

# **Work-based Learning: How Ready Are We?**

## **A Tool for ETF Partner Countries**

**June 2016**



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## Introduction

This simple and practical tool has been designed to help ETF partner countries work through the key issues that need to be thought about when introducing or improving work-based learning arrangements as part of vocational education and training. It has been designed to help those who have a stake in work-based learning to work together in groups to identify issues and barriers that need to be addressed, and to work out solutions to these issues and barriers. The intention is that, in working through issues and thinking of solutions, it can act as a learning tool to deepen stakeholders' understanding of work-based learning. Those with a stake in work-based learning include people such as: employers; vocational school teachers; policy makers in education or labour ministries; leaders of employer associations and employers' chambers; trade union officials; and members of regional development organisations.

Of necessity work-based learning involves these sorts of stakeholders working together. And so while the tool may sometimes be used by groups made up of only one type of stakeholder, in most cases a better outcome will be achieved if groups are made up of different types of stakeholders who need to understand one another's points of view and who will need to work together in implementing solutions. The primary users of the tool will be those who are leading or facilitating these groups.

The principal aims of the tool are to help draft recommendations for policy makers, and to stimulate action to implement these recommendations. With this in mind, the tool can be used in a number of ways and in a number of different contexts. For example it might be used to:

- Help government policy makers, employer associations and trade unions at the peak national level to work through major reforms such as the introduction of a national apprenticeship system or the expansion of a regional pilot programme into a national programme;
- Help regional stakeholders think about the best model to adopt when introducing pilot work-based learning programmes; or
- Help teachers in a vocational school to think about ways to improve the quality of the work-based learning that their students take part in.

It contains seven sections, each one looking at a different issue or topic in work-based learning. They are:

- Which type of work-based learning should be used?
- Connecting work-based learning and classroom-based learning;
- Starting and expanding work-based learning programmes;
- Ensuring the quality of work-based learning;
- Assessing and recognising work-based learning;
- Financing work-based learning; and
- Governing work-based learning.

A concluding section asks the group to plan what action needs to be taken to implement what has been decided in the discussion.

The tool can be used very flexibly. Sometimes it will be important for stakeholders to work through each of the seven topics. This may require meeting on more than one occasion. In other cases stakeholder groups may want to work on only some of these topics. The choice will depend very much on the national context and on the reasons for using the tool. And the outcomes of discussing one topic may influence which other topics or parts of topics you decide to discuss. For example the type of model of work-based learning that is preferred may influence which financing issues are discussed. And the topics do not necessarily have to be discussed in the same order that they are presented here. The order may depend upon what issues are seen to be more important in the country and to a particular group of participants. When planning discussion groups, bear in mind that some sections will require more time for discussion than others.

The decision about what to discuss and in what order should be taken by the group leader and stakeholders according to the level of implementation of work-based learning in the country and according to national priorities. However in all cases the concluding section to plan next steps should be included.

In each section there is a set of issues that groups should consider or of questions that they need to ask. And there is generally a set of possible options that participants may want to work through to address these issues and questions. In some cases these are accompanied by some brief advantages or disadvantages that may be helpful in making a choice between the options.

The seven topics and the issues, questions and options provided for each one draw heavily from an ETF handbook for policy makers and social partners on work-based learning<sup>1</sup>. These issues, questions and options draw on the experience of ETF partner countries, as well as on the experience of EU and OECD economies. **Those who are leading the discussions using the tool should make sure that they are familiar with the handbook before group discussions begin.**

Those who are leading the discussions may find it helpful to develop a PowerPoint presentation in their national language. To help them do this, each section of the tool is subdivided into parts that could be translated directly and prepared as PowerPoint slides. Each of these is shown on a separate page, with each page representing a separate PowerPoint slide. Group leaders could also think about handing these out to participants as a form of worksheet that they can take away with them, or perhaps provide to them before the meeting begins.

### **What is work-based learning?**

It will be very important for all discussion groups to be very clear, from the outset, about what is meant by work-based learning as part of vocational education and training. **It refers to learning that occurs when people do real work.** This work can be paid or unpaid, but it must be real work that leads to the production of real goods and services. In nearly all cases we are talking about vocational education and training programmes in which learning occurs in two places: a workplace; and a classroom. In practice, of course, there is a continuum between purely classroom-based learning and learning that occurs only in the workplace. The focus here is the area between the two that forms part of vocational education and training programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> European Training Foundation *Work-based Learning: A Handbook for Policy Makers and Social Partners in ETF Partner Countries*, ETF, Turin, 2014.

