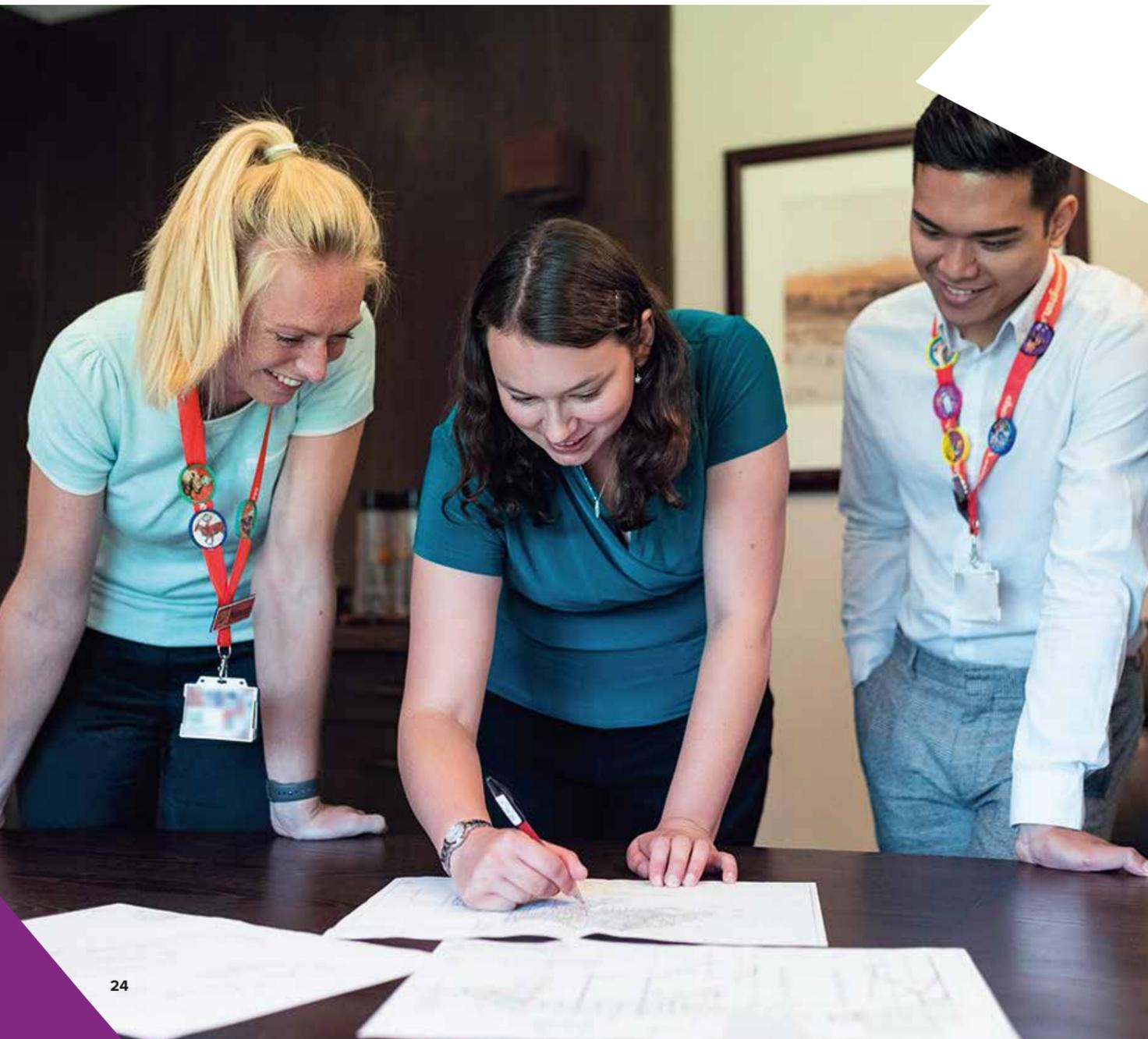
(University of Malta, 2020, p. 13)

