

Assessing work-based learning on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education – the view from three main stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

Signature: John Carty

Abstract

The tourism and hospitality industry has been at the forefront in partnerships with higher education for many years and a key feature of this relationship is work-based learning, which sees students enter industry-partner workplaces as part of their study. The main issues with work-based learning are the lack of consistency across and within higher education institutes, the tensions that exist between the stakeholders and the changing higher education sector that is impacted by a neoliberalism agenda and marketisation, resulting in a push for employable graduates. The Covid-19 pandemic and negative industry image present challenges for higher education and tourism and hospitality, whilst the work-based learning power imbalance has also led to an attitude of servitude from higher education institutes towards industry.

The research utilises the community of practice theoretical framework and a case study approach to investigate these issues in an Irish context by assessing work-based learning from the viewpoint of three key stakeholders: students, industry and higher education institute staff. Fifty-seven surveys were conducted with students at one higher education institute and 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with higher education staff (n=13) and tourism and hospitality industry professionals (n=7).

The main finding of this research is the variety and inconsistencies that prevail within and across higher education institutes regarding work-based learning, fragmented partnerships and the opportunities and challenges of assessment. Resourcing work-based learning was found to be a significant issue that attracts high costs for higher education and industry partners, but research shows evidence of low investment. Assessment of work-based learning varies greatly, and a more consistent approach is suggested for the sector, with special attention given to the role of industry and the scheduling of assessments to allow for more meaningful and consistent work-based learning experiences. The research recommends a refocusing of work-based learning on the learner and presents the Learner Focused Work-Based Learning Framework to create more effective partnerships and address consistency across the landscape, overseen by a national oversight group.

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List of abbreviations and organisations

| | |
|----------------|---|
| AHECS | Association for Higher Education and Careers Services |
| ALPS | Assessment and Learning in Practice Setting |
| AVEA | Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions |
| CAFCE | Canadian Association for Co-operative Education |
| CEWIL | Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning |
| CoP | community of practice |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills |
| DTCAGSM | Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media |
| DTTS | Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport |
| EGFSN | Expert Group on Future Skills Needs |
| EIAI | Event Industry Association of Ireland |
| FET | further education and training |
| FI | Fáilte Ireland |
| HE | higher education |
| HEA | Higher Education Authority |
| HEI | higher education institute |
| HSOG | Hospitality Skills Oversight Group |
| IBEC | Irish Business and Employers Confederation |
| IHF | Irish Hotels Federation |
| IHI | Irish Hospitality Institute |
| IoT | Institute of Technology |
| ISSE | Irish Survey of Student Engagement |
| ITIC | Irish Tourism Industry Confederation |
| ITOA | Incoming Tour Operators Association |
| LoP | landscape of practice |
| LVA | Licensed Vintners Association |
| MSF | multisource feedback |
| MTU | Munster Technological University |
| National Forum | National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education |
| NFQ | National Framework of Qualifications |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PEAR | pedagogy, experience, assessment, reflection |
| POC | Panel of Chefs |
| QEP | Quality Employer Programme |
| QQI | Quality and Qualifications Ireland |
| RAI | Restaurants Association of Ireland |
| REAP | Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| RQ | research question |
| SOLAS | An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna |
| THEA | Technological Higher Education Association |
| TI | Tourism Ireland |
| TUD | Technological University of Dublin |
| UNWTO | United Nations World Tourism Organisation |
| USI | Union of Students in Ireland |
| VFI | Vintners' Federation of Ireland |
| WBA | work-based assessment |
| WBL | work-based learning |
| WTTC | World Travel and Tourism Council |

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Tourism and hospitality (hereafter referred to as T&H) are growth industries in Ireland, accounting for 6.2% of the country's GDP (Knoema, 2019) and approximately 1 in 10 jobs (ITIC, 2020a). Worldwide, travel and tourism accounts for 10% of GDP and 1 in 10 jobs (WTTC, 2020) and increasingly, the industry workforce is being professionalised and T&H programmes can be found in higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world. As a subject, or discipline, T&H stand out from other more traditionally academic subjects; combining practice, real world experience as well as theoretical knowledge. As such work-based learning (WBL) has become a key motif within undergraduate programmes; however, from my own experience as a HE lecturer working on WBL programmes, I have observed a level of taken for grantedness among the three key stakeholders (students, industry and HEI staff) with regards to how WBL is organised, delivered, assessed and its outcomes. The current situation resulting from the Covid-19 global health pandemic has illuminated this taken for grantedness as WBL and opportunities for students to enter industry have been postponed and are no longer guaranteed. What replaces WBL, should the pandemic play out for a longer duration, is a key question facing all three stakeholders in T&H, in particular for overseas placements, but also for those in local settings. This research offers a timely evaluation of T&H WBL in ten Irish HEIs to identify the key issues and views of the three WBL stakeholders (students, HEIs and industry) and to understand the challenges and opportunities for WBL resourcing, assessment, and for creating effective partnerships.

There is a need for a more strategic approach to WBL and to regard it as an integral part of a HEIs core activity rather than a supplementary pursuit (Basit *et al.*, 2015). As I argue here, WBL experiences are often seen as outside of a university or institutional business, leading to stakeholders to take WBL for granted. I have chosen to focus on T&H because this is my area of expertise and a domain within which I have years of experience. Moreover, there is a lacuna regarding research in an Irish context and, thus, this research will make significant contributions to the theory in this area, whilst also making important recommendations for policy. Specifically, this research advances the Community of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework through its application in the T&H WBL field.

The research seeks to answer the following four research questions, which are discussed later in this chapter in line with the research objectives and methodology. In order to provide a context for the background discussion that follows in this introductory chapter however, the research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: How and in what way is WBL regarded by different tourism and hospitality stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)?

RQ 2: What tensions are there between different stakeholder understandings of WBL, particularly regarding employability, assessment, and student engagement/quality?

RQ 3: How are the pressures of a more marketised and consumer focused HE sector (globally, but specifically within Ireland) manifested in and contributing to the ways WBL is developing within tourism and hospitality programmes?

RQ4: What are the implications of these findings for supporting changes in how work-based learning is managed in Irish higher education institutes?

I use the remainder of this introductory chapter to situate T&H at the centre of Irish culture and demonstrate how WBL and HE have emerged as key enablers and supports to the T&H ecosystem. I present the research objectives and design used to address the research questions and I conclude with a broad overview of the thesis structure, organised over six chapters.

T&H in Ireland

As an industry, T&H has been a key player in Ireland's economy for many years (DTTS, 2015; DTTS, 2016; ITIC, 2017; ITIC, 2018; ITIC, 2021) and it is anticipated to grow in importance in years to come, with a need to expand the tourism workforce by 80,000 employees by 2025, to cater for the forecasted growth in tourism numbers (ITIC, 2018). HEIs have a long history of resourcing T&H workforces through WBL placements and graduates, which I posit is undervalued by industry. Since January 2020, Covid-19 has severely impacted the tourism industry, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2021) estimates international visitors may have been reduced by up to 75% in 2020, due to the travel restrictions and business closures. In Ireland, ITIC (2020b)

have called this “Irish tourism’s greatest challenge”, due to the severity of the impacts – with most businesses closed, major events cancelled, travel restrictions and access transport curtailment and they predict that tourism revenue decreased by 85% in 2020 (ITIC, 2020c). This research began pre-Covid-19 and much of the project has taken place in a pre-pandemic landscape. However, the pandemic has reemphasised the simultaneous importance of WBL and its precarity. The industry and landscape in which it operates has changed and considerable uncertainty remains. Thus, it might be expected that WBL will take a back seat; however, during recessions, enrolment in higher education (HE) often surges as more people lose their jobs and face a lack of job prospects (Whistle, 2020). An increase in student T&H enrolments would place further demands on WBL, which might be difficult to meet as businesses remain closed or operating with less capacity. Innovations to in-person WBL may well have to be imagined. It remains to be seen if this trend will materialise for T&H programmes in HE; nevertheless, this study of WBL is important as the Irish government plans to roll out WBL on all undergraduate programmes in the coming years.

The study draws insights from the three central stakeholders involved in WBL - students, HEIs, and industry - and whilst the focus of my research is T&H, the research will also interest stakeholders involved in other vocational programmes and similar audiences outside of Ireland, particularly as WBL continues to grow in popularity elsewhere. WBL theory and practice are found in many industries, such as health practice (Rounce and Workman, 2005) and engineering (Medhat, 2008) and Stibbe (2013) points out that WBL is now embedded within humanities programmes with no obvious employer connection, therefore elements of this research will be relevant to a wide range of programmes leaders who are interested in industry engagement. There is a lacuna regarding research on T&H WBL in Ireland and this study offers a significant opportunity for the wider HEI community who are looking towards including WBL across all programmes, particularly as I question the focus on graduate employability skills, which I argue is a result of a move towards a marketised HE sector.

Ireland: The Island of the Welcomers

T&H represent one of Ireland’s largest industries; it makes a major contribution to Ireland’s economic prosperity and is worth over €6 billion annually, with over 20,000 businesses supporting 265,000

jobs (ITIC, 2020a). The Irish tourism industry includes many sub-sectors: accommodation, food and beverage, travel and transport organisations, cultural activities, sports and recreational activities and retail trade. I envisage tourism as an umbrella industry that covers many sub-sectors, such as hospitality, which in Ireland is comprised of hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs, canteens, and catering operators' (EGFSN, 2015). This highlights the scale and importance of T&H, particularly as an industry that has the potential to reach all parts of Ireland, including rural areas. T&H is geographically dispersed, both nationally and internationally, and can be found in remote areas where a local skilled workforce, or alternative employment, is not readily available (Solnet *et al.*, 2014). In Ireland, the sector is a significant contributor to regional employment and there is a high extent of seasonal/casual and part-time employment (40%) in the hospitality sector, 30% of the industry are non-national staff, and more staff will be needed in the future to meet forecasted growth (EGFSN, 2015). There are many drivers impacting on the demand for skills in the hospitality industry: growth of new hospitality products and services, growing number of overseas visitors with an increased length of stay, seasonal nature of demand, technological change, value competitiveness and changing consumer demand (EGFSN, 2015). T&H work is greatly influenced by the impacts of precariousness of seasonality, can be anti-social in the demands it makes on the working day, and is frequently perceived to be of low status and limited desirability from a career perspective (Mooney, 2018). Whilst Covid-19 is certainly challenging the industry, highlighting its vulnerability (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), T&H has known ability to respond quickly post-crises by providing employment and income opportunities (OECD, 2020) and is well placed to be a driving force to help stimulate the economy in 2021 and beyond. WBL will play a role by providing learners to work in industry as part of their HE studies. Successful WBL will only be possible if HEIs commit resources to planning, co-ordinating and innovating WBL, more than they have in the past and industry must recognise their role in creating effective partnerships that have historically been taken for granted.

Tourism in Ireland is an industry that reaches all corners of the country and hospitality is at the heart of the Irish culture, with everyone involved in T&H to some extent; residents in host communities engage with and impact on the visitor experience, be they domestic or overseas, same-day or overnight visitors. Ireland is often called the 'Island of the Welcomers' and hospitality is

something that is said comes naturally to people in Ireland. However, as society changes, the need to ensure a focus on what makes a highly skilled T&H graduate is of utmost importance and should not be taken for granted. To this end, formal education is provided at various qualification levels via both institutes of HE and Further Education and Training (FET). The HEIs typically provide courses at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 6 to Level 10, while FET institutes provide courses from NFQ Level 1 to Level 6.

The research presented here focuses on HE only, and the T&H programmes under examination relate to hotel, hospitality, tourism, event, and culinary. The significance of the T&H industry is reflected in the range of related HE programmes on offer throughout the country. From 2011 to 2016, there were an average of 90 HE hotel, restaurants and catering courses, with 3,802 enrolments each year (HSOG, 2018). For the same timeframe, there were an average of 10 travel, tourism and leisure courses with average enrolments each year of 342 (HSOG, 2018). In 2015, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) report assessed the skills demand needs arising within the hospitality sector in Ireland up to 2020 and recommended the setting up of the Hospitality Skills Oversight Group (HSOG), which had a two-year term from 2016 to 2018. These documents make much reference to the need for education and skills provision to support industry and employment growth (EGFSN, 2015; HSOG, 2018) but there is notable absence of WBL in either, which supports later contentions in this study that WBL is often taken for granted or not taken seriously enough.

The T&H industry is perceived to be tough, combining unsociable hours with low pay and poor progression opportunities and these factors have led to a reduction in programmes on offer and a decline in associated enrolments and graduates, which is particularly noticeable in the culinary industry, with the shortage of chefs receiving much publicity (Kenny, 2019; O'Brien, 2019). Such trends emphasise the close relationship between HEIs and industry and as one suffers in terms of enrolments, the other ultimately suffers the loss of WBL students and graduates to make the successful transition into businesses. This highlights the need to create effective partnerships between HEIs and industry to make the industry attractive to students again, and to offer WBL opportunities that provide positive experiences of T&H industry and support longer term

commitments to the professions within it. It should be said that downward HEI enrolment trends are not confined to Ireland; indeed, they are mirrored across the world (Dillon, 2018; Giousmpasoglou, *et al.*, 2019). Even so, the continued demand for T&H workers often leads to employers seeking unskilled workers who go straight into industry rather than study the T&H discipline as a prerequisite.

Significant training and learning can be provided on-the-job, which is one reason why WBL has been so successful in the T&H industry and why WBL is being adopted by other HE programmes. Given its long history of involvement, T&H can act as a WBL exemplar and this research offers recommendations that can be adopted by other sectors. In 2016, the Irish Government launched the *National Skills Strategy 2025*, which aims to offer all full-time students studying at levels 6 to 8 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (see Appendix Six) with access to work placements and internships (DES, 2016: 86). This strategy also aims to ensure that students at levels 9 and 10 on the NFQ have access to work placements or work-based projects and case studies, as appropriate (DES, 2016: 86). This strategy acknowledges that employer engagement is not consistent across regions or sectors but seeks to build on good practice already underway and ensure that this is systemised where appropriate (DES, 2016: 83). These aims are of great concern in a context where WBL resourcing is a challenge. Moreover, there is a risk that the proliferation of WBL on all HE programmes will lead to diluted opportunities and experiences for all stakeholders. The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DES, 2011: 59) highlighted the challenge of finding suitable WBL opportunities for large numbers of students, further exacerbated when significant numbers of second-level students and other training courses are seeking placements. Service learning, integrating meaningful community service with instruction and reflection, is suggested as an alternative to address the challenge of sourcing WBL (DES, 2011: 59), but would not be sufficient to replace T&H WBL, which has specific learning outcomes. Further drawbacks of WBL as cited in the literature are set out in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 3 where I discuss how lessons from T&H experience may address such issues. As stated, concerns around issues of (under) resourcing of WBL specialised staff are central. This is something that was illuminated in the primary data discussed in Chapter 5.

Under-resourcing WBL programmes is a key problem for the sector and can lead to negative student experiences and, hence, attrition. Notwithstanding, another reason often cited for high rates of attrition from the T&H industry or for avoiding it altogether, is the problematic culture of the workplace. Although anecdotal, there are many horror stories that people share from their experiences as casual workers in the industry or as WBL participants. In my role of tutor to many WBL students, I have heard accounts of deplorable working conditions and poor WBL management. With all T&H programmes offering WBL opportunities, this highlights the need to ensure that we 'get it right', which is an onus that falls on all stakeholders, the HEI, industry and the student themselves. HEIs and industry need to commit dedicated resources to ensure that WBL is co-ordinated, supervised and monitored and there are some good examples of this; however, it does not happen consistently enough. Hospitality employees are highly mobile (Duncan *et al.*, 2013) and there are high rates of exit/replacement among certain occupations in the sector, notably among waiters/waitresses, bar staff and chefs. Other factors being equal, high levels of exit among staff will increase the replacement component of future skills requirements in the sector. The T&H industry has a track record for being associated with anxiety, depression and poor mental health (Suesey Street, 2018) and research also points to evidence of sexual harassment in the Irish hospitality sector (Falvey, 2019). The challenges are many, therefore, it is important that educators and industry work together to overcome student wellbeing and student experience barriers and to make the industry more attractive to new entrants and to retain workers and students in the industry.

Covid-19 is an opportunity for the T&H industry to reflect on improvements as they restart, and it is hoped that the taken for granted attitude shown by some stakeholders towards WBL will be reframed to focus on the benefit and value of WBL partnerships. Education providers can use this restart opportunity to revisit WBL and with proper engagement, all three stakeholders can improve the experience and outcomes of WBL within T&H programmes, with a particular focus on resourcing, assessment and creating effective partnerships. In Chapter 4, I discuss the constructivist paradigm used in my analysis and I stress the importance of a good workplace culture for learning to take place and to allow the construction of new ideas. I was lucky to have positive WBL experiences myself as a T&H undergraduate student but am aware of some people who were 'turned off' the

industry based on negative WBL experiences. It is my contention that the WBL experience should not be left to luck or chance, and this research aims to address that challenge, drawing on the data I have generated and my own experience (as a WBL student, WBL mentor and WBL academic).

I am a graduate of a hospitality programme at a HEI that included two WBL components (one for 12 weeks and one for 12 months). I have worked in the T&H industry where part of my role was mentoring and supervising WBL students and I now teach in an Irish HEI and am involved in the learning experience and assessment of T&H programmes, including WBL. I also held a similar part-time teaching role in one other Irish HEI and have acted as an external examiner in four other institutions. Having occupied all three WBL stakeholder roles and being closely involved with six of the twelve Irish HEIs who offer T&H programmes, I have particular interest in WBL and carried out initial research in this area (Carty, 2014a). Through student surveys and interviews with HEI staff, I learned that students and employees are more likely to stay in the industry if they feel they are being invested in and offered continuous professional development and lifelong learning (Carty, 2014a).

Davies *et al.* (2012) predicts the future of lifelong learning will be interactive partnerships between the worlds of management and WBL, open and virtual university networks and frameworks. Covid-19 may have accelerated such a move, as HE has been forced to migrate online and WBL has had to adapt too, therefore, this investigation is timely as it identifies good practices for assessment of WBL. Well-run WBL is an effective way of harnessing the knowledge economy as the skills of lifelong learning need to be nurtured, especially in learning how to learn (Lester, 1999). Work-based assessment (WBA) is a key element of successful WBL, which requires effective partnerships and understanding between all WBL stakeholders. Before partnerships can be established and nurtured, industry and HEIs must commit resources to support and manage WBL, which I suggest has been lacking at times and this research helps to advance this issue for T&H and other industries.

In 2016, I represented one of five Irish HEIs in a National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum) funded project to discuss a standardised approach to assessments as/of/for Learning of placements and internships in hospitality education. This limited primary research with the key stakeholders highlighted an appetite

for standardisation and the use of ePortfolios emerged, which I probe further in this study. In 2021, I am engaged with a National Forum research fellowship to pilot a workshop on optimising the balance between meaningful (authentic) and comparable (consistent) WBA in a T&H context at one Irish HEI. The pilot is part of a national project that I am well positioned to contribute to as it aligns closely with the findings in this study, which calls for consistency in the T&H context, particularly for resourcing, and assessment in order to establish effective WBL partnerships.

Supporting Industry: Tourism and Hospitality, Work based Learning (WBL) and HE

Work placement is defined as a work context for intentional learning that is relevant to the aims and intended learning outcomes of a HE programme or module (Sheridan and Lenihan, 2011: 9). It is also suggested that work placements are a planned transition from the classroom to the job and are a natural bridge between college and the work world (Coco, 2000). For the purposes of this research, I use the term work-based learning (WBL) and define it as applying the knowledge, know-how, skills and competencies gained in a HE setting, to enhance the workplace learning for the student, whilst also meeting the organisation performance objectives, resulting in reflective opportunities for all stakeholders. WBL is seen as an ideal way to connect theory with practice, while applying acquired discipline knowledge in the workplace (Smith *et al.*, 2014). Sheridan (2019) suggests WBL is central to the acquisition of learning which cannot be gained in the classroom and the application of learning that is gained in the classroom in the practice domain. WBL itself helps prepare students for the transition from HE to the workplace (Linehan, 2008), which can be a complex and confusing process (Nyström *et al.*, 2008) and it can also improve employment prospects (Smith *et al.*, 2014). The increasing interest in WBL stems from an understanding that work-ready graduates are expected by industry (Gribble, 2012), particularly in industries with skills shortages, such as T&H. As a result, HEIs are under pressure to produce work-ready graduates who will enjoy a smooth transition into the workforce (McLeenan and Keating, 2008), and this topic of the drive for employability and neoliberalism is further probed in Chapter 3. WBL is now seen as a mainstream form of flexible HE pedagogy (Nottingham, 2016), however, there has been a tendency to narrowly define WBL as a mode of study (QAA, 2012), which might limit the pedagogic scope for academics who are seeking

a more comprehensive interpretation of WBL to inform their learning and teaching strategies (Nottingham, 2016). In my experience, most WBL in the T&H industry use the field of study approach (i.e. using generic and transdisciplinary criteria) rather than the mode of study (i.e. using subject specific criteria). Costley and Armsby (2007) contend that more practice-based programmes require more practice-based models of assessment that fully acknowledge the context of work (ibid.: 23) but the data from this study shows current assessment methods of WBL on some T&H programmes do not fulfil this. The portfolio approach (Costley and Armsby, 2007; Jones, 2013) as a mode of study is well established on T&H programmes and others could learn a lot from how they have been used to capture student learnings before, during and after WBL, which I return to in Chapter 5.

T&H industry has been at the forefront in partnerships with HE to provide real WBL opportunities to students on work placements, work experiences, internships and all the other many formats of WBL. Therefore, as HE moves towards more industry engagement and WBL opportunities, I argue that T&H professionals and educators can be at the forefront in terms of leading the change and providing guidance based on the many years' experience gained through partnerships. As WBL is rolled out across more programmes, T&H programmes can act as leaders or exemplars in terms of how WBL can be integrated and workable partnerships achieved with industry. T&H programmes have been forerunners with regard of the recontextualisation of knowledge as it moves from context to context, in a WBL and classroom setting, the two-way process of generating theory from practice and vice versa. Currently there are issues with the WBL process, which are not exclusive to one industry or one HEI and this research addresses these challenges that are also cited in literature, in particular around assessment, creating effective partnerships and resourcing WBL.

Smith (2014) suggests that when, how and who assesses the WBL will depend on the context and purpose of assessment. These are concepts that I believe are central to 'good' assessment and I investigate each aspect in this research and the opportunities and challenges of industry involvement in the WBL assessment process. Assessment is a critical piece of the jigsaw, and there will be more discussion of this in Chapter 2 and 3, but for now it is important to mention assessment in the context of accredited WBL modules, based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation

System (Europa, 2013). The WBL modules on T&H programmes I investigated at ten Irish HEIs vary from 10 weeks (worth between 0 and 10 credits) to 30 weeks and up to 52 weeks in one case (worth up to 30 credits). Usually each academic year/stage consists of 60 credits, so WBL with 30 credits are quite significant for each of the three main stakeholders in the WBL process and I have observed that some partners, particularly industry and HEIs can sometimes take WBL for granted. It is common to have multiple WBL experiences on a programme, for example, 12 weeks between first and second year, with a 30-week WBL as part of the third year of a four-year programme. WBL is an integral component of these programmes and how it is assessed needs further attention, as set out in Chapter 2 and 3.

The topic of assessment is very much on the national agenda in Ireland and for 2016-2017, the theme of *Assessment of/for/as Learning* was the focus for the National Forum. As part of this theme, the National Forum (2017) provided an insight of the context, purposes and methods of work-based assessment of/for/as learning, which is very useful in enhancing the understanding of the various approaches to WBL in HE and allowed me to relate their findings to T&H stakeholders. One of the questions they discuss is who should be involved in assessment, which is an area my research addresses, specifically the role of industry/workplace staff in the assessment process and this is further discussed in Chapter 3. The National Forum (2020) have developed this topic with numerous webinars and a national symposium on WBA which have highlighted many of the issues raised during my research also and I will return to this in Chapter 5. QQI (2018) published a Green Paper on *Assessment of Learners and Learning* for consultation and they raise the issues of grading WBL assessments and quality assuring assessment in the workplace (QQI, 2018: 62), which is further investigated during this research.

WBL in T&H has undergone many changes over the years. Hotels have a great history of training their own staff, on-the-job WBL and many T&H businesses are now formalising this with structured training programmes or graduate management programmes. A common theme emerging from this research is the impact of changes in government support for training in the industry, including WBL. In 1955, Bord Fáilte was established to promote tourism in the Republic of Ireland, at home and abroad and as tourism in Ireland developed, the Council for Education, Recruitment

and Training (CERT) was established in 1963 to provide education, recruitment and training services for the T&H industry (Fáilte Ireland, 2020). CERT had their own training facilities around the country where they focused on skill-based programmes that provided skilled workers to the industry. As HE progressed, CERT worked closely with HEIs to hand over these programmes, which included WBL components. CERT provided supports to HEIs through funding of the programmes and oversight in terms of quality assurances, which respondents to this research said worked very well as it allowed consistency and central oversight. In 2002, Bord Fáilte was disbanded to make way for the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland. This new body continued to support skill-based programmes in HEIs for several years, but CERT was gone, and the authority moved away from the educational space, leaving FET and the HEIs to deliver the programmes without financial support or oversight. This devolution of T&H training from a central government agency (CERT) to individual HEIs was positive in many ways, but experienced academics and industry stakeholders involved in this project have noted the value of a centralised approach. These findings are teased out in Chapter 5 and in Chapter 6 where I make recommendations for policy, and the return of a national oversight group.

A key feature of well-organised and effective WBL is the establishment and maintenance of partnerships between all stakeholders and an opportunity for each one to learn from the other. WBL might be understood as more along the lines of expansive learning (McArthur, 2011), rather than restrictive learning, in that it refers to learning that enhances the individual's wellbeing and contributes to a better society. I follow McArthur (2011) who argues that HE should serve all society, sustaining, enriching, cultivating and critiquing the culture that underpins that society and I revisit this concept in Chapters 5 and 6.

Research Objectives and Design

The research questions are re-stated below followed by the objectives driving this research.

RQ 1: How and in what way is WBL regarded by different tourism and hospitality stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)?

RQ 2: What tensions are there between different stakeholder understandings of WBL, particularly regarding employability, assessment and student engagement/quality?

RQ 3: How are the pressures of a more marketised and consumer focused HE sector (globally, but specifically within Ireland) manifested in and contributing to the ways WBL is developing within tourism and hospitality programmes?

RQ4: What are the implications of these findings for supporting changes in how work-based learning is managed in Irish higher education institutes?

To support the research questions, several research objectives were identified to shape the research strategy:

1. To critically review the literature in the field of WBL and how its role is viewed by the various stakeholders (students, HEIs, industry), in particular focusing on employability and engagement.
2. To critically review the literature in the field of assessment of WBL, specifically investigating industry involvement in the process, to determine its influence on WBL learning and teaching.
3. To develop appropriate methodology and methods to explore the WBL issues impacting the main stakeholders participating in tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education.
4. To present the findings of the study by incorporating examples of good practice.
5. To discuss the findings in conjunction with the literature and contribute to knowledge and practice by considering the practical implications for the various stakeholders (students, HEIs, industry).

Methodology

To address the research questions and objectives, I engaged with key WBL stakeholders; students, HEIs and industry and a more detailed overview is offered in Chapter 4. I began by surveying 57 students post-WBL on T&H programmes in one Irish HEI, which helped to set the scene and identify issues from the student perspective. I then completed thirteen semi-structured interviews (SSIs)

across ten HEIs in Ireland (ten with lecturers who are also responsible for coordinating T&H WBL and three with Heads of School). To further breakdown HEIs, they are identified by the number of T&H students undertaking mandatory WBL annually: small (less than 50), medium (between 50 and 100) and large (over 100). There were five respondents from large HEIs, four from medium HEIs and four from small HEIs. To complete the stakeholder analysis, seven industry interviews were undertaken, five with industry professionals and two with industry group representatives. Common themes emerged throughout the research and there were divergent views presented also, which are laid out in Chapter 5.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised into six chapters, beginning with **Chapter 1**, which gives an overview of the importance of T&H to Ireland's economy and way of life, and it situates T&H in the HE landscape. The WBL focus of the research and its assessment is introduced and the motivations for undertaking the research are discussed, before outlining the research questions and objectives and briefly discussing the methodology undertaken. Throughout the chapter, the justification for the research is made and the intended contributions of the research to knowledge and practice are considered. **Chapter 2** presents the literature on WBL, teaching and learning for WBL and assessment of/for/as WBL and positions my research at the intersection of these topics. The benefits of WBL are discussed and challenges are identified, such as resourcing WBL, ineffective partnerships and assessing WBL. The communities of practice (CoP) theoretical framework is also applied to WBL, which relates to the concept of boundary-crossing that occurs as a result of WBL. CoP is utilised as a model for developing WBL as a tripartite experience, which forms part of my theoretical contribution as I make recommendations on creative effective partnerships. The CoP theory has developed to focus on the multiple communities people belong to and I present the landscape of practice (LoP) theory from a local, national and international perspective.

The changing HE landscape is presented in **Chapter 3** where the neoliberalism agenda is discussed and the push for employable graduates is identified. The drive towards employability calls for better partnerships and I discuss how assessment can play a role in that process by looking at self-assessment and the role of industry in WBL assessment. The chapter concludes with a focus

on complications associated with WBL. **Chapter 4** presents the research methodology and methods, commencing with a brief overview of the constructivist paradigm theoretical framework and research philosophy, justifying the interpretivist ontology and epistemology approaches used for this study. The research process is outlined, and the case study approach and data generation is explained (57 student surveys, 13 interviews with HEIs and 7 interviews with industry partners) followed by a description of the analysis of the data.

Chapter 5 sets out the overwhelming positive views towards WBL and identifies WBL as a positive feature of HE worth protecting. The Chapter reviews the findings by describing the experiences of each of the WBL stakeholders (students, HEIs and industry) in relation to four common and divergent themes that emerged. Theme one discusses the culture of individualism and a lack of cohesion that exists. Theme two identifies the high cost of resourcing effective WBL, which needs more investment. Theme three outlines the fragmented partnerships that arise from various tensions among and between stakeholders. Theme four investigates the opportunities and challenges of WBL assessment. **Chapter 6**, the concluding discussion offers recommendations for the WBL stakeholders on how to improve the quality of the WBL experience, particularly relating to resourcing, assessing and creating effective partnerships. The recommendations are made with the learner as the focus of all decisions and the term learner is purposely chosen to replace student in an attempt to refocus the stakeholder views of the true essence of WBL – learning. I present a new framework to enhance the capacity and capability for T&H WBL, whilst delivering shared stakeholder understanding under the guidance of a national oversight group. I discuss the contribution to knowledge and practice provided by this research and the limitations of the study and implications for future research are also considered.

Chapter Summary

The legitimacy of WBL as a source of learning is increasingly recognised by HEIs and the need for effective partnerships and appropriate assessment is coming under more scrutiny. As a result, the findings from this study can be used to develop recommendations for HEIs currently using WBL or those thinking of introducing such practices. There is a lack of T&H research into this issue in Ireland,

particularly around the involvement of industry in the assessment practice. The lack of guidance for those involved in coordinating and assessing WBL makes it difficult to ensure consistent and quality learning experiences. Without common guidelines, HEIs may adopt their own methods of implementation and assessment. To address this, the findings from this study can be used to develop recommendations for HEIs employing WBL or those introducing them for the first time. Guidelines are necessary to ensure accountability, consistency and rigour in all assessment processes and to enhance the learning experience for all involved.

Chapter 2: Appraising WBL for Tourism and Hospitality – Situating the Research

Introduction

This chapter appraises the literature relating to WBL for T&H and begins by explaining how the secondary research was conducted, the intersections of literature reviewed and the searching and filtering process. I explain that WBL and the concept of learning through work has been around for many years and outline the different forms of WBL and how it is defined. The benefits and challenges of WBL are presented and the theme of WBL assessment is detailed. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the CoP and LoP theoretical frameworks and how they relate to WBL. The aim of this chapter is to set out the context for WBL and emergent themes are further elaborated in Chapter 3 and 4, with the related findings of this research presented in Chapter 5.

The Literature Review Process

I carried out a thorough research and critique of existing secondary sources to prepare for the task of undertaking primary research and to aid in the design of interview and survey protocols. McCracken (1988) contends that the researcher who is well versed in the literature has a set of expectations that the primary data can challenge and I prepared for this by conducting a literature review of published articles and reports, journals, books, reports and theorists in the relevant areas. This was complemented by an extensive situational analysis regarding relevant policies to gain an understanding and insight into relevant subject matters including assessment, WBL and the role of industry in assessment. The three key areas of literature researched were: WBL, teaching and learning for WBL and assessment of/for/as WBL. My research sits at the intersection of these literatures (see Figure 2.1).

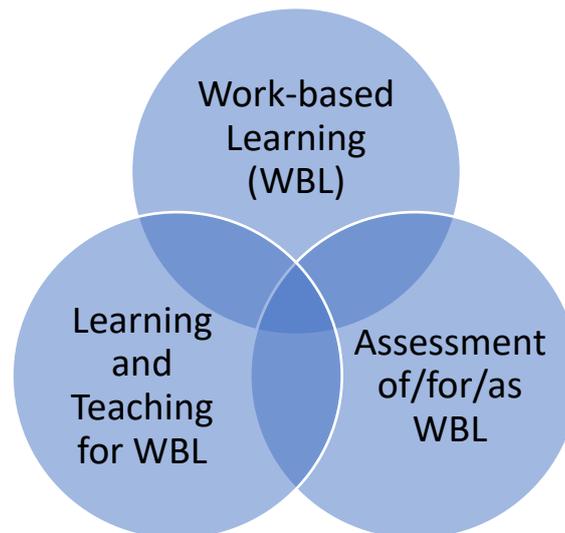


Figure 2.1: Intersection of Literature Reviewed

The WBL literature review began by defining WBL and discussing different terminology used and the history of WBL is traced back to the early 20th century (Dewey, 1916) and Plato and Aristotle's connection to WBL are featured. The reasons for growth of WBL are outlined, as well as criticisms and challenges of WBL. Particular focus is paid to emerging Irish policy and initiatives that are all part of driving the knowledge economy and lifelong learning.

