



Malta
Further & Higher
Education Authority

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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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
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
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

Introduction

The MFHEA Guidelines for Quality Assurance for Courses that include a Work-Based Learning Component represent the effort of the MFHEA to support local higher education institutions in their endeavours to provide high quality education and to make such education opportunities accessible to as many prospective learners as possible.

The quality guidelines on work-based learning (WBL), in line with the other MFHEA quality assurance documentation, 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. These guidelines refer to further, higher and adult formal education provision in both the state and the non-state sectors.

The 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.

It is advisable that educational institutions implementing work-based learning courses read these guidelines alongside the Malta Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, Chapter 576 of the Laws of Malta, available online at <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/576/eng/pdf>. The duties of educational institutions, sponsors and learners, as outlined in the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, are copied in the appendices of these guidelines for ease of reference.

What is WBL?

These guidelines understand work-based learning as 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.

Different Types of WBL Experiences

Work placement:

The term ‘work placement’ refers to 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.

As indicated in Schedule 1 of the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, work placements are intended for MQF Levels 1-4 courses. Work placements entail:

- Allocation of a learner to a registered sponsor to gain basic work experience and skills.
- Programmes that include work placements lead to a vocational qualification or an award at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 1 to Level 4 or similar.
- The learner is linked to the sponsor with a training agreement for work placements compiled by the educational institution and the sponsor.
- The learner may or may not receive remuneration for the work-based learning portion of the work placement.
- ECTS credits are allocated by an educational institution for learning outcomes achieved during the work period and assessed as part of the work placement programme.

Apprenticeship:

The term ‘apprenticeship’ refers to training that engages learners on programmes that include school-based learning at a licensed educational institution and work-based learning with a registered sponsor. Programmes that include 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.

As indicated in Schedule 1 of the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, apprenticeships are intended for MQF Levels 3-4 courses. Apprenticeships entail:

- Allocation of an apprentice to a programme of school-based learning at an accredited educational institution that includes a work-based learning component with a registered sponsor.
- Programmes that include apprenticeships lead to a recognised vocational qualification or award at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 3 and Level 4 or similar.
- The apprentice is linked to the sponsor with a training agreement for apprenticeships compiled by the educational institution and the sponsor.
- The apprentice receives remuneration for the work-based learning portion of the apprenticeship.
- ECTS credits or similar are allocated by an educational institution for learning outcomes achieved during the work period and assessed as part of the apprenticeship programme.

Internship:

The term 'internship' refers to training that engages learners on programmes that include school-based learning at a licensed educational institution and work-based learning with a registered sponsor (workplace provider). Programmes that include 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.

As indicated in Schedule 1 of the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, internships are intended for MQF Levels 5 and above. Internships entail:

- Allocation of an intern to a programme of school-based learning at an accredited educational institution that includes a work-based learning component with a registered sponsor.
- Programmes that include internships lead to a recognised vocational or professional qualification or award at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 5 and above or similar.
- The intern is linked to the sponsor with a training agreement for internships compiled by the educational institution and the sponsor.
- The intern may or may not receive remuneration for the work-based learning portion of the internship.
- ECTS credits or similar are allocated by an educational institution to learning outcomes achieved during the work period and assessed as part of the internship programme.

