



Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work  
Experience in Higher Education

# National Literature Review Slovenia

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Ljubljana, March 2018



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

## PROJECT PARTNERS



This WEXHE publication is applicable to the following disciplinary sectors:

Hard pure (e.g. physics etc.)

Soft pure (e.g. literature etc.)

Hard applied (e.g. engineering etc.)

Soft applied (e.g. management studies etc.)

WEXHE research has showed that there are no substantial differences between these four sectors regarding the implementation of Work Based Learning in Higher Education. Therefore this document represents the four sectors mentioned.

This publication is a result of the project that is funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2, Knowledge Alliances Projects (Grant agreement: 575683-EPP-1-2016-1-NL-EPPKA2-KA)

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The WEXHE project responds to the concerns expressed by stakeholders on the shortcomings in the labour market orientation of HE, focusing on the balance between practical and theoretical learning in HE and to mismatches between the skills sets of graduates and the skills they require during early careers” (WEXHE 2017).

Present literature review analyses all relevant literature as well as the results from recent projects and programs. There is no single definition of work-based learning (WBL) (na delu temelječe učenje) in Slovenia. Young people would typically experience WBL to a small extent in some programmes of upper secondary and/or tertiary level of education, in the process of acquiring more or less relevant work experiences, and later in training settings as employees. WBL is at the moment increasingly discussed on various levels in the area of upper Vocational education and training system (VET). A special challenge is to increase the role and reputation of WBL also in university programmes. Some changes are being made in the process of implementation of the bologna processes. However, in WBL implementation practices there are big differences among study fields and particular HEI.

Another Slovenian particularity is the so called “Student work” (študentsko delo) which has much more to do with legal framework for earning extra income during study than with acquisition of relevant work experiences. While student work undoubtedly provides some benefits to the students, both in terms of short term financial gains and long term work experience, it does have limitations. First of all, there is the question of the relevance of this kind of experience for professional development, and second, even when students work in their own field of study, the formal recognition of these experiences is limited.

## UNDERSTANDING WORK-BASED LEARNING

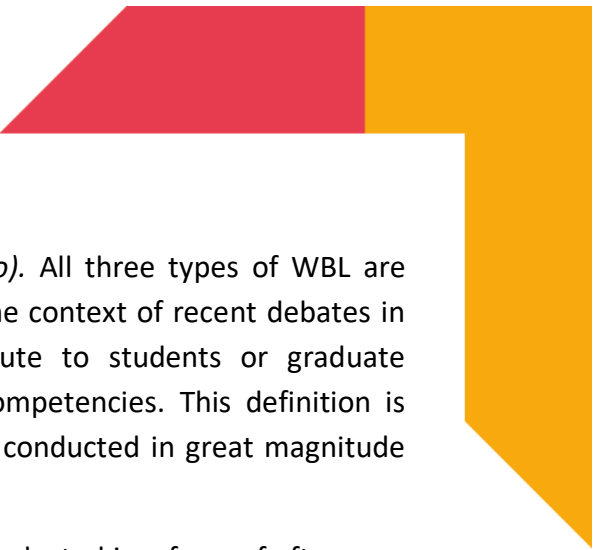
There is no single definition of work-based learning (WBL) (na delu temelječe učenje) in Slovenia. Young people would typically experience WBL to a small extent in some programmes of upper secondary and/or tertiary level of education, in the process of acquiring more or less relevant work experiences, and later in training settings as employees. WBL experiences of some secondary education graduates are certified through NVQ system<sup>1</sup> for occupations not included in a formal education programme (responsibility of the Ministry of Labour), or validation and recognition procedures at the Chamber of Craft, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, vocational and professional chambers or particular companies and organizations (Pavlin and Svetlik 2006).

WBL is at the moment increasingly discussed on various levels in the area of *upper Vocational education and training system (VET)*. On this level WBL is considered in the context of apprenticeship system which was reintroduced in 1996 and in 2016 (in the process). Due to general employers attitudes towards long term investment into human resources, the status of the chambers and the general societal image of VET, the system never really succeeded, and is currently facing several problems. The responsibility for WBL has been shifted to the domain of schools and is now named “Practical Training in Programmes of Vocational and Technical Education” (Praktično usposabljanje z delom v programih poklicnega in strokovnega izobraževanja) with duration between 4 weeks and few months. Currently various attempts are being made to establish a developmental framework of WBL that would go beyond vocational programmes for youth and would also include practical training in higher vocational schools, national vocational qualification certificates, verified VET programmes for adults, training related to master craftsmen and foreman managers by chambers, training programmes provided by the Employment Service of Slovenia, various forms of continuing education and training, and a range of programmes for vulnerable groups etc. A special challenge is to increase the role and reputation of WBL also in university programmes. Some changes are being made in the process of implementation of the bologna processes. However, there are big differences in WBL implementation practices among study fields and particular higher education institutions.