After gaining a background in WBL literature, I delved into the literature on learning and teaching, specifically related to WBL and the topics included situated learning, self-directed learning and expansive learning. The notion of employability and career management competencies are also explored and the debate around WBL being a mode or a field of study leads on to a review of literature on WBL and programme design. The literature on briefing sessions, learning outcomes, learning agreements/contracts and the student's ability to reflect appropriately are examined and there is much consensus across the literature.

As I navigated through the literature, a common issue that kept arising (as it did in my academic role) was the need for good practice relating to WBL assessment. I reviewed the literature on assessment generally and connected it to WBL, setting out some general theories and investigating the views on formative, summative, self, peer and holistic assessment. The topic of validity and reliability is raised and the challenge of assessing employability skills. A significant area of discussion is around work-based assessors and the power brokerage that this can cause, which

leads to the feedback on assessment and overall equity and quality assurance. A considerable body of literature features resource implications of WBL for HEIs and industry and there is further discussion about this and assessment in Chapter 3.

Searching for and filtering the literature

I began by only seeking out peer reviewed academic journal articles as I believe they offered a sound academic basis and initially I left the search dates open, as I was looking to track the development of these concepts over time. The OneSearch facility from the library at Lancaster University was the main tool for searching the literature and I also accessed some articles via an online search database, Google Scholar. I focussed on more recent papers (within 10 to 15 years) and book chapters in later searches, to ensure that I had the most recent thinking on the topic. There is a lot written about this topic, so I filtered the work by looking for literature relating to T&H. This was a lot more focussed and the results were mostly from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Asia (Bilsland and Nagy, 2020; Hayden *et al.*, 2001; Hughes, *et al.*, 2013; Khuong, 2016; Spowart, 2006; Walo, 2001; Wood and Roberts, 2017). There is a significant gap in terms of Irish literature; however, I widened the search to include Irish conference papers and this approach yielded some useful material. As McCracken (1988: 31) argues, a good literature review is a critical process that makes the investigator the “master not the captive of previous scholarship”. The literature review helps the researcher decide what to ask the respondents during their primary data collection (McCracken, 1988: 31) and by the end of the review, I had a list of topics for which questions and interview templates were prepared.

I undertook secondary research of policy documents (DES, 2011; DES, 2016; DES, 2017, DTCAGSM, 2020; DTTS, 2015; DTTS, 2016; HEA, 2018; ITIC, 2015; ITIC, 2018; ITIC, 2020b; ITIC, 2021; OECD, 2020; QQI, 2014; QQI, 2018) primary analysis of secondary data (EGFSN, 2013; EGFSN, 2015; HSOG, 2018; ISSE, 2020; ITIC, 2017; ITIC, 2020a; ITIC, 2020b; UNWTO, 2020) and there are some seminal pieces of work that investigate WBL in an Irish context (Burke, 2010; Linehan, 2008; Sheridan and Linehan, 2011), which are revisited later in this chapter. The Irish reports, including literature reviews as part of any context setting, are mainly audits of WBL in an

Irish context and were useful in providing a good foundation for this study. Newspaper articles, trade publications and websites were also reviewed for relevance and they provided insights to opinions and conversations at a point in time.

The WBL Context

It is important to point out that WBL is not a new type of activity or trend (Sheridan and Linehan, 2011: 8) and learning through work in the form of WBL or skills practice has had a long history in education (Costley, 2007: 1). As stated in Chapter 1, T&H has led the way in Irish HE WBL with established modules since the 1970s, and all indications are that WBL will remain a feature in the future, therefore warranting ongoing investigation. Dewey (1916), an educational reformer, considered that life and learning should be integrated.

“The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling.” (Dewey, 1916: 51).

WBL in HEI offers a structured mechanism for such learning and Saunders (2006) references Dewey’s preoccupation with the intellectual and the practical, and he discusses how work and education are understood to be socially, culturally and economically connected – emphasising the pivotal role of WBL and supporting the notion of expansive learning (McArthur, 2011) introduced in Chapter 1. Dewey sought a new model of education that eliminated the separation of ideas of the world from the ideas of the classroom (McRae and Johnston, 2016) and historically there has been a distinction between the development of intellect as promoted by Plato, and the more pragmatic Aristotelian development of “practical wisdom” (McRae and Johnston, 2016). WBL can promote the development of intellectual, personal, critical and analytical skills, which will support and complement the students’ practical skills and knowledge (Helyer, 2015) and the research findings in Chapter 5 indicates this occurs for many WBL students in the Irish T&H industry. As HE develops, and WBL grows in popularity, it is important to ensure that quality assurances are in place for all WBL arrangements, which this research addresses in Chapter 6.

Literature shows that WBL exists in many forms, including internships, placements, fieldwork, sandwich placements, work integrated learning, job shadowing, co-operative education, apprenticeships, practicals, practicums, service learning, experiential learning, professional learning, cadetships, clinical placement, field placement and community-based learning (CEWIL, 2020a; Clinton and Thomas, 2011; Gribble, 2012; Patrick *et al.*, 2009; Sheridan, 2018; Von Treuer *et al.*, 2010). Throughout my research, considerable variation between WBL language and modules is evident and the wide range of terminology can inhibit stakeholder understanding of its value (Maertz *et al.*, 2014). The lack of a shared language and an understanding of what constitutes quality WBL experiences also inhibits research of this area and the tracking of impacts (Johnston *et al.*, 2016). The spectrum of WBL opportunities ranges from those strongly integrated and aligned to the institution's curriculum/programme and those that are loosely aligned, sometimes called co-curricular (McRae and Johnston, 2016; National Forum, 2017). WBL may involve work in paid employment or working on a voluntary basis, where there is a holistic interpretation given to the term 'work' (Costley and Armsby, 2007). One can also differentiate between 'placement' and 'non-placement' (Jackson *et al.*, 2017), the former being where students gain hands-on experience in a work setting, whilst the latter may connect students with industry through industry-based projects and simulations. This research focuses on WBL of the placement variety, where students are active in the workplace and most are in receipt of a paid wage.

The connections between education and work have been conventionally understood or theorised (Saunders, 2006) and from my review, much of the literature focuses on the taught elements of WBL rather than the work-based experience and assessment. This may be because of the barriers placed by organisations in terms of quality assurance and access issues, such as not allowing robust research in the workplace or with students. WBL in the workplace (rather than work-integrated learning [WIL], which can take place in the classroom) is more prevalent on T&H programmes and has particular implications for resourcing, assessment and creating effective partnerships, which are the focus of this study. WIL does take place in academic settings of T&H programmes, particularly in the practical settings such as kitchens, training restaurants and computer laboratories, but this is not the focus of this research.

There is a lack of research on WBL in an Irish context, with most research conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, Europe, and North America. Two pieces of Irish research that influenced my study are now outlined, beginning with the *Work Placement in Third-Level Programmes* (Sheridan and Linehan, 2011), which is an output of the Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships (REAP) project. This report provides an Irish context for work placement (a term used interchangeably with WBL) and empirical research was conducted with Irish HEIs, employers and students to ascertain the state of WBL provision. The report builds on earlier research *Work-Based Learning – Graduating Through the Workplace* (Linehan, 2008) and several agreed benefits were outlined, and concerns raised, including WBL assessment, which piqued my interest. Other key issues to emerge from this report and relevant to my study are: growing demand for WBL; some WBL having no formal agreements or contracts for learning; some students feel high levels of anxiety during WBL due to lack of preparation or difficult managers; and opportunities for institutional learning being lost where approaches to WBL are uncoordinated. An issue highlighted in some cases is a lack of clear value for WBL, including a lack of confidence in the learning and assessment methodologies. This reflects concerns about the authenticity and validity of assessment methodologies and the variability in the quality of the experience (Sheridan and Linehan, 2011: 53), which continues to be an issue (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2020; Bosco and Ferns, 2014; Govaerts and van der Vleuten, 2013). This study adopts many of the principles of the Sheridan and Linehan (2011) report, but applies it to one industry, T&H and in the next section I critique the tripartite negotiated learning arrangement arising from the report.

The second study explores the Placement Experience Partnership (PEP) for Irish T&H programmes (Burke, 2010) and it was based upon surveys with students at one HEI (n=117), a focus group with Irish HEIs (n=7), and a focus group with industry (n=9). The research found the majority of students had a valuable learning experience, industry highlighted the importance of student preparedness for WBL and considerable variation in the management of WBL by HEIs. Moreover, and importantly for the present study, the report identified that in many instances, industry partners do not always take a role in assessment of students. The key criteria set out in the framework for all three stakeholders (students, HEIs and industry) are: commitment, learning and development,

preparation, placement agreement, communication, monitoring and evaluation, assessment, support and resources. The report suggested a two-year pilot initiative of industry competency based (skills, attitudes, behaviours) assessment of WBL worth 25%; however, there is no evidence that this materialised in a structured manner. The report offers sound and useful observations for all stakeholders and it can be postulated that the positive features of T&H WBL in Irish HE may be as a result of this report, however, many of the challenges it identified still remain. This study adopts a similar methodology that aims to build on emergent themes relating to assessment and addressing resource issues, with a view to further enhancing and creating effective WBL partnerships.

I now offer an analysis of some WBL models and frameworks, which highlight the variety and flexibility in how WBL is interpreted and implemented to meet the needs of many situations and contexts. Despite the valuable contributions of previous research, many of the same WBL challenges persist in T&H, indicating a need for recommendations that can be implemented and executed, which are presented in Chapter 6.

WBL Models and Frameworks

There are many different WBL and WIL models and frameworks in existence, and I analyse those most relevant to this study, highlighting the important contributions they make, whilst also identifying limitations. This analysis, in conjunction with the data from my own research, leads to the proposal of a new framework in Chapter 6, which I argue is merited specifically for the Irish T&H industry.

Defining WBL is highly problematic (Connor, 2005) but no matter what term is used to describe WBL, there are three interrelated components: i) the individual; ii) the organisation; and iii) the academic institution (Linehan, 2008). Sheridan and Linehan (2011) present these partners in a tripartite negotiated learning arrangement (see Figure 2.2) – employee learner, employer, HEI.

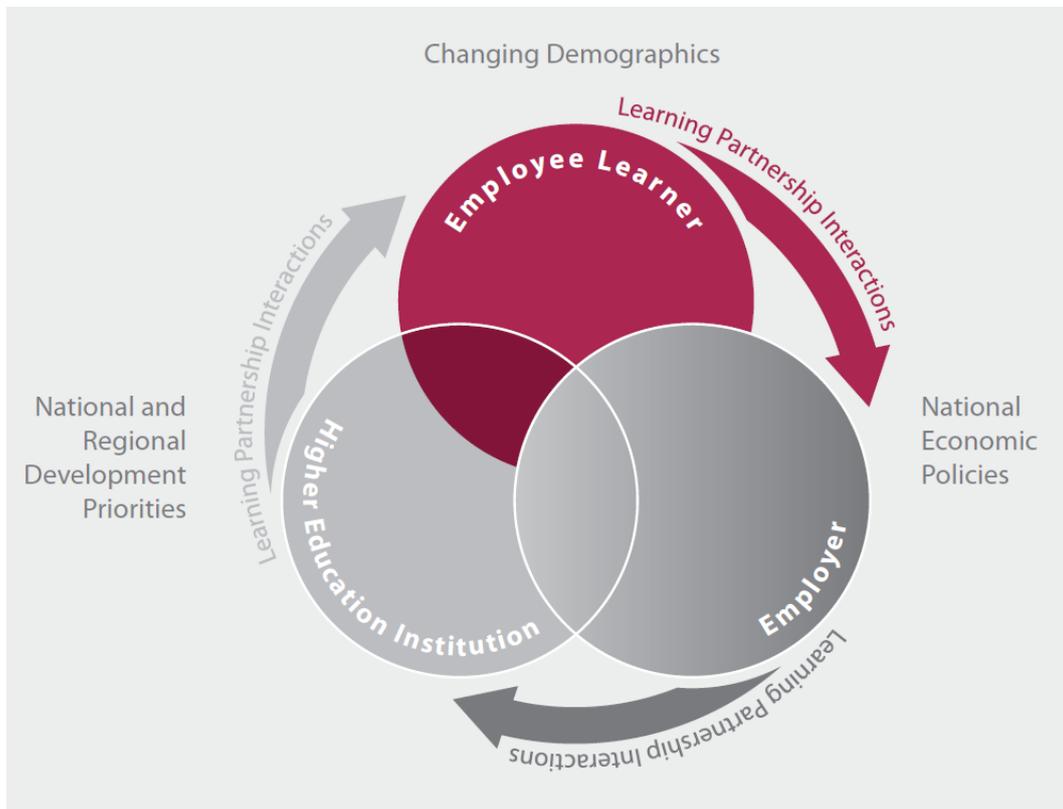


Figure 2.2: Tripartite negotiated learning arrangement

(Sheridan and Linehan, 2011)

Arising from research on Irish HE work placements, this model highlights learning partnership interactions by each stakeholder, whilst also acknowledging the macro-environmental forces at play, such as changing demographics, national and regional development priorities and national economic policies. A limitation I have identified is that the learner partnership interactions appear to be one way, not accounting for a feedback mechanism from each partner and there is only minimal overlap of the circles, indicating sub-optimal partnership conditions for true exchanges of information and learning for all partners. The language of employee and employer is also misrepresentative for some WBL students undertaking unpaid experiences and such language also skews the focus towards the worker narrative rather than the learner.

The Forum Insight (National Forum, 2017) shows a similar tripartite partnership (see Figure 2.3) and usefully highlights that WBL can be assessed by both HEI and workplace staff, which is an angle I explore later in this study.

Three partners in work-based assessment

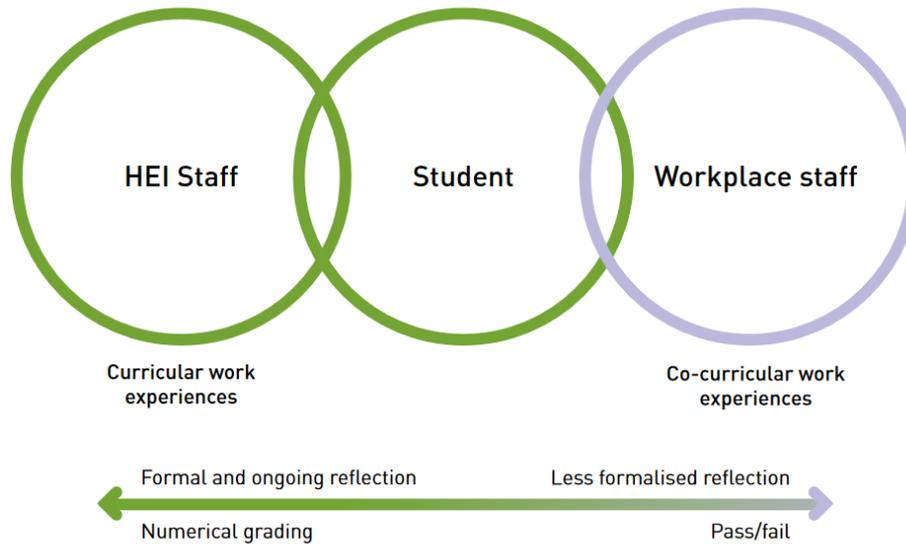


Figure 2.3: Characteristics of curricular and co-curricular work-based contexts

(National Forum, 2017)

My criticism of this representation is that an effective tripartite relationship should show a relationship between all partners, but Figure 2.3 shows HEI staff on one end of the spectrum, workplace staff on the other, with students in-between. This diagram accurately reflects some of the shortcomings I have discovered during my research, by placing two of the stakeholders on either end of the spectrum, there can be a lack of true engagement between the HEIs and industry in relation to assessment, monitoring and communication, ultimately impacting on the student WBL experience. Both models are a result of Irish studies, and there are other international models, which identify the fragmented nature of the discourse on this topic and an appetite for structure and cohesion.

Smith (2012: 250) proposes an evaluation framework that divides WIL curriculum structurally and conceptually into six domains or constructs: authenticity, alignment of teaching and learning, alignment of assessment, integrated learning support, supervisor access and induction and preparation processes. This framework is useful for evaluating WIL, but not necessarily for module designs as it acts more as a measuring instrument. Blackwell *et al.* (2001) propose a model of good quality WBL, based on a UK study, with six themes: purposefulness, quality monitoring, accreditation, assessment, work experience portfolio, reflection and articulation. I incorporated these features of good practice for WBL into this study as they are transferrable to the T&H context.

The cultural web for WBL (Doherty and Stephens, 2020) is a result of an Irish study and therefore has particular significance to the Irish HE sector, and is relevant for all WBL relationships. It sets out recommendations for WBL collaboration under the headings: organisational structure, power structures, control systems, rituals and routines, stories, symbols and the cultural paradigm at the centre (see Figure 2.4).

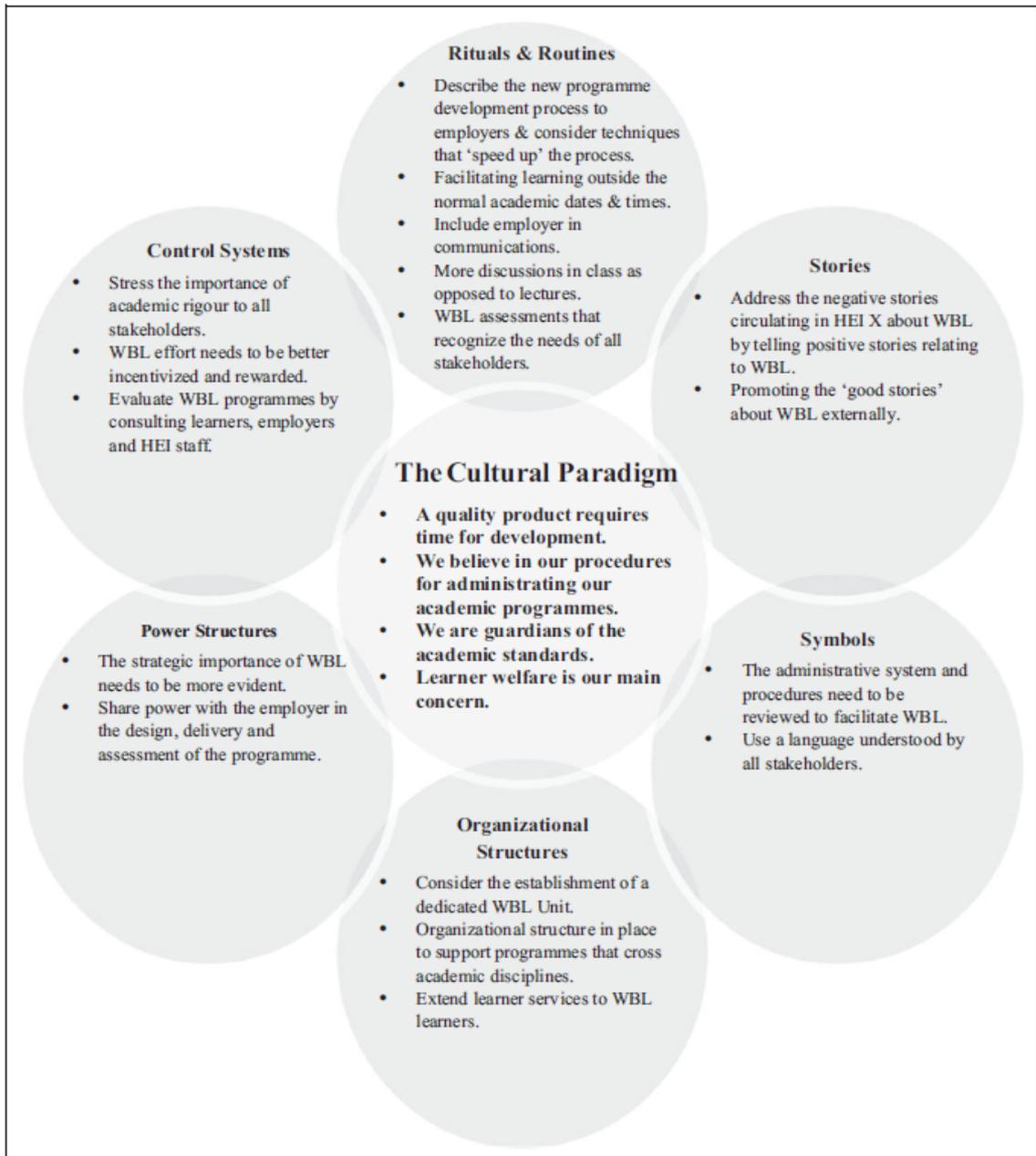


Figure 2.4: Cultural web for higher education

(Doherty and Stephens, 2020: 331)

The cultural web (Doherty and Stephens, 2020: 331) identifies that cultural issues within the HEI or external employer can create difficulties when attempts are made to initiate or manage WBL and they suggest requirements of all stakeholders participating in WBL, which align with my call for effective partnerships and open communication between all stakeholders. This research offers a revised framework for constructing T&H WBL experiences and it is proposed that such a structure is necessary before the desired cultural values can be cultivated.

To address the fragmented nature of the topic, and a plethora of models and frameworks, McRae and Johnston (2016) suggest a global work-integrated learning framework (see Figure 2.5), which is an important attempt to identify the shared elements of a variety of types of WIL. The framework is based on shared WIL attributes of experience, curriculum integration, student outcomes and reflection, but differentiated through their unique processes and outcomes of various WIL approaches. The authors also suggest a framework for co- (or extra) curricular WIL and both present a way of checking WIL modules against a set of quality attributes and programme related outcomes to existing standards (McRae and Johnston, 2016: 346).

| ATTRIBUTES | CURRICULAR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|-------|------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Applied Research | Sandwich Education | Clinic | Curricular Community Service Learning | Co-op | Internship | Field Placement | Practicum/ Clinical Placement | Work Experience |
| Experience: | | | | | | | | | |
| Direct hands-on experience | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Meaningful and substantial | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Linked to curriculum | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Curriculum Integration: | | | | | | | | | |
| Learning outcomes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Assessment by institution | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Assessment by workplace | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Integration back to curriculum | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Student Outcomes: | | | | | | | | | |
| Knowledge, skills, attributes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Knowledge of discipline and workplace | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Capacity to contribute | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Reflection: | | | | | | | | | |
| Formalized, ongoing, integrated | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Figure 2.5: Global WIL Curricular Learning Framework

(McRae and Johnston, 2016: 345)

The framework usefully focuses on the shared attributes of WIL, rather than the differences and I welcome the focus on learning, which provides a useful reference point for discussions on WBL design. However, it lacks depth and details on each of the attributes, such as the extent of their presence on WIL modules. The authors acknowledge such limitations, which reflects the challenge of creating a globally representative WIL framework. A lead author of this study, McRae has contributed, through scholarly research in this area, to Canada being recognised as a world leader regarding WBL research.

Building on a long history in this field, with the formation of the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (CAFCE) in 1973, now called Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) Canada, McRae is a member of the lead organisation for WIL in Canada (CEWIL, 2020a). CEWIL Canada is a registered charity and membership includes organisations, schools and institutes (CEWIL, 2020c) and the CEWIL website offers a one-stop-shop for all things WIL related in Canada, with useful information about governance, advocacy, a national WIL database (with data from more than fifty post-secondary member institutions) and details of a national co-op/WIL month in March 2020 (CEWIL, 2020b). The structures and procedures are worth emphasising as they offer a good model that Ireland, and other countries, can learn from and replicate, which will be revisited in Chapter 6.

In 2018, the University of Waterloo, a key member of CEWIL Canada, published the WIL Quality Framework White Paper (McRae *et al.*, 2018), which incorporates the Triple A Framework that includes five stakeholders (see Figure 2.6). Their paper follows the CEWIL definitions of nine specific forms of WIL and sets out the need to articulate the aims/goals for each of the five stakeholder groups; accomplish actions to enable stakeholder success; assess achievements for each stakeholder group in terms of outcomes and measures. This is a useful document that brings together much of the earlier discussion topics and presents them in a considered manner. The document also summarises the key components for quality WIL using the P.E.A.R. acronym for pedagogy, experience, assessment and reflection (McRae *et al.*, 2018), which is in line with other models or frameworks that stress the importance of stakeholder engagement before, during and after the WBL experience (National Forum, 2017; Sheridan and Linehan, 2011).

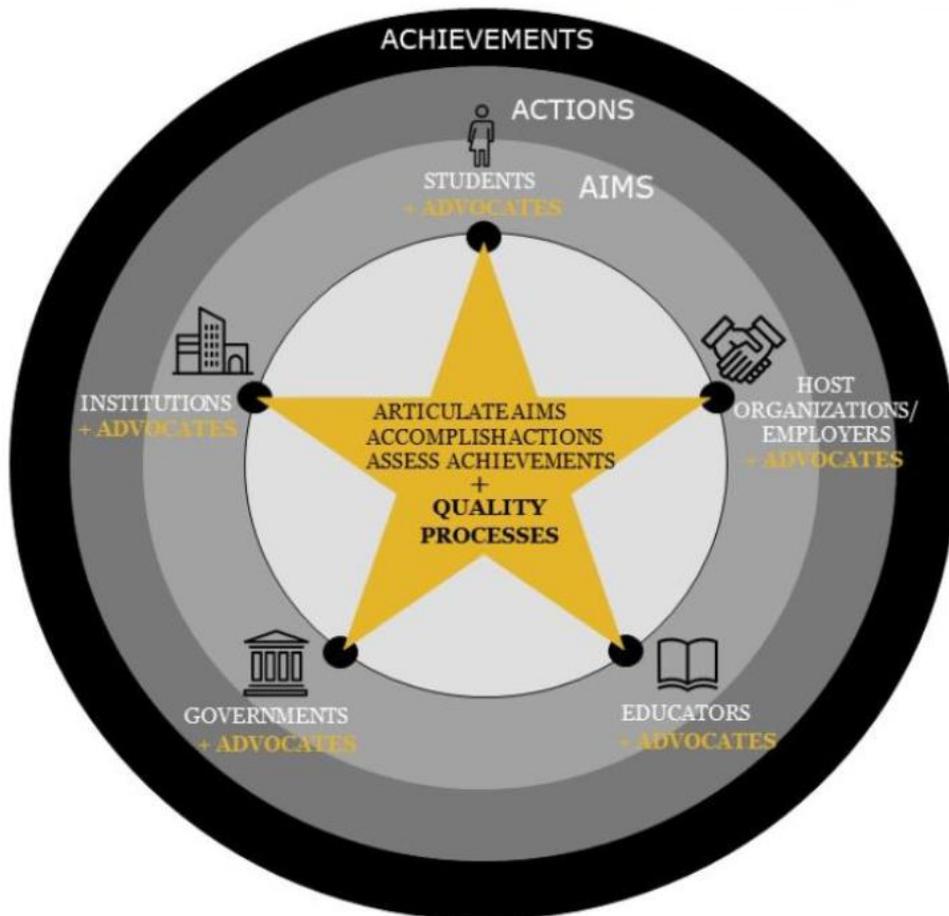


Figure 2.6: Triple A Framework

(McRae *et al.*, 2018)

The Triple A Framework put forward by McRae *et al.* (2018) offers useful guidelines around articulating aims, accomplishing actions and assessing achievements for five stakeholders, which include students, host organisations/employers and educators in line with most other WBL models. Although I draw on this work in my conclusions in Chapter 6, it is important to set out the key critique of this approach to WIL/WBL. I suggest that it is appropriate to identify two additional stakeholders in the Triple A Framework (governments and institutions), and I recognise their role in contributing to quality processes for WBL. However, by placing all stakeholders on equal points on the star, the power imbalance already experienced by students will be further exacerbated with the introduction of more stakeholders, operating at the same level on the framework and introducing further competing needs.

There is consistency with many features of these models and frameworks and I agree with Sheridan (2019) who suggests that a single model of engagement with enterprise is not appropriate for all HEIs. However, I suggest that a sectoral structured framework is appropriate and I incorporate the good practice elements of these models in my proposed framework in Chapter 6, which also aims to address the shortcomings identified. This section has highlighted some of the challenges associated with WBL, but before those are discussed, it is appropriate to offer a summary of the WBL benefits that are consistently promoted in literature.

Benefits of WBL

In the wider literature, there is considerable support for WBL, in terms of collaborative activities with employers (Busby, 2005; EGFSN, 2013; Harvey *et al.*, 2002), enhancing the skills of students, preparing them for employment (Harvey and Green, 1993) and giving students abilities that exceed classroom-based knowledge and technical skills (Aggett and Busby, 2011; Freudenberg *et al.*, 2008; Little, 2000). It is also said that students benefit from time spent on WBL as they enhance their understanding of their own life choices, enabled the acquisition of transferable skills and provide a tangible link between theory and application (Bullock *et al.*, 2009: 482). Smith (2014) outlines the purpose of WBL can be to: experience the world of work before graduation, develop or acquire specific skills, professional abilities/attributes; and/or apply the theoretical disciplinary knowledge in practice. There are broader benefits to the HEI and workplaces as a result of WBL, including: enhancing networking and mutual understanding between HEI and workplaces, maintaining curriculum relevance along with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, and integrating employability skills into curriculum (Blackwell *et al.* 2001; Sheridan and Lenihan, 2011). The notion of employability skills is placing considerable pressure on HEIs to produce work-ready graduates, which is an ongoing challenge and this issue is probed further in Chapter 3. There is an expectation for HE to include graduate employability in its curricula (Nottingham, 2016) and according to Jackson (2015), the core aim of WBL is to better prepare undergraduates for entry into the workforce.

Additional to developing work-related skills, WBL offers opportunities for personal growth (Fuller and Unwin, 2003) and WBL is an innovative way to develop curricula for engaging learners and workplace partners in order to widen access to HE (Nottingham, 2016). The work of Jackson and Wilton (2016) investigates the role of WIL on developing career management competencies. Their research discusses the industry demand for employable graduates, namely those with disciplinary expertise, non-technical skills and life and work experience (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). It is argued that WIL is an alternative or complementary platform for the successful development of such competencies, as it intersects theoretical and practice learning. WBL provides necessary exposure to a relevant work setting, which helps students make informed career choices (Usher, 2012), whilst also facilitating successful networking in their chosen field (Bourner and Millican, 2011). Jackson and Wilton (2016) found that WBL was useful for developing students' ability to identifying strengths and weaknesses and areas for future development, as well as helping to identify their interests, values and personality. All these positive aspects of WBL need to be to the forefront when HEIs are recruiting for T&H programmes as the HE landscape changes and competition becomes tougher from other sectors and programmes. Even so the challenges of WBL also need to be considered and I set out some of the themes that emerge from the literature.

Challenges associated with WBL

Despite the benefits of WBL, some stakeholders are prevented from fully engaging in WBL. There are many possible reasons for this including: an inability to provide suitable projects and tasks for students to complete; sourcing suitable students; concerns with student performance and capacity to mentor/supervise (Jackson *et al.*, 2017). Resource allocation is a major concern for WBL, particularly for HEIs, with difficulties in applying academic and administrative resources to the WBL process, which has been exacerbated by growing full-time student numbers and reducing staff numbers in most HEIs (Sheridan and Lenihan, 2011). Milton and Jones (2008) identify that resources required for direct and close supervision, for accessing sites and materials, for administration (particularly meeting the many requirements of WBL initiatives) can limit the possibilities for some WBL activities. Such resource shortages can occur from the industry

perspective too; Patrick *et al.* (2009: 25-6) note that academic and administrative staff had additional responsibilities not only for the students but also for the organisations and industry supervisors. A good example of this is in overseas WBL, which are particularly common on T&H programmes. These WBL experiences require more resources, but regardless of location, health and safety issues and insurance arrangements need consideration when assessing suitable placement and learning opportunities (Sheridan and Linehan, 2011: 65). Cooper *et al.* (2010) highlight the clear duty of care when students are completing WBL off-campus, which requires staff to be involved in appropriate risk management processes and in supporting the preparation of both students and supervisory staff for contingencies that may arise. This places additional demands on HEI staff and is an extra demand on human resources in the WBL partner organisation. A poorly resourced and poorly managed WBL module can have a significant, long-lasting negative impact on the reputation of a HEI in the very sectors in which its graduates are seeking employment (Bates, 2011). The resources requirements are obvious for the HEI, but industry must also dedicate resources to the WBL process.

The T&H industry image can suffer during WBL, but the PEP report (Burke, 2010) challenges Jenkins (2001) who argues that as their studies progressed, hospitality students' perception of the industry deteriorated and their desire to work therein diminished considerably. Similar research shows that students will often change their career choices relating to the T&H industries following work experiences (Robinson *et al.*, 2016); however, the PEP report contradicts this and identifies that post-WBL, 88% of the T&H students intended to enter the sector, down 2% from pre-WBL (Burke, 2010). This is quite a variance from Jenkins (2001) who recorded as few as 50% of the UK and Dutch students intending to enter the hospitality sector post-placement. Despite the PEP report and the study from Jenkins revealing different outcomes, both highlight that WBL has an impact upon retention and the relationships students start to develop with the T&H industry during their studies. Ongoing research in this area is vital, then, to ensure that WBL is not a source of student disenchantment, leading to attrition of potential employees and managers in the T&H industry. The present study aims to support the transition from WBL to industry post-graduation, by identifying the need for WBL to be resourced sufficiently, effectively assessed and delivered through quality partnerships.