WBL

within the 2016 Referencing Report

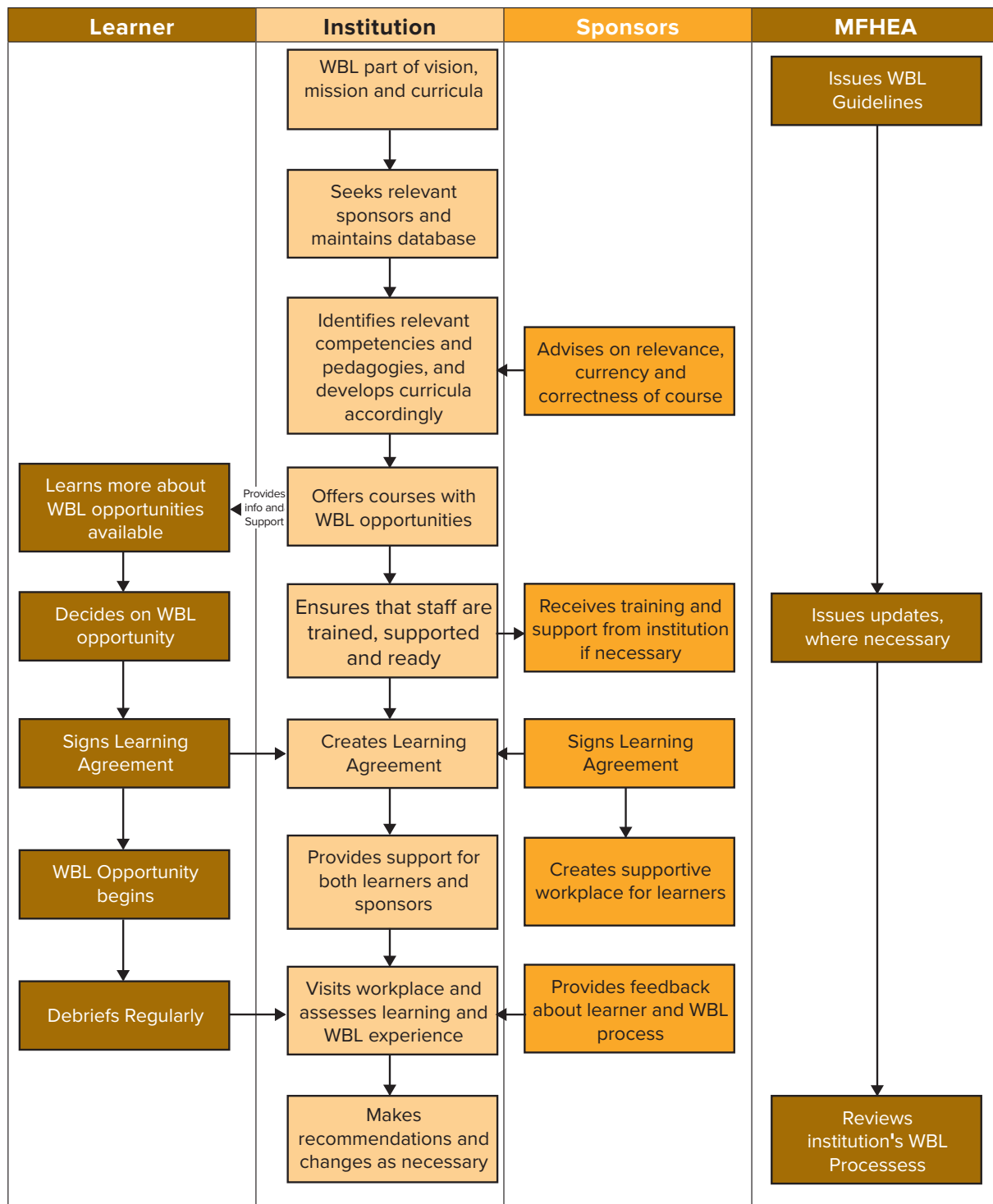
These Guidelines are aligned with the directions provided within the NCFHE Referencing Report (2016). As outlined in the report, there are a number of principles underpinning work-based learning to ensure that learners are provided with a genuinely educational experience. These principles include:

- 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 do not perform tasks for which they are not trained.

