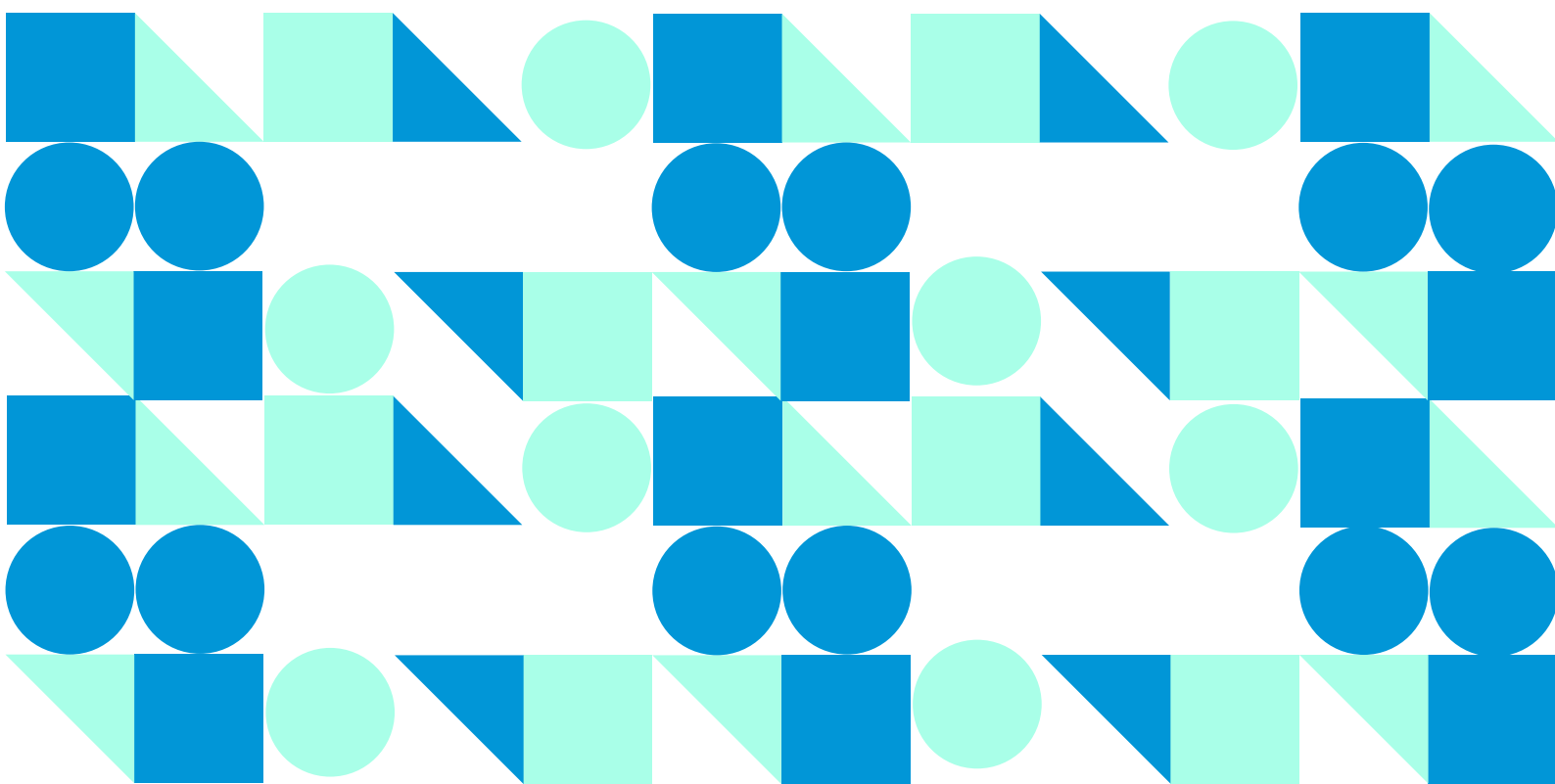




Research paper

The impact of learning-outcomes-based curricula on work and practice-based IVET



The impact of learning-outcomes-based curricula on work and practice-based IVET

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Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu
www.cedefop.europa.eu

Jürgen Siebel, *Executive Director*
Tony Donohoe, *Chair of the Management Board*

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Foreword

This publication was prepared as part of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) project *The shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality*. The purpose of this research is to analyse the conceptual, structural and political factors influencing the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes. It is considered the first step in a long-term research strategy aiming to achieve a better understanding of the conditions for high-quality vocational education, training and learning. The research focuses on initial vocational education and training (IVET) in schools and apprenticeships in the 27 EU Member States, and Iceland and Norway.

The research is divided into five separate but interlinked themes:

- (a) addressing the influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools;
- (b) focusing on the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices (in school-based programmes);
- (c) examining the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula in company training (the part of apprenticeship programmes that takes place in companies);
- (d) mapping and analysing the influence of learning outcomes on assessment;
- (e) developing suggestions for the future by supporting stakeholders and policymakers in addressing future challenges and opportunities in this area.

This publication explores the impact of learning-outcomes-based curricula on work- and practice-based IVET across 10 Member States: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. While many studies have investigated the integration of learning outcomes in school-based settings, this report focuses on how learning outcomes are implemented and experienced within the work-based component of IVET programmes. It considers the roles of companies, in-company trainers and learners, and investigates how learning outcomes influence workplace training, learning processes and learners' progression.

The report highlights that the transition to learning-outcomes-based vocational education and training (VET) curricula has been driven by EU policy initiatives and national reform agendas. Although learning outcomes feature prominently in national qualifications frameworks and VET standards, their incorporation into work-based learning varies significantly across Member States. Their use in company-based training depends on the initiative of individual providers,

employers or trainers. In some cases, learning outcomes are interpreted differently by educational and company actors.

Overall, the report shows that learning outcomes play a key role in structuring and orienting VET, including the work-based component. They offer a shared language for VET providers and companies, help define competences to be developed and provide a basis for planning the training process and assessment. However, the extent to which learning outcomes are used in work-based learning remains uneven. In many cases, they are well established in school-based curricula but only partially embedded in workplace training. Their impact on learning depends not only on formal curriculum design but also on the engagement of companies, the skills of trainers and the support learners receive.

We hope this publication and the other documents that will be published as part of this study can serve as a reference point for continuous cooperation and exchange that could take forward both learning outcomes and the key role they play, not only in the dialogue between education and training and the world of work, but also in the transformation of learning intentions – articulated through curricula or programmes – into actual teaching and assessment practices.

Jürgen Siebel
Executive Director

Irene Mandl
Head of Department for VET and Qualifications

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The research was carried out by a consortium led by PPMI Group, UAB (Lithuania), coordinated by Mariia Kolokolova, Donatas Pocius and Milda Venckutė-Jakštė. The consortium includes 3s Research & Consulting (Austria), Ockham IPS (the Netherlands) and, as subcontractors, the European Institute of Education and Social Policy (France), INOVA+ (Portugal), Tomaž Deželan (Slovenia), Suzanne Gatt (Malta), Jouko Luomi (Finland) and Andrew McCoshan (Ireland).

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Executive summary

This study explores the use and impact of learning-outcomes-based curricula on work- and practice-based initial vocational education and training (IVET) across 10 EU Member States: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. While many studies have investigated the integration of learning outcomes in school-based settings, this report focuses specifically on how learning outcomes are implemented and experienced within the work-based component of IVET programmes. It considers the roles of companies, in-company trainers and learners, and investigates how learning outcomes influence workplace training, learning processes and learners' progression.

The study is part of a wider European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) project examining the transition from intended to achieved learning outcomes in vocational education and training (VET). To help fulfil this broader objective, this report provides new insights on how learning outcomes are used in practice within real-life workplace learning environments, how they shape interactions between educational and labour market actors and how they affect the learner experience.

Objectives and research questions

The overarching aims of the study are to better understand the pedagogical and operational use of learning outcomes in work-based learning (WBL) settings and to identify the conditions under which learning-outcomes-based curricula are successfully implemented. Three key research questions guide the analysis.

- (a) How are learning-outcomes-based curricula informing, influencing and/or steering WBL?
- (b) To what extent and how are company trainers using the learning-outcomes-based curricula to plan and execute their job as trainers?
- (c) To what extent are learners aware of the learning-outcomes-based requirements and how does this influence their learning and progression?

Methodology and approach

The report is based on a combination of a literature review, Member State case studies and fieldwork conducted with VET providers and WBL companies. In each of the 10 participating Member States, two companies involved in IVET WBL were

selected as case studies, along with their associated VET providers. The companies operate across diverse sectors, such as engineering, childcare, healthcare, hospitality, logistics and the creative industries.

In total, 20 companies and 17 VET providers participated in the study. The research team conducted (in quarters 1–3 of 2024) 151 interviews with company managers, in-company trainers, learners and VET school staff. These interviews were complemented by document analysis (e.g. individual learning plans, curricula, assessment tools) and non-intrusive observation of training in WBL environments.

A shared analytical framework was applied to all Member State cases, supporting consistency across national contexts while taking into account differences in regulatory frameworks, institutional structures and pedagogical practices. The framework focuses on three interlinked levels of analysis: macro (policy and governance), meso (institutional practices) and micro (individual experiences).

The research also builds on existing European and national literature on learning outcomes, WBL and the role of company actors in vocational education. While the emphasis is on practical implementation, the study also considers the policy and institutional frameworks that shape these practices.

National frameworks and curriculum design

Across all 10 Member States, the transition to learning-outcomes-based VET curricula has been driven by EU policy initiatives and national reform agendas. Learning outcomes now feature prominently in national qualifications frameworks and VET standards. However, their incorporation into WBL varies significantly across Member States. In those with mature WBL systems, such as the Netherlands, Slovenia and Finland, learning outcomes are embedded in both school- and work-based components of IVET. National regulations or guidelines often require cooperation between VET providers and companies to define and coordinate learning activities based on learning outcomes. These Member States also tend to have established mechanisms for developing individual learning plans and aligning workplace training with curriculum requirements. In Member States with less mature WBL systems, such as Bulgaria or Ireland, WBL is often more fragmented and less systematically integrated into the curriculum. While learning outcomes are formally part of qualification standards, their use in company-based training is more variable and may depend on the initiative of individual providers, employers or trainers. In some cases, learning outcomes are interpreted differently by educational and company actors. For example, VET schools may focus on

curriculum implementation and assessment, while companies prioritise productivity and workplace routines. The absence of shared tools or communication channels can lead to the inconsistent application of learning outcomes in the workplace.

Planning and coordination between schools and companies

The use of learning outcomes to guide the planning of WBL varies across the Member States studied. In several (e.g. Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia), schools and companies collaborate to construct individualised training plans based on the learning outcomes specified in national curricula. These plans serve as reference documents for learners, trainers and tutors and help ensure coherence between school-based learning and WBL. In the Netherlands and Finland, VET providers and companies share responsibility for designing and implementing personalised learning pathways. Workplace instructors are supported by clear documentation and often participate in joint planning and (midpoint) assessments. This collaborative approach facilitates the alignment of learning outcomes with real workplace tasks and enhances the relevance of work-based training. By contrast, in Member States where WBL is primarily internship based (e.g. Ireland, Malta), formal planning tends to be less structured. While assessment briefs or templates may be used to identify relevant tasks, the extent to which learning outcomes inform training at the company level depends on the initiative of individual trainers or tutors. Even in Member States with formal coordination mechanisms, challenges remain. Company size, sector and capacity all influence how learning outcomes are used. Smaller firms may lack the time or expertise needed to engage in curriculum planning, while larger firms often have more experience and internal systems to support learners.

Role of in-company trainers

In-company trainers play a central role in translating learning outcomes into practical training experiences. Across all case study Member States, trainers are responsible for supervising learners, guiding workplace tasks and contributing to formative or summative assessments. However, the extent to which trainers use learning outcomes pedagogically differs markedly. In Member States like the Netherlands, Slovenia and Finland, trainers receive structured support from VET providers, including training materials, online resources and briefing sessions. In

Finland, for example, trainers are given detailed information about learners' goals and expected competences and are involved in planning, midterm feedback and final assessments. A national system for trainer support ensures consistency and quality. In Slovenia, a national mentor training programme provides 16 hours of instruction on topics such as communication, learner motivation and the application of learning outcomes. Participation is voluntary but encouraged, particularly in apprenticeship programmes. Chambers of commerce are often involved in delivering this training. In other Member States, support is more limited or informal. In Ireland and Poland, for instance, trainers often rely on their own experiences or brief instructions from VET schools. While some trainers are highly engaged, others are unsure how to use learning outcomes in their mentoring practice. Many express a desire for more guidance and recognition of their pedagogical role. Sectoral and organisational context also matters. In highly regulated sectors (e.g. healthcare, early childhood education), training processes are more formalised, and trainers are more likely to be aware of curriculum goals. In other sectors, workplace training may focus on routine tasks, with limited engagement with learning outcomes.

Learner awareness and experience

The study shows that learners' awareness of learning outcomes is generally limited, particularly in the early stages of WBL, except for in Ireland. While many learners receive documentation outlining the expected competences, they tend to focus more on tasks, assessment deadlines or day-to-day responsibilities. Learning outcomes are rarely used as an active reference point in learners' own planning or reflection. In contexts where learning outcomes are consistently discussed by tutors and trainers, learners are more likely to understand and engage with them. In Finland, learners help co-create their personal competence development plans; and, in the particular case examined in Ireland, learners co-create their WBL activities with teachers and trainers. In the Netherlands, some learners are encouraged by the company (or the VET school) to reflect on their progress using online platforms that link tasks to learning outcomes. Learners' ability to benefit from learning-outcomes-based approaches depends on the support they receive. Clear guidance, regular feedback and structured assessment help learners make connections between workplace tasks and the competences to be achieved (described as 'intended learning outcomes'). Without this scaffolding, learning outcomes remain abstract and disconnected from daily learning experiences. Overall, the study suggests that learning outcomes have the potential to support learner agency and help structure WBL, but their impact

depends on consistent communication, coordinated guidance and alignment between schools and workplaces.

Success factors and barriers

The study identifies several success factors that facilitate the effective use of learning outcomes in WBL, namely:

- (a) **Strong partnerships between VET providers and companies:** Close collaboration and regular communication between schools and companies support the alignment of curricula with workplace practices and evolving labour market needs.
- (b) **Clear and practically relevant learning outcomes:** Clearly defined knowledge, skills and competences provide a shared reference point for educators, workplace mentors and learners, helping to structure training and assessment.
- (c) **Support for workplace mentors and trainers:** Guidance, training and practical tools enable in-company trainers to effectively support learners and assess progress in line with learning outcomes.
- (d) **Flexibility in interpreting and applying learning outcomes:** Allowing learning outcomes to be adapted to different company contexts and learner needs supports meaningful implementation in diverse workplace settings.
- (e) **Embedding learning in authentic work tasks:** Hands-on learning experiences using real tools and equipment enhance learner engagement and ensure that theoretical knowledge is applied in practice.

At the same time, several challenges persist, including:

- (a) **Limited pedagogical training for workplace mentors:** Many in-company trainers possess strong technical expertise but lack training in instructional methods needed to apply learning-outcomes-based approaches.
- (b) **Misalignment between learning outcomes and workplace realities:** Company training may prioritise immediate operational tasks, which can limit opportunities for learners to achieve the full range of intended competences.
- (c) **Resource constraints and limited financial incentives:** Limited funding, time and staff capacity can reduce companies' ability to fully engage in structured WBL.
- (d) **Task-oriented rather than learning-oriented training:** In some workplaces, training focuses on completing tasks rather than supporting broader competence development.

- (e) **Complexity of learning-outcomes frameworks:** Highly technical or abstract descriptions of learning outcomes can make them difficult for workplace trainers to interpret and apply.
- (f) **Variation in student engagement and readiness:** Differences in learner motivation, preparedness and basic professional skills can affect the quality of WBL experiences.
- (g) **Limited company ownership of learning outcomes:** Some companies view learning outcomes primarily as the responsibility of VET schools rather than as an integral part of workplace training.

These findings point to the need for more integrated approaches that link curriculum design, workplace practice and assessment within a coherent pedagogical framework.

Conclusions and implications

This study shows that learning outcomes play a key role in structuring and orienting VET, including the work-based component. They offer a shared language for VET providers and companies, help define the competences to be developed and provide a basis for planning the training process and assessment. However, the extent to which learning outcomes are used in WBL remains uneven. In many cases, they are well established in school-based curricula but only partially embedded in workplace training. Their impact on learning depends not only on formal curriculum design but also on the engagement of companies, the skills of trainers and the support learners receive. To strengthen the use of learning outcomes in WBL, the report identifies several areas for action:

- (a) **Strengthening structured collaboration between VET providers and companies:** Closer cooperation in planning, implementing and monitoring workplace learning can help align school-based curricula, workplace tasks and assessment practices.
- (b) **Developing practical tools to operationalise learning outcomes:** Tools such as competence checklists, logbooks and planning templates can help translate learning outcomes into workplace-relevant tasks and support consistent assessment.
- (c) **Investing in the training and professionalisation of in-company trainers:** Training, certification schemes and peer-learning opportunities can strengthen trainers' ability to guide learners, provide feedback and apply learning outcomes in daily work processes.

- (d) **Promoting learner-centred practices in WBL:** Practices such as personalised learning plans, reflection and self-assessment can help learners better understand learning outcomes and take a more active role in their learning.
- (e) **Monitoring implementation and gathering feedback from practice:** Regular monitoring of how learning outcomes are used in workplaces, combined with feedback from companies and learners, can help identify gaps and support continuous improvement.

As Member States continue to expand and reform their VET systems, learning outcomes can serve as a key instrument for ensuring quality, transparency and relevance, provided they are not only written into curricula but actively used by all those involved in the learning process.

CHAPTER 1.

Research approach

1.1. Main objectives and research questions

The objective of this study is to provide insights on how learning outcomes influence interactions among initial vocational education and training (IVET) teachers, trainers / company instructors ⁽¹⁾ and apprentices ⁽²⁾, analysing the overall impact of learning outcomes on workplace learning practices ⁽³⁾. The following research questions orient this study.

- (a) How are learning-outcomes-based curricula informing, influencing and/or steering work-based learning (WBL)?
- (b) To what extent and how are company trainers using the learning-outcomes-based curricula to plan and execute their job as trainers?
- (c) To what extent are apprentices aware of the learning-outcomes-based requirements and how does this influence their learning and progression?

This study is conducted in a broader context of analysing the transformation of intended learning outcomes into achieved learning outcomes in IVET ⁽⁴⁾, focusing on the conceptual, structural and political factors influencing this process. It focuses on how learning outcomes are used to structure the WBL process and

⁽¹⁾ With the term 'in-company trainer', reference is made to the wide range of terms used to refer to those professionals in companies who work to support the learning process of vocational education and training (VET) students (European Commission, 2017). Other job titles used include IVET trainers, practical training instructors, mentors, instructors, workplace instructors or tutors (see also Annex 1 of Cedefop, 2024a).

⁽²⁾ This study looks at apprentices/learners and VET students (depending on the national terminology used) in the sense of learners who are exposed to work-based learning (WBL) within an IVET programme.

⁽³⁾ The study shows that a learning outcomes approach can be built on the input and ownership of labour market stakeholders. The intended learning outcomes are often based on the involvement of labour market stakeholders and define what VET institutions expect their pupils to accomplish after completing their programme. This suggests that the learning outcomes approach could be seen as an intrinsic part of work-based learning.

⁽⁴⁾ As described by Cedefop, IVET concerns 'learning carried out in the initial VET system – usually before entering working life – to acquire skills and competences leading to a specific occupation or job'. It can be carried out at the secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels, as part of full-time school-based, alternance or apprenticeship programmes (Cedefop, 2014). More information on different definitions is available in [Cedefop's online glossary](#). In some EU Member States examined in this study, the division between IVET and continuing VET may be blurred. In such cases, the whole VET system can be considered.

how they support interactions among in-company trainers, company management, work colleagues, vocational education and training (VET) teachers and VET students more directly. It hence examines how learning outcomes affect the relevance of what VET students learn in WBL for the occupational practice.

While this study focuses on this transformation in WBL contexts in IVET in select EU Member States, it is part of a larger study focusing on other closely related aspects. These concern, firstly, the influence of learning outcomes on pedagogical theory and tools (Cedefop, 2024a); secondly, the influence of learning-outcomes-based curricula on teaching practices (in school-based programmes) (Cedefop, 2025a); and, finally, the influence of the learning-outcomes-based approach on learner assessment (Cedefop, 2026).

1.2. Methodological approach

This report draws on a mixed-methods research design combining desk research, site visits, interviews and observations to explore how learning outcomes are used in the context of WBL in IVET. The methodological approach was structured to collect rich qualitative data at the policy (macro), company (meso) and trainer and learner (micro) levels, with particular attention being paid to the interactions among policy frameworks, institutional practices and the experiences of learners and practitioners.

International-level literature review and development of the analytical framework

At the international level, the research process began with a literature review (covering 2005–2025) aiming to identify knowledge gaps and informing the development of the analytical framework. This review explored key concepts related to WBL and the role of learning outcomes, including the variety of WBL formats (e.g. apprenticeships and internships, leaving aside open market and active labour market policy internships) and associated pedagogical approaches. The defining criterion was whether students leave school premises to receive occupational training outside the teacher's direct supervision. Simulated WBL conducted in VET school facilities (e.g. on-site labs, workshops or simulated business projects) was excluded. However, practice-based training conducted in dedicated practical training centres outside VET schools was included.

The review covered academic studies, commissioned research and technical or government reports, with the aim of grounding the research in current evidence while refining the conceptual model underpinning the study. Insights from this process were used to revise and fine-tune the analytical framework, which

structured the research questions and data collection tools across the macro (policy), meso (institutional) and micro (learner and trainer) levels.

Desk-based research at the national level

The national-level research process began with a comprehensive desk review of national policies, legal frameworks, strategic documents and guidance materials (introduced during the last five years) relevant to WBL and the use of learning outcomes in VET. In parallel, the research team developed interview topic guides, data collection templates and case study write-up formats. These tools were shared with national researchers through a dedicated guidance document and an online briefing session. The methodology was also adapted to national contexts, allowing flexibility in how companies were approached and fieldwork was organised. Ongoing support was provided to national teams through bilateral meetings during the data collection phase to ensure consistency and address emerging challenges in the field.

National researchers in each Member State consulted key policy texts, including qualifications frameworks, curriculum guidelines and quality assurance standards. Where available, existing evaluation reports and sector studies and previous project outputs were also considered to establish the broader policy and institutional context. In some cases, these were complemented by semi-structured interviews with national-level stakeholders, including policymakers, representatives of VET authorities and representatives of sectoral bodies, to clarify specific arrangements or gain insights into recent developments and current debates.

Site selection and case study design

Field research (in quarters 1–3 of 2024) focused on the workplace-based component of IVET, involving multiple case studies. In each of the 10 participating Member States (Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland), two companies involved in providing WBL opportunities to VET learners were selected. These companies were identified in collaboration with VET providers that had participated in previous stages of the study (Cedefop, 2024a, 2025a), enabling researchers to also examine school–company cooperation and alignment in the implementation of learning outcomes. In total, 20 companies were visited, alongside 17 VET schools that support these placements. The selected companies represent a range of sectors, including engineering, information technology, logistics, finance, hospitality and childcare. Efforts were made to include variation in company size and sector to allow for a

comparative analysis across contexts with differing degrees of formalisation in training practices.

Interviews and observation

During each site visit, national researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders, tailored to their roles within the WBL ecosystem. Interviews were typically held with:

- (a) company management (e.g. directors, human resource managers), to explore strategic approaches to WBL and the integration of learning outcomes (approximately 35 interviews);
- (b) in-company trainers and mentors, to examine how they understand and use qualification standards and learning outcomes in planning, guiding and assessing learners (approximately 40 interviews);
- (c) learners, to capture their awareness of and engagement with learning outcomes in daily work practices (approximately 50 interviews);
- (d) additional VET school staff or stakeholders involved in workplace coordination (approximately 26 interviews).

The number of interviews per Member State varied based on the availability of staff and the depth of information provided, ranging from 6 in Bulgaria to 38 in Finland. Across the 10 Member States studied, a total of 151 interviews were conducted. Where feasible, researchers also conducted non-intrusive observations of the training process *in situ*, with follow-up interviews or focus groups to reflect on observed practices. Observations were used to gather data on how learning is organised and scaffolded in the workplace, what pedagogical approaches are employed and how tasks are aligned with intended learning outcomes.

Documentation review

To complement the interviews and observations, researchers reviewed relevant documentation provided by the companies and VET schools. This included training plans, apprenticeship agreements, assessment templates, logbooks and personal development plans. In some cases, these documents offered direct evidence of how qualification files or national standards were translated into practice and how they were used to monitor learners' progress and inform assessment.

Data analysis and quality assurance

After the fieldwork, national researchers compiled structured case study reports following a common analytical framework. These reports addressed key dimensions of the use of learning outcomes in WBL at the macro (policy), meso

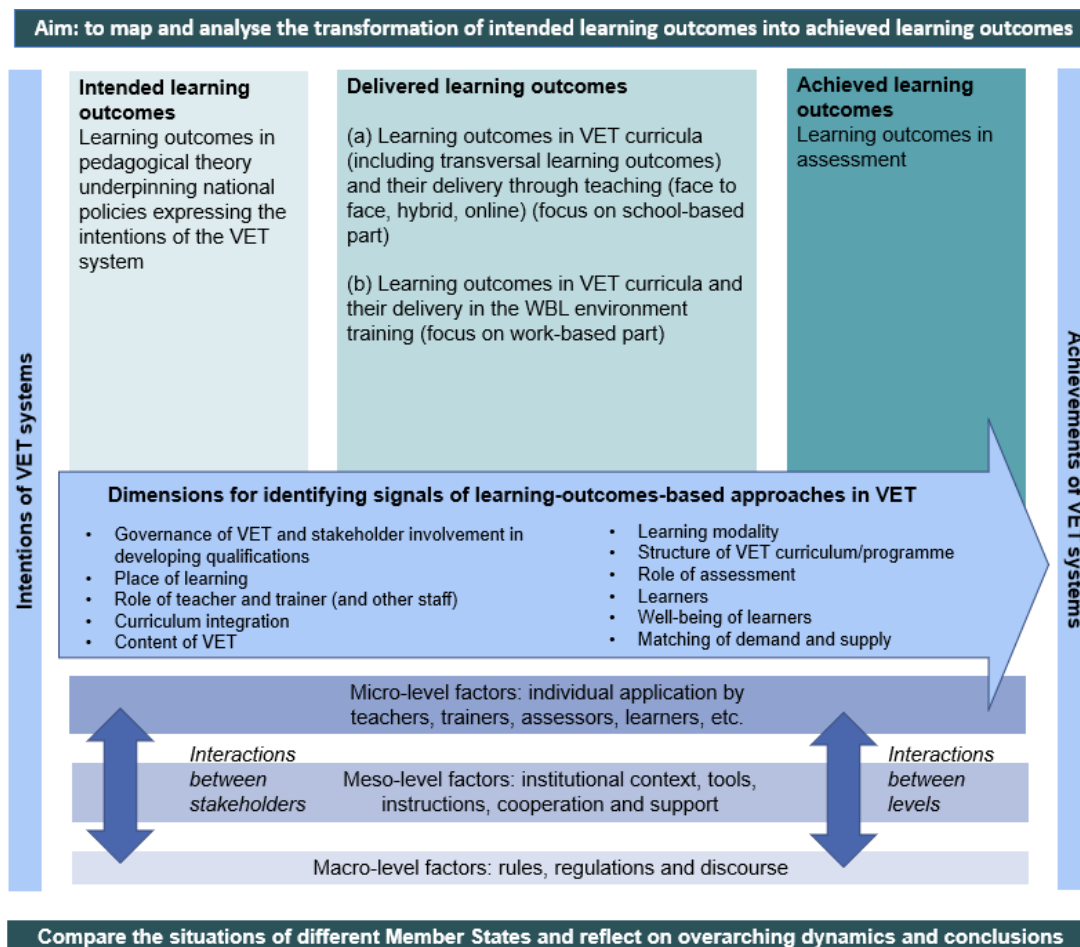
(institutional) and micro (individual) levels. Concrete examples were used to illustrate findings. Each draft case study underwent an internal review by the core project team, with feedback provided to ensure clarity and consistency across Member States. Finalised case studies were then used to inform the comparative analysis of Member States that is presented in this report.