Since there is not unified definition of WBL in the context of (higher) education or the world of work authors of this report considered, the WEXHE consortium classification of WBL as appropriate. This classification defined WBL as a process that is related to equipping students with real-life work experiences organised as work placements/internship (*študijska praksa*), traineeships (*pripravništvo*) which can be also labelled as systematic onboarding

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<sup>1</sup> National vocational qualifications. See link National VET Institute link for more details [http://www.cpi.si/files/cpi/userfiles/Publikacije/ESF\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cpi.si/files/cpi/userfiles/Publikacije/ESF_eng.pdf) (page 35).



(sistematično uvajanje) and entrepreneurship (*podjetništvo*). All three types of WBL are typically developed at an employer's worksite (source). In the context of recent debates in Slovenian HE area such training would need to contribute to students or graduate professional relevance or improvement of their generic competencies. This definition is important since until recently many university programmes conducted in great magnitude the so called study with a special status:

“study at work” (*študij ob delu*). “Study at work” has been conducted in a form of afternoon and/or evening classes and has in principle targeted adult working population. However, in practice this form of study has been opened also to youth who was not able to enrol into regular study programmes and presented extra income for higher education institution. Another Slovenian particularity is the so called “Student work” (*študentsko delo*) which has much more to do with legal framework for earning extra income during study than with acquisition of relevant work experiences. Based on formal student status, young people in higher education can get paid work through special agencies – student employment offices – that issue so called “student referrals” – administrative forms that stand in place of work contracts. This kind of work is temporary by definition, but it is not unusual for students to work for the same employer over a longer period of time and even obtain regular employment there after they finish studies. While student work undoubtedly provides some benefits to the students, both in terms of short term financial gains and long term work experience, it does have limitations. First of all, there is the question of the relevance of this kind of experience for professional development, and second, even when students work in their own field of study, the formal recognition of these experiences is limited. Some initiatives had been taken to improve this situation, e.g. a digital portfolio called “My experience” which allow validation and recognition of non-formal knowledge gained through student work. Both forms of learning “study at work” and “student work” will not be in the focus of this report.

## WBL TYPES/TIPOLOGY: HIGHER EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

Following elaboration in section 2, the most common modes of WBL of higher education students and graduates delivery are work placements/internship (*študijska praksa*), traineeships (*pripravništvo*) that can be also labelled as systematic onboarding (*sistematično uvajanje*) and entrepreneurship (*podjetništvo*).

### Internship (Work placements)

Educational study programmes in Slovenia are defined by the Higher Education Act. The Act provides that, within undergraduate study programmes, practical education in a working environment is a mandatory component of professional study programmes (short cycle professional post secondary level and non-university programmes at the tertiary level), while at the university programs it is only optional. An exception is practical training of certain, professionally oriented study programmes such as medical or pharmaceutical studies what is determined in the EU, Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications. Mandatory components of post-graduate programmes in general include projects in a working environment or basic, applied or development research tasks on a masters level and basic or applied research tasks on doctorate level (Higher Education Act, Art. 33).

Internship is the most common and prominent mode of WBL in the Slovenian higher education system. *“Well-developed academic disciplines are usually emphasising their monodisciplinary focus which makes it harder for them to adapt to the needs of individuals’ life-long learning. Internships are meant to fill that gap by allowing students to take the knowledge they gained in the educational environment and test it in real-life work environment”* (Kristl et al. 2007, 7). Increasing focus of internship is an important part of the Bologna process of study programmes reform. The main goal of such activities, aimed at upgrading students’ institutionally gained knowledge through practical experience, is improving their employment potentials in the labour market (Svetlik et al. 2012, 14). Usually the parties involved in internship are students, mentors and/or a coordinator at the HEI and an external mentor in the organization or company where internship takes place.

The role of the HEI in the implementation of internships includes *“preparing the programme or curricula of the internship; posting, monitoring, controlling and evidencing the students in internships; preparing documents for successful implementation; and offering support, help and counselling to the students”* (Kristl et al. 2007, 12). The extent at which HEI role is of administrative or content nature varies significantly. We could determine the role of the student in internship from two aspects: their options and their obligations. First of all, the students are able to choose an internship provider and a mentor and prepare a proposal of work tasks that suit their abilities and expectations and the criteria of the programme. On the other hand, they have to fulfil all the demands of the internship, which encompass things like following the instructions of mentors and coordinators, responsible execution of tasks, filling

the required documentation, following work regulations and possible rules regarding professional secrecy etc. Finally, the student has to obtain a positive grade from both mentors – the one in the faculty and the one in the internship provider’s organization (Kristl et al. 2007, 16).