It can be difficult for industry to predict manpower requirements with accuracy, therefore, leading to an inability to guarantee WBL opportunities for students on a regular basis (Carty, 2014a; Saunders, 2006). There is also the issue for HEIs in projecting the number of student enrolments; these are often determined at the last minute and can lead to under- or over-subscribed programmes which has a knock-on impact to WBL requirements (Saunders, 2006: 5). These kinds of issues are even more likely to occur in the post-pandemic landscape when enrolments and industry activity are increasingly uncertain. Jackson (2015) reflects on the tendency towards cessation of ongoing WBL arrangements when host businesses close, which can often happen with so many small and micro businesses in the T&H industry.

WBL also faces a number of other challenges: differing levels of institutional support; limited engagement of staff (academic and industry partners); limited resources for pedagogic development; variable engagement of students; and difficulties with assessment strategies (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Cleary *et al.*, 2007; Holdsworth *et al.*, 2009; Nottingham, 2016; Young *et al.*, 2007). As Gibbs (1999: 47) argues, assessment should generate appropriate student learning activity; however, Smith (2014) notes, placements are often unreliable in terms of the consistency of the experience a cohort of students receives across a widely disparate set of workplaces. Consequently, Smith (2014) questions the validity of placement assessment, because a consistent type of experience cannot be guaranteed. Hence, assessing WBL students using a pre-conceived set of criteria and standards cannot be facilitated fairly, evenly and consistently, meaning validity cannot be assured (Smith, 2014). Sheridan (2019) posits that WBL depends on a recognition of the workplace as a valid and valuable centre for knowledge, skills and competence acquisition, which I contend is not always the case for T&H as explored later in this study. There are also concerns that some students might not meet the expected employer standards, which is often an issue for WBL if expectations are managed incorrectly for the student and/or the WBL provider (Jackson 2015). Together, this body of research illuminates' issues for WBL and the ways in which they are assessed is a major concern, which I now explore further.

WBL Assessment

WBL stakeholders (students, HEIs and industry) need to work together in pursuit of a common goal, and this can be focussed by having a clear WBL assessment strategy, common understanding of

how it is to be implemented and clarity of the role played by each stakeholder. There is a need for a 'common language' to describe outcomes of what is being undertaken (Boud, 2000) and HEIs should encourage negotiation and agreement of learning outcomes both in terms of generic (graduate) capabilities and professional learning outcomes (Costley and Armsby, 2007). The coordination of educational activities with external partners is complex and there is evidence of misalignment between WBL stakeholders leading to different perceptions of authenticity (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2020). This gives rise to variable approaches being utilised, which raises questions about the validity of assessment methodologies (Bosco and Ferns, 2014; Govaerts and van der Vleuten, 2013). This highlights the need for the ongoing National Forum research to address the issue of optimising the balance between meaningful (authentic) and comparable (consistent) work-based assessment, which can be applied to T&H.

The HEI must deliver on the validated programme and learning outcomes but individual learning agreements or learning contracts are built into many WBL programmes, so that all stakeholders can be involved in designing a customised programme of study, which is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the students, industry and their HEI (Costley and Armsby, 2007). This all makes sense in theory, but in practice, it can be quite challenging as with so many parties involved, there are often issues around communication, agreement and motivation. Therefore, learning contracts or agreements are important and they should identify the tasks to be undertaken in the workplace, the assessment instruments to be used and the criteria and standards that apply. All relevant stakeholders should be party to and endorse this agreement to ensure there is no confusion or ambiguity. Flexibility is required as learning outcomes are not easily defined in advance and learning agreements need to be negotiated (Boud, 2001). Learning agreements could help to address differing expectations between workplace and classroom settings on the nature and standard of skills required, as evidenced by Jackson (2015) who suggests that students favour classroom learning and/or assessment activities which involved planning and goal setting and subsequent self-reflection on performance and achieved outcomes. Key questions circulate around WBL assessment, and whether to involve the host organisation in this process. Before this can

occur, the industry partner needs to be aware of the graduate capabilities endorsed by the HEI, the capabilities to be assessed and the level of performance expected.

Briefing/debriefing sessions during or following WBL can play an important role in the formal evaluation instruments (Costley and Armsby, 2007) or it can just be part of a monitoring process to ensure all parties are aware of what is expected from them. The HEI could be involved in this process, or it could take place between the provider and student, if the WBL provider is trained in what to discuss; highlighting one way to mitigate some of the concerns outlined above. Due to quality assurance concerns, however, it would be most beneficial if the HEI was involved in the process on an ongoing basis allowing information to be acquired if any amendments or refinements need to be made to agreed learning outcomes and/or assessment criteria, standards or instruments. Such bespoke arrangements highlight the intense nature of negotiations and resource implications. Bandaranaike and Willison (2011) called these face-to-face dialogues between the student and assessor as 'motivational interviewing', where the learner reflects on their performance and identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Jackson (2015) argues that these performance management meetings are very helpful to WBL students, as are team meetings, professional development workshops or seminars. It is thought that these tools help the student in question, but also that the results acquired from the assessment regime and the evaluation data from WBL stakeholders can act to inform curriculum renewal and reform in the contexts of the workplace units and programmes more broadly (Costley and Armsby, 2007). Therefore, the benefits of a well structure WBL process are many, if each stakeholder knows what the desired outcomes are and if the required resources are committed, which I outlined earlier, is not always the case and needs to be addressed.

With so many challenges, it is not surprising that tensions exist between experiential pedagogies and more conventional programmes (Walsh, 2007). Some scholars challenge learning from the workplace as legitimate knowledge (Boud and Solomon, 2001) but WBL continues to feature and there are a range of new initiatives in Irish HE, such as apprenticeships and government supported programmes which seek to upskill people (DES, 2017). As outlined in Chapter 1, learner-centred pedagogy has previously been supported by various government initiatives in the T&H industry (CERT and Fáilte Ireland). The Irish government continues to look for better employer-

engagement and have launched a range of apprenticeship model programmes (DES, 2017), some of which cater for the T&H industry and all feature a WBL component. Apprenticeships offer an alternative model of learning and an opportunity for certain cohorts of learners to start on the pathway of a career in a variety of sectors, including hospitality, for example on culinary programmes. Apprenticeships delivered in conjunction with HE are essentially an elongated WBL programmes and they alternate learning in the workplace (minimum 50%) and an education or training centre (HEA, 2021). The Apprenticeship Council is tasked with expanding apprenticeships into new sectors and up to level 10 on the NFQ, which Sheridan (2019) suggests is the impetus for negotiated WBL at higher levels. The apprenticeship model is widely used throughout Europe and Apprentice Track is a project that uses a smart electronic system for tracking apprenticeship projects (Apprentice Track, 2021), which should be monitored closely for application in the T&H industry. The assessment model for apprenticeships in Ireland is still being tested, but the role of trained industry assessors on culinary programmes is worth noting. Currently there are over 60 programmes available in Ireland, and due to their blended delivery approach, apprenticeships are considered to take place in a community of practice, a theoretical framework which is now discussed.

Community of Practice (CoP)

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Much like WBL, the theory of CoP is a socially situated, practice-based approach to learning (Omidyar and Kislov, 2014) and the original exponents are Lave and Wenger (1991). It has been suggested that this theoretical framework may be falling away (Lang and Canning, 2010), however, I propose that its developments over the years render it appropriate for this WBL research. It was in the workplace that Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the notion of CoP when they were observing apprenticeship tailors in Africa and they noticed the apprentices were more likely to ask questions of fellow apprentices than the master. This is similar to WBL in T&H where much of the learning is driven by those in or on the periphery of the community, as students learn by modelling and observing other people.

Wenger (2000) suggests that members of a CoP are bound together to a sense of joint enterprise, where they hold each other accountable. This research investigates the stakeholder experiences of T&H WBL to examine the communities and experiences that have developed through mutual engagement of interacting with each other and establishing norms and relationships (Wenger, 2000; Wenger *et al.*, 2002). There are many interpretations of a CoP and Tight (2012) defines them as groups or networks which help guide, regulate and make meaning of our lives, both in work and outside. CoP has found practical application in business, organisational design, government, professional associations, civic life and education. Regardless of how one interprets or defines a CoP, there are three crucial characteristics: the domain; the community; and the practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The domain creates the common ground (Li *et al.*, 2009) and membership implies a commitment to the domain (i.e. a minimal competence that differentiates members from non-members) (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Each CoP has its own domain of competence consisting of a set of criteria and the experiences by which members recognise membership, and the boundaries between CoPs (de Nooijer *et al.*, 2021). I propose the student domain is the study of T&H with a HEI, which involves learning and research; the HEI domain is the delivery of T&H HE theory, practical skills and research; and for industry the domain refers to business and societal considerations. In pursuing an interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), all of which is evident in successful WBL partnerships.

The second characteristic of CoP is community, which refers to the social structure that create and facilitate learning through interactions and relationships with others (Li *et al.*, 2009). I define the community for students as their immediate classmates and other students at the HEI, as this wider student body can also impact on the learning experience; for HEIs the community is constituted of academics, support staff and management; the T&H industry community is made up of owners/managers, heads of department, supervisors, peers/colleagues, suppliers and support agencies. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, (2015) point out that having the same job or the same title does not make for a CoP unless members interact and learn together, but members of a

CoP do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. Student communities can vary if they are split into sub-groups from the larger cohort, but overall there is an identity attached to the discipline being studied. HEI communities are more likely to be stable and consistent in terms of membership, but industry may change on a regular basis due to shift work and the transient nature of the T&H industry. Whilst the members of these communities might not engage with each other on a daily basis, their ongoing interaction and learning together make for viable communities.

The third characteristic is practice, and members of a CoP are practitioners who engage with a set of shared repertoires of resources that include: documents, ideas, experiences, stories, tools, information, and ways of addressing recurring problems (Wenger, 2000; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The WBL practice for students includes sourcing, applying and interviewing for opportunities, conducting WBL, completing assessments and reflecting on their experience. In HEIs the practice refers to the WBL co-ordination, monitoring, assessment and feedback. Industry practice includes recruitment and selection, training and development, assessment, appraisals and feedback. In essence, the practice is the specific knowledge the community shares, develops, and maintains (Li *et al.*, 2009). Examples of shared repertoires across all communities are contracts or learning agreements, appraisal forms, and assessment documents. These are shared CoP resources, which each stakeholder engages with differently. Table 2.1 summarises the CoP characteristics for T&H WBL in Irish HEIs.

| | CoP 1 | CoP 2 | CoP 3 |
|------------------|--|--|---|
| | Students | HEI | Industry |
| Domain | T&H learning & research | T&H HE delivery & research | Business / society |
| Community | Class & workplace | Academics, Support, Management | Managers, human resources, heads of departments, supervisors, peers/colleagues, suppliers, support agencies |
| Practice | Sourcing, interviews, WBL, assessment, reflection. | WBL co-ordination, monitoring, assessment, feedback. | Recruit and select, train and develop, assessment, appraisals, feedback. |

Table 2.1: CoP Characteristics

Communities of practice do not substitute teams or networks or other joint enterprises. Each has its own place in the overall ecology of the learning system (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner,

2015). Considering this informal and self-organising nature of CoPs, Wenger *et al.* (2002) referred to cultivating rather than creating them but this is challenged by Akkerman *et al.* (2008) who suggest it is possible to initiate a CoP from the outside. In this research, I suggest the CoPs in question are organic (naturally occurring) and cultivated (with investment over time by the various stakeholders). In early work (Wenger & Lang, 1991) the focus was on single communities in which learners participate. However, the theory has developed to do justice to the multiple communities people belong to and the concept of a landscape of practice (LoP) was developed (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Landscape of Practice (LoP)

Initially, the idea of communities moved on to 'hills', where specialisms represent peaks of knowledge (Wenger, 2000) and the image of hills represents a concentration of specialist knowledge, the closer to the top, the more expert you are. This concept is useful to portrait the different heights that someone can reach within each community and this is seen as some members exceed in their T&H WBL domain and practice. However, instead of focusing centrally on a CoP and its membership, the theory has developed to focus more on multiple communities and systems of practice, LoPs, and identity as formed across practices and not just within practices (Omidyar and Kislov, 2014). The T&H WBL experience is based around three CoPs representing students, HEIs and industry, but together these can be seen as a LoP, which I present at a local level (see Figure 2.7) built around a HEI.

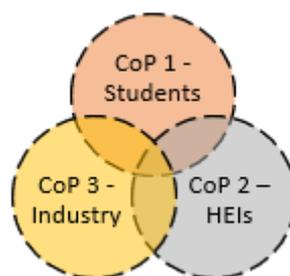


Figure 2.7: Landscape of Practice (LoP) 1 – Local

Each local LoP, is part of a broader national landscape, as set out in Figure 2.8. In Ireland, at the time of doing the research, there were twelve HEIs offering T&H WBL programmes. This number

changes as mergers and technological universities emerge, but regardless of the number involved, LoP 2 signifies a broader national picture of the T&H WBL landscape. The student and HEI community are mainly concentrated around their local level, and whilst HEIs work most closely with the local industry, the industry community is shared nationally, as they engage with multiple HEIs and student communities. Over time, members may move from one community to another (e.g. students to industry, industry to HEIs) and often there is boundary crossing from one local LoP to another, as students continue studies at another HEI, or staff move from one HEI to another. This gives rise to overlapping landscapes and constellations of interconnected practices which focuses on the idea of multimembership and knowledgeability of actors across the LoP (Omidyar and Kislov, 2014).

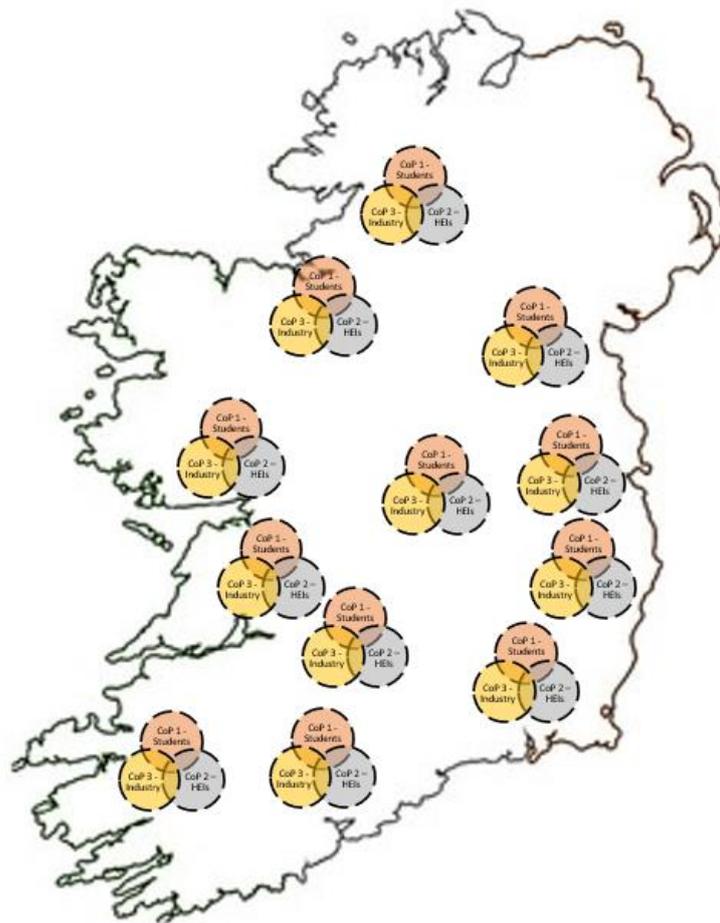


Figure 2.8: Landscape of Practice (LoP) 2 – National

T&H is an international industry and WBL is a feature of such programmes all over the world, therefore, it is appropriate to consider the international LoP (see Figure 2.9). It is common for

students to undertake (sometimes mandatory) international WBL opportunities and the Irish industry also welcomes international WBL students, indicating the reciprocal nature of such arrangements. HEIs in recent times have had to focus on more international engagement to meet expansion goals, which has seen more mobility of staff and students. Figure 2.9 indicates how each national LoP can be seen as part of a larger international network of connected communities and landscapes. This research focuses on the Irish LoP, but it is important to highlight the global context and many of the challenges are shared regardless of location.

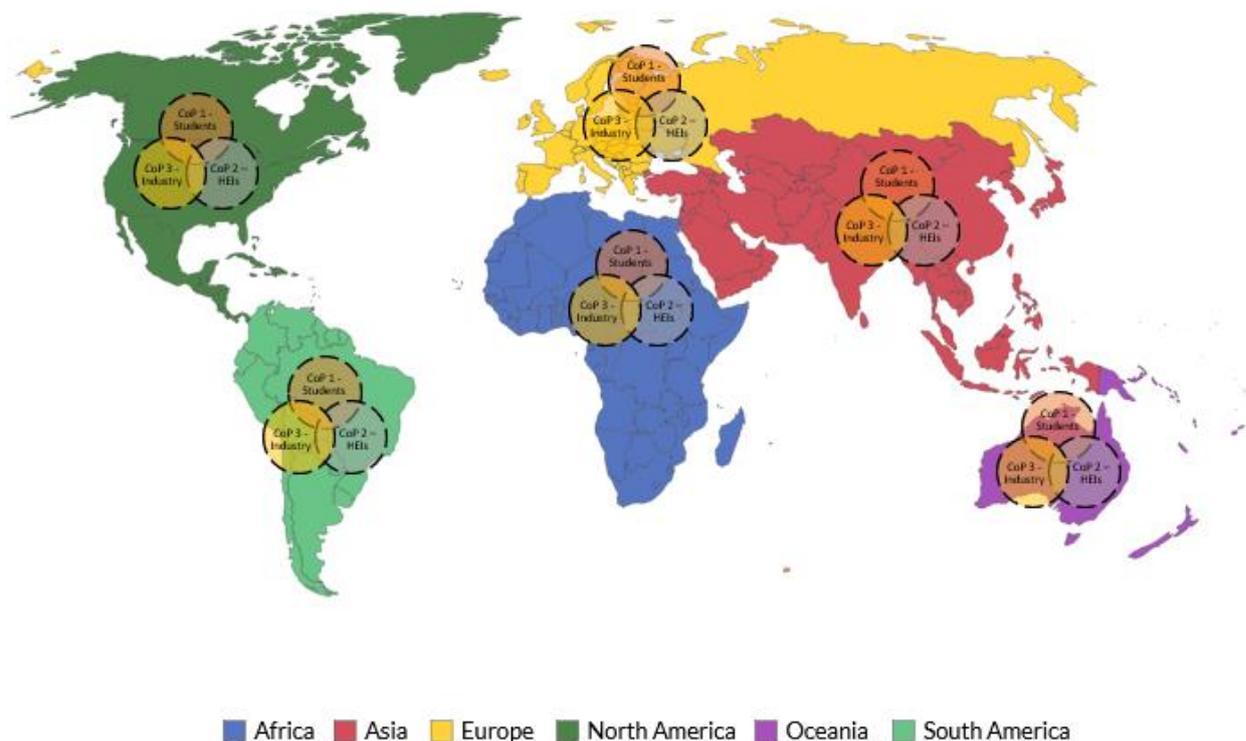


Figure 2.9: Landscape of Practice (LoP) 3 – International

(Map image sourced from Our World in Data, 2021)

Whilst it may have been traditional for members of a learning community to reside at the same location (Graves, 1992), this is not true nowadays as technology presents opportunities for global communication and engagement through synchronous and asynchronous dialogues. Virtual CoPs can be effective for WBL, especially for students and HEIs and there has been an accelerated drive towards such practices as international WBL has grown and as a result of Covid-19. Virtual learning communities are more fluid than traditional communities (Johnson, 2001). However, the service and

personal nature of the T&H industry ensures that face-to-face engagement will continue to play an important role in cultivating effective CoPs.

Wenger (2000) suggests that learning is a process of becoming and assuming an identity – the apprentices moved from the edges to the centre – closer to the identity of a master (tailor in their original case study). Assuming that identity may be a process of acquiring skills and knowledge as well as the trust and approval of the community you are joining – as is necessary in WBL, you need to ‘get on with’ and ‘fit in’ to the organisation to be successful. Wenger (2000) also used the example of Alcoholics Anonymous where recovery involves members learning a new identity – the identity of a recovered alcoholic. He noted that this is a very successful programme and suggested that it is the reconstruction of identity which makes it effective even in the long term. I propose that the notion of participant learning and changing can be applied to students on successful WBL modules. The student looks to find meaning (through their experiences), they seek an identity (who they are and who they are becoming), they do this in a community (where they belong, the classroom and the workplace) and they achieve the transformation through practice (what they are learning and doing). Competency in each particular community is not necessary but identity is and the learner’s journey within and across CoPs in the landscape results in an accumulation of different experience that form who the learner is (de Nooijer *et al.*, 2021). Over time, the WBL students develop a clearer understanding of their own identity and the identity of other professionals, that allows them to move between and across the boundaries of the CoP and LoP. LoP theory simultaneously addresses identity (as it focuses on understanding one’s own identity and that of other professionals) and knowledgeability about a field and its actors, which is necessary for successful collaboration across professional and practice boundaries (de Nooijer *et al.*, 2021).

The notion of boundaries is important in CoP, as people can often belong to more than one CoP, with boundaries separating them from each other. Boundaries can be viewed as a point of difference, different enterprises, different ways of engaging with one another, different histories, repertoires, ways of communicating and capabilities (Wenger, 2000; Wenger *et al.*, 2002). Saunders (2006) also discusses the boundary-crossing narrative when he talks about how the connections between education, learning and work have been understood. He posits that the act of moving

across boundaries yields the potential for learning as sense-making processes and informal learning is given impetus to produce 'ontological security' in the new environment (Saunders, 2006). The metaphor of 'transfer' does not do justice to the complex social and cognitive processes that take place as boundary crossing is undertaken (Beach, 2003: 39). I posit that one of the main ways students' cross boundaries is through successful completion of assessments, and Cooper (2017) talks of the role of collaborative assessment enabling WBL students to experience a performance of understanding in a CoP.

It is on the edges that students can experience real learning. Ajjawi *et al.* (2020) refers to students as brokers, who are coordinating their own activity and meaning across communities, whilst constructing their professional identity for the communities they wish to join. The LoP framework describes crossing the boundaries of different landscapes as requiring 'knowledgeability' more so than competence. (de Nooijer *et al.*, 2021). Those who can cross the boundaries of their own practice and question how the perspective of their own practice are or might be relevant for another practice, show knowledgeability (de Nooijer *et al.*, 2021). Omidyar and Kislov (2014) suggest that knowledge is not just information and it exists in social communities that negotiate local forms of competence inside the organisation. They go on to say that many of such competencies may be invisible to the organisation but still critical to the organisation's ability to succeed in what it is doing (ibid.).

The construction of knowledge outside the classroom results in learning that is more associated with self-direction of learning and this topic is further explored in Chapter 3. As Atherton (2003) points out adults are self-directed and seek to make their own decisions, but they are also at the mercy of their industry mentors or colleagues. Without proper supervision and mentoring, WBL can be a lonely place, where little learning occurs, or not enough guidance is given. To avoid such situations, students need to be enabled to critically evaluate their own work and to review their own personal and professional knowledge and skills. This will become even more important in the future as there will be an emphasis for HE to enable students to learn how to learn and to continue to learn as independent and self-regulating individuals (Peters, 2000). As adult learners, reflection is vital

for students' transformations for advance practice (Daly and Carnwell, 2003; Johns, 2002; Mezirow, 1991) and reflection is a skill that merits more attention in the T&H WBL process.

Chapter Summary

T&H programmes have engaged with WBL for many years, yet they still are faced with challenges and barriers to participation. The opportunities and challenges associated with WBL have been set out and resources are major issue within HEIs and industry. The topic of assessment plays a central role to HE WBL, therefore, this research is an opportunity to present good practice guidelines on how industry can play a positive role in WBL assessment, through good partnerships that will ultimately result in more rounded graduates. There are many models and frameworks already created to address WBL challenges, and this chapter has presented key ones that offer positive contributions. However, issues persist and this chapter outlines that for a CoP to work effectively in a LoP, there has to be balance and cohesion among the stakeholders and reliability is a key consideration, particularly regarding the involvement of work-based assessors. These themes are particularly relevant as HE changes and there is a shift towards employability, all of which is further explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: The Changing Higher Education Sector – Neoliberalism, Assessment and the Push for Employable Graduates

Introduction

This chapter discusses how HE is changing, with a major focus on work-ready and employable graduates, whilst highlighting the need for a partnership approach between industry, HEIs and students to deliver successful and engaging WBL opportunities. Assessment practices within WBL are examined and self and peer-assessment are considered as potential approaches, before setting out the opportunities and challenges of industry playing a more central role in the assessment of WBL. The chapter concludes that assessment of WBL is complicated, as a result of WBL itself being disjointed and diverse.

Context setting: the HE landscape in Ireland

HE in Ireland is changing, in terms of governance, structures, funding and participation rates. There was a record number of students enrolments in Irish HE in 2017/2018 (231,710), mostly undergraduates (87%) and the total number has been on the increase in recent years (up 8% since 2012/2013) (HEA, 2019a) and this growth is likely to continue in the future. In 2011, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) commissioned the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. The Chairman of the group was Colin Hunt and the report is known widely as the Hunt Report (DES, 2011) and has guided much development and pressure to reform HE in Ireland. At the time of the report, the Irish HE landscape consisted of seven Universities, eleven Institutes of Technology (IoT) and five other Colleges (HEA, 2019b). The most recent additions to the HE playing field is the Technological University of Dublin (TUD), which was formally established in January 2019 and the Munster Technological University (MTU) established in January 2021. TUD is a merger of three IoTs - Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tallaght (TU Dublin, 2019) and MTU is a merger of Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Tralee (MTU, 2021) with further mergers proposed among other IoTs to form new Technological Universities (TU) in the coming years. This development is interesting, as it shows how IoTs are moving to inhabit the traditional university space. Traditionally, T&H

programmes have been delivered within the IoT space, but with the movement towards TU, some T&H academics are concerned that such vocational disciplines will be left behind as TU leaders may pursue research funding and the perceived higher order programmes, whilst leaving T&H to FE or industry training. For now, T&H retains a presence at HE and the IoTs remain on the same spectrum with Universities, moving closer with the development of TUs. Up until now, ranking systems are not part of the IoT culture, but as they gravitate towards University status, this will become more obvious, as will the competition among graduates for jobs. Therefore, value for money, reputation and employability will all play key roles in the recruitment of students as HEIs compete to provide knowledge workers to the smart economy and to build better industry partnerships.

WBL is a common way of promoting cooperation between HE and industry for mutual benefit (European Commission, 2014: 18), it is a very visible aspect of employer engagement (DES, 2016: 82; DES, 2017) and the European Commission (2014:12) have highlighted the need to increase the links between HE and other economic actors, through involvement in the design and delivery of programmes and the provision of WBL opportunities. Nottingham (2016) cites WBL as a European-wide lifelong learning initiative to educate the workforce for economic buoyancy and social cohesion. There has also been a call from Europe for more integrated curriculum and evidence-based practice (Devins, 2013: 8) to unlock the potential for HEIs to make a greater contribution to a smarter, more inclusive Europe (Devins, 2013: 29).

In recent years there has been a transformation from an information-based to a knowledge-based economy, and the concept of the knowledge society is derived from the discussion of knowledge management in enterprises (Drucker, 1969). Hammer *et al.* (2004: 14), draw on Drucker for what he considers the best definition of knowledge worker: “someone who knows more about his or her job than anyone else in the organisation”. By that definition, most workers today could be classified as knowledge workers regardless of whether they acquired their knowledge through formal education or in an industry setting, like a T&H business. The knowledge worker is likely to face changing careers and organisations several times during their working lifetime (Chisholm and Davis, 2007) and this is particularly true of people in the T&H industry as the nature of the work allows them to travel and be transient in terms of where they work – location, organisation and the department

within the business. This is embedded in T&H students as they progress through HE, often taking multiple WBL opportunities in different locations at various stages of the programme. WBL itself recognises that working knowledge is not just to be found in books and is more likely to be developed within the context and environment of the immediate workplace (Keating, 2012). Since the beginning of T&H in HE, WBL has played a central role in enabling students to apply the theory from the classroom in a workplace setting. Some commentators (Bowden 1997; Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Tucker, 2006) argue that knowledge which can be applied is far more valuable to students than explicit academic knowledge in that it is contextual, social, and situation specific. The applied skills gained working in the T&H industry are fundamental customer service skills that are valued by all other industries. This emphasises the importance of HE and industry working together to ensure the continued recruitment and retention of students and ultimately employees to the industry, where knowledge workers have become important figures.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has a long tradition in Ireland and is a key foundation for lifelong learning policies (Sheidan, 2019). RPL is addressed in national strategies and policies (DES, 2011; DES, 2016; QQI, 2017) and it can be availed of to gain WBL exemptions by those with industry-based experience, but it was not a key feature or focus of this research. The *Tourism Recovery Plan 2020-2023* suggests that RPL should be a feature of a larger continuous professional development programme for the sector (DTCAGSM, 2020: 20). RPL may also become more prevalent in T&H as industry increases on-the-job training opportunities, or as more industry professionals return to HE, post-Covid. Anecdotally, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase of T&H students seeking RPL, as WBL opportunities are scarce. QQI (2020: 10) suggest that education providers need to ensure there is a robust and clearly thought-out process to recognise prior learning, and this has implications for WBL. One such implication identified by Sheridan (2019) is the capability and capacity for the evidencing and assessment of learning in the experience domain, which is further investigated in this chapter.

Need for better partnerships – a drive towards employability

HEIs are accountable for the quality and proficiency of graduates they produce (Bosco and Ferns, 2014) and employers are demanding graduate applicants have relevant experience, evidence of

work readiness and non-technical skills to operate effectively in the workplace (Edwards *et al.*, 2015). In response, HEIs are increasingly focusing on embedding WBL into undergraduate programmes (Jackson *et al.*, 2017) and WBL is seen as a useful way of enabling employer feedback on graduate employability, curriculum design and programme supply (DES, 2011: 76). Molesworth *et al.* (2009) talk of the massification of HE, which is designed to support industry by providing a 'better workforce' and they suggest this drive to commodify HE is both a top-down and bottom-up process. An example of market orientation of HEIs is the advertisement for programmes that feature job and career prospects very prominently (Ford, 2007; Lacey, 2006) and this is obvious when one reviews the promotional material for Irish HEIs.

Vocational programmes, like T&H, can be seen as a commodity purchased in the hope of gaining an advantage over others in future employment situations (Grosjean, 2004). This leads on to a bigger debate about students 'buying' degrees, which perhaps has less purchase in Ireland than in England for example; however, Irish HE is not wholly outside of or protected from the global marketised landscape and, hence, this thought process can be common, particularly among students. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) assert that the introduction of tuition fees in HE may have embedded a view that staff have no right not to award the consumer their purchase, and teachers can sometimes be guilty of teaching to the exam or giving students what they need to pass. In considering a market addressing consumer 'needs' (rather than a public good addressing learners' needs), we turn our attention away from discussions of 'good' teaching and towards analysis of consumer culture (Molesworth *et al.*, 2009).

Student satisfaction with the 'service offering' has become crucial for the marketised HEI (Alves and Raposo 2006; Dolinsky 1994; Hart and Coates 2010; Webb and Jagun, 1997) and student satisfaction measurement mania exists as scores are endlessly sought to assist staff performance management (Molesworth *et al.*, 2009). Whilst this is not as evident in Ireland yet, and did not feature during my research, the arrival of TUs may herald such mania as the TU process has already highlighted the marketisation culture, by setting strict criteria before a TU designation can be sought (HEA, 2018). In addition to internal metrics, there are overriding criterion used to measure the value of HE and its contribution to the economy: the number of graduates with well-paid jobs,

research and consultancy revenue, rankings in league tables (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits (Olssen and Peters, 2005: 313). This is referred to as the neoliberal university and it is something that I am concerned about due to what I see as a focus on quantity of student numbers and the wages they are earning, over the quality of the student experience. As Ball (2004) has observed, success in neoliberalism is translated as marketplace performance and outcomes.

Neoliberal ideas have come to dominate cultural, social and political life almost everywhere in the developed world (Saunders, 2010) and HE is no exception. It is based on the belief that individuals are primarily self-interested and that self-interest furthers the interests of the whole society (Zepke, 2015). Molesworth *et al.* (2009) challenged the dominant discourse of the neoliberal HEI by articulating Fromm's theory of having and being modes of living (Fromm, 1976; Fromm, 1993). Their paper suggests that the current market discourse promotes a mode of existence where students seek to 'have a degree' rather than 'be learners'. The authors argue that this movement should be resisted, but concede that many HEIs are preparing students for a life of consumption by obtaining a well-paid job: a mission of confirmation rather than transformation (Molesworth, *et al.*, 2009), thereby maintaining a focus on employability. This brings into question whether industry experience is suitable preparation at all since it is rooted in a 'having' mode and suggest that academic training based on 'being' a scholar may be better preparation for future industry leadership. HE needs to cater for students motivated by an intrinsic interest in their subject and the possibility of an emerging love of the subject (Beaty *et al.*, 1997), but through my experience and research I have observed situations where this love is not being given a chance to flourish as the pressure of marketisation becomes more apparent.

At a national level, there is a focus for Irish HE policy to work better with industry to achieve more coherent and coordinated outcomes and to smooth the transition between the education system and the world of work (DES, 2011; DES, 2017; QQI, 2014). The collective experience and successful cooperation between educators and employers is also highlighted in policy documents (HEA, 2019b; QQI, 2014: 3) and the *National Skills Strategy 2025* (DES, 2016: 86) have emphasised that HE needs to increase the number of HE students undertaking a work placement or work based

project as part of their programmes by 2025, a target which is likely to be impacted by Covid-19 pandemic. T&H programmes already meet this objective and are therefore well placed to be vanguards of change as other programmes introduce WBL. For further evidence of the prevalence of WBL in HE, the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) (2020) reports that 63% of students surveyed have blended academic learning with workplace experience.