The University of Malta has success stories in relation to WBL. It offers a series of work-based opportunities through its placement schemes with the necessary enrolment information easily accessible on its website (<https://www.um.edu.mt/knowledgetransfer/placements>). UM's *Student Placement Programme* has been referred to as good practice to follow. In part, its success is attributed to the fact that it is run by MITA (Malta Information Technology Agency) and led in tandem with industry, managing to incentivise employers to take interns from ICT courses from the first year onwards (National Employment Policy, 2021, p. 239). Unlike some other WBL experiences, this scheme has had little to no dropouts. The *Student Placement Programme* is hailed as an excellent learning experience and a positive opportunity for all involved stakeholders. MITA's website explains:

The Student Placement Programme (SPP) is an annual, mutually beneficial programme for ICT and ICT related students and employers of all sectors during the summer season. The programme aims to reduce the mismatch between supply and demand for ICT skills in the Maltese labour market. With the help of this programme employers can have a more diversified workforce as they employ new generations with new talents and a variety of ideas into their organisation. Hiring of students brings about fresh perspectives and innovations, which can enhance productivity. Employers also have an opportunity to find future employees through such programme. Students who participate in the programme will acquire necessary experience and skills required in a professional working

environment. A summer placement also bridges the gap between education and employment, giving students a head-start once they start their full-time employment.
(<https://mita.gov.mt/portfolio/engagement-with-community-bringing-digital/student-placement-programme/>)

Another reason for the success of this scheme is the high level of collaboration between all stakeholders involved (this is a key tenet of the Quality Priorities).



9.2

Work-Based Learning at MCAST

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) was established in 2001 as Malta's main VET provider. Today, through its institutes, MCAST offers more than 190 full-time and over 300 part-time vocational and professional courses ranging from certificates to degrees (MQF Level 1 to Level 8) covering different industrial sectors (MCAST Annual Report, 2022).

Each institute provides the professional expertise towards the delivery of their respective programmes of study. As a self-accrediting institution, MCAST can accredit its own study programmes up to MQF level 7. It adheres both to local accreditation rules as stipulated in the *National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education* (MFHEA, 2015) and the *MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance, Standard 3: Design and Development of Programmes*.

MCAST promotes applied, practical modes of learning and encourages its teaching staff to employ industry-based contexts to enhance the students' learning (Cassar, 2019). Its courses are designed on an outcome-based approach and are in line with the Malta Qualifications Framework, with students being given the Europass document along with their qualification certificates to enhance their mobility prospects (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015b, p. 14). Throughout their stay within the college, learners can progress from one level to the other within their institute and even across institutes, allowing flexible progression pathways up to the completion of their training (Strategic Plan for the prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta, 2014a).

MCAST's current *Strategic Plan 2022 – 2027: A Community College for All* establishes WBL as a priority (Strategic Objective 3: "Position Work-Based Learning (WBL) as the heart of all professional and vocational training programmes offered by MCAST"). The strategic plan identifies three key targets in relation to WBL:

1. Consider WBL more holistically, recognising alternative models where boundaries and models are evolving.
2. Provide professional development for lecturers, mentors (at the place of work) and WBL coordinators to develop instructional strategies.
3. Create and sustain relationships with employer associations, the public sector and relevant stakeholders in order to further strengthen the endorsement and active involvement towards a meaningful WBL experience.

Measures identified to reach these specific targets include important initiatives such as the delivery of train-the-trainer courses for industry employees and the involvement of employer representatives in assessment procedures to reflect practices in the industry (MCAST, 2022).