Here, work-based learning does **not** refer to:

- Training that enterprises provide for their employees that takes place entirely within the enterprise;
- Training for an enterprise's employees that takes place entirely in an educational institution;  
or
- Practical work as part of a vocational education and training course that takes place in workshops, laboratories or similar facilities that are part of the educational institution and where the teaching is done by the institution's staff.

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## **Section 1: Which type of work-based learning should be used?**

Here we are concerned with three main types of work-based learning programmes that are commonly used in vocational education and training:

- Programmes in which the learner is legally an employee and is paid a wage, such as formal apprenticeships where a contract is signed between the learner and the employer. Programmes like this can also be called terms such as alternance. In some cases informal apprenticeships may come under this heading;
- Programmes in which the learner is legally not an employee, but is a “student”; these can be called by a number of names, including traineeships, internships, work placements and cooperative education; and
- Programmes such as virtual firms, training firms, or ‘real’ firms that are attached to and part of educational institutions.

These types of distinctions are more important than the name of the programmes, as names can vary widely, even between programmes that are very similar.

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## Some things to consider

Here are **some** of the things to consider when choosing between these options:

- Who will the “students” be?
  - What is the purpose of the programme and what outcomes do you want to achieve?
  - What resources are available (workplaces, teachers and trainers, teaching and learning materials, supervisors, finances)?
  - How much time will learners spend in the workplace, and how much in the classroom?
  - How will the work-based learning be supervised and monitored?
  - How will it be assessed and counted as part of a vocational education qualification?
  - Will legislation or regulations be needed?
  - How difficult will each type of work-based learning programme be to implement?
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## If the learner is legally an employee

If you are thinking about things like **formal apprenticeships**, here are some things to consider:

- How will the wage be set?
- What will the contract include, who will sign it, and how many years will it include?
- Is new legislation needed to regulate it?
- Are new financing mechanisms needed?
- How will the social partners be involved in designing and supervising the programme?
- Are national governance bodies in place?
- What qualifications will be awarded, and who will award them?
- Are enterprises prepared? For example do they have staff to supervise the learners, both their work and their learning?
- Normally more time is spent in the workplace than in the classroom in these types of programmes.

**A hint:** Programmes such as apprenticeship can develop high quality skills. However they require a lot of co-operation and negotiation to set up, and they ask a lot of enterprises.

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## **If the learner is legally not an employee but is a “student”**

If you are thinking of programmes such as **internships or work placements where the learner is legally not an employee but is a “student”**, here are some things to consider:

- In these types of programmes “students” normally spend more time in the classroom than in the workplace.
  - Normally the main responsibility for managing the programme rests with the school or college, not with the social partners or individual enterprises. However this does not mean that the social partners and enterprises should not be involved.
  - You will need to think about how the school or college timetable will have an influence on how much time students spend in the workplace and when they spend time there.
  - You will need to think about how closely you want the programme to be connected to the vocational education and training system. Will the content of the work-based learning be part of the curriculum? Will it be assessed and count towards a vocational education qualification?
  - How will the learning in the workplace be supervised?
  - Are appropriate insurance arrangements in place?
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## Simulated work-based learning

If you are thinking of **simulated work-based learning** (for example training firms online or in a school or college) here are some things to consider:

- How realistic will the learning experience be, and what sorts of skills do you want to develop? Would other types of programmes develop these skills to a higher level?
  - What resources are available?
  - How much time does the school or college have to set up the programme?
  - Do teachers have the skills needed to supervise it?
  - It may be easier to set up a programme like this than a programme such as apprenticeship or internship. Will this be outweighed by the quality of the skills that are developed?
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## **Section 2: Connecting work-based learning with classroom-based learning**

The two are complementary. Good work-based learning programmes need both. Integrating and co-ordinating them needs some practical and administrative questions be addressed:

- What should be learned in the workplace and what should be learned in the classroom?
  - What are the options if a workplace cannot cover the full range of knowledge and skills that need to be learned at work?
  - How should work-based and classroom-based learning be organised?
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## **Dividing learning between the workplace and the classroom**

