UniLab
Tools for Practical Placements

INTRODUCTION

Work-Based Learning (WBL) programmes differ from ordinary programmes in integrating students' theoretical learning with the practical experiences they gain on their placement, and thus allowing students to develop a range of work-related skills in addition to the academic competencies they acquire in the classroom. As a result, WBL programmes' learning outcomes, modes of delivery and structures, are also different from regular programmes, and require a special set of tools to be implemented successfully. The current document is a compilation of such tools, which the UniLab consortium considers essential for the initial establishment of WBL programmes, as well as for their ongoing maintenance and continuous development and improvement. Thus, both HEIs that are experienced in implementing WBL programmes, as well as those that are not, will benefit from this set of tools.
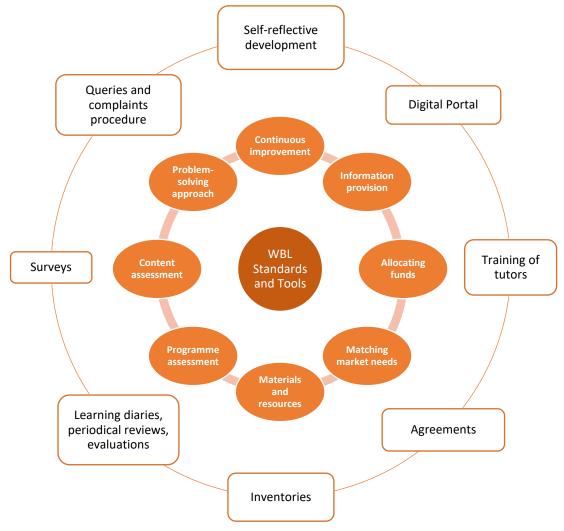

Figure 1 Quality Standards and Tools for WBL programmes

The tools complement each other, and each corresponds to one of the quality standards outlined in the UniLab "Quality Plan and Standards for Work-based learning" document. This is illustrated in *Figure 1.*

This document outlines nine different tools. A description, including content, purpose and structure, and a list of beneficiaries of each tool are provided to guide HEIs in effectively implementing the tool. Moreover, a sample or template has been identified or developed for each tool, drawing either from the UniLab project outputs, or from other similar projects and initiatives. These examples are all open source and can be used by HEIs directly or modified to meet HEIs' needs. Alternatively, they may serve as a model or as inspiration for HEIs to develop their own tools. Depending on the HEI and the particular context in which it is implementing WBL programmes, some tools may be more relevant than others, however, the UniLab consortium has found that the tools complement each other and are most effective when implemented jointly.

LIST OF SELECTED TOOLS

Below you can see in a glance the list of tools selected by UniLab and the page numbers where you can find it, for your quick reference.

The document has been formatted in a way that allows you to print out tools individually for ease of use.

1. DIGITAL PORTAL

Context

The purpose of the digital portal is to provide students, their supervisors/tutors and companies with up-to-date information on the WBL placements offered by the HEI. It also serves as a platform for students to network with the relevant companies at which the WBL placements take place, share their CVs, and later upload the necessary documentation to register for the placement, as well as to upload the portfolio, learning diary (see below), and other forms of assessment students are required to submit to successfully complete their placement.

Beneficiaries

Students. Tutors. Companies. HEIs.

Content and structure

- The digital portal consists of different sections:

    a. Information pages outlining the purpose, structure and terms of conditions of WBL placements
    b. Company profiles which can be updated regularly with information about the company and the WBL placements they offer
    c. Student profiles where students can upload their CVs, assessments and other documentation
    d. Messaging/communication functions which allow students and companies to connect with each other

Practical Sample

The UniLab sample portal features sections and characteristics that you may find useful for your own portal. The UniLab project also offers you the possibility to download and use the code to develop your own portal. You can find access to the sample portal and access to the free-open license code **here**.

2. TRAINING OF TUTORS/MENTORS

Context

In order to successfully supervise students undertaking WBL placements, tutors must be pre-pared and trained. This training may be delivered by the company or by the university and in alignment with both of these structures. The tutor / supervisor must be aware of the WBL placement's legal conditions, but also needs to be informed about the contents of the courses of study, and how and when to accompany the student throughout the entire period of the WBL placement.