1.3. Analytical approach

To guide data collection and data analysis across all themes of the project ‘the shift to learning outcomes: rhetoric or reality’, a detailed analytical framework was developed (see Figure 1), illustrating the ‘learning outcomes “chain”’ (Cedefop, 2024a, p. 115). Aligning the analytical framework with the WBL context, two key perspectives are identified and discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

- (a) The first perspective concerns the logical steps required to get from intended to achieved learning outcomes. This perspective helps to define learning outcomes and operationalise what their use in WBL means.
- (b) The second perspective maps the levels at which actions are (or may be) taken to implement the learning-outcomes-based approach. These three levels – macro, meso and micro – are discussed further.

Figure 1. **Overarching analytical framework of the study**



Source: Authors.

From intended to achieved learning outcomes, and the use of learning outcomes in practice

Intended learning outcomes are written statements and expressions of intentions / desired targets of learning. They describe what learners are ‘expected to know and be able to do and understand having completed a learning sequence, a module, a programme or a qualification’ (Cedefop, 2022b, p. 18). Such statements are used in qualifications frameworks, qualification standards and curricula. Intended learning outcomes are ‘delivered’ in teaching and learning processes and assessed in order to confirm achievements. Thus, achieved learning outcomes are the outcomes that an individual learner demonstrates at the end of a learning process. Achievement is determined as part of student assessment.

This part of the study focuses on the use and role of learning outcomes in WBL but has a close link to other parts of the overall study, as it addresses the alignment of intended learning outcomes, assessment processes and achieved

learning outcomes in WBL settings. In the first part of the learning outcomes study (Cedefop, 2024a), a table with ‘signals of the use of learning-outcomes-based approaches in VET’ ⁽⁵⁾ was developed. In line with the overarching analytical framework, dimensions were identified that could signal the use of a learning-outcomes-based descriptors in WBL. In general, learning outcomes approaches are closely linked with more learner-centred and demand-driven approaches to VET (Cedefop, 2010; Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012). Based on the review of the literature on curriculum reforms and demand–supply-driven curricula (Adamson & Morris, 2007), input–outcome-oriented curricula (Sloane & Dilger, 2005) and learner–teacher-centred curricula (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012), the overview in Table 1 was developed, aiming to identify dimensions in which the use of learning outcomes in VET is signalled. As such, it goes beyond observations that texts (e.g. policy documents, textbooks, qualification descriptions (linked to intentions)) are changed to reflect a learning outcomes approach and tries to identify actual changes in the delivery of programmes, assessment approaches and learning achievements in terms of what is learnt, how it is learnt, where it is learnt, who supports the learning and what the result of the learning supported by this approach is.

Table 1 also considers the implicit use of learning outcomes in VET, rather than focusing solely on their explicit application. Learning outcome descriptors, such as those found in standards or curricula, are often clearly referenced to guide VET delivery, including lesson planning, teaching and learning methods and assessment tasks and criteria. However, this explicit use is not universal; in some Member States, learning outcomes approaches may be more implicit. They may be reflected in principles such as teachers becoming facilitators rather than instructors and in the increasing use of active and experiential learning. Yet these principles may not be explicitly identified as ‘learning-outcomes-based approaches’ in policy documents or by VET teachers and in-company trainers, even if they are firmly embedded in VET. Throughout the study (including this report), such explicit versus implicit use of learning outcomes approaches is differentiated and provides the basis for a discussion of the extent to which these amount to the shift towards learning outcomes in reality.

⁽⁵⁾ The table with signals is also included in related reports (Cedefop, 2024a, 2025a). In addition to the role of assessment, it includes the following dimensions: governance of VET and stakeholder involvement in developing qualifications and delivering VET, place of learning, role of teachers and trainers (and other staff), role of learners, curriculum integration and content of VET, learning modality, structure of VET curriculum/programme, inclusion, well-being of learners and matching demand and supply.

Table 1 framed and informed the data collection and data analysis. Such operationalisation of learning outcomes approaches is particularly important for site visits, namely to understand what can be treated as evidence of learning outcomes being used and to do so consistently across WBL contexts (companies) and the 10 Member States studied.

Table 1. **Dimensions signalling implications of implementing a learning-outcomes-based approach in WBL**

Dimension	Implications of implementing a learning-outcomes-based approach
Governance of VET and stakeholder involvement in developing qualifications	There is increased involvement of labour market stakeholders in the governance of VET, as they are becoming more important players in defining the learning outcomes of VET qualifications and programmes and providing input into the description of learning outcomes with respect to demands from the labour market (Cedefop, 2010). Learning outcomes are seen as a language to bring together labour market stakeholders and education stakeholders to discuss the content and intentions of VET programmes (Stanley, 2015).
Role of in-company trainers	Trainers in companies are usually not specifically recruited for a training position in a company but rather nominated by their employer to take on the role in addition to their regular daily tasks. In most Member States, there is no formal framework that defines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that trainers should possess; in the ones that do have frameworks, they are at most a suggestion, rather than binding (European Commission, 2017). With regard to the training of in-company trainers, there is a wide variety of programmes, differing in terms of duration and responsibility. As delivering training is considered more a role than a profession in itself, professionals who provide training are experienced workers who already have the role of supervising and guiding new employees. Continuous professional development is usually not a legal obligation at all and its uptake is limited (Cedefop, 2022c; European Commission, 2017).
Role of learners	The approach is learner centred and encourages self-directed, autonomous learning (Cedefop, 2022b). This means that the learner is put at the centre of the learning process and treated 'as an active constructor of knowledge and not just a passive receiver, who not only "assimilates" but also "accommodates" knowledge, skills and competences based on previous experiences, mental structures and beliefs' (Cedefop, 2016). The learner is also encouraged to take a more active role in the planning of learning, take control of their own learning process and monitor their progress (Adam, 2006).
Learning modality	Instruction methods are not predefined but chosen based on intended learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2022b). Nevertheless, given the greater focus on skills and competences (rather than knowledge) and on mixing theory and practice, there is more emphasis on experiential learning and active learning (as opposed to instruction) (Frommberger & Krichewsky, 2012). This means that methods such as situated learning, self-directed learning, scaffolding (gradually withdrawing support), coaching, and learning based on observation, imitation and interaction, and reflection with others are encouraged (Billett, 2011a).

Dimension	Implications of implementing a learning-outcomes-based approach
Role of assessment	The key role of assessment is to determine to what extent the intended learning outcomes have actually been achieved (Cedefop, 2022d). Using a learning outcomes approach allows for the collecting of evidence to compare intended learning outcomes with the performance of a learner. Assessment criteria provide a reference point for this judgement (learning outcomes approaches also imply greater use of criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced measures). Assessment results allow judgements to be made on an individual's progress and achievement of learning goals. Thus, formative and summative methods of assessment can be better combined (Frommberger and Krichewsky, 2012) and learner's self-assessment is encouraged. As the intended learning outcomes are often more comprehensive and include, for example, cross-cutting skills and competences, assessment is also carried out more comprehensively, measuring different types of learning outcomes. Therefore, skills demonstrations in the work context and other forms of practice-based assessment methods, such as work assignments, portfolios or learning diaries, are increasingly used.
Inclusion	The flexible nature of learning outcomes allows VET to be opened up to non-traditional learner groups (e.g. older learners), break through gender patterns in VET enrolment and, in general, respond to the diverse needs of learners (NCCA, 2019). This can be linked with the modularisation of programmes, less standardised learning modalities, the mixing of theory and practice, individualised learning plans, differentiated teaching approaches, personalised learning activities, flexible pacing, etc. It would also be valuable to see in what ways companies address role patterns, biases and entrenched habits within the workplace that may hinder inclusive practices.
Well-being of learners	There is more transparency in what is requested from learners and reduced stress among learners, as the learning process is better attuned to their specific situations (Mahajan & Singh, 2017). VET learners will have increased levels of self-confidence and personal development, come upon new ideas and thoughts about work, and not only attain new knowledge and skills but also put this knowledge to use in their daily work (Ellström & Ellström, 2014).
Matching demand and supply	VET programmes make learners better equipped for the labour market and respond to employers' and learners' needs by closing feedback loops (Cedefop, 2021).
Managerial support for learning-outcomes-based approaches in WBL	Many managers see their work as separate from the role of facilitating and supporting learning processes (Ellström & Ellström, 2014). However, managerial behaviours have been found to be positively related to learning outcomes, and the transfer from training includes supportive behaviours, such as following up on and discussing new learning, participating in training, providing encouragement, and coaching on the use of new knowledge and skills on the job (Burke & Hutchins, 2007).

Source: Authors, based on the table in Cedefop, 2024a.

Levels at which actions are taken to implement the learning-outcomes-based approach in WBL

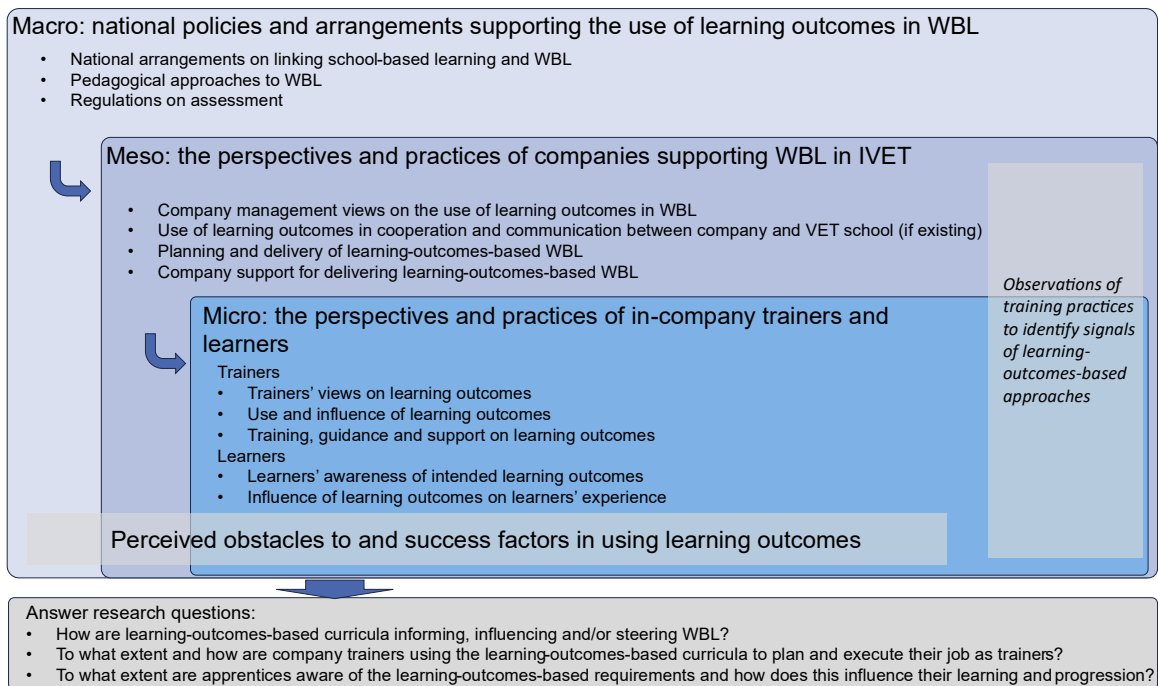
In line with the overall perspective model (analytical framework), distinctions are drawn between three levels at which learning outcomes influence the WBL environment. For each level, further elaboration is given on what specific factors are taken into account for this study.

- (a) **National-level rules, regulations and guidelines (macro level).** At the macro level, the regulatory landscape of WBL environments significantly shapes learning outcomes. The regulatory and institutional framework closely determines the national approach to apprenticeships and WBL. These frameworks, governed by organisations and intermediate bodies, impact the role of learning outcomes in communication between WBL stakeholders (most notably VET providers and companies). National policies not only structure and organise the system but also determine the knowledge balance, the VET programme's purpose, the function of work-based components and the desired outcomes. The role of learning outcomes varies based on VET purposes, with specific occupational tasks or cross-cutting skills emphasised accordingly. Pedagogical approaches, such as direct instruction or project-/challenge-based learning, further influence how the WBL curriculum is shaped, determining the utilisation of learning outcomes.
- (b) **Employer-level tools, instructions, cooperation mechanisms and support (meso level).** At the meso level, variations in the cooperation and communication between secondary (vocational) education and training schools and WBL companies are evident among Member States. In the Danish VET system, for example, social partners and employers play a central role, actively engaging in the governance, delivery and quality assurance of VET. These labour market stakeholders lead the development of qualification content, contribute to overall governance, serve on VET college governing boards, oversee a significant portion of the learning process and manage the final apprenticeship examinations. The coaching of learners is a shared responsibility between the VET college and the company, facilitated by regular communication and transparency tools such as logbooks. Across Member States, tools, checklists and logbooks are employed to monitor learners' progress. There is variation in how they reference learning outcomes, ranging from input-oriented task repetition to workplace assessments. At the meso level, workplace pedagogical approaches diverge. This is influenced by nationwide guidelines, sector-specific traditions and company-specific culture and practices. Additionally, the preparation and professional development of in-company trainers play a crucial role, determining their capacity to work with learning outcomes, assess acquired skills and document evidence. This impacts the practical application of the learning outcomes approach in the workplace.
- (c) **Teachers', trainers' and learners' levels of awareness and capacities (micro level).** While regulations, tools and training programmes at the macro and meso levels may advocate for the adoption of the learning outcomes

approach, the practical aspects of the work practices and environment may present challenges for in-company trainers and learners in embracing these approaches. The feasibility of applying learning outcomes approaches hinges on factors such as the work environment's allowance for learners to actively develop, practice and demonstrate their achieved learning outcomes (e.g. the permission to operate equipment and tools). Additionally, the capacities of in-company trainers to embrace new pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes methodologies play a pivotal role in this dynamic.

- (d) **Overarching analytical framework on how learning outcomes are applied in WBL.** Figure 2 provides a concise overview of the three levels, the topics addressed in the Member State case studies and the role of observation.

Figure 2. **Specific WBL-related analytical framework and topics**



Source: Authors.

In assessing the three levels and touching upon the abovementioned topics, this report develops a characterisation of each case study Member State in line with the analytical framework. This means that at each of the three levels an assessment is given of each Member State case study of whether the practices examined firmly embedded the learning outcomes of WBL, whether they are advancing in embedding or whether learning outcomes are not embedded in WBL. Firmly embedded refers to Member State situations in which, on that specific

aspect of WBL, learning outcomes are commonly used. That is, the aspect of WBL that is being focused on shows signs that learning outcomes have an impact. Advancing to embedding refers to Member State situations where certain signs of the use of learning outcomes are there, but where learning outcomes are not systematically used. Not embedded at all refers to Member State situations where there are currently no signs of the use of learning outcomes. This assessment then leads to a Member State-specific indicative 'heat map' and overview table for all cases together, showing at which levels and in which Member States learning outcomes are informing the WBL environment.

1.4. Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is organised in six further chapters:

- (a) Chapter 2 'Setting the scene: WBL and learning outcomes' introduces key concepts and the current state of knowledge on WBL and learning outcomes, based on a targeted literature review;
- (b) Chapter 3 'National policies and arrangements' analyses macro-level factors shaping the integration of learning outcomes in WBL, including regulations, cooperation mechanisms, pedagogical approaches and assessment frameworks;
- (c) Chapter 4 'The perspectives and practices of companies supporting WBL in IVET' explores how company management understands and uses learning outcomes in planning, delivering and evaluating WBL;
- (d) Chapter 5 'The perspectives and practices of in-company trainers' investigates trainers' awareness of learning outcomes, their pedagogical use and the training and support trainers receive;
- (e) Chapter 6 'The perspectives and practices of learners' focuses on learners' awareness, understanding and engagement with learning outcomes during their WBL placements;
- (f) Chapter 7 'Conclusions' presents the overall conclusions, a comparative heat map of Member State findings and policy implications, including recommendations and areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2.

Setting the scene: WBL and learning outcomes

Key finding

- (a) The literature reveals a clear gap in the understanding of how learning outcomes function in real-world WBL settings, especially from the perspectives of learners and trainers. While policy frameworks promote learning outcomes, their impact on workplace-based pedagogical practice remains under-researched.
- (b) Learning outcomes are widely recognised in policy as a tool to align education and labour market needs, providing a common reference point for stakeholders. However, the literature shows that their practical use to support collaboration and guide WBL processes is still limited and uneven across Member States.
- (c) There is inconsistent evidence of the integration of learning outcomes into WBL, with most evidence focused on school-based VET. Where learning outcomes are used in workplace settings, their application often depends on local or sector-specific arrangements rather than a consistent system-wide approach.
- (d) In-company trainers are identified as key facilitators of learning outcomes in WBL, yet studies highlight a lack of structured training, pedagogical support and clear guidance for these trainers. Their ability to use learning outcomes effectively is shaped by organisational culture and the degree of managerial backing.
- (e) VET students' awareness of and engagement with learning outcomes are rarely explored in the literature on learning outcomes and, where they are, they appear to be limited. Learners tend to focus more on assessments than on achieving explicitly formulated outcomes, and their engagement is influenced by how outcomes are communicated and embedded in teaching.

Learning outcomes enable education and labour market stakeholders to work more closely with each other in discussing the content of VET programmes and how this content (based on learning outcomes) is delivered (Cedefop, 2021). This exchange between education and labour market stakeholders can be complemented through external survey tools and consultations and one-on-one discussions between employers and schools about the VET training provided in schools and how the learning outcomes achieved are realised in the workplace.

2.1. WBL: an introduction

WBL is one of the oldest forms of learning, dating back as far as the start of human civilisation and remaining an important method to learn a trade (Jacobson, 2015). Examples are the guild systems and master craftsperson approaches where the

direct interaction between master craftsperson and pupil ensured that the pupil would learn the skills needed to successfully conduct work tasks. With industrialisation, many forms of traditional WBL approaches were rendered obsolete, as capitalist mass production required low skills levels and cheap labour, out of line with WBL approaches focusing on expert craftpersonship (Jacobson, 2015). The focus shifted to educating learners in basic skills with which they would be able to work as production workers and through school-based education designed to discipline them on the requirements of the new mode of production. With such economic and social shifts came educational systems that focused more on school-based learning at the expense of WBL (Jacobson, 2015). While in some Member States WBL remained an extensive part of skills development systems (e.g. Germany, Austria), here too the model example of the autonomous master craftsperson lost ground in relation to academically qualified workers (Gessler & Howe, 2015). In VET as well, the theoretical perspective, and hence school-based approaches, gained ground over the practical perspective, and hence over the WBL approaches.

Reorientation to WBL

While the value of WBL and experiential learning is well understood and appreciated, in formal education and specifically in VET, the reorientation to WBL came to the foreground at the international and national levels in the 1990s and 2000s. Key milestones were the 2002 Copenhagen process (European Commission, 2002), which set out the foundations for a WBL focus in the EU; the 2010 Bruges communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training et al, 2010), which aimed to mainstream WBL as a key priority; the 2015 Riga conclusions (European Commission, 2015), which focused on concrete deliverables related to WBL; and the 2020 Osnabrück Declaration (European Commission, 2020b), which linked WBL with resilience and facing transitions. Beyond Europe, WBL is also gaining importance (Inter-agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 2017; Musset, 2019).

Member States have increased the focus on WBL in their VET systems, as it is a policy priority at the EU level. Across Member States, illustrative reforms have been undertaken to enhance WBL in VET systems (Cedefop, 2025b). In the Flemish Region in Belgium, for example, financial incentives have gradually been broadened to benefit both participants and employers. These include apprenticeship bonuses and reduced social security contributions for companies hiring low-qualified young people, in some cases contingent on the employer providing workplace training to help the workers develop new skills. Latvia implemented a legal and regulatory framework in 2015 to embed apprenticeships

in formal VET, supported by tax incentives and capacity building for in-company trainers. In Estonia, reforms included piloting flexible WBL models for diverse enterprise types and quality assurance systems. France's reforms from 2018 streamlined the creation of apprenticeship centres and simplified contract conditions to boost participation. In Spain, a broad alliance of public and private actors promoted dual VET, while national plans fostered partnerships and quality standards. Lastly, Croatia and Malta have progressively integrated dual education and WBL pathways into VET systems, aiming to align educational delivery with labour market needs. Collectively, these reforms reflect a pan-European shift towards more responsive, employer-engaged and learner-oriented VET ecosystems, reinforcing the role of WBL in enhancing employability and aligning education with economic priorities.

WBL approaches

Today, WBL is widely recognised as a core component of VET systems. In 2022, an estimated 60 % of recent VET graduates in the EU had undertaken a period of work experience as part of their studies. However, this average conceals considerable variation across Member States. The proportion of recent VET graduates who had participated in WBL ranged from as low as 8.4 % in Romania to as high as 98.4 % in Spain (Cedefop, 2024b). WBL produces a broad range of high-quality, relevant skills (which foster employability), makes a positive contribution to youth employment rates and has the potential to produce intrinsic benefits for society in terms of the inclusion of vulnerable groups (Cedefop, 2024b; European Commission, 2013; European Training Foundation, 2018).

WBL encompasses a range of educational approaches that combine theoretical instruction with practical experience in a real-world setting. Among the most prominent forms of WBL are apprenticeships and internships, each offering distinct pathways for learners to develop occupational skills and gain valuable insights into the workplace (see Box 1).

Box 1. **Description of WBL approaches: apprenticeships and internships**

Apprenticeships ⁽⁶⁾ are structured programmes that integrate theoretical learning with paid employment. They lead to recognised qualifications and are based on an agreement defining the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the VET institution; the apprentice is paid or otherwise compensated for the work-based component (Council of the European Union, 2018). The duration of an apprenticeship varies by Member State and sector, but it usually spans several years. Apprenticeships are often seen as long-term investments by employers, fostering the development of highly skilled workers tailored to specific occupational profiles.

Internships, by contrast, are usually shorter-term placements that provide learners or recent graduates with an opportunity to experience working life in a particular field. Internships can be paid or unpaid and may not always be formally embedded in an educational programme. They are often used to supplement academic learning with practical exposure, helping individuals to build their curricula vitae, explore career options and develop soft skills such as teamwork and communication. Three types of internships can be distinguished (Broek et al., 2017; European Commission, 2012):

- (a) **Internships within vocational or academic curricula.** These are often embedded in formal education programmes or part of mandatory professional training, for example in teaching, medicine or architecture. They are primarily focused on learning and skills development and are typically overseen or accredited by education providers. While their broader aim is to prepare individuals for the labour market, the emphasis is more on achieving specific learning outcomes than on securing immediate employment.
- (b) **Internships linked to active labour market policies.** These placements are designed to support young people, particularly those who are unemployed or at risk of being so, in entering the workforce. Although they may include a learning element, the main goal is to enhance employability by providing practical experience and building job-relevant skills, with a stronger focus on short-term employment outcomes than on structured educational development.
- (c) **Internships on the open market.** This category encompasses a wide range of internships found directly within the labour market. Often offered in professional sectors, these opportunities may be taken up by students or graduates – such as a law student interning at a legal firm during the summer – or by young individuals seeking career orientation. The format, quality and purpose of these internships can vary significantly.

Source: Authors based on Broek et al. (2017).

(⁶) There is no common agreed definition of 'apprenticeship' in Europe, as definitions reflect national traditions and the diversity of apprenticeship approaches in Europe, ranging from fully fledged dual vocational systems with a long-standing tradition, to recent efforts to introduce and strengthen WBL as an element of VET systems, thus building up dual systems. The [European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships](#) provides criteria (or learning and working conditions) for apprenticeships that could be interpreted as providing a common understanding. Briefly, apprenticeships require a written contract, defined learning outcomes, pedagogical support, workplace training (at least 50 % of apprenticeships), pay/compensation, social protection and compliance with work, health and safety regulations.

These WBL practices take place in 'WBL companies', which – in the context of this study – refers to companies that are responsible for implementing the WBL component of an IVET programme. These companies have a structural involvement in offering WBL, meaning that they have VET students in the company and have a regular (annual) enrolment of VET students. Further, they have a structured approach to offering WBL, meaning that there is dedicated staff to support WBL (at the management level, with in-company trainers and through tailored company skills plans, embedded human resource strategies and possibly support staff). In particular national contexts, the work of inter-company training organisations associated with the companies can be included.

2.2. National approaches to WBL

National WBL policies vary widely, shaped by historical contexts and tailored to specific needs (Cedefop, 2023). WBL is organised differently in each Member State and this organisation, together with the historical developments in the VET sector as a whole and related to integrating WBL in particular, has a considerable impact on whether and how learning-outcomes-based approaches are integrated into VET and WBL. While there are many good overviews and classifications of WBL systems and approaches available, they tend to focus only on apprenticeships (Cedefop, 2018; European Commission, 2012) or internships (Broek et al., 2017); this study grouped the 10 selected Member States (Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland) by the level of maturity of their WBL practices.

More mature in embedding WBL

Member States with a more mature approach to embedding WBL in VET have well-integrated systems where industry collaboration, apprenticeships and employer involvement are deeply embedded.

Finland has one of the most mature WBL systems among the analysed Member States, where WBL is an essential and obligatory part of all VET provision. WBL occurs in versatile learning environments, both inside and outside VET institutions, including practical training in classrooms, e-learning, virtual learning and real workplace settings. The system provides structured apprenticeship training and training agreements, ensuring that students gain hands-on learning experience while being guided towards vocational qualifications. Finnish VET institutions closely collaborate with industry, making the WBL approach highly integrated and responsive to needs.

The Dutch VET system has deeply embedded WBL within its dual education pathways, both leading to the same qualification. The pathways are the WBL pathway (*beroepsbegeleidende leerweg* (BBL)), where students work most of the time in a company while being employed as apprentices, and the school-based vocational training pathway (*beroepsopleidende leerweg*), which includes more school-based education with periods of work-based training. The BBL pathway ensures strong employer engagement, and students receive a salary while training. The collaboration between VET institutions and industry partners is well structured, ensuring that curricula align with professional standards and workforce needs.

France has a well-established WBL system, with three main pathways for initial vocational training: (1) vocational education schools (*lycées professionnels*) where students complete school-based VET with internships, (2) apprenticeship training centres (*centres de formation d'apprentis*), which are managed by private organisations, chambers of commerce or public institutions and offer apprenticeships with structured employer involvement, and (3) professionalisation contracts, which provide structured WBL for young people aged 16–25 years. WBL is integral to VET, particularly through apprenticeships, which are regulated by the French Labour Code and allow learners to progress from basic qualifications to higher education levels.

In Malta, WBL mainly takes place through apprenticeships, which are managed by the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), the main post-compulsory state vocational education provider in Malta. MCAST incorporates multiple WBL formats, including placements, apprenticeships, internships and live case studies. Apprenticeships make up the majority of IVET courses in Malta qualifications framework levels 3–6, with students expected to complete structured work placements. However, due to limited availability, not all students can be placed at the same time. The system ensures that a strong emphasis is placed on practical exposure, with some internships offering paid placements.

Slovenia's VET system combines general education with vocational modules that integrate theoretical and practical learning. WBL is an integral part of all VET programmes, with training taking place in inter-company training centres, businesses or upper-secondary vocational programmes. WBL models have been expanded in recent years, and VET schools collaborate with local companies to tailor curricula to industry needs. The chambers of commerce play a key role in assessing training placements, approving contracts and monitoring company training. The dual nature of WBL, including both apprenticeships and internships, makes the Slovenian system relatively mature.