From the industry perspective, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) also highlights the role that work placement at HEIs can play in reducing the incidence of labour market mismatch amongst new graduates (McGuinness *et al.*, 2015) and this report also calls for more resources to be allocated to service work placements and job matching in HEIs (*ibid.*), which is appropriate considering the need for resources as identified in Chapter 2 and further discussed in Chapter 5. The *Irish National Employer Survey 2018* (HEA, 2019b) also highlights the value of work placement and apprenticeships, the existing good levels of collaboration between employers and HEIs, with employers expressing an 85% satisfaction rate with the quality of graduates recruited in the previous two years. These findings align with the Irish Business and Employer Confederation (IBEC) *Smarter World, Smarter Work* report (IBEC, 2018) that calls for investment in skills and employability and flexibility to address the dynamic labour market needs and to ensure smoother career transitions. WBL can play a key role in narrowing the skills gap and bridging gaps between industry and HEIs, which can lead to further collaborative opportunities. As the HE landscape changes, more emphasis is being put on the employability of graduates, with HEIs competing to offer higher employment rates and with better starting salaries, in order to attract student enrolments. Employability statements are used in the United Kingdom HE to improve information available to prospective students and to help them navigate existing information (Higher Education Academy, 2010). It has been suggested that such statements should also be introduced for each programme in Ireland (DES, 2016:80), which indicates the focus on employability opportunities arising from HE. HEIs are expected to be the engine for economic growth (O'Connor, 2013) and to provide work-ready graduates, but for that to happen, there must be healthy and united partnerships between all stakeholders, which I maintain is currently not the case as evidenced in discussions in Chapter 5 and this research makes suggestions in that regard in Chapter 6.

Employability skills can be seen as 'critical enablers' of graduate ability to function effectively in the modern workplace (Jackson, 2015), and they include team working, problem-solving, communication, information literacy and professionalism (Coll *et al.*, 2009; Freudenberg *et al.*, 2011). WBL can help provide such skills and simultaneously have a positive impact on academic performance (Gamble *et al.*, 2010), which is possibly due to WBL accelerating maturing and enhancing motivation and accountability in students (Mandilaras, 2004). However, McArthur (2011) stresses the dangers of the employability movement in HE, which risks students understanding their identity mainly in terms of their exchange value in the world of work. Students might learn about the value of creativity or initiative, for example, solely in terms of exchange value rather than as an aspect of what makes us good citizens. Rook and Sloan (2021) suggest students have a lack of understanding of employability and McArthur (2011) argues that HE should nurture capacities for the betterment of individuals, the economy and society. As discussed earlier, expansive learning is a distinct idea that focuses on the personal growth rather than the employability and I agree with aspects of McArthur's (2011) argument, as today's students are more conscious about the world in which they live. As influencers on student programme choices, parents and career guidance teachers also need to be informed about the career opportunities and the positive role that T&H students can play in society and the broad skill set they will acquire, including WBL. The presence of WBL on all T&H programmes should be an attraction for students and their influencers, which needs to be promoted better and this is discussed further in Chapter 5.

The impact of WBL can sometimes be centred on the outcome-focused skills development, with less attention to the process of what, how and from whom students acquire skills during placement (Jackson, 2015). The teaching and assessment of HE programmes implicitly defines what counts as knowledge and how things become known (Jones, 2013), therefore, the assessment of WBL begins prior to the students entering industry at all. Assessing employability skills can be difficult because achievements cannot be neatly pre-specified, they take time to develop and resist measurement-based approaches (Knight and Page, 2007). A paradigm shift in WBL assessment is required as academics are more comfortable assessing disciplinary content rather than generic skills

(Yorke, 2011). T&H programmes have good practices in this regard and these are discussed in Chapter 5, but first it is important pay attention to WBL assessment.

Assessment within WBL programmes in HE

Assessment has two fundamental purposes: learning and testing, and students should be given results to help support their learning and to understand their strengths and weaknesses (in knowledge, understanding or skills) (Smith, 2014). For testing, results are part of a broader social system of accreditation and assurance, to ensure the student has achieved a certain standard. For T&H WBL, standards are decided at each HEI and this is something I probed with respondents and will revisit in Chapter 5, a call for consistency, which I have established is currently lacking. It is recognised that all types of testing influence how students are motivated to learn (Harlen *et al.*, 2003) and this can have a positive and negative effect, for some student's motivation will increase if there is a test to pass, whilst for others motivation may wane (Harvey and Slaughter, 2007: 39). Some WBL assessment may lead students to focus on the assessment rather than the work and learning, and if this assessment is not well designed, it can lead to a disappointing experience for all WBL stakeholders. Smith (2014) argues that if the aspects not measured are crucial to professional practice then the assessment tool is valid but not complete and it is my position that this is the case with some WBL.

The concept of sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000: 151) appeals to me as it suggests assessment that meets the needs of the present and prepares students to meet their own future learning needs, which is a key outcome of WBL. In a similar vein, Biggs (2003: 157) discussed the concept of holistic assessment, which sets out that an assessment protocol may validly measure only some aspects of performance, but not the whole performance. Such a concept would work well for T&H WBL as the assessment is of the integrated action, not of the performance of each part (Biggs, 2007). The collaborative assessment approach used in some WBL highlights the degree of exposure of various stakeholders (Cooper, 2017) and I revisit this power imbalance later.

“Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by

definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.” (Boud 1995: 35).

This quote perfectly captures the tensions at the heart of WBL that I have so far mapped out in this thesis; assessment is an integral part of HE and it requires adequate resourcing and the creation of effective partnerships. Robust WBL assessment involves all stakeholders, but evidence shows it is undervalued by some, which stresses the importance of the recent work undertaken by the National Forum.

The National Forum is advancing discussions in Irish HE on the topic of assessment (National Forum, 2016a; 2016b) and they have turned their focus to work-based contexts (National Forum, 2017) and organised several webinars and a national symposium on the topic of WBA (National Forum, 2020), which aligns with much of my research findings and highlights the topicality of my study not only for T&H programmes, but for all HE and FET. The Forum Insight document is very useful to expand the understanding of assessment and feedback in Irish HE (National Forum, 2017). This document outlines summative assessment (also termed assessment OF Learning) as assessment of an activity that has occurred (i.e. after a period of learning) and suggests that it can be termed 'high stake assessment' where this activity is normally graded and has a high weighting or has significant consequences for progression (National Forum, 2017). Formative assessment is also discussed (also termed assessment FOR learning) and related to the concept of 'feedback' to the student that emphasises learning (National Forum, 2017). There has to be an impact on student learning in order for it to be considered real 'feedback' (Evans, 2013) and feedback also applies to staff about their teaching, emphasising the need for dialogue between students and teachers (Nicol, 2010). There have been calls for much greater emphasis and use to be made of formative assessment (Boud, 2000) and it lends itself very well to WBL, where students are in industry for a period of time and would benefit from feedback on an ongoing basis. Assessment as learning (Earl and Katz, 2006) is an extension of assessment *for* learning, except students are empowered to self-regulate and critically evaluate their own learning and performance (Carless *et al.*, 2011; Sadler, 2009; 2010). This already features quite strongly in T&H WBL with significant reflection required by

the students and Martin *et al.* (2011) suggest that other formative methods for assessing WBL include blogs, e-journals, diaries, commentaries and emails, items that I will revisit later in the chapter.

Whatever tools are used, assessment should generate appropriate student learning activity (Gibbs. 1999: 47) and this is particularly true for WBL, but one of the areas where assessment and evaluation have posed issues for practitioners is the devising of mechanisms that are appropriate across a wide range of WBL circumstances (Costley, 2007: 3). Some of the issues with assessing WBL as summarised by Costley and Armsby (2007: 32):

- Translating work-based abilities and knowledge into academic HE assessment criteria
- How to assess theory and practice together
- Assessing transdisciplinary knowledge
- Ensuring personal learning is assessed
- How far it is useful to include work-based assessors in assessing WBL
- The legitimacy of the workplace as a context for research
- Problems of balance in assessing reflective practice

Part of the difficulty is that the skills that are being learned and assessed are very practical and for skills related programmes. Riebe and Jackson (2014) argue that assessments should clearly define the precise nature of the skill and expected level of performance for undergraduates at different stages of their degree. They support standardised rubrics, yet caution should be given to the variation across different WBL contexts (*ibid.*). The variety of T&H WBL locations and situations is so wide that it is quite difficult to design and assess robustly enough for all eventualities. Jackson (2015) conducted research with 131 WBL students in Australia and found that most prefer learning the theory in the classroom as a foundation, which is then built on during WBL. A small minority's preference was for skills development in the classroom and they cited that inadequate preparation in these areas augmented a sense of inferiority in some students, impacting on their confidence during WBL. In my experience this is somewhat different for T&H students who typically have more of an opportunity for such skills development and assessment in HEI training bars, kitchens and restaurants, which simulate the work environment. Jackson (2015) supports the need for integrating

skill development across two settings – the classroom and in the workplace, followed by self-reflection and performance review on the return to the classroom. As set out in Chapter 5, this approach is happening in the main for T&H programmes, but there is a lack of consistency across the sector.

The assessment of WBL needs to support the development of comprehensive subject knowledge as well as the capacity to scrutinise and add to and amend an evolving theory of practice. In addition to the content of what is assessed, Jones (2013) suggests the methods of assessment are crucial to the promotion of an autonomous capable professional. The way teaching and assessment are conducted in preparation programmes implicitly define what counts as knowledge in the field and how things become known (Jones, 2013). This highlights the importance of preparatory modules and assessment for WBL, setting the foundation for when a student is situated in a learning environment outside the classroom and this research highlights an inconsistency in this regard from one HEI to another. The programme of teaching and assessment needs to be constructively aligned (Biggs, 2003) with the goals of professional practice and Costley and Armsby (2007) suggest that WBL assesses learning that is more to do with reasoning and making judgements than it is to do with skills and know-how. They argue that WBL at HE should be concerned with being able to think at a higher level about practice and understand the context well enough to be able to offer interventions into practices that have been researched, analysed critiqued and evaluated. This shows us that there are many views as to how assessment should be conducted, and the variety of approaches illuminates the challenges in assessing WBL. Another feature of WBL assessment is self and peer assessment, with most HEIs seeking to enable learners to critique knowledge and critique self, which is not something that I feel all students are equipped to do.

Students as assessors?

Students need to develop the skills of self- and peer-assessment prior to, during and post-WBL (National Forum, 2017). It is recognised that students can be acknowledged as 'experts' in the sense that they understand the work situation, its nuances and micro-politics and therefore, it is appropriate

for them to be involved in self- and peer-assessment to reflect on the WBL experience. Whilst self-assessment exercises and learner-centred approaches have become popular in HE, there are implications for the development of teachers as facilitators of learning (Moore, 2007: 66). The paradigm shift of power in the teacher-learner relationship means that it is important for teachers facilitating the empowerment of the learners to understand the power tensions that can evolve, and to provide the appropriate support (Tan, 2004). As Edwards and Knight (1995) identify, an investment of teacher support in the beginning and with practice over time the learners will become more skilled in this important aspect of self-development. Peer-assessment can help raise the level of the practitioner's thinking and actions by focussing the important, more salient aspects of what is to gain in HE (Costley and Armsby, 2007) and the development of self-assessment skills requires appropriate scaffolding, with the lecturer working with the student as part of co-regulation (Evans, 2013). Peer discussions can be useful because they normally use a language that is more easily understood among peers (Land *et al.*, 2014). There is certainly a self-development function to be gained through self-assessment, and peer-assessment could also play a role; however, this again raises the whole area of equity and quality assurance.

Blackwell *et al.* (2001: 282) point out, although students can readily describe their experiences, it is the articulation of what has been learned that is key. That, in turn, depends upon initial purposefulness and then upon regular reflection that involves others. WBL is centred on reflection; it is not merely a question of acquiring a set of technical skills, but a case of reviewing and learning from experience (Gray, 2001: 316). Reflection should be incorporated before as well as during WBL and a range of tools can be used such as journals, portfolios, learning circles, and critical incident analysis (Jackson, 2015). WBL is centred on learning in and through work, Brodie and Irving (2007: 13) indicate that this requires students engage with a range of aspects of learning. Students should:

- know what learning is (learning implies change) and how to do it most effectively (the style, approach and fitness for purpose);
- be able to recognise what they have learnt (description of and reflection about the learning);
- be able to identify what has been learnt (analysis and evaluation of learning);

- know what the learning is informed by (its validity: how the learning stands up to scrutiny against outside evidence);
- Be able to recognise what they need to learn (future learning).

In WBL there is an emphasis on students' capacity to engage successfully in reflective practice and be reflective practitioners (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983). Biggs (2003) argues that understanding is demonstrated when a student interacts thoughtfully with a new task, thinking about appropriate feedback to see how they can improve their performance. Effective WBL practitioners are reflective people who can use current knowledge and ability to develop interests and become change-makers within their particular working contexts and sometimes more widely within their professional areas. WBL can be used to prompt reflection upon career intentions and this needs to be supported by proper programme design (Jackson and Wilton, 2016). Programmes should be scaffolded and integrated in such a way that WBL complements disciplinary-based offerings and close attention must also be given to the order in which modules are taken to ensure upmost gain from the WBL experience.

Smith (2014) suggests that some reflective practices for WBL students can be personally valid, but their use as a valid measure of intended learning outcomes is limited. As there is such variety in terms of WBL contexts and circumstances, the reliability of reflective practices is questionable (Ferns and Zegwaard, 2014) and Cheetham and Chivers (2000) suggest that reflection contributes more to the experienced professionals and therefore, might not be as valuable for undergraduate students. Critical reflection might not be guaranteed, but it is a worthwhile exercise as it should at least encourage students to identify strengths, weaknesses and future learning needs (Jackson, 2015). Learning transfer theory also emphasises the important role of reflection in allowing students put theory into practice (Bransford and Schwartz, 1999). Clearly defined expectations, consideration of skill transfer in the design of assessments and activities and the use of formative assessment are needed for a successful WBL experience (Cates and Jones, 1999). Reflective thinking can be troublesome as it requires judgement suspension (Land *et al.*, 2014: 209), which could be an issue if asking students to gather information/portfolios and do reflective exercises.

Across all Irish HEIs, portfolios are commonly used as an instrument for assessment of WBL on T&H programmes. Portfolios require students in professional education programmes to produce practice-based evidence (Eraut, 2004) of developing competence. Taylor *et al.* (2010: 180) discuss the Assessment and Learning in Practice Setting (ALPS) programme used in health and social care programmes, which uses mobile devices to deliver learning resources and assessments to enrich, enhance and extend practice learning. They discuss how the mobile assessment client enables students to view, complete, and save their completed assessments onto the device and then upload them to their e-portfolio (*ibid.*). The ALPS mobile device system is appealing as it enables reflection anywhere, anytime by allowing students to jot down quick notes, make audio recordings or take photographs that can be revisited to evoke memories and more thorough considerations (Taylor *et al.*, 2010: 189). This type of formative assessment helps to support and motivate students (Broadfoot and Black, 2004) and should be considered when developing any assessment strategy. The portfolio approach largely fits into the assessment of learning and students are given a grade that measures their performance and results in a classification of award. However, as discussed earlier, there is an argument that assessment *for* learning, a more formative approach, is the major driver of learning (Bryan, 2015). Jackson (2015) suggests that students deem portfolios to be useful in articulating capabilities in different skills to future employers. ePortfolios have also been endorsed as a good platform to demonstrate skill acquisition in authentic and relevant environments (Ferns and Zegwaard, 2014). McKenna *et al.* (2010) suggest that portfolios make an important contribution to both formative and summative assessment of WBL, by tracking the students' development over time. Of course, this relies on proper mentoring for each student; the portfolio must have clear guidelines; and learners must be allowed to create a piece of work which reflects their personal interests and concerns. However, research has shown that stakeholders have issues with the current portfolio approach at some HEIs (Carty, 2014a) as it is argued students are being rewarded for writing good reports/portfolios without properly engaging with the WBL component. If portfolios are to be used as part of WBL assessment, there needs to be a robust process in place.

Jones (2013) provides a five processes model of portfolio compilation: collection of evidence, selection of evidence, annotation of evidence, reflection and projection. I particularly like the fifth

process of projection as suggested by Wagner *et al.* (1994), which involves the setting of appropriate professional goals. This highlights the role that good portfolios can play by involving the compiler in testing their skills and knowledge in the workplace contexts and gaining feedback that impacts on further learning and personal goals. The reflective process involved in portfolio construction is inherent in assessment tasks and during this process, the learner can gain feedback on their actions (Jones, 2013), which contributes to their learning. I believe the area of feedback is very important for WBL assessment, more than for any other module and Li and De Luca (2014) provide useful commentary on what constitutes effective and ineffective feedback. The notion of feedforward is mentioned, in terms of informing future work, which is a concept that is apt for WBL, as students are expected to progress in the world of work.

The need for staff training and development is paramount for effective feedback. Some HE staff and host organisations provide feedback to students as they have received it themselves, which is not always ideal. Boud and Molloy (2012) provide a good background on feedback and the pressures of modern HE regarding providing good feedback. The Mark 2 – sustainable model for feedback, positions learners as having a key role in driving learning and generating and soliciting their own feedback, which links with self and sustainable assessment mentioned earlier. Crook *et al.* (2006) discuss video feedback and this is an area that could be useful, particularly for online courses and WBL modules, as necessitated during Covid-19. However, Race and Brown (2001: 112) argue that an online dialogue for feedback is less effective than face-to-face exchanges, however, with the post-pandemic landscape accelerating the move to online delivery in HE, this might need to be revisited.

It should be noted that not everyone views assessment positively. 'Backwash' is a term referring to students learning what they think will be assessed and some commentators say this only encourages surface learning (Elton, 1987; Frederiksen and Collins, 1989). Snyder (1971) discusses how students encouraged to be creative at Massachusetts Institute of Technology abandoned any such aspiration when they realised that most marks could be gained by rote learning of material for multiple choice questions. It is my position that this concept is alive and well among some T&H WBL students who are strategic by only focussing on what is being assessed to allow them to pass the

module or programme but not really engaging with or understanding WBL. Due to a lack of clarity and guidance and rigorous thought in current assessment methodologies, backwash has found its way onto WBL modules (Carty, 2014a) and this needs to be addressed. Another view to consider is that assessment is not a positive experience for some students who can find themselves demotivated with the process. Students with poor marks in assessment can interpret that as poor performance, meaning a lack of ability and may give up (Dweck, 2000). I have seen this at first-hand experience, where students that performed poorly in the WBL module, in terms of the mark achieved, have been very demotivated. Saunders (2006) cites Otter (1994) who identified that positive responses of people who participated in WBL may be more connected to feelings of well-being because of publicly acknowledged work/skills, rather than any direct improvement in work effectiveness.

In his discussion of WBL, Lester (1999) makes an interesting distinction between map-makers and map-readers. The map-readers focus on learning of subject matter, whereas map-makers prioritise self-managed, generic learning typical of a work environment. Lester (1999) argues that assessment methods should be different for both; map-readers need to be assessed on their accumulation of facts and knowledge, but more importantly, map-makers need to be able to identify what particular facts and knowledge are required in real world situations. Regardless of which learner you are dealing with, the industry partner will have a role in delivering the WBL experience and their role in assessment is now discussed.

The role of industry in WBL assessment

The notion of work-based assessors is a contentious one, some HEIs find it useful to include work-based assessor, but there is a huge onus on them to carefully select and train such work-based supervisors or mentors. Patrick *et al.* (2009) state that workplace assessment may be shared with various stakeholders, including students and industry supervisors, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the university and academic supervisors. In Irish HEIs, on T&H programmes, there is no consistent approach, some allow industry input, whilst others allow none and I will present this in more detail in Chapter 5. Sheridan and Linehan (2011: 93) suggest an assessment process that

includes the employer's views formally and encourages autonomous learning through a reflective self-assessment process by the student providing optimum opportunities for learning and engagement. It is suggested that the most important stakeholder in assessing students ability to perform employability skills is the workplace supervisor, followed by other employees, university lecturer and finally classmates (Jackson, 2015). Nottingham (2016) says much is to be gained from engaging with the employer-centred pedagogic perspective and they give examples of employer designated learning outcomes on some employer-centred WBL, but these are mostly not credit-based modules.

It is suggested that industry evaluations of student performance are vital (Hundley, 2010) and that supervisors/mentors are instrumental in ongoing observation, review and feedback (Bandaranaike and Willison, 2011) that benefits student learning (Hodges, 2011). There are many benefits to capturing workplace supervisors' perspectives on student work (Ferns and Zegwaard, 2014; Patrick *et al.*, 2009) and providing rich information on effectiveness of WBL design (Hundley, 2010). Bandaranaike and Willison (2009) developed a work skills development framework to measure the extent of students' autonomy against a range of work skills. The purpose of this framework is to integrate key employability skills into WBL and devise a measure of qualitative assessment in the workplace. These authors are proponents of work-based assessors, highlighting the opportunities it presents for a holistic approach to WBL assessment. Much of these points have been raised during the National Forum (2020) series of online events investigating WBA and I am involved in discussions to do a pilot study in 2021, which will aim to apply some of these WBA learnings to the T&H industry, whilst also testing some WBA challenges.

The main criticisms of work-based assessors are around quality assurance and the challenge to ensure standardisation across different industry settings (Yorke, 2011), recognising the nuances of unpredictable, context-dependent WBL experiences (Ferns and Zegwaard, 2014). It is recognised that assessment is a specialist skill that requires detailed knowledge, particularly regarding standards in HE. Costley and Armsby (2007) point out that industry assessors could be more focussed on outcomes than analysis, which brings into question validity and reliability of WBL assessment (Smith, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2010). Reliability is the degree to which the same result will

be obtained when the assessment is done either by different assessors or by the same assessor on different occasions and the degree to which the same result will be obtained when the same student does the assessment on different occasions. The challenge of this arises in industries where proper systems are not in place. In industries such as nursing and education, the workplace staff are qualified and required to assess student competencies and performance against specified criteria aligned with learning outcomes, academic standards and professional competencies. Whilst it works in these industries because there are agreed standards and practices and the majority of staff have gone through the same or similar system, within the T&H industry generic standards are not set across the industry and not all managers in the industry have necessarily gone through HE or WBL. This therefore raises issues with quality assurance and standardised approaches, without which, empowering work-based assessors is very difficult and can be complicated. In their study of multisource feedback (MSF) among medical education residency students, Moonen–van Loon *et al.* (2015) identified the increased reliability of multiple assessors and assessor groups for competency-based assessment programmes to evaluate learners' performance. This study provides evidence of a successful process where a learner is assessed by multiple assessors, on an ongoing basis and it shows a potential model to be followed in T&H WBL. The study suggests that unique characteristics of assessor groups should be considered and that feedback from a single source should be treated with caution (Moonen–van Loon *et al.*, 2015: 1098), which challenges the current assessment strategies on some T&H WBL modules.

Some industry stakeholders may not want to be involved in the assessment process and are content to contribute to appraisals or make recommendations, without being involved in the formal assessment process. Woolf and Yorke (2010) suggest that industry assessors are reluctant to progress beyond awarding pass and fail grades and QQI (2018: 60) raises the issue of grading WBL and whether WBL should contribute to the final award classification or grade and, if so, how to ensure consistency. Whether they are involved in assessment or not, it is important to have access to supportive mentors for observation, advice and feedback purposes (Martin *et al.*, 2011). Employers need to proactively provide WBL opportunities for students to develop career management and related competencies, which will be beneficial for them to identify potential recruits and to shape

prospective employees through curriculum co-design (Jackson and Wilton, 2016). Another factor to consider when discussing work-based assessors is the potential power tensions that can occur. McArthur (2011) identifies the potential clash between the interests of workers and employers and suggests that HE should play a role in developing workers who can challenge workplace inequalities and imagine different futures for themselves and others. This power brokerage suggests that students on WBL in industry may have little bargaining power and be at the mercy of employers, which could go against them if industry are to have a role in the assessment process. Cooper (2017) suggests strategies are required to reduce power relations that arise from collaborative assessment and I aim to address this with the new framework in Chapter 6. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that research has indicated harassment of workers in the T&H industry (Falvey, 2019) and whilst my research did not encounter any such issues, I never asked about it either but I suggest it is an area that merits further research.

When discussing self and peer-assessment, the notion of equity and quality assurance was raised. Capability is central to successful WBL and following the principle of alignment, capability must be assessed. Sometimes the employer can be involved and contribute to this process and when this does happen, there must be equity, in employer perception of what and how they are assessing and quality assurance of assessment undertaken outside of the HEI (Brodie and Irving, 2007: 17). Some authors believe strongly in the importance of having employers' input into the development and assessment, to add realism and credibility to content (Bridgstock, 2009; Gunn and Kaufmann, 2011; Jackson, 2014). Regardless of who is assessing, it is important that learning can be quantified and qualified, in other words adequately evaluated, so that the quality of the HE credits gained can be assured in terms of academic credibility and the personal achievement of the student (Harvey and Slaughter, 2007: 38). Evaluation procedures are required to ensure WBL assessments are fit for purpose and such procedures address student interpretations of the effectiveness of the assessment regimes and the possibilities for improvement (Costley and Armsby, 2007). Equivalency of academic standards for WBL is an issue highlighted by Nottingham (2016) and this is something that I have observed is lacking with assessment across the range of T&H programmes offered in Irish HEIs and beyond.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focuses on how HE is changing in Ireland and set out issues relating to the learning, teaching and assessment of WBL. The literature supports the importance of WBL in skill acquisition and knowledge creation, which works as a complement to classroom learning, not as a replacement. I have noted the lacuna in literature for T&H programmes and the Irish perspective on WBL, which this study aims to address. I have constructed a narrative that shows the appetite for and growth of WBL, while highlighting issues with assessment and the role of industry in the process. One of the major critiques made by industry of graduates and HEIs is that they are not doing enough to make them (graduates) work-ready and this raises the issue of who has responsibility for this. HEIs are viewed by some as businesses, not spaces for learning, and these topics are investigated through my research and findings are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and methods employed for this thesis. The research questions are stated again, the theoretical framework is presented, the rationale for the research, the research objectives and the research philosophy are discussed. The primary and secondary research methods are described and the data collection methods used during primary research are discussed as well as justification for their choice and use. In addition, the areas of sample selection and data analysis are outlined. Reliability, validity and generalisability, and ethical considerations are also highlighted as well as limitations of the research. Researching WBL, and particularly the role of various stakeholders requires a multi-method approach to attend to and incorporate the different voices, orientations and investments in WBL and how these might overlap and/or come into tension. As such, this study synthesises a survey with students and semi-structure interviews (SSIs) with industry and HEI stakeholders and the methodology is informed by literature around learning theory, communities of practice and WBL. I adopted a case study approach for my primary research to give a voice to those with a stake in WBL – beneficiaries, partners and providers.

Research Questions

Arising from previous research (Carty, 2014a) and following a review of literature and policy documents, the research questions were formed:

- RQ 1:** How and in what way is WBL regarded by different tourism and hospitality stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)?
- RQ 2:** What tensions are there between different stakeholder understandings of WBL, particularly regarding employability, assessment and student engagement/quality?
- RQ 3:** How are the pressures of a more marketised and consumer focused HE sector (globally, but specifically within Ireland) manifested in and contributing to the ways WBL is developing within tourism and hospitality programmes?

RQ4: What are the implications of these findings for supporting changes in how work-based learning is managed in Irish higher education institutes?

To support the research questions, several research objectives were identified to shape the research strategy:

1. To critically review the literature in the field of WBL and how its role is viewed by the various stakeholders (students, HEIs, industry), in particular focusing on employability and engagement.
2. To critically review the literature in the field of assessment of WBL, specifically investigating industry involvement in the process, to determine its influence on WBL learning and teaching.
3. To develop appropriate methodology and methods to explore the WBL issues impacting the main stakeholders participating in tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education.
4. To present the findings of the study by incorporating examples of good practice.
5. To discuss the findings in conjunction with the literature and contribute to knowledge and practice by considering the practical implications for the various stakeholders (students, HEIs, industry).

Theoretical Framework

This study was approached from a constructivism angle and the constructivist paradigm was used in my analysis. Dewey's work (1938) set the stage for constructivist theorists whose philosophy of learning fully engages the learner in the construction and re-construction of their knowledge. The theory of constructivism rests on the notion that there is an innate human drive to make sense of the world. Instead of absorbing or passively receiving objective knowledge, learners actively construct knowledge by integrating new information and experiences into what they have previously come to understand (Billett, 1996; 2011), as is the case when students undertake WBL in T&H businesses. Constructivism prescribes a whole new level of student involvement whereby content becomes the

means to knowledge rather than the end (Weimer, 2002). The content in this study is WBL, which takes place within a community and landscape of practice, as outlined in Chapter 2 as a theoretical framework, that embraces the concept of WBL enabling boundary-crossing.

WBL provides opportunities for learners to construct their own meanings and to convey their meaning making to others, be they classmates, lecturers or workplace employers/colleagues. The construction of learning is individual and unique to each student but is influenced by the culture of the workplace and the CoP participants. According to Bruner (1996), learning is an active rather than passive process which reflects on the construction of new ideas and concepts grounded in current and past experience and knowledge in a social and cultural context. This proposes that learners construct their meaning of experiences depending on the context in which they are; therefore, learning is situated in a particular context and CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). A constructivist orientation to learning underscores the important role of critical reflection in and on practice as well as to the learners' ability to mobilise what they know and can do from one context to another (McRae and Johnston, 2016). Biggs (2003) emphasises that any learning/meaning is constructed by the student during their learning experience; learning is a product of the student's activities and experiences, rather than the tutors (Walsh, 2007: 80). Therefore, I explored the student learning via interpretivism, to gather first-hand experience of the situated learning that occurred through WBL. To encourage this process, teachers need to inspire students to become self-directed learners (Weimer, 2002) and I investigated if this is occurring during my research with the WBL stakeholders.

Research Design

This section outlines the decisions made about my choices of what to study, who to study, where to study and what research traditions to work within, as well as the ethical considerations

Research Philosophy

There are two main research philosophies outlined in the research literature: the positivist philosophy and the phenomenological/interpretive philosophy (Carson *et al.*, 2001; Chisnell, 2001; Hussey and

Hussey, 1997; Kinnear and Taylor, 1996; Malhotra and Birks, 2003). Positivists take the view that only phenomena, which are observable and measurable, can be validly regarded as knowledge. They believe that the objects that they are researching are unaffected by their research activities and will still be present after the study has been completed. This philosophy embraces the quantitative approach to research, which seeks a particular form of 'objectivity', although this is often disputed. The phenomenologist, by contrast, considers that researchers have values, even if they have not been made explicit. These values help to determine what are recognised as facts and the interpretations that are drawn from them. Phenomenologists believe that the researcher themselves becomes involved with what is being researched (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Hussey and Hussey (1997: 53) argue that the phenomenological approach which is more qualitative in nature stresses the subjective aspect of human activity by focussing on the meaning, rather than the measurement, of social phenomena. The philosophical stance taken by a researcher impacts upon the perspective and approach to how the research is carried out, how the problem is conceptualised and how data is gathered and analysed (Carson *et al.*, 2001). It is necessary therefore to decide at an early stage in the research which philosophy is most appropriate (Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

Philosophical Stance

This research is primarily qualitative, in that it seeks to ascertain the views, experiences and feelings of WBL stakeholders through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. I adopted an interpretivist ontology agreeing with the assumptions set out by Mack (2010) that reality is indirectly constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective, people interpret and make their own meaning of events and that there are multiple perspectives on one incident. Such perspectives are influenced by interactions, socially constructed during WBL, therefore, I examined participants' personal view of the situation and made sense of them (Creswell, 2007). Each stakeholder's experience of WBL will vary depending on their background, previous experience, the team they work with and the social and cultural structures they are part of. Interestingly, many of the HEI and industry respondents had themselves participated in WBL as a student, whilst studying T&H at HE, which gives them interesting insights that I teased out and present in Chapter 5.

I also adopted an interpretivist epistemology in line with the assumptions presented by Mack (2010) that knowledge arises from particular situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation and knowledge is gained through personal experience. I probed the personal experiences of the WBL stakeholders and collected their reflections on the phenomena of WBL. I drew commonalities across the participant experiences for each cohort of WBL stakeholder and identified patterns and themes. Qualitative work within the interpretivist tradition can be challenged on the grounds that its finding cannot be replicated elsewhere. However, it should be emphasised that the study can offer a case which can be illuminating to other similar contexts and a research design that might be replicated elsewhere. This is particularly relevant as WBL is rolled out across all HEIs in Ireland, and the T&H experience can act as an exemplar for other industries.

Methodology

To 'go deep' and to learn what works and what does not (Corcoran *et al.*, 2004) I utilised the case study approach to my primary research of WBL in T&H. Yin (1989:23) says that a case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". This approach was appropriate for the research as I sought to bring all three stakeholder voices together using surveys with students and SSIs with HEIs and industry. The survey and SSI respondents can be considered groups of cases and the purpose of each was to gain understanding of the larger groups they represent (Gerring, 2004: 342).