### Traineeships/Systematic onboarding

Implementation of traineeship in Slovenia is formal and legal requirements only in some sectors and occupational domains. In most sectors, employers are free to design their own systems of traineeship or systematic onboarding, if necessary. Since traineeship is not compulsory requirement employers organizations mostly also use different terms for training of new employees. However, the concept of traineeship is still very present in employers organisation even though it contains other aspects as in the past when it has been formal requirement. In some areas traineeship has been to some extent in areas complemented with active employment policies.

The legal foundation of traineeship in Slovenia is the Employment Relationships Act from 2013, articles 120 to 124. General provisions state that a law or branch collective agreement may provide that a person, who starts to carry out work appropriate to the type and level of his professional qualification for the first time in order to gain ability to carry out his job independently, concludes an employment contract as a trainee. The maximum duration of traineeship is set to one year unless stipulated otherwise by law, with some specific provisions for the cases of part-time work, justifiable absence and duration reduction proposal of the trainer. Matters of the realisation of traineeship, such as the program, the mentorship and the method of monitoring and evaluating, shall also be laid down by law, other regulation or branch collective agreement. The trainee’s employment contract may only be terminated if there are reasons for an extraordinary termination or in the case of introduction of proceedings for termination of the employer or compulsory composition. *Voluntary traineeship* is defined in article 124 as traineeship that is, pursuant to a special law, served without an employment contract between the worker and the employer. However, this kind of traineeship still has to follow the provisions of Employment relationships act on the duration and realisation of traineeship, limitation of working time, breaks and rests, liability for damages and safety and health at work (Employment Relationships Act, Art. 120-124).

There is an on-going debate whether voluntary traineeship system is appropriate in terms of workers’ rights, especially the right to fair remuneration<sup>2</sup>. This takes into account the fact that successful traineeship implies performing real work, thus in the absence of a regulatory framework or instrument, or because there is a lack of transparency regarding working

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<sup>2</sup> Some argue that unpaid traineeship is later on “reimbursed” in the form of better employment opportunities. However, some studies have shown that paid traineeship leads to better job opportunities compared to unpaid traineeship. The quality of unpaid traineeship is often critically debated as well (Orešnik 2015, 33–35).



conditions for traineeships and their learning content, traineeship providers may be able to use trainees as cheap or even unpaid labour. Together with other concerns related to the quality of traineeship, this is addressed thoroughly in the European Council recommendation on a Quality

Framework for Traineeships. The framework principles include recommendations on: conclusion of a written traineeship agreement, learning and training objectives, working conditions applicable to trainees, rights and obligations, reasonable duration, proper recognition of traineeships, transparency requirements, cross-border traineeships, use of European Structural and Investment Funds and applying the Quality Framework for Traineeships (European Council 2014).

While general provisions on traineeship are defined in the Employment Relationships Act, more detailed provisions on traineeship duration, programme, mentorship, evaluation and final exam are set in sectoral legislation, mostly in regulated professions in the public sector. This kind of regulation is present in *public administration, justice, health, education and social care*. Besides that, traineeship is also defined in a number of collective agreements (Miklošič 2014, 46–58). There are ongoing discussions on whether regulated and formalised traineeship in certain professional fields is (still) needed and reasonable, mostly in the context of its costs and insufficient financial background for these activities. This takes into account the assertion that unpaid traineeships are inappropriate in light of the benefits they bring to the organizations and the risk of being misused as a means of getting unpaid workforce. Public sector organizations often tackle this issue by trying to cover most of the costs with European funds. According to the interview with Turšič, unpaid traineeships have been forbidden for the past two years (Hanžič 2015; Turšič 2017).

Although internships and traineeships usually take place in employers' organizations, internships are in most cases conceived as an integral part of study programme curricula, while traineeships take place after the student had graduated so this form of WBL does not have direct link to HE system.

### Entrepreneurship<sup>3</sup>

Young people increasingly pursue entrepreneurial path due to their desire for independence, better fulfilment of their own potentials and achieving goals that are not feasible in a regular job. Activities related to entrepreneurship education and training could be divided into three types:

- 1) Promotion of entrepreneurship and motivating youth for entrepreneurship;
- 2) Education and training for entrepreneurship and mentoring;

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<sup>3</sup> This section is in its large part based on the interview with Stevanovič from Ljubljana University Incubator (2017).

- 3) Support mechanisms for the establishment of enterprises and adapting to and entering the business arena and expansion to foreign markets.

One of the most prominent (but not exclusive) institution that systematically conducts these activities in Slovenia is Incubator of University of Ljubljana, which has been funded by the University of Ljubljana since 2004. It is focused mainly on supporting researchers, professors, students and graduates in their entrepreneurial activities. Institute is specialised in organizing promotional events, workshops and work individually with newly established enterprises in setting up their business, testing and developing ideas, developing strategies and connections, acquiring funds and investments and other activities.