Less mature in embedding WBL

These Member States have WBL components within their VET systems, but they are more school based, less structured or not as systematically embedded as those in the more mature group. Many rely more on internships or short-term work placements rather than fully integrated apprenticeship models.

In Bulgaria, IVET programmes offer three forms of WBL: (a) training in a real working environment (dual VET/apprenticeships), (b) production practice (short work practice in a company for 10 days per year) and (c) study practice (simulated workplace learning in school labs or workshops). Although apprenticeships exist, WBL is largely regulated by the Vocational Education and Training Act and its implementation varies. While minimum WBL percentages are mandated (e.g. at least 50–70 % of VET subjects, depending on the qualification level), WBL remains secondary to school-based training, with limited integration depth.

In Ireland, most vocational training falls under further education and training (FET) rather than a dedicated IVET system. WBL in FET occurs mainly through internships, traineeships and simulated workplace environments rather than structured apprenticeships. The core IVET component includes post-leaving-certificate courses, which provide vocational skills and mandatory modules on work experience or personal development. However, outside apprenticeships, WBL is not a dominant part of VET, making Ireland's approach more modular and school based.

Lithuanian VET combines theoretical education with practical training. WBL occurs primarily through school-based learning with internships. Students participate in a compulsory 'introduction to the labour market' module, which provides industry exposure, but apprenticeships are less prominent. Although WBL can be integrated into school-based curricula, its implementation depends on project-based financing, making it less systematic than in more mature systems.

In Portugal, IVET integrates three pathways: (a) professional courses, (b) education and training courses and (c) apprenticeship courses. Each pathway has different forms and durations of WBL, with some courses focusing on practical activities in VET schools (labs, workshops) and others involving real work placements. However, the WBL component varies significantly in duration, weight in final assessments and monitoring procedures, making the system less structured than in Member States with formalised apprenticeship models.

In Poland, practical vocational training is mandated by the Law on School Education, ensuring that technical schools and vocational schools allocate 50–60 % of instructional time to that type of training. Although WBL with employers is indicated by law as the most desirable option, the system is largely school directed,

and WBL is often conducted in school workshops, vocational training centres and continuing education institutions rather than being primarily employer driven. While employer partnerships are encouraged, they are not as deeply embedded as in more mature VET systems.

2.3. Learning outcomes approaches

In parallel to the increased emphasis on WBL at the European level, the emphasis on learning outcomes has also become more prominent. Since 2004, the EU has consistently promoted the use of a learning outcomes approach as a means to enhance VET. It can be argued that the emphasis on WBL and the emphasis on learning outcomes are aiming for the same goal, namely to make VET more practice-oriented and ensure that VET students obtain the skills and competences needed for the labour market. Key policy documents that have positioned learning outcomes as a central tool for improving the standardisation, transparency, quality and relevance of VET include the recommendation on the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning (Council of the European Union, 2017; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2008), the recommendation on the European credit system for vocational education and training (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2009), the Bruges communiqué (European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training et al., 2010), the European skills agenda (European Commission, 2020a) and the Osnabrück Declaration (European Commission, 2020b). As a result of these initiatives, nearly all Member States now actively use learning outcomes or competence-based formulations to define, update and refine their qualifications, VET curricula and training programmes. Box 2 reflects on the use of learning outcomes and competences.

Box 2. Learning outcomes and competences – discourse

The terms 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' are often used interchangeably, yet they represent distinct concepts. Mulder and Winterton (2017) define competence as the ability to perform tasks effectively, encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes and enabling action in specific roles or contexts. The European handbook on learning outcomes highlights their interrelation: the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) defines competence as the 'ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context' (Cedefop, 2014, p. 47, 2022b, p. 58). Thus, competences can be seen as validated learning outcomes, demonstrated through the autonomous application of knowledge and skills in work and societal contexts. Competences reflect the practical mastery of learning outcomes, as assessed against standards defined in curricula or reference frameworks (Cedefop, 2012, p. 35, 2022b, pp. 58–59).

As shown in earlier strands of this study, in some Member States the concept of competence is closely tied to the concept of learning outcomes, or even used in place of it (Cedefop, 2024a, p. 37). While definitions and interpretations vary, sometimes causing confusion in international settings, terms are often used interchangeably in this report's case study Member States (Cedefop, 2024a). When analysing national approaches, this study relies on English translations of local terminology where possible. Competence-based approaches are considered part of the broader category of learning-outcomes-based approaches, as both reflect a shift from input to output orientation in VET (Cedefop, 2025a).

Source: Cedefop (forthcoming).

Over the years, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) has conducted a series of studies exploring the implementation and impact of learning outcomes within European VET systems (Cedefop, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2024a, 2024b, 2025a). Still, a significant knowledge gap persists regarding the actual impact of learning outcomes on pedagogical practice, specifically in relation to learning in WBL contexts in VET and what conditions shape their effective implementation on the ground.

2.4. State of play in understanding the role of learning outcomes in WBL

This section synthesises existing knowledge on three key themes, namely the relationship between learning outcomes and WBL, the role of and support for in-company trainers in applying learning outcomes, and VET students' awareness and understanding of learning outcomes. Together, these themes provide a foundation for understanding how learning outcomes are being used and experienced in real-world WBL settings. It needs to be emphasised, however, that the existing body of knowledge focuses only in a limited way on the interplay

between learning outcomes and WBL, how in-company trainers are supported in using learning outcomes and students' awareness/understanding.

The relationship between learning outcomes and WBL

In initial VET, learning outcomes approaches play a key role (Cedefop, 2024a), but this role is better evidenced in relation to school-based VET than WBL (Cedefop, 2025a). For instance, when vocational education is school based, teachers are guided in their delivery by national, regional or local curriculum documents. In certain Member States, such as Germany and the Netherlands, it is not necessary to integrate learning outcomes in a single document, and thus a written plan for the work-based part of the training is created separately from the school-based curriculum, which may not necessarily be drafted in terms of learning outcomes. In this context, Cedefop (2010) provides a valuable comparative perspective on the incorporation of learning outcomes into VET curricula across Europe (implicitly also reflecting on WBL). According to the study, there may be some divergence between provisions in written curricula promoting and allowing for innovative pedagogies and the actual way that these curricula are being taught. The question of whether learning outcomes in curricula realise their potential of contributing positively to making systems more learner centred is highly dependent on external factors, such as institutional support, industry collaboration, policy frameworks, cultural context, teacher training and attitudes, assessment practices, socioeconomic factors and technological advancements.

Many reports and studies discuss the fundamental characteristics of WBL and, in doing so, touch on whether WBL is fundamentally input or outcome based (Billett, 2003; Broad, 2018; Cedefop, 2015a; European Training Foundation, 2018). For instance, Billett (2010) furthers our understanding of the practical aspects of learning within occupational settings. It is argued that, before the advent of mass education, WBL and practice-based learning were the default manners of gaining occupational knowledge. Billett argues that WBL should not be viewed and practised as input based, counting repetitive tasks, but rather is something that should be recognised as much more complex and demanding. As such, to maximise the contributions of these WBL settings, it is essential to establish robust conceptual foundations and implement adaptable curriculum, pedagogical and epistemological approaches. Billett advocates for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of WBL that transcends traditional notions, in order to make way for a more rewarding and effective educational experience within the workplace. In this sense, WBL has, since its origins, been structured around learning outcomes: students' learning involves being able to conduct occupational tasks with the right level of quality. In line with Billett's

argument and also the discussed literature related to the exchange between educational and labour market stakeholders, the relationship between WBL and learning outcomes may need to be reversed: it is about not only whether WBL is integrating a learning-outcomes-based approach but also whether the learning outcomes in VET are informed by work practices through continuous exchange between educational and labour market stakeholders (Cedefop, 2021).

All in all, despite the literature addressing work- and practice-based VET and learning-outcomes-based curricula, the focus of the existing literature often tends to be on the influence of WBL on reorienting VET provision towards practical training and implementing a focus on learning outcomes (i.e. what learners will be able to do in the workplace). The prevailing narrative suggests a reciprocal relationship, where the labour market influences learning outcomes approaches, subsequently impacting VET provision in a feedback loop. Few research reports and articles have been identified that look at the effects of the learning outcomes approach on WBL in practice.

In-company trainers and the use of learning outcomes

An important factor of quality in school-based education is the quality of the teacher (Rivkin et al., 2005). When transposing this finding to workplace learning, the quality of the in-company trainers plays an important role in the learning taking place (Billett, 2011b; Cedefop, 2015b; Grollmann, 2008). Trainers not only contribute to the modernisation and reform processes in VET but can also provide higher innovation and productivity in companies while ensuring a better transition from school to work (Cedefop, 2022c; European Commission, 2017). They can also play a role in supporting more learning-outcomes-based approaches in VET. Exploring in-company trainers' use of learning outcomes approaches involves understanding who they are, how they are trained and if their training programmes emphasise learning outcomes approaches.

Overall, the role of teachers and trainers is not equally well defined across the EU, which can in part be explained by the difference in sectoral backgrounds. Additionally, the definition of a 'trainer' varies between Member States (Cedefop, 2022c; European Commission, 2017, 2025). In France, for example, this person (i.e. the trainer) is responsible for training the apprentice, takes on the role of tutor in a company and is tasked in the company with contributing to the apprentice's acquisition of skills for the qualification. In Ireland, a 'trainer' is defined as a qualified craftsperson overseeing the work and training of apprentices during the on-the-job phases of the apprenticeship programme (European Commission, 2017). Additionally, governance frameworks are found to be lacking in terms of assessing what makes a quality teacher or trainer in WBL. Teachers in

VET are highly regulated by strict guidelines (Cedefop, 2022c; European Commission, 2017), often in tandem with national and European qualifications frameworks set out by educational institutions and governments, whereas trainers are often not required to work to a systematic or regulated approach.

The role of in-company trainers in facilitating competence development is well documented in the literature. Studies consistently highlight that these trainers are responsible not only for guiding apprentices or students through practical tasks but also for shaping the learning environment, translating abstract learning outcomes into meaningful, work-based experiences (Billett, 2011b; Cedefop, 2015b). They act as mediators between the workplace and the educational system, helping learners combine theoretical knowledge with hands-on application (Grollmann, 2008; Illeris, 2011). The literature also emphasises the pedagogical dimension of their role, noting that effective competence development depends not only on technical expertise but also on the trainer's ability to mentor, provide feedback and align workplace tasks with intended learning outcomes (Harris, 2019). As such, in-company trainers are increasingly seen as key players in the success of WBL pathways.

Besides the in-company trainer, other factors also play a role in modernising WBL and potentially applying learning outcomes approaches. For example, a study by Ellström and Ellström (2014) on the learning outcomes achieved by work-based training programmes emphasises the significance of managerial support. These bring insightful perspectives on what aspects of this subject are most important to the learner and in what way the teachers and trainers are aware of this within their own approaches to work- and practice-based learning. Their research proposes that not only can traditional 'trainers' in a company influence the learning outcomes of a WBL programme, but the manager/management of the company can play an equally important role in the learning environment of a workplace by becoming facilitators of learning through their heightened communication and reflection skills. Nijman and Gelissen (2011) argue that not only the meaning and content of managerial support for learning but also the way in which managerial support influences the outcomes from training remains unclear, which indicates a clear research gap. Similar to Ellström and Ellström (2014), Fuller and Unwin (2019) emphasise the importance of managerial reflection, stressing that WBL has to balance the needs of individuals, the workplace and education, the training institutions involved and other potential stakeholders. Doing so enables greater teamwork, collective learning and the sharing of expertise. Additionally, curriculum development for WBL schemes is brought to the forefront. Hence, managerial support is crucial for pursuing learning

outcomes approaches in WBL; without this support, in-company trainers cannot immediately take on the role of modernising WBL.

All in all, the limited literature shows that in-company trainers play a vital role in applying learning outcomes within WBL, yet their use of these approaches is inconsistent and shaped by national, sectoral and organisational contexts.

VET students' awareness of learning outcomes

VET students' awareness of learning outcomes receives hardly any attention in the existing literature. It is widely considered an assumption that having a comprehensive set of statements of exactly what they will be able to achieve after successful study leads to more effective learning (Adam, 2006), but whether this is the case is still unclear. A recent Cedefop report did shed light on this in school-based VET (Cedefop, 2025a). This report indicates that, while VET students are generally introduced to learning outcomes at various stages of their training, their actual awareness and engagement with these outcomes remains limited. Many students focus more on assessment criteria or passing exams than on achieving specific learning outcomes. Although learning outcomes are often made accessible through lesson introductions or digital platforms, students do not always internalise them or use them to guide their learning. Moreover, the impact of learning outcomes on the learner experience depends significantly on the teaching approaches used. Learner-centred and active teaching methods tend to enhance students' motivation, autonomy and ability to link theory to practice. These methods can support a stronger connection to learning outcomes, even if students do not explicitly refer to them. However, some learners still express a need for more structured guidance from teachers, particularly in the early stages of their programmes. Overall, learning outcomes can enhance learner autonomy and the relevance of learning experiences, but their effectiveness relies on consistent communication, pedagogical support and the alignment of outcomes with meaningful, work-based activities.

2.5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding the changing role of learning outcomes within WBL in initial VET. While both WBL and learning outcomes have been the focus of sustained policy attention, their intersection remains underexplored in both research and practice. Learning outcomes offer a common language for educational and labour market stakeholders to engage with the aims and content of vocational training. However, their actual use in structuring

and guiding workplace learning experiences is often fragmented and shaped by national, institutional and organisational contexts.

Despite progress in embedding learning outcomes within VET systems, particularly in school-based settings, significant gaps remain in understanding their role within WBL. The literature suggests that in-company trainers, company management and the wider workplace learning environment play decisive roles in whether and how learning outcomes are translated into meaningful learning experiences. Similarly, the extent to which VET students are aware of, understand and engage with learning outcomes in practice is still largely unknown.

CHAPTER 3.

National policies and arrangements

Key findings

- (a) Learning outcomes act as a shared reference point across national systems, supporting cooperation between VET schools and companies and structuring the content and delivery of WBL.
- (b) National laws and regulations define roles and responsibilities, but the balance of involvement between schools and companies differs widely, ranging from school-led planning to company-dominated training models.
- (c) Formal liaison roles and intermediary institutions (e.g. WBL organisers, teacher-methodologists, national bodies) play a crucial role in coordinating WBL, ensuring alignment with qualifications and sustaining communication across actors.
- (d) The pedagogical use of learning outcomes varies across Member States, with some systems embedding them into personalised learning plans, workplace activities and assessment, while others treat them more as formal requirements than active teaching tools.
- (e) Assessment practices are a key driver of consistency in the application of learning outcomes. Some Member States demonstrate how clear, outcome-linked criteria and shared responsibilities between schools and employers enhance reliability and relevance. In other Member States, assessment lacks operational clarity, relying on informal feedback or general reports, which can lead to the inconsistent application of learning outcomes and poorer quality assurance.
- (f) Employer engagement is often limited to hosting learners, with relatively few Member States systematically involving companies in curriculum co-design, pedagogical planning or formative assessment, despite policy ambitions to do so.

To examine how learning outcomes are used and understood in WBL in initial VET ⁽⁷⁾ in the selected Member States, the first section looks at their role in national systems and how they support communication and cooperation between VET schools and companies in organising WBL. This is followed by sections on how national-level arrangements concerning pedagogical approaches towards WBL refer to learning outcomes, and how regulations on assessment refer to learning outcomes and how these steer WBL content and delivery.

(7) Please note that the study looks at WBL as part of an IVET programme leading to a VET qualification, being organised outside of the VET school (out of sight of the teachers), preferably in companies, but it could also be organised in practical training centres.

3.1. National arrangements on communication and cooperation

Across European VET systems, national arrangements for linking school-based learning and WBL reflect a wide diversity of approaches. Despite significant contextual differences, common threads emerge, particularly around the use of learning outcomes to structure cooperation between VET schools and companies. This section outlines how responsibilities are distributed between the two institutional groups, the modes of communication that support collaboration and how learning outcomes influence these dynamics. Notably, the degree to which companies participate in curriculum co-design and the mechanisms for ensuring alignment with national qualifications frameworks differ considerably.

Shared responsibilities, different balances

One key similarity across Member States is the shared responsibility for VET programme delivery between schools and companies. However, the balance of responsibility varies. In Lithuania, the National Regulation for Apprenticeships stipulates that companies must provide at least 70 % of training, with schools limited to no more than 30 %. This legally reinforces the dominance of workplace learning in apprenticeships. The VET school retains control over the learning outcomes and prepares individualised learning plans that determine the content delivered by each partner. In contrast, in Finland, while WBL is highly integrated, VET providers maintain overarching responsibility for the planning and quality assurance of all WBL forms. The Finnish approach allows for flexible pathways through personal competence development plans (PCDPs) and training agreements. Companies provide training aligned with national qualification requirements, but the VET provider supervises the implementation and ensures alignment with learning outcomes.

Role of national legislation in structuring responsibilities

National legal frameworks play a crucial role in defining how WBL is structured and the extent of company engagement. In Malta, the Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act (2018) clearly delineates the roles of VET providers, companies and learners. VET institutions are legally mandated to manage the work-based component, ensuring that training environments support the achievement of defined learning outcomes. Moreover, companies (referred to as 'sponsors') are legally obliged to offer tasks and conditions conducive to the realisation of specified learning outcomes. Similarly, in Slovenia, legislation establishes that companies must provide suitable premises and qualified mentors to support learners' achievement of learning outcomes. Here, the law requires

companies to appoint a mentor, who must have appropriate qualifications and work experience. The VET school employs a WBL organiser, a pivotal role that coordinates the collaboration with companies, ensures the proper planning of WBL and acts as the main point of communication. In Poland, national law mandates that vocational education includes practical training aligned with learning outcomes from a national curriculum. Agreements between vocational schools and employers must include the school's teaching programme as a reference, ensuring that practical learning targets the formally specified competences. Despite this, companies often rely on the school-defined programme without specifying or customising the intended learning outcomes, resulting in variation in how outcomes are actually addressed in practice. The extent to which workplace learning aligns with the intended outcomes depends on the company's training culture and instructor competence.

Structured communication mechanisms and liaison roles

Where the distribution of responsibilities is clearly defined, effective communication mechanisms are essential. Several Member States have introduced liaison roles to mediate between schools and companies. In Bulgaria, teacher-methodologists act as the primary link, providing methodological support and facilitating curriculum design and feedback loops between mentors and VET schools. However, since this role is not formally regulated, it sometimes lacks recognition, which may reduce teachers' incentives to assume the position. In Slovenia, a WBL organiser, employed by each VET school, ensures the systematic coordination of WBL implementation. This position plays a central role in linking school-based and workplace learning, organising student placements and aligning them with the national catalogue of learning outcomes. In Portugal, a legal requirement for a protocol for cooperation between the VET school and the company supports structured communication. This protocol includes a training plan and clearly assigns responsibilities. In addition, documents provided by national authorities guide the assessment of WBL and promote a shared understanding among VET coordinators, tutors and trainees. These formalised arrangements enhance the transparency and accountability of WBL.

Role of intermediary institutions

Several Member States rely on intermediary institutions to facilitate cooperation. In Slovenia, chambers of commerce and other social partners help identify and verify WBL placements and contribute to curriculum design. The central register of WBL placements provides transparency and allows students to be matched with verified companies.

In the Netherlands, the [Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven \(SBB\)\)](#) (Box 3) serves as a national hub for managing learning companies, developing qualification files and monitoring training quality. These intermediaries enhance trust between schools and businesses and ensure that training reflects labour market needs. Similarly, in France, [France Compétences](#) acts as an intermediary body (Box 3).

Box 3. **Examples of intermediary institutions (France and the Netherlands)**

The role of SBB in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has established the SBB as a central actor in managing learning companies. The SBB develops and maintains qualification files that specify learning outcomes, ensures the quality of training environments and coordinates the recognition of companies as suitable WBL providers. Through its regulatory and consultative role, the SBB exemplifies how intermediary bodies can ensure consistency and alignment between education and labour market demands.

France Compétences: an intermediary body in France. France Compétences is a national public institution responsible for regulating and coordinating VET. It brings together representatives of the state, employers, trade unions and regional councils. One of its key tasks is ensuring that qualifications remain aligned with labour market needs, often by updating competence blocks and funding apprenticeship contracts. This model reflects the governance dimension of learning outcome implementation, bridging education and employment through structured multistakeholder dialogue.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Use of learning outcomes as a common language

A consistent feature across all systems is the use of learning outcomes as a reference point for organising and assessing WBL. In Finland, the entire VET system is competence based, and the planning and assessment of WBL is explicitly anchored in learning outcomes. Each student has a PCDP, and the training agreement outlines the specific learning objectives to be achieved during each WBL period. These objectives are jointly agreed upon by the student, the VET provider and the company. In Ireland, both programme- and module-level learning outcomes are explicitly linked to the WBL component. Learning outcomes guide the planning of placements and inform the assessment of students. Teachers and company tutors collaborate to ensure alignment between the professional practice modules and the overarching programme goals. In the Netherlands, the learning outcomes approach is embedded in qualification files, which form the backbone of curriculum and assessment. These files outline the core tasks and work processes that graduates must be able to perform, creating a direct link between education and workplace requirements. The SBB plays a key

role in ensuring that companies meet the standards necessary to support students in achieving these outcomes.

Challenges in employer engagement

Despite the widespread use of learning outcomes, challenges remain in engaging companies as co-creators of WBL curricula. In Bulgaria, for example, schools prepare the WBL curriculum based on national frameworks, and companies primarily provide feedback rather than participating in design. While schools attempt to generalise learning outcomes so they can be used across various companies, this often limits their specificity, which is needed for contextualised workplace learning. France offers another example where governance complexity affects company involvement. Although apprenticeship training centres (*centres de formation d'apprentis*) operate under the Ministry of Labour and use competence blocks for certification, the overall system still reflects a divide between academic and vocational tracks. Schools tend to retain strong control over curriculum and assessment, and companies' roles are more operational than pedagogical.

Lessons learnt: bridging two worlds through learning outcomes

All in all, despite national differences in legislation, institutional responsibilities and degrees of employer involvement, a common trend across all Member States is the use of learning outcomes to structure WBL. Learning outcomes provide a shared language that bridges the educational and professional realms, enabling schools and companies to collaborate effectively. Where legal frameworks are clear, communication mechanisms are structured and companies are recognised as pedagogical partners, WBL is more effective and meaningful. However, further efforts are needed to engage employers more deeply in curriculum co-creation and ensure the consistent quality of learning experiences across diverse sectors and company types.

3.2. Pedagogical approaches

As indicated in Chapter 1, pedagogical approaches based on learning outcomes focus on what learners are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end of a learning process. These approaches have the potential to place the learner at the centre, encouraging self-directed and autonomous learning and shifting the role of education from transmitting knowledge to facilitating the development of competences. Rather than relying on standardised teaching methods, instruction can be tailored to support the achievement of specific

outcomes, often involving experiential and active learning methods such as reflection, coaching and imitation. Assessment can be aligned with the intended outcomes and focused on providing meaningful evidence of progress, using a variety of practice-based methods. This approach can foster greater transparency, inclusivity and responsiveness to individual learner needs and labour market demands. This section examines whether these pedagogical approaches are embedded in WBL, particularly in terms of how they are stimulated within policies, regulations and guidelines. It explores the ways different Member States integrate learning outcomes into their pedagogical frameworks to create a seamless connection between school-based learning and WBL. The primary objective of these pedagogical approaches is to ensure that practical experiences are structured around clearly defined learning outcomes. This alignment enhances the relevance and authenticity of vocational training, making it more effective in preparing students for professional employment (Cedefop, 2015a).

National policies and regulations in VET increasingly recognise the need for pedagogical frameworks that align with a learning outcomes approach, particularly in WBL. Although all participating Member States incorporate learning outcomes in some form, their translation into pedagogical practice varies.

Learning outcomes as a pedagogical anchor

In Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, pedagogical approaches to WBL are firmly grounded in learning outcomes. In Finland, PCDPs (see Box 4) and training agreements define specific learning objectives, enabling an individualised, goal-oriented pedagogy. The workplace instructor and VET teacher jointly guide the student, with assessment based on competence demonstrated in authentic work tasks. This structure ensures that pedagogical planning and assessment align with nationally defined learning outcomes. Similarly, in Ireland, post-leaving-certificate courses employ structured modules that map module-level learning outcomes (minimum intended module learning outcomes) to broader programme-level outcomes (minimum intended programme learning outcomes). Teachers and tutors use these mappings to design both in-class and on-the-job learning activities. For instance, in the early learning and care programme, placement supervisors check that learners have achieved specific competences, often using reflective practice and simulation environments to replicate real-world conditions. In the Netherlands, learning outcomes are deeply embedded in the qualification files that define core tasks and work processes. These outcomes not only steer curriculum content but also inform pedagogical decisions, including in-company training. For example, in the childcare sector, sectoral agreements ensure that pedagogical methods align with regulated

qualifications and occupational standards. VET trainers and company mentors interpret learning outcomes within a framework of professional practice, creating consistent learning pathways that integrate school-based and workplace-based learning.

Box 4. PCDPs and training agreements in Finland

In Finland, PCDPs and training agreements form the backbone of an individualised and goal-oriented approach to WBL in VET. Every student in VET has a PCDP, developed collaboratively by the student, VET provider and, where applicable, the workplace. The PCDP outlines the student's existing skills, sets out learning objectives aligned with national qualification requirements, and details the means and environments – such as a workplace – through which these objectives will be achieved.

Training agreements are formalised arrangements that allow students to learn in real workplaces without an employment contract. These agreements define the learning outcomes to be attained, the responsibilities of all parties, the duration of the workplace learning period, and the tasks and support structures in place. They are a flexible instrument to tailor workplace learning to the needs of individual learners and host companies.

Pedagogically, this structure fosters an integrated approach to planning, guidance and assessment. VET teachers and workplace instructors jointly plan the student's learning path, ensure support during workplace learning and conduct assessments based on competence demonstrations – real work tasks through which students must show that they have achieved the outcomes described in the qualification standards. Assessment is thus based on evidence and situated within authentic work contexts.

The PCDP and training agreement system ensures a tight alignment between national learning outcomes and local implementation. It also enables greater ownership by learners, who actively co-design their learning path and participate in decisions about how, where and when learning takes place. Employers benefit from clarity about expectations and outcomes, while VET providers ensure quality through structured processes for planning, monitoring, support and assessment.

Source: Authors based on country case studies. See also sources such as [Eurydice's research on teaching and learning in vocational upper-secondary education and training](#) and [the Turku Vocational Institute's web page on PCDPs](#).

Reflection and experiential learning

Several Member States promote pedagogical approaches rooted in experiential learning, even if explicit references to learning outcomes are limited. Slovenia stands out with its use of reflection as a pedagogical method in WBL. A 2021 publication by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training frames WBL as experiential learning, where reflection on practice is seen as the core driver of competence development (Makovec Radovan, 2021). Learners are encouraged to link workplace experiences with theoretical knowledge, supported by feedback from mentors and teachers.

In Malta, apprentices are required to maintain a reflective journal (see Box 5) as part of their logbook. The journal includes regular entries on skills acquired, personal strengths and weaknesses, and photos or other documentation of tasks completed. This tool is currently being revised to better capture soft skills and other competences beyond technical learning outcomes. The mentor's role is to guide and assess this reflective process, thereby integrating experiential and reflective pedagogies. In Poland, instructors who supervise workplace learning must complete a short pedagogical course, which includes a component on learning outcomes and instructional methods. However, in observed practice, teaching remains largely instructional, with limited learner autonomy. In some instances, learners report that they benefit from seeing the real-world relevance of tasks, which enhances engagement, although learner-centred pedagogy is not yet consistently adopted.

Box 5. Reflective journals in Malta

In Malta, apprentices enrolled in VET programmes at MCAST are required to maintain a reflective journal, which forms a core part of their apprenticeship logbook. This journal is not only a record-keeping tool, but also a structured pedagogical instrument to capture the learning taking place during the WBL period.

