eWBL – Making work-based learning work in an online environment

Case Studies – Slovenia (WP1)

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Exploring the challenges met and the alternatives found by WBL providers across Europe in their shift from WBL to eWBL.

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PROJECT PARTNERS

CASE STUDY REPORT 2

Name of the case	Case study 2 - Slovenia
Organisation(s)	HE2 and Translation Company
Country(-ies)	Slovenia
Disciplinary sector	Translation
Case written by	University of Ljubljana

This case describes the eWBL in Translation (2nd cycle MA) offered by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. In the first study year, an internship is mandatory (120 hours (6 ECTS)). It is completed in a work environment that deals professionally with translation services. The eWBL was performed within a Slovenian company as part of a global company that recently purchased a Slovenian translation service provider. Several students in translation are trained there to complete their mandatory WBL. Since March 2020, the company has been working only online in Slovenia and this WBL was conducted 100% online. No significant differences were found in management, administration, quality assurance, assessment/evaluation process, and learning outcomes compared to offline WBL by all three respondents (working mentor, faculty mentor and student/intern). The challenges in sustaining WBL in Translation online, remain in technology (sufficient infrastructure for interns), material conditions, and equal access to equipment for interns. For the company mentor, eWBL is undoubtedly the future, but faculty need to take a more active role in providing adequate equipment and space for interns. Communication and constant feedback are very important factors between all three players in eWBL, so the hybrid mode (at least once per week implementing WBL face to face in a company setting) conducting this WBL in the future would be the optimal scenario, among others, especially for the intern to adequately develop soft skills, since all three respondents exposed communication barriers.

Section	Answer
1) Organisation's background	The Faculty of Arts offers an undergraduate program in Translation and Translation studies (Ba, Ma, PhD). Translation Studies offers courses in Slovenian and English, as well as in German, French or Italian. Since the introduction of the renewed Master's program (2nd cycle) in Translation (Bologna reform), an internship is offered in the first year of study in the form of a compulsory translation practice of 120 hours (6 ECTS). It is completed in a work environment that professionally deals with translation services and regularly uses translators. In consultation with the faculty supervisor, interns may extend the translation practicum for an additional three weeks and take it instead of the elective (6 ECTS). Prior to the start of the WBL, the course Translation Practice is offered in the first year of the Master's program in Translation/Interpreting at the Department of Translation. The seminar (15 hours) consists of regular group meetings, an internship meeting where students who have already completed an internship in a company or other institution (government agency, etc.) present their experiences to younger colleagues. Individual counselling sessions are also possible with the department coordinator/mentor who leads the course and also organises the department's career day, where future interns meet translation service providers with whom the department has signed or will sign a cooperation agreement in the future (in 2020 and 2021, the career day was held online). The Slovenian company -a translation service provider with which the faculty in Slovenia collaborates; several faculty students are trained there to perform their mandatory WBL. The company is a unique global leader in technology-enabled language, content, and intellectual property services, with a global network and local offices around the world. Their goal is to promote global understanding. As far as translation is concerned, their principle is to have access to translation for any spoken language. Since March 2020, this company has been

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	working only online. At the beginning of the pandemic, the face-to-face office was closed, and translators now only have a virtual/remote office. The WBL for students in the company was immediately conducted online, so 100% of activities are conducted online. Nevertheless, some employees of the company have rented a small office in the Ljubljana region, but this is related to their personal decision and the fees are paid by them. Officially, the work is done online for everyone, including an intern.
	The student in the interview is a master's student of translation. She carried out the mandatory WBL in May 2022, 100% online in the translation company.
2) Design, delivery and management	The main WBL coordinator at the faculty started by contacting companies and other organisations from their internal base (they have about 100 contacts, they have worked with 20-30 companies regularly over the last ten years) to see if WBL could be offered hybrid or online while closure due to Covid became a long-term reality. After receiving all of this information, she held online meetings with potential interns to decide whether they wanted to take eWBL during the current academic year (100% online) or postpone it. The majority of 30 chose to do so. Generally, students are encouraged to conduct WBL during the semester break (January and February, April/May, and July through September). The student's task was exclusively translation. She was given tasks for each day, which were expected of her. There were no major changes for the company in terms of staff preparation; online translation was already part of the daily routine. The only difference was that students could no longer be in the office. At the faculty, all procedures and activities related to WBL were transferred online (meetings with mentors, administration and management of contracts, and others). A special translation tool is used in the company, and Virtual Desktop is used as the online office. Microsoft Teams is used for communication. In moving activities online, the faculty took advantage of all available e-learning tools and began using Zoom, MS Teams, etc. for daily instruction and meetings. The eWBL students at the company were given access (with protection) to their virtual office. They had the same access as staff, email was set up for interns, they were given guidelines on how to use the system, etc. (an exception to access is only for translations of sensitive texts, where a special clause must be signed). Students were required to have their own computer and high-quality Wi-Fi access, which was mentioned by both students and the pedagogical mentor at the faculty that this could sometimes be a problem and would need to be addressed in the future. Regarding social events, the company has a dedicated forum (coffee break, quiz, morning chat).
	This WBL was conducted 100% online.
3) Difference and similarities	No major differences were noted for the company in terms of management; the technical guidelines were conveyed to the intern just as they would have been in a face-to-face meeting in the office. The eWBL mentor noted that it would be easier to have an intern in the office, especially when the student starts the eWBL. Organising the eWBL needs more guidance, especially once the initial online call is set up with all the introductions. Compared to the offline WBL, the communication was much more formal. Many questions could also be asked by interns, and while they were sitting in the office, they could be clarified immediately; during the online event, the company noticed the reluctance of interns to ask questions. A forum was open during the day, but students did not really use it. For the faculty mentor, the sudden situation of transferring WBL online was found to