Beneficiaries

Mentors. Tutors. Students.

Content

- Principal themes:

    a. Overview of WBL placements, including the main operations, rights, and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved
    b. Types of contracts for WBL placements and the specifications for the role of stakeholders, working conditions, etc.
    c. Range and availability of WBL placements at the HEIs
    d. Step-by-step procedures for the student to take before and during the WBL placement (including administration and documentation)
    e. Procedures for the company when recruiting and onboarding students for WBL placements
    f. Tips for students to secure a WBL placement, reach out to supporting office in the university, engage with national organisations which organize events, maintain links with companies
    g. Information on student fees and financial assistance offered by companies and the university

Procedures and materials

- Information sessions and presentations on WBL placements by the WBL programme coordinator in the university, covering:

    a. Structure of WBL placements and their integration in the curriculum
    b. Schedule and timetable of the WBL placement
    c. Supporting documents to guide the student, to report the internship, including terms and conditions.
    d. Relevant officers within the university and companies, and their contact information

- Booklet for the tutor/supervisor/mentor with elements concerning:

    a. The student (personal details, study programme, level of diploma, professional skills…)
    b. The learning objectives to achieve over the course of the placement (on-site visits and reports, periodic observations of the student, validation of learned competences, marks to be given to the student)

Practical Sample

The ApprEnt prototype course for mentors, which can be accessed at **here**, is a free-open license course that includes content which could be applied in the training of tutors/supervisors in WBL placements. The course consists of different tools, which can be mixed and matched according to an institution's needs.

3. LEARNING AGREEMENT MODELS

Context

Different types of agreement serve to formalize the collaboration between the stakeholders. Legally, the company must propose and sign an employment contract with the student, as the student is effectively working for the company alongside their course programme. Another formal agreement should be established between the company and the university, and the student and the university. A list of documents is proposed with some elements to fulfil.

Main beneficiaries

Companies. HEIs. Students.

Types of agreements and their contents

Pre-agreement between the student and company

- A preliminary agreement should be established to ensure that the student will be engaged by the company for their WBL placement. It is not the employment contract but a formal promise to hire the student with elements like:

  a. Information on the student and company
  b. Elements concerning the tutor and/or the responsible supervising the student
  c. Information relating to human resources (the type of contract, salary, duration and all legal aspects)
  d. Information about the university, the diploma or training followed with the program, dates, schedule

WBL placement agreements and contracts

- Agreement between the university and the employer covering:

  a. Both parties' legal and contractual information
  b. Both parties' responsibilities in organizing and implementing the WBL placement
  c. Outline of legal details and procedures regarding personal data, insurance, rules in case of conflict, etc.

- Agreement between the university and the student covering:

  a. The student's registration details (including dates of study)
  b. The university's guarantee that the WBL placement is recognised as part of the programme the student is pursuing. It confirms the agreed duration, the modalities of accompaniment, terms of evaluation, and modules.

Practical Sample

As part of the ApprEnt project, a model agreement was created that can be used as a template for institutions planning to develop their own agreements can be downloaded from **here**. This free-open license model stresses the importance of including the company, the university and also the student in the design of the placement and the signature of the agreement. It also includes a guide that highlights the key aspects of the model to take into consideration.

4. INVENTORIES OF RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

Context

Inventories are created by HEIs to identify the resources, materials, and infrastructures necessary to organise and implement WBL placements successfully. This involves regularly reviewing the materials and resources that are already available and in place and identifying missing elements. It also requires HEIs to regularly adapt the materials and resources according to the needs of students, companies and supervisors/tutors.

Beneficiaries

Companies. HEIs. Students. Tutors/Mentors.

Content and structure:

The inventories are maintained online and may be structured according to the different WBL programmes the HEI offers, or according to the different disciplines within which WBL placements are held. A designated officer within the university is responsible for regularly updating the inventory.

Recommendations

Institutions need to plan a method to store and regularly update the resources that are needed for the effective implementation of WBL programmes. For example, a map of the storing space might be useful and could be shared with all involved staff, a comprehensive list of documents should also be made available, and a coherent classification of resources for their easy access is also essential.

The inventory of resources will grow and change with time. However, old files should be stored and organised in archives, as they may prove useful when developing new materials.