- How should this be decided? By employers and the social partners? By educators? Or by both working together?
  - A good rule of thumb:
    - First work out the total programme should contain.
    - Then work out what each location is best suited to teach.
    - Be realistic about how much time will be available in each location for teaching and learning.
    - Think about the balance between theory, specific vocational skills, and general education and personal development.
  - Will you need to use experts and special techniques such as DACUM, surveys or research?
    - If yes, who should do this? Who will fund it?
  - How will the final result be validated?
  - Who will need know what has to be learned? Employer associations? Trade unions? Individual employers? Schools and colleges? How will you make sure that they know this?
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## **What if a workplace cannot cover the full range of knowledge and skills that need to be learned at work?**

Some options:

- Rotate learners to other workplaces that can teach the missing skills.
    - This may require organisations that can link different enterprises together. For example: a school or college that has contact with many firms; an employer organisation; a regional development body; an organisation that has been specially established to co-ordinate training at the local or regional level.
  - Set up special supplementary training centres between firms.
  - Allow colleges or schools to provide the missing training in their workshops.
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## Organising work-based and classroom-based learning

If most of the programme's time is spent at the workplace options include:

- A short period of classroom-based training at the beginning, with the rest of the programme alternating between periods at work and periods in a classroom.
- Equal periods in the workplace and the classroom alternating with one another.
- Classroom-based learning occurring each week, one or two days at a time
- Classroom-based learning taking place in a smaller number of longer blocks of time, such as a week or a month.
- The entire classroom-based education and training taking place in one long block at the beginning of the programme, and all of the time in the workplace taking place after that.
  - A comment: This may make administration easy. But it does make it harder for students to integrate theory and practice. And if the delay in starting workplace learning is too long, it may be hard to maintain students' motivation.

If most of the programme's time is spent in the classroom options include:

- A day a week at work for the entire programme.
- Blocks of time such as a week at regular intervals - for example once a term.

However the time is divided between workplace and classroom, in choosing between the options you should consider:

- Which makes the most pedagogical sense.
  - How the choice will impact on students' motivation.
  - The impact that the choice have on enterprises and on colleges or schools.
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### **Section 3: Starting and expanding work-based learning programmes**

There are two main options:

- Introduce large-scale changes quickly.
- Introduce pilot programmes, test them, and then gradually expand them.

Countries have been successful using both approaches.

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## **Key questions to ensure success, whichever approach is chosen**

- Do we have a vision that is shared between all key stakeholders?
  - Is there a strong policy framework built on this vision, and does it have political support?
  - Do the social partners have strong ownership and control? Who can make key decisions about what?
  - Is a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework in place that clearly sets out each stakeholder's responsibilities?
  - Are there proposals for financing (for example wages, subsidies, tax relief, industry levies, social security, insurance) and how will these motivate employers, students and educational institutions?
  - What channels exist for co-ordinating the different stakeholders (for example social partners, peak VET councils, industry sector councils, regional councils)?
  - Does what is being proposed compete with other existing programmes?
  - Can international partnerships assist?
  - What practical tools are needed to make things work (for example skills lists, assessment tools, competency standards)?
  - Has training and development for key staff such as employers and teachers been taken into account?
  - How will it be marketed to stakeholders: locally, regionally, nationally?
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## **Section 4: Ensuring the quality of work-based learning**

There are three ways to try to ensure the quality of work-based learning. In many cases all three are used:

- Strengthen the capacity of enterprises and work with them.
- Develop practical tools for students and enterprises.
- Create formal quality assurance mechanisms.

Key considerations when thinking about the emphasis to give to each of these:

- Is there a trade-off between quality and what can be afforded?
  - Will measures to improve quality be seen as burdensome by employers, interfere with the ongoing business of enterprises, and participation?
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## **Strengthening the capacity of enterprises to provide quality work-based learning**

A number of organisations can help enterprises to deliver work-based learning (particularly small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have special training staff):

- What is the capacity of employers' chambers and small business associations?
    - How could they be resourced to provide help?
  - Do government vocational education or training departments have inspectors or other regional staff that can assist?
  - Does a formal mechanism exist for co-operation and communication between schools or colleges and companies - for example local management committees?
  - Are schools and colleges active in reaching out to companies?
  - Can college or school teachers make regular visits to the enterprises where students are placed?
  - Do teachers' working conditions allow for such visits as part of normal working time?
  - Are local management committees that include key stakeholders in place to help address quality issues?
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## **Practical tools for students and enterprises**