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be quite stressful, as there were still many unanswered questions at that point (whether companies will be able to conduct WBL online, whether students will be interested, etc.). The feedback from some students was rather negative at the beginning as they were doing everything online (studying), including WBL, and it became quite stressful and difficult. In the last two years, WBL in the translation industry is mostly done hybrid (3-4 days remote and 1-2 days in an office). The company conducts WBL 100% online, as in this case. The faculty mentor was able to identify positive aspects of eWBL after some time (100% online), based on the two-year evaluation (by the students and feedback from the company). Interns are interested in doing WBL online, this is especially true for the students who are on a mandatory exchange abroad as part of the joint degree programme. Previously they had to wait until they came back to complete WBL, now the system is more flexible, and they can complete it from abroad. The administrative aspects have remained the same for all parties involved. The faculty supervisor has an online tool that students can use to request all the guidelines and instructions and documents needed to complete WBL.

In the company, a two-step evaluation process is used to ensure the quality assurance and monitoring of the progress and outcomes of the intern, whether online or offline WBL. The student's work is also reviewed and evaluated by editors or a person from the translation team who does not directly serve as a mentor. The evaluation is then discussed between a work mentor (the last day of the internship, the intern has a follow up discussion with company staff) and a faculty mentor. The faculty mentor could not find any differences in this perspective.

Students are already familiar with the main technological translation tools, platforms and programmes as part of their studies and have the appropriate infrastructure at the faculty in a dedicated classroom. Of course, if they are working in a company, some of the services (esp. translation companies) use currently updated and modern technology. Students are encouraged by the faculty mentor to use their time during eWBL to pursue modern technology in the field. Transferring WBL to online causes problems because of the IT equipment availability. Some of the interns do not have sufficient computers and equipment available as it is at the company and to company staff. In addition, some interns live in dormitories and share a room or flat with others. This will be explored further by faculty (faculty is considering setting up a dedicated classroom where eWBL could be conducted with sufficient equipment (camera, computer, etc.)).

Assessment/Evaluation/Reflection: the work mentor in a company is a key person to implement an internship. A special spreadsheet is created where all grades are entered to assess and evaluate the students' work according to different criteria (quality of translation, professionalism, skills, etc.). Interns keep a daily diary in which all observations are recorded (which texts were translated, tools used, type of communication, working atmosphere, driving forces and obstacles). The evaluation is sent to the faculty mentor. Prior to this, the intern, the working mentor, and the evaluator (corporate team member who proofread or edited the intern's work) had a debriefing about the intern's work (satisfaction, expectations, and learning outcomes achieved). The faculty mentor and the work mentor are also very closely connected, especially with regard to the mediation of problems that arise during the WBL, either by the company or the interns. Special attention is given to the relationship between interns