The 2020, the MCAST Annual Report reported that 950 students in MQF Level 3 and Level 4 programmes took part in the Apprenticeship Scheme and over 1,800 companies and entities registered as partners to offer WBL opportunities to students (MCAST, 2020, p. 23). In 2020, over 1,600 students enrolled in courses with apprenticeships (MCAST, 2021, p. 36), while the figure increased to 1,900 students in 2021 (MCAST, 2022, p. 70). This increase in participation is due to the effort put into the promotion of WBL due to the genuine belief at MCAST in its many benefits.

9.3

Work-Based Learning at the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS)

The Institute of Tourism Studies has a long history of integrating school-based and work-based learning. As shown on the Institute's website, (<https://www.its.edu.mt/internships.html>), ITS offers its students several opportunities for WBL. These include the *Local Industrial Trade Practice* (LITP) and the *International Internship Trade Practice* (IITP). The LITP is a fourteen-week study that involves practical experience in the Maltese tourism and hospitality industry. The IITP is a twelve-month study visit abroad focusing on practical experience in the tourism and hospitality industry. Both LITP and IITP learners are provided with the opportunity to apply what they have learnt in class within a WBL experience, while having access to industry leaders, which could potentially lead to job offers after graduation.

The ITS Internships Department supports learners to reap the full benefits of these work-based experiences, keeping in constant communication with students on placement and offering students mentoring before, during and after their WBL experiences. For assessment, all learners present a reflective journal and portfolio at the end of their experiences.

ITS's current Strategic Plan 2021-2025 indicates the interest to foster WBL opportunities further as a priority, as a means to develop flexible and blended learning (ITS, 2021, p. 36). The Workplace Learning policy (<http://www.its.edu.mt/upload/files/policies/PO54%20-%20WP%20policy.pdf>) states that "the Board of Governors is to support the use of local workplace learning according to ITS strategy and curriculum based programmes. This refers both to Apprenticeship scheme and Local Industrial Placement". It also mentions the signing of a learning agreement, and that the Internships Office is responsible for finding local placements for the students where this is a required module.



9.4

Work-Based Learning at the Institute for Education (IfE)

The IfE is wholly focused on the training of educators. Courses at IfE are enriched with micro-placements, defined as "short industry-based placements outside of the school/classroom-based environment" (IfE, Micro-Placement Policy). These are completed in July. The IfE's Micro-Placement Policy V2 (available online) states that its primary goal is "to allow course participants to gain an additional work experience that is different from their routine within the classroom". The listed reasons include the ability of future educators to pass on what they have learnt to their own students such as 21st century soft skills (e.g., teamwork, effective communication, social interaction, professional networking, understanding business procedures, leadership, critical thinking).

The 2020 IfE Annual Report explains that the purpose of the micro-placement modules is "to create a bridge between the world of work and the education sector" and "to provide future educators with a hands-on experience within the industry" (IfE, 2020, p. 27). A series of operational documents sustains the micro-placement learning experiences, including a detailed policy, course participants' Handbook, contributors' Handbook, and other specific forms. In 2020, the IfE had thirty sponsors who committed to taking on IfE students on placements. In 2021, the Experiential Learning Board had approved sixty-two industry sponsors. Within the Bachelor of Education, the module carries six ECTS with 80 hours of training placement (IfE Annual Report, 2021).

Research data indicates that 78% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were happy with the quality and experience provided throughout the micro-placement period. Micro-placement modules are guided by a trilateral agreement that outlines the mutual expectations and responsibilities of IfE, the hosting organisation and the course participant.

9.5

Jobsplus

Jobsplus has a long history of providing WBL opportunities. It is Malta's public employment agency and a licensed Further and Higher Education Institute. Currently, Jobsplus offers a variety of training programmes that range from short courses to traineeships. The offered short courses vary from basic skills to more technical and vocational courses and are offered to both employed and unemployed persons.

Jobsplus has a unit whose remit is specifically to develop and update its range of training programmes, and to implement Quality Assurance for programme delivery. Quality standards cover everything from the qualifications required by trainers to classroom facilities, learner course notes, assessment and certification. Additionally, a Monitoring Unit is in charge of monitoring and evaluating the various Jobsplus schemes (Jobsplus, 2017, p. 18).