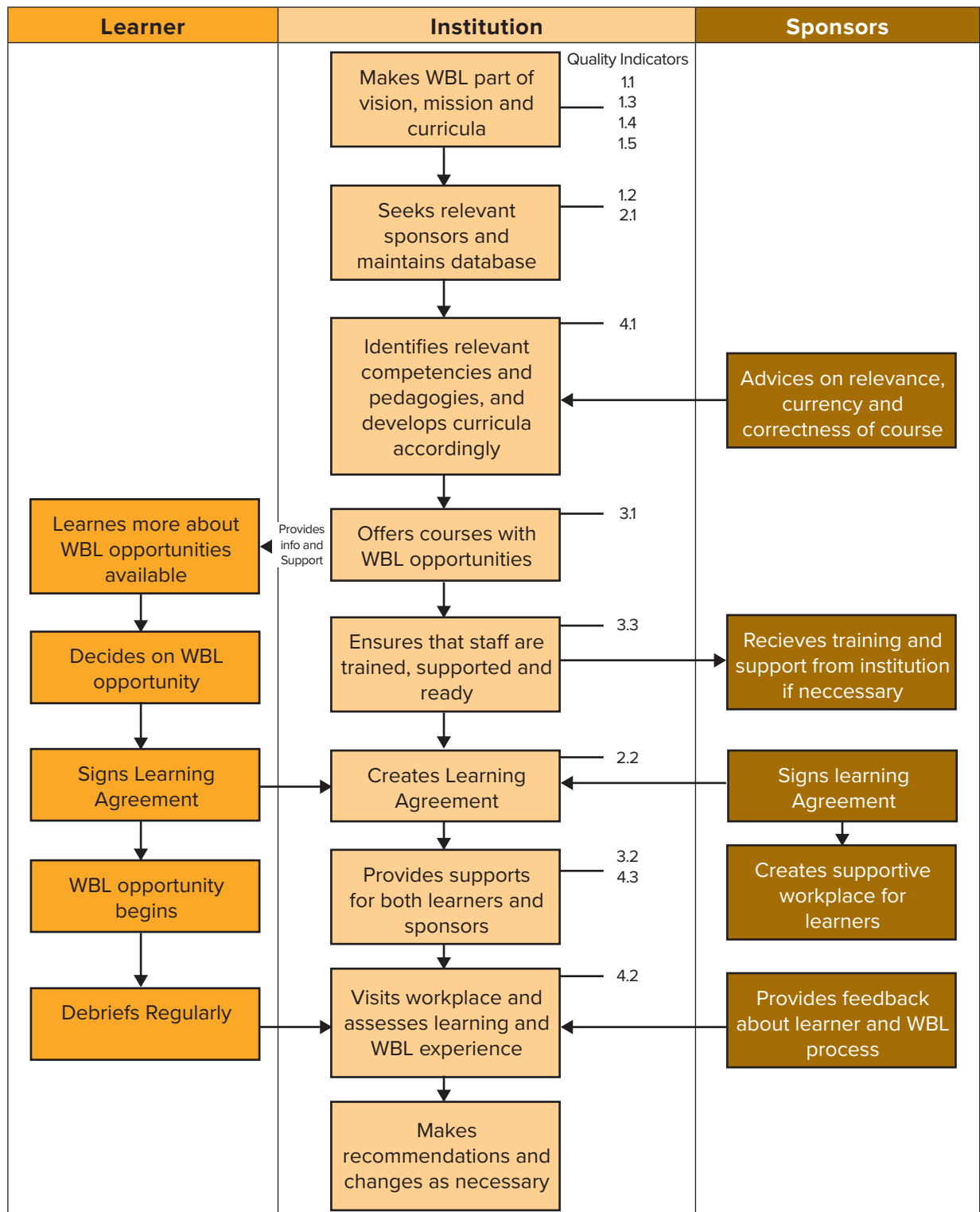
Suggested

WBL Implementation Workflow

This flowchart is a suggested overview of the process workflow for implementing WBL. Each column shows the processes for the main stakeholders within the process. It is not prescriptive but provides a visual representation of these Guidelines.



This workflow flowchart shows the Indicators of the Quality Priorities linked with each procedure from the Educational Institution's perspective.



Quality

Priorities for WBL

Quality Priority One: Effective Governance of Work-Based Learning	
Standard 1.1	Institutional management supports WBL by nurturing a culture of quality governance at all levels.
Standard 1.2	Prospective learners can choose from a selection of Work-Based Learning Opportunities for the learning opportunity that suits them most.
Standard 1.3	Study Programmes that include a WBL component are of good quality.
Standard 1.4	Courses that include WBL components are cyclically reviewed through data analysis and feedback collection.
Standard 1.5	Adequate resources are dedicated to implementing WBL effectively.

Quality Priority Two: Active Collaboration Among Stakeholders	
Standard 2.1	Educational institutions and sponsors collaborate actively to provide a genuine and worthwhile WBL component.
Standard 2.2	Responsibilities of each stakeholder are clearly articulated in writing.

