

Newsletter 1

BRIDGES

- Improving work-based learning through employer links (WBL)



OVERVIEW

Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational strategy that provides learners with real-life work experience where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop their employability.

WBL takes place in apprenticeships, traineeships, skills to advance, skills to compete and other such courses with work placement.

WBL creates a different learning paradigm.

By ETBI

Welcome to our Bridges Newsletter – Issue 1.

We hope that this Newsletter gives you a sense of what we wish to achieve through BRIDGES – Improving work-based learning through employers links.

All eight Partners, across seven European countries, are thoroughly familiar with the benefits of work-based learning (WBL) to our students but our challenge is to make it better by strengthening the bond between education providers (VET) and employers in addressing stakeholders' needs through a more meaningful conversation.

In common with so many others, we have been dependent on Zoom/Teams since our kick-off meeting in January 2021 but that may have concentrated all minds and we have kept very much on track.

Our BRIDGES Employer Engagement Framework (Intellectual Output 1) has been completed by Mindshift Talent Advisory and is at feedback stage, while Evolve and CWEP are leading in the CPD Programme and Digital Learning and community of practice respectively.

Thanks to all who contributed to Issue 1 and to those who contributed synopses on WBL developments within their colleges. Technology has served us well throughout 2021 but we greatly look forward to meeting face-to-face in November and December.

Project Description

BRIDGES will support and facilitate the up-skilling of VET professionals at all levels (teachers, trainers, tutors, course developers, business development team, managers) through a baseline and bespoke framework on how to effectively engage employers and through high quality open and innovative blended CPD activities, digital resources and Community of practice.

The starting point of this development process is the internal needs analysis research undertaken by the VET providers partners involved in BRIDGES, as well as Pan-European desk research and a comparison of employment engagement practices and challenges.

Target groups:

- VET providers
- VET professionals
- VET learners



Project outputs

1: BRIDGES Employer Engagement Framework – Output 1 (O1) will include a mapping literature review involving Local Experts Groups, the definition of what is an engaged relationship with an employer, describe each one of the 4-level for employer engagement and comprehensive guidance.

2: BRIDGES CPD Programme – Output 2 (O2) blended training for VET professionals, offering a flexible curriculum adaptable to different countries and contexts.

3: BRIDGES Digital learning resources and Community of practice – Output3 (O3) a set of infographics based on O1, e-learning contents to support O2, good practice videos on employer engagement and a Community of practice to promote exchange of ideas, actions and practice, which contribute to effective employer engagement.

Partners

- Belfast Metropolitan College – Belfast, United Kingdom (coordinator)
- City of Dublin Education and Training Board – Dublin, Ireland
- Internationaler Bund – Chemnitz, Germany
- Mindshift Talent Advisory – Lisbon, Portugal
- Evolve Global Solutions Ltd – Stratford Upon Avon, United Kingdom
- Infodef – Valladolid, Spain
- Center for Social Innovation Ltd – Nicosia, Cyprus
- CWEP – Rzeszow, Poland



Employer Collaboration Delivers Exciting Career Opportunity for Forty-Five New Posts through Vocational Educational Training Pathway

Belfast Met is delighted to be delivering Vocational Education Training (VET) utilising the apprenticeship delivery model for forty-five new jobs in the Operational Delivery Profession (ODP) within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

This Apprenticeships career opportunity is the result of effective employer engagement and collaboration, where the Centre for Skills and

Apprenticeships team in Belfast Met have co-designed this programme with ODP partners.

The efforts of all involved has led to a pioneering approach to Vocational Educational Training (VET) through the Apprenticeship model.

The ODP apprenticeships scheme has also broken new ground with cutting edge digital learning interactions, through the investment in a bespoke "Met LIVE' virtual studio, allowing the College to embrace our "College without Walls' philosophy and interact with learners from all over Northern Ireland and the world.