The state supports entrepreneurial activities through various funds. Within the first year of activity, new enterprises can apply for a subsidy of The Slovene Enterprise Fund that financially supports 40 newly established enterprises with development funds. Later on, the enterprises can apply for additional funds, but they are available in the form of a convertible loan. Through different channels, government funds are also available to other innovative environment subjects such as university incubators, entrepreneurship incubators and technological parks.<sup>4</sup>

Entrepreneurship education and promotion is to a certain extent also included in formal education programs. It takes place in the form of study subjects and extracurricular circles. The inclusion of such activities on university level varies among HEIs. Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana, for example, has included entrepreneurial education in their programmes and also supports with entrepreneurship subjects some of other faculties of the University of Ljubljana. Other educational and training activities organized by different stakeholders also often take place in the educational environment. The HEIs hence play an important role in developing youth entrepreneurship nationally, while employers set implementation and utilisation of entrepreneurial competencies. One of the main approaches in bridging the gap between the two worlds is done via mediators, such as is LUI<sup>5</sup> or Acceleration Business City<sup>6</sup>, which in a systematic way nurture entrepreneurial skills via sharing real problems and challenges of the companies with those students and graduates, who are eager to use their knowledge and create something new. Nationally, one of the strong factors of the promotion of entrepreneurship is its representation in the media. Business oriented TV-shows and other means of mass communication are encouraging young people to take on some kind of a business path themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> Innovative environment subjects in Slovenia are listed at <https://www.podjetniski-portal.si/ustanavljam-podjetje/inovativno-okolje/Evidenca-subjektov-inovativnega-okolja> (25 October 2016).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://lui.si/welcome-to-lui/>.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://accelerationbusinesscity.com/>.

## WBL POLICY CONTEXT

### General policy context

The main policy driver for implementation of WBL and practical orientation of higher education in general is related to implementation of the Bologna process and its link to better employability of graduates (Pavlin 2014). As in other EU countries, also Slovenian labour market experiences fast changes. This is the reason why graduates face many challenges in work environment that is substantially different from educational. Its dynamics, work modes and high expectations in terms of results can be hard to keep up with, so the system of internships as well as other forms of WBL should be a vital component of study programmes to enable the students to prepare for the transition in the best way possible. Particularities of this implementation are related to disciplinary differences and strategies of certain HEIs. Higher education institutions in Slovenia are mostly free to decide whether they include structured WBL in their study programmes (European Commission /EACEA/Eurydice 2015, 202). Under this framework, various programmes take place on the national level. The National Youth Programme 2013 – 2022, for example, is the thematic guide to youth policy and programmes in Slovenia. It encompasses six areas: education, employment and entrepreneurship, youth residential conditions, health and well-being, youth in society and the importance of youth sector, and lastly, culture, creativity, heritage and media. The area of employment and entrepreneurship has six priority sub-areas, most of which are highly relevant to the area of WBL:<sup>7</sup>

- 1) improving active policies of enabling youth entrance to the labour market with special emphasis on young graduates,
- 2) encouraging personal initiative, entrepreneurship and self-employment of youth and increasing the importance of developing entrepreneurial orientation and knowledge,
- 3) improving the connection of educational system to labour market needs,
- 4) increasing the shares of permanent forms of youth employment,
- 5) youth under-employment prevention,
- 6) reducing work in anti-social periods.

The Council of the EU established a *Youth Guarantee programme* in 2013. With it all member states committed to ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities adopted the first implementation plan in 2014 and the second one in 2016 (valid until 2020). The plan instates a number of measures in two segments: a) *early action and activation*, which is particularly

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution on the National Youth Programme 2013 – 2022.

targeting young people in education or in transition to the labour market, and b) *activation of youth in the labour market*, which supports young unemployed people in general. At this point one can mention the measures most relevant to the area of WBL: *life-long career orientation* (1), *systemic change in the area of traineeship* (2), *promoting creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation* (4), *government grants* (5), *education and training of unemployed youth* (10), *youth employment incentives* (11), *youth entrepreneurship support* (13) and *projects for youth* (15) (Youth Guarantee 2016). An important national funding mechanism is tender *Creative path to knowledge* by Slovene Enterprise Fund, which only in 2016/2017 distributed in the amount of almost four million euro (for particularities see the next part).

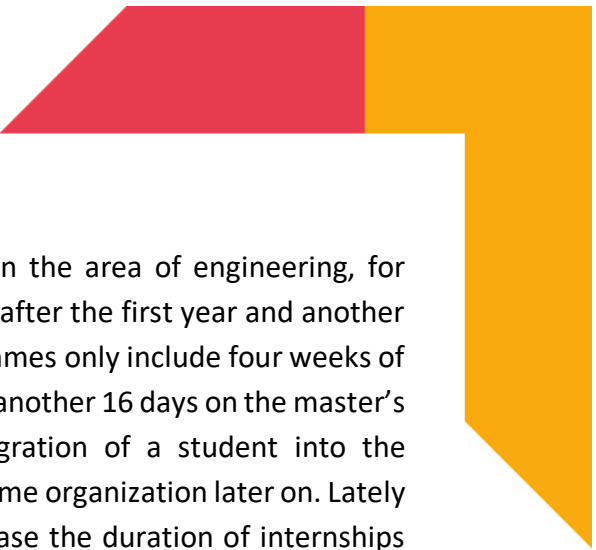
Further elaboration of policy framework is divided to particular WBL modes: internship, traineeship and entrepreneurship.