Quality Priority Three: Effective Learner Support Systems	
Standard 3.1	Learners are well prepared before they start their work placements.
Standard 3.2	Learners are supported throughout their work placements.
Standard 3.3	On-the-job trainers sustain learners' learning processes.

Quality Priority Four: Robust WBL Assessment	
Standard 4.1	Programmes of study are based on best practice and balanced and up-to-date curricula.
Standard 4.2	Valid and reliable assessment systems are in place.
Standard 4.3	Teachers and Assessors are well trained and suitably qualified to support learners.

Why is this Important?

WBL provision must be governed effectively due to the diverse roles of stakeholders (e.g. private vs public sector employers, union representatives, employment regulations (e.g. health and safety), educational institutions, and their staff and learners.

There are additional considerations and risks in integrating learners into industry, compared to fully school-based models where learning is more visible, measurable and controllable.

WBL only benefits learners if the learning opportunities are genuinely worthwhile and relevant to them.

Institutions must offer and organise work placements carefully and monitor progress regularly.

Job-specific and transferable skills which are useful to the learners in the long term should be developed.

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.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 1.1 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 1.1	The Institution
Institutional management supports WBL by nurturing a culture of quality governance at all levels.	• makes WBL part of its vision and mission. • has strategic and policy documents with a WBL focus. • has a quality assurance policy for WBL. • manages and budgets for WBL courses.
Evidence	• Demonstrable commitment to WBL in policies and budgeting. • Quality assurance policy and procedures for WBL.

Standard 1.2 Prospective learners can choose from a selection of Work-Based Learning Opportunities for the learning opportunity that suits them most.

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.
- Supportive Guidance is offered to those who do not meet the selection requirements.
- Employers providing quality WBL placements are recognised accordingly, for example, through the establishment of an institution-based quality mark/award.

What does good practice for Standard 1.2 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 1.2	The Institution	The Learner
Prospective learners can choose from a selection of Work-Based Learning Opportunities for the learning opportunity that suits them most.	• maintains a database of companies and learning opportunities. • is involved in the selection criteria and/or matches learners with WBL opportunities. • provides compensatory programmes for learners who do not meet selection criteria. • recognises employers who provide quality WBL.	• can use the database as a deciding tool before enrolling in a course. • can access the database to make informed decisions about where they want to do WBL. • can avail of support or advice from the institution to make a decision.
Evidence	• Database of WBL sponsors. • WBL enquiry, fulfilment and support procedures for learners. • Scheme for recognition of quality sponsors.	• Availability of and access to WBL sponsor information. • Trained personnel to assist, advise and support learners.

Standard 1.3 Study programmes that include a WBL component are of good quality.

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, materials and trained staff to supervise learners. Health and Safety issues are taken into consideration.
- 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.

What does good practice for Standard 1.3 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 1.3	The Institution
Study programmes that include a WBL component are of good quality.	• ensures study programmes comply with the MQF and Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship Act. • creates school-based components which prepare learners for practice-based components. • carefully vets WBL sponsors through a clear process. • monitors the work environment to ensure it is conducive to learning.
Evidence	• Course design and development integrating WBL into academic content. • Process and procedures of vetting WBL sponsors and monitoring the WBL environment.

Standard 1.4 Courses that include WBL components are cyclically reviewed through data analysis and feedback collection.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 1.4 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 1.4	The Institution
Courses that include WBL components are cyclically reviewed through data analysis and feedback collection.	• reviews WBL courses and stakeholders, internally and externally, for quality. • considers all WBL aspects, including pedagogy, course design, organisational culture, technology, etc. • ensures learners develop the expected knowledge, skills and competencies. • ensures sponsors fulfil their responsibilities optimally. • obtains feedback from all stakeholders.
Evidence	• Comprehensive review and improvement process for courses with WBL components.

Standard 1.5 Adequate resources are dedicated to implementing WBL effectively.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 1.5 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 1.5	The Institution
Adequate resources are dedicated to implementing WBL effectively.	• has clear policies and the budget for creating and supporting WBL opportunities. • reviews and updates its WBL policies regularly. • aligns teaching and learning strategies with WBL components. • develops and shares resources for administration, teaching and assessment with all staff and learners. • uses technology to implement WBL components, where possible.
Evidence	• Policies and procedures in place for resourcing WBL in line with teaching and learning strategies.