Louise Warde Hunter, Principal and Chief Executive at Belfast Met, confirmed;

We are delighted to be the Further Education partner delivering the training for this new Operational Delivery Apprenticeship scheme with the Civil Service which will provide vital employment and valuable career opportunities.

We would encourage people from all backgrounds to apply to this scheme and look forward to welcoming the first cohort of apprentices to Belfast Met."



MentorConnect

Connecting you to the right skills



Mentor Connect – A Successful Six College Collaboration Story from Northern Ireland

The six colleges of Further and Higher Education in Northern Ireland have worked effectively in partnership to deliver a unique Elearn solution to support the knowledge and understanding of key stakeholders in Vocational Educational Training (VET).

The Mentor Connect, Apprentice Connect and Employer Connect toolkits will offer a unique set of guidance and support for target audiences, via Elearns hosted on each College Webpage and Virtual Learning Environment platform (Canvas/Moodle).

Each toolkit contextualises Elearning interactions to demystify the various components of VET hence, improving employer engagement, learner retention and providing a consolidated information source for all stakeholders.

The project was funded through the Challenge Fund as part of the Department for the Economy's Apprenticeship Recovery Package for Northern Ireland which channels financial support to help the apprenticeship system respond to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

Aidan Sloane, Interim Director of Development and Infrastructure Belfast Met said,

"We will be working together to devise an employer mentoring programme to equip the managers of apprentices with the skills they need to effectively support and develop apprentices and apprenticeship programmes.

An online module will certify employers as trained Apprentice mentors.

The resources produced will also help employers to better understand the structure of apprenticeship NI, and higher level apprenticeship programmes with the strategic objective of increasing participation."



MentorConnect
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Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (CDCFE)



Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (CDCFE) is one of 23 colleges within the City of Dublin Education & Training Board (CDETb).

CDCFE prides itself on its established Employer Engagement and identifies this as a fundamental aspect to the running of the college, as it is across all the colleges within the CDETb.



CDCFE Employer Engagement was established to develop links with employers to assist learners in obtaining their work experience minor award as set out by Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI). Learners are required to complete their work experience in the different vocational area in order to meet learning outcomes required by QQI.



QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cállochtá agus Cállochtáí Éireann

CDCFE Employer Engagement also seeks advice & recommendations from the employers while in the development of new bespoke courses such as Traineeship, as well as identifying the needs within the sectors, enabling the college to identify what we should be delivering in the curricula.

In addition to this the college also engages with local employers and enterprises to offer them support in ensuring their business can keep pace in the ever-changing environment, as well as engage with employers that have been identified by CDETb's Employer Engagement Unit.

Through the Skills to Advance Initiative Government Training Funding, we work with companies to develop flexible bespoke and tailored training solutions for their individual needs and provides access for employers to an existing suite of high-quality education opportunities through on-line learning, part-time and evening provision in the delivery of highly subsidised upskilling and reskilling opportunities for employees.

The training aims to support enterprises to invest in and develop their workforce to adapt to changes in technology, markets, and work practices.

Skills To Advance aims to equip employees with the skills to progress in their current job or to take advantage of new job opportunities.



Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (CDCFE)



Skills to Advance Initiative has the scope to enable individual employees to access training programmes by direct application or for a company to create bespoke training by recognizing a skills deficit through completing an Occupational Skills Analysis with the Programme Coordinator within the college.

The onset of Covid19 and the subsequent lockdowns created a space whereby employees /employers found the time to engage with online learning platforms offered by the college. CDCFE's development of Blended Learning Programmes prior to March 2020 was hugely beneficial in the continued success of the programme and prepared teachers for online delivery.

A team of highly skilled, motivated, and passionate teachers, who very quickly adapted from the regular face-to-face delivery, delivered the online classes with huge success.