The reflective journal comprises four structured sections:

- (a) introduction to the work context – descriptions of the apprentice's job role and the host organisation;
- (b) ongoing reflections – a minimum of two entries per month documenting newly acquired skills, supported by photos or other evidence of completed tasks;
- (c) self-assessment – reflections on personal strengths and weaknesses;
- (d) cumulative reflection – a summary of development over time, focusing on progress made and key lessons learnt from the workplace experience.

The reflective journal is guided and assessed by a mentor from MCAST, who visits the apprentice at the workplace and engages the apprentice and in-company supervisor in discussions. The process integrates experiential and reflective pedagogies, encouraging learners to critically assess their performance and development in relation to nationally defined learning outcomes.

Since 2023/2024, the journal is undergoing a comprehensive revision and pilot phase aimed at deepening its educational function. The format is shifting from a compliance-based checklist to a more learner-centred, developmental tool. It encourages the documentation not only of technical competences but also of cross-cutting skills, such as communication, teamwork and time management. The revised version allows apprentices and sponsors to select a subset of relevant learning outcomes, promoting flexibility while maintaining alignment with qualification standards. It also provides space for apprentices and companies to identify and record unintended or emergent learning, especially soft skills developed in authentic work settings.

Through this development, the reflective journal is becoming a dialogic space where learners articulate their growth, mentors provide formative feedback and companies

gain insight into apprentices' holistic development. By fostering reflection, self-awareness and ownership of learning, the tool enhances the quality and depth of WBL and strengthens the learner's ability to connect experiences to competences.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Gaps in pedagogical guidance

Despite the emphasis on learning outcomes, several Member States do not offer explicit pedagogical guidelines in their national regulations. In France, for example, while competence-based approaches (*approches par compétences*) structure curricula, the pedagogical role of companies remains vague. The agreement documents used in internships list activities and objectives but do not specify how learning should be facilitated. Pedagogical inspections (*missions de contrôle pédagogique*) ensure compliance with diploma frameworks but provide limited support for developing pedagogical strategies. In Bulgaria, while teacher-methodologists are intended to support pedagogical alignment, there are no national guidelines prescribing pedagogical methods for WBL. Even recent initiatives such as the EU-funded mentor training programmes (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2023) have focused more on organisational and psychological support than on learning-outcomes-based pedagogy.

Sectoral and company-level variability

The pedagogical implementation of learning outcomes often depends on sectoral norms and company size. In Lithuania, smaller companies often lack familiarity with educational terminology, which limits their ability to implement structured pedagogical approaches based on learning outcomes. Interviews with VET stakeholders indicate that only larger firms with human resource departments are likely to engage deeply with the educational aspects of WBL. As a result, learners may perform narrowly defined tasks without structured guidance or reflection. Portugal shows a hybrid approach: while national catalogues define learning outcomes and assessment criteria, VET providers have autonomy in pedagogical implementation. This results in significant variation in how WBL is delivered. Some schools engage in detailed planning and communication with companies, while others rely on simplified documentation. In all cases, however, WBL activities must align with nationally defined learning outcomes and are assessed accordingly.

Pedagogical roles and training of mentors and instructors

The training of in-company mentors and school-based instructors is a key determinant of whether learning outcomes are implemented pedagogically. Slovenia offers structured mentor training through national and chamber-led

initiatives. These programmes focus on communication, didactic strategies and guidance techniques to support competence development. Similarly, Malta requires sponsors to appoint mentors and participate in assessments, with responsibilities clearly articulated in law. In Finland, the strong tradition of cooperation between VET providers and employers ensures that mentors are familiar with pedagogical expectations. Workplace instructors receive guidance on how to assess competences and provide formative feedback. The VET legislation reinforces their pedagogical responsibility by defining WBL as a guided, goal-oriented process based on learning outcomes.

The availability of formal training for in-company trainers is a major differentiator across systems. In Slovenia, a national programme for mentor training is available and often delivered in cooperation with chambers of commerce (see Box 6). These courses focus on communication, learner motivation and the application of learning outcomes. The certification is not mandatory in all cases but is encouraged as a quality assurance mechanism. In Poland, workplace trainers must complete a mandatory 48-hour pedagogical course. However, ongoing professional development and structured pedagogical support are uncommon. Trainers typically rely on their practical experience and receive limited guidance once the learner is placed in their company. Some larger companies have internal mentorship pathways and peer support models, although this remains the exception. In Malta, while no standardised national training exists for company mentors, sector-specific training is provided in regulated professions, for example in engineering and healthcare. In those professions, trainers must follow guidelines from professional councils and use structured logbooks that include learning outcomes.

Box 6. Mentor training programmes in Slovenia

Slovenia has developed a structured approach to preparing company mentors for their pedagogical role in WBL. A national 16-hour mentor training programme, often delivered in cooperation with chambers of commerce and other public institutions, introduces future mentors to the fundamentals of guiding and supporting learners in the workplace. This includes topics such as communication with young people, motivation techniques, basic pedagogical and andragogical principles, and legal responsibilities. A key focus of the training is the application of learning outcomes from national VET curricula. Mentors are introduced to the structure and purpose of learning outcomes and shown how to use them to plan and guide learners' progress. Training sessions include practical examples of how to link workplace tasks with vocational competences and how to provide effective feedback aligned with intended outcomes. Although certification is not legally required for all mentors, it is widely promoted as a quality assurance tool. Participation in such training is strongly encouraged in apprenticeship pathways and may be a prerequisite for company approval as a recognised WBL provider. In recent years, additional initiatives have expanded training

opportunities, including a programme funded by the European Social Fund that aims to train nearly 2.000 mentors by 2026, reflecting a growing commitment to professionalising the mentoring role in Slovenian WBL.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Integration of theory and practice

In several Member States, there is a conscious effort to integrate theoretical and practical learning using learning outcomes. Ireland combines classroom-based modules with professional placements, where students are expected to apply and reflect on theoretical knowledge. For instance, game design students simulate industry settings in class, enabling seamless transitions between learning environments. In the Netherlands, the alignment of qualification files with occupational standards ensures that both theory and practice contribute to achieving learning outcomes. VET providers adapt their pedagogical approaches to the needs of specific sectors, combining hands-on tasks with reflection and peer learning.

Lessons learnt: from compliance to pedagogical intentionality

All in all, while learning outcomes are widely used to structure WBL across Europe, their pedagogical application remains uneven. Member States like Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland exemplify how national policies and institutional frameworks can embed learning outcomes into pedagogical practice. Others, such as Bulgaria or France, demonstrate that, without explicit pedagogical guidance, learning outcomes may be treated as compliance tools rather than teaching instruments. Reflection, experiential learning and mentor training emerge as critical practices for turning learning outcomes into meaningful pedagogical action. Further investment in pedagogical training and clearer guidance for companies could enhance the educational value of WBL and support learner-centred, outcomes-based education in practice.

3.3. Regulations on assessment

Assessment is a central mechanism through which the quality and effectiveness of WBL can be ensured. This section examines how national assessment regulations refer to learning outcomes and how these references influence the content and delivery of WBL. In doing so, it highlights how learning outcomes can steer pedagogical focus, structure assessment criteria and foster alignment between workplace practices and VET goals. While learning outcomes are generally acknowledged as the foundation of assessment in VET, Member States

differ in how explicitly and systematically these are operationalised in the assessment of WBL (Cedefop, forthcoming).

Assessment systems anchored in learning outcomes

Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland exhibit strong alignment between assessment regulations and learning outcomes in WBL. In Finland, learning outcomes are central to both formative and summative assessment. Students' progress is monitored through the assessment of learning and competences, culminating in competence demonstrations in the workplace. These demonstrations are evaluated jointly by the VET teacher and the workplace instructor using criteria derived from national qualification requirements. In Ireland, the assessment process for post-leaving-certificate courses is structured around learning outcomes that are specified in national programme modules. A substantial portion of the total grade in WBL modules comes from workplace-based assessment. The student's competence is assessed jointly by placement supervisors and mentors using a binary scale ('competent' or 'not yet competent') across professional competences. Further, assessment tools such as portfolios, self-assessments and supervisor reports all refer to predefined learning outcomes. The Netherlands also demonstrates the systemic integration of learning outcomes into assessment. Qualification files explicitly define what a learner must know and be able to do, and these outcomes form the core of examination and certification (see Box 7). Companies participating in WBL are accredited by the SBB based on their ability to support students in achieving these learning outcomes. In-company mentors participate in assessment, contributing to a coherent framework that links workplace learning directly to qualification standards.

Box 7. Learning outcomes and assessment in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, assessment in VET is directly and systematically linked to nationally defined learning outcomes, as set out in the qualification files (*kwalificatiedossiers*). These qualification files describe, in detail, the core tasks and work processes expected of a professional beginning in a given occupation. Each task is broken down into specific competences, describing what learners must be able to do, know and apply by the end of their programme.

This outcomes-based framework underpins the entire assessment system. Assessment is not designed separately from the curriculum; it is its natural extension. Examination tasks, whether in the classroom or in the workplace, are derived directly from the qualification files. Learners are assessed on their ability to demonstrate the required competences in authentic or realistic contexts, often through work-based performance tasks, portfolios and reflective assignments.

In the WBL component – particularly for students in the BBL (dual learning) track, this alignment is especially pronounced. Companies participating in WBL must be accredited by the SBB and demonstrate that they can offer the learning experiences

required to meet the outcomes described in the qualification file. In-company mentors play an active role in observing and supporting learners, while formal assessments are typically conducted jointly by the school and the workplace, using nationally standardised rubrics and assignments developed by examination boards such as Prove2Move or Stichting Consortium Bereopsonderwijs.

These assessment instruments are explicitly mapped to the qualification file and must cover the full range of learning outcomes. This ensures national consistency and fairness, regardless of where or how the learning takes place. For example, a childcare student assessed on planning and evaluating educational activities for young children will be judged against the precise indicators described in the relevant qualification file, whether the evidence comes from a school simulation or a workplace project.

Assessment in the Dutch VET system is not just about certifying outcomes but also about guiding learning. Learners and mentors use the qualification files to set individual learning goals, plan progression and track readiness for final assessment. In some sectors, like childcare, this process is structured through personal development plans and regular progress reviews. In others, such as technical fields, assessment may be more integrated into ongoing work performance, but the link to the qualification files remains constant.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Flexible but outcome-driven approaches

Some Member States provide flexibility in assessment approaches while still requiring alignment with learning outcomes. In Lithuania, VET schools and companies co-develop internship plans tailored to workplace contexts. Although national VET programmes define broad learning outcomes, the specifics of assessment methods and tasks are left to the discretion of schools and employers. The manager of the internship, often a VET teacher, is responsible for designing the assessment instruments and ensuring that they reflect the learning outcomes of the module. The lack of detailed national guidelines allows for contextual adaptation, although it can also lead to inconsistencies in assessment practices. Portugal provides assessment templates that include general descriptions of knowledge, skills and attitudes but stops short of operationalising learning outcomes as explicit criteria. Tutors and trainees rely on simplified lists derived from the national catalogue of qualifications. Assessment forms are mandatory but often general, and the alignment with specific learning outcomes depends heavily on local practices. France also demonstrates partial integration. Assessment frameworks for vocational diplomas are organised around blocks of competences. Continuous assessment (*contrôle en cours de formation*) and final exams are guided by these competence blocks, which resemble learning outcomes. However, workplace tutors and company representatives are not always directly involved in assessment, and there is limited standardisation of how learning outcomes are applied in WBL contexts. In Poland, there is no formal requirement for assessing learning outcomes during internships or practical training. Learners complete

diaries requiring descriptions of tasks performed, and instructors may provide informal verbal feedback. Final written evaluations generally comment on behaviour and participation rather than the achievement of specific competences, limiting the potential for formative assessment to guide learning.

Gaps in operationalisation and quality assurance

A common challenge across Member States is the lack of detailed operationalisation of learning outcomes in WBL assessment. In Bulgaria, learning outcomes are part of the national curriculum and must be reflected in WBL curricula. However, company mentors are not required to define or apply specific assessment indicators. Ordinance No 11 (2016) outlines general qualitative and quantitative grading criteria but does not standardise how these are interpreted in the workplace. In Slovenia, the situation is mixed. In school-based WBL, assessment is minimal, often a 'pass' grade based on participation. However, in apprenticeships, the assessment of vocational modules is conducted jointly by schools and employers, using the learning outcomes defined in the curriculum. This dual approach highlights the disparity between forms of WBL.

Role of employers in assessment

The extent to which employers are involved in assessment varies. In Malta, employers are required by law to participate in assessment. The MCAST mentor monitors apprentices through workplace visits and uses a logbook to verify task completion and learning outcomes. In sectors requiring licensure (e.g. electrical work), specific sectoral logbooks are used instead of generic tools. In Lithuania, Slovenia and Finland, employers provide feedback on student performance and may co-develop assessment tasks, but their role in grading is limited or informal. The absence of formal training on assessment for mentors further complicates standardisation.

Lessons learnt: aligning assessment with learning outcomes enhances quality and transparency

All in all, assessment is a vital lever for ensuring the relevance and quality of WBL. Member States with strong systems for learning-outcomes-based assessment, such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, demonstrate that alignment between educational goals and workplace practice can be achieved through clear standards, joint assessment practices and institutional support. However, the lack of detailed operational guidance and the limited involvement of company mentors in some Member States highlight areas for improvement. Strengthening mentor training, clarifying assessment roles and fostering consistency across providers

can further embed learning outcomes into assessment and improve the overall effectiveness of WBL.

3.4. Concluding remarks

A recurring theme in the analysis is the gap between policy ambition and practical implementation. While national laws and strategies often emphasise learning outcomes and stakeholder cooperation, actual practices on the ground may be shaped more by local cultures, institutional capacities and the engagement of individual actors than by national frameworks. As can be seen in Table 2, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland stand out with fully implemented frameworks for using learning outcomes in WBL. In these Member States, at the national level, learning outcomes are deeply integrated into WBL. In addition, Ireland, France and Lithuania are close to full embedding (only lacking firm embedding in one out of the three dimensions discussed). In contrast, Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia have frameworks that are only partially in place. Overall, across the Member States examined, learning outcomes play a crucial role in bridging school-based learning and WBL, enhancing communication, structuring pedagogical approaches and shaping assessment practices. National arrangements for coordination vary, with some Member States establishing formal platforms and intermediaries, while others integrate learning outcomes through regulations and structured agreements. Pedagogically, Member States differ in the extent of prescription, with some providing detailed national guidelines and others granting training providers flexibility in designing instructional strategies. Assessment frameworks also reflect these differences, ranging from standardised national criteria to industry-driven evaluations.

Table 2. Rules, regulations and guidelines in place that steer how WBL approaches are based on learning outcomes (macro level), 2025

Member State	National approaches to communication and the use of learning outcomes	Pedagogical approaches and the use of learning outcomes	Assessments and references to learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the macro level
Bulgaria	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learning outcomes support communication. However, the involvement of companies is limited in terms of using learning outcomes to align VET with industry needs.	<u>Not embedded</u> There are no structural approaches to embedding learning outcomes in pedagogical guidelines for WBL.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In WBL, policies on formative assessment practices are put in place based on learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> National guidelines exist for WBL, but the role of employers in developing curricula remains unclear, leading to less structured collaboration than in other Member States. This approach can lead to a reactive rather than proactive role for companies, which hinders the effective application of learning outcomes in WBL.
Ireland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes steer both the school-based and WBL components of VET.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While WBL is firmly embedded, there are limited guidelines on how to structure and design the WBL based on learning outcomes.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Under the regulations of Quality and Qualifications Ireland, learning outcomes are central to assessment criteria, which influence WBL content and delivery.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are central to the Irish WBL system. The system leaves a high level of autonomy to the schools and companies to develop the pedagogical approach, with limited national-level support.
France	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes (or competences) form the common language in VET that can be understood by both education providers (VET schools) and companies.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There are limited national-level pedagogical guidelines. On the other hand, learning outcomes (competences) form the basis of any pedagogical approach in WBL.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Nationally regulated assessment regulations are tied to competence blocks within diploma frameworks. These assessments are developed based on input from trade unions and employers' organisations and are aligned with the national qualifications framework	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes (or competences) are firmly integrated into the structure of the VET and WBL system, steered through assessment regulations and the description of courses and modules. Less emphasis is on providing support to develop pedagogical approaches in WBL using learning outcomes.

Member State	National approaches to communication and the use of learning outcomes	Pedagogical approaches and the use of learning outcomes	Assessments and references to learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the macro level
Lithuania	<u>Firmly embedded</u> A learning-outcomes-based approach underpins the joint organisation of apprenticeships by schools and companies.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is a lack of pedagogical guidance for companies on working with learning outcomes.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Under national regulations, a closing module in each VET programme assesses practical skills, with learning outcomes focusing on familiarisation with job specifics, labour market integration and competence demonstration in real work environments.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a flexible approach to WBL, where national guidelines provide a broad framework for the integration of learning outcomes into WBL, but implementation is often left to individual VET schools and companies. This flexibility allows for adaptation to different industries but can also lead to inconsistency in how effectively learning outcomes are achieved.
Malta	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are the basis for designing learning experiences in schools and companies leading to programme outcomes.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> The use of learning outcomes in the pedagogical approach in WBL is ensured by the apprenticeship training agreement and related logbooks used to document the tasks completed (described in terms of learning outcomes). Support is in place for apprentices.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Nationally regulated WBL assessment focuses on the achievement of learning outcomes. Several conditions are put in place to ensure that skills are assessed while conducting practical tasks (e.g. requirement to fill in logbook).	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes form the basis of the Maltese WBL system, mainly coordinated by one institution (MCAST). This also ensures that there are national-level pedagogical guidelines on and support structures for using learning outcomes in WBL. Further, assessments focus on the achievement of learning outcomes by students.

Member State	National approaches to communication and the use of learning outcomes	Pedagogical approaches and the use of learning outcomes	Assessments and references to learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the macro level
Netherlands	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes serve as the foundation for cooperation between VET schools and companies. Both are involved in defining the learning outcomes.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes form the basis of all VET delivery, and VET schools have the autonomy to apply any pedagogical approach. Companies also have this autonomy but generally follow pedagogical advice from VET schools or the SBB.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Under national regulations, assessments are fully in line with the learning outcomes described at the national level.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> National frameworks ensure that learning outcomes are central to VET, with strong collaboration between employers and educational institutions. Further, the integration of learning outcomes into both theoretical and practical aspects of training ensure a high degree of alignment between education and industry.
Poland	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There are no explicit requirements to define learning outcomes in training agreements, resulting in variability. However, there is a structured framework for collaboration between VET schools and employers, aligning practice training with the core curriculum.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is a strong emphasis on WBL, which is seen as essential for implementing the teaching programme and achieving learning outcomes. However, the pedagogical approach in WBL and the application or assessment methods remain the responsibility of individual schools.	<u>Not embedded</u> There is no comprehensive national framework for assessment in VET, leading to significant variation in evaluation practices in WBL settings, from strict measurement of specific learning outcomes to informal, unstructured assessment of cross-cutting competences, attitudes and behaviours.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is a structured framework ensuring collaboration between VET schools and employers, aligning practical training with the core curriculum, but the lack of explicit learning outcome requirements in training agreements and the absence of a comprehensive national assessment framework create variability in implementation and evaluation.

Member State	National approaches to communication and the use of learning outcomes	Pedagogical approaches and the use of learning outcomes	Assessments and references to learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the macro level
Portugal	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes shape the design and delivery of WBL in professional courses through agreed training plans and protocols involving VET schools, trainees and company tutors.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> WBL activities are guided by protocols between VET schools and companies, ensuring alignment with course objectives.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are defined at the national level. For WBL, the pedagogical coordinator or trainer identifies specific learning outcomes and criteria based on the general framework. These are agreed upon by the VET school, trainee and company tutor and are included in protocols and contracts between stakeholders.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> National regulations outline the WBL structure, support the communication between stakeholders and support the development and alignment of pedagogical approaches in WBL and schools. In addition, assessment procedures are firmly based on learning outcomes.
Slovenia	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are defined for the school-based and WBL components of programmes and are included in a national knowledge catalogue.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Pedagogical approaches to WBL are increasingly aligned with learning outcomes, improving experiential learning, reflection, feedback and coordination of training activities between environments.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While WBL in school-based education is recorded as a 'pass' grade based on commitment, apprenticeships involve more detailed evaluations of vocational modules.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> A well-defined legal framework exists, with legislation that clearly outlines the roles of schools and employers, requirements for mentors and adequate working conditions. However, the effectiveness of WBL depends on the cooperation between VET schools and employers during implementation.

Member State	National approaches to communication and the use of learning outcomes	Pedagogical approaches and the use of learning outcomes	Assessments and references to learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the macro level
Finland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes fully inform the WBL context, guiding students in their learning process in the companies.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Pedagogical approaches are oriented to flexible, individualised learning pathways and practical learning, reflecting learning outcomes approaches.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Nationally regulated WBL assessments (i.e. all assessments of vocational units focus on the demonstration of competence in real work situations).	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a comprehensive system where national vocational qualification requirements strongly guide WBL / workplace learning, ensuring consistent and outcomes-based learning across various contexts. Company and VET school collaboration is well established, which ensures that learning outcomes can be achieved effectively.

NB: 'Firmly embedded (dark green)' means that learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational and present in national, school-/company-level documentation and perspectives. 'Advancing to embedding (light green)' means that, while learning outcomes are generally applied and/or are present in relevant documentation, their application in practice is not considered foundational for developments and implementation. This category includes cases where the presence and application of learning outcomes is more implicit in nature. 'Not embedded (light red)' means that no evidence was available to determine the presence of an approach or application.

Source: Authors' assessment based on Member State case studies.

The comparative analysis of national policies and arrangements across Member States reveals a shared commitment to embedding learning outcomes in WBL yet also underscores considerable variation in how this is realised in practice. Learning outcomes serve as a powerful mechanism for aligning the expectations of VET schools, companies and learners. However, the consistency among legislation, pedagogical implementation and assessment frameworks varies widely, impacting the effectiveness of WBL systems.

(a) **Learning outcomes as a common foundation.** One of the most consistent features across Member States is the integration of learning outcomes into qualifications frameworks and national curricula. In nearly all systems examined, learning outcomes function as a common reference point for structuring VET programmes, designing WBL activities and setting expectations for learners' progression. This shared foundation enables mutual understanding between education providers and employers and enhances the potential for the transparency, comparability and portability of skills across sectors and borders.

- (b) **Differences in implementation and pedagogical integration.** Despite this common reference framework, the extent to which learning outcomes shape the pedagogical and organisational dimensions of WBL differs markedly. Member States like Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland have developed comprehensive systems in which learning outcomes underpin not only the curriculum but also the planning, delivery and assessment of WBL. These systems offer personalised pathways, support structured cooperation between stakeholders and promote consistent quality assurance. By contrast, Member States such as Bulgaria, France and Lithuania illustrate more fragmented approaches. While learning outcomes are present in national frameworks, their translation into pedagogical strategies or operational practices remains limited. Teachers, company mentors and even learners may not explicitly reference or understand learning outcomes, relying instead on tacit knowledge or informal communication. This limits the transformative potential of learning outcomes to shape meaningful learning experiences in the workplace.
- (c) **Assessment as a driver of consistency or disparity.** Assessment is a critical domain where the impact of learning outcomes is either reinforced or diluted. Member States with detailed assessment criteria linked to learning outcomes, such as Finland, demonstrate how regulatory clarity can support formative and summative assessments that are fair, valid and relevant to work. In these systems, employers are often directly involved in evaluating student performance against defined learning outcomes. In contrast, in systems where assessment is vaguely specified or delegated entirely to local actors, as seen in Bulgaria, Portugal and Slovenia, there is a greater risk of inconsistency. Without robust mechanisms to monitor or support how learning outcomes are assessed in real-world contexts, the quality and credibility of WBL may vary significantly across providers and sectors.
- (d) **The critical role of intermediaries and liaison roles.** Another key factor in successful implementation is the presence of dedicated roles and intermediary bodies that facilitate communication and coordination between VET institutions and employers. Roles such as the teacher-methodologist in Bulgaria and the WBL organiser in Slovenia and institutional structures like the SBB in the Netherlands or France Compétences in France exemplify models that help bridge the gap between education and industry. Where these roles are clearly defined, supported and recognised within national frameworks, cooperation tends to be more structured and effective. Conversely, where such roles are informal, under-resourced or poorly integrated, communication challenges persist and limit the pedagogical and developmental value of WBL.

- (e) **Challenges in engaging employers as pedagogical partners.** Across all Member States, employer engagement remains a mixed picture. While most systems mandate some degree of cooperation between schools and companies, the depth of this cooperation varies. In many cases, employers act as hosts for student placements rather than as active co-educators or curriculum developers. Some Member States have taken steps to formalise employers' pedagogical responsibilities, such as requiring mentor training or involving employers in assessment. Yet these initiatives are not always systematic or widely implemented. Enhancing the role of employers as pedagogical actors, rather than logistical facilitators, remains an area for further policy and practice development.

CHAPTER 4.

The perspectives and practices of companies supporting WBL in IVET

Key findings

- (a) Company engagement with learning outcomes remains uneven. While most companies are aware of learning outcomes, their practical use in structuring training often depends on individual initiative rather than systematic integration.
- (b) Structured communication and planning tools support effective WBL. Personalised learning plans, regular feedback loops and clear documentation help align workplace activities with intended outcomes and promote shared understanding.
- (c) In-company trainers play a central role but need better support at the company level. The successful translation of learning outcomes into daily practice relies on well-prepared mentors, yet many lack pedagogical training, time and clear guidance.
- (d) Sectoral culture and organisational capacity shape implementation. Service-oriented sectors and larger companies tend to embed learning outcomes more fully, while smaller firms and technical sectors may struggle to connect tasks to curriculum goals.
- (e) Bridging policy and practice depends on shared responsibility. Successful implementation of learning-outcomes-based WBL requires closer cooperation between schools and companies, supported by guidance, training and intermediary roles.

This chapter presents an overview of how company management across various Member States perceives and utilises learning outcomes in the planning, delivery and evaluation of WBL. Drawing on structured interviews and case study visits, the findings reveal notable variation in the depth of understanding and application of learning outcomes across sectors and national contexts. While there is a shared interest in ensuring meaningful WBL experiences, the role of learning outcomes in shaping those experiences is not always fully articulated by company representatives.

4.1. Company management views

While there is a shared recognition of the value of WBL, companies vary significantly in how well they understand, engage with and apply learning outcomes

in practice. The differences are influenced by national VET frameworks, company size, sectoral characteristics and the maturity of cooperation with VET providers.

General awareness and understanding of learning outcomes

Many companies are aware that learning outcomes are part of national VET programmes. However, the understanding of what learning outcomes are and how they should be used in structuring WBL differs significantly. For instance, in Malta, the interviewed company managers recognise that learning outcomes shape the apprentice's training but refer to them in general terms, often considering them as part of MCAST's responsibility. While they support the principle, the actual content of learning outcomes is less familiar, and their application in everyday work remains vague. In France, the awareness of learning outcomes is similarly indirect. While the studied companies acknowledge that certain competences must be achieved during apprenticeships or internships, they rely heavily on school-provided documentation. There is no systematic effort to align company training practices with learning outcomes, and pedagogical planning is left to tutors or educational staff. This reflects a broader divide between educational and workplace responsibilities. In contrast, the interviewed companies in Finland demonstrate a much deeper understanding of learning outcomes as a structuring tool. Here, learning outcomes are integrated into the PCDP of each student. The student's learning objectives are documented in their personal plan and are discussed in triadic meetings involving the student, teacher and company instructor. Tasks are chosen based on these learning outcomes, and feedback is systematically gathered to monitor progress. Employers are directly involved in planning tasks that support the acquisition of defined outcomes. This clarity enables structured learning and assessment in the workplace, with company mentors actively supporting competence development.