The research involved gathering case studies of people working/studying within their regular environment (Corcoran *et al.*, 2004) and focused on naturalistic 'real-life contexts' that sought to provide a comprehensive and holistic examination of a phenomenon within its economic, political or social context (McGovern and Alburez-Gutierrez, 2017). The case study approach allowed me to "close-in" on real-life situations and test views directly as they unfolded (Flyvbjerg, 2006). According to Yin (1989: 82), case studies allow a researcher to reveal the multiplicity of factors which have interacted to produce the unique character of the entity that is the subject of study. The case study method was appropriate for the research questions and circumstances of this study as it allowed me

to analyse the topic of WBL in the T&H industry through the cases of each stakeholder group and to access a broad range of constructs about reality that I investigated via interpretivism. Connecting the case study to CoP theory, Lave & Wenger (1991) discussed how shared viewpoints or ways of thinking and feeling give the learner a sense of competence and belonging to the community of learners and practice.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach was used, and I began with a student survey, followed by interviews with various stakeholders involved in WBL (HEIs and industry). Mixed methods can lead to separate studies Yin (2006), unless certain guidelines and approaches are used to keep it a single study and I heeded these guidelines to ensure a true mixed methods approach, starting with the research questions, the units of analysis, the structure of samples, the instruments and data collected and analytical strategies (Yin, 2006). I piloted the research tools in one HEI and after refining the survey I extended it to others in that HEI, and after refining the interview template I rolled it out across other HEIs in Ireland that offer WBL components on T&H programmes. The quantitative method (surveys of 57 students in 2014) was used to gather data and to steer my research project and set my research in context. I constructed themes from the survey (which itself was based on the major themes identified in literature and policy) that were probed with a selection of those stakeholders using qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews with 20 stakeholders). There are twelve HEIs in Ireland offering WBL on T&H programmes and research was conducted with 13 respondents from ten of them. WBL staff are often based in various units within the HEI – academic departments, career guidance, professional development and my research was conducted with ten academics and three Heads of School. The industry SSIs were undertaken with five managers who have experience of WBL and two representative industry groups were also interviewed. The triangulation of data collection with all stakeholders enhanced the trustworthiness of the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

I view myself somewhat as an insider researcher (Nixon, 2008; Raelin, 2008) and in this context an inside evaluator (Caro, 1971) and I understand that this can have implications on the

research as I cannot escape my own experience. Also known as endogenous research (Trowler, 2011), it refers to research undertaken within an organisation, group or community where the researcher is also a member (Hellowell, 2006). It is also suggested that it can be undertaken by someone who may not necessarily be a member of that group, but who has a 'priori' intimate or familiar knowledge of the group (Hellowell, 2006). In addition to me being considered an inside researcher, this categorisation can also apply to my respondents, which I recognise has associated challenges, but I overcame these by following guidelines by Trowler (2011) and Fleming (2018), which included: identifying potential biases and ensuring trustworthiness; acknowledging preconceived ideas and the desire for positive outcomes and ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

My own T&H journey began in 1997, when I began my first job working in a hotel on a part-time basis for three years. I undertook a four-year programme in hotel management at an Irish HEI from 2000 to 2004, which included two WBL modules, one for 12 weeks in Ireland, the other for 12 months in Germany. After graduation, I worked in the T&H industry for a number of years, before going to work in HE, where I have been for 15 years (since 2006), working in two Irish HEIs. My role as an external examiner at four other HEIs has given me good insights into WBL at other colleges and my current role has seen me involved in the design of WBL modules, participating in WBL workgroups in my own HEI and nationally, carrying out WBL monitoring visits each year (approximately 250 since 2011) and as tutor to over 600 WBL students (since 2011). During my research I have presented preliminary findings to three Irish and one European T&H academic conferences and have been invited to talk at a hospitality industry conference, which has allowed me to get feedback and input from wide audiences. I also secured funding from Fáilte Ireland for a benchmarking trip to investigate T&H programmes in Switzerland, who are often considered to be world leaders in this discipline. During this trip, I was able to explore the international experience of WBL, which is similar to the Irish context. My experience has identified challenges and opportunities for WBL that this research explores and advances, particularly concerning resource allocation, assessment of WBL and creating effective WBL partnerships.

Research Process

A number of research process models are illustrated in the literature (Malhotra and Birks, 2003; Domegan and Fleming, 2003; Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Ryan, 1995) and the research process followed for this thesis followed the model proposed by Malhotra and Birks (2003) who propose a six-stage research process, which is illustrated below.

- Stage 1: Problem definition
- Stage 2: Research approach development
- Stage 3: Research design development
- Stage 4: Fieldwork or data collection
- Stage 5: Data preparation and analysis
- Stage 6: Report preparation and presentation

Malhotra and Birks (2003)

Data Generation

For this study, data was generated from a survey and semi-structured interviews and collected from documents and other artefacts.

Survey and Interviews

I conducted an online survey with 57 students who had undertaken WBL on T&H programmes, and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with academics in HEIs throughout Ireland and industry providers of WBL and industry representative bodies. Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (2008) present several practical considerations that I followed when conducting the interviews. One of the important factors they refer to relates to obtaining the trust of the interviewee. I was fortunate to know a good number of my interviewees as the T&H industry in Ireland is relatively small, as is the related HE sector, which meant I had contacts to engage with, who also assisted in connecting me to new audiences. Before each interview, I distributed a participant information sheet that outlined the purpose of the research to the participants (see Appendix Three). This sheet was signed and returned by participants before the interview was conducted. Furthermore, I assured all research

participants that their identities would not be linked to information provided in the interview (Whiting, 2008). This was important when presenting data, as respondents could have been identifiable from the comments they made due to the concentrated nature of the T&H HE landscape in Ireland.

The survey tool (see Appendix One) captured profiling information about the respondents and probed their WBL experience based on five closed and six open questions. The survey questions were based on existing themes in literature relating to: WBL preparation, overall experience, learning experience, communication and assessment. The survey findings are presented in Chapter 5 and these results helped to frame the discussion points for my interview schedules with HEIs (see Appendix Four) and industry (see Appendix Five). The surveys provided a good opportunity for students to offer personal accounts of their experiences and the interviews delved deeper into these interpretations with other stakeholder groups. My role as a tutor to WBL students and completing WBL monitoring visits over many years also allowed insight into the emergent themes, which are presented in Chapter 5 and form the foundation for the recommendations in Chapter 6.

The constructivist approach was a good fit with the interpretivist nature of my research as it positioned the participant as central to the experience, allowing them to construct their own meaning that I analysed across the stakeholder groups. The cases chosen were a mix of comparable cases and cases across population subgroups (students, HEIs, industry). Comparable cases were a random sample, of students who participated in a survey and the purpose of this approach was to allow for generalisations for students (Flyvbjerg, 2006). A stratified sample of cases was utilised for HEI and industry respondents, which allowed for generalisation for specially selected subgroups within the population (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As the research progressed, it became clear that the stratified sample HEI cases were often simultaneously comparable, in that respondents were from similar organisations and circumstances, which provided a wealth of information for me to interpret in the findings and discussions.

For each group of interview participants (HEI and industry), I set out an interview schedule that helped to guide the discussions (see Appendix Four and Five). Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) discuss the importance of using structured questions for comparative case studies, to support

consistency. Table 4.1 sets out the thirteen HEI interviews that were conducted from February 2018 to September 2019, across ten HEIs. Ten interviews have been completed with lecturers who also act as WBL co-ordinators and there were three interviews with Heads of School, as I felt it was important to include HEI management perspectives in the study. To further breakdown HEIs, they are identified by the number of T&H students undertaking mandatory WBL annually: small (less than 50), medium (between 50 and 100) and large (over 100).

| No. | Position in the organisation | Type of HEI – in terms of WBL students | Identifier |
|-----|------------------------------|--|--------------|
| 1 | Head of School | Large | Large HEI 1 |
| 2 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Medium | Medium HEI 2 |
| 3 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Large | Large HEI 3 |
| 4 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Small | Small HEI 4 |
| 5 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Medium | Medium HEI 5 |
| 6 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Small | Small HEI 6 |
| 7 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Medium | Medium HEI 7 |
| 8 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Medium | Medium HEI 8 |
| 9 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Large | Large HEI 9 |
| 10 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Large | Large HEI 10 |
| 11 | Lecturer / WBL co-ordinator | Small | Small HEI 11 |
| 12 | Head of School | Small | Small HEI 12 |
| 13 | Head of School | Large | Large HEI 13 |

Table 4.1: HEI Interviews

There were five respondents from large HEIs, four from medium HEIs and four from small HEIs. The number of students being placed at each HEIs annually ranged from approximately 30 to over 300. The 'size' of a HEI did not impact the benefits or challenges encountered with WBL or with assessment, as all reported similar concerns and observations. The main difference brought about by the type of HEI was the resources available to support WBL. All the large HEIs have dedicated resources that vary from one person to teams of up to three people specifically supporting T&H WBL students. The medium HEIs can typically avail of administration support from college-wide placement offices, but these tend to be limited, in one example it was half a day per week and the

focus is on collating and storing paperwork associated with WBL. The small HEIs reported no such support, instead the reliance for coordinating and managing WBL rests with academic staff. All HEIs rely on academics, but some have additional administration support. The academics always play a role in monitoring visits and assessments, but the smaller HEIs rely much more on academics, which is addressed further in Chapter 5 as the topic of resources was a major feature of the discussions.

Table 4.2 sets out the 7 industry interviews that were conducted from July 2019 to September 2019. Five were with industry professionals, and two were with experts from industry representative bodies, who are in tune with their members and are well placed to offer insights on their perspectives and experiences.

| No. | Organisation | Position in the organisation | Identifier |
|-----|--------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Hotel | General Manager | Industry 1 – Hotel GM |
| 2 | Hotel | General Manager | Industry 2 – Hotel GM |
| 3 | Industry Group | CEO | Industry 3 – Industry Group CEO |
| 4 | Restaurant | General Manager | Industry 4 – Restaurant GM |
| 5 | Industry Group | CEO | Industry 5 – Industry Group CEO |
| 6 | Hotel | Group HR Manager | Industry 6 – Hotel Group HR Manager |
| 7 | Tourism Attraction | Operations Manager | Industry 7 – Tourism Attraction Operations Manager |

Table 4.2: Industry Interviews

The interviewees were selected based on my knowledge of their involvement in WBL and the T&H industry. Some respondents were recommended to me by others who I initially contacted but suggested someone else best positioned to address my research questions. I chose to conduct interviews, like many qualitative researchers (Carson *et al.*, 2001), because they allowed me to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs and feelings towards WBL and assessment (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). I considered a focus group approach, but felt the personal interview allowed a free exchange of information that may not be possible in focus groups as there is less social pressure to agree with the views of other group members. Individual interviews allow respondents to be more open about sensitive topics, which was important for my research, as respondents may be more

guarded in a focus group, and logistically, with respondents geographically dispersed around Ireland, telephone interviews were easier to organise. Patton (1990) is an advocate for the interview as a way to find out things that we cannot observe or discover in other ways (Carson *et al.*, 2001: 73). As part of both interview schedules, vignettes were used, which was particularly useful as it allowed me to introduce a scenario that helped explore respondents' perceptions, beliefs and meanings about a particular situation (Barter and Renold, 1999: 4). As MacIntyre *et al.* (2011) posits, vignettes have the advantage of enabling respondents to consider realistic scenarios, whilst allowing some distance between the example and their own personal views or practices. This worked extremely well in this context as it gave respondents a clear focus and usually generated animated responses, which are presented in Chapter 5.

Data Analysis

Domegan and Fleming (2003) define data analysis as 'a set of methods and techniques that can be used to obtain information and insights from the data collected'. The object of analysis is to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988: 42). The data collection for this study initiated with the student survey, structured around questions arising from the literature review. My pre-existing understanding of the research topic assisted in the analysis and interpretation of data (Fleming, 2018) and the survey data was broken into five main categories: WBL preparation, overall experience, learning experience, communication and assessment. After listening to the student voice, HEI and industry respondents gave their views through the SSIs. This research can be considered as a comparative case study, which is the systematic comparison of data points ("cases") obtained through use of the case study method (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999) with each WBL stakeholder. Investigating more than one case study was useful as it allowed me to compare patterns (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999) and this "pattern matching" is a key advantage of the case study methodology (Collier, 1993). As the research developed and patterns and themes were noted, I revisited the cases on an ongoing basis, which allowed me to make comparisons, explain the relationships discovered and to ultimately to answer the research questions.

This process of categorisation involved classifying or labelling units of data (e.g. a passage of survey comments or interview transcripts of any length) as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon (Spiggle, 1994). Comparison across categories was then carried out to discover connections between the cases and to build an overall picture. This stage is referred to by Spiggle (1994) as 'abstraction' and surpasses categorisation in that it collapses more empirically grounded categories into higher-order conceptual constructs, and it involved grouping previously identified categories into more general, conceptual classes or themes. An example of this process was the theme of resourcing WBL, with literature highlighting the need for effective WBL to be sufficiently resourced. This theme manifested among student respondents through their comments about feeling unsupported (by HEIs and industry) before and during WBL. This theme continued to be developed during the SSIs, when HEI respondents spoke about the unmanageable WBL workload and industry respondents indicating they are often too busy to engage properly in the WBL student experience.

Analysis was carried out to enable me to achieve the overall research objectives and this approach to identifying themes was effective as Rubin and Rubin (1995) explain that related themes help build towards a broader description or an overall theory. The categories identified in the literature and survey findings offered foundations for the interview schedule questions and after the interviewing was completed a more detailed and thorough content analysis was conducted and four main themes were identified allowing me to explain the information: individualism, resourcing, partnerships and assessment. This approach allowed me to organise the data, extract meaning, arrive at conclusions, and generate and confirm themes that describe the data (Spiggle, 1994). I aimed to understand the meaning of the findings through interpretive procedures and Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that analysis begins while the interviewing is still underway.

The SSIs were done by telephone (19) and face-to-face (1) and recorded with the permission of the interviewees and shortly after the information was transcribed, while the information was still fresh in my mind. I transcribed the interviews myself, which was a very useful process, that embedded me in the research and as set out by Widodo (2014), this allowed deep engagement with the data and the opportunity to reflect on interviews, which I transcribed as they were completed,

therefore, allowing me to make any changes to interview questions as I progressed. This stage of the analysis was exciting as themes and concepts embedded in the interviews began to emerge. From the initial interviews I learned to acknowledge repetitive themes and used the probing technique to delve deeper into respondent's answers. Malhotra and Birks (2003) argue that the quality of the work occurs through making comparisons, asking questions, going out and collecting more data and I kept this to the fore of all interviews.

Analysis of this type takes a lot of patience and care and quite often needs a lot of inspiration however, as the jigsaw starts to come together (McCracken, 1998) the results are well worth the effort. Qualitative interviewing is a great adventure, every step of an interview brings new information and opens windows into the experiences of the people you meet (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), a statement, which based on this research I agree with. Qualitative interviewing allowed me to enter the respondent's world, to hear their words, to feel their emotions and to extend an emotional reach that would not have been possible with other methods of research. At the beginning the analysis seemed intimidating due to the sheer amount of data, nevertheless, as the research progressed it became more exciting as the themes became apparent. The emerging themes are presented in Chapter 5, and they relate to: individualism and lack of cohesion for WBL; resourcing issues; the need for effective partnerships; and opportunities and challenges of WBL assessment.

Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

The literature suggests that research carried out should be reliable, valid and generalisable (Chisnell, 2001; Malhotra and Birks, 2003) but validity and reliability are inapplicable where qualitative approaches are used Yilmaz (2013). I followed alternative criteria for judging the quality of a research study from a qualitative perspective: credibility instead of internal validity; transferability instead of external validity or generalisability; dependability instead of reliability; confirmability instead of objectivity. Generalisation is described in the literature as the application of research results to situations other than that which was researched (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; Malhotra and Birks, 2003). To generalise from research carried out on a sample, that sample must be representative of the research population (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The sample used for this research may not be sufficiently large to make definitive generalisations but I believe that general

trends and views can be offered based on the research sample that was undertaken. The use of multiple sources is one way to enhance validity (Yin, 1994:34), which this study achieved through surveys and SSIs. Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) agree that structured questions are necessary for structure focused comparisons (George, 1979), similar to the use of a case study protocol (Yin, 1994), but they also propose that structured answers are necessary by using the same set of general categories or answers to guide researchers across the cases. Eisner (1991) points out that there is an opportunity for generalisations from case studies, as transfer occurs through a critical process, allowing past experiences to be seen in a new light. The findings presented in Chapter 5 are a valid representation of the reality at the time of carrying out the research, which took place in a pre-Covid-19 landscape.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained ethical approval for my research from Lancaster University and all those involved in the research consented to do so (Appendix Two – Consent Form) and express permission was received from respondents to the survey and SSIs. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study before they began (Appendix Three – Participant Information Sheet) and were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any point. Ethical considerations in research are necessary to ensure that no one is adversely affected by the research carried out (Cooper and Schindler, 1998). Student participants might have been wary that anything they say could have implications, such as an impact on their marks or relationships with the HEIs/industry, which might have resulted in them being reluctant in giving their true and honest reflections. I attempted to overcome this by emphasising the confidential nature of the feedback and that all data collected was anonymised to ensure they cannot be linked to the data in any way. Similarly, academics may have been wary that critical responses and contributions could be attributed to them, therefore, I reinforced the confidential nature of the responses and ensured that nobody can be identified in the research.

Opportunities and Risks

As mentioned earlier, I participated as a student on a programme with a WBL element and now as an academic member of staff am involved in WBL. I understand that this may have implications on

the research, therefore, I was aware of any power relations in play and tried to allay any fears with participants and remove any bias in my RQs. I was only be able to do what was feasible (Tight, 2012: 224) and where I could get access (Blaxter, *et al.* 2010: 28) but I feel that I have a representative sample, with key representatives from ten of the 12 HEIs offering T&H programmes, industry experts and representative bodies, along with the student voice.

Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) identify that case study research is often challenged as a methodology and Harland (2014) points out that detractors are critical of case studies being specific to the circumstances of individual practice, and therefore, limited in what they can offer theory. However, these authors suggest case study methodology is valid and reliable, when conducted correctly and offer guidance, which I followed, including: having specific research questions; identify variables from existing literature; sample and case selection; use structured questions; conduct a pilot study. Flyvbjerg (2006) robustly challenges some of the misunderstandings about case study research and concludes that it is a method of learning. Eisner (1991) points out that humans have the ability to learn from the experience of others, we do not need to learn everything first-hand, which is one of the main reasons I chose the case study approach, to offer a shared learning from WBL stakeholders.

Time was a personal limitation as was conducting this study on top of a full-time teaching load and extracurricular activities. On reflection, I would have like to expand my student sample to represent more than one HEI, and to conduct SSIs with students, but for the purpose of the research questions, it is appropriate that respondents were mainly academics engaged with WBL, supported by active industry players with WBL experience. I would also have like to talk to more industry respondents, but did not have the time within this study, however, it is an area that I suggest for further research in Chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the research methodology, the research questions and research objectives. The research philosophy and process that I followed are detailed as well as illustrating the research methods used to gather the necessary data to achieve the set objectives. I present arguments

justifying the use of these research methods and other issues such as reliability, validity and generalisability of the research are discussed. This chapter aims to clearly illustrate the steps followed in carrying out this research and it provides a blueprint for the replication of the research undertaken. I posit that the methodology chosen was appropriate to the type of research being undertaken and to the achievement of the objectives of the research. The following chapter analyses and interprets the findings of the research carried out for this thesis and the consensus is that there is no single approach that will work. Consistency of assessing WBL would be good and the sharing of ideas too, however, these things are not always realistic or possible.

Chapter 5: Research Outcomes and Discussion

Introduction – WBL – a positive experience, worth protecting

This Chapter presents the findings from the research and is organised around four broad themes which separately and collectively address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The four themes are: a culture of individualism and lack of cohesion; resourcing issues; fragmented CoPs and LoPs; and the opportunities and challenges of WBL assessment. These themes have clear implications for the ways WBL is experienced, understood and invested in by each of the stakeholders and how communities and landscapes of practice emerge and become more or less stable. The Chapter begins by setting out positive viewpoints towards the WBL experience and the value in protecting what is good and addressing areas of weakness.

T&H programmes have a long track record with WBL in Irish HE, yet there are still many issues that arise on an ongoing basis. Through this research I was able to explore a wealth of WBL experience among the diverse respondents; it was not unusual for respondents – from both HEI and industry, to have over 25 years' T&H experience. Some HEI respondents joined HE more recently and they offer a different perspective, whilst the student respondents had just completed WBL within a year or two prior to the research being conducted. The 57 students who participated in the online survey (see Appendix One) were studying hotel management (61%), culinary arts (26%) or tourism/event management (13%) and respondents completed a 30-week (88%), or 12-week (12%) WBL. Over half of the student respondents (56%) were overseas for WBL, with the balance (44%) taking place in Ireland and the majority (83%) were paid during WBL.

This chapter brings together the three stakeholder voices, outlining the key themes and issues that emerged from the research and their relevance to the different cohorts of participants. It is worth noting at the outset that all stakeholders agreed that T&H has a good track record with WBL and recognised it now faces challenges due to the changing nature of the industry: different ownership structures (fewer family run businesses); increased demand (a longer tourism season); more competition for employees (within the industry, but also from other industries); having to deal with a more marketised HE sector; and since 2020 the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the industry.

There was a strong consensus with HEI and industry respondents that the student cohort has changed greatly in terms of their values and career objectives, identifying students as exhibiting lower levels of commitment to the industry during and beyond their HE journey. The student respondents were mainly positive about the overall WBL and learning experience, but there were higher levels of dissatisfaction with WBL assessment, communication and preparation. The survey prompted students to explain their views and to offer suggestions how WBL could be improved, particularly regarding assessment, and these findings are presented under the thematic structure of this Chapter. The data pointed to the need to protect WBL and a strong commitment from the different stakeholders in wanting to establish productive CoPs in and through WBL. The first theme I will discuss is the rise of individualism and a growing sense of disconnection across the sector where WBL is concerned. More cohesion and consistency is required to ensure the interconnected stakeholders can mutually encourage positive WBL experiences within and across Irish HEIs and the T&H industry.

Theme two highlights the resource implications of WBL and I propose that while WBL has a high cost, there is, in the current context, a low investment by some HEIs that needs to be addressed. This leads onto a discussion of the marketisation of HE and the drive towards employability of graduates to prepare them for the real world in which HEI graduates must hit the ground running and graduate success is linked closely to employment outcomes. Many of the challenges identified in this research stem from the marketisation of HE and I discuss an attitude of servitude towards industry, prioritising their needs over those of students or HEIs. Quality at the heart of WBL is explored from a quality assurance perspective, beginning with a view of WBL partnerships, including a critical examination of the monitoring visits that are integral to effective WBL.

Theme three continues the analysis of WBL partnerships and identifies where fault lines occur across communities and landscapes of practice. Since my first experience working in the T&H industry, over 20 years ago, I have been aware of the sense of community that exists within businesses and across the industry. This sense of community also prevails throughout T&H departments and programmes in Irish HEIs and WBL is central to this. Therefore, the incorporation of the community of practice (CoP) theoretical framework in this study is appropriate and I expand

on this concept to discuss the wider local, national and international landscape of Practice (LoP) during this Chapter and Chapter 6.

Theme four investigates the opportunities and challenges associated with assessment of WBL and pays particular attention to the role of industry involvement, with an overall view that industry are happy to be involved but do not want to take on major responsibility. This theme highlights again the inconsistency of approach to WBL within and across the HE sector.

WBL was overwhelmingly described as a positive experience for all stakeholders, with consistent feedback regarding the building of confidence and relationships through the work-based activity. WBL students spoke positively about enjoying the break from the classroom, for some it was their first proper experience in industry, there is a feeling of independence and most referred to the good times they had outside of work with colleagues and friends. One student said that working in industry and having a practical WBL linked to the programme of study was a major benefit to them:

“Work placement was a massive help to my confidence and the hotel I worked in was very supportive to the fact I was on placement and were delighted to help me out by taking me on for the summer holidays. I learned a lot from them and they learned a lot from me.” (Student)

This highlights the positive CoP environment that some students found themselves part of and suggests the positive contributions students can make to industry during WBL too. This is a positive example of boundary crossing between HEIs and industry but as O’Donovan (2018) sets out, for bilateral benefits to accrue to industry and students, the workplace should be a ‘learning environment’, which I found is not always the case. Some students reported less positive WBL experiences, such as; not getting supervised/mentored on a regular basis; being left to do menial tasks on a repetitive basis; not getting rotated around the organisation departments as had been promised; and another spoke of their disappointment of not having as good an experience as a classmate on WBL, but when probed on this they acknowledged that it was possibly down to them leaving it late to arrange their WBL and not being determined enough to seek more variety during the placement. This reflection does not however absolve HEIs or industry of their duties to provide

meaningful learning experiences and procedures need to be in place to ensure proper learning is occurring.

Long established partnerships between industry and HEIs were evident during this research and strong relationships have been nurtured over years of engagement, often with multiple HEIs.

“We have a great relationship with many colleges and offer many work placement opportunities. It is a win-win situation that we look forward to continuing into the future.”

(Industry 6 – Hotel Group HR Manager)

The benefits of WBL for all stakeholders has been highlighted throughout the literature and this industry respondent recognises that they gain from the transaction. Two industry respondents have noticed a trend of recruiters from other industries (retail and technology in particular) actively pursue and poach T&H graduates and staff because of their valuable T&H WBL experience. One hotelier recently spoke of “losing” two long-serving staff members who have gone to work in leadership roles in Amazon and one industry respondent spoke about being annoyed by the fact that staff they have invested time and effort in are being lured away to rival industries.

“We are training them [students] up to have great customer service skills and these big companies are coming in snapping them up in their 20s and 30s.” (Industry 4 – Restaurant GM)

Academics noted the positive transformation in students on integrated WBL programmes, mirroring my own experience as I navigated through the various WBL stakeholder roles, crossing all of the relevant boundaries. HEI respondents agreed on the educational and personal development as the main positive outcomes of WBL, by giving students the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge and practical skills whilst also learning life skills. Student respondents also referred to life experiences and how they had developed as people, which was particularly evident for WBL students who were placed overseas as they had to cope with new cultures, languages and different

ways of doing business. Several students spoke about learning enabling them to be promoted during the work placement to supervisory position and the transformative element of WBL is an important one as students also benefit from the contacts formed during WBL, which are useful as they progress on their career and life journeys. Industry respondents pointed out their willingness to host WBL students who are trained and educated for their industry, particularly at times when T&H is experiencing skilled-worker shortages. WBL has become a key feature of resourcing T&H businesses and WBL students contribute to the smooth running of many T&H organisations, whilst also having a positive direct and indirect impact on the local economy through their tax contributions and spending. It is favourable that industry recognise their role in ensuring a positive experience for students, as set out below.

“Work placement is vital and you can even see other industries doing it as well, especially in science courses. At the end of the day, if they don’t get a good experience when out in industry [during WBL], then we [industry] are shooting ourselves in the foot.” (Industry 4 – Restaurant GM)

This links back to Jenkins (2001) who identified that unsatisfactory WBL experiences were resulting in high defection rates from industry, therefore, it is positive that some in industry recognise the importance of a good WBL experience, however there needs to be more cohesion to consistently deliver on this, and to ensure that WBL is protected as a vital cog on the T&H higher education.

WBL – A culture of individualism and a lack of cohesion

Whilst there is much positivity, the different cohorts of participants expressed concern and frustration at some of the problems presented by WBL programmes. Each of the ten HEIs involved in this research are operating independently and providing little in the way of structured WBL cohesion across the national LoP. It was this very point that first piqued my interest in this topic, as I spoke with the general manager of a hotel who was incredulous that they had WBL students from four different HEIs with a wide variety in terms of: how they were assessed, the duration, monitoring visits,

and other considerations. Such a lack of cohesion initially surprised me, but my research has shown this is certainly the case as each HEI tends to forge their own path with little consultation with other HEIs. This supports the earlier reference to literature on marketisation and how HEIs are working against each other, as competitors. I propose that the silo mentality is not one based out of collusion or secrecy, but because HEIs are developing programmes within a market environment and each one is trying to outdo the other with ‘best’ programmes and this does not lead to a broad and uniform curriculum. Another reason for working in isolation is that HEI respondents noted there has been no forum or recent initiatives to bring these parties together. It is my position there are some annual events already in existence in Ireland that could be ideal platforms for discussing the broad topic of WBL among the national LoP, and I will refer to these in Chapter 6. With many complex stakeholders, it is no surprise that there is a lack of cohesion among HEIs in terms of WBL, which is neatly summed up by an academic respondent:

“There should be more joined up thinking. If everyone came together once a year to meet up and share documentation. You’d very quickly see people learning and amending their documents.” (Small HEI 6)

This speaks to the issue of relationships again and I was interested in ascertaining how respondents gauged the levels of engagement among HEIs and if they would be willing to work together more. The response was overwhelmingly positive with all HEI respondents agreeing that such a move would be welcome, but not without challenges.

“I think there should be more round table discussions across all colleges. A lot of that comes down to having champions to drive and push the message.” (Small HEI 12)

Those with the biggest appetite for collaboration were the smaller HEIs, which is unsurprising as they may have the most to gain and they can sometimes feel more isolated. One respondent from a small HEI talked about their only lifeline regarding WBL being the external examiner, which gives

an insight to the loneliness that some HEIs feel in their community, as they navigate the world of WBL. As set out in Chapter 1, industry and HEI respondents reflected on what they perceived to be better times, when Fáilte Ireland played a coordinating role for WBL nationally, which was emphasised by this respondent:

“If you talk to an old timer in business, they would have seen Fáilte Ireland as the model for workplace learning.” (Industry 5 – Industry Group CEO)

This quote highlights there are some in industry who still revere the old Fáilte Ireland structure and centralised coordination but implementing consistencies across the HEI sector would not be without difficulties:

“Standardisation would be useful, but every property is different. Industry want the staff and they will mentor them and bring them on board. Industry don’t want time consuming stuff or to be having to go to lots of meetings.” (Large HEI 3)

I asked HEI respondents if they would be in favour of industry standards for WBL and standardisation of assessment for WBL and 10 of the 13 respondents said yes, showing an appetite for a holistic approach similar to that offered by Fáilte Ireland in the past. The 10 respondents in favour were emphatic about their support for such a national approach, but all respondents identified how this would be challenging. Interestingly, two of the three respondents who expressed strong views against standardisation, also highlighted some positives, showing that most respondents could see value in more consistency across all HEIs. There were palpable tensions between and among stakeholders and this has implications for establishing successful CoPs, where students, industry and HEIs need to work in harmony towards a common goal (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Whilst there are examples of successful communities, it also needs to be replicated at local and national LoP levels too, but this is often challenged by variations associated with WBL, assessment approaches, the focus on employability and student engagement.

An example of one such tension is with WBL terminology, there is no common language and the varying terminology inhibits stakeholder understanding of its value (Maertz *et al.*, 2014), particularly for industry who reported finding it confusing. Terms used by respondents to describe WBL include placement, internship, supervised internship, work-based learning, placement year, Erasmus internship – all of which can be interpreted differently by stakeholders. Further WBL variations across the ten HEIs include the number of WBL opportunities on a T&H programme, its scheduling and WBL durations. All ten HEIs involved in this study have WBL modules on their T&H programmes and it is common for HEIs (90%) to have two placements on their programmes, a short one (12 weeks or less) at an early stage and a long WBL (more than 12 weeks, typically 30 weeks but up to one year) later on (normally third year). There are some examples of WBL occurring in an award year, whilst other HEIs have specifically avoided this. Short duration WBL normally takes place in Ireland and longer ones can be in Ireland or overseas, three of the HEIs indicated that international placements were mandatory, and the other respondents said this was encouraged where possible. A trend towards shorter duration WBL (going from 6 months to 3 months) was mentioned by one HEI respondent, and an industry respondent did lament the fact that a once 12-month placement was now six months, which aligns with the finding from Ziegler *et al.* (2020), that reducing engineering WBL from 12 to six months in South Africa was a move in the wrong direction from the industry point of view as a reduction in duration will negatively impact on student workplace learning and employability, which is something worth considering at a national level as Irish HEIs revisit WBL module design.

Three HEIs mentioned the option to undertake Erasmus opportunities as well as or instead of WBL and a flexible semester was mentioned by one HEI, who said that it was possible for students to undertake WBL or Erasmus. The data shows that WBL students normally get paid (minimum wage) for the hours worked and in some cases a portion of wages may be held back if meals and accommodation are provided. Respondents concurred that the hospitality industry, more so than the tourism industry, had a “culture of paying students”, which is because this was the case from the start of WBL in the hospitality industry. Tourism WBL is a more recent phenomenon and HEIs sometimes struggle to secure paid WBL positions, instead students might get a nominal stipend, or

only be expected to perform WBL for a number of hours per week (e.g. 20 hours) to allow them to get paid work elsewhere or sometimes within the same organisation offering WBL, getting payment for any hours over the 20 WBL hours they work for free.

WBL modules are usually stand alone, but two HEIs have WBL integrated into other modules. For example, a small HEI in the study has a 12-week WBL worth 60% of a five credit Personal and Career Development module and another HEI has voluntary WBL, with zero credits attached between year 1 and 2, but there is little uptake of this, students instead focus on their mandatory 30-week WBL in year 3. One HEI also has WBL between year 1 and 2 worth zero credits, but the WBL is the focus of a continuous assessment in a year 1 and a year 2 module. However, some students were failing to engage with this approach, so it is proposed to make that WBL mandatory, but to remain non-credit bearing. A further HEI has a WBL element at the end of the programme, after year three is completed, with no credits attached, but 5 credits are gained through a preparation module in semester 5. One HEI has a 10-week work placement in third year, worth 25 credits, but this is being phased out as it was identified as carrying too many credits. Another HEI has two 12-month WBL modules, one in 2nd year and the other in 4th year, each worth 30 credits. This level of detail might appear confusing and difficult to follow; however, it is important to outline the complexity and variation that exists in the structures of WBL modules across HEIs, all of whom are offering similar types of T&H awards. This can cause real problems, as one HEI respondent highlighted:

“Another programme [in our college] has 15 credits for a 12-week work placement, ours is 5 credits for 12 weeks – how in the name of Jaysus, from an educational view, can you explain that? I think academics have a lot of sorting out to justify why one 12-week work placement gets 5 credits and another gets 15 credits.” (Large HEI 9)

This respondent was at a loss to make sense of this variance within their own HEI and they gave a further insight to other issues with WBL:

“I can find that 1st year students are getting 5 credits for working in food and beverage and then go back [to the same hotel] another year and 3rd year students are getting 15 credits but are doing the same work. I think there is something radically wrong with that. There should be progression. It’s a reality in our own department.” (Large HEI 9)

This highlights the variance and lack of standardisation that can occur within one HEI and the data shows that further variances are found between all HEIs, resulting in tensions and lack of clarity for the sector. Understanding the diversity of WBL requires major collaborative efforts between industry and HEIs (Ziegler *et al.*, 2020), which this study has shown is not always the case.