Quality

Priority Two: Active Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Why is this Important?

The stronger the collaboration between stakeholders, the smoother work-based learning (WBL) opportunities run.

This can be done through a balanced distribution of responsibilities, a commitment to fulfil responsibilities to the best of 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.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 2.1 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 2.1	The Institution	The Sponsor
Educational institutions and Sponsors actively collaborate to provide a genuine and worthwhile WBL component.	- actively seeks and collaborates with sponsors for the benefit of learners. - maintains continuous dialogue between all WBL partners (including employee representatives, employer associations, MCCEI). - provides compensatory programmes for learners not meeting selection criteria. - creates written agreements with sponsors with a clear and balanced distribution of responsibilities.	- is informed of the benefits, responsibilities, and support available for WBL placements. - is involved in curriculum/ course design and development, and selection. - is supported with trainers and training, administrative work relating to WBL, and other matters. - has quality assurance mechanisms that ensure learning.
Evidence	- Evidence of collaboration between different stakeholders. - Process for delineation of responsibilities. - Alternative options for learners.	- An information pack or procedure for new sponsors. - Support system and assistance for sponsors of all sizes.

Standard 2.2 Responsibilities of each stakeholder are clearly articulated in writing.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 2.2 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 2.2	The Institution	The Sponsor
Responsibilities of each stakeholder are clearly articulated in writing.	• creates a Learning Agreement outlining the relationship between institution, sponsor and learner. • ensures that Learning Agreements are understood and signed by all parties. • provides alternative options such as structured learner-sharing, placement rotation schemes or inter-company training. • supports micro, small, and/or medium enterprises, first-time sponsors, and those working with disadvantaged learners to increase availability and diversity of opportunities. • debriefs learners after placements to review and address issues.	• receives guidelines, policies and procedures describing qualification and skills requirements with learning outcomes. • receives support for creating the right administrative and learning support for WBL placements. • participates in debriefs after placements to review and address issues.
Evidence	• Sample Learning Agreements. • Debriefing process for both learners and sponsors.	• Onboarding pack and/or training for sponsors.

Quality

Priority Three: Effective Learner Support Systems

Why is this Important?

Active learner support can help a higher proportion of learners to benefit from WBL opportunities and reduce the course drop-out rate. Learners should be well prepared for their placement before they even start.

Effective career guidance can help learners choose the career path that motivates them most and is the best fit. Ongoing, targeted support throughout the placement is necessary to ensure success for learners.

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 5. 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.

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 to 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.

What does good practice for Standard 3.1 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 3.1	The Institution	The Learner
Learners are well-prepared before they start their work placements.	• provides learners with high-quality career guidance for choosing the best fit WBL opportunity. • may call on sectoral associations to assist with this. • ensures learners have the necessary skills and competences expected by sponsors.	• is prepared socially, practically and psychology for WBL. • must have the commensurate literacy, numeracy and digital skills necessary for the WBL opportunity. • can do a study skills module at the start of their course.
Evidence	• Guidance resources and/or staff. • Process that evaluates learners' skills, abilities, aptitude and fit for the WBL opportunity. • A Study Skills module is available.	• Resources and staff to look after pastoral, welfare and skills-based needs, where necessary.

Standard 3.2 Learners are supported throughout their work placements.

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 them 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-conductive workplace situations as soon as this is brought to their attention.

What does good practice for Standard 3.2 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 3.2	The Institution	The Sponsor
Learners are supported throughout their work placements.	• sets up a reference point (or person) between all parties to the Learning Agreement • with sponsors, helps learners remain confident, committed and motivated in their jobs. • provides course teachers with pedagogic development on implementing and assessing WBL. • removes learners from negative or non-conductive workplace situations. • provides counselling support for mental health or welfare issues.	• creates a supportive and respectful workplace where all co-workers, trainers and managers provide training and clear feedback. • provides clear, accessible communication channels and feedback mechanisms. • has a learner support system for workplace-related issues.