### Internships (Work placements)

Renovation of internship system followed the existing experience and best practices of the particular Slovenian HEIs. At the University of Ljubljana, many issues were associated with the implementation and recognition of internships and quality assurance. Both aspects were supported by implementation of standardised guidelines (Kristl 2007). The process of designing internship programmes took into account students' existing knowledge and motivation in relation to needs for graduates' specific competencies in the labour market. This required, among others, substantial improvement of mentorship system, efficient appointment of work tasks and roles at HEIs and employers, system for monitoring students' knowledge and skills and appropriate evaluation of results. Mentorship can be demanding in terms of time management and energy allocation, which opens up the question of feasibility of these activities in some organizations particularly due to the fact that additional financial resources has for this activity almost not been allocated.

Internships are also supported nationally. Tender *Creative path to knowledge*, for example, is aimed towards strengthening the cooperation between the higher education system and the (economic and non-economic) environment and towards the implementation of open and flexible models of transition between education and socio-economic environment. The funds are assigned to higher education institutions that apply with (a) group projects of 6 to 8 students with a mentor in education and at work or (b) mutual exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices among the worlds of education and work. Each institution can apply with up to five such projects with the minimal duration of 3 months and maximum duration of 5 months (Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia 2016).

Despite institutional, national and European efforts for strengthening the role of WBL some study did not experience improvement. In some fields there are reports that the extent of internships in study programmes has been with the implementation of the bologna process



actually reduced in terms of time, quality and regulation. In the area of engineering, for example, old programmes provided one month of internship after the first year and another six months period after the third year, while the new programmes only include four weeks of internship after the third year of the undergraduate level and another 16 days on the master's level. The previous system allowed for much better integration of a student into the organization and more often resulted in landing a job in the same organization later on. Lately students have been coming forward with initiatives to increase the duration of internships again, so the faculty is planning to introduce another internship period at the end of the second year (Švetak 2017). This claims lack systematic investigation cross study fields.

### Traineeships/systematic onboarding


There are very limited sources in Slovenia that would describe traineeships/systematic onboarding from the system perspective. One of the few is an analysis on traineeships for public sector in Slovenia has been conducted recently 2015 (see Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities 2015). The results showed that training system was very important mechanism for transition of young graduates to labour market. Findings of this report presented the basis for action plan on which basis state administration's introduced a quota for trainee employment in particular ministries and governmental bodies.

At the same time Chamber of commerce and industry of Slovenia's legal office explains that the number of traineeships in the private sector has been decreasing since 2013, when the new Employment relationships act was adopted (see Section 2). While most of the branch collective agreements determine the possibility of trainee employment, branches without them have no legal bases for this kind of contract (Križnik 2017). Other policy mechanism for supporting traineeships are provided within Youth guarantee programme (see the first part of this section).

### Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship education is mostly taught in HEIs in the field of business and economics. Outside this area, HE system in Slovenia still lacks general awareness of the importance of entrepreneurial skills. The necessity of these skills should be thought of in terms of broadening one's horizons and giving them the knowledge they need to be able to start successful working careers. In that sense, entrepreneurial skills may be equally important for those who will take on that path and those who will not (Rebernik et al. 2017, 116).

One of the important international benchmark for the status of entrepreneurship is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. It defines the environment that affects the development of entrepreneurship at the national level as "business ecosystem". It covers nine main areas out of which the most relevant to our research subject is *entrepreneurship training and education*. The latter is described as "the extent to which training related to establishing or running an SME is incorporated in education and training at all levels". As an indicator it can be divided into two components, namely the prevalence and quality of entrepreneurship training and



education (a) in primary and secondary education and (b) post-secondary education (Rebernik et al. 2017, 148–149). According to the national experts in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study, the prevalence and quality of entrepreneurship training and education in primary and secondary education in 2016 in Slovenia is graded the lowest among all of the areas of business environment and way below European average. However, on the level of post-secondary education the same indicator shows much better results and comes close to the EU average (Rebernik et al. 2017, 150–153).<sup>8</sup>

Other policy mechanism for supporting traineeships are provided within Youth guarantee programme (see the first part of this section).