Originally the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), Jobsplus has been administering such schemes since 1990 (Ministry for Finance, 2013). Two nationally funded apprenticeship schemes at MQF Levels 3 and 4 were available, known as the Technician Apprenticeship Scheme (TAS) and the Extended Skill Training Scheme (ESTS).

School-based training used to be delivered at MCAST or ITS, depending on the chosen career path. From 2017 to 2021, Jobsplus continued to offer three training schemes: the Traineeship Scheme; Work Exposure Scheme (both launched in 2015); and the Work Placement scheme. These schemes were intended to facilitate transition into employment by providing jobseekers with initial hands-on training that helped them obtain the knowledge, skills and competences required to find and retain employment (Jobsplus Annual Reports 2017 and 2018). Regular monitoring visits are held. These include interviews with employers and participants. The 2021 Annual Report states that these schemes “will be continually reviewed to align with global and national economic trends”. Also, it declared that more emphasis on “transversal and cognitive skills may be warranted, as these are increasing in importance across occupations and sectors” (JobsPlus, 2021).

9.6

Private Providers

The private providers licensed in Malta by the MFHEA offer an increasingly wide array of courses. The Malta Qualifications Database (available online through the MFHEA database) shows courses in diverse subjects, such as Education, ICT, HR and Commerce. There are, additionally, a wide range of qualifications awarded by foreign bodies (e.g., UK higher educational institutions) that also offer programmes of study to Maltese students. Increasingly, local higher educational institutions are opting to accredit a course locally through the MFHEA.

The *National Vocational Education and Training Policy 2015* notes that locally accredited courses range from vocational education programmes in welding, electronics, jewellery design and crafts to courses in the performing arts and sports, and to more traditionally academic programmes in languages, finance and business. Local courses are being accredited at certificate, diploma, Bachelor's and Masters' degree levels. It is expected that the demand for accreditation of courses that include WBL will increase, hence this scoping report and the need for clear Quality Assurance guidelines on WBL.

9.7

Brief Summary of the Maltese Context

Malta has much experience related to WBL and training that includes both school-based and work-based elements. There are institutions, such as the aforementioned ones, who vary in their approach to WBL. Regardless, there has been a clear alignment in their approaches with the MQF for the benefit of students and employers.

While the terminology may differ between institutions, documentary analysis provides evidence that there is a clear understanding that direct work-experience can have positive educational effects on students and that such experience enriches the related programmes of study. The ways in which WBL is assessed seems to differ from one institution to another, although most include some form of on-the-job visits. A further commonality is the drive towards a learning outcomes based approach to course design, which is important for the industry and the future employee.

Most institutions have a formal policy on apprenticeship or WBL. All institutions also endeavour to support learners when needed. The Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018) has provided the necessary regulatory framework to enable every accredited educational institution to develop effective training programmes that include WBL components for its students. This can potentially have great benefits for each individual student and their industries, and to society at large.

Lessons from Recent Peer-Reviewed Research on WBL

Recent research has shown that WBL has some worthwhile benefits and attributes which contribute to the holistic development of learners and goes towards enhancing their employability. Below are some of the important lessons about WBL.

Transdisciplinarity

Effective WBL should be transdisciplinary rather than conforming to the traditional subject disciplines at educational institutions. The concept of 'flexibility' is important since employers may require educational institutions to respond flexibly and quickly to market or labour changes. To do this, a three-way negotiated learning agreement between the student, their employer/ sponsor and the educational institution (Garnett, 2016) needs to be established. To be clear, transdisciplinarity is concerned with creating new integrative knowledge to address complex problems of the world (McGregor, 2015), something which is at the heart of WBL.