It is suggested that students and HEI staff are the primary contributors to HE organisation success (Cavallone *et al.*, 2020) but WBL partnerships are somewhat complicated by the fact they are tripartite, also including industry as a primary contributor. To further complicate matters, there are many layers of involvement within each partner group and community; in HEIs there are academic staff who might be involved in assessment and monitoring; support staff involved in co-ordination, monitoring and administration; and management who are involved in all aspects. Each of the ten HEIs researched during the 13 interviews have different structures, reporting mechanisms and ultimately varying assessment strategies too, which lead to tensions throughout the WBL process and experience. Such tensions are exacerbated by the varying cultures of stakeholders and in their paper on WBL in one Irish HEI, Doherty and Stephens (2020) suggest that WBL partnerships can be enhanced by considering the organisational cultures of the HEI and the external employer organisation, which I strongly support. These authors argue that cultural issues within the HEI or external employer can create difficulties when attempts are made to initiate or manage WBL and provide a cultural web that recognises the requirements of all stakeholders participating in WBL, which I revisit in Chapter 6 to align with my own recommendations.

The student role also varies from one HEI to another, with some allowing students the freedom to arrange their own WBL, whilst other HEIs take full control, and some accommodate both approaches or a hybrid model whereby the HEI presents WBL opportunities and students follow up themselves. This in turn can be a little confusing for some industry members, who field approaches

from various HEIs, all coming from different angles and looking for different arrangements and involvement from industry. The variety of structures also occurs in the industry community as different players are involved, depending on the individual business; some may have human resource departments, others might just have the owner/manager coordinating WBL. With such varying layers of involvement and so many interested parties, it is no wonder that stakeholders are often unclear about their exact role in WBL. HEIs and students are direct stakeholders that are involved in co-designing and co-delivering educational services, thus occupying the roles of co-producers and value co-creators (Hughes and Brooks, 2019). From a WBL perspective, industry can also be considered direct stakeholders and they too must be engaged in the WBL process to attain excellence in the HE context (Cavallone *et al.*, 2020). Drawing on the research findings, the level of engagement varies across the sector and this is evidenced in the diversity of assessment strategies, which will be revisited under theme 4.

Resourcing WBL – high cost but low investment

In Chapter 2, I set out that a poorly resourced and poorly managed WBL module can have a significant, long-lasting negative impact on the reputation of a HEI in the very sectors in which its graduates are seeking employment (Bates, 2011). All 13 HEI respondents talked about the need for quality relationships to ensure quality WBL and there is a common belief that for WBL to be done correctly it requires major input from HEIs before, during and after WBL. However, the existing positive engagement is being eroded as the market demands efficient teaching methods as evidenced by these quotes:

“The amount of work involved is not recognised sufficiently. There was a perception that you could fit it [WBL coordination] alongside everything else (e.g. teaching), but you can’t.” (Large HEI 1).

“There’s not a lot of support with WBL – lots of people out there banging the drum about how important it is, but when it comes down to managing it, there is very little support.” (Large HEI 9)

Teaching by its very nature is resource intense, and a common theme among HEI respondents was the resource issues associated with WBL. Initially respondents did not talk about a lack of financial resources, but time, however, in marketised HEIs, time is money so ultimately it does come down to financial pressures. In Chapter 2, it was identified that some WBL activities can be limited due to lack of resources for indirect and close supervision and administration (Milton and Jones, 2008). Respondents agreed with this point and a common criticism of the WBL process from HEI respondents is the under-estimation of time required and allocated on timetables.

“From our perspective [academics], It [WBL] is not valued, the level of work that needs to go into placement if it’s to work. We have one person in the placement office. We’ve been looking for another person to come on board, an industry liaison person to work with industry and get employers signed up, in addition to help with the huge admin work (agreements, insurance cover, etc.).” (Large HEI 10)

As explained in Chapter 4, the size of a HEI did not impact the benefits or challenges encountered with WBL or with assessment, as all reported similar concerns and observations. The main difference associated with the size of the HEI was the resources available to support WBL; some (medium and large HEIs) have support teams (of one or more people) dedicated to assist with the WBL process, looking after paperwork, contracts, and other co-ordinating duties. Others (some medium and all the small HEIs) reported having no support; thus, academics do all the work in arranging and co-ordinating WBL, as well as carrying out a teaching load, and this can be onerous.

Drawing on the research findings, many of those HEI staff involved in WBL were primarily involved in the traditional mode of classroom teaching and learning but Stephens *et al.* (2014: 159) explain that designing and delivering a curriculum for WBL is challenging for such academics and I

suggest this is part of the problem where it seems that HEI staff are involved in WBL without any training or upskilling in that area.

Some HEI respondents criticised HEI management for skimping on timetabled hours for WBL and feel that HEIs are not taking WBL seriously. Others go further to suggest that HEI managers are only interested in supporting WBL as they see it as a way to free up staff while students are away from HEIs on WBL and possibly commercially driven by the opportunity to hire out classrooms to corporate customers too.

The data shows that the number of staff involved in WBL is typically low and I put this point to the three Heads of School respondents who all believe that WBL resources in their HEIs are challenged, but sufficient. They indicated there were pressures on all areas of staffing, including WBL, and put this down to changing funding structures, unit costing and a drop in student numbers on some T&H programmes. An interesting comment about an offer for more streamlined processes was made by this HEI respondent, who normally manages all of WBL themselves:

“There was a move towards centralised placement coordination, but it was resisted as academics wanted to keep control of it. Now it’s graded [WBL] – it used to be pass/fail for 10 years, but grading will ensure that it remains an academic exercise.” (Small HEI 6)

This shows an element of protectionism on the part of academics who want to maintain control over WBL, recognising that there are instances where the responsibility has been passed to support staff. Such a move, to involve support staff in WBL caused concern among some respondents, mostly to do with academic integrity if their involvement impacts on student assessment, which was the case in some HEIs.

Another topic with resource implications is the duty of care to students, which was mentioned several times by respondents, particularly regarding students participating in WBL overseas. In Chapter 2, I discussed Cooper *et al.* (2010) who highlight the clear duty of care when students are completing WBL off campus. Unfortunately, I have experienced the worst extremes in this regard at my own HEI when two students died tragically in a fire whilst completing WBL abroad. Respondents

mentioned duty of care when talking about resources as they felt that they did not have enough time to work with students and to ensure all contingencies and supports were covered before and during WBL.

“Everything we do is underpinned by college H&S [health and safety] policy and I’ve established a specific one for hospitality department, which includes guidance for employers and students and college insurance details (2 pages). So that’s our bible to work with and that’s adopted in the college, because you have to have a framework to operate within.”
(Medium HEI 7)

This respondent has tried to ‘cover’ themselves and the HEI with robust policies, but it is my position arising from my discussions with HEI respondents that some students are not being afforded that duty of care at a satisfactory level, which is mainly due to lack of resources. The data shows that those most closely involved in WBL are critical of the resource allocation and identify this as a major issue impacting on the WBL experience. In a climate where HEI management are under pressure to control and reduce expenditure on resources, I fear that WBL will be under-resourced in the future, particularly as WBL is rolled out across more programmes.

There was a feeling among some respondents that HEI management were trying to reduce costs by engaging non-academics or support staff in the process and I can see that this is appropriate for some aspects of WBL, but not all, such as assessment. The data shows that HEIs are being constantly challenged to manage WBL with limited resources and likewise, it was pointed out by some HEI respondents that industry sometimes engage in WBL to access reduced cost labour. Interestingly, there is research from Australia that points to WBL actually costing more for HEIs to deliver than classroom teaching, due to the individual monitoring and administration workloads (Jackson *et al.*, 2017), when WBL is done correctly. This is likely to be news to many in HEI management and with proper consideration may alter the push for so much WBL to be embedded across all undergraduate programmes. Due to the resource intense nature of effective WBL, it is a high-cost feature of T&H programmes and there is evidence of low investment at some HEIs, which

will need to be addressed to enable a high standard of WBL in the future. This ties in with the neoliberal drive towards marketisation of HEIs, and there is a body of scholarship focused on understanding the implications of HEIs operating and being treated like businesses. This has led to HEIs becoming more outcomes oriented and cost focussed, which is to the detriment of quality on several fronts.

There was a consensus among over half of HEI respondents that policies and procedures are often relaxed to maximise pass rates, which is seen to be a cultural shift in line with the marketisation of HE. One industry respondent felt the biggest challenge engaging with WBL was availability of time (for industry and HEIs), which relates to the marketisation of HEIs under neoliberalism in which Morrish (2020) suggests that audit culture and performance management (including techniques of surveillance, dashboards, benchmarking, 'quality' audits, and workload models) have reduced time and time itself acts as a penalty. The industry respondents highlighted the competitive market economy in which industry partners exist, where time is precious for them too, which is a similar pressure HEIs are experiencing as they drift towards marketisation and a focus on efficiencies and managing time and resources. Whilst commercial pressure is understandable for industry partners, it is not appropriate in HE, where the focus should be on quality, nor is it right that WBL should slip down the list of industry priorities, just because an industry partner is busy.

de Zilwa (2010: 137) likens the marketisation of HE to that of being on a treadmill, with the speed and incline being increased all of the time and they make a worrying prediction that academic units who fail to keep up with the intensified pace will be eliminated from the competition by fitter, stronger and quicker competitors. HEIs need to reflect on who is in control of the WBL treadmill – themselves, industry or students. It is my position that a balanced approach, an equal partnership is required, but that does not always happen. There are competing priorities at stake in the WBL partnership relationship and students' own needs (and the aims of HEIs) sometimes get lost under the more pressing demands of sector shortages and the lack of uniformity in terms of WBL management. The relationships can too easily break down under the current system when there is a lack of oversight or limited buy-in from industry partners to the students' needs in terms of skills

and competencies to be learned. This HEI respondent was particularly annoyed at the disconnect they feel between industry and academia:

“There is a disconnect I feel, industry say ‘we want, we want, we want’. Then you find someone for them, and they turn around and say they don’t want anyone anymore.” (Medium HEI 7).

Planning for WBL is further complicated by HEIs not being able to forecast their numbers exactly, particularly for early stage WBL and due to people being ineligible to progress to WBL (because of failed exams at the end of the preceding semester or deferrals on programmes).

“It’s tricky, because we are often not sure, right up until the end, who we are sending on placement. This causes issues for us with industry, who can often feel let down.” (Large HEI 13)

This terminology of ‘letting down’ industry reinforces my view that HEIs are often guilty of an attitude of servitude, more focussed on serving industry needs than those of the students. Serving the master of industry is also manifested through the focus on employability of graduates, as defined primarily by the industry partners who use their own criteria to assess the competency of graduates and WBL students alike. Other terminology that I have taken issue with earlier is the use of ‘real world’ as if HE does not reflect reality. WBL provides opportunities for trial transition to the world of work (Inceoglu *et al.*, 2019) that is often referred to as the real world, a term used regularly by academic and industry respondents during this research. A student respondent also said that the most positive aspect of WBL was that it was *“Good to see the ‘real world’*”, but it is my position that this term real world does a disservice to the world of HE. It is identified that the real world appears to be the commercial one (Molesworth *et al.*, 2009) and that education deals with abstraction, which suggests a devaluation of academic pursuits over more practical and commercial ones that could lead to students feeling that their academic studies are not regarded as highly. I posit that

programmes with embedded WBL offer insights into the real world not just during WBL but also whilst preparing and reflecting on it. I follow Coco (2000) who uses the term work world instead and think that this is more appropriate phrase to use when discussing WBL or Cooper (2017) who talks about the real professional life. WBL provides central transition experiences that enable social learning processes and trigger changes in a person's identity development as a professional (Inceoglu *et al.*, 2019), thereby increasing career resources and employability. The data shows that all stakeholders agree such transformations take place for most students, but there is little consistency in how that is achieved.

Another feature of the research impacted by resourcing and the pressures of the marketised HE sector, was the monitoring of WBL and the main issues were who conducts the monitoring visit and their timings. Monitoring the WBL experience is important to ensure positive student learning is occurring and that the industry partner is satisfied with the relationship. Traditionally, a monitoring visit is carried out with T&H students by a staff member from the HEI who visits the WBL student. Students noted inconsistencies around monitoring during WBL, with some getting a visit from an academic or support staff that they know from the HEI, whilst others only got a phone call or met someone new to them, which made it difficult to engage properly or to give real feedback.

HEI respondents acknowledged there are inconsistencies around monitoring WBL, particularly with students overseas who do not always get a face-to-face visit, but they argue this is not viable due to cost implications. Five HEI respondents indicated that the monitoring visit is always done by a person known to the student and often they take place regularly during the WBL, sometimes as often as once a week (this may be a phone call or email too). Three HEI respondents defended having people unknown to the student conduct monitoring visits by the fact that often these were voluntary roles that take place outside term time, but five HEI respondents indicated that students were paired with an academic staff member known to them to avoid this situation arising. It was a popular view among HEI respondents that monitoring visits should be done by academic staff:

“There was a time when people from placement office were going to do the visits, but we (academics) were adamant that wouldn’t happen, at the end of the day if student is getting a grade that needs to be done by a lecturer and not an admin person.” (Medium HEI 5).

This quote shows the importance of academic involvement when the visit is graded, which was the case for six of the HEIs. There appears to be a different level of connection between small and large HEIs and their industry partners. The bigger the HEI, the more likelihood that support staff will be in place to assist with WBL, whereas, in smaller HEIs there is less support and the academics tend to do all the work. The data suggests that HEI respondents are in favour of support staff, but too much support appears to hamper the formation of a close relationship between academics and the industry partner. Dedicated placement offices are only found in medium and large HEIs, with smaller HEIs utilising academic staff to manage the process. As set out above, another key aspect of the monitoring visit is building and maintaining a relationship with the industry partner, and the following quote shows the potential problems that can occur if there is no investment in proper engagement:

“Every student gets a [college] mentor but not every student gets a visit. That can have a negative impact with an employer who says we’ve had them [students] here for however long and nobody ever tried to engage with the employer and that can have a knock-on impact with employers not taking students again. We’ll only find about it when somethings gone wrong, and it may be too late then. Students abroad will not always get a visit and some others may fall through the gap, because it’s not seen as a priority.” (Large HEI 10)

This reinforces that monitoring visits are useful for checking in with industry partners as much as the students, but some students did take issue with aspects of their monitoring visits:

“In the 9 months I was in Edinburgh I only heard from the college the weekend they came over to us. It would have been nice to get an email or a phone call in the second or third month to see how we were getting on.” (Student)

The timeliness of the visit is important, and communications should be established before and after such visits, which most HEIs say does happen, but as evidenced by the quote above, in practice this is not always the case. Industry respondents also identified issues with how some HEIs conduct monitoring visits, with one criticising a tick-box sheet, saying they would prefer more in-depth discussion about the student. Such an approach is followed by some HEIs, but as with many WBL features, there is no consistency in this regard. The smaller HEIs seem to offer more tailored and individual attention to their WBL students, whereas the larger HEIs tend to be more removed or distant from the students, as set out earlier. It appears that resourcing of monitoring visits needs attention, as it can play a vital role for all stakeholders.

Good monitoring should also place an emphasis on what the student can achieve for the remainder of the WBL, whilst also reflecting on the learnings to date. This again brings into focus the timing of any monitoring, it must be timely enough to identify any issues and to ensure that quality learning is taking place. Technology offers opportunities for ongoing monitoring and this is being utilised by two HEIs, who get regular progress reports updated online by the students and reviewed by someone in the HEI, an academic or someone in a placement office. I expected technology would feature more strongly in the research, but it did not, except for these mentions above and some respondents who discussed ePortfolios as a method of assessing WBL, mostly in a positive light. Respondents did not emphasise technology as a major issue or opportunity, however, I recognise that technology can play a key role and will revisit this topic in Chapter 6.

Fragmented Partnerships

By their definition, partnerships are a relationship between two or more people, organisations, etc.; the state of having this relationship (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2019). The important word in that definition is relationship; and like most successful relationships, a good partnership is built on communications, trust, reliability, loyalty and it takes hard work. Applying these values to the WBL partnerships that I researched and experienced, I have learned there are relationship issues. There has been a long history of relationships between the T&H industry and HEIs in Ireland, and my research identified emotional attachments between respondents and the WBL topic, as most HEI

and industry respondents were previously WBL students. One might expect that such relationships would lead to more workable partnerships and for the most part this is true, but the data also shows that some partnerships would benefit from improvement and competing priorities need to be addressed, as I see an imbalance towards a priority for satisfying industry needs. Two industry respondents agreed they might be harsh or strict in terms of their handling of WBL students, because that is the culture they experienced as students and they spoke as if it was almost a rite of passage for WBL students to be toughened up. However, such an approach raises questions about meeting students' needs and wellbeing, which are central to many HEIs offering in marketised system and as Hughes and Brooks (2019) point out, HEIs need to understand the overall experience of students from the student's point of view.

This point also raises the need to ensure equity for all WBL students, and it emerged in my research as a key challenge, to establish consistent policies for WBL in T&H, partly because the staff involved in WBL vary from business to business; some larger organisations will have general managers who might be involved in the recruitment of WBL students, HR staff who will organise paperwork and heads of department and supervisors who manage the student on a daily basis. In micro and small enterprises, the owner may do all these jobs, meaning some students only engage with one person, whereas others might have numerous people to report to. This can make points of contact for assessment difficult in larger organisations and whilst all respondents to my research agree that training should be provided to those involved in the assessment process, this is sometimes impractical with so many people to consider.

Online or virtual WBL also adds a relatively new challenge as this becomes more of an option for some students who can perform WBL from their home. As this will become more common in the future (Bilsland and Nagy, 2020), more so in tourism than hospitality, it requires more thought as it would not fit with a traditional work-based placement. Equally challenging is that some owners/managers are reluctant to undertake training on assessing WBL, citing time pressures as a barrier, which shows the complex variety of issues making it difficult to organise and assess consistently.

Variance among the student cohort is also evident, as they are dynamic, ever changing and diverse and academics have noted that there is a rise in non-traditional students in HE, which brings challenges for WBL. Historically, most students who entered HE in Ireland shared common characteristics, they were: from middle class backgrounds, of school leaving age (usually eighteen or nineteen), spoke English as their first language, had no disabilities, studied full time with no significant external responsibilities (Trinity Inclusive Curriculum, 2018). This is beginning to change as more students from non-traditional backgrounds enter HE. Any student who does not share all the characteristics noted above can be considered a non-traditional student, for example: mature students, international students, students from ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students who are parents/carers, travellers, part-time students (ibid.). HEIs and industry respondents pointed out that diverse students have diverse needs, which impact on WBL and presents challenges such as English not being the students first language or not meeting visa requirements. Industry spoke of the need to limit international students on front-line T&H jobs due to language barriers, and the need to offer more flexible work schedules to accommodate WBL students who need to care for children or adults. HEI respondents also highlighted the flexibility that needs to be shown to students who normally are required to carry out a mandatory international WBL, but instead must remain at a local business for personal reasons. These are some examples of what stakeholders have to manage to be inclusive in terms of delivery of WBL modules, but such flexibility does not appear to extend to teaching and assessment models on WBL modules to cater for non-traditional students.

High-quality HE has become associated with an 'employability' agenda (Abbas et al., 2012; Roberts, 2009) and Molesworth *et al.* (2009) provide a good analogy when discussing the marketisation of HE, saying that the consumer society must offer HE to all who want to buy it, something akin to a market that allows all to dine out, but for most this means fast food. Like fast food, HE in such a landscape is not likely to be nourishing for any stakeholders involved. It is also argued that the proliferation of WBL, internships and HEIs focusing on developing enterprising and entrepreneurial students in the UK are a sign of increasing neoliberal culture (Allen *et al.*, 2013; Olssen and Peters, 2005) that seeks to create the individual on the model of consumer and entrepreneur (Brown, 2006). Research shows that consumerist discourses have certainly become

more widespread and are increasingly framing students' relationship to HE (Tomlinson, 2017) but Brooks and Abrahams (2018) suggest that that processes of marketisation have failed to construct the ideal 'empowered consumer' invoked by neoliberalism, instead students have not been empowered and, in some cases, are vulnerable and relatively powerless and I revisit this power imbalance later in this Chapter.

Chapter 2 presented the considerable support for collaborative activities with employers (Busby, 2005; EGFSN, 2013; Harvey *et al.*, 2002) and for enhancing the skills of students to prepare them for employment (Harvey and Green, 1993). However, there is a strong feeling among HEI respondents that industry is expecting too much in terms of employable graduates and some within the industry agree as evidenced by the following quote:

"There is an undue expectation by industry that the colleges can produce someone ready to work. There needs to be a better understanding and better collaboration between industry and colleges as to what the expectations should be on both sides." (Industry 1 – Hotel GM)

Such views are echoed by Rhew *et al.* (2019) who researched different stakeholder priorities in HE and identified significant gaps, particularly in some soft skills such as self-management, influencing and persuading. HEIs are now viewed and managed more akin to a business, and it is my position that some in industry imagine students as products on a production line that are being churned out. This academic seems to agree to some extent, pointing out that:

"The colleges are there to provide work ready people, but someone coming out college at 19 or 20 isn't a fully formed person and has quite a bit to go in terms of training." (Large HEI 1)

These two quotations, taken from two of the three anchor points in the partner relationship are sympathetic both to the student and the limits of what a degree can offer in terms of work-readiness. It is important to note, however, that these were not dominant views/were only held by some respondents. This quote highlights an alternative industry perspective:

“Business want ‘shovel ready’ candidates coming into them, that they have the skill sets to start working immediately and they are not retraining them the minute they walk in the door.”

(Industry 5 – Industry Group CEO)

This raises the question of where the learning is in the work-based activity if industry expect students to arrive work-ready. Often the criticism for this focus of churning out work-ready employees is levied at industry who are said to be demanding certain types of graduates, but HEIs bear some responsibility too, in their rampant focus on metrics and graduate outcomes, which feed into their ranking as institutions and wider perceptions of course quality. As the focus has shifted to such crude measurements, one can rightly question the quality of graduates and their programmes and how they are assessed.

Adams and Smith (2014) suggest that many HEIs in the UK are engaging in fierce competition for students, expending large promotional and marketing campaigns and this trend is also becoming more evident in Ireland, as I see HEIs invest more in traditional and digital marketing. Another feature of competition raised during my research was about the *National Skills Strategy 2025* aim to offer all undergraduate students’ access to work placements and internships (DES, 2016: 86) and five HEI respondents believe this could be damaging to T&H students. These five HEI respondents agreed that their T&H students should still be able to secure WBL in the T&H industry, but there are fears that some roles might now be contested with one academic recounting of a business student securing a WBL opportunity in a hotel sales and marketing office, which was traditionally filled by a hotel management student. In discussions with HEI respondents, five were not aware of this new strategy to extend WBL to all undergraduate programmes in Ireland, but when given time to consider it, they too were mostly concerned about this prospect. Those concerns might be partly due to some HEI respondents fearing that there are not enough engaged students to fulfil WBL. Words such as ‘millennials’ and ‘snowflakes’ were used by some HEI and industry respondents to describe the current generation of students, usually in a derogatory way, referring to a lack of work ethic and possessing very little emotional intelligence or emotional resilience. This

quote shows how one industry respondent laments the lack of commitment of some of today's students:

"There are students studying hospitality now that are never going to work in that industry. When we all studied it, we saw it as our career and were committed to it. But some students nowadays are not committed but they still have to do work placements." (Industry 2 – Hotel GM).

This echoes back to an earlier point that most HEI and industry respondents had themselves gone through WBL as part of HE and they carry certain expectations based on their own experience. It also highlights the challenge for HEIs in motivating some students to engage in WBL if they are not as 'committed to it' and one academic talked about their embarrassment of student behaviour with industry partners:

"It can be a bit embarrassing sometimes, the hoteliers come in [to the HEI] looking to hire staff and the youngsters are like birdwatchers [daydreamers]." (Medium HEI 7)

This respondent has worked in HE and being involved in WBL for approximately 30 years and they commented on the ongoing deterioration in some student attitudes, which I probed further, and they said:

"I blame the helicopter and snow-plough parents for ruining some students." (Medium HEI 7)

This academic respondent levied criticism towards some parents for the lack of student enthusiasm and engagement with WBL, referring to 'helicopter' and 'snow-plough' parents who are constantly hovering over and involved in their children's lives and who try to forge paths for them through life, sometimes trying to bypass WBL as it is perceived to be too tough. Research has shown that 'helicopter' parents are sometimes responsible for HE choices that students were ultimately dissatisfied with and those students felt they could have achieved more if they had chosen differently

(Fearn, 2010). The impact of family on WBL choices and experiences, as members on the periphery of a CoP, is interesting and was mentioned by other HEI respondents who talked about the need to have a supportive family for students going on WBL especially for overseas placement. One HEI respondent talked about the need to incorporate counselling to students to coach them on coping skills and life skills as well as imparting academic knowledge and practical skills. There is little research about parental involvement in HE choice but Haywood and Scullion (2018) have identified that HE choice was experienced by parents as an attempt to maintain and renegotiate a relationship with their child at a time of change. The role of parents and the wider family on WBL can be considered an extension of the CoP to outside the workplace and situating it in the home environment, which I revisit in Chapter 6.

The increasing involvement of parents might be partly explained by anxieties about outcomes, a hyper competitive graduate labour market and the drive for employability. In Chapter 3, the dangers of the employability movement in HE (McArthur, 2011) were set out, where there appears to be a fixation on student achievement, which my data suggests is not just driven by students but also their families. Instead HE should nurture capacities for the betterment of individuals, their programmes, the workforce, the economy, community and society (McArthur, 2011; Yorke, 2006), which are laudable ambitions that have been lost as WBL has gotten caught up in the marketisation of HE and I follow Rhew *et al.* (2019) who suggest that remedying employability deficiencies is probably a task best shared through engagement with all stakeholders.

A more positive way of looking at the student engagement issue is that students are, today, perhaps more discerning about what they want, and they are more demanding. If the 'products' or 'outputs' (i.e. graduates) from HE are to improve and be more work-ready or real world ready, it will take a concerted effort from all stakeholders and HEIs have to work with current and future generations of students and rather than expecting them to change, HEIs need to show the leadership to connect with students (and their families) and engage them in positive WBL opportunities that expose them to the work world.

The data shows students experience of WBL in the T&H industry as being challenging but rewarding and any negative aspects of WBL that arose in my research were not too extreme and

most deal with procedural issues and assessment strategies. The recent reports of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry (Falvey, 2019) did not arise, but it has given me pause for thought. These findings (Falvey, 2019) were based upon research undertaken with full-time workers in the industry (i.e. not with students undertaking WBL); therefore, perhaps there are cases that go unreported due to that power imbalance, where students may not feel empowered to report such breaches, in fear of implications for their study and assessment. Further research is being undertaken in this area and I am keen to be involved to explore this topic specifically with WBL students. There are mechanisms in place for students to contact HEIs with complaints or issues, but this should be revisited to ensure that the systems are robust enough and consistent across the sector to cater for sensitive issues that guarantee the student no negative implications regarding their programme of study. This topic can be classified as a type of power brokerage that did emerge during my research, with industry appearing to hold a lot of the cards as HEIs effectively hand over students to them. Thankfully most of the time the partnership works, but there are times when it does not. HEI respondents did acknowledge there are instances when WBL partnerships breakdown that HEIs are aware of and there are times when problems may go unreported, possibly out of fear from a student's perspective, who is concerned about negative impact on their grades or progression. It may suit industry and HEIs to ignore such partnership breakdowns, but it is my position that there is a need for an independent mechanism for students to be able to record grievances or to report claims, without fear of any retribution or negative reactions from the HEI or industry. Linked with the notion of unsatisfactory situations I asked industry if they were ever guilty of providing unsatisfactory WBL experiences and two respondents acknowledged it sometimes happened, due to very busy operations or due to students not engaging satisfactorily. This industry respondent acknowledged that they are poor practices at times, but also had a suggestion:

"We are going to have to identify businesses that are conducting matters in a certain way to ensure that a student is going to get a good experience. We should reward that type of collaboration." (Industry 1 – Hotel GM)

This happens informally in most colleges, whereby, HEIs continue to work with ‘good’ industry partners year on year, as set out in the partnerships discussion earlier. However, this HEI respondent made a novel suggestion as to how that could be formalised:

“The Irish Hotels Federation have a Quality Employer Programme [QEP]. If there was an element like that where we [HEIs] could work with the Irish Hotels Federation or the Irish Hospitality Institute and have a code of best practice and they could subscribe to it. It could say how a placement student would be treated, it would have to be voluntary, that sets out the guidelines, this is what we [HEIs] expect you [industry] to do.” (Small HEI 12)

The QEP is currently aimed at permanent staff in hotels, and WBL students are not mentioned, but this suggestion calls for a national industry recognised standard or a memorandum of understanding, which would guide industry and HEIs on acceptable standards, which would fit with this perspective:

“We [industry] are finding it much harder to get staff, yet [HEIs] have less students coming into the college, so the good employers have to start shouting about being good employers and help better the industry and shake up those [in industry] who are not providing good experiences.” (Industry 4 – Restaurant GM)

A QEP scheme for WBL would help to achieve such recognition for the ‘good employers’ and I will revisit this suggestion in Chapter 6. I probed with the HEIs on how poor or sub-standard WBL experiences were allowed to happen, and respondents said that sometimes they only found out too late about any issues and other times it was down to the student not being motivated or competent enough. I followed up by asking if businesses who did not offer good learning experiences were ‘struck off’ or not used again and was told that this would happen on occasion, but not always. There was a sense that HEIs somehow feel indebted to the industry providers for providing WBL opportunities and an unwillingness to question them or to give negative feedback to industry partners and only in extreme circumstances are providers ‘struck off’. This attitude of servitude relates again

to the power relations in existence with industry seeming to hold most of the power and it is my position that there is a need to refocus WBL, with the student as the priority and this academic respondent summarised what good WBL experience should be:

“I remind them [students] that this is their opportunity to try everything, you don’t have to succeed at it, you are not technically in your career yet. You get to taste a bit of it all and see where you want to go.” (Small HEI 11)

This talks to the need for WBL students to have space to explore and learn, which should happen in HEIs and that should be extended as the campus and learning space ‘moves’ to the workplace, an extension of their CoP. Students should not be punished for suboptimal performance and industry need to remember that they are taking on learners, at early stages of career development.

The opportunities and challenges of WBL assessment

WBL assessment causes many challenges, but also provides opportunities and I now present the feedback on grading assessments, WBL impacts on award classifications, current assessment approaches before delving into the role of industry. Similar to other aspects of WBL, the main theme is the variety of approaches used to assess WBL across all ten HEIs and even within each HEI. Currently, WBL in three HEIs is worth zero credits (normally less than 12 weeks, early in the programme), therefore, there is no formal assessment. However, a pass/fail grade may be applied, and students are unable to progress in their studies if they fail WBL. For those WBL modules that are assessed, the most common assessment is a reflective portfolio that is completed during and/or after the WBL and can be submitted in paper format or electronically (an ePortfolio).

It is interesting, and worrying, that one respondent mentioned the flexibility that each lecturer in their HEI seems to have regarding the breakdown of marks for a WBL module, which supports feedback from some students who believed there was a lack of consistency with marking of WBL within their own class, and I revisit this later in this Chapter. Some HEIs include marks from a WBL preparation module, which highlights the value placed by them on student preparedness, an issue of concern raised earlier. In Chapter 2, concerns about the authenticity and validity of assessment

methodologies were set out (Ajjawi *et al.*, 2020; Bosco and Ferns, 2014; Govaerts and van der Vleuten, 2013; Sheridan and Linehan, 2011: 53) and during my research, all HEI respondents agreed that assessment of WBL was important and most industry and student respondents agreed. There was a debate with some HEI respondents around whether WBL should be graded or treated on a pass/fail basis, with supporting arguments put forward for both. Those in favour of grading WBL feel that doing so provides more motivation to students to do well. Those against felt it was very subjective and had concerns when WBL takes place during an award stage, as students tend to get particularly high marks in WBL, which respondents felt may inflate their grades. In such cases, pass/fail was deemed fairer and easier to agree on, particularly if industry is involved in the process, a topic which is discussed later.

There was division among HEI respondents as to whether formative or summative assessment was best for WBL, but most agreed that a mixture of both is appropriate. Currently, most weighting seems to go towards summative assessment, but in chapter 3, I mentioned the ideas of holistic and sustainable assessment, which I posit would both work well with WBL. The topics of peer and self-assessment was raised with academics and it was felt by HEI respondents that peer-assessment of WBL is not practical, as students are mostly in different businesses/locations. Neither was self-assessment deemed viable by HEI respondents due to the need for independent oversight and quality control. Industry respondents did not have any major objections to peer or self-assessment but did recognise that it could be complicated and may take up valuable time. Self-assessment does happen on most WBL modules as students are asked to reflect on WBL, often as part of an assessed element of completing a portfolio. I queried if reflection was a skill taught to students before WBL or as part of preparation for such assessments and no HEI respondent said reflection is taught. The need to reflect is obvious, and this academic emphasised the point:

"In the past, we have gotten it all wrong, assessment time is the time for them to do the thinking. They will be doing the work forever, until they retire. The primary aspect of placement is for them to think about the work. So, reflection is the most important part and thinking and writing is most important and not the doing, they will be doing forever. They

[students] won't have the opportunity to reflect on work when out in industry earning a salary. So we have built reflection in to the new programme.” (Small HEI 4).