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<sup>8</sup> See [http://ipmmp.um.si/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/GEM\\_2016\\_\\_web.pdf](http://ipmmp.um.si/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/GEM_2016__web.pdf)

## WBL IMPLEMENTATION: DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

### Internships (Work placements)

The document that best describes internship standards in Slovenia has been prepared at the University of Ljubljana (Kristl 2007). It describes three steps of internship implementation. First, the student has to apply for internship according to faculty rules and get an approval from the internship provider. This step usually requires a formal application, a written approval of the provider and finally a contract between all three parties. Second step is related to implementation of internship in which the faculty may or may not demand interim reporting on the progress. Last step describes the completion of the internship, which usually requires a final report from the student, a certificate from the mentor in the organization and a survey about the whole process (Kristl et al. 2007, 13).

In the implementation process, the external mentor in employers' organization is responsible for professional requirements of the HEI. External mentor can be a licensed mentor or an employee whose education level is at least equal to the level that the student in the internship will achieve when they finish the study programme. Exceptionally, if none of the before mentioned criteria can be fulfilled, a mentor can be the most experienced employee. The mentor is expected to be a role model, a motivator and a consultant to the student, so that they encourage professional development, the development of generic competencies (e.g. communication, critical thinking, teamwork) and specific skills. Mentors set the responsibilities of the student, provide them feedback, help them understand the internal culture in the organization and connect with others, explain things, share information, encourage and support the student. Specific tasks of mentors can be detailed in the contract on the implementation of the internship. The work of external mentor is monitored by – an authorised professor – the internship mentor at the HEI (Kristl et al. 2007, 17). For the mentor, internship is an opportunity to learn through teaching, keep track of the latest advances in their professional field, get new ideas, expand their network of professional contacts and lastly give them a feeling of accomplishment when students' progress (Kristl et al. 2007, 18).<sup>9</sup>

The University of Maribor also presents a set of standards for students preparing for internship (The Career Centre of the University of Maribor). At the university the internship coordinators compare searching for internship placement to the activities of job searching, where it is important to think about the desired field of work, jobs that might fit ones qualifications and aspirations, and concrete organizations that could provide the placement. In the next phase, the students are expected to prepare their CV and other necessary documentation and prepare for the interview with the employer – internship provider. The guidelines recommend networking in the process, seeking help with the career centre and

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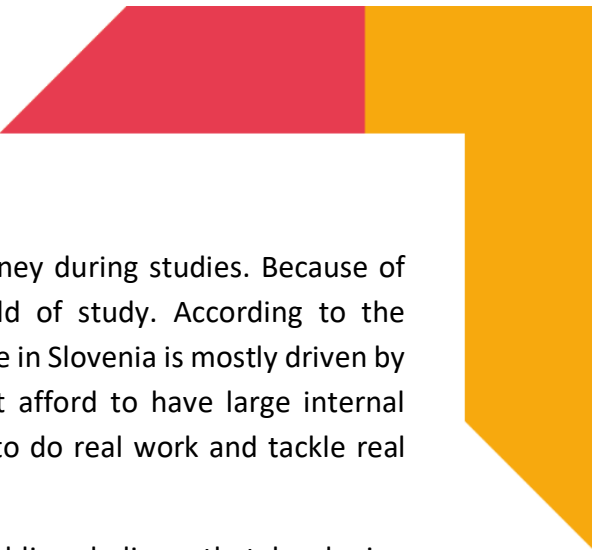
<sup>9</sup> This can be perceived as the main driver for implementation of internship.

possible connections of professors and assistants at the HEI. One aspect of internship placement is its financial cover, where it is important to note that the best paid opportunity is not necessarily also the most beneficial for long term career development of the student, especially considering the relatively short duration at the placement itself.

Introduction of internships in line with the bologna processes proved to be quite a challenge for the HEIs. First of all, a basic clash of mind-sets can occur when academics, who often have no real experience with business, cooperate with companies, who are equally unexperienced in the educational sphere. This implies a bigger role of students in finding an internship placement, but of course, the appropriateness of such placement can be questionable. Students often try to get internship credit for their regular student work, which may have very little relevance to their study field. A representative of Germanic studies, for example, reported that placements in companies can be hard to establish. Some have stated a lack of physical space or proper job positions. Others complained about the internship duration being too short to allow for any real results. Anyhow, successfully implemented internship could still present a risk for the faculty to lose some students as internships may redirect them to a different career path (Žolnir 2012).