Reciprocal Learning

Reciprocal learning is an instructional model where learners work in pairs to master lesson content (Iserbyt, 2012). They cooperate in well-defined roles of doer and observer (i.e., mentor and mentee) to maximise their own and each other's learning. While one learner is doing (doer), the other learner (observer) is observing, analysing the doer's performance and giving performance-related feedback. Used in WBL, the mentors or tutors assigned to students can also update their own knowledge about the industry while gathering feedback for improving the WBL and course provision.

The Flipped Learning Approach

Similar to reciprocal learning, the flipped learning approach can work quite well in a WBL context as it takes two individuals and flips their roles so that deeper learning can take place, while providing new opportunities for redesigning resources, environments and reframing problems. It can also work well in the case of learners with 'hidden' disabilities, e.g., pairing a dyslexic learner with an autistic one (Lawton, Blower and Gravestock, 2021).

Regiolearning

Advocated on a large scale in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, regional learning gets VET students working directly with the industries in their region, understanding the real-world problems faced by the industry and actively working with them to address these. For example, in the agricultural industry, students co-articulate the problems with agribusiness and are co-owners in the day-to-day operational management. They collect relevant data and learning

results directly within the industry, and with the help of teachers as coaches, develop solutions to industry problems.

Lifelong Learning

There is a renewed interest in approaching WBL in a holistic manner, so that it is a part of lifelong learning. It is therefore imperative to design WBL with continuous learning in mind (Cedefop, 2015). WBL needs to be a genuine educational experience where students are provided with the opportunity to develop creative ways of thinking and mentors to develop new ways of doing things, while stereotypes are challenged and student perceptions are broadened.



Quality Priorities for WBL

This scoping report recommends a Quality Assurance framework to ensure that WBL is carried out effectively with concrete and beneficial outcomes. Different sources were consulted, adapted and synthesised to create four Quality Priorities.

Quality Priority One: Work-Place Learning is Governed Effectively

Effective governance of WBL provision is complex but highly important due to the diverse roles of stakeholders, such as the private sector, employers' representatives, statutory employment regulations (e.g., health and safety regulations), educational institutions, and their staff and learners. There are risks in integrating novice learners into industry process, particularly in relation to production or service provision quality. These considerations do not have to be tackled in fully school-based models where learning is more visible, measurable and controllable than in WBL. Moreover, WBL benefits can only be realised if the learning opportunities are genuinely worthwhile for learners. Institutions must organise work placements carefully and monitor progress to develop job-specific and transferable skills which are useful to the learners in the long term.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

- Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance
- Standard 2: Institutional Probity
- Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes
- Standard 4: Learner-Centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Standard 7: Learning Resources and Learner Support
- Standard 8: Information Management
- Standard 10: Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
- Standard 11: Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Standard 1.1

Institutional management supports WBL by nurturing a culture of quality governance at all levels.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 1.1

- ▶ WBL forms part of the institution's vision and mission.
- ▶ Strategic and policy documents include a focus on the quality of courses with WBL components.
- ▶ A Quality Assurance policy covers courses that include WBL components.
- ▶ The institution manages and budgets for WBL courses in a dedicated capacity.
- ▶ Internal cyclical reviews of courses that include WBL components are completed.

Standard 1.2

Prospective learners have a selection of work-place learning opportunities to find the learning opportunity that suits them most.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 1.2

- ▶ The institution maintains a database of companies and the learning opportunities on offer.
- ▶ Prospective learners can access relevant information on courses with WBL components online to make a considered decision on enrolment.
- ▶ Prospective learners are given information about the companies, including negative and positive experiences from past learners, course completion success rates, type of work, selection odds, and the work-based to school-based hours ratio.
- ▶ Learners may be matched with their workplaces in line with sponsor expectations.
- ▶ Sponsors are involved in the selection process to better improve workplace fit.
- ▶ The selection exercise establishes the learners' preparedness and aptitude to enter work, their motivation, and their affinity for the chosen industry sector.
- ▶ Compensatory programmes are offered to those who do not meet the selection requirements.
- ▶ Employers providing quality WBL placements are recognised accordingly.