Companies' motivation and recruitment strategies

Companies that view WBL as a recruitment pathway are often more engaged with learning outcomes. For example, in Lithuania, a metalworking company aligns WBL with internal human resource strategies, aiming to train future employees (i.e. current VET students). Learning outcomes are indirectly referenced when assigning tasks, although managers may not articulate them using educational terminology. In Bulgaria, a logistics company and others participating in dual learning projects express a growing interest in aligning work tasks with students' skills development. While they may not write WBL curricula themselves, they provide feedback and adapt tasks based on students' abilities and progress. In Poland, companies vary in their engagement with learning outcomes. In some

sectors, especially manufacturing, companies link learning tasks to internal competence frameworks used in employee development. These structures help integrate students into the workplace while supporting learning. However, in many small and medium-sized enterprises, the school-defined training programme serves as the sole form of guidance, and the pedagogical dimension is minimal.

Sectoral influence and pedagogical culture

Sector-specific expectations influence how learning outcomes are perceived. In the Dutch childcare sector, learning outcomes are closely integrated into personal development plans and daily coaching. Staff are trained to use qualification files and maintain strong coordination with VET schools. Learners follow structured development plans aligned with national standards, with biweekly meetings involving trainers and teachers to monitor progress. In contrast, technical sectors like welding adopt a more task-oriented approach. While management is aware of qualification requirements, the learning process is less structured, and students are expected to take greater responsibility for navigating their own learning with limited guidance.

Perceived benefits and challenges

Employers frequently acknowledge the value of using learning outcomes to improve learner autonomy and workplace integration. In Slovenia, one company representative interviewed reported that learning outcomes help learners understand expectations and navigate tasks with increasing independence. Yet many employers also cite challenges such as abstract language in qualification documents, which can hinder understanding; time constraints that limit the ability of mentors to offer continuous support; and the lack of pedagogical training, which makes it difficult for staff to meaningfully link tasks with learning outcomes. For instance, in Finland, despite a strong culture of competence-based learning, some Finnish employers find that learning outcome formulations are complex. They rely on VET provider support to interpret them and convert them into concrete work tasks.

Lessons learnt: awareness without ownership

All in all, the analysis shows that, while most companies are aware that learning outcomes frame WBL, few take full ownership of their application. Member States with strong institutional support, clear frameworks and dedicated liaison roles, such as the Netherlands and Finland, see a greater integration of learning outcomes into company practices. Elsewhere, learning outcomes remain an abstract reference unless reinforced by proactive school–company cooperation. Enhancing

companies' pedagogical capacity and fostering co-responsibility are crucial for turning learning outcomes into a shared framework for learner development. In addition, despite progress, gaps remain in aligning school and company expectations. In Malta, while companies understand their role in offering placements, they rarely consult the actual learning outcomes. Communication with MCAST mentors often focuses on general performance rather than specific outcomes. Similarly, in France, pedagogical responsibilities are often left to schools, and company input is limited to operational aspects.

4.2. Cooperation and communication in practice

Effective collaboration mechanisms help ensure that WBL is aligned with curriculum goals and labour market needs. Across Member States, both structured and ad hoc approaches exist, with varied levels of engagement and feedback. This section builds on Section 3.1, with the focus being the operational level and the perspectives of companies on cooperation.

Formal agreements as foundations for communication

In several Member States, cooperation begins with formal agreements that define roles and responsibilities in WBL. As already indicated, in Portugal, schools provide companies with a WBL plan that includes desired learning outcomes framed as professional achievements. These are then validated and adjusted in dialogue with the company tutor. The shared understanding of these expectations forms the basis of WBL cooperation. In Poland, internship arrangements are formalised through agreements between the school and the company. These contracts include the school's teaching programme, but specific learning outcomes are rarely discussed in detail. Communication is often ad hoc, with schools relying on informal relationships to coordinate tasks and expectations with employers. In Finland, cooperation is underpinned by the student's PCDP. Teachers, employers and students jointly determine which learning outcomes can be acquired in the workplace. Companies report that these documents clarify expectations and facilitate planning, task selection and feedback.

Adjusting WBL content through communication

In Bulgaria, WBL curricula are developed by teacher-methodologists and adjusted based on feedback from companies. While companies are not co-creators, their views on task relevance are taken into account, especially when specific equipment or processes require alternative tasks. In Lithuania, schools and companies collaborate on individualised learning plans. Employers contribute by

identifying which competences can be realistically achieved in their context. This cooperative planning ensures alignment with the national curriculum while allowing flexibility for contextual adaptation, as detailed in Box 8.

Box 8. Tailoring learning plans in Lithuania

In Lithuania, the development of individualised learning plans for apprenticeships is a collaborative process between VET schools and companies. VET schools take the lead in preparing these plans, aligning them with national VET programmes that define the modules, intended learning outcomes and proposed training content. Employers then review these plans and actively contribute to their refinement. As part of this cooperation, companies assess which competences can realistically be achieved within their own operational context. They advise on which modules can be most effectively taught on-site – making use of their equipment, technologies and work processes – and which modules are better suited for delivery in the VET school or sectoral practical training centres due to resource constraints or the nature of the content. For example, companies typically provide practical training for modules that match their core business operations, while recommending that more general or theory-heavy modules be retained within the school-based component. This dialogue results in a jointly developed training schedule, specifying the distribution of hours between the workplace and school and aligning delivery with both the national curriculum and the company's capabilities. This coordinated planning enables learners to develop the required competences through a combination of structured school-based instruction and contextualised, real-world workplace training.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Communication tools and tracking progress

Tools to track progress and enable dialogue are key to ensuring that WBL remains goal-oriented. In Ireland, assessment briefs linked to learning outcomes are used to structure communication. Learners use these briefs to coordinate with supervisors, and supervisors validate task completion. In France, a formal document known as the internship logbook (*livret de stage*) is used in VET schools to monitor WBL. It specifies the competences to be acquired and allows tutors and teachers to document activities. However, the use of this tool in companies varies and often depends on individual initiative rather than systematic practice.

Structured feedback and triadic dialogue

Member States with strong triadic feedback mechanisms report higher levels of alignment between schools and companies. In the Netherlands, regular feedback meetings involving learners, trainers and teachers are integrated into the learning process. The student's progress is tracked through personalised development plans linked to nationally defined learning outcomes. In Slovenia, although company involvement in curriculum development is limited, WBL reports filled out

by mentors include reflections on learners' performance. These documents contain daily logs, summaries of work processes and evaluations of learners' behaviours and technical skills. These Slovenian WBL reports include fields for company mentors to describe tasks completed, equipment used and feedback on performance. Although based on professional competences rather than explicit learning outcomes, they encourage structured reflection and transparency.

Lessons learnt: structured communication supports learning outcomes

All in all, learning outcomes serve as an essential bridge between VET schools and companies. Where communication is structured and collaborative, learning outcomes are more likely to steer the design, delivery and assessment of WBL. This supports greater coherence in learners' progression and ensures that WBL contributes meaningfully to vocational qualifications. Member States that invest in communication tools, joint planning and feedback mechanisms tend to show stronger alignment between intended and achieved outcomes.

4.3. Planning and delivery

This section highlights practices that translate intended learning outcomes into concrete workplace experiences and identifies challenges in aligning delivery with national qualification expectations.

Planning based on national frameworks

In many Member States, according to the company management representatives interviewed, the planning of WBL starts with qualification standards and curricula that define the learning outcomes. In Slovenia, learning outcomes are drawn from modularised vocational programmes, with VET schools coordinating with employers to define the sequence and duration of WBL tasks. In Portugal, national catalogues offer detailed guidelines, and schools are responsible for interpreting them and turning them into task-specific WBL plans. Before the WBL period begins, Portuguese VET schools organise planning meetings with company tutors. These meetings aim to adapt learning outcomes into achievable tasks based on the company's operational setting. The resulting plan outlines the expected skills, timing and supervision arrangements.

Translating learning outcomes into tasks

A critical challenge is transforming abstract learning outcomes into workplace-relevant activities. In Ireland, tutors and company supervisors use assessment briefs and learning outcome descriptors to identify suitable tasks (Box 9). However,

in less formal systems, such as in France, companies often rely on general lists of tasks with limited connection to formal outcomes. This can result in learning experiences that are rich in practice but disconnected from curricular goals.

Box 9. Linking tasks to learning outcomes in Ireland

In Ireland, particularly within FET programmes such as the level 5 certificate in early learning and care, the connection between workplace tasks and learning outcomes is established through structured assessment briefs. These briefs are developed by tutors and serve as practical tools to interpret programme-level and module-specific learning outcomes. They guide learners and workplace supervisors in selecting tasks that enable the achievement and demonstration of the intended competences. In sectors like creative media or early childhood education, this process is highly collaborative. Tutors explain the learning outcomes to learners and encourage them to discuss with their company supervisors how specific tasks – such as editing a promotional video or organising an early learning activity – can meet the expectations set in the briefs. Supervisors support learners in adapting tasks to the specific context of their workplace while ensuring alignment with the required outcomes. Learners' progress is tracked using checklists, supervisor reports and structured feedback forms. Regular tripartite meetings involving the learner, the workplace supervisor and the college tutor help ensure that the learning remains on track. This approach fosters learner autonomy and ensures that learning outcomes remain central throughout the WBL experience.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Role of the mentor or in-company trainer

The delivery of WBL depends heavily on the role of in-company mentors or trainers. In Malta, mentors support apprentices in achieving learning outcomes by guiding them through logbook tasks. In Slovenia, mentors provide weekly evaluations aligned with pre-defined learning goals. However, in Member States like Bulgaria, where mentor roles are less formalised, delivery tends to be more reactive and less aligned with learning outcomes.

Lessons learnt: from (intended) learning outcomes to learning experiences

Planning and delivering WBL based on learning outcomes requires more than just formal documents. It depends on collaborative design, mutual understanding of expectations and the pedagogical capacity of mentors. Member States with strong planning tools, personalised plans and joint monitoring systems are more successful in turning intended learning outcomes into meaningful learning experiences. For others, additional investment in mentor training and structured tools could significantly improve implementation.

4.4. Company support for trainers

The successful implementation of learning-outcomes-based WBL depends not only on curriculum frameworks or school–company cooperation but also on the capacity of in-company trainers and mentors to translate learning outcomes into daily practice. This section explores the types of support that companies provide to in-company trainers, highlighting training opportunities, guidance materials, internal coordination mechanisms and the institutional context that enables or hinders effective delivery.

Internal guidance and coordination mechanisms

Some companies offer internal support structures to help trainers navigate their mentoring role. In Ireland, for example, larger employers appoint experienced supervisors or human resource personnel to assist new trainers. In some organisations, internal guidelines map specific workplace tasks to learning outcomes, offering a ready-made reference for trainers. In Lithuania, while structured internal guidance is less common, schools often step in to fill the gap. VET teachers prepare support materials and conduct on-site visits to provide coaching. However, in smaller enterprises, such support may be absent, placing the full burden of interpretation on individual trainers.

Collaborative support from schools and intermediaries

The role of schools and intermediary organisations in supporting company trainers is critical. In Portugal, schools provide companies with a training guide that outlines learning outcomes and example tasks. This is complemented by regular visits from VET coordinators. In France, chambers of commerce occasionally offer optional workshops for company tutors, although uptake remains limited. In Ireland, employers receive assessment briefs that include clear descriptions of learning outcomes. Tutors visit companies during WBL to support both learners and trainers, offering real-time guidance and clarification. In Finland, workplace instructors are involved in planning and assessment, supported by clear documentation and coaching from VET institutions (see Box 10).

Box 10. Supporting the trainer role in Finland

In Finland, in-company trainers, referred to as 'workplace instructors', play a vital pedagogical role in the delivery of WBL. VET providers systematically support trainers before, during and after each WBL period to ensure that learners acquire the skills and competences defined in the national qualification requirements. Before a learner begins their placement, trainers receive detailed documentation from the VET provider, including the relevant competence unit, the student's PCDP and instructions on how to guide learning and participate in assessment. In some cases, such as in large healthcare providers, a VET teacher may even be stationed on-site to provide continuous support. During the WBL period, trainers guide students through real work tasks aligned with learning outcomes. A midway feedback session, often involving the VET teacher, is organised to assess progress, identify challenges and adapt the learning approach if needed. Trainers are encouraged to give formative feedback and help students reflect on their learning process. Trainers also participate in competence demonstrations at the end of the WBL period, co-assessing learners' performance with VET teachers. VET providers offer ongoing support, including training, online materials and workplace visits, to help trainers fulfil their pedagogical responsibilities effectively.

Source: Authors based on country case studies.

Lessons learnt: supporting trainers strengthens learning outcome implementation

Effective delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL requires intentional, structured support for in-company trainers. Where trainers are equipped with pedagogical tools, training and institutional backing, they can translate learning outcomes into meaningful workplace learning. Member States that invest in mentor training, develop clear guidance materials and facilitate ongoing dialogue between trainers and VET institutions see higher levels of quality and consistency in WBL implementation. Bridging the gap between professional expertise and educational guidance remains key to realising the full potential of learning outcomes in practice.

4.5. Concluding remarks

Learning-outcomes-based curricula provide a foundational framework for WBL across the case study Member States. However, limited awareness or use of learning outcomes by companies remains a key barrier to bridging policy and practice. Table 3 presents a summary of case study authors' assessments of the extent to which company-level factors, such as context, tools, instructions and cooperation, support the application of learning outcomes. As only a limited number of companies were visited in each Member State in the course of this study, and the application of learning outcomes in companies has been minimally researched, this table is of an indicative nature. The degree of support varies

across Member States: in some, like the Netherlands and Finland, integration is comprehensive and well established; in others, such as Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia, progress is evident but uneven, with VET schools often compensating for weak company-level structures. Importantly, no Member State falls into the category of having no implementation at all, suggesting that learning outcomes are at least partially embedded in all systems. While some Member States have developed robust mechanisms to support alignment between workplace learning and intended outcomes, others are still in the process of strengthening their approaches towards full integration.

Table 3. **Company context, tools, instructions and cooperation to support learning outcomes being used in WBL (meso level), 2025**

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Bulgaria	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies acknowledge learning outcomes as part of national curricula but rely heavily on VET schools for curriculum development, with limited direct engagement in designing or interpreting learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While VET schools take the lead in developing WBL curricula, tools like individual diaries and consultations with companies indicate progress towards integrating learning outcomes into cooperation.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The planning and delivery of WBL rely heavily on VET schools, with limited direct involvement of companies in structuring learning outcomes, indicating progress but not yet full embedding.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While mentors have access to some training under the Ministry of Education and Science's programme and receive ad hoc support from VET schools, the explicit focus on learning outcomes in WBL remains insufficiently developed.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Bulgaria, learning outcomes are integrated into WBL to some extent, but the level of company involvement is limited. Companies provide feedback rather than shaping the curriculum directly, which results in only the partial integration of learning outcomes into the workplace learning process.

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Ireland	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While companies are familiar with learning outcomes in qualifications, they view them as implicit components and depend on VET providers for detailed implementation and alignment in WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies support WBL through assignment briefs linked to national learning outcomes, but their minimal role in programme development reflects the partial embedding of outcomes in cooperation.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learning outcomes are a foundational part of the assessment briefs used in WBL, but companies demonstrate limited direct engagement in planning or adjusting these outcomes, reflecting partial integration.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is limited systematic support or CPD for trainers in delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL, although strong relationships between early learning and care certificate providers and FET colleges offer informal guidance.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although companies recognise learning outcomes as integral to qualifications, their reliance on VET providers for implementation and their limited involvement in programme development underscore the need for greater collaboration to achieve full integration in WBL.
France	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies recognise competences within the WBL framework but lack an explicit integration of learning outcomes into structured training or planning, often relying on traditional apprenticeship models.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While sector bodies influence curriculum design and tools like the <i>livret de stage</i> track progress, limited direct communication between companies and VET schools hinders the full integration of learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While learning outcomes are formally referenced through the Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles (National Directory of Professional Qualifications) framework, companies show limited engagement with pedagogical approaches or assessment processes linked to learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although there is informal collaboration between VET schools and companies, the lack of systematic CPD or resources for trainers limits the embedding of learning-outcomes-based WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In France, learning outcomes guide WBL curricula, but their integration varies. While there is a strong framework in place and collaboration occurs between companies and VET schools, the practical implementation of learning outcomes in the workplace is sometimes not fully formed, depending on the sector.

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Lithuania	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Employers align tasks with national learning outcomes but treat them as implicit guidelines, with limited awareness or structured engagement beyond adherence to VET programme requirements.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies play an active role in translating national VET programmes into tailored plans, but the reliance on VET schools for curriculum design shows room for greater company-driven integration of learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although companies demonstrate flexibility in adapting learning outcomes to reflect industry needs, limited involvement of learners in planning processes indicates that full embedding has not been achieved.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While some general training is provided, there is no explicit focus on learning outcomes in CPD, reflecting limited progress towards embedding learning-outcomes-based WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> At the national level, VET programmes provide a framework for WBL in Lithuania, but the influence of learning outcomes is limited by the level of support from VET schools and companies. While learning outcomes guide the curricula, their application in workplace learning is still developing.
Malta	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Companies support learning outcomes and recognise their role in guiding apprenticeships, although the operationalisation of learning outcomes is often delegated to MCAST and in-company supervisors.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Recent reforms aim to enhance flexibility in using learning outcomes, but the primarily administrative communication between companies and VET schools indicates limited practical integration.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Despite awareness of learning outcomes, companies rely on general terms and lack specific alignment with apprenticeship agreements, indicating progress but a still incomplete integration of learning outcomes into WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The absence of targeted training or resources for trainers on learning outcomes hinders embedding, although MCAST's engagement with employers provides a foundation for further development.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While companies increasingly acknowledge the importance of learning outcomes, inconsistent application and limited collaboration between VET schools and employers highlight the need for strengthened mechanisms to fully embed learning outcomes into WBL.

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Netherlands	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Companies actively use learning outcomes, particularly in structured industries like childcare, embedding them into quality assurance and personal development systems, although practices vary by sector.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are well integrated through sectoral tools, personal development plans and regular collaboration between companies and VET schools, although practices vary by sector.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes form the basis of qualification files and WBL processes, with clear alignment between schools and companies, robust assessment practices and strong learner responsibility, reflecting full integration.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Support for in-company trainers varies significantly by sector and company. While some training programmes exist, formal requirements for applying learning outcomes approaches are lacking.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> The Netherlands demonstrates a fully integrated approach, where learning outcomes are embedded into WBL frameworks. Cooperation between VET schools and companies, with support from sectoral bodies like the SBB, ensures that learning outcomes continue to guide training and assessment across sectors.
Poland	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Large companies interviewed systematically integrate learning outcomes into their training, medium-sized companies align internship tasks with student specialisations, and smaller companies engage with learning outcomes on a more flexible, ad hoc basis. In every case, practical training with employers serves to implement the teaching programme, achieving the learning outcomes defined in the core curriculum.	<u>Not embedded</u> Formal agreements rarely reference learning outcomes explicitly, but the teaching programmes with defined learning outcomes are obligatorily annexed to the agreements. Collaboration is predominantly pragmatic and informal, and employers – particularly smaller ones – do not commonly engage with learning outcomes in discussions.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies follow the learning-outcomes-structured core curriculum, but their ability to design learning-outcomes-based training remains limited. Some examples of large companies demonstrate full alignment, while others prioritise practical tasks over formal learning outcome integration.	<u>Not embedded</u> While some large companies provide structured and accredited training, most in-company trainers/instructors receive no dedicated support for integrating learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The embedding is not yet structurally ensured. Some large companies systematically integrate learning outcomes, medium-sized companies align tasks with student specialisations and small companies follow the learning-outcomes-structured core curriculum, but progress is hindered by a lack of formal references to learning outcomes in agreements, limited employer engagement and insufficient support for in-company trainers.

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Portugal	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies implicitly incorporate learning outcomes into WBL through task alignment and mentorship but lack an explicit understanding or use of learning outcomes as a formal framework for training.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> VET schools lead WBL planning with learning-outcomes-based frameworks that allow companies to tailor tasks while maintaining alignment through robust communication and evaluation tools.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While WBL plans structured around learning outcomes are used, companies and tutors show limited awareness of the concept.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although companies provide general training with components relevant to WBL and ensure adequate working conditions for trainers, the lack of dedicated support for learning outcomes limits full embedding.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The partial integration of learning outcomes into WBL in companies can be seen in Portugal. While national guidelines are in place, practical application at the company level may often depend on the collaboration of VET schools, leading to variability in how well learning outcomes are incorporated in workplace learning.
Slovenia	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Companies comply with national guidelines and align tasks with competences, but the explicit recognition and structured use of learning outcomes in planning and delivery are limited.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learning outcomes are based on occupational standards and implemented through predefined objectives, but limited company involvement in curriculum design restricts their full embedding.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although companies utilise national catalogues of competences and monitor learners' performance, limited attention to detailed learning outcomes and pedagogical approaches suggests that embedding is not yet achieved.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> The companies invest extensively in mentor training and have mechanisms for applying learning outcomes, supported by regular communication with VET schools, reflecting a well-embedded approach.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Slovenia has a well-defined legal framework through which learning outcomes can guide WBL. However, while companies follow national guidelines closely, there is limited flexibility in tailoring learning outcomes to individual workplace contexts. The system is structured, but there is room for improved collaboration between companies and VET schools to optimise the use of learning outcomes.

Member State	Company management views on the use of learning outcomes in WBL	Use of learning outcomes in cooperation and communication between company and VET school	Planning and delivery of learning-outcomes-based WBL	Company support for trainers delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the meso level
Finland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Employers fully integrate learning outcomes into task planning and assessment, demonstrating a clear understanding of and alignment with national vocational qualification requirements.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> The use of PCDPs ensures that learning outcomes are central to planning, communication and assessment, with companies and VET schools working closely within a nationally structured framework.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are at the core of WBL planning and delivery, with clear alignment of vocational qualification requirements, PCDPs and company practices, ensuring thorough integration.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Comprehensive support, structured collaboration with VET providers and the integration of learning outcomes into workplace tasks and assessments demonstrate a robust implementation of learning-outcomes-based WBL.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a well-structured system in Finland, where national vocational qualification requirements and local implementation plans steer WBL / workplace learning. Companies and VET schools tend to collaborate closely, with systematic tools and frameworks in place to ensure that learning outcomes are central to the WBL / workplace learning experience.

NB: 'Firmly embedded (dark green)' means that learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational and present in national, school-/company-level documentation and perspectives. 'Advancing to embedding (light green)' means that, while learning outcomes are generally applied and/or are present in relevant documentation, their application in practice is not considered foundational for developments and implementation. This category includes cases where the presence and application of learning outcomes is more implicit in nature. 'Not embedded (light red)' means that no evidence was available to determine the presence of an approach or application.

CPD, continuous professional development.

Source: Authors' assessment based on Member State case studies.

The evidence highlights promising practices and persistent challenges across Member States and sectors.

- (a) **Shared understanding begins with communication.** Clear, structured communication between VET schools and companies is critical for ensuring that learning outcomes are understood, contextualised and delivered effectively. In Member States where personalised learning plans, regular feedback loops and joint planning are institutionalised – such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland – learning outcomes are more than policy tools; they are embedded in practice.

- (b) **Trainers are key, but often undersupported.** In-company trainers and mentors play a central role in operationalising learning outcomes. However, they are often underprepared and undersupported. Where systems provide structured training, such as in Slovenia, or close school–company cooperation, as in Finland, trainers can deliver high-quality learning experiences. In contrast, the absence of training, resources or recognition can reduce the effectiveness of WBL delivery, even in systems with strong legal frameworks.
- (c) **Planning tools enable alignment.** Effective planning – through national catalogues, personal development plans and logbooks – helps connect intended learning outcomes to concrete workplace tasks. Member States with established tools and clear guidance mechanisms enable companies to engage more meaningfully in the planning and delivery of WBL.
- (d) **Context and culture shape implementation.** Sectoral differences and organisational cultures play a decisive role in how learning outcomes are applied. Training-intensive sectors such as healthcare or childcare tend to show higher engagement with learning outcomes than sectors focused on manual or technical skills, where WBL may be more task-oriented. Similarly, large organisations often have more resources to support trainers than smaller enterprises.
- (e) **Intermediaries and liaison roles make a difference.** Dedicated liaison roles – such as WBL organisers, mentor coordinators or intermediaries – are essential for bridging the institutional cultures of VET schools and companies. Their ability to translate learning outcomes into workplace-relevant practices supports not only learners but also company staff in their mentoring roles.

CHAPTER 5.

The perspectives and practices of in-company trainers

Key findings

- (a) The interviewed in-company trainers in the case study Member States were mostly aware of the learning outcomes included in the (national) WBL curricula, with the level of awareness varying by sector, occupation, individual trainer and job function. Sometimes in-company trainers lack a clear opinion on the advantages and disadvantages of learning outcomes, but they recognise the importance of learning outcomes for delivering training and their relevance to working life.
- (b) In all 10 case study Member States, in-company trainers report having considerable autonomy in how they deliver WBL, while they feel less involved in defining WBL content.
- (c) In-company trainers typically are not familiarised with the concept of learning outcomes and learning-outcomes-based approaches during their initial professional preparation. Continuous professional development (CPD) for in-company trainers is usually voluntary and the link to learning outcomes in these training sessions is more often implicit than explicit.

The views and experiences described below are of an exploratory nature and cannot be seen as representative of an entire Member State. These views and experiences were collected in the interviews and focus groups during the site visits conducted in the context of this study.

5.1. Trainers' views on learning outcomes

This section presents findings from the case studies on in-company trainers' familiarity with and awareness and understanding of learning outcomes, the benefits and challenges they associate with learning outcome orientation, their perceived levels of autonomy and flexibility in the 'delivery' of learning outcomes and their involvement in the definition of learning outcomes for WBL.

Familiarity with and level of awareness and understanding of learning outcomes

The interviews with in-company trainers indicate that in most Member States they are familiar with the learning outcomes approach and associated teaching

methods and practices. Levels of awareness vary and partly depend on macro-level factors such as how well the learning outcomes approach is established in a Member State and for how long it has been in place. For instance, Finnish in-company trainers interviewed showed a profound understanding of intended learning outcomes, which can be partly explained by the fact that the learning outcomes approach has been fully integrated into Finnish VET for many years. The experiences of Irish in-company trainers are similar to those of their Finnish counterparts, as learning-outcomes-based approaches have been part of Ireland's FET sector for years. However, levels of awareness of learning outcomes can also vary by sector, occupation, company, individual trainer and a trainer's specific function; this variation is most clearly captured in the Dutch case study.

In Member States where learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational components of the VET systems and are firmly embedded in documentation and practical applications, such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, evidence indicates that in-company trainers have high levels of understanding of the concepts and the practice. This is manifested in a more mature practical application that involves reflections on their changing practices. In contrast, in Member States where these concepts are generally present in relevant documentation but their application in practice shows inconsistencies or is not as foundational, in-company trainers reported having had limited opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of these concepts. As a result, while they also appear to apply the concepts to their WBL practice, at least to a certain extent, this application has been observed as more implicit in nature, as opposed to appreciating and utilising learning outcomes as an underlying guiding principle. For example, in some of the companies, such as those visited in Lithuania and Slovenia, trainers were not familiar with the terminology of learning outcomes. In such cases, the interviews explored the components of the terminology, namely that learning outcomes signify what learners should know, understand and be able to do at the end of the learning process that leads to the acquisition of competences. The conversations revealed that it was the pedagogical terminology that trainers were less familiar with, as opposed to the concepts' relevance to WBL or their practical applications.

On the one hand, trainers' limited awareness of learning outcomes terminology can be attributed to the fact that they typically do not receive specific training as trainers and the majority of them become familiar with learning outcome descriptions through collaborations with VET providers during the preparation of WBL. On the other hand, as seen in Slovenia, trainers often do not use national documents or published guidelines on learning-outcomes-based approaches and rely on the curricula and any additional documentation they may receive from the

VET school as their main sources of information. In the absence of structured training or national regulations on learning-outcomes-based approaches to WBL, the VET schools can play a role in preparing guidelines that accompany the curricula for WBL partners. Such documents can accompany the preparatory work schools do with in-company trainers, to enhance clarity and understanding of the specialised, pedagogical language of curricula.