Evidence	- Support personnel or department for WBL issues, including counselling service. - Scheme for teacher professional development vis-à-vis WBL. - Safeguarding process for WBL participants and sponsors.	Process and procedures in place at sponsor for WBL participants.
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Standard 3.3 On-the-job trainers sustain learners' learning process.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 3.3 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 3.3	The Institution	The Sponsor
On-the-job trainers sustain learners' learning progress.	- ensures all trainers supervising and mentoring learners are suitably experienced and qualified. - can develop <i>ad hoc</i> courses for teachers and workplace trainers on pedagogy, WBL frameworks, assessment, etc. - collaborates with sponsors to offer ongoing professional development for trainers and teachers.	- has adequate human resources to mentor, train and support learners. - ensures learners are well-trained before assigning them to actual tasks. - creates a work environment that encourages learners to be responsible and problem-solve by themselves where possible.

Evidence	• Safeguards for fulfilment of the Learning Agreement. • Ongoing process and procedures for sponsor-based trainers and institutional teachers to help them to develop professionally.	• Examples of learners being allowed independent thought and actions to solve problems.
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Why is this Important?

WBL provision must be managed robustly 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 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.

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.

What does good practice for Standard 4.1 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 4.1	The Institution	The Learner
Programmes of study are based on best practice and balanced and up-to-date curricula.	• updates study programmes regularly to reflect industry needs, new policies/ standards/technology, etc. • aligns learning outcomes with the learning experience, pedagogy, content-knowledge and assessment. • ensures curricula develops digital, self-management, professional and 21st century skills. • uses pedagogical school-based assessment, such as project-based learning, simulations and case studies. • seeks views of respective industry bodies to inform on and help develop curricula.	• is aware of the latest trends and methodologies in the respective industry.
Evidence	• Programme design, development and review processes, with an emphasis on WBL components. • Feedback from other stakeholders.	• Information about WBL opportunities reflect current and best practice, where possible.

Standard 4.2 Valid and reliable assessment systems are in place.

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 is 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.

What does good practice for Standard 4.2 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 4.2	The Institution	The Learner
Valid and reliable assessment systems are in place.	• is solely responsible for the WBL assessment process. • has experts visiting learners at their workplace and measuring progress. • uses assessment to improve learning experiences or plan changes in syllabus/teaching. • uses a variety of formative and summative assessments.	• can demonstrate learning through formative and summative assessment. • can discuss progress, present work, raise issues and demonstrate skills.
Evidence	• Clear framework and procedures for assessment. • Evidence of improvement based on feedback.	• Sample portfolios and completed assessments. • Interviews with learners.

Standard 4.3 Teachers and assessors are well-trained and suitably qualified to support learners.

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 knowhow and are up to date on the latest education and technology trends.

What does good practice for Standard 4.3 look like?

WBL processes are considered to be within the parameters of good practice when stakeholders are fulfilling the following tasks and when clear evidence is present as indicated below.

Standard 4.3	The Institution	The Teachers/Assessors
Teachers and assessors are well-trained and suitably qualified to support learners.	• appoints and vets all required staff for WBL duties. • lists WBL-related duties clearly in respective staff contractual documents. • supports continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and staff. • ensures that teaching staff understand and observe the ethical implications of their actions at all levels.	• are suitably trained and experienced in their respective fields. • are up to date with developments in their field. • are able to develop learners to reconstruct concepts and knowledge. • are able to observe and determine learner progression.
Evidence	• Clear policies and procedures on staff recruitment, development and retention for WBL.	• Sample reports of monitoring visits, debriefs, etc. • Interviews.

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. Programmes that include 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 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). Programmes that include 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 workforce. 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/s, which include 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. Online remote work counts as an 'on-the-job' course component.

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.

Appendix 1:

Rights and obligations of VET providers.

VET providers shall act as the administrators of the training programmes and shall be responsible for the development, coordination, control, assessment and certification of the training programmes, as well as the provision of the school-based learning component, and have such functions as set out in this Act and such other functions as may devolve upon them under any other law or as may be assigned by the Minister under this Act.

