

## **Track 1: Innovation and Critical Learning in Business & Education**

### **Work Based Learning Partnerships: A Match made in Heaven?**

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Work Based Learning (WBL) has been defined by Sobiechowska & Maisch (2006, p. 270) as '...where students are full-time employees whose programme of study is embedded in the workplace and is designed to meet the learning needs of the employees and the aims of the organisation.' A WBL partnership involves a programme of learning being jointly developed and delivered between an employer and a higher education provider.

'In Ireland, until recent years, the emphasis in state-funded third level education was almost entirely towards "for-employment" rather than "in-employment" education and training. In-employment training has, for the most part, been largely disconnected from the formal education qualifications system. The newer emphasis on upskilling of persons already in the labour force poses new and significant challenges' (Linehan and Sheridan, 2009, p. 496).

With the competition to attract the traditional learner (18-25 year old full time student) more intense than ever, many higher education providers are focusing their attention on those in employment. According to a recent report, 'the current climate of rapidly rising unemployment puts future skills needs into sharp focus. Future recovery largely depends on capitalising on the full potential of the people that live and work in Ireland, and this requires a flexible education and training system that enables our workforce to make the most of enterprise and employment opportunities as they arise' (Forf6s, 2009, p. 2).

An increasing number of Irish employers are recognising the importance of investing in their employees and are turning to higher education providers to deliver this training. This represents a significant deviation from the traditional approach to higher education and training. In order to ensure a successful WBL programme, it is extremely important that there is a good partnership between the higher education provider and the employer.

Rowley (2005) regards successful partnership as requiring: 'clear objectives and strong commitment; clear statements of the respective partners' responsibilities; schedules and staff resources that allow for individuals from different organisations to learn how to work effectively together; effective communication and persistence in managing the partnerships'.

The objectives of this paper are to identify the critical success factors for WBL partnerships and to make recommendations for successful WBL partnerships. Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) has acquired significant experience in developing WBL partnerships with local and national employers. This paper proposes to collect data through a series of depth interviews with experienced WBL practitioners (representatives from both industry and higher education).

The findings from this research will contribute to the debate on how higher education providers can engage in successful partnerships with industry to offer innovative WBL programmes.

**Friday 8 October 9:00 – 10:30**