This places reflection at the heart of WBL assessment, a point agreed by Jackson *et al.* (2017), but all respondents admitted that they do not necessarily teach a student how to reflect. It is my position that expecting students to be able to reflect without teaching them how to do so seems unfair, particularly when such emphasis is put on reflective practices. One HEI explained that their reflective journal is quite personalised, asking students to set their learning outcomes to start with, giving them ownership from the beginning, which is a good idea and helps to create good engagement. Another industry respondent had a novel suggestion related to reflection:

“A reflective piece from the students is normal on work placements, perhaps a reflective piece by the mentor or assessor on a weekly basis would be useful too. These could be predetermined checklists or notes from the mentor.” (Industry 3 – Industry Group CEO)

The concept of weekly reviews is sound and would provide great direction to the student learner, however, with shortage of time identified as an issue by industry already, any such system would have to be very easy and quick to complete. Another way that one HEI encourages reflection is during the monitoring visit:

“During the visiting lecturer report, we get the student to reflect on where they've been, what they have done/learned and what they are going to do for the remaining few weeks.” (Medium HEI 8)

This is a very good practice as it situates the learning during WBL, which was highlighted by Costley and Armsby (2007) as it allows the students' situated practice to be viewed through their own understanding and constructions. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, monitoring visits are a mainstay of most WBL arrangements, but there is a major variance with how they are conducted.

The concept of situated learning connects with the community of practice (CoP) framework, which proposes that learners construct their meaning of experiences depending on the context in which they are; therefore, learning is situated in a particular context (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1991). CoP is very apt for this research considering the tripartite nature of WBL and the need for the industry partner to play a role in providing a learning experience for the student, as evidenced by this student on WBL:

“My work placement experience was a very valuable one that I enjoyed, working out in the industry and learning first-hand experience on how to please a guest was an invaluable experience that books in college can guide/advise you on how to approach a situation but the reality of it is the world doesn't stick to the books guidelines. Learning from veterans in the industry, your colleagues, gives you the skills that separate you from any other person that is not in industry.” (Student)

The managers, supervisors, mentors and work colleagues that WBL students engage with are fundamental in their learning. HEI respondents pointed out that often the industry link person for the HEI has nothing to do with the student's daily activities, they may be a general manager or a HR manager, who only sees the student at interview stage and rarely during WBL. Therefore, it is appropriate to have systems in place that allow HEI engagement with the correct line manager who the student deals with on a regular basis. This is a pragmatic and sensible approach and by working with the same industry partners year on year, this should encourage standard procedures to be formed.

The lack of consistency around marking assessments was raised by students with some identifying that classmates were getting very high marks, even though they felt those students did not perform well during WBL, which is a valid observation by those who were on WBL with classmates in the same organisation. HEIs agreed that this can sometimes happen due to the assessment procedures in place (being graded on the final reports only) and it is my position that

whilst there are some very good practices regarding assessment of WBL in Irish HE, some approaches raise concerns, which needs to be addressed.

A key feature of my research has been on the role of industry in the assessment process. All HEIs involved in the research source feedback from industry partners regarding WBL student performance, which varies from short tick-the-box forms, or phone calls to in-depth appraisal forms or progress reports, at least once and sometimes multiple times during the WBL. Regarding industry involvement in assessment, nine of the 13 HEI respondents indicated their HEIs allow industry to input anything from 20% to 50% of the assessment marks in the format of an appraisal form or progress reports. Fifty percent of a 30-credit module is significant and as outlined in Chapter 3, there must be equity in employer perception of what and how they are assessing and quality assurance of assessment undertaken outside of the HEI (Brodie and Irving, 2007: 17). For some industry contributions, a pass/fail is recorded as their contribution and for others it is graded, but most HEI respondents agree this does tend to skew marks upwards as industry typically give high grades. One HEI gets a grade from the industry partner, but it is not included in the weighted mark for the module. The 'inflation' of marks is particularly concerning for WBL that takes place in an award year, which is common in some T&H programmes. It appears through my data that some industry players take their role in WBL assessment very seriously and have robust procedures in place, whereas others are more lenient in their approaches. Industry is sometimes confused about their role in assessment and what they must input to the process, if anything at all, which shows a lack engagement and preparation by the HEIs with industry, a view shared by this industry respondent:

“Would industry be capable of performing a decent evaluation of work placement? I don't think they would, without decent training.” (Industry 1 – Hotel GM)

This raises the point that not only preparing students for WBL is important, but also preparing industry partners, particularly if they are to play an active role in assessment. The following quote is somewhat contradictory as it suggests industry do want to be involved in assessment but are not willing to commit the time to the process.

“I think industry would like to be more involved in assessing work placement but because there’s no requirement for it, they don’t. They [industry] might not have time to be involved. It [involvement in assessment] needs to take into consideration how busy the business is and it shouldn’t be too onerous.” (Industry 5 – Industry Group CEO)

Through my research, it has become apparent that industry want to be involved in assessing WBL, but not to be held responsible. This statement from another academic, presents a reluctance by some HEIs to engaging industry in WBL assessment at all:

“We decided to give the industry no control over the marks. This ties in with the whole idea of treating every student the same and having consistency. They [students] could be working for different employers, with different attitudes, different areas they are interested in. We feared that students could be under or over-rewarded and that we [the HEI] wouldn’t be able to stand over the consistency of people outside academia allocating credits.” (Small HEI 4).

This HEI has a similar perspective:

“Industry has no control over marks. Part of the documentation that needs to be submitted is an appraisal from their industry mentor. It’s checked that it’s there and fully completed, once it is, then that’s ok. In a lot of cases, I’d say they (industry) don’t even know how we are grading or what’s being graded or anything.” (Large HEI 10)

Whilst there was strong agreement that industry should be involved in the assessment process, major concerns were expressed with the level of input industry might have to the assessment process. The vignette below was constructed as part of my interview templates and presented to respondents to generate a discussion and it led to much animation from industry and HEI respondents alike, all who expressed deep reservations about such a move.

“The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum) recently published an Insight document on the context, purposes and methods of work-based assessment of/for/as learning. In this document, they suggest that industry should play a role in the WBL assessment process. They suggested that industry could be responsible for awarding up to 70% of the credits available.”

The vignette is true except for the 70% guideline, the National Forum did not make any suggestion in this regard and I purposely selected a relatively high percentage to stimulate a debate initially, before clarifying that no such suggestion was made by the National Forum. All HEI respondents felt that such a weighting would be placing an unfair burden on industry and that academic integrity and quality assurance issues would arise. Concerns were also expressed that putting extra time pressures on industry, which this would cause, may discourage some businesses from signing up to WBL at all.

Chapter Summary

This Chapter has presented the thematic findings of the research focusing on the different stakeholder groups and relating the themes – a growing culture of individualism and fragmentation of WBL across the Irish T&H sector; the issue of resources and how this impacts upon the CoP in Irish T&H and Irish HEIs; the need for, but problematic nature of, partnerships; and the challenges and opportunities associated with WBL assessment. These four themes play out differently for the different cohorts of participants and are integral in developing effective CoPs, that can work harmoniously across local, national and international LoPs.

This Chapter has presented the findings of the mixed methods research, whilst presenting the views of each stakeholder throughout and for the most part, consistency of views is evident. WBL is a valued and valuable component of T&H HE programmes, with all stakeholders identifying many benefits including building confidence and relationships, helping to transform lives and economies of all stakeholders. However, there is a lack of cohesion and standardisation within and across HEIs and industry, leading to tensions around the topics of employability, assessment and

student engagement/quality. The research shows many opportunities and challenges of industry involvement in WBL assessment and highlights that industry suggest they want to be involved but not responsible. The data shows unequal partnerships in WBL due to industry and/or HEIs having unrealistic expectations and students not engaging fully in WBL, which leads to tension between the partners. Much of these pressures tend to arise from the marketised and consumer focused HEIs, operating in a neoliberal environment putting pressure on the resourcing of WBL, which is acknowledged as a high-cost feature of HE but the research indicates is suffering from low investment.

I have outlined the ways that the increasingly marketised nature of the HE landscape has led to a neoliberal approach of churning out graduates like products, ready for the workplace. The data reveals that in some cases, this focus on quantity (of graduates and good starting salaries or well-paid jobs) has come at the price of quality, in terms of the calibre of students as defined by industry and academics in HEIs. The research has highlighted several areas of concern around quality and I suggest the quality focus should begin with the preparation of students to undertake WBL. HEI respondents mostly reported that students were well prepared in terms of skills in advance of their WBL, particularly due to the practical modules that are often delivered in training bars and restaurants on campus, which helps to simulate the work word. However, some industry respondents were critical of a lack of preparedness of some WBL students arriving for WBL and whilst it is concerning that students may be going on WBL without being properly prepared or having reached a certain standard or level of competency, I understand there are multiple factors that might impact preparedness. HEI respondents pointed out that industry need to engage in preparing for WBL too, which they reported was not always the case, and indicates weak partnerships and industry need to recognise that they are not just getting a worker, but a learner who needs guidance and support. HEIs ultimately need to ensure that students are suitably prepared for the WBL position, which should be selected based on their skills and competencies. The student has a responsibility to prepare as best possible and to work closely with HEI and industry partners, but the research discovered this is not always the case.

HEIs need to reflect on the relations of power and control of WBL, considering their own roles, those of industry and students, because the research has shown an attitude of servitude from some HEIs towards industry, prioritising their needs ahead of those of the students or HEIs on occasion. This connects with the idea that industry tends to reflect the real world which by implications brands HEIs as fake or a type of bubble, which is seen in a negative light, however, I argue that this sort of protective and safe environment is appropriate and necessary for learning to occur. WBL should play a supportive role in the learning experience and a balanced and equal partnership approach is necessary for that to occur. One feature common to much of the research is the focus on WBL chronology and the important stages before, during and after WBL, which provide useful lenses for stakeholders to consider in their approaches to WBL.

Overall, WBL can have a key role in impacting on the image and reputation of the T&H industry and this is another major reason to ensure that WBL is operating optimally. I conclude that there are many good cases of WBL partnerships already in existence and these should be acknowledged and celebrated, and such successes can act as exemplars for other WBL partners to emulate.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This final Chapter synthesises the findings outlined in this thesis and makes recommendations for WBL in Irish HE. It begins by recapping on the purposes and context of my research and sets out the contribution to knowledge and implications for theory, practice, policy and methodological lessons learned under the headings of: creating effective partnerships, consistency and resourcing, assessing WBL, addressing image and reputation and revisiting CoPs and LoPs in WBL. I note the limitations of the work and make suggestions for future research before a closing statement with a personal research reflection.

Context

WBL has been a feature of T&H in Irish HE for over 50 years and the industry has provided a valuable and valid place of learning; however, in my experience as a student, industry employee and now an academic tutor, in some circumstances WBL has become taken for granted and is performing sub-optimally. Regularly the WBL partnerships on T&H programmes work, but it is my position that they could and should work better, more consistently. There are many inconsistencies among each of the three key stakeholders – students, HEIs and industry – however, the variety and range of stakeholders is also what makes T&H so successful. This chapter offers conclusions and recommendations about how effective partnerships can be better nurtured by repositioning quality at the heart of all aspects of WBL, whilst also addressing resourcing and assessment issues that emerged so prominently during this study. Covid-19 has brought about many challenges to each stakeholder, but it also has presented an opportunity to revisit WBL and reposition it as a key learning feature of HE programmes and to refocus attention to the students as the fulcrum of all WBL decisions.

A key challenge identified by this research is the current discourse and language related to WBL, with many different terms and interpretations by the various stakeholders. My research has used the umbrella term of work-based learning (WBL), and I have discovered that much of the focus of WBL in T&H is on the work and not the learning. Drawing on the research findings, I posit that HEIs sometimes prioritise the T&H industry needs ahead of student needs, and this fosters an

attitude of servitude which needs to be addressed. There needs to be a refocussing of WBL towards the learner, not 'student', whilst based in a work environment, provided by an industry partner, not an 'employer'. I propose that subtle changes in language will help to reposition the partner roles in the WBL process and benefit all stakeholders, and will help in keeping the learner at the centre of all decisions.

I agree that HE has a social, economic and educative role that extends beyond its walls and its own students and it should look messy (McArthur, 2011) and it is true for WBL which reaches out from the classroom and looks messy, lacking in consistency and structure, hence the need for careful programme design and integration. WBL design requires careful consideration of many factors and can be costly and difficult to implement (Abeysekera, 2006), and my research has shown that resource issues are a central concern, particularly for HEI partners. WBL should be designed with input from all stakeholders involved and a tripartite approach ensures that all stakeholders are invested in the process and understand their role, to ensure best use of all of the resources input. Host organisation must provide adequate access to supervisors, learning support and induction/preparation processes (Smith, 2012) and a clear articulation of expectations of the student (Patrick *et al.*, 2009). HEIs are responsible for ensuring authentic learning activities, constructively aligned to learning outcomes and with appropriate support (Smith, 2012), the management of resourcing challenges (Martin *et al.*, 2012) and the effective assessment of targeted outcomes (Winchester-Seeto *et al.*, 2010).

Billet (2011) suggests several curriculum and pedagogic practices for incorporating WBL effectively in the HEI setting and the most important point is integration – of learning in the workplace with the on-campus learning, so students can make the link between both. To achieve this, Billet (2011) suggests adequate student preparation prior to practice-based activities is vital, as well as support during the placement and opportunities for reflection, which this research supports. WBL should be scaffolded and integrated in the programme, with particular attention paid to the order in which units are taken to ensure maximum gain from the experience (Jackson and Wilton, 2016). Jackson (2015) also identifies the benefits of combining and scaffolding development across the classroom and placement settings. The successful WBL pathway is one that all partners have

agreed on the learning outcomes, how they will be achieved, supported, monitored, and assessed. All this stems from programme design, which, from analysis of the data generated by this research, needs to be considered at a national level to ensure some form of consistency. It is also vital to have the right interaction and engagement between HEI staff and students (Hodgson, 1997; Jones, 2007; Sander *et al.*, 2000) and I now suggest how effective partnerships can be created, specifically for T&H, but relevant for all sectors that utilise WBL.

Creating effective partnerships

There is an onus on HEIs and industry to ensure successful CoPs and they can do this by cultivating good partnerships that allow students to fit in and contribute to the host organisation, whilst also meeting learning outcomes from the HEI programme. My research shows evidence of good practice within some partnerships, but further refocusing and streamlining is required to make the WBL process a better experience that is easier to navigate for all stakeholders. To this end, I propose a new framework to address the cases and findings of this research, whilst also reflecting the positive contributions from the models and frameworks analysed in Chapter 2. Successful WBL partnerships will ensure positive recruitment and retention of students to HEIs and industry, which is needed as the poor T&H industry image persists (across the national and international LoPs) and as industry grows and restarts after the Covid-19 pandemic. WBL partnerships need to be adaptable, agile and innovative to respond to the changing needs of each stakeholder, who need to recognise their role in the process and their responsibility to engage in the WBL experience to build real partnerships and relationships that are properly resourced.

Marketised education is evident in Irish HEIs through this research, and I suggest much of this direction is driven by industry but this could be detrimental for them, as it may not provide critical, imaginative graduates able to deal with the ever-changing demands of industry and need for people who can instigate changes. By following a marketised approach, the market dictates the criteria for evaluating the purpose of HE and it appears that in some cases HE is serving a marketplace, rather than serving students. This attitude of servitude distracts HEIs as it takes the focus way from students. In a marketised system, HEIs are reluctant to be critical of these industries, as they are the ones they tend to serve, but it is my position that such criticism is necessary for all stakeholders

to truly benefit. I follow Molesworth *et al.* (2009) who argue that HEIs need to provide space and time for reflection and invention, and to engage students who seek to be challenged and changed as people. Marketisation undermines and weakens this role and with a focus on job-related skills, other skills and competencies may slip from the radar of HEIs and students. HE supports economic development and social well-being and WBL is a strong feature of deliberate engagement between HEIs and industry. Whilst employability is a worthy aim for all graduates, it should not be the singular focus and WBL itself is not responsible for this feature of graduate competencies. WBL needs to be outcomes focussed; however, this direction is often missed with too much time and effort spent on processes and procedural elements. A clear graduate profile (similar to the employability statement discussed in Chapter 3) for each programme, agreed by the main stakeholders in the form of a learning agreement, would support WBL as one of the many pathways to achieve the agreed knowledge, know-how, skills and competencies. The targeted attributes should include professional and personal development goals and a WBL learning agreement should identify specific learning that can take place in the practice domain.

This research has shown a wealth of research, policies, models and frameworks regarding WBL, some specifically for T&H, but a more coherent structure is required to activate and implement all of these contributions and specific industries like T&H merit separate consideration. The WBL issues raised during this research may have been addressed if there was more opportunity for engagement of all partners, better resourcing and more of a focus on the student as a learner. Therefore, I present an alternative framework for representing an effective WBL relationship specifically for T&H, but which could be applied to any discipline/industry – the Learner Focused WBL Framework (see Figure 6.1). Data has shown an attitude of servitude towards industry, prioritising their needs over those of students or HEIs. This framework refocuses the attention towards the learners and by doing so consistently across the sector, it aims to highlight the need for better resourcing of WBL to be able deliver more effective assessment and ultimately to create and cultivate better engagement of all stakeholders in the community and landscapes of practice.

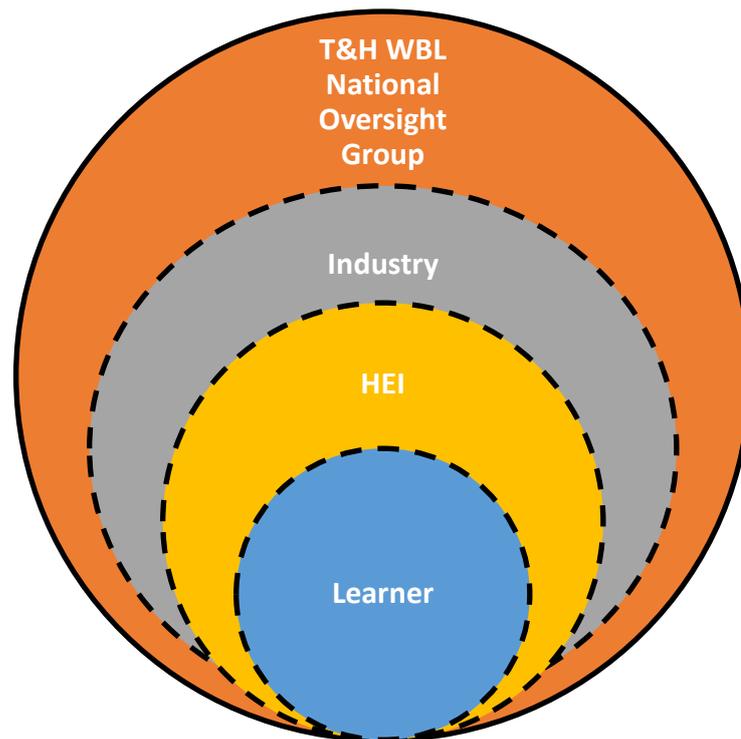


Figure 6.1: Learner Focused WBL Framework

The proposed framework offers a new structure composing of four membership levels: learner, HEI, industry and the national oversight group (NOG). The stacked Venn diagram moves away from the linear version suggested by the National Forum (2017) and refocuses the partners presented by Sheridan and Linehan (2011). This framework positions the learner at the centre of the WBL experience and the term learner is purposely chosen to indicate that the student engaging in WBL is situated in the workplace to learn. Refocusing the language in this way will remind each stakeholder of the true focus of WBL and their role in the process. This proposed structure allows the integration of the local and national LoPs to provide better consistencies across the sector, whilst ensuring that learners are front and centre of all decisions.

Initially, there were up to 12 HEIs involved in offering T&H programmes in Ireland, but with the ongoing and planned mergers, this figure will be reduced, possibly to six or seven in the coming years. Such mergers will ensure better alignment between those communities, but a national overview is still required to ensure consistency across the sector. Each HEI should work with its own learners and its own industry partners before, during and after the WBL experience, all under

the guidance of the NOG. Within each HEI community, there should be dedicated WBL specialist academics or support staff, ideally a mix of both and each student should be assigned a dedicated WBL academic mentor who can assist and mentor them before, during and after the experience. There is a need for HEI collaboration across the sector, particularly considering competitiveness in securing WBL opportunities as set out in Jackson *et al.* (2017) and as WBL is rolled out to all Irish HE programmes in the coming years.

The industry layer refers to the practitioners on the ground, host organisations directly offering WBL opportunities in the practice domain. Each learner should be paired with a WBL mentor in the organisation and this should be someone directly in contact with the learner, as some issues arise due to decisions being made by people not closely involved with the WBL experience. It is recognised that some industry partners might offer WBL to multiple HEIs, therefore emphasising the need for national consistency, which was the original issue that sparked this research. Information and data about the nature and scale of WBL partnerships should be identified by the NOG who will be responsible for overseeing a national WBL database for T&H, that will work in conjunction with local HEI structures and systems. It is important that industry actively engage in the WBL process as they need to ensure the supply of future workers for the industry and to develop pathways to improve workforce productivity, particularly among new graduates (Jackson *et al.*, 2017).

To address the complex policy environment, the framework introduces a new layer of the T&H WBL National Oversight Group, directly involved in the WBL partnership, rather than operating in the boundaries exerting macro-environmental forces. This NOG is accountable for T&H WBL development and will guide all partners and bring much needed oversight, consistency and monitoring to WBL in the Irish T&H industry – the national LoP. It will meet less frequently than the other three communities (see Table 6.1) who will engage regularly at a local LoP level, and this aligns with Doherty and Stephens (2020) who call for cross-disciplinary WBL units in each HEI.

| T&H WBL National Oversight Group | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Industry | Industry | Industry | Industry | Industry | Industry |
| HEI A | HEI B | HEI C | HEI D | HEI E | HEI F |
| Learner | Learner | Learner | Learner | Learner | Learner |

Table 6.1: Learner Focused WBL Framework – Local Level

It is proposed that the T&H WBL National Oversight Group will be made up of representatives from education and T&H agencies involved in WBL – some directly and others indirectly:

- Education –
 - Association for Higher Education and Careers Services (AHECS); Department of Education and Skills (DES); Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Higher Education Authority (HEA); Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC); National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum); National Skills Council; Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI); Skillnet Ireland; SOLAS (An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna) - Ireland's Further Education and Training Authority; Technological Higher Education Association (THEA); Union of Students in Ireland (USI).
- Hospitality –
 - Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Irish Hotels Federation (IHF); Irish Hospitality Institute (IHI); Licenced Vintners Association (LVA); Panel of Chefs (POC); Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI); Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI).
- Tourism –
 - Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions (AVEA); Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Event Industry Association of Ireland (EIAI); Fáilte Ireland (FI); Incoming Tour Operators Association (ITOA); Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC); Tourism Ireland (TI).

This indicative membership is not exclusive or exhaustive and others can be included as deemed appropriate by the group, but to ensure the focus always remains on the learner, it is proposed that the group should be jointly chaired by two of the educational partners – HEA and National Forum.

The members are all Irish organisations initially, for ease of collaboration and to form an established structure, before international T&H agencies should be included to reflect the varying WBL challenges and opportunities that occur at an international LoP level. The group should meet at least once per year and should engage with representative members from each of the local industry partners, HEIs and learners to help evaluate and formulate policies and guidance for T&H WBL

The T&H industry has had various task forces and work groups in the past and present, to focus on industry issues in an ad hoc fashion, but this will be a permanent group and focus on WBL solely, to avoid distraction. Previous task forces and groups had limited involvement from educational partners and this structure redresses this imbalance, which is necessary to ensure the learner remains the focus of the WBL experience. The wide range of T&H bodies suggested for the NOG indicate how vast and disparate the industry is, which also supports this call to bring all these voices together, which does not happen enough. The formation of a T&H Forum by the government (DTCAGSM, 2020b) to address the Covid-19 pandemic is a welcome move, as it provides a platform for a structured engagement between these sectors, which is what this research seeks. However, the absence of education from the terms of reference and membership is notable (DTCAGSM, 2020c), which highlights the need for a learner focused framework, as these learners are the leaders of the future and they need to be invested in and placed at the centre of all deliberations.

The framework will need to adopt a bottom-up approach to engaging with all partners and identifying common issues and opportunities, and the NOG will be responsible for communicating top-down initiatives and policies. The remit for this group could include:

- Agreeing consistent WBL terminology for T&H in Ireland
 - (e.g. work placement for short durations and internships for longer duration WBL, learner instead of student, industry partner instead of employer).
- Establish a central website/repository for useful documents, policies, templates, etc.
- Organise and manage a national database for T&H WBL.
- Promote T&H HE opportunities with a focus on WBL, with March dedicated as a T&H WBL month, a time traditionally associate with the start of the tourism season in Ireland due to St. Patrick's Day national holiday (17th March).

- Undertake research and special projects as appropriate.

In addition to the month-long focus on T&H WBL, there are a range of existing T&H recurring events that give a platform for researching and communicating key topics with various stakeholder groups. Most of the organisations mentioned have annual conferences, competitions and/or award ceremonies that offer opportunities to address their employees, members and sponsors. A standalone event specifically for T&H WBL in a central location, or a roadshow style pop-up event could take place at each HEI to communicate examples of good WBL practices, to facilitate positive interactions and to create shared understanding.

An award for best WBL partner should be considered at the various award ceremonies, with criteria agreed by the NOG. This aligns with a recommendation from one respondent who identified the IHF Quality Employer Programme (QEP), which could be expanded to incorporate WBL. However, a more consistent approach is a Quality WBL Provider scheme or WBL code of conduct compiled by the framework partners, which can be adopted by industry partners.

Consistency and resourcing

The research with ten HEIs has shown considerable diversity and variety in T&H WBL in terms of terminology, language, duration, assessment, the role of each partner and supports available and coupled with this is the varying WBL approaches by industry partners. Drawing on the research findings, the Learner Focused WBL Framework introduces a NOG to address the appeals for consistency, which harks back to the time when CERT and Fáilte Ireland offered a centralised co-ordination role for T&H WBL. The removal of these central supports has never been replaced sufficiently by HEIs or industry, which this NOG intends to address with a more encompassing group. The overall aim is to provide equity for all WBL students and consistent procedures for all partners. A key challenge identified by HEI respondents was the lack of support and resources for coordinating WBL, industry also frequently cited lack of dedicated time to support learners throughout the WBL experience. The stakeholders were in agreement that successful WBL requires considerable effort and the recommendation of a NOG is intended to elevate the standing of WBL in the minds of HEI and industry, which also needs funding supports. By focussing on collective solutions and

opportunities, national strategies and policies will emerge, which should be followed by better structures and commitment of resource allocation to WBL at a local level. HEI respondents in particular were critical of the lack of support for WBL, so having similar structures and support networks across Irish HEIs will be beneficial and will allow for regular engagement and cross-sharing of information.

The NOG should also work with partners to design and deliver specialised training, with dedicated programmes for HEI and industry, as there was unified feedback that many of those involved in WBL were unprepared and felt 'thrown in at the deep end'. This aligns with other Irish WBL research that called for collaboration and centralised training as it was found that designing and delivering curriculum for WBL is challenging for academic practitioners more familiar with a traditional mode of teaching and learning (Stephens *et al.*, 2014: 159). The strategy document calling for WBL to be rolled out on all undergraduate also makes a similar suggestion of dedicated training for HEI staff (DES, 2016: 87).

One of the impacts of Covid-19 is the supportiveness that exists in T&H and HEIs – sharing ideas, networking and generally helping each other out. Meitheal is the Irish expression of the ancient and universal appliance of cooperation to social need, most associated with neighbours coming together to save crops. Fáilte Ireland's largest international annual travel trade fair is also called Meitheal, therefore, the word is already well known among the T&H industry and I suggest this sense of meitheal and cooperation can be harnessed by all partners using this new framework and true learner centred approach, which provides consistent structures, supporting mechanisms and shared understanding to maximise the success of WBL across the sector.

Respondents identified that many of the issues with WBL are a result of limited time for proper engagement by HEIs and industry, therefore, more collaboration may be idealistic but unrealistic considering the ongoing WBL resource implications. Meitheal is reliant on goodwill to make the framework effective, and my research has shown an appetite for this with informal efforts already established at a micro level, but dedicated resources will also be required. The government and support agencies should be lobbied to divert funds and/or human resources to support the framework and engage with collaborative efforts. Such a framework will need at a minimum a national manager

and a support role to co-ordinate all activities and actions, and the government agencies and HEIs should be approached to fund this initiative, as they all benefit from WBL. For the T&H industry partners, a framework membership fee could be considered, but this might need to be on a phased basis when the Framework is well established, as it may prove to be a barrier to participation at the early stages. WBL needs to be investment orientated by all stakeholders and HEIs need to avoid the send and forget, cost saving approach of WBL suggested by some respondents. As part of the WBL engagement, HEIs should seek opportunities to foster large scale industry collaborations and research and development projects, which will ultimately benefit the learners too as HEI staff remain active and involved in industry.

The Irish tourism strategy, *Tourism Recovery Plan 2020-2023* (DTCAGSM, 2020a), supports much of this research suggestions as it calls for better coordination of tourism education and training. It also suggests the development of a National Tourism Education Gateway as a one stop shop to access education for tourism employees and calls for consistency in terms of quality and content of education and training provided by education providers (DTCAGSM, 2020a: 11). ITIC highlights the need for education to be recognised and supported as tourism in Ireland focuses on survival and revival from this existential crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic that has disproportionately impacted the industry (ITIC, 2021). However, a serious commitment of resources and energy is required to action many of these initiatives and the Learner Focused WBL Framework offers a structure to approach the challenges ahead, with WBL as a key pillar and strategic enabler of recovery plans.

As set out in Chapter 2, CEWIL Canada offers good practice WIL initiatives such as the national database, national co-op/WIL month, governance and other advocacy roles, coordinated under the CEWIL banner, which I suggest Ireland should replicate. The proposed framework offers a structure for this with the NOG taking on similar projects to CEWIL and continuing the good work of the National Forum who have opened a national conversation around the topic of WBL and WBA, expanding the communities involved in the national LoP.

Assessing WBL

Assessment approaches to WBL vary greatly across HEIs, which is to be expected with such variety of module weightings and learning outcomes. Formative and/or summative assessments are

utilised, and industry partners have varying levels of involvement in the assessment process. It is not surprising that assessment and academic standards in WBL have been largely deflected due to the complexity and difficulty in developing appropriate standards (Higgs, 2014). In Chapter 2, there was a suggestion that WBL students favour classroom learning and/or assessment activities which involved planning and goal setting and subsequent self-reflection on performance and achieved outcomes (Jackson, 2015). I support this and suggest that WBL should have meaningful assessment constructively aligned to the module learning outcomes before, during and after the WBL experience, which some HEIs are doing already, but not all. A preparatory module that is assessed and accredited is a good idea for students and industry would also benefit from a preparatory session too. The concepts of authentic and collaborative assessment provide useful principles to be considered as part of WBL design, to ensure suitable scaffolding for each stakeholder.

Expansive learning was introduced in Chapter 1 as a distinct idea that focuses on the personal growth rather than the employability (McArthur, 2011) and in light of my discussion around the neoliberalism agenda being pursued in HE, this type of learning is even more relevant for today's students who are more conscious about the world in which they live and work. WBL is an opportunity for HE to serve all society, sustaining, enriching, cultivating and critiquing the culture that underpins that society, but this can only happen with meaningful engagement by all partners, particularly in the assessment strategy.

Industry is happy to take on WBL students, however, the data shows there is less willingness to invest too much time in the assessment process, they want to be involved, but not responsible. I appreciate this differentiation and support the fact that for industry to be involved in assessing WBL, they need guidance and training. It is my position that it is too complex and difficult to have industry involved in grading WBL assessments in line with rigorous quality assurance, instead they should be able to sign off on a student using a non-graded competency approach, similar to what is done in other industries like nursing, which also supports multiple assessors during WBL. Allowing industry to record a pass or fail, rather than a graded mark, would be preferable and is an approach that could be adopted by HEIs too, which some already implement. A national set of agreed

competencies could be established by the NOG in association with suggested assessment strategies to be implemented by each HEI. To borrow further from nursing, and to enhance the reliability of assessment, a multisource feedback process could be implemented, where a learner is assessed by multiple assessors as part of WBL, often including self-assessment. This contrasts to the present situation in T&H where often only one person is involved in the feedback process and sometimes, they are not directly involved with the student during WBL, relying on reports from others instead.

There is a clear need to understand what students want/need for learning and HEIs must understand these concepts to improve teaching approaches and to assess the learning outcomes successfully. To develop teacher-student interactions and form more learning supportive relationships, there is a need for close relationships with students before, during and after they undertake WBL. Ashwin (2009; 43) stresses how the object of the interaction may be different for the HEI and for the student. This means HEIs might view WBL as one thing, whereas the students view it as something different, therefore, there is a need to ensure, as Ashwin (2009) points out, that we explore different approaches to understanding different aspects of the teaching and learning process. This is relevant for WBL and emphasises the need to keep up to date with what is happening for all stakeholders (students, HEIs, and industry) as things are constantly changing, such as technology and how it can be incorporated for assessment and all approaches should be inclusive to cater for non-traditional students.

If one considers Biggs' (2003) strong emphasis on the active behaviour of the student leading to learning, then it could be postulated that WBL is more likely to be successful (Walsh, 2007: 82) than traditional classroom learning. In the context of Feather's expectancy/value approach, it is highly likely that a student in the workplace, who works alongside other employees, will put a high value on successful learning in that context (Walsh, 2007: 82) because they have invested in the industry by choosing to study that career and will be willing to challenge themselves to learn and perform on the job. This is likely to generate a high level of motivation and engagement by students, and the literature also suggests that technology might increase engagement during WBL, which is another aspect that the NOG should investigate.