Standard 1.3

Study programmes that include a WBL component are of good quality.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 1.3

- ▶ Study programmes fully comply with the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018).
- ▶ Sponsors offering WBL are carefully vetted through a clear and appropriate process. Factors considered include whether the sponsor can teach the required skills, the suitability of the work placement in terms of legislative requirements, and the availability of appropriate equipment, facilities and materials and trained staff to supervise learners.
- ▶ School-based components must prepare learners for practice-based components.
- ▶ Institutions monitor their learners' work environment regularly to ensure that it is conducive to learning.

Standard 1.4

Courses that include WBL components are cyclically reviewed through data analysis and feedback collection.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 1.4

- ▶ WBL courses and stakeholders are internally and externally reviewed through quality assurance mechanisms.
- ▶ The institution assigns a specific unit/person to collect and analyse the data from sponsors, learners and other stakeholders.
- ▶ Ongoing internal review systems consider aspects such as overall management, human and material resources, expertise (pedagogy, course design, IT, quality assurance) and organisational culture (mindset, leadership, quality, integrity).
- ▶ Reviews ensure that learners develop the expected knowledge, skills and competences from both the work-based and school-based components, and that course content is relevant.
- ▶ Sponsors are reviewed to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities and provide WBL learners with an optimal learning opportunity.
- ▶ Feedback is encouraged from all stakeholders at all the stages of programme implementation.

Standard 1.5

Adequate resources are dedicated to implementing WBL effectively.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 1.5

- ▶ There is a clear policy and budget for creating and supporting the necessary infrastructure for WBL implementation, monitoring, assessment and learner support.
- ▶ Clear policies cover issues such as on-the job visits, regular meetings, professional behaviour during WBL and intellectual property.
- ▶ Such policies are reviewed and updated regularly, and all staff and learners are aware of them.
- ▶ Teaching and assessment strategies are closely aligned with implementing WBL components.
- ▶ Technology can be used to implement courses with a WBL component (e.g., part or all of the school-based component can be implemented live online or asynchronously).
- ▶ Resources for administration, academic teaching and assessment are developed professionally and shared online to all members of staff and learners, as appropriate.

Quality Priority Two: Active Collaboration between Stakeholders

The stronger the collaboration between stakeholders, the smoother work-based opportunities run. This can be done through a balanced distribution of responsibilities, a commitment to fulfil one's responsibilities to the best of one's abilities, and clearly articulated agreements.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 2: Institutional Probity

Standard 7: Learning Resources and Learner Support

Standard 10: Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Standard 2.1

Educational institutions and sponsors collaborate actively to provide a genuine and worthwhile WBL component.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 2.1

- ▶ Institutions work actively to seek and collaborate with sponsors for the benefit of learners.
- ▶ Sponsors are informed of the benefits, responsibilities and support available when taking on learners for WBL placements.
- ▶ A continuous and transparent dialogue is maintained between all work placement partners (including employee representatives, employer associations, MCCEI).
- ▶ Sponsors are involved in curriculum design, course development and selection.
- ▶ Sponsors are supported with organising trainers and training, administrative work relating to WBL, and other matters.
- ▶ Micro, small and medium enterprises, first-time sponsors, and those working with disadvantaged young people are additionally supported to increase availability and diversity of work placements.
- ▶ Written institutional arrangements and agreements between institutions and sponsors show a clear and balanced distribution of responsibilities.
- ▶ Both institutions and sponsors have quality assurance mechanisms that ensure learning.
- ▶ Other stakeholders involved include ministries, education authorities, awarding bodies, chambers of commerce, professional bodies, employers' associations and private companies.