Beneficial aspects of learning outcomes

The interviews conducted point to a wide range of views on learning outcomes, with most reflecting on beneficial aspects. These refer particularly to the orientation and communication function of learning outcomes and their relevance to the work context. In Lithuania, Portugal and Finland, in-company trainers emphasised learning outcomes as a kind of orientation tool providing clarity on what should be achieved, how trainers should lead the process, in what activities and situations they have to involve learners and what tasks they need to assign to them. The communication with VET providers is seen as crucial in guiding trainers in how to deliver learning outcomes. For example, in Bulgaria, in-company trainers sometimes seek help from VET teachers for the formulation of practical assignments so that these can be better aligned with intended learning outcomes. Similarly, in Finland, trainers stated that they are sometimes uncertain about the work tasks they need to select to ensure that students are provided with suitable learning situations and opportunities to achieve the learning objectives set. In such cases, trainers find solutions after consultations with colleagues, company management and the VET provider representatives. In addition, Malta's case illustrates that good relationships between national- and college-level mentors and in-company trainers can be an important factor for success, as they can facilitate discussions on the learning outcomes of WBL and the selection of appropriate tasks within the companies to achieve these learning outcomes.

Another beneficial aspect expressed relates to the relevance of learning outcomes to the company context (e.g. job-specific skills requirements) and the different types of competences they include, occupation-related and cross-cutting ones. For instance, Portuguese in-company trainers find learning outcome descriptions useful in that they make them aware not only of occupation-related skills but also of cross-cutting competences that learners should develop, demonstrate and possibly use in their future job(s). Finnish trainers acknowledged the 'high working life relevance' of learning outcomes, meaning that the learning outcomes are a good reflection of what is expected from future employees.

Challenges related to the learning-outcomes-based approach

The interviews did not reveal strong views among in-company trainers regarding challenges associated with learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach. Multiple factors may have influenced this finding. On the one hand, the limited familiarity with the terminology and the presence of implicit, intuitive applications of the learning outcomes approach in WBL practice across some of the Member States – coupled with the limited provision of structured and regular initial and CPD training opportunities for trainers to learn and develop their skills regarding learning-outcomes-based approaches – may be a contributing factor. On the other hand, as outlined below, the flexibility that in-company trainers tend to enjoy when it comes to tailoring the tasks students perform may also explain why they did not identify multiple challenging aspects. However, the few points made by the interviewees are worth highlighting here. The challenges noted relate to the sometimes-identified lack of relevance of learning outcomes, the difficulty of capturing cross-cutting competences and the need to adapt learning outcomes to the needs of individual learners.

Interviewed Bulgarian trainers, for example, while recognising the overall relevance of learning outcomes, pointed to cases where specific learning outcomes were outdated or relevant contemporary learning outcomes were missing from the WBL content (e.g. digital skills in the automobile industry). In France, some in-company trainers drew on ‘small divergences’ in the learning outcomes delivered at school and those required in the workplace, highlighting that trainers ‘always manage to get by’ (i.e. they mitigate these divergences). Irish in-company trainers interviewed noted how capturing cross-cutting competences was challenging when using the learning outcomes framework, although they added that WBL plays an important role in developing such skills. Another French trainer pointed out that learning outcomes tend to ‘put learners in boxes’. The point made can be associated with the need to customise learning outcomes approaches to the needs of the learners so that the learning outcomes function effectively for each individual learner. This kind of adjustment can also be linked to the trainers’ perception of autonomy and ownership, as will be outlined in the next few sections.

Considerable autonomy and flexibility in delivering learning outcomes

In all Member States explored, in-company trainers reported having considerable leeway in how they deliver WBL, including the selection of teaching methods and tools and the order in which they deliver learning outcomes. The perceived autonomy can be attributed to the necessity of adjusting WBL to company needs, learner characteristics (motivation, skills) and/or a lack of mandated national or provider-level approaches on how to deliver training. For instance, in the

Netherlands, learning outcomes are considered 'flexible', as they are dependent on the nature of the work and the work tasks and therefore are not strictly defined by VET programmes. In Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Finland, there are no explicitly mandated training methods, which gives trainers the flexibility to decide the best ways to deliver training and thus meet the intended learning outcomes. In Bulgaria, WBL curricula are structured according to topics and days of the week, which does not always match the work tasks students really perform. While work tasks intend to cover both intended learning outcomes and company needs or clients' request (e.g. 'whatever car and damage there is to be repaired'), this can sometimes create tension. In such situations, in-company trainers find a solution by shifting tasks earlier or later so that most of the intended learning outcomes can be achieved by the end of the work-based training. In this context, Portuguese trainers highlighted that each WBL experience can only address part of the intended learning outcomes and they considered this as something 'natural'. While this autonomy and flexibility is generally appreciated, in-company trainers from Poland expressed a preference for receiving guidelines regarding the practical skills the VET schools wish for them to focus on, in an effort to provide a more structured, programme-aligned WBL experience.

Limited involvement in defining learning outcomes for WBL

While trainers generally feel that they have a relatively high degree of autonomy in the use of learning outcomes, they also acknowledged that they have limited involvement in defining the content of WBL, with some slight variations. For example, in Bulgaria, around 10 % of the content of WBL is reserved for company-specific needs, and in-company trainers, together with managers, are consulted to define this part. In Lithuania, trainers frequently advise VET teachers which theoretical topics should receive greater emphasis in school to facilitate practical training within the company. Further, instead of altering the learning outcomes specified in the programme, they often integrate supplementary topics into the teaching and learning process (e.g. trainers organise additional training on familiarising learners with the specific equipment and technologies used in the company). In the Netherlands, trainers have limited direct involvement in revising the learning outcomes unless they are involved in the national-level process of revising the qualification files or are consulted for that purpose. In Portugal, in-company trainers did not express a desire for more involvement in determining learning outcomes, saying that they felt satisfied with the flexibility they have in delivering the training.

Lessons learnt: trainers as key translators of learning outcomes

The case studies reveal that in-company trainers across Member States generally support the use of learning outcomes in WBL, appreciating their role in clarifying expectations and guiding learners' development. However, familiarity with the terminology and pedagogical implications of learning outcomes varies widely, often depending on national traditions, sectoral context and the extent of collaboration with VET providers. Trainers value the flexibility they have in adapting tasks to real work situations, but this autonomy is not always balanced with structured support or training. While most interviewed trainers are not directly involved in defining learning outcomes, they play a critical role in interpreting and applying them in diverse workplace settings. The findings highlight the importance of enhancing trainers' pedagogical capacity, improving communication with VET institutions and providing clearer guidance to strengthen the consistency and effective implementation of learning outcomes in practice.

5.2. Use of learning outcomes by trainers

With regard to the use and influence of learning outcomes in WBL, the approaches in the case study Member States differ in terms of the explicit or implicit use of learning outcomes for the planning and preparation of the WBL process, the extent of learner-centredness in WBL and the relationship between in-company trainers and students, and the extent to which learning outcomes are used in assessment processes in WBL.

Implicit use of learning outcomes for the planning and preparation of WBL processes

Data from case study Member States revealed that in-company trainers to some extent align learning outcomes with practical work assignments. For example, trainers in Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia often make implicit connections between training approaches and intended learning outcomes, as VET providers have a lead role in planning and preparing WBL content. This means that the VET providers link the content of WBL to the national VET programme for explicit learning outcome descriptors. As a result, trainers use the WBL content developed by the VET provider and not the national VET programme per se. Choices of pedagogical methods are also usually implicitly aligned with learning outcomes. For example, in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Portugal, trainers assign students practical tasks that are relevant to the company's current demands, provided that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved through them. In France and Slovenia, the in-company trainers interviewed often rely on

their personal experiences when selecting training approaches and methods rather than explicitly following the intended learning outcomes. In Poland, the use of learning outcomes follows a similarly rather 'implicit' application, where trainers are aware of the intended learning outcomes but there is less clarity on the connection between these and their applied training approaches. Similarly, in Malta, although the use of learning outcomes is more evident in the assessment of the WBL component, the leadership role of MCAST mentors in these processes influences the extent to which in-company trainers feel motivated and empowered to take ownership of certain parts (e.g. going through and checking each individual learning outcome for WBL).

Use of learning outcomes in WBL with strong learner-centred approaches

Some case studies clearly demonstrate the use of learning outcomes in WBL that both meet the needs of the company and reflect a learner-centred approach. In Finland, the WBL process is planned jointly by the student, the VET provider and the company, leading to the creation of a student's PCDP, which specifies the main work tasks and intended learning outcomes, among others. As trainers consider the learning outcome descriptions included in the PCDP as highly relevant to industry requirements, in most cases they do not have difficulties aligning learning outcomes with company-specific work tasks. In the Netherlands, students are expected to plan the WBL process for themselves, with trainers responding to students' learning and training needs rather than completing the planning for the student. In Ireland, the learner-centred ethos of FET informs the choices of training approaches and methods, with in-company trainers acting as learning facilitators as opposed to instructors. Ensuring that learners take responsibility for their learning is seen as especially important in the early learning centres, as this reflects the approach of the early childcare and education sector in general. The learning-outcomes-based curriculum, in this context, is a mutually reinforcing and integral component of the learner-centred pedagogy.

Relationship between in-company trainers and students

Regarding the role of in-company trainers, site visits strongly signal that trainers are increasingly acting as facilitators and enablers of learning rather than as traditional instructors. They guide, coach and support learners to become more independent in carrying out work tasks. There is, however, no evidence suggesting a direct link between the changing role of trainers and the use of learning outcomes. For instance, in Bulgaria and Lithuania, trainers do not specify the learning objectives or competences to be obtained for each practical assignment but focus instead on task completion and application in real working life.

Developments related to the role of trainers can be attributed primarily to the logic of the WBL process; that is, in most of the Member States studied, in-company trainers provide more direct instruction and support at the beginning of WBL. This support gradually decreases as learners become more capable and gain more experience. For example, in the social and healthcare sector in Finland, it seems to be quite common for students to start their WBL period working together with the in-company trainer. The trainer keeps an eye on the student and explains what is being done and why. When the trainer is 'convinced' that the student is capable of managing the tasks they are assigned, the student gets more independence and responsibility but stays under the supervision of the trainer. In Slovenia, at the beginning of WBL phases, trainers provide learners with theoretical instructions related to work processes and equipment.

The changing role of in-company trainers partly correlates with the changing role of learners. For instance, in Finland, learning is entirely based on students' own active work and performance by having them do real work in real working life situations. In all in-company training sessions observed in Lithuania, learners were encouraged to independently carry out practical tasks based on their individual knowledge and skills, clearly indicating the use of learner-centred approaches. In the Netherlands, students are seen as responsible for their own learning process, and hence trainers act more as co-workers, facilitating and providing feedback rather than directly instructing. In Slovenia, learning modalities are shifting towards more learner-centred methods, including active learning, flexible learning and problem-based learning, but not so much self-directed learning. The extent to which these methods are used in the context of learning-outcomes-based curricula depends on the school and the programme in which the learner is enrolled. However, no information was provided on whether trainers have any insight into these methods.

Use of learning outcomes in assessment processes in WBL

Assessment practices in WBL vary across Member States, but with common elements such as the provision of regular feedback and the involvement of trainers in formative assessment procedures. Differences lie in the methods and tools used, some sector-specific practices, the involvement of trainers in summative assessment procedures and the level at which assessment criteria (summative assessment) are set (national/provider).

Regarding formative assessment, a practice of regular feedback provision to track and discuss learners' progress was reported by in-company trainers in Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Finland. This practice aims to monitor learners' progress and is based on a collaborative approach involving in-

company trainers, students and VET teachers. In Finland, (formative) assessment methods and practices differ depending on the sector and the VET provider. For example, when a student starts a WBL period in social and healthcare, trainers have feedback discussions with students to review their progress against intended learning outcomes and to plan future tasks. More informal feedback (e.g. during coffee or lunch breaks or in the car on the way to a client) complements these feedback discussions. In Lithuania, sector-specific practices are also observed: in the welding company visited, trainers set a specific quota for the number of metal components students must weld each training day using specific welding methods. At the end of the training session, in-company trainers evaluate the students' performance based on whether they met the required quota and quality standards, measuring productivity and identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, this form of assessment serves as a self-assessment tool for students, allowing them to track their progress and determine whether their productivity levels change with each training session.

While in-company trainers across all Member States studied are directly involved in formative assessment procedures, this is not always the case for summative assessment. With regard to summative assessment, this can be explained by the form of WBL applied or considerations related to the objectivity and impartiality of assessment. For example, in Slovenia, the trainers interviewed do not directly assess learners' performance, as they are not involved in the delivery of apprenticeships (but are involved in another form of WBL). By way of contrast, in France, trainers (apprenticeship supervisors) are not directly involved in summative assessments, as these are performed by an independent and professional jury (i.e. considerations related to the objectivity and impartiality of assessment). In Finland, summative assessment procedures (competence demonstrations) are the same for all sectors; the process is clearly defined in VET legislation and steered by VET providers. At all stages, in-company trainers base their assessments on learning outcomes defined in vocational qualification requirements, which also include assessment criteria. In the Netherlands, summative assessments are externally developed and guided by external examination providers. They provide in-company trainers with assessment criteria, instruction and assignments.

Lessons learnt: from implicit practice to informed pedagogy

The case studies reveal that, while in-company trainers play an essential role in delivering learning-outcomes-based WBL, their use of learning outcomes often remains implicit and heavily shaped by contextual factors such as company practices, sectoral culture and the degree of collaboration with VET providers. In

systems where learning outcomes are embedded in personalised learning plans and jointly developed training processes, learner-centred approaches are more visible and trainers are better positioned to act as facilitators of learning. However, in many cases, trainers rely on intuition and experience rather than formal pedagogical frameworks, particularly where documentation is unclear or support is limited.

5.3. Training, guidance and support experienced by trainers

While company interviews showed that some Member States have guidance and support systems for trainers, the interviews with trainers conducted during the site visits indicated largely that there is no structured approach to the provision of institution-level training and support for trainers. For example, as trainers are not required to undergo initial professional preparations, they are typically not introduced to learning outcomes approaches or the acquisition of pedagogical and psychological knowledge, as noted in all Member States studied. Interviews with Finnish trainers revealed that familiarisation with the concept of learning outcomes varies by age – that is, younger trainers who have acquired VET qualifications based on the competence-based approach have a clear understanding and experience of it, while older generations do not. In Ireland, as learning-outcomes-based approaches have long been part of FET, many in-company trainers have taken part in earlier versions of the same programme that their learners are now undertaking. This familiarity with the concept and how it works in practice is being handed down as professional standards across generations. In Poland, while trainers are required to complete a pedagogical course to qualify as in-company practical training instructors, this covers an extensive array of topics over a relatively short time, namely 48 hours of instruction.

Regarding CPD, which is usually not mandatory or regulated ⁽⁸⁾, a common feature across Member States is that it is typically offered by VET providers, since companies usually rely on them when it comes to pedagogical support for the delivery of WBL. In-company trainers typically take part in CPD on a voluntary basis and the link to learning outcomes is more often implicit rather than explicit (i.e. training addresses only some aspects relevant to learning outcomes). For example, CPD offers predominantly focus on enhancing trainers' preparedness to effectively coordinate WBL for students, helping them to become facilitators of the

⁽⁸⁾ For further information on CPD arrangements for VET trainers in the case study Member States, see Cedefop (2024a, pp. 125–127).

learning process through using self-directed learning, listening to students and monitoring and assessing learners' progress. It was only in Finland that the trainers interviewed emphasised receiving training explicitly addressing the use of learning outcomes in WBL.

In some Member States, in-company trainers reported being introduced to the use of learning outcomes in a more informal way: in Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania and Portugal, this mostly happens through communication with VET teachers or through the support provided by company management. For instance, in Bulgaria, teachers sometimes help trainers to formulate and link work tasks with learning outcome descriptions. Trainers in one of the companies visited in Lithuania indicated that they receive support from management through the provision of training. Such training is designed for all company employees (trainers) who manage other employees and focuses on enhancing leadership skills, effectively coordinating work, increasing overall productivity and maintaining team motivation. Although the training is not centred around learning outcomes approaches, they are argued to be highly beneficial when working with students as well. In Portugal, staff managing human resources usually explain the role of in-company trainers to them, including related expectations and instructions on how to best support students and monitor and assess their learning outcomes.

Other kinds of support or guidance that trainers see as linked to learning-outcomes-based approaches relate to templates for assessment, developed within specific projects (Bulgaria), and online support sites (Finland).

Overall, while these forms of support received and used seem to be limited, they are not considered necessary by companies and/or trainers in many cases. For example, in-company trainers in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia reported that they did not feel the need for additional training on learning outcomes. In the Lithuanian context, this is explained by the fact that trainers perceive guiding students as fairly clear and intuitive.

However, some trainers expressed a wish for more training, support and guidance. For example, in-company trainers interviewed in Finland expressed a clear desire for more resources being allocated (time, finances, facilities) – that is, they typically practise the role of trainer as part of their usual work, without any additional time or resources allocated to it. They also expressed a wish for clearer learning outcome descriptions that show them how to align intended learning outcomes with real work tasks. In France, trainers expressed an interest in learning more about pedagogical aspects (e.g. alignment between the learning outcomes acquired at school and those to be delivered through WBL) and how to increase learners' well-being during WBL. The Netherlands exhibits sectoral differences in trainers' perceptions of support and preparedness. In the welding company visited,

the trainers generally did not feel well equipped to guide and support students. Nevertheless, they acknowledged that their engagement with training helped them to be more aware of their role and how to better support students. In the childcare companies visited, trainers felt well equipped and supported, as they graduated from the same qualification programme as the students, providing them with a similar background and an opportunity to better relate to students' journeys, and because CPD is firmly embedded in this sector, exposing trainers to new approaches and insights on a near daily basis.

Lessons learnt: strengthening trainer support for learning-outcomes-based WBL

The case studies show that, while in-company trainers are central to delivering effective WBL, structured support and training related to learning outcomes remain limited and uneven across Member States. Initial training is often minimal or non-existent, and CPD tends to focus more on general facilitation than on explicitly linking tasks to learning outcomes. Support is often informal, provided through collaboration with VET providers or internal company guidance, and largely depends on sectoral culture and individual initiative. Many trainers do not perceive an urgent need for further training, often relying on intuitive practices. However, some express a clear desire for more time and resources and clearer guidance on aligning learning outcomes with real-world tasks. These insights point to the need for more consistent, accessible and targeted support systems that enhance trainers' pedagogical understanding and help embed learning outcomes meaningfully in WBL practice.

5.4. Concluding remarks

This chapter presented the implementation of learning outcomes at the micro level, looking at a small and non-representative sample of teaching and learning practices in WBL environments. Based on the analysis, Table 4 provides an overview of the degree to which in-company trainers use learning outcomes to plan and execute their job as trainers. Since only two practices were described and considered per Member State, and learning outcomes' application in WBL is researched only to a very limited degree, the table is of an indicative nature. In assessing the degree of application, the authors considered the assessments made by national experts looking at the level of awareness of in-company trainers, how in-company trainers align learning outcomes with work tasks / practical assignments and the existence of a structural approach in the provision of institution-level training (initial and continuous) and support to in-company trainers.

Based on observations, interviews and focus groups, it can be concluded that most in-company trainers interviewed are aware of learning outcomes and use them to some extent, albeit often rather implicitly. Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland are outliers, as the use of learning outcomes there is firmly embedded. In summary, most in-company trainers perceive the learning outcomes approach as useful and relevant. They use learning outcome descriptions as the content of WBL, which is typically developed or supported by VET providers. In doing so, trainers link the practical work assignments with the intended learning outcomes, which does not always work smoothly, as difficulties in formulating the assignments and/or selecting the most suitable ones are experienced. It is worth noting that the in-company trainers interviewed appear to be able to use learning outcomes, although they are not usually introduced to learning outcomes in their initial and/or continuous training.

It is worth noting that there may be a correlation (positive or negative) between the degrees of application at the micro level (in-company trainers) and those at the meso level (company context) (see Table 4).

Table 4. **Indication of the extent to which in-company trainers are able to use learning outcomes in WBL environments (micro level), 2025**

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Bulgaria	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers are aware of the national curricula and WBL curricula, and they have the opportunity to provide input to WBL curricula and intended learning outcomes in some cases. While the use of learning outcomes in their daily practice is more 'intuitive,' trainers have the autonomy to select the training activities and the sequence of tasks.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers are aware of learning outcomes and their place in the curricula. Interviewees also indicate that they use learning outcomes in formulating a task linked to intended learning outcomes; these are recorded in individual diaries. However, the assessments do not steer the WBL content and delivery.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is no initial professional training for mentors in Bulgaria. In relation to CPD, mentors can take part in training activities that offer basic pedagogical and psychological knowledge and skills to mentors. Such opportunities are unregulated and optional.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In-company trainers use learning outcomes implicitly, guided by individual diaries, but there is no standardised approach to or guidelines on consistently applying learning outcomes

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Ireland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers are fully aware and supportive of learning outcomes, especially as learning outcomes have long been part of FET. With an explicit national approach in place, trainers' roles and responsibilities are well defined. While they have no autonomy to determine the learning outcomes, trainers have scope to develop how the learning activities are structured, creating a sense of ownership of the process.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning-outcomes-based curricula and learner-centred pedagogies have long been part of FET and also the early learning and care sector learning culture. Trainers are more learning facilitators than instructors. They are, nevertheless, strongly guided by the assessment briefs developed by college teachers, which link to the learning outcomes learners need to achieve.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Despite the long tradition of learning-outcomes-based approaches in FET, there is no systematic CPD in place for trainers. However, as many trainers are graduates of the same programme they are supporting, they are familiar with the formal and informal professional standards reflected in the learning outcomes.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers are fully familiar with and feel a sense of autonomy in applying learning-outcomes-based approaches. While there is no systematic CPD in place, the strong relationship between trainers and programme coordinators helps bind the different components together.
France	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> National guidelines and regulations for tutors and apprenticeship supervisors are in place. Trainers are also aware of learning outcomes and feel that they have enough autonomy to mentor interns and apprentices. However, this sense of ownership is linked to the training process overall as opposed to the learning-outcomes-based approach in particular.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While trainers are aware of learning outcomes, they do not use the descriptors to prepare the WBL process, leaving their practical application rather inconsistent. With a quite informal approach to preparing and delivering the WBL, trainers see themselves as facilitators of professional learning. Assessment criteria and modalities are set nationally.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Recently, a certification process for apprenticeship trainers was introduced, aiming to certify trainers' competences and support their professionalisation as trainers. The uptake and implementation of this appears to be sporadic to date.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While trainers are aware of learning outcomes, their practical application varies, and more systematic communication with VET schools is somewhat lacking.

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Lithuania	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers showed limited awareness of learning outcomes and learning-outcomes-based approaches; the unfamiliarity, however, mainly pertains to the terminology itself. They also do not tend to conceptualise the various teaching methods they employ as complementary pedagogical practices. Trainers have significant flexibility in how they train, but they have little influence over the content (the learning outcomes).	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While the intended learning outcomes are recorded in the training schedule, trainers typically select tasks based on their professional experience and not explicitly based on the learning outcomes. Trainers do tend to act as facilitators, putting emphasis on supporting learners in undertaking tasks independently. They are involved in formative assessments, providing students with feedback and areas for improvement.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is no mandatory training for in-company trainers to qualify for their role. Trainers can voluntarily undertake pedagogical training courses offered by, for example, VET schools. In some cases, companies provide in-house training on leadership skills, coordination and managing teams, which trainers consider relevant to working with students as well.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers adhere to the learning outcomes set by VET schools, but gaps remain in their explicit use of these approaches due to limited pedagogical training.
Malta	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In-company trainers have limited in-depth knowledge of learning outcomes; therefore, their sense of ownership is rather limited. While they have a degree of freedom to assign tasks, they do not decide these with close reference to the learning outcomes identified for WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Using learning outcomes in the assessment of WBL is more evident and structured, although the trainers have limited input and roles in the process (with MCAST mentors taking the lead and overall responsibility).	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers have limited opportunity to engage in training in general and specifically on the use and application of a learning-outcomes-based approach.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers have limited in-depth knowledge of learning outcomes and apply them rather implicitly. Structured training and awareness-raising activities could help close gaps in practice and contribute to developing their sense of ownership.

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Netherlands	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers are aware of learning outcomes and learning-outcomes-based approaches, although this can be rather implicit and more rooted in the fact that learning outcomes in the Dutch system (by design) tend to be aligned with the work processes of companies. The trainers have limited autonomy in terms of revising the learning outcomes, although they have flexibility in designing work tasks.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers use the learning outcomes for planning the learning process only to a limited degree, but this is because the students lead the planning of their own learning process. In this approach, trainers are seen as co-workers who facilitate the self-learning of a VET student. Trainers do not develop summative assessment, with this being lead by external examination providers.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is no formal qualification requirement to operate as an in-company trainer in place; however, there are guidelines on the competences of trainers. Trainers have various initial and CPD training opportunities, although these do not explicitly consider learning-outcomes-based approaches. However, they do implicitly cover the topic, as the learning-outcomes-based approach is part of the Dutch system by design.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In-company trainers effectively implement learning outcomes in WBL, integrating them into their practices.
Poland	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers show awareness of learning outcomes and their place within the curricula. However, this does not translate into a sense of ownership of the application of learning-outcomes-based approaches to WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learning outcomes from WBL appear to develop rather informally, based on company or industry-relevant activities, as opposed to through informed planning.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is limited opportunity for basic training, as the pedagogical training to qualify as an in-company trainer is very short. Trainers tend to rely on industry-relevant professional experience to guide students.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While trainers are aware of learning outcomes, there is limited explicit application or sense of ownership. Structured training and closer collaboration with VET schools could help develop their practices.

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Portugal	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers have limited awareness of learning outcomes, first encountering the concept through their WBL planning work with the VET school. While they are not involved in determining the learning outcomes, they have flexibility within WBL delivery to develop and adjust the tasks and their sequencing.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Company tutors consult the learning outcome descriptions included in the WBL plan as guidance for the activities planned. However, the connection between the two is rather implicit in nature. The assessments also do not appear to steer how trainers organise and structure WBL content and delivery.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Company tutors often receive initial and CPD training to host students, but, when they receive it, the strengthening of pedagogical competences – including the learning-outcomes-based approach – does not appear to form a core part of the training.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers informally use learning outcomes but lack systematic training. Their reliance on personal experience means that they adjust the curriculum to fit the WBL environment.
Slovenia	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The awareness of trainers is rather limited from the pedagogical perspective, although they follow the VET schools' curricula for WBL. With no explicit national approach to adhere to, trainers have flexibility in devising the practicalities of training. While they are not involved in determining the learning outcomes, the flexibility to customise the tasks provides them with a sense of autonomy in relation to that aspect.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers use learning outcome descriptions to plan the WBL; this is entirely based on documentation from the VET school. Assessments are not carried out by trainers in WBL in Slovenia, but they do monitor students' progress. This monitoring of students' progress provides evidence of the presence of a learning-outcomes-based approach to a certain extent.	<u>Not embedded</u> No evidence of training for trainers was identified for their roles as in-company trainers specifically. While trainers do receive initial VET training, this focuses on the profession as opposed to pedagogy or a mentoring role in WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers use learning outcomes to plan and evaluate tasks based on VET school guidelines, but their approach is often implicit, without explicit reference to learning outcomes terminology.