Whatever assessment approaches are suggested by the NOG, support training should be designed for all partners, so there is a clear understanding of expectations, roles and responsibilities. The NOG can coordinate such initiatives and feedback or feedforward training is particularly important as learners expect and deserve this, not only from their academic mentor, but their industry mentor too, which each learner should be clearly assigned. Reflection skills and know-how is another area for specialised training for students and industry staff, which should form part of briefing and debriefing sessions facilitated by HEIs on a regular basis. A focus on such practical issues will address some of the concerns of authenticity and validity of assessment and variability in quality of experience (Sheridan and Linehan, 2011) and the ongoing National Forum research in this area is already providing useful insights and solutions.

Addressing image and reputation

The worldwide T&H industry has a long-held reputation as being a challenging workplace and this image causes people to avoid entering the workforce and related HE programmes. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of T&H for many destinations as a key employer and economic contributor and governments are acutely aware of its significance as they support those businesses during the pandemic. My research uncovered a sentiment among industry and HEI respondents that T&H is taken for granted by government and I posit that from this macro perspective a similar narrative of taken for grantedness has developed towards T&H programmes in HE and by extension for T&H WBL. At a time when other industries and programmes turn towards WBL, T&H should be to the forefront and act as a vanguard of change, but this is hindered by the lack of cohesion evidenced throughout this research.

T&H has responded from other global crises, often one of the first industries to do so and has shown itself to be agile and flexible, traits which are particularly necessary as the industry recovers post-Covid and likewise, WBL can play a dual-role of supporting industry with learners in the workplace, whilst also advancing HEI programmes through on-the-job learning. However, T&H will take time to return to peak capacity and some businesses will not reopen, which will result in a drop in the supply of WBL opportunities. Travel restrictions also mean that overseas WBL, often a

mandatory component of a T&H programme, cannot be fulfilled and will have to be replaced by domestic or virtual WBL opportunities or alternative taught modules at the HEI, radically changing the traditional WBL experience. Work is already much different with many workplaces having pivoted to allow working from home, therefore, WBL of the future will also be changed greatly in many industries. This will require a rethinking and redevelopment of WBL modules and suitable alternatives will take even more of a priority. For T&H, there are some roles that might transfer to a home, online or virtual environment, but the majority of WBL will necessitate a presence in the workplace domain. This provides a significant challenge, but as a worldwide industry, international WBL opportunities may return more quickly, and the proposed framework applies in this context too.

The post-Covid recession may also be an opportunity for HE as more students tend to enter or return to education and T&H typically benefits from an upswing in enrolments, but HEIs appear more cautious about such a prediction due to the ongoing negative T&H industry image issues. This reemphasises the need for the T&H industry to address the negative image and perceived barriers to participation, which WBL can support. To borrow from the neoliberal perspective and to compete with other programmes, there was always a need to promote T&H in HE and this is even more true in light of the global pandemic. The T&H industry have taken WBL for granted and need to refocus on WBL benefits and better communicate these to prospective students and industry partners.

Aligned with the Covid-19 challenges, the emergence of Technological Universities in Ireland in the coming years will bring new challenges and opportunities for T&H programmes to succeed. Support is required from senior management in HEIs and industry, alongside a concerted effort to invest in marketing and branding of T&H and WBL, something that was absent or poorly conducted by most HEIs. The suggestion to market T&H programmes and WBL, may seem at odds with earlier criticism of such neoliberal approaches, but in competitive times and in light of the challenges faced by T&H and competition with other programmes and partnerships, it is time to engage in similar marketing and promotion tactics, which the NOG can lead.

Lastly, Covid-19 has led to an increased focus on the duty HEIs must have for students, an issue this research identified, with HEI respondents citing a lack of time/effort as reasons for not engaging sufficiently. In their cultural web, Doherty and Stephens (2020) place learner welfare as a

main concern and this merits serious attention and effort by all partners. The NOG can collate and disseminate good practice guidelines and I suggest the introduction of an ombudsperson to investigate any WBL stakeholder complaints, as this will address some of the power imbalance students can feel during and after WBL.

Revisiting WBL CoPs and LoPs

This research utilises the CoP theoretical framework to analyse WBL as part of T&H programmes in Irish HE, which was particularly apt as the foundation of the CoP notion was observing apprenticeship tailors in Africa (Lave and Wenger, 1991), a form of WBL. It was a useful approach for analysing T&H WBL and my research supported the finding that WBL has the power to transform (Lave and Wenger, 1991; McRae and Johnston, 2016) both lives and economies, as presented in Chapter 5. Transformation is impacted by the community a learner is immersed in and I put forward a new framework to provide a supportive structure for a positive WBL experience for all stakeholders. The Learner Focused WBL Framework advances the CoP theory to one of a community of partnerships, in a landscape of practice (LoP) (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2015) with the three main WBL stakeholders working in partnership to learn from the process and extending that community to include the NOG, a new national landscape of partnerships.

Each member of the framework has a responsibility towards creating successful WBL experiences and the scale of each circle in the framework is indicative of their communities graduated responsibility. The learner at the centre of the process highlights the need for all decisions to start and finish with them in mind. The dashed lines between each membership group signify the boundary crossing narrative which effective CoP encourages and promotes. This research has shown that those boundary lines are sometimes impervious walls constructed between partners, acting as obstacle in effective WBL partnerships. By providing a national and local framework, there will be more opportunity to build WBL capability and capacity throughout the framework, with meaningful engagement, communication and support. WBL collaborations work best when they are managed by people who can cross boundaries easily and have a deep understanding of the cultures they need to bridge (Basit *et al.*, 2015), therefore, by providing a formal framework, it will help to grow mutual awareness and appreciation among the various members. The scaffolding structure

enabled by the framework will reinforce those informal arrangements established by some parties in the WBL ecosystem, acknowledged in HE strategy documents (DES, 2011: 76), and ensure better collaboration of a variety of interconnected elements and stakeholders.

WBL aims to mobilise learners from their CoP to hills of expertise, but as this research has shown, there is no one road to successful WBL, instead each learner makes their own winding path through valleys and hills. Wenger (2000) talked about the interactions in the valleys or boundaries and for many WBL students, they can become lost in a valley and shadows of the hill, not seeing or finding the path that exists over every hill. There is a saying that mountaintops inspire leaders, but valleys mature them and this is true of WBL where it is recognised that not all partners will have positive experiences, but all stakeholders should learn throughout the LoP journey. This links with the concept of map-readers and map-makers (Lester,1999) in Chapter 3 and the proposed framework aims to offer support to all types of learners to ensure the WBL journey is as successful as possible, by supporting each community on their respective journey. Without a community, a member will feel lonely and isolated, which was a feeling expressed by some HEI respondents, as well as students. The framework addresses this by providing structures for people to work together to traverse new landscapes and cross boundaries, which should be central to the WBL experience to enable sense-making processes for each stakeholder.

Limitations of the research and implications for future research

The research was conducted with an industry that I am embedded in and the stakeholders I engaged with were largely known to me through my involvement in HE and the T&H industry. This positions me as an insider researcher (Nixon, 2008; Raelin, 2008) and an inside evaluator (Caro, 1971), which I understand can have implications on the research as I cannot escape my own experience. However, I argue that my background has helped with the research, by getting access to industry and HEI respondents and I follow Fleming (2018) who identified that insider research provides a valuable contribution to the theory and practice of WIL from a different perspective than may be obtained by someone not deeply embedded and involved. Expanding my research across ten HEIs and a variety of industry respondents, all with varied backgrounds and experience, has exposed me

to a wide range of views from the anchor point of all three stakeholders – students, industry and HEI staff. These respondents can be considered insiders in their own organisations, therefore, each one offers a unique perspective of the history and culture of WBL, enabling a deep level of understanding and interpretation of the material related to the research questions.

The qualitative approach is perspective-based and I had to be careful to avoid my bias when analysing and interpreting the data, which I attempted by cross-referencing the perspectives with multiple stakeholders. I follow Eisner (1992) who says that research cannot reach true knowledge, just belief based on good reason and by conducting my research in a reflective manner, I have tried to remain objective and certainly reflect on my own biases and positionality. Qualitative work within the interpretivist tradition can be challenged on the grounds that its findings cannot be replicated elsewhere. However, it should be emphasised that the study can offer a case which can be illuminating to other similar contexts (HEIs delivering WBL) and a research design that might be replicated elsewhere. This is particularly relevant as WBL is rolled out across all HEIs in Ireland, and the T&H experience will have relevance to other industries.

A comparative analysis of this study in a different jurisdiction would be interesting, to test if undertaking the study with a similar sample in a different location would yield divergent results. This research was limited to the Republic of Ireland, therefore, an obvious suggestion might be a study in Northern Ireland, but I believe there would not be enough critical mass there in terms of HEIs offering T&H WBL opportunities, therefore, a location such as Scotland might be more comparable or New Zealand, which is often seen as a WBL leader and has a T&H industry similar to Ireland in terms of scale and offering. Much research on WBL generally exists, but my suggestion is to explore the various stakeholder perspectives towards WBL, focussing on standardisation, resources, assessment and creating effective partnerships. Exploring assessment tools to evaluate WBL would benefit educators in particular (Yiu and Law, 2012) and a niche area worthy of investigation is with the non-traditional students.

The research with students was limited to 57 surveys at one HEI, and this is an area for future research, particularly to investigate their views of industry's role in WBL assessment. I included student views to help address an unequal distribution that can often exist and I propose their views

were also well represented through HEI respondents, who deal with WBL students on a daily basis and therefore, provided sufficient insights for this study.

This study included seven semi-structured interviews with industry professionals and whilst they were carefully chosen to reflect a broad spectrum, including two industry representative groups, it is recommended that future research would be beneficial specifically with business owners/manager, representing different sized businesses with varying staff numbers. The topic of RPL and implications for WBL also merits further consideration, specifically from the perspective of industry professionals seeking exemptions on HE programmes.

A power imbalance can exist between WBL students and industry and a study on this area would add further value to the WBL literature generally, but specifically for the T&H area. Research is being undertaken currently with full-time T&H employees in Ireland regarding harassment issues and it is finding an underreporting of such issues, highlighting serious problems and cultural dynamics that appear unique to T&H. I have not encountered any research on this topic specifically with WBL students and my own study did not raise any such issues, but due to the sensitive and serious nature of such a topic, I believe it merits a careful and attentive research approach, which I intend to engage with.

Students have identified relationships with others in the classroom having a significant impact on their own learning (Sabri, 2013) and this is something that should be extended and tested in a WBL environment. Research should focus on learners' impact on each other or the impact of learners on and by work colleagues, which would help to further advance the CoP theory and to challenge the notion of students as passive receivers of education (Brooks and Abrahams, 2018). The impact of Covid-19 and other crises on WBL would be a useful investigation, specifically for industries like T&H that have suffered greatly, resulting in a need for WBL alternatives to be implemented.

The impact of technology before, during and after T&H WBL is another area for future research, beyond its current use for ePortfolio development on some T&H programmes. Technology has been integrated to HE at an accelerated pace since the arrival of Covid-19 and mobile learning (m-learning) is acknowledged to have increasing significance and visibility in HE (Ally, 2009; Fuller

& Joynes, 2015; Hardyman *et al.*, 2013; Koskimaa *et al.*, 2007; Ramanau *et al.*, 2008; Satchwell *et al.*, 2013; Shepherd, 2011; Traxler, 2009), however, there was little evidence of this relating to WBL during my research (Sandars and Dearnley, 2009; Sandars and Pellow, 2006). Coulby *et al.* (2011: 259) found that the medical students who used personal digital assistants (PDAs) during WBL reported higher levels of feedback on assessment and this formative assessment enabled better reflection on learning and the technology helped to act as an icebreaker and encouraged engagement with their patients. The introduction of a new device for learning also linked with the CoP concept as it facilitated an opportunity for the staff and students to open a dialogue and further develop shared meaning and experiences (Wenger, 1998) and I suggest there is potential for similar benefits to accrue in a T&H workplace setting, which would be worth investigating.

Personal research reflections

“A guest never forgets the host who has treated them kindly.”

(Homer's *Odyssey*, 9th Century BC).

This quote resonates with me and is apt for inclusion for two reasons. Firstly, it is travel and tourism related due to the theme of a voyage, undertaken by Odysseus, which correlates to the WBL journey undertaken by learners and all other stakeholders. Secondly, the quote touches on the notion of hospitality experienced by travellers and tourists, which WBL students can also relate to during their interactions with WBL providers, never forgetting the host who is kind, or not. The WBL journey is not a passive one; students are not passive learners; industry should not be passive hosts and HEIs need to be active in a meaningful way to deliver successful WBL experiences.

I have been involved in T&H WBL for over 20 years, in the role of student, industry partner and more recently as a HEI partner, and thankfully I have a wonderful journey so far, but I recognise this is not true for all. This research has been ongoing for almost eight years, but the topic has been with me for much longer, and this study has given me an opportunity to delve deeper into two topics, which I am passionate about – T&H and WBL. I have some great WBL memories and through the research have identified an emotional attachment to WBL, evident with all respondents, particularly HEI staff and students.

This research has already had an impact at my own HEI, where I have been involved in redesigning WBL modules and it has informed my contributions to other Irish HEIs as an external examiner and programme validation panel member. I have had many opportunities to discuss my developing research with T&H industry and academic colleagues informally and through presentations at the annual Tourism and Hospitality Research in Ireland Conference (Carty, 2014b; 2015; 2017, 2018) and the Travel and Tourism Research Association European Chapter Conference (Carty, 2016), which has afforded me useful feedback that guided and challenged my investigations. My close connections with industry have been beneficial throughout the study, to gain insights to their perspectives, as has consultancy work that has allowed me to engage with a number of T&H businesses and organisations. I am fortunate to be on the judging panel of a range of industry annual award schemes (Hotel and Catering Review Gold Medal Awards, Bar of the Year, Event Industry Awards, and Digital Media Awards), which also keeps me actively engaged in the industry developments and meeting WBL partners outside my own HEI. As a Fellow of the Irish Hospitality Institute and member of Skål International (professional organisation of tourism leaders around the world), I am well positioned to take this research further and to have a positive impact and enhanced engagement with T&H WBL.

My research aligns with my own experience in this area, namely that there is good work being done but there are consistent issues that are surmountable with increased sharing of information and more transparency. I liken my research experience to that of as an observer at a crowded crossroads, without traffic lights, with all sorts of vehicles progressing on their own journeys. In the main, it seems to work satisfactorily, but there are times when things go wrong and this is when a light is shone on certain issues. All of this is happening at a micro level in each HEI, but when you zoom out and look at the national landscape, which this research allowed, it reveals a busier spaghetti like junction with even more traffic and congestion at certain points. Certainly, things are working fine for most partners in the process, but it is my contention that with more oversight and guidance, the WBL journey could be a better experience, particularly for the learners, by offering better signage, traffic lights and rules of the road.

On my own research journey, I have learned more about the WBL experience and this knowledge has given me a newfound confidence in my ability to contribute to the ongoing WBL discussions in my own HEI and on the national and international stage. My journey has encountered many distractions along the way, mostly work related and some extracurricular, but ultimately, they have all contributed to this thesis as I have found myself linking those distractions to this research. Whilst Covid-19 has impacted on aspects of my research and the T&H and HE industries, most of my work was conducted before it took hold and the findings are even more apt given the changed circumstances and opportunities afforded by Covid-19.

As I navigated through the research, I was struck by the level of emotion attached to WBL, mainly positive, but some negative. This was compounded by the fact that most of the industry and HEI respondents also experienced the WBL process as students and some HEI respondents also had experience of managing WBL students in industry. The passion I witnessed and emotional attachment indicates the power of WBL to impact change for the good and whilst some respondents reflected almost romantically on WBL experiences, like any love story, not all have happy endings. The goal of this research has been to learn more about the stakeholder views towards T&H WBL and to suggest changes that can improve the experience for all partners, but mainly for the learners.

Research Question Summaries

RQ 1: How and in what way is WBL regarded by different tourism and hospitality stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)?

WBL is seen positively by all the main stakeholders (students, HEIs and industry) as it helps to build confidence, particularly among students, whilst also building relationships that have been shown to stand the test of time. WBL has the capacity to transform lives and economies but there is little cohesion across the HEIs or industry as to how this happens. Instead, many stakeholders operate in silos throughout the WBL process, and whilst WBL is mainly satisfactory, it is argued that with better co-ordination and consistency, the WBL experience could be optimised and reduce the tensions that exist.

RQ 2: What tensions are there between different stakeholder understandings of WBL, particularly regarding employability, assessment and student engagement/quality?

The tensions that exist between WBL stakeholders are often a result of a lack of understanding and communication between partners. However, the lack of consistency in approaches to WBL also plays a key role, particularly regarding assessment and the role of industry in process. There is evidence of unequal WBL partnerships that need to be addressed and all stakeholders have a role to play; HEIs need to take a lead role, supported by industry and students must recognise their role as learners. In the past, the needs of industry were often prioritised with the aim of providing employable graduates and there now has to be a refocusing on the learner as the priority stakeholder.

RQ 3: How are the pressures of a more marketised and consumer focused HE sector (globally, but specifically within Ireland) manifested in and contributing to the ways WBL is developing within tourism and hospitality programmes?

The HE sector globally and in Ireland is experiencing pressures of a consumer focus and marketisation, with one manifestation of this pressure being the reported lack of resources available to support WBL sufficiently in HEIs and industry. A focus on quantity instead of quality is having a negative impact on the WBL experience for all stakeholders that needs to be addressed and managed better into the future.

RQ4: What are the implications of these findings for supporting changes in how work-based learning is managed in Irish higher education institutes?

The implications of my research on how WBL is managed in HEIs revolves around the need for partnerships that work. The key to ensuring successful WBL lies in quality preparation by all stakeholders. During WBL, the monitoring is vital and good practice is required to ensure that each student and industry partner is clear about their HEI contact who engages with them in a regular and timely fashion. There is a need to focus on improving the reputation of the T&H industry and related

HE programmes, which WBL can support but only as long as all stakeholders agree to standards and consistency that can be overseen by a NOG at the national LoP level.

Chapter Summary

T&H has been at the forefront in partnerships with HE and the industry faces unprecedented times as a result of Covid-19 with all three WBL stakeholders impacted. The local, national and international landscapes have changed for all communities as students seek different experience, the HE sector is undergoing a series of mergers and the T&H industry is challenged. The Irish context for this research is important, because of the key role that T&H plays in the economy and the Covid-19 pandemic has reemphasised the simultaneous importance of WBL and its precarity. There is a need for careful consideration to balance the changed supply and demand patterns for WBL but notwithstanding these challenges, this crisis offers an opportunity to leave behind suboptimal practices and to focus on building quality into every aspect of the WBL experience. There is an opportunity, and need, to nurture a new WBL relationship, correcting the power imbalance towards industry and HEIs need to lead on this refocusing of WBL to support the learner experience. The learners have a key role in driving learning and the refocusing of the WBL experience on the learner first principle is intended to correct a power imbalance identified during this research, with industry partners and some academics holding all of the power and students being at the mercy of their industry mentors or colleagues. HEIs need to reflect on who is in control of the WBL treadmill – themselves, industry or students and a national conversation on this would be beneficial for all stakeholders.

As an academic who collaborates on WBL across many disciplines at one HEI and being part of a national WBL community, I see a need for tailored approaches that take account of specific and nuanced sectoral characteristics and considerations. The overarching framework can be applied to any industry, but in each case the NOG will constitute relevant partners that represent the different structures, organisations, and history. T&H can be a vanguard of change regarding WBL, but this research shows WBL is complex and each discipline and industry will need to find its own path, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, but lessons learned from this research are relevant for

other industries and merit attention as competition for partnerships between academia and industry increases. A NOG for each discipline would be appropriate and enable consistency for WBL across Irish HE, and like nursing, a dedicated group of engaged professionals and representatives of the stakeholder groups, can work together collegially to ensure agreed standards are met and national objectives delivered. Consistency of language and terminology is the first step proposed, followed by agreements for standard WBL durations and assessments, which will be more difficult to achieve consensus, but will be beneficial for all stakeholders.

Scholars and practitioners have paid increasing attention to WBL around the world and more recently in Ireland. Some research has focussed on T&H, but without proper oversight, recommendations have yet to be implemented on a consistent basis and this study suggests a NOG to implement and monitor relevant policies and procedures, specifically for the T&H discipline. This research has uncovered many examples of good practice in T&H WBL, and some HEIs have more to learn than others, but collectively there are opportunities for group learning through a common framework to share creative and learner focussed approaches. The NOG is not starting with a blank slate, there is much history and experience with T&H WBL that needs to be mined and shared, which this study hopes to initiate. The NOG can begin with a listening and collating brief to gather the good practices and share them across the framework partners and to a wider audience with an interest in WBL. A shared understanding across these key stakeholders will help to offer collective and universal principles for good practice T&H WBL, but ultimately implementation will rest at a local level.

In many respects, WBL is uncontrollable and unpredictable, and it exists in a complex ecosystem that is composed of a variety of interconnected elements and stakeholders that serve to mutually benefit each other. This research aims to provide a supporting structure to maximise the success of WBL, resulting in a win-win-win for the three main stakeholders and wider community of partners. The coordinated framework offers a consistency that is absent currently in T&H and aims to address the issues of resourcing and assessing WBL and creating effective partnerships. The research has already informed WBL changes to module descriptors and assessment strategies and I plan to advance this topic through shared understanding in my own practice and further research.

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Appendix One – Student Survey

GMIT Work Placement

Information page

Dear GMIT student/graduate, I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

This is a small piece of research as I am only approaching a limited number of students, to talk about your experience of work placements at GMIT. Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The purpose of the study is to investigate your experience of work placement and how work placement can be best managed in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). You have been selected to participate due to your role as a student/graduate who has undertaken work placements in GMIT in recent years.

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any stage. The survey takes approximately 4 minutes to complete and no preparation is required from you – I will raise a number of items and ask for your views on them. Some questions are mandatory (marked with a red *) and you will be prompted to complete them if you have not done so.

The only people who will have access to the data will be the researcher (John Carty) and module convenor (Murray Saunders). Your anonymity will be protected by using respondent throughout the report and you are not asked for your name at any time to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you for reading this information page, please click next to begin the survey and make sure to click 'done' at the end to submit your responses. Thanks again.

Kind regards,

John Carty
john.carty@gmit.ie
+353 (0)87 410 2126

Work Placement questions

*** 1. Please indicate the programme you are studying/studied at GMT.**

- Culinary Arts
- Event Management and Public Relations
- Hotel and Catering Management
- Retail Management
- Tourism Management

*** 2. Please indicate the duration of your work placement.**

- 12 weeks
- 30 weeks

*** 3. Where did you conduct your work placement?**

- Ireland
- Overseas

*** 4. Was your work placement paid or unpaid?**

- Paid work placement
- Unpaid work placement

*** 5. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of work placement:**

| | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Neutral | Dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Preparation | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| Overall experience | <input type="radio"/> |
| Learning experience | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| Communication | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assessment | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

*** 6. How could the following aspects of work placement be improved in your opinion?**

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Preparation | <input type="text"/> |
| Overall experience | <input type="text"/> |
| Learning experience | <input type="text"/> |
| Communication | <input type="text"/> |
| Assessment | <input type="text"/> |

*** 7. What were the three best aspects of work placement from your experience?**

1

2

3

*** 8. What were the three aspects of work placement that you liked least?**

1

2

3

*** 9. Please make three suggestions as to how you feel work placement in GMIT could be improved.**

1

2

3

*** 10. Most work placement modules are assessed by a business report (50%), employment diary (20%), reflections on appraisals (20%) and interview (10%). Do you have any views on how the assessment of the work placement module could be done differently? Please explain your answers and give as much detail as possible.**

11. Please record any additional comments you wish to make about work placement here.

Appendix Two – Consent Form

Department of Educational Research
 County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK
 Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592685

Educational
 Research

Lancaster
 University



Consent Form

Title of Project: Enhancing the learning experience and assessment of work based learning on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education

Name of Researcher: John Carty

| | | Please Tick |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated January 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. | |
| 2. | I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary. If for any reason I wish to withdraw during the period of this study, I am free to do so without providing any reason. I understand that my contributions will be part of the data collected for this study and my anonymity will be ensured. I give consent for all my contributions to be included and/or quoted in this study. | |
| 3. | I consent to the interview being audio recorded. | |
| 4. | I understand that the information I provide will be used for a PhD research project and the combined results of the project may be published. I understand that I have the right to review and comment on the information I have provided. | |
| 5. | I agree to take part in the above study. | |
| Name of Participant: | | |
| Signature | | |
| Date | | |

Contact phone number: _____

Please indicate any days / times in the coming two weeks that might suit you to participate in a telephone interview:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Appendix Three – Participant Information Sheet

Educational
Research

Lancaster
University



Participant Information Sheet

Name of Project: Assessing work-based learning on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education – the view from three main stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)

Researcher: John Carty

Module Convenor: Dr Kirsty Finn, Lancaster University

Dear academic colleagues,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

Please feel free to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to enhance the learning experience and assessment of work-based learning (WBL) on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education institutes (HEIs). The study will examine the WBL stakeholder (industry, academics and students) views towards learning and perceptions of the role and value of assessment of WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE. Mixed methods will be used to gather data – through online surveys with students and semi-structured interviews with academics. The study will provide guidance and make recommendations for HEIs regarding the enhancement of the WBL experience and its assessment on all programmes, but specifically those relating to tourism and hospitality management.

Why have I been invited?

Due to your role as a stakeholder (student, academic, industry) involved in work-based learning (WBL) in an Irish HEI.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any stage. After participating in the survey/interview, a two-week grace period is granted by which time you should contact me by email (j.carty@lancaster.ac.uk) to have your contributions removed. After this time, the work will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed and thus making it impossible to extract individuals' data from the overall dataset.

Please be advised that the only people who will have access to the data will be the researcher (John Carty) and if necessary, my supervisor (Dr Kirsty Finn). Your anonymity will be protected by using

respondent throughout the report and you are not asked for your name at any time to ensure confidentiality.

What will taking part involve for me (interview)?

- A 20-30-minute semi-structured interview. No preparation is required from you – I will raise a number of items and ask for your views on them.
- The interview will take place in a meeting room (not the office of the interviewee or the interviewer) or via Skype / telephone call
- The only people who will have access to the data will be the interviewer (John Carty) and my supervisor (Dr Kirsty Finn)
- Your anonymity will be protected by using the term participant or a generic pseudonym throughout.

What will you do with my data?

The interview data will be recorded on a portable digital recorder. Sound files will be transferred from that recorder to an encrypted folder and deleted from the recorder within one hour of our interview. Should you wish to withdraw your consent, you can do so by emailing me within fourteen days after being interviewed. All data will be transcribed, and you will be assigned a pseudonym and a “generic” job title – such as “academic staff” or “clerical officer”. Transcription and analysis will be undertaken by the principal researcher.

Data will be stored for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the project (anticipated to be July 2018), as per Lancaster University policy. Transcribed and survey data will be stored in an encrypted folder. You will have the opportunity to see a copy of your transcript notes and have two weeks to withdraw any portions of your data you are unhappy with – including your entire contribution. These portions will not be used in subsequent analyses or reports. After this two-week period, it will not be possible to unpick your data from the anonymised transcripts, reports or publications

If you would like further information about this project or if you have any concerns, please contact me by email. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr Kirsty Finn:

Dr Kirsty Finn
Lecturer in Higher Education,
Dept. of Educational Research,
Lancaster University,
Lancaster, LA1 4YD

Tel: +44 1524 595123
Email: k.finn1@lancaster.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information, please sign the attached consent form to participate in this research and return to me at your earliest convenience.

Kind regards,

John Carty
j.carty@lancaster.ac.uk
+353 (0)87 410 2126

January 2018

Office 456
Galway International Hotel School
Dublin Road
Galway

Appendix Four – Interview Schedule – HEIs



ID:
Name:
HEI:
Role:
Date:
Time:
Duration:
No.:

Interview Introduction

Name of Project: Assessing work-based learning on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education – the view from three main stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to enhance the learning experience and assessment of work-based learning (WBL) on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education institutes (HEIs). The study will examine the WBL stakeholder (industry, academics and students) views towards learning and perceptions of the role and value of assessment of WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE. Mixed methods will be used to gather data – through online surveys with students and semi-structured interviews with academics. The study will provide guidance and make recommendations for HEIs regarding the enhancement of the WBL experience and its assessment on all programmes, but specifically those relating to tourism and hospitality management.

Interview Schedule - HEIs

1. What do you call WBL / work placement in your HEI?
2. What are current assessment practices for WBL assessment on tourism and hospitality programmes in your HEI?
3. How do you view the role and value of assessment of WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE?
4. What do you consider good practice for WBL assessment on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE?
5. Vignette
The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum) recently published an Insight document on the context, purposes and methods of work-based assessment of/for/as learning. In this document, they suggest that industry should play a role in the WBL assessment process. They suggested that industry could be responsible for awarding up to 70% of the credits available.
 - i. What are your views of this?
 - ii. Should industry play a role in WBL assessment?
 1. If yes, what role should they play and how much involvement should they have regarding assessment?
 2. If no, explain why you feel this way.

6. Would you be in favour of industry standards for work-based learning and standardisation of assessment for WBL?
7. What role do you expect WBL to play in future tourism and hospitality management programmes in Irish HE?

Appendix Five – Interview Schedule – Industry



ID:
Name:
Organisation:
Role:
Date:
Time:
Duration:
No.:

Interview Introduction

Name of Project: Assessing work-based learning on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education – the view from three main stakeholders (students, industry, HEI staff)

What is the purpose of the study?

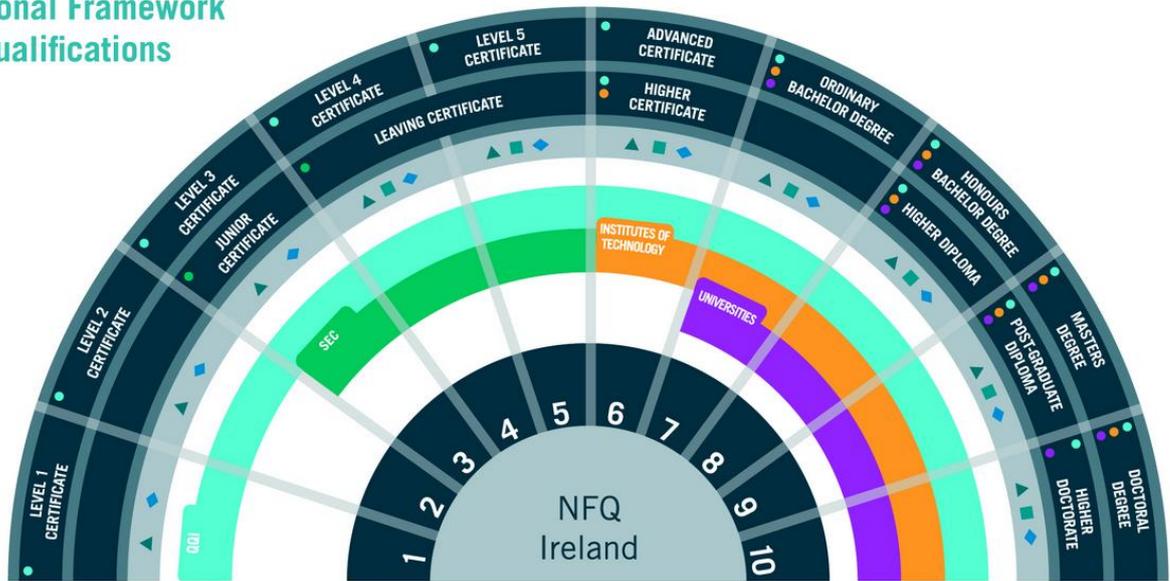
The purpose of this study is to enhance the learning experience and assessment of work-based learning (WBL) on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish higher education institutes (HEIs). The study will examine the WBL stakeholder (industry, academics and students) views towards learning and perceptions of the role and value of assessment of WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE. Mixed methods will be used to gather data – through online surveys with students and semi-structured interviews with academics. The study will provide guidance and make recommendations for HEIs regarding the enhancement of the WBL experience and its assessment on all programmes, but specifically those relating to tourism and hospitality management.

Interview Schedule - Industry

1. Regarding WBL:
 - a. How many work based learning (WBL) students does your organisation take on each year?
None in recent years, due to another business in the town swamping up all of the available students interested in WBL in the town. Used to be in the kitchen and F&B roles.
 - b. What are the durations of these work placement?
Used to be 12 weeks normally.
2. How familiar are you with:
 - a. intended module and programme learning outcomes for the students WBL
 - b. creditsIs broadly aware, but mainly through their links with education and training.
3. How much support do you get in terms of training or briefing in advance of WBL? Limited
4. Are you aware of the current assessment practices for WBL assessment of these students that you take on? No.
 - a. If yes, please specify what they are:

5. What role does your organisation currently play in the assessment of WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE?
6. Is there any feedback or follow up with you after the student has returned to the HEI?
7. Vignette
The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (National Forum) recently published an Insight document on the context, purposes and methods of work-based assessment of/for/as learning. In this document, they suggest that industry should play a role in the WBL assessment process. They suggested that industry could be responsible for awarding up to 70% of the credits available.
 - i. What are your views of this?
 - ii. Should industry play a role in WBL assessment?
 1. If yes, what role should they play and how much involvement should they have regarding assessment?
 2. If no, explain why you feel this way.
8. Would you be in favour of industry standards for WBL and standardisation of assessment for WBL on tourism and hospitality programmes in Ireland?
9. What role do you expect WBL to play in future tourism and hospitality programmes in Irish HE?

Appendix Six – Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)



AWARDING BODIES

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) makes awards in further and higher education and training
- SEC - State Examinations Commission (Department of Education and Skills)
- Institutes of Technology
- Universities

AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

There are four classes of award in the National Framework of Qualifications:

- ⤴ **Major Awards:** named in the outer rings, are the principal class of awards made at a level
- ⬆ **Minor Awards:** are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- ⬇ **Supplemental Awards:** are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- ⬇ **Special Purpose Awards:** are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement

(QQI, 2021)