(2) With respect to training programmes it shall be the duty of VET providers to:

- (a) develop training programmes for skills that are in demand or are expected to be in demand in the future, based on national research reports and national requirements for skilled and technical occupations;
- (b) identify potential sponsor and training programme vacancies for learners;
- (c) develop training programmes in consultation with sponsors;
- (d) review and update the training programmes periodically at least every three years;
- (e) conduct internal quality audits on training programmes and their support administrative processes;
- (f) develop internal training programme regulations on educational and operational matters of the respective programmes;
- (g) set up of a Work-Based Learning Operational Board, as stipulated in this Act, intended to develop, administer, control and improve all processes pertaining to the training programmes in relation to work placements, apprenticeships and internships;
- (h) deliver school-based learning as part of the training programme;
- (i) conduct assessments of the skills gained by learners through work-based learning and school-based learning, based on learning outcomes specified in the training programme plan;
- (j) determine the transfer of credits earned in a training programme to another, taking into account the learning outcomes acquired in the course of such previous training;
- (k) compile a training programme plan as specified in this Act;
- (l) develop a training programme plan so that working and training hours shall be, as reasonably possible, flexible in order to make them more accessible to learners with dependents;
- (m) ensure that training programmes, systems and processes reflect the national strategy for social inclusion in education.

- (3) VET providers shall ensure that consideration is given to the special training programme requirements of disabled persons and that training of disabled persons is coordinated with other measures to promote their participation in working life.
- (4) With respect to qualifications and awards, it shall be the duty of the VET provider to:
 - (a) issue the qualification or award for each training programme in accordance with the Malta Qualifications Framework or on international qualification structures recognized by industry;
 - (b) exercise the voluntary option to issue a skills card, as specified in this Act, to the learner on the successful completion of the training programme;
 - (c) issue the EUROPASS Certificate/Diploma Supplement or similar to learners on the successful completion of the training programme.
- (5) With respect to training agreements it shall be the duty of the VET provider to:
 - (a) ensure that the content of the training agreement signed by the learners, the sponsor and the VET provider is compliant to the terms of this Act;
 - (b) ensure that the training programme plan pertaining to the balance of work-based learning and school-based learning is compliant to the terms of this Act;
 - (c) maintain a Register of Training Agreements.
- (6) It shall be the function of the VET provider, with regard to the sponsors, trainers and learners, to:
 - (a) supervise the suitability of sponsors and appointed lead trainers;
 - (b) supervise the suitability of the premises where work-based learning is held;
 - (c) ensure that the learners have a designated lead trainer on the work premises for the whole period of the training programme;
 - (d) determine the maximum number of learners that sponsors can engage, based on their respective resources for training and learning;
 - (e) maintain regular contact, communication and co-operation with the sponsors on all aspects of the training programme;
 - (f) provide information and access for learners regarding offers of work placement, apprenticeship, and, or internship opportunities by sponsors;
 - (g) match learners with training programme vacancies for final selection by the sponsor;
 - (h) provide counselling and guidance services to learners;
 - (i) take all necessary action to ensure the wellbeing of learners during the work placement, apprenticeship and/or internship opportunities provided by sponsors;

- (j) mediate on issues relating to work-based learning and training which may arise between the learner and sponsor;
- (k) manage the transfer of learners from one sponsor to another when the need arises and if the transfer is required by the nature of the training programme;
- (l) ensure that entry requirements and the selection of learners are equitable and free from discrimination on the grounds of: age, belief, creed and, or religion, colour, ethnic origin and, or race, disability, family responsibilities and, or pregnancy, family and, or civil status, gender expression and, or gender identity, genetic features, health status, political opinion, sex and, or sex characteristics, and sexual orientation.

Appendix 2:

Rights and obligations of sponsors.

It shall be the right of the sponsor to:

- (a) select prospective learners who apply for training programme vacancies;
- (b) advertise work-based learning and training programme vacancies through the VET providers or independently.

(2) Sponsors may be eligible for tax incentives for the cost incurred to engage a learner on a training programme.