Member State	In-company trainers' views on learning outcomes	Use and influence of learning outcomes on WBL, trainers' role and assessment	Training, guidance and support regarding learning outcomes	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – trainers
Finland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In-company trainers show a great awareness and understanding of the role of learning outcomes. When developing learning objectives for WBL, trainers focus on the practical skills of learning. While they cannot set the learning outcomes, they can influence how the students learn in the workplace.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers use the learning outcomes defined in the qualification requirements; these are aligned with work-related needs. Trainers consider WBL a way for students to learn about the daily practices of the profession. Trainers participate in students' assessment during WBL and provide guidance to students during their WBL as preparation.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While there is no formal pedagogical qualification requirement for workplace instructors in Finland, VET providers are responsible for ensuring that WBL places are suitable for WBL. VET providers offer training and other forms of support to workplace instructors and workplaces to ensure the quality of WBL. Trainers learn about learning-outcomes-based approaches during this training.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In-company trainers consistently use learning outcomes that are integrated into national qualification requirements and PCDPs, embedding them deeply into training practices.

NB: 'Firmly embedded (dark green)' means that learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational and present in national, school-/company-level documentation and perspectives. 'Advancing to embedding (light green)' means that, while learning outcomes are generally applied and/or are present in relevant documentation, their application in practice is not considered foundational for developments and implementation. This category includes cases where the presence and application of learning outcomes is more implicit in nature. 'Not embedded (light red)' means that no evidence was available to determine the presence of an approach or application.

Source: Authors' assessment based on Member State case studies.

The evidence highlights promising practices and persistent challenges across Member States.

- (a) **Understanding and interpreting learning outcomes.** In-company trainers across Member States generally support the use of learning outcomes, recognising their value in clarifying expectations and structuring workplace learning. However, the depth of understanding varies. In Member States like Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, where learning outcomes are embedded in national VET systems, trainers demonstrate a stronger grasp of their pedagogical relevance. In contrast, in Lithuania and Slovenia, learning outcomes are often applied intuitively, with limited familiarity with the terminology.

- (b) **Applying learning outcomes in practice.** Trainers commonly use learning outcomes to guide training, even if implicitly. In Bulgaria and Portugal, trainers adapt tasks to meet company needs while aiming to fulfil intended outcomes. Learner-centred practices are especially visible in Ireland and Finland, where learners take an active role in planning and reflecting on their progress, supported by trainers acting as facilitators rather than instructors.
- (c) **Assessment and feedback practices.** Formative assessment involving regular feedback is common across most Member States, including France, Poland and Slovenia. However, involvement in summative assessment remains limited in several systems due to legal or procedural constraints. In Finland, trainers are involved throughout the competence demonstration process, with assessments clearly linked to learning outcomes.
- (d) **Leeway in delivery but limited involvement in design.** Trainers often enjoy autonomy in delivering WBL but are rarely involved in defining learning outcomes. In Bulgaria and Lithuania, they may contribute suggestions or adapt delivery, but the core content is usually predefined. In Portugal, trainers report being satisfied with delivery flexibility, even if they do not participate in outcome development.
- (e) **Inconsistent training and support.** Structured support for trainers is limited. While some, like those in Finland, receive targeted training on learning outcomes, most rely on informal guidance from VET providers, as seen in Bulgaria, France and Portugal. Trainers in the Netherlands show sectoral variation: those in childcare feel well prepared, while others, such as those in welding, report feeling under supported.

CHAPTER 6.

The perspectives and practices of learners

Key findings

- (a) Learners benefit most when learning outcomes are clearly communicated and connected to their workplace tasks. Tools such as individual learning plans, assessment briefs and qualification files help clarify expectations and foster active engagement.
- (b) Authentic, real-world tasks enhance learners' motivation and can support competence development. When learners can apply their knowledge in meaningful scenarios, they report deeper learning and a stronger commitment to their future profession.
- (c) Learning outcomes can promote learner responsibility, but only when supported by structured feedback. Supervisors and tutors play a crucial role in enabling this transition.
- (d) The visibility and understanding of learning outcomes vary widely across Member States and systems. Terminology, communication and pedagogical integration are critical factors in making outcomes relevant and actionable.
- (e) When learning outcomes are poorly aligned with tasks or perceived as formalities, they fail to enhance the learner experience. Addressing this requires better alignment between school and workplace expectations, more reflective practices and increased involvement of learners in planning and assessment.

This chapter examines how vocational learners across 10 Member States engage with learning outcomes during WBL. It explores three key dimensions: (1) learners' awareness and understanding of learning outcomes, (2) the influence of a learning-outcomes-based approach on the learner experience and (3) how such approaches affect learners' motivation, responsibility and progression. Drawing on qualitative interviews and field observations, the analysis highlights both enabling conditions of and obstacles to the meaningful engagement of learners with learning outcomes.

6.1. Learners' awareness and understanding of intended learning outcomes

Learners' awareness of learning outcomes during WBL varies widely across Member States, ranging from high levels of engagement in systems with strong

learning-outcomes-based planning to minimal or implicit references in more task-oriented settings.

High awareness in strongly structured systems

Learners' awareness of learning outcomes tends to be high in Member States with well-structured, outcomes-based VET systems that actively engage learners in their own learning process. In Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, learning outcomes are embedded in institutional frameworks that actively involve learners in the planning and monitoring of their own learning process. In Finland, students work with PCDPs that clearly specify the competences to be acquired and the tasks through which they will be demonstrated. Learners reported having a clear sense of direction and valued the alignment between school-based preparation and workplace experience. Similarly, in Ireland, assessment briefs at the module and programme levels clearly communicate the expected learning outcomes. Learners not only understand these outcomes but also use them to structure their placement activities and engage in discussions with tutors and supervisors. In the Netherlands, qualification files define core tasks and work processes, and students reported being well informed about what they needed to achieve and how their daily tasks mapped onto qualification standards.

Formal understanding without a practical link

In systems where learning outcomes are formally embedded but less integrated into daily practice, such as in France and Poland, learners often show awareness of expected achievements without a clear link to their practical application. In France, learners are generally aware of the skills required to obtain their diplomas, but they often lack a deeper understanding of how workplace tasks connect to the broader competence-based framework. Several students described a mismatch between classroom learning and the demands of real-world practice. For example, while theoretical knowledge was covered in school, they struggled to apply it in unpredictable workplace situations, particularly when dealing with interpersonal challenges such as customer relations. Similarly, in Poland, students tended to focus primarily on exam requirements and summative assessment criteria, rather than on the development of practical competences through daily work tasks. Learning outcomes were rarely referenced explicitly by learners. Some students questioned the relevance of their assigned workplace activities to their occupational goals, pointing to a perceived misalignment between the curriculum and the realities of the work environment.

Limited awareness in task-oriented contexts

In more task-oriented contexts, such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia, learners' awareness of learning outcomes tends to be limited, often overshadowed by the immediate demands of workplace tasks and operational routines. In Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia, students often start their WBL periods with some level of awareness of learning outcomes, gained through classroom preparation or documentation provided by schools. However, this awareness tends to diminish in the workplace, where immediate tasks and operational demands take precedence. Learners in Portugal and Slovenia described how company tutors rarely referred back to learning outcomes during WBL. Instead, learners were assigned tasks based on availability and company needs, with less emphasis on personal learning goals. In Lithuania, most learners interviewed were unfamiliar with the term 'learning outcomes'. Even after an explanation, many struggled to see how workplace tasks aligned with their intended competences. Similarly, in Bulgaria, the interviewed learners received a curriculum at the start of the year that included learning outcomes but, once in the company, their focus shifted almost entirely to completing daily tasks. While mentors followed a training diary that documented activities completed, tools used and problems encountered, this instrument functioned more as a checklist than a developmental guide. A similar pattern emerged in Malta, where interviewed learners were not familiar with the learning outcomes listed in their apprenticeship training agreement. Although individual tasks were often explained by supervisors, students lacked awareness of how these tasks contributed to their overall qualification goals. As in Bulgaria, the logbook was used mainly to record activities, rather than to reflect on competence development.

Lessons learnt: learners' awareness depends on the role learning outcomes play

Learners in Member States with transparent, well-communicated frameworks – such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland – demonstrate a clear understanding of learning outcomes and how these relate to their WBL. In other systems, particularly in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia, learning outcomes are less consistently integrated into workplace learning, often overshadowed by immediate operational demands.

6.2. Influence of learning outcomes on learners' experience and progression

The application of a learning-outcomes-based approach influences the learner experience in multiple ways. Where learning outcomes are clearly embedded in planning and delivery, learners describe their WBL as more structured, motivating and relevant to future employment. Conversely, limited awareness or weak alignment between learning outcomes and workplace tasks can reduce engagement and clarity, leading to a more passive or task-driven experience.

Making learning meaningful through practice

Across Member States, interviewed learners consistently described WBL as more engaging and practically oriented than school-based instruction. In Bulgaria, Lithuania and the Netherlands, apprentices associated WBL with developing practical skills, gaining independence and building confidence. Compared with classroom-based learning, which was often viewed as abstract or theoretical, learners expressed a preference for learning by doing. In Finland, the integration of learning outcomes into authentic professional contexts was particularly strong. Healthcare students recounted practising injections on oranges and sponges in school, but only during WBL did they face the real challenge of injecting a patient. One student described how a patient reacted aggressively, requiring emotional regulation and post-event reflection with the workplace instructor. These experiences helped learners build not only technical skills but also cross-cutting competences such as communication, emotional control and resilience, all core components of the intended learning outcomes. In Ireland, learning outcomes helped learners frame their work experience. One student explained how, during an assessed assignment, they negotiated expectations with both their tutor and company supervisor to ensure that the tasks supported their learning goals. Similarly, in Portugal, learners reviewed both the intended learning outcomes and the host company profile before starting their placement. While the term 'learning outcomes' was not always used, the underlying logic of learning-outcomes-based learning was reflected in tutor feedback, observation-based evaluation and authentic task assignments. Learners in France also expressed appreciation for clear learning targets. One student noted that knowing which competences they were expected to develop helped them stay focused and made their learning more structured. This clarity translated into a stronger sense of responsibility and ownership over their development.

From guidance to autonomy: gradual progression and professional identity

The link between learning outcomes and learner autonomy was especially evident in Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, where interviewed learners were encouraged to take initiative and gradually assume more responsibility. In Dutch companies, for instance, students in welding and childcare began working under close supervision but were soon managing tasks and equipment independently. This progression helped to build confidence and professional identity. In Portugal, while certain sensitive or high-risk tasks were restricted, learners were otherwise trusted to participate in real work scenarios. This balance between guidance and responsibility helped learners build both technical competences and soft skills in realistic environments.

In contrast, Member States such as Lithuania, Malta and Poland showed more limited engagement of learners with learning outcomes. Students in these Member States tended to view outcomes as formalities embedded in documentation, rather than practical tools to guide learning. As a result, they often focused on completing tasks without a deeper reflection on the competences they were developing, limiting their progression towards self-directed learning.

Learners' responsibility, motivation and progression

A recurring theme across all Member States is the connection between learning outcomes and learner motivation and responsibility. When learners understand the skills they are working towards and are supported in achieving them, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning process. In the Netherlands and Slovenia, students described gradually gaining autonomy as their placements progressed. Supervisors played a key role, offering structured guidance at the outset and stepping back once students demonstrated competence. This progressive responsibility fostered both engagement and confidence. In Bulgaria and France, students were trusted to complete tasks but described limited opportunities for self-direction. Their mentors remained closely involved, and students rarely discussed planning or evaluating their own learning. In Malta, WBL was often described as a series of tasks to complete, with little reference to broader goals. In Lithuania, students followed daily routines but lacked clarity on how their work contributed to competence development. Where learning outcomes were clearly communicated and integrated, such as in Ireland and Finland, learners expressed strong motivation and a clear sense of purpose. Irish learners described 'owning their learning', supported by regular tutor check-ins and transparent outcome expectations. Finnish learners, guided by the PCDP and a strong feedback culture, were encouraged to take initiative, reflect on their development and view themselves as active participants in their vocational journey.

Lessons learnt: learner experience shaped by structure, practice and responsibility

The case studies show that learners engage most meaningfully with learning outcomes in WBL when these are clearly communicated, practically applied and supported through feedback and collaboration. Systems like those in Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate how structured approaches empower learners to take ownership of their development and connect classroom theory with workplace realities. Where outcomes are less visible or poorly aligned with tasks, as seen in several other Member States, learners tend to focus on task completion rather than competence building. Overall, the integration of learning outcomes into WBL enhances not only the relevance of training but also learners' motivation, autonomy and progression.

6.3. **Concluding remarks**

Overall, the implementation of learning-outcomes-based approaches in WBL environments varies significantly across Member States. In contexts where these approaches are firmly embedded, students' guidance by learning outcomes plays a pivotal role in their progression. Conversely, in Member States where these approaches are only partially implemented or not embedded during WBL, students tend to focus more on task completion, with limited reflection on how these specific tasks impact their overall development of competences. There is an assessment provided in Table 5, with further evidence to support these claims given in the subsequent sections.

Table 5. Indication of the extent to which students are aware of the learning-outcomes-based requirements and how this influences their progression (micro level), 2025

Member State	Learners' awareness of intended learning outcomes	Influence of learning outcomes on learners' experience and progression	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – learners
Bulgaria	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners are not involved in developing WBL curricula but they receive information about their learning outcomes at the beginning of the year.	<u>Not embedded</u> Learning outcomes are not used. Individual diaries are more focused on task completion than understanding how these tasks contribute to the knowledge and skills learners are meant to develop.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Bulgaria, students have limited awareness about learning outcomes. In workplace learning, they track completed tasks and assignments rather than knowledge and skills related to intended learning outcomes.
Ireland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learners are fully aware of learning outcomes in WBL through VET programmes and assessment briefs where they are core elements.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes guide learners through WBL, encouraging self-directed learning, helping them take responsibility and ensuring equality with company employees.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Ireland employs a participatory approach to implementing learning outcomes in the workplace. Learners are fully informed about learning outcomes in WBL by college teachers and plan their achievements together with in-company supervisors.
France	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners are aware of the competences they are expected to attain for their diploma, but are not necessarily aware of how they are to be applied in WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Knowing the expected competences in advance can benefit learners by making them more responsible for and engaged with their learning process. Learning outcomes also help them to recognise coherence or misalignment between school learning and practical application during WBL periods.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although learners in France are seemingly aware of the competences they need to achieve, there is a disconnect between classroom learning and real-world application. Learners tend to focus on immediate tasks rather than more deeply engaging with learning outcomes.
Lithuania	<u>Not embedded</u> The learners interviewed indicated limited awareness of learning outcomes.	<u>Not embedded</u> During training sessions, learners are provided with specific tasks to be completed in a given time frame without explicit reference to the skills and competences they will develop through these tasks.	<u>Not embedded</u> In Lithuania, findings suggest that learners are not familiar with learning outcomes and learning outcomes approaches in the workplace. Learners struggle to connect the tasks they complete in the workplace with the competences they are expected to develop.

Member State	Learners' awareness of intended learning outcomes	Influence of learning outcomes on learners' experience and progression	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – learners
Malta	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is a limited awareness of learning outcomes among the apprentices.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners do not consider learning outcomes a tool that directs their learning process. They discuss learning outcomes with workplace supervisors but are often referred to outcomes of individual work tasks, not those in learning agreements.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners often do not fully grasp that learning outcomes indicate the knowledge and skills they need to acquire. Instead, they concentrate on completing tasks assigned by trainers.
Netherlands	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learners are aware of the learning outcomes and how they are assessed in both school-based learning and WBL, as they are introduced to the qualification file at the start of their studies.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes guide the WBL process. Students typically understand their progress in terms of these outcomes and what is required to complete the programme and take an exam.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learners in the Netherlands are well informed about learning outcomes from the start of their WBL, benefiting from structured guidance.
Poland	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Students may not use the term 'learning outcomes', yet they demonstrate an awareness of the teaching programme and assessment criteria and an understanding of whether workplace activities are aligned with them.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners do not refer to learning outcomes as a guiding principle in WBL. Instead, they are more focused on the content of WBL and how completing tasks will help them to pass exams.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Poland, the WBL tasks assigned to the students do not come with clearly defined learning outcomes. Therefore, learners have a superficial understanding of the skills and knowledge acquired in WBL. They tend to assess tasks in terms of exam preparation.
Portugal	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainees are mostly aware of the learning-outcomes-based requirements, especially in the beginning of the WBL experience.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In the workplace, learners shift their focus from learning outcomes to tasks assigned. It cannot be stated that the learning-outcomes-based requirements influence learners' progression other than them being used to register the tasks / learning outcomes accomplished as WBL progresses.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners in Portugal indicate starting with a clear understanding of their intended learning outcomes in the classroom. However, once in the workplace, their focus shifts to completing tasks set by company tutors, who try to reconcile them with personal learning goals whenever possible.

Member State	Learners' awareness of intended learning outcomes	Influence of learning outcomes on learners' experience and progression	Overall indication of embedding learning outcomes at the micro level – learners
Slovenia	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners are aware to some extent of the requirements based on learning outcomes, but mostly at the school level.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> At the WBL level, learners mainly focus on tasks and work processes, not linking them directly to learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners in Slovenia are briefed on learning outcomes at the start of the academic year, but their awareness mostly remains theoretical, with limited connection to practical tasks during their WBL placements.
Finland	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Students demonstrate a clear understanding and awareness of required learning outcomes, how they will acquire them in WBL and how they will be assessed.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> As learners take an active role in planning WBL, they know how learning outcomes are aligned with work tasks and what competences and skills they will acquire.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Finnish learners demonstrate a strong awareness and understanding of learning outcomes, actively aligning their work-based tasks with the competences they need to develop.

NB: 'Firmly embedded (dark green)' means that learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational and present in national, school-/company-level documentation and perspectives. 'Advancing to embedding (light green)' means that, while learning outcomes are generally applied and/or are present in relevant documentation, their application in practice is not considered foundational for developments and implementation. This category includes cases where the presence and application of learning outcomes is more implicit in nature. 'Not embedded (light red)' means that no evidence was available to determine the presence of an approach or application.

Source: Authors' assessment based on Member State case studies.

Learning outcomes enhance engagement, when clearly integrated

A consistent message emerging from the case studies is that, when learning outcomes are clearly communicated and embedded in the planning and delivery of WBL, learners are better able to understand, engage with and benefit from their training. In Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, interviewed learners demonstrated high awareness of what they were expected to achieve and how workplace tasks contributed to broader learning goals. Structured instruments like PCDPs, assessment briefs and qualification files made learning outcomes visible and actionable. Learners in these systems were not only informed of but actively involved in shaping their learning process – planning tasks, reviewing progress and negotiating expectations with trainers and tutors. In contrast, in systems where learning outcomes were less embedded in workplace practices, learners often viewed them as bureaucratic formalities or disconnected from their day-to-day tasks. In Member States such as Lithuania, Malta and Poland, students had only a limited awareness of learning outcomes and did not use them as reference points for their development. Instead, they focused on

completing assignments or meeting assessment requirements, often without a clear understanding of the competences being developed.

Practical relevance and situated learning drive learner motivation

Across Member States, learners consistently described WBL as more engaging than school-based learning due to its hands-on, practical nature. The learning-outcomes-based approach was particularly effective when aligned with authentic work scenarios. In Finland, for instance, learners described a transformative shift when moving from simulated exercises to real patient care. These experiences not only enabled them to apply technical skills but also helped develop cross-cutting competences such as communication, resilience and decision-making, core components of occupational readiness. Learners also reported feeling more motivated when they saw the relevance of their tasks to their future profession. In Portugal, although the terminology of learning outcomes was not always used, the principles were reflected in workplace practices: structured feedback, observation-based evaluation and access to real tools and equipment allowed learners to understand and demonstrate their competences. In Ireland and France, learners appreciated having clearly defined targets, which gave structure and meaning to their work and supported their sense of ownership. However, where tasks were disconnected from formal learning goals or perceived as irrelevant to learners' future careers, as noted in Lithuania and Poland, motivation and reflection declined.

Learner responsibility and progression depend on supportive structures

The degree to which learners took responsibility for their own learning varied significantly across Member States. In systems where learning outcomes were integrated into personalised plans and supported through regular feedback, such as in Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, students were encouraged to take initiative and reflect on their progress. Supervisors and tutors played a critical role in gradually transferring responsibility to learners, enabling a shift from dependence to autonomy. In contrast, in Member States such as Bulgaria, France and Malta, students were often guided through tasks without being explicitly involved in planning or evaluating their learning. Although mentors were supportive, the focus remained on task execution rather than building learners' agency.

CHAPTER 7.

Conclusions

7.1. Overall mapping of learning outcome integration

This report has explored the use of learning outcomes in WBL in IVET within the settings of national policies and arrangements, and the various perspectives and practices of companies, in-company trainers and learners. Table 6 brings the assessments related to policies, companies, trainers and learners regarding the embedding of learning outcomes together in an indicative heat map of how learning outcomes are embedded in WBL in IVET ⁽⁹⁾.

Table 6. **Indicative heat map of how learning outcomes are integrated into WBL in IVET, 2025**

Member State (maturity of WBL in IVET)	National policies and arrangements	Perspectives and practices of companies	Perspectives and practices of in- company trainers	Perspectives and practices of learners
Bulgaria (less mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> National guidelines exist for WBL, but the role of employers in developing curricula remains unclear, leading to less structured collaboration than in other Member States. This approach can lead to a reactive rather than proactive role for companies, which hinders the effective application of learning outcomes in WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Bulgaria, learning outcomes are integrated into WBL to some extent, but the level of company involvement is limited. Companies provide feedback rather than shaping the curriculum directly, which results in only the partial integration of learning outcomes into the workplace learning process.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In-company trainers use learning outcomes implicitly, guided by individual diaries, but there is no standardised approach to or guidelines on consistently applying learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Bulgaria, students have limited awareness about learning outcomes. In workplace learning, they track completed tasks and assignments rather than knowledge and skills related to intended learning outcomes.

⁽⁹⁾ Due to the limited number of interviews and the exploratory, qualitative approach of the study, the findings/table should be read as giving an indication of trends rather than a comprehensive presentation of the facts.

Member State (maturity of WBL in IVET)	National policies and arrangements	Perspectives and practices of companies	Perspectives and practices of in- company trainers	Perspectives and practices of learners
Ireland (less mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes are central to the Irish WBL system. The system leaves a high level of autonomy to schools and companies to develop the pedagogical approach, with limited national-level support.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although companies recognise learning outcomes as integral to qualifications, their reliance on VET providers for implementation and their limited involvement in programme development underscore the need for greater collaboration to achieve full integration in WBL.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Trainers are fully familiar with and feel a sense of autonomy in applying learning-outcomes-based approaches. While there is no systematic CPD in place, the strong relationship between trainers and programme coordinators helps bind the different components together.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Ireland employs a participatory approach to implementing learning outcomes in the workplace. Learners are fully informed about learning outcomes in WBL by college teachers and plan their achievements together with in-company supervisors.
France (more mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes (or competences) are firmly integrated into the structure of the VET and WBL system, steered through assessment regulations and the description of courses and modules. Less emphasis is on providing support to develop pedagogical approaches in WBL using learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In France, learning outcomes guide WBL curricula, but their integration varies. While there is a strong framework in place and collaboration occurs between companies and VET schools, the practical implementation of learning outcomes in the workplace is sometimes not fully formed, depending on the sector.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While trainers are aware of learning outcomes, their practical application varies, and more systematic communication with VET schools is somewhat lacking.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Although learners in France are seemingly aware of the competences they need to achieve, there is a disconnect between classroom learning and real-world application. Learners tend to focus on immediate tasks rather than having a deeper engagement with learning outcomes.
Lithuania (less mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a flexible approach to WBL, where national guidelines provide a broad framework for the integration of learning outcomes into WBL, but implementation is often left to individual VET schools and companies. This flexibility allows for adaptation to different industries but can also lead to inconsistency in how effectively learning outcomes are achieved.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> At the national level, VET programmes provide a framework for WBL in Lithuania, but the influence of learning outcomes is limited by the level of support from VET schools and companies. While learning outcomes guide the curricula, their application in workplace learning is still developing.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers adhere to the learning outcomes set by VET schools, but gaps remain in their explicit use of these approaches due to limited pedagogical training.	<u>Not embedded</u> In Lithuania, findings suggest that learners are not familiar with learning outcomes and learning outcomes approaches in the workplace. Learners struggle to connect the tasks they complete in the workplace with the competences they are expected to develop.

Member State (maturity of WBL in IVET)	National policies and arrangements	Perspectives and practices of companies	Perspectives and practices of in- company trainers	Perspectives and practices of learners
Malta (more mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learning outcomes form the basis of the Maltese WBL system, mainly coordinated by one institution (MCAST). This also ensures that there are national-level pedagogical guidelines on and support structures for using learning outcomes in WBL. Further, assessments focus on the achievement of learning outcomes by students.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While companies increasingly acknowledge the importance of learning outcomes, inconsistent application and limited collaboration between VET schools and employers highlight the need for strengthened mechanisms to fully embed learning outcomes into WBL.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers have limited in-depth knowledge of learning outcomes and apply them rather implicitly. Structured training and awareness-raising activities could help close gaps in practice and contribute to developing their sense of ownership.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners often do not fully grasp that learning outcomes indicate the knowledge and skills they need to acquire. Instead, they concentrate on completing tasks assigned by trainers.
Netherlands (more mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> National frameworks ensure that learning outcomes are central to VET, with strong collaboration between employers and educational institutions. Further, the integration of learning outcomes into both theoretical and practical aspects of training ensure a high degree of alignment between education and industry.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> The Netherlands demonstrates a fully integrated approach, where learning outcomes are embedded into WBL frameworks. Cooperation between VET schools and companies, with support from sectoral bodies like the SBB, ensures that learning outcomes continue to guide training and assessment across sectors.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In-company trainers effectively implement learning outcomes in WBL, integrating them into their practices.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Learners in the Netherlands are well informed about learning outcomes from the start of their WBL, benefiting from structured guidance.

Member State (maturity of WBL in IVET)	National policies and arrangements	Perspectives and practices of companies	Perspectives and practices of in- company trainers	Perspectives and practices of learners
Poland (less mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> There is a structured framework ensuring collaboration between VET schools and employers, aligning practical training with the core curriculum, but the lack of explicit learning outcome requirements in training agreements and the absence of a comprehensive national assessment framework create variability in implementation and evaluation.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The embedding is not yet structurally ensured. Some large companies systematically integrate learning outcomes, medium-sized companies align tasks with student specialisations, and small companies follow the learning-outcomes- structured core curriculum, but progress is hindered by a lack of formal references to learning outcomes in agreements, limited employer engagement and insufficient support for in-company trainers.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> While trainers are aware of learning outcomes, there is limited explicit application or sense of ownership. Structured training and closer collaboration with VET schools could help develop their practices.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> In Poland, the WBL tasks assigned to the students do not come with clearly defined learning outcomes. Therefore, learners have a superficial understanding of the skills and knowledge acquired in WBL. They tend to assess tasks in terms of exam preparation.
Portugal (less mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> National regulations outline the WBL structure, and support communication between stakeholders and the development and alignment of pedagogical approaches in WBL and schools. In addition, assessment procedures are firmly based on learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> The partial integration of learning outcomes into WBL in companies can be seen in Portugal. While national guidelines are in place, their practical application at the company level may often depend on the collaboration of VET schools, leading to variability in how well learning outcomes are incorporated in workplace learning.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers informally use learning outcomes but lack systematic training. Their reliance on personal experience means that they adjust the curriculum to fit the WBL environment.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners in Portugal indicate starting with a clear understanding of their intended learning outcomes in the classroom. However, once in the workplace, their focus shifts to completing tasks set by company tutors, who try to reconcile them with personal learning goals whenever possible.