Standard 2.2

Responsibilities of each stakeholder are clearly articulated in writing.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 2.2

- ▶ A Learning Agreement is signed for each work placement clearly outlining the relationship between institution, sponsor and learner.
- ▶ Sponsors are issued guidelines, policies and procedures describing qualification and skills requirements vis-à-vis the respective learning outcomes.
- ▶ Alternative options, such as structured learner-sharing, placement rotation schemes or inter-company training schemes, are considered.
- ▶ Sponsors are debriefed after placements to review and address issues.
- ▶ Learners are debriefed after placements to review what they learnt and address any issues.

Quality Priority Three: Effective Learner Support Systems are in Place

Without active learner support, a higher proportion of learners would fail to benefit from WBL opportunities, and the course drop-out rate would increase. Learners can be well prepared for their placement before they even start. Effective career guidance can ensure that learners have chosen the career path that motivated them the most. Ongoing targeted support throughout the placement can help learners even further to ensure success.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance

Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes

Standard 4: Learner-Centered Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Standard 8: Learner Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification

Standard 7: Learning Resources and Learner Support

Standard 8: Information Management

Standard 3.1

Learners are well prepared before they start their work placements.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 3.1

- ▶ Institutions provide high quality career guidance to help learners choose the work placement that fits their capabilities best.
- ▶ Sectoral associations may be called upon to assist in this matter.
- ▶ Institutions ensure that learners have the level of skills and competences expected by sponsors. This includes transferable job skills such as work ethics, communication skills, timekeeping, teamwork, problem solving and stress management.
- ▶ Learners are prepared socially, practically and psychologically to meet their sponsor's expectations so as not to get discouraged at the first minor setback.
- ▶ Learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills are commensurate with their prospective workplace. This is also important for future upskilling and reskilling.
- ▶ Learners are offered a study skills module at the beginning of their course.

Standard 3.2

Learners are supported throughout their work placements.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 3.2

- ▶ A reference point (unit or person) is set up to inform all parties to the Learning Agreement of their rights and responsibilities and support them in case of problems.
- ▶ Both institutions and sponsors help learners to perceive their job to be meaningful, remain confident, committed and motivated, and sustain a sense of progress and accomplishment.
- ▶ Sponsors create a supportive and respectful workplace and ensure that co-workers, trainers and line-managers provide the learner with appropriate training and constructive feedback.
- ▶ There are clear communication channels and feedback mechanisms.

- ▶ Institutions provide counselling support for welfare and mental health issues arising during work placement or in class or refer learners to qualified professionals.
- ▶ Sponsors have a support system for learners for workplace-related issues.
- ▶ Stakeholders are given information on how to access or implement support mechanisms.
- ▶ Course teachers receive the necessary pedagogic professional development to understand how to implement and assess WBL.
- ▶ Institutions remove learners from negative or non-conducive workplace situations as soon as this is brought to their attention.

Standard 3.3

On-the-job trainers sustain learners' learning process.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 3.3

- ▶ Institutions ensure that sponsors have adequate human resources to mentor, train, support and encourage learners to fulfil the Learning Agreement.
- ▶ Trainers designated to supervise and mentor learners have relevant work experience and training.
- ▶ Institutions may develop *ad-hoc* professional courses for workplace trainers on pedagogic skills, the WBL legal framework, and the learning outcomes learners are expected to reach.
- ▶ Trainers ensure that learners are well trained and understand different components of the job before they are assigned specific tasks.
- ▶ Sponsors create a work environment that encourages WBL learners to take some degree of responsibility and solve problems by themselves.
- ▶ Institutions and sponsors collaborate to offer up-to-date training and ongoing professional development to both the institution's teachers and the sponsor's trainers.

Quality Priority Four: Assessing WBL Successfully

WBL provision must be carefully managed through regular monitoring and assessment. Programmes of study need to be up to date and address the present (and future) needs of the industry. Educational institutions should therefore focus on concrete teaching and learning outcomes for school-based, work-based and, possibly, on-line learning. An effective assessment system comprises the right approach, processes and procedures in a coordinated effort by qualified and experienced expert assessors. Ultimately, the goal is to support learners to develop the necessary skills and abilities that will give them long-term success in their careers.