As elaborated earlier, implementation of internships is importantly determined by study fields. Study programmes at the *Faculty of engineering* in Ljubljana include internships in the duration of four weeks on undergraduate level and another 16 days on master's level (Švetak 2017). The internship is credited as a separate study subject with credit points. Students usually find their own internship positions in the industry, their student organization also maintains a web portal listing internship opportunities and the faculty also fosters contacts with cooperating organizations. The majority of students carry out their internship in an organisation they have already been working with through the system of student work. The internship is instated with a contract between the HEI, the company and the student, which sets the obligations for all three parties. Before the internship starts, the student has to prepare the work plan in the company and make arrangements with a mentor in the company and a mentor at the faculty. Mentors from both sides have mentorship training organized annually by the faculty, while students also have an annual informative meeting with internship coordinator. During the internship the student writes a log that allows the faculty mentor to monitor the progress and concludes the internship with a (20 to 25 page long) written report that is graded by both mentors. The interviewee reports no significant problems in the implementation of the internships. There is however one *barrier* that mostly affects the business side of this cooperation: the faculty simply does not have enough students to meet the demands of companies. On the other hand, this could also be seen as a *driver* as it encourages companies to compete for internships and guarantee themselves students through scholarships and better terms of agreement (Švetak 2017). Also the second interviewee from the *Faculty of engineering* (Vižentin 2017) reports that in the last few years the majority of students is not focused enough on developing their professional competencies





but are increasingly motivated by opportunities to earn money during studies. Because of this, they often take student work unrelated to their field of study. According to the interviewee, the need for high level of professional knowledge in Slovenia is mostly driven by the fact that most of the companies are SMEs that cannot afford to have large internal education systems but demand new employees to be able to do real work and tackle real problems very early in their new job.

An interviewee from the *Faculty of electrical engineering* in Ljubljana believes that developing practical knowledge is very important but it should be monitored by HEIs. Internship is not a compulsory part of the university curricula so students' practical experiences mostly come in the form of student work with little professional relevance. The companies in the sector show strong demand for good students, which can present a downside risk of students specializing too early, being completely engaged in paid work and thus never finishing their studies. The faculty, however, does have an ECTS credited study subject called "interdisciplinary projects" that engages students in concrete projects introduced by companies. In this context, students work in interdisciplinary teams to resolve real-life work challenges. Other forms of cooperation include projects that present a basis for students' bachelor or master theses. Outside the educational environment students also connect with companies through grants and competitions. This kind of cooperation is also in the best interest of pursuing greater students' and graduates' employability (Bešter 2017).

Before the bologna reform, the *Faculty of social sciences* included internships only in some study programmes and the implementation was defined very loosely. After bologna processes, a system had to be set up. Establishing a common understanding that internships are not primarily a demand of employers but a realistic need of higher education proved to be in this phase very important element. Further developments have shown that the implementation is highly affected by the sector of internship provider: organizations in public sector are more concerned with the formalistic/administrative aspects (e.g. following strict regulations on covering expenses), while private sector organizations are mostly interested in students doing real student work for them. From a policy point of view, the problem (*barrier*) is that the bologna process introduced mandatory internship while it had not granted any extra funds for its implementation. Some employers contend that even though this kind of cooperation demands input from both sides, the expenses are not proportionally divided among them. Another *barrier* specific to this study field is that different faculties (even members of the same university) compete for internship positions in the same employers' organisations: e.g. the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Administration both compete for internship placements in the Slovenian Parliament. Other important legal aspects of internships include insurances related to health concerns and damage liabilities. However, these may be less emphasized in the field of social sciences as most of the practical work is done in an office environment. Some study fields nevertheless require some caution, e.g. defence studies (Kohont 2017).

A representative from the study field of *biology, biodiversity and ecology* from Biotechnical Faculty describes the study programs as very practically oriented. As such, its mandatory curricular content already includes a high extent of practical tasks to be carried out in the field or in laboratories. Besides that, there are three predominant modes of WBL:

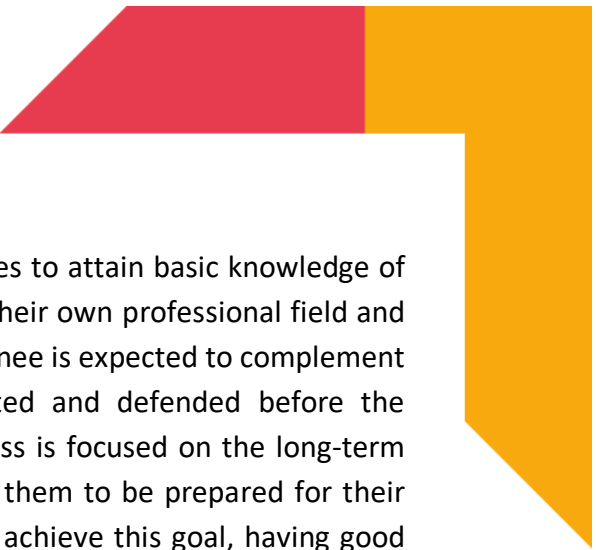
- 1) research assignments, bachelor's and master's theses,
- 2) student work related to the field of study
- 3) direct integration in projects, usually voluntary (relevant for further thesis or professional work).

There are no formal quality assurance mechanisms of WBL, but the representative does not think there is a need for such frameworks. The extent and level of cooperation related to WBL is reflected on very positively, the only real *barrier* being the lack of financial coverage that can strongly affect the feasibility of some projects (Toman 2017).