5. LEARNING DIARY

Context

The purpose of a learning diary is to document the WBL placement, both in its overall development as well as in relation to specific key events during the placement. The learning diary could describe the company, its sector of activities, the responsibilities entrusted to the student, and/or their meetings with their tutor, as well as the highlights of their internship.

Beneficiaries

Students. Tutors/Mentors. Companies. Academic staff

Content and structure:

The learning diary can be divided into two distinct sections: one covering all the basic information related to the placement, and another section serving as a logbook in which students record and reflect on their daily activities within the placement.

Overview of the WBL placement

- Duration, frequency and schedule of the placement
- Presentation of the company (including the wider business sector, the companies' activities and outputs, the company's internal organisation and external partners)
- Description of the students' activities, how they relate to their studies, how they are supervised and assessed, and the necessary skills to complete their tasks successfully, as well as an outline of the students' working conditions

Student's log-book

- Accurate records of the hours and days worked
- Reporting on the activities student undertook and how they contributed to the company
- Academic and professional skills they developed in undertaking their activities
- Wider observations relating to the company and the sector
- Challenges they encountered and how they overcame them

Practical Sample

The UniLab project has developed a sample template which institutions may use to develop their own learning diary. You can find this document **here**. This is a free-open license document and can help students and mentors/supervisors to understand the student's professional and academic development throughout their placement.

6. PERIODICAL REVIEWS AND EVALUATIONS

Context

Students undertaking the WBL placement meet with their supervisors/tutors regularly during the placement as well as at the end of the placement to reflect on their activities within the placement and for the supervisor/tutor to evaluate the students' achievements throughout the placement. Together, they should consider how the placement benefited students' learning, the skills they developed, and the contributions they made to the company. This will also provide students with a valuable opportunity to reflect on their ongoing personal and professional development.

Beneficiaries

Students. Tutors/Mentors. Academic staff.

Structure and content

During the WBL Placement

- In <u>monthly interviews with supervisors</u>, students will describe their activities and observations month, discuss challenges and plan corrective actions
- In <u>on-site visits</u>, supervisors will be able to observe students undertaking their daily activities and ensure that these are aligned with the students' learning objectives and the aim of the placement
- In both cases, the supervisor will keep detailed records and complete the relevant forms. Students will also document these meetings in their diaries and/or portfolios

At the end of the WBL placement

- In a <u>final meeting</u>, supervisors and students will reflect on the placement, including whether the students' learning objectives were met and how the student contributed to the companies' activities
- Students will complete self-evaluation grids documenting and appraising the skills (both soft and technical), competencies and knowledge the student acquired during the WBL placement. These will be reviewed and commented on by the supervisor, and will form part of the final grade students are awarded for their WBL placement.

Practical Sample

The UniLab project has developed a sample template which institutions may use to develop their own periodical review and evaluations template. You can find this document **here**. This is a free-open license document and can help students and mentors/supervisors to understand the student's professional and academic development throughout their placement.

7. THE PORTFOLIO

Context

The portfolio is an important tool which serves to support students' professional development and career building, and which helps them adopt a more professional approach to the labour market. It is generally a digital or physical folder consisting of various documents, allowing students to present their professional evolution and career. Besides containing the Learning Diary and Periodical Reviews outlined above, the Portfolio should also include a self-assessment questionnaire, which supports students in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement.

Beneficiaries

Students. Companies.

Content and structure of self-assessment questionnaire:

Questions relating to student's overall academic and professional development may cover topics such as:

- Soft skills (time management, organisation skills, motivation and autonomy)
- Technical and academic skills acquired during the placement and studies
- Personal interests, affinities and preferred learning styles
- Overall development since commencing studies
- Aims for future development and means to achieve them

Questions relating to student's placement experience may cover topics such as:

- New knowledge, skills and competencies student developed
- Insights gained through self-reflection and periodical reviews
- Understanding of the company, sector, and how student envisions their future within the sector
- Technical knowledge and competencies students gained and how they can apply them in other jobs/sectors

Practical Sample

The UniLab project has developed a sample template from the documents used at Université Lille (FR) which institutions may use to develop their own portfolio template. You can find this document **here**. This is a free-open license document and can help students and mentors/supervisors to understand the student's professional and academic development throughout their placement.