	and faculty mentors, as mentioned above. No differences were detected in this aspect. Quality of students work/deliverables**:** For the faculty mentor, face-to-face WBL is important, and she/he would encourage it more than just being online, especially in terms of achieving soft skills and transversal skills, building a professional network, and meeting people in person. The company and the student built a good relationship, and the work results were evaluated every day by reviewing her texts to respond to and improve the intern's work (via e-mail, special tool).
4) Learning outcomes	Transversal and soft skills: While implementing WBL online, some of the skills were not developed as desirable. This was the comment of all three stakeholders in the eWBL: company, intern, and faculty mentor. The online eWBL organisation provided some distance between people, but the company pursued a strategy to constantly encourage students to communicate, ask questions, critique problems, etc. The company set up a group chat where all questions and problems related to translation could be asked, but students were rather reluctant to participate in discussions or ask questions. The company mentor recognised that in the future, there should be more focus on the group and interpersonal communication and focus on developing the students' soft skills. Sometimes the mentor is also very busy with his/her own work, so he/she may not be available to the student during the day (for half of the day). This is even more apparent with online delivery and differs from face-to-face mentoring in an office setting. Students and faculty mentor mentioned a lack of communication, especially in terms of interpersonal communication, where face-to-face contact is lacking, immediate resolution of problems, etc. In contrast, the student was in general satisfied with the system as she was invited and asked every day to report problems, how she was doing, etc., but she felt challenged by interpersonal communication (she noted a lack of this aspect). In terms of gaining professional experiences, the working mentor did not notice any differences. The faculty mentor and the student also saw no disadvantages. The student sufficiently stated that she had gained good work experience. In terms of acquiring disciplinary knowledge, the company mentor and faculty mentor could not find any differences. The student also saw no disadvantages. For the faculty mentor, developing a professional network is key to WBL, but it is compromised when doing WBL entirely online versus face-to-face. The student mentioned that if conducting WBL face-to-face, she could probably establish a more direct contact for her future network. Although the Slovenian company is part of a large corporate network, it has built its own culture, norms and routine that are consistent with the owner's culture. Special codes and training are required for employees, but interns are not part of this process. They familiarise the interns with the general culture, rules, norms, and routines of all translation departments, especially privacy, data protection, passwords, etc., to avoid viruses or IT hacks when working online. The only difference is the use of technological tools as intermediaries. The student felt part of the company from the first day, everything was clear to her, the team was introduced to her, and she learned how the work process works.
5) Pedagogical	The pedagogical innovations related to online socialisation and

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innovations	corporate team building were carried out every week and some of them every day. On Mondays, there was a virtual morning coffee to greet and chat with each other. Once a week, online games related to professional work were organised during the day (translation quizzes, games). All interns were invited to these sessions. Interns were encouraged to express their expectations (what do I want, do I see myself in this field, in this company) before the eWBL officially started and when they reported at the end to assess/evaluate the online experience.
6) Technological innovations	The Company gave interns access to all of their collaborative platforms, opening up their virtual worlds and the socialising aspect of corporate meetings. The contribution was to break the daily routine and create an atmosphere of group communication, team building, etc on different channels (Teams). The interns were always invited to be a part of it.
7) Drivers and barriers to eWBL	The main barrier for the working mentor is the technological preparation of the interns to access all the online systems and platforms of the company. In particular, if the interns have a poor WiFi connection, this could be a problem in terms of organisation, quality of work, results, delays, etc. To avoid any obstacles, a good strategy and plan for the eWBL should be written down with all protocols and clear guidance and supervision for the interns. For the faculty mentor, immediate feedback is not possible in eWBL and students sometimes feel lonely (online feedback cannot be provided immediately) as they are used to face-to-face communication. There should be a constant open and available communication channel available online. For the student, the main obstacle was the technological aspect also (availability of equipment and good internet connection) and space (during the eWBL there were many meetings, and she had a roommate in a dorm). The main driver for the company is seen in time management (freedom and greater flexibility), i.e., one of the interns was abroad and the eWBL could be done without personal presence. Whereas before the WBL relied more on mobility in the region (Ljubljana being the capital), now all students who were at home in other regions could do the eWBL with this company. Moreover, the interest of students in eWBL in this company has increased in the last two years. The advantage for the students was flexibility, freedom, and working remotely (no need to drive to the office).
8) Long-term impacts of eWBL	Good technology and support from IT are the main factors that makes this eWBL quality and possible, i.e., to implement translation WBL online. For the company mentor in translation, eWBL delivered 100% online is undoubtedly the future. In terms of further development in the implementation of eWBL, faculty need to take a more active role in providing students with adequate equipment and space. They have already decided that in the future almost all WBL should (based on the company partners and translation providers working remotely) be offered hybrid and online (perhaps in a combination where one day per week would be available for face-to-face). The focus should be on further developing the quality of online tools, taking into account the psychological and socialisation effect (compared to online camera and face-to-face eye contact). From acost efficiency point of view for the company, the cost of office rent, electricity costs, transportation costs for employees, etc… are eliminated, which is in line with the approach of green policies, and time management has also improved. For students, it is very important that interns in eWBL should have the same access to technological infrastructure in the future (material conditions,

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	equipment and tools). Communication is also a very important factor between all three stakeholders in eWBL, the students and the two mentors. Student would still prefer to work in a hybrid mode (at least one day in the office to maintain face-to-face communication, as socialisation is a very important factor).

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