(3) It shall be the obligation of the sponsor to:

- (a) pay a remuneration to the learner in accordance with the rate established by the relevant legislation, for the duration of the time the learner spends at the place of work as part of the work-based learning component, as predefined in the training programme plan;
- (b) ensure that learners are provided with the environment to achieve the learning outcomes as defined in the training programme plan;
- (c) run the work-based training process systematically, in accordance with the training programme plan, syllabus and timetable, in an appropriate form so that the training is achieved within the specified period;
- (d) allow learners to attend school-based learning sessions, assessments or any other commitments which are related to the training programme, as specified in the training programme plan;
- (e) allow learners to participate in international exchanges which are related to work-based learning, and which provide for the development of vocational competences as part of the training programme plan;
- (f) identify individuals who possess technical knowledge, experience and personal competence to act as lead trainers in terms of this Act;
- (g) ensure that learners have a designated lead trainer on the work premises for the whole period of the training programme;
- (h) entrust work-based training to the lead trainers or to suitable competent persons, as agreed with the VET provider, for the whole period of the training programme, and to other trainers who shall remain under the direction of the lead trainer;
- (i) ensure that the lead trainer is available at all times to monitor the learner and ensure that the learner is receiving adequate training;
- (j) provide the facilities and training necessary for the learner to achieve the learning outcomes necessary for the successful completion of the training programme's interim

and final assessment, administered by the VET provider;

- (k) provide the premises and equip learners with the tools and supplies necessary for the successful completion of the training programme and the passing of their interim and final assessments, administered by the VET provider, even if such assessments take place right after the end of the work-based period;
- (l) allow learners to attend at another workplace for a specified period of time to receive essential training that cannot be delivered within their establishment as specified in the training programme plan:

Provided that such allowance shall only be possible by prior agreement with the sponsor before the commencement of the learning programme as specified in the training agreement;

- (m) oblige learners to keep a written training logbook record up to date, and to inspect the records insofar as such records are required as part of the work placement, apprenticeship or internship;
- (n) provide proper health and safety equipment and facilities in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Authority Act;
- (o) ensure that learners are covered by the sponsor's public liability insurance and vehicle insurance, where appropriate;
- (p) ensure that learners are entrusted with tasks that serve the purpose required for the development of, and are commensurate with, the physical abilities;
- (q) ensure that the learners' well-being is safeguarded and that they are trained in an environment that is free from discrimination, work place bullying or harassment;
- (r) present training agreements to be entered in the Register maintained by the VET provider as soon as the agreements are established. The same shall apply to amendments to the essential stipulations of an agreement;
- (s) retain records of the training agreements and a record of progress of the learner in terms of work-based learning activities. Records shall be retained for a period of three years after the termination of the training programme. The sponsor shall pass on the records to the VET provider on demand within the period of the training programme and the subsequent three years;
- (t) immediately inform the VET provider of any learner's shortcomings in order for necessary action to be taken;
- (u) allow access for monitoring purposes by the VET provider's official representatives and any other official who is authorised by the VET provider.

Appendix 3:

Rights and obligations of learners.

Learners shall have the following rights:

- (a) learners may be eligible to benefit from student's maintenance grant in terms of the Student Maintenance Grant Regulations;
- (b) learners on apprenticeship programmes have the right to an income equivalent to the national minimum wage per hour for the hours spent at the workplace as stipulated in the training programme plan. The income per hour is calculated as the income derived from the sponsor and from the student maintenance grant.

(2) Learners shall have the following obligations:

- (a) perform tasks entrusted to them as part of their work-based training;
- (b) undergo vocational education and examinations as outlined in the training programme plan set by the VET provider;
- (c) abide by the instructions given to them within the framework of their work-based training by the sponsor, trainers or any other persons entitled to give them such instructions;
- (d) attend for the work-based learning component in accordance to the pre-established training programme plan set by the VET provider;
- (e) attend for any school-based learning as provided by the VET provider or any other service provider according to the needs, without absenting themselves for unjustified reasons;
- (f) update the training logbook on a regular basis as established by the VET provider in accordance to the requirements of the training programme;
- (g) notify the VET provider if the sponsor is not adhering to the conditions established in the training agreement;
- (h) abide by the rules of behaviour as established by the sponsor and the VET provider.