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8. REFLECTIVE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT APPROACH

Context

HEIs should ensure that the programmes they offer are relevant and follow a student-centred approach. Tutors/mentors (representing HEIs and companies, respectively) play a crucial role in ensuring this. Therefore, a self-reflective continuous improvement approach should be established, through which tutors/mentors can review and evaluate their practice. Parallel to students' learning journal, tutors/mentors should keep record of their experiences of supervising WBL placements. This will serve as a basis for individual and/or peer reflection, which will allow tutors/mentors to identify challenges and areas of improvement, as well as best practices that they can share with fellow tutors/mentors. Such individual or collective reflective sessions should take place at the end of every WBL placement cycle, and feed into tutors'/mentors' work in the following cycle. Depending on the Continuous Professional Development practices established in the HEI, these sessions may also be accredited and serve to formalise tutors/mentors ongoing professionalisation.

Beneficiaries

Tutors/Mentors. Students. HEIs.

Structure and content

The reflective continuous improvement approach is divided into three stages:

1) Review of practice:

   In this first stage, mentors/tutors keep record of any issues or challenges they encountered during their supervision of students on their WBL placements. These may relate to student-company interactions and communication, or may arise from a mismatch between students' placement experience and their academic study, or between the students' and company's expectations. Regardless of the situation, it is important that the mentor/tutor keeps a detailed record of the problem and how they addressed it.

2) Identification of good practices and areas for development (either as an individual activity or in collaboration with peers)

   In the second stage, ideally to be undertaken at the end of the academic year or semester, mentors/tutors revisit the documentary reports they compiled in Stage 1, and select salient experiences, either due to their frequency, sensitivity, or degree of impact. These are then analysed in more detail, identifying what the source of the issue, how they dealt with it and with whom, and the effect their action had. This activity can be undertaken individually or as a peer learning activity. In the latter case, it will be even more beneficial if mentors and tutors (from the hosting company/organisation and the HEI, respectively) get together to undertake this activity, as it will allow for both parties to better understand the others' perspective, and to identify potential sources of miscommunication or misalignment, which can be addressed in the final stage.

3) Planning of next steps and action points for next cycle of students
In the final stage of the continuous improvement approach, tutors/mentors either individually or collectively agree on several actions which they could implement in the following semester or academic year in order to better respond to the issues and challenges identified in the previous stages. They may also set themselves specific targets (e.g. meeting with students or their counterpart in the company or HEI more frequently), which can then be reviewed at the end of the following semester.

Sample

The UniLab project has developed a sample template which institutions may use to develop their own continuous improvement approach. You can find this document **here**. This is a free-open license document and can help students and mentors/supervisors to understand the student's professional and academic development throughout their placement.

9. QUERIES AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Context

Beneficiaries

HEIs. Students. Tutors/Mentors. Academic staff. Companies.

Structure and content

Crucial to the successful implementation of WBL programmes are their relevance and adaptiveness both to students and to the companies and organisations in which students are undertaking their placements. It is therefore essential that HEIs can identify and respond to any issues and challenges that arise before, during and after the placement takes place. For this, robust queries and complaints procedures, adapted to the different target groups (students, representatives of companies/organisations, academics involved in the WBL programmes), need to be established. The possibility to report an issue anonymously will ensure that stakeholders feel comfortable to voice their concerns.

Sample

HEIs should set up channels which allow students and other beneficiaries to ask questions or present complaints to the programme coordinator (relevant to indicator 7.1, 7.2), who will then pass on their comments to the relevant person, institutional body or office, as necessary. The programme coordinator needs to deal with these queries or complains in a confidential and unbiased manner, and for this a clear procedure is required, which assigns clear roles and responsibilities, and outlines how questions and complaints need to be escalated depending on their gravity. Since every HEI has different structures and processes in place, the UniLab consortium has decided that instead of prescribing one definitive queries and complaints procedure, it would be more beneficial to give information about different interesting established procedures in more than one HEI. Three examples of such procedures are listed below. Although they are not related to WBL programmes specifically, they may serve as useful models for developing a procedure that can support WBL programmes or a specific procedure for WBL programmes.

- University College Dublin (IE)
- The University of Hertfordshire (UK) proposes a number of steps to follow
- University of East London (UK) sample complain form