According to the representative from the field of *humanities*, this study area in most cases does not include internships in the classical sense of working in an external organization. Due to the specifics of the field, most WBL related activities can be done as research assignments at the faculty. One exception are the students of philosophy education that have to undertake some pedagogical practice in a workplace environment, namely a school. Besides that, there is still a prevalent view that students in internships are of little use to working organizations (Kreft 2017). Also in the area of *translation studies* there is a three-week long mandatory internship on the master's level. Students can find their own placement or the faculty coordinator can help them with an existing network of contacts. Before the internship begins, a personal interview with the applicant is done by the organization providing the internship. Many students carry out their internship voluntarily in the European institutions where the duration of internships cannot be less than one month and later on many of those students are employed by the same institution. The students in internship are expected to have a mentor in the organization and they must write a work log about the assignments they are given and the general progress of the internship. In the end, they also have to produce a final report. Internships allow students to try out their knowledge in practice and see if a certain work area suits them or not. As the interviewee pointed out, another important function of internship is boosting the students' confidence as they witness the use of their own work (Hirci 2017).

#### Traineeships/systematic onboarding

As traineeship outside the regulated domains is no longer legal requirement, employers' organizations can design and implement their own training systems and practices. This means that in some organisations the quality and formal aspects of traineeship can be below or above legal requirements. A representative from employers organisation described traineeships – or formulated more accurately the systematic onboarding – that can be considered nationally as a good case. It is implemented in two main stages. In the first initial



stage the trainee works in the wider area of related processes to attain basic knowledge of key company processes. In the second stage, they focus on their own professional field and learn about specific work tasks and processes. At the end trainee is expected to complement professional assignment which is expected to be presented and defended before the company's committee. The nature of this traineeship process is focused on the long-term career development of the trainees, as the company wants them to be prepared for their advancement to more demanding job positions. In order to achieve this goal, having good insight of the main processes in the company is of crucial importance. As stated by the interviewee, a very important goal of traineeship is also the trainee's inclusion and socialization in the company. The main actors in the traineeship/*systematic onboarding* process are the trainee, the HR representative, mentor and in some cases the executive director (Vodopivec 2017).

### Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship practices are largely determined on disciplinary area, purpose of entrepreneurial activity and organisational setting. As formulated earlier, activities related to entrepreneurship education and training can be divided into three stages: a) promotion of entrepreneurship and motivating youth for entrepreneurship, b) education and training for entrepreneurship and mentoring and c) support mechanisms for the establishment of enterprises and adapting to and entering the business arena and expansion to foreign markets. Some insights collected in preparation of this report include the following descriptions. *Translation study programmes* include only some basic content on entrepreneurship, e.g. information on how to establish a sole proprietorship or prepare an invoice. Other than that, the HEI where translation study in Slovenia takes place does not have particular mechanism for promotion and training in entrepreneurship (Hirci 2017). Lately some graduates from the area of humanities are also pursuing entrepreneurial path, but mostly with little reference to their original study field. Some typical example areas of this kind of philosophy graduates' study field deviations are translation and publishing activities (Kreft 2017). In the area of *engineering* there is lack of funds and other conditions for supporting start-ups, what can be seen as the main barrier. Interviewee expressed concern that in some study fields the increasing number of start-ups has more to do with lack of jobs than with professional motives (Vižintin 2017). A representative from the *Faculty of electrical engineering* in Ljubljana stressed out that entrepreneurship promotion and education is necessary, but the academics are not systematically encouraged to engage in such activities. Namely, the university does not formally account for any such endeavours in habilitation processes (Bešter 2017).

## WBL IMPACT

The question, what are expected long-term results from WBL implementation in the eyes of HEI, external partners, and society is in Slovenia at the moment extremely hard to be answered. What is at the moment clear is the HEGESCO project empirical finding that *“key factors contributing to a successful transition from higher education to the labour market include the acquisition of study-related work experience during higher education and strong links between HE institutions and the labour market”* (van der Velden and Allen 2011, 127). Some Slovenian HE experts believe that in the current economic situation in several sectors the key development of WBL should be more in the hands of HEI than enterprises. They believe HEIs should play the key role in internships as well as traineeships and entrepreneurship activities. At the moment several HE programmes are too passive when it comes to implementation of WBL. As one of experts pointed out, WBL activities in companies are motivated as *“human resources search”* and *“earning”* processes and less as the long-term investment in employees (Prašnikar 2017). Because of this, the transfer of relevant work experiences and professional learning is very limited. It not clear to what extent can top down EU policies shift WBL from currently mainly administrative to more developmental activity. In the current situation learning about practice in HE classroom in a very structured way and supported with a good practitioners’ expertise might in several cases add to students professional careers better than practical learning in companies. One of good options for further WBL development might be related to integration of students and graduates into existing bilateral research projects among universities and enterprises. The IEWEXHE project might play very important role in clarifying this issue.

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*List of interviewees in alphabetical order*

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