Member State (maturity of WBL in IVET)	National policies and arrangements	Perspectives and practices of companies	Perspectives and practices of in- company trainers	Perspectives and practices of learners
Slovenia (more mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> A well-defined legal framework exists, with legislation that clearly outlines the roles of schools and employers, requirements for mentors and adequate working conditions. However, the effectiveness of WBL depends on the cooperation between VET schools and employers during implementation.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Slovenia has a well- defined legal framework through which learning outcomes can guide WBL. However, while companies follow national guidelines closely, there is limited flexibility in tailoring learning outcomes to individual workplace contexts. The system is structured, but there is room for improved collaboration between companies and VET schools to optimise the use of learning outcomes.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Trainers use learning outcomes to plan and evaluate tasks based on VET school guidelines, but their approach is often implicit, without explicit reference to learning outcomes terminology.	<u>Advancing to embedding</u> Learners in Slovenia are briefed on learning outcomes at the start of the academic year, but their awareness mostly remains theoretical, with limited connection to practical tasks during their WBL placements.
Finland (more mature concerning WBL in IVET)	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a comprehensive system where national vocational qualification requirements strongly guide WBL / workplace learning, ensuring consistent and outcomes-based learning across various contexts. Company and VET school collaboration is well established, which ensures that learning outcomes can be achieved effectively.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> There is a well- structured system in Finland, where national vocational qualification requirements and local implementation plans steer WBL / workplace learning. Companies and VET schools tend to collaborate closely, with systematic tools and frameworks in place to ensure that learning outcomes are central to the WBL / workplace learning experience.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> In-company trainers consistently use learning outcomes that are integrated into national qualification requirements and PCDPs, embedding them deeply into training practices.	<u>Firmly embedded</u> Finnish learners demonstrate a strong awareness and understanding of learning outcomes, actively aligning their work- based tasks with the competences they need to develop.

NB: 'Firmly embedded (dark green)' means that learning outcomes and the learning-outcomes-based approach are foundational and present in national, school-/company-level documentation and perspectives. 'Advancing to embedding (light green)' means that, while learning outcomes are generally applied and/or are present in relevant documentation, their application in practice is not considered foundational for developments and implementation. This category includes cases where the presence and application of learning outcomes is more implicit in nature. 'Not embedded (light red)' means that no evidence was available to determine the presence of an approach or application.

Source: Authors' assessment based on Member State case studies.

The heat map shows that the integration of learning outcomes into WBL is generally more advanced in national regulations and documents (macro level) than at the company level (meso level) and the in-company trainer and learner level (micro level). This provides an indication that, while regulations may be in place, the implementation and integration of learning outcomes in company training plans and the preparation of trainers are not yet fully in place, calling for additional emphasis and action. Further, the heat map shows that it is not necessarily the case that the embeddedness of learning outcomes follows a purely top-down approach, travelling from policy development to application in companies. The situations in some Member States show that using learning outcomes can be fully embedded at one level while not being fully embedded at higher levels. This is, for instance, the case in Ireland.

When looking at Member State differences, the heat map shows clear differences in learning outcome integration across various levels. Member States like the Netherlands and Finland exhibit comprehensive learning outcome integration across national regulations, pedagogical approaches, company training practices and learner awareness. These Member States benefit from robust frameworks ensuring that learning outcomes guide the structure and delivery of WBL, with strong employer engagement and extensive support for trainers. In contrast, Bulgaria, Malta, Poland and Slovenia show more fragmented integration, with learning outcomes playing a role in certain aspects (e.g. assessment) but lacking systematic application across all levels. In Poland, for example, learning outcomes are included in policy frameworks but are not always explicitly referenced in company training agreements. However, practical WBL must support the implementation of the school teaching programme complementing school-based education. This decentralised approach leads to variability in how the teaching programmes are implemented in the workplace. Bulgaria's reliance on VET schools to lead WBL efforts results in limited employer participation in designing learning outcomes and aligning them with workplace needs. In Slovenia, while there is a legal framework for learning outcomes in WBL, in-company trainers receive minimal pedagogical training, which affects the depth of learning outcome application in practice.

The level of integration (not embedded, advancing to embedding or fully embedded) across four main dimensions – national policies and arrangements, perspectives and practices of companies, perspectives and practices of in-company trainers, and perspectives and practices of learners – is closely associated with the level of maturity in terms of developing WBL practices in IVET. Member States with mature systems, such as the Netherlands and Finland, show strong learning outcome integration across all dimensions, whereas Member

States like Lithuania and Portugal have gaps in pedagogical guidelines and employer collaboration. National regulations are critical in setting expectations, but the role of employer-driven pedagogical innovation and learner engagement remains crucial in ensuring the full integration of learning outcomes into WBL. On the other hand, Slovenia, despite being a Member State deemed more mature concerning WBL in IVET, is not assessed as having fully embedded learning outcomes. Here, one remaining challenge is further operationalising the learning outcomes approach being applied in WBL (at all levels).

A key insight from the heat map is the strong correlation between the degree of employer engagement and the depth of learning outcome integration. Member States with well-developed apprenticeship models, employer–VET collaboration structures and CPD support for trainers show higher levels of embedding (France, the Netherlands, Finland). On the other hand, where employers are less involved in defining training content, the application of learning outcomes remains less advanced (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovenia).

7.2. Cross-cutting themes

This study reveals several themes that cut across the policy (macro), company (meso) and trainer–learner (micro) levels. These cross-cutting issues illustrate the interdependence of national frameworks, organisational practices and individual experiences. This section reflects on four central themes that emerge across levels: autonomy and flexibility, the role of and support for trainers, company involvement in the development and delivery of VET programmes, and assessment practices.

Autonomy and flexibility in planning and delivery

Autonomy in implementing learning-outcomes-based WBL appears at all levels, regulated or encouraged at the policy level, enabled or constrained at the company level and enacted through everyday decisions by trainers and learners at the individual level. In Finland, the national VET framework supports flexible, individualised learning pathways, which translate into learner-centred planning at the provider level and a high level of autonomy for both trainers and learners. Similarly, Ireland and the Netherlands promote flexibility through national policies, leaving room for VET institutions and companies to tailor delivery to learner needs and workplace contexts. At the company level, many employers have discretion in adapting work-based tasks. In Portugal and Slovenia, employers adjust WBL delivery based on operational needs and learner profiles, despite national curricula and catalogues offering standardised expectations. In Bulgaria and Poland, the

absence of robust pedagogical structures results in more ad hoc approaches, where delivery is shaped more by company routines than by defined learning outcomes. At the level of trainers and learners, autonomy is often perceived as a positive feature, enabling responsiveness to the workplace context. However, where guidance and support are limited, this autonomy can result in inconsistency. Without clear frameworks, autonomy risks becoming fragmentation. Whether enabling or problematic, autonomy must be supported by shared understanding and coordination across all levels.

Role of and support for in-company trainers

In-company trainers are central to translating learning outcomes into workplace practice, and their interpretation and day-to-day use of outcomes shapes the quality of WBL. Across the case study Member States, most trainers are aware of learning outcomes and apply them to some extent, but often implicitly and mainly through WBL plans and documentation prepared or supported by VET providers. The degree of embedding varies across countries. In systems where learning outcomes are strongly integrated into national VET frameworks, such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, trainers demonstrate higher familiarity and use them more systematically, often in combination with learner-centred practices and structured assessment arrangements. In other contexts, including Bulgaria, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia, learning outcomes are more frequently applied intuitively, with trainers relying on practical experience rather than explicit pedagogical frameworks. Across Member States, trainers generally report considerable autonomy in delivering WBL, selecting tasks and adapting training to workplace realities, while having limited involvement in defining learning outcomes or WBL content. Structured strategies for trainer preparation remain limited, and participation in CPD is typically voluntary. Support also varies at company level. In sectors with stronger organisational structures, such as childcare in the Netherlands or healthcare in Finland, learning outcomes are more likely to be embedded in trainer guidance and routines. Elsewhere, support tends to rely on informal cooperation with VET schools, as observed in Bulgaria, Lithuania or Portugal. Many trainers therefore take on significant responsibility without systematic pedagogical preparation. Strengthening professional development, clearer guidance and recognition for trainers is essential to move from largely intuitive practices towards more consistent and effective outcomes-based WBL.

Company involvement in programme development and delivery

Active employer involvement in the design and delivery of VET programmes is crucial to ensure the labour market relevance of learning outcomes. The extent of

this involvement varies greatly across Member States. At the policy level, some Member States institutionalise company involvement through formal governance mechanisms. In the Netherlands, the SBB plays a key role in maintaining qualification files with employer input. Finland also engages companies in national curriculum development and sectoral feedback processes. At the company level, however, employers are rarely involved in shaping programme content. In France and Portugal, companies provide feedback and participate in placement coordination, but they are not typically engaged in curriculum design. In Poland and Slovenia, employers are expected to deliver WBL aligned with formal learning outcomes, yet have little influence on defining those outcomes. At the level of trainers and learners, this limited engagement has clear consequences. Trainers often rely on VET schools to provide the learning plan, and many do not feel ownership over the learning objectives. As a result, learners may experience tasks that are operationally relevant but not explicitly linked to the competences required for qualification. Building stronger partnerships between schools and companies – beyond placement logistics – is key to aligning policy ambition with everyday learning practice.

Assessment and the alignment of intentions with practice

Assessment is a critical mechanism for ensuring the coherence and credibility of learning outcomes in WBL. Yet approaches to assessment differ markedly across Member States and levels. At the policy level, Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland demonstrate strong alignment between national qualification requirements and workplace assessment. Competence demonstrations or workplace-based assignments are used to assess learners against clearly defined criteria, and employers are often involved in the assessment process. In contrast, in Bulgaria, and Lithuania, assessment practices are more fragmented. Formative feedback is common, but it is often loosely connected to learning outcomes. Summative assessment tends to be centralised or school led, with minimal company involvement. At the company level, the use of standardised tools is limited. Companies often rely on verbal feedback or task checklists rather than structured evaluation frameworks. In France, for instance, final assessments are carried out by independent juries, while in Slovenia trainers in non-apprenticeship WBL programmes do not formally assess learners. At the level of trainers and learners, the absence of assessment training or shared criteria limits the use of learning outcomes as a tool for guiding development. Trainers in Lithuania, Malta and Poland often focus on task completion rather than competences demonstrated. Learners, in turn, may receive limited feedback on

their progress towards achieving the defined outcomes, weakening their ability to self-assess and reflect.

7.3. Reflections on the research questions and lessons learnt

Extent to which learning outcomes are implemented and used across Member States, systems, institutions and company contexts

Learning outcomes are formally embedded in national VET systems across all 10 Member States studied. In most cases, they are included in curricula, forming a common reference point for VET providers and, to a lesser extent, for companies. However, the extent to which learning outcomes are operationalised in the planning, delivery and assessment of WBL varies significantly both between and within Member States. Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland show high levels of integration of learning outcomes into WBL. Learning outcomes are used not only to design curricula but also to structure personal learning plans, workplace assignments and assessment tools. In these systems, learning outcomes are a shared language among VET providers, companies, trainers and learners. In contrast, Member States such as Bulgaria, Lithuania and Malta show a more fragmented picture. While learning outcomes are referenced in policy documents and training agreements, their translation into pedagogical practice is often limited or inconsistent. Trainers and learners in these systems may not be familiar with the terminology or may refer to outcomes only implicitly.

The successful integration of learning outcomes into WBL within VET depends on several key factors that vary across national contexts. Nevertheless, common themes emerge across different case study Member States, illustrating the importance of structured collaboration, adaptability and supportive institutional frameworks. Several success factors support the effective implementation of learning outcomes in WBL.

- (a) **Effective partnerships and communication between VET schools and companies.** A fundamental factor for the implementation of learning outcomes in WBL is the presence of strong partnerships between VET schools and companies. Member States such as Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland have well-established cooperative frameworks where companies actively collaborate with VET providers in the design and delivery of VET programmes. These partnerships facilitate regular communication, allowing for adjustments to ensure that training remains relevant to changing labour market needs. This partnership ensures alignment between the learning outcomes taught in schools and the practical skills required in the workplace.

- For example, in Finland, continuous dialogue among VET providers, companies and workplace instructors fosters a shared understanding of qualification requirements and learning expectations. In Ireland, mutual trust and informal networks between educational institutions and workplaces create an environment where learning outcomes can be meaningfully applied and assessed in real-world settings.
- (b) **Clarity and practical application of learning outcomes.** The clarity and relevance of learning outcomes play a crucial role in effective implementation. When outcomes are explicitly defined and understood by both educators and employers, they can serve as a guiding framework for structuring training and assessments. In the Netherlands and Finland, national vocational qualifications provide clear descriptors of expected knowledge, skills and competences, making it easier for trainers and mentors to support students' learning progress. In Portugal, learning outcomes are seamlessly integrated into workplace processes, as company tutors facilitate hands-on learning experiences that closely align with industry requirements. In Bulgaria, experiential learning methods, such as coaching and mentoring, enhance the practical application of learning outcomes, allowing students to gain confidence in their abilities.
 - (c) **Support for workplace mentors and trainers and the guarantee of autonomy.** The role of workplace mentors and in-company trainers is crucial in the effective application of learning-outcomes-based curricula. In Poland, structured training programmes for workplace instructors, such as those implemented by a large retail company, ensure that trainers are well prepared to support student learning. Similarly, in Finland, workplace instructors benefit from clear guidelines and assessment tools that help them facilitate and evaluate students' progress. In Bulgaria and Malta, efforts to provide pedagogical training to mentors have been noted as valuable in enhancing their ability to guide learners beyond task completion. Even when formal training is limited, informal peer learning and collaboration among trainers can contribute to improving instructional practices. Further, in several Member States, such as Portugal and Finland, in-company trainers enjoy significant autonomy in adapting training to align it with both company needs and learner abilities. This flexibility supports the effective implementation of learning outcomes, which enables the trainers to personalise learning and cater to individual student needs.
 - (d) **Flexibility in the interpretation of how to operationalise learning outcomes.** A certain degree of flexibility in how learning outcomes are interpreted and applied in practical training is beneficial in adapting training to

different workplace contexts. In Bulgaria, WBL curricula are designed with broad learning outcomes to accommodate diverse company settings. In Portugal, a learner-centred approach enables company tutors to tailor training experiences to the specific needs of individual trainees, fostering engagement and skills development.

- (e) **Practical application of skills.** Hands-on learning, where learning outcomes are embedded in real-life tasks, enhances student engagement and ensures that theoretical knowledge from the classroom is applied in the workplace. In France and the Netherlands, for example, students benefit from working with real tools and equipment, ensuring that they acquire skills that are directly applicable to their future professions.

While learning outcomes offer significant advantages, their implementation is not without challenges. Various barriers exist across the case study Member States, reflecting the complexities of aligning education with workplace realities.

- (a) **Limited pedagogical training for in-company trainers.** One of the most frequently mentioned challenges is the lack of pedagogical training for workplace mentors and in-company trainers. While they often possess technical expertise, many trainers in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Portugal have not received formal training on instructional methods. This can make it challenging to apply learning-outcomes-based approaches effectively. In France, some apprenticeship supervisors acknowledged difficulties in translating learning outcomes into daily training practices, often relying on informal guidance rather than structured pedagogical techniques.
- (b) **Alignment between learning outcomes and workplace training.** In some cases, there is a misalignment between learning outcomes and workplace realities, leading to difficulties in ensuring that students acquire the intended competences. In Poland, for example, some companies structure training based on immediate operational needs rather than national qualifications frameworks. In France, short internship durations sometimes limit the extent to which learners can develop the full range of skills outlined in their programmes.
- (c) **Resource constraints and financial incentives.** Financial constraints and a lack of resources are recurring themes in some Member States selected for case studies. Several Member States face resource and financial constraints that impact the implementation of learning-outcomes-based curricula. In Bulgaria, financial support for apprenticeships remains limited, making it difficult for companies to fully engage in WBL. In Portugal, the availability of

- company tutors is affected by competing workload demands, which can reduce the level of individualised support provided to trainees.
- (d) **Task-oriented approaches over learning-outcomes-oriented approaches.** In some case study Member States, trainers focus more on completing tasks rather than ensuring that these tasks contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes. In Lithuania, for example, workplace trainers often emphasise task completion over learning, which prevents students from gaining a deeper level of understanding regarding how the tasks relate to their development.
 - (e) **Complexity of learning-outcomes-based frameworks.** In some instances, the structure and language of learning outcomes frameworks can present challenges. In the Netherlands, qualification files are sometimes considered overly theoretical, leading to assessments that may not always reflect real-world work situations. Similarly, in Finland, some workplace instructors find certain learning outcome descriptions difficult to interpret and apply in practical training settings.
 - (f) **Student engagement and readiness.** A recurring challenge across several case study Member States is the variation in student motivation and readiness for workplace training. In Bulgaria and Slovenia, declining student engagement has been observed, with some learners struggling to see the long-term benefits of their training. In Finland, workplace instructors note that students sometimes lack basic professional and interpersonal skills, which can hinder their ability to fully benefit from WBL experiences.
 - (g) **Company engagement and ownership of learning outcomes.** In some cases, companies perceive learning outcomes as the responsibility of VET schools rather than an integral part of workplace training. In Malta, companies expressed a need for more guidance on how to implement learning outcomes effectively. In France, while some companies actively integrate learning outcomes into training, others take a more operational approach, prioritising immediate work tasks over structured learning objectives.

Pedagogical use of learning outcomes in the planning, delivery and assessment of WBL

The pedagogical use of learning outcomes in WBL varies across contexts. While all systems use learning outcomes for curriculum design, their use in pedagogical planning, delivery, and assessment ranges from systematic and explicit to informal and incidental. In Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, learning outcomes underpin all stages of WBL. Personalised plans, collaborative task design and regular feedback are used to ensure that learners' progress is continuously aligned

with intended competences. Trainers and tutors in these Member States act as facilitators of learning, helping students connect theory and practice. In France and Portugal, learning outcomes are often reflected in practice, even when not explicitly referenced. In contrast, in Lithuania, Malta and Poland, learning outcomes are present in formal agreements and documentation but are not widely used by company mentors or trainers. WBL in these contexts tends to be task-oriented, with less emphasis on guiding learners through competence development.

At the planning stage, Member States with individual learning plans or modular curricula (e.g. Slovenia, Finland) allow for tailored WBL experiences. In others, such as Bulgaria or Poland, workplace learning follows a pre-structured programme with limited room for adaptation. During delivery, the pedagogical application of learning outcomes depends heavily on trainer competence and cooperation with VET providers. In Ireland and Portugal, workplace tutors and college staff engage in regular communication, enabling real-time adjustments. In contrast, in France and Malta, trainers often receive little pedagogical guidance, leading to varied practices.

The assessment of WBL is one of the most decisive factors for embedding learning outcomes. In Member States like Ireland and Finland, workplace-based assessments are aligned with qualification standards and involve both VET staff and company mentors. In the Netherlands, assessment criteria are provided by external bodies, helping ensure consistency. In other systems, such as Bulgaria and Portugal, assessment remains largely formative and informal. Summative evaluation is often conducted by schools alone, without systematic input from companies. This disconnect weakens the feedback loop between planned outcomes and demonstrated competences.

Learners' and trainers' engagement with learning outcomes in practice

Learners and trainers engage most effectively with learning outcomes if they are clearly communicated, practically applied and supported through structured tools and collaboration. If these conditions are met, as in Ireland, the Netherlands and Finland, learners are able to understand what they are working towards, take responsibility for their learning and reflect on their progress. Trainers in these systems are supported through planning tools, ongoing contact with VET providers and, in some cases, mentor training. In France, Portugal and Slovenia, engagement tends to be more practice based than terminology driven. While learners may not reference learning outcomes explicitly, they participate in activities that reflect competence development and progression. In contrast, in Lithuania, Malta and Poland, both learners and trainers describe learning outcomes as distant from their day-to-day experience. Learners focus on

completing tasks or preparing for final assessments, without necessarily understanding how these relate to the intended competences. Trainers often rely on experience rather than formal guidance and may not refer to learning outcomes at all when designing or supervising workplace tasks.

Key enablers of learner engagement concern the following:

- (a) **Authentic task design.** Learners engage more deeply if workplace activities are clearly linked to real-world occupational competences.
- (b) **Progressive responsibility.** If learners are given increasing leeway, as in the Netherlands or Portugal, they develop confidence and ownership.
- (c) **Feedback and reflection.** Structured feedback mechanisms, such as those in Ireland and Finland, help learners link daily practice to long-term goals.

Several barriers to learners' engagement with learning outcomes were identified across the case studies. These include the following:

- (a) **Limited pedagogical communication.** In many cases, learning outcomes are embedded in curriculum documents or agreements but are not discussed with learners in a way that connects them to workplace tasks.
- (b) **Terminology gap.** Learners (and sometimes trainers) do not always understand or use the formal language of learning outcomes, even if they are indirectly engaging with the underlying goals.
- (c) **Misalignment between schools and workplaces.** In some Member States, students noted a disconnect between what is taught in school and what is expected at work, making it difficult to see the relevance of learning outcomes in practice.
- (d) **Task-oriented approaches.** When the emphasis is placed solely on completing tasks rather than developing competences, the potential of learning outcomes to guide reflection and progression is diluted.

Trainers' engagement is often shaped by their access to pedagogical training and institutional support. Where training is available (Finland), trainers are better equipped to apply learning outcomes intentionally. In Member States where support is minimal (Bulgaria, Malta), trainers tend to supervise learners operationally rather than guide their competence development. Even if well intentioned, the lack of structured support can lead to inconsistent learning experiences for learners. Trainers need the key enablers of structured support and recognition from both VET schools and companies to fulfil their role in implementing learning outcomes meaningfully in WBL.

7.4. Policy considerations and future research needs

This section outlines key policy recommendations based on the analysis of learning outcomes in WBL across Member States. It reflects on the core challenges identified in the study and highlights where further efforts, at the system, institutional and practitioner levels, are needed to strengthen the pedagogical use and implementation of learning outcomes, enhance the role of and support for trainers, strengthen company engagement, improve assessment and support learning engagement. It also proposes areas for future research that could enhance understanding and inform policy development.

Strengthening the pedagogical use of learning outcomes

Pedagogical use can be stimulated through the following:

- (a) **Clarifying the educational function of learning outcomes across settings.** While learning outcomes are formally embedded in most VET systems, their pedagogical use in workplace settings remains uneven. Policies should promote a shared understanding of learning outcomes as tools for structuring and guiding learning, not only as assessment criteria or curriculum descriptors. Communication strategies and guidelines should ensure that schools, companies, trainers and learners understand how learning outcomes support learning progression.
- (b) **Bridging the gap between school-based learning and WBL environments.** Several Member States report a mismatch between what is taught in classrooms and what is expected in the workplace. Policy efforts should aim to better align curricula, workplace tasks and assessment methods. National authorities can support this by encouraging the co-design of training plans and providing planning templates that link theoretical content with practical competences.

Enhancing the role of and support for trainers

The role of and support for trainers can be enhanced through the following:

- (a) **Providing structured training and recognition for in-company trainers.** Trainers play a pivotal role in realising learning outcomes during WBL, yet their pedagogical function is often informal and unsupported. Policymakers should consider making mentor training more widely available and in some cases mandatory, particularly for those directly responsible for supervising and assessing learners. Training should focus on how to translate learning outcomes into workplace tasks, support learners' progression and provide constructive feedback.

- (b) **Developing national or regional support systems for trainers.** To reduce fragmentation and support consistent implementation, Member States may consider developing intermediary or support structures (e.g. chambers, sectoral bodies or VET agencies) to provide trainers with materials, examples and advice. This could include developing online platforms, sector-specific guidance and communities of practice.

Promoting company engagement and co-responsibility

Company engagement and co-responsibility can be promoted through the following:

- (a) **Formalising the pedagogical role of companies in WBL.** While most systems require cooperation between schools and companies, few define the pedagogical responsibilities of employers. Policies should encourage companies to move beyond a hosting function to become co-educators. This includes clearer expectations on task planning, learning supervision and involvement in assessment processes.
- (b) **Supporting employer participation in curriculum design and review.** In systems where companies are actively involved in designing qualifications (e.g. the Netherlands, Finland), learning outcomes are more likely to reflect real-world needs. National and regional authorities should establish or reinforce consultation mechanisms with employers and sectoral bodies to ensure that learning outcomes remain relevant and up to date.

Improving assessment practices

Assessment practices can be improved through the following:

- (a) **Aligning assessment practices with learning outcomes across settings.** Assessment is a key driver of learning outcome implementation, but practices vary widely across Member States and institutions. Policymakers should promote assessment approaches that are consistent, transparent and workplace relevant. This includes strengthening both formative and summative assessment procedures and encouraging collaboration between schools and companies in evaluating learners' progress.
- (b) **Developing and sharing tools for learning-outcomes-based assessment.** Clear, accessible tools, such as competence checklists, assessment grids and logbooks, can support consistency and enable both trainers and learners to engage with learning outcomes. These tools should be co-developed with practitioners to ensure usability, including low administrative burden, practical value and sectoral relevance.

Supporting learner engagement

Learner engagement can be supported through the following:

- (a) **Embedding learning outcomes in learner communication and guidance.** Learners are more motivated and autonomous if they understand their learning goals. National frameworks should promote the use of personalised learning plans (e.g. PCDPs), self-assessment tools and learner-led planning practices. VET providers should involve learners in aligning work tasks with learning outcomes and encourage reflective practice.
- (b) **Ensuring learning outcomes are accessible and understandable to learners.** Policies and schools should aim to make learning outcomes more learner-friendly, both in language and format. This may involve revising how outcomes are communicated in agreements and briefings or on learning platforms to ensure that they can be used as reference points for learners' development.

Areas for future research

The following areas for future research can be identified:

- (a) **Investigate the impact of learning outcomes on learners' progression and employment.** Further research is needed on how the use of learning outcomes in WBL influences learners' transitions to the labour market, long-term competence development and professional identity formation. Longitudinal studies could explore whether clearer alignment between outcomes and tasks leads to stronger career readiness and career progression.
- (b) **Explore sectoral and company-level variability in implementation.** Given the influence of sector-specific practices and company cultures, comparative research at the company level could shed light on effective models of training and mentoring. This includes understanding how small and medium-sized enterprises manage WBL delivery and what targeted support they require.
- (c) **Assess digital tools and technologies for learning-outcomes-based learning and assessment.** Digitalisation offers new opportunities to monitor, support and assess learning outcomes in real time. Future studies could investigate how digital tools (e.g. e-portfolios, digital logbooks, applications) support reflection, feedback and assessment in WBL contexts while being applied ethically and respecting legal requirements.

Abbreviations

BBL	<i>beroepsbegeleidende leerweg</i> [work-based learning pathway]	Netherlands
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training	—
CPD	continuous professional development	—
FET	further education and training	Ireland
IVET	initial vocational education and training	—
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology	Malta
PCDP	personal competence development plan	Finland
SBB	Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven [Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market]	Netherlands
VET	vocational education and training	—
WBL	work-based learning	—

Glossary

Learning outcomes	'Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence' (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2008)
Intended learning outcomes	Written statements and expressions of intentions / desired targets of learning. They describe what learners are 'expected to know and be able to do and understand having completed a learning sequence, a module, a programme or a qualification' (Cedefop, 2022a, p. 18). Such statements are used in qualifications frameworks, qualification standards and curricula.
Achieved learning outcomes	Outcomes that an individual learner demonstrates at the end of a learning process. Achievement is determined as part of student assessment.
Realised learning outcomes	Outcomes (skills, competences) that an individual learner applies in the labour market, having completed their training.

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The impact of learning-outcomes-based curricula on work-and practice-based IVET

The report examines how learning-outcomes-based curricula are applied in the work-based component of initial vocational education and training (VET) across 10 EU Member States: Bulgaria, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. Although learning outcomes are embedded in national VET frameworks, their use in companies varies considerably.

Drawing on 20 company case studies and 151 interviews with employers, trainers, learners and VET providers, the study explores how learning outcomes guide training, influence pedagogy and support learners' progression. Findings show that learning outcomes can help align workplace learning with curriculum goals, but their effectiveness depends on cooperation between VET institutions and companies, and sufficient support for in-company trainers. Learners often have limited awareness of learning outcomes, although feedback and mentoring improve understanding.

The report concludes that learning outcomes can enhance the quality and relevance of work-based learning, but only if they are fully integrated into planning, delivery and assessment processes across both education and workplace settings.

**CEDEFOP**European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 57001 Thessaloniki, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020
Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

www.cedefop.europa.eu

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