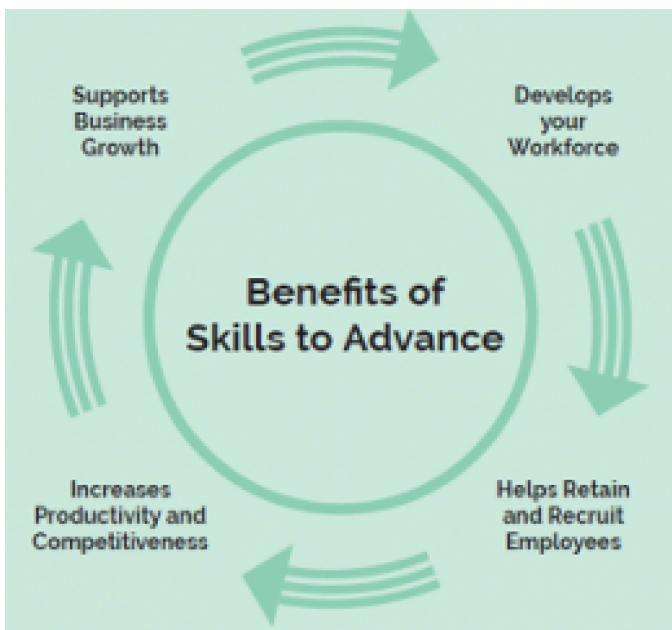
Mary Hickey, Principal of Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education says,

"I am very proud and grateful for the position which Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education occupies as the 'goto' place for the employers in the Northside of Dublin wishing to recruit and upskill their workforce.

This has largely been achieved by the staff of the college who have developed strong partnership relationships with local agencies including,

The Northside Partnership, Regional skills Forum, the North Dublin Chamber and Skills strategy group.

I am also really impressed by the transformation which has been achieved by our learners and staff in achieving the required digital transformation required in the last 18 months."



Over the past 18 months, CDCFE Employer Engagement has seen an increase in the collaboration with several leading companies in various sectors, including Healthcare, Youth work, Tourism & Manufacturing.

Employees that have participated in CDCFE bespoke courses designed for their needs, have successfully completed QQI Level 5 and/or Level 6 minor awards mapped on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Benefits to Businesses and Employers

Develop more robust talent pipelines.

By participating in work-based learning (WBL) programs, businesses can embrace “grow your own” talent development strategies by giving their current employees opportunities to develop the skills that are needed for difficult-to-fill positions.

As partners in these initiatives, businesses can ensure that the skills and qualifications trainees acquire are aligned with their specific workforce needs.

WBL, in which students and other trainees receive temporary job assignments with participating employers, can give businesses an opportunity to train and observe potential employees before committing to hiring them.

Access a more diverse and innovative labour pool.

Companies with diverse workforces are stronger and may be more competitive than others because their teams are made up of individuals who bring a range of perspectives and innovative ideas that can help them keep pace with a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Work-based learning programs can help cultivate diversity in the talent pipeline by providing the structure, support, and training that people of many different backgrounds need to succeed.

Motivation and teamwork.

Work-based learning programs help to strengthen the local business climate and foster economic growth by contributing to the creation of a skilled regional workforce. Providing workers with opportunities to earn valuable credentials and develop new-skills benefits everyone in the community by encouraging a culture of knowledge sharing and interaction

Retention

Many organizations find that their staff turnover rates decline when they launch work-based learning programs. That's because employees see these opportunities as investments in their future and are more likely to stay loyal to businesses that offer them. Jobseekers may also see work-based learning as a plus when they are evaluating potential employers.



During the first months of the project, partners were actively working on the development of the first output - BRIDGES Employer Engagement Framework.

Initially, data collection was carried out in each partner country to identify models, challenges, opportunities, success factors and trends in VET-employer relations, as well as to define which qualities should be considered in these associations. For this purpose, each partner worked closely with their Local Experts Groups, having gathered a total of 40 contributions from them.

Mindshift and Belfast Met analysed the data and designed the Framework, presented in the scheme below, as a 4-level pathway for engaging employers in VET programmes.

Partners are now translating the Framework in their national languages, with the necessary adaptations to suit local contexts, so the framework can be available for implementation in 2022.



Employer Engagement Framework