Applicable MFHEA Internal Quality Assurance Standards

Standard 1: Policy for Quality Assurance

Standard 3: Design and Approval of Programmes

Standard 4: Learner-Centred Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Standard 10: Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Standard 4.1

Programmes of study are based on best practice and balanced and up to date curricula.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 4.1

- ▶ Programmes of study are updated regularly depending on the industry concerned.
- ▶ Curricula reflect issues such as new educational or occupational standards, policy directions, immediate market demands, technological innovations, skills needs and placement availability, drop-out rates, learner performance, transition rates and employment rates.
- ▶ Curricula demonstrate a clear alignment between the learning outcomes, the learning experience, pedagogy, content knowledge and assessment.
- ▶ Curricula give adequate space to the development of digital skills, self-management skills, professional skills and 21st century skills.
- ▶ The views of respective chambers, sector representatives, companies, trade unions and other stakeholders are sought.
- ▶ Learners' achievement of the learning outcomes is evidenced through performance data generated through formative and summative assessment.
- ▶ Pedagogical practices for the school-based component are evidenced through practices such as project-based learning, simulations and the use of case studies.

Standard 4.2

Valid and reliable assessment systems are in place.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 4.2

- ▶ The training institution is solely responsible for overseeing the assessment process.
- ▶ The assessment system measures progress made in knowledge, skills and competences.
- ▶ The institution has a system where experts visit the learners at their placement.
- ▶ Regular monitoring, support and assessment visits allow learners to discuss progress, present their work, raise placement issues, and demonstrate the integration of theory and practice.
- ▶ The assessment system includes evidential methods, such as logbooks, diaries and portfolios, for learners to record their experiences and reactions and reflect on what they have learnt.
- ▶ Assessment is used to understand how to improve learning experiences, how much has been learnt, and/or plan changes in teaching.
- ▶ Formative and summative assessment forms include interviews, presentations, demonstrations, poster displays, peer evaluations, written assignments and examinations.
- ▶ Assessment addresses the competences learnt, learning outcomes achieved and processes undertaken, including reflective practice and self-direction.
- ▶ Ongoing communication and cooperation between teachers and workplace trainers is a must.
- ▶ Assessment must accommodate differences in occupations, standards, culture and practices.
- ▶ Assessment is authentic, realistic and as close to the real working process as much as possible.

- ▶ Evidence of learning practice is obtained by the end of a placement.
- ▶ Debriefing learners so they reflect on their experience and reinforce learning can form part of the assessment and provide valuable feedback to learners, employers and teachers.
- ▶ Assessment policies and procedures, including grading rubrics, are clearly communicated.
- ▶ A formal procedure for learner complaints and appeals is in place.

Standard 4.3

Teachers and assessors are well trained and suitably qualified to support learners.

Suggested Quality Indicators for Standard 4.3

- ▶ Institutions have suitably qualified staff looking to support and encourage learners.
- ▶ WBL-related duties are clearly listed in the contractual documents of respective staff members.
- ▶ Institutions have access to expert professionals for curriculum development and assessment design who may be employed full-time, part-time or engaged through an expression of interest.
- ▶ Teachers and workplace trainers are professionally developed to structure learner logbooks/diaries/portfolios and use them for assessment purposes.
- ▶ Assessors are trained in their respective fields and can determine learner progression.
- ▶ Assessors know how to foster the learners' ability to observe and analyse work tasks to identify learning points, and to reflect on their own practices and professional development needs.
- ▶ Teachers know how to promote learners' abilities to reconstruct concepts and knowledge.
- ▶ Institutions support continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and staff.
- ▶ Teaching staff understand and observe the ethical implications of their actions at all levels.
- ▶ Teaching staff possess both the relevant pedagogical knowledge and skills and the occupational know-how and are up to date on the latest education and technology trends.

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