- How are learners prepared for their time in the workplace? Have they been selected carefully? Do they know what to expect in advance?
  - Can organisations such as employers' chambers and small business associations help firms to select apprentices/trainees?
  - Where learners are students, can local programme management committees help to match students to workplaces?
  - Are there personal learning plans or checklists of the skills that need to be acquired in workplaces?
  - Will learners be asked to keep a diary of what they have learned?
  - Are employers provided with a list of the skills that they will have to teach?
  - Will students be debriefed after their placements, and is time for debriefing included in the school timetable?
  - Are there guidelines for schools and colleges so that students are placed in enterprises that they are likely to be interested in?
    - Do students have a say in where they are placed?
    - Do schools and colleges screen workplaces to make sure that they can teach the skills in the programme and meet occupational health and safety requirements?
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## Formal quality assurance mechanisms

These are requirements on employers, learners and schools or colleges that are imposed by legislation, regulation or administrative directions. For example:

- Requiring enterprises to be accredited or approved before they can take part (for example by an employers' chamber, school or college).
- Requiring the employees who supervise work-based learning to have particular experience, a vocational qualification, or a qualification in training.
- Practical tests of what has been learned before certificates can be awarded.
- Compulsory insurance to cover participants in the event of injury at work.
- Occupational health and safety requirements that are identical for programme participants and regular employees.

### **A note of caution:**

- By themselves legislation, regulations and administrative directions will not guarantee quality.
  - In order to be effective, formal imposed requirements need to be widely accepted and respected, and able to be enforced. Resources to ensure that they are enforced need to be provided.
  - Formal requirements that are not generally accepted and that are widely flouted or unsupervised will do little to improve quality.
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## **Section 5: Assessing and recognising work-based learning**

Three things to keep in mind:

- Assessment is one of the ways to ensure the quality of work-based learning.
  - Assessment (whether it is done, how it is done, how often and who by) will have an impact upon costs.
  - Who has the authority to assess and certify learning is central to the governance of work-based learning programmes.
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## **Should work-based learning be assessed?**

In most cases the answer will be yes. This is because:

- Assessment tells you if anything has been learned.
- It is essential if the learning is to count towards a vocational qualification.
- Formal recognition in certificates helps to ensure that the learning is portable in the labour market.

However:

- If the programme is just trying to teach about work, not develop skills, assessment may not be needed.
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## What is assessment for?

Assessment is used to::

- Check progress.
- Give feedback to learners, employers and teachers.
- Identify gaps and problems.
- Decide if the learner meets the required standard, and can progress to the next grade or be awarded a certificate or qualification.

Understanding how assessment is going to be used helps to decide how often to assess and how to do it, and what the impact of assessing will be on programme costs.

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## **How often should work-based learning be assessed?**

This depends on how long the programme is and what the assessment is for.

- The more frequent the assessment the greater the cost and potential disruption.
  - The less frequent the assessment the harder it will be to assess quality.
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## Who should assess and certify work-based learning?

The options for assessment are:

- Individual employers.
- Employers' associations or economic chambers.
- The social partners (employers plus trade unions).
- School or college teachers.
- Learners themselves.
- Combinations of these.

Questions to ask when deciding who should assess:

- What impact will the decision have on who feels they have ownership of the programme?
- How much time and effort is involved?
- Is the purpose of the assessment to give feedback to learners, or to certify the achievement of standards?

The options for certification are:

- Public authorities (ministries of education, vocational training authorities, labour ministries).
  - Social partners.
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## How should work-based learning be assessed?

Some questions to ask:

- How easy are the skills to assess?
  - Will written tests assess skills, or will a practical test that demonstrates competence be needed?
  - Who has the time and resources to assess and who is best placed to assess?
    - Individual employers, employer associations, colleges and schools?
  - Does authentic assessment (for example in real work situations) need to be balanced against what is practical and what can be afforded?
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## Section 6: Financing work-based learning

Three key questions that need to be considered:

- What needs to be financed?
- What level of resources will be needed?
- Who should pay for what?

**Don't forget:**

- Financing is not just about direct payments. It is about **all** of the costs involved in providing work-based learning. Costs can be met in more than one way: for example direct payments or people's time.
  - In work-based learning, costs and benefits are normally shared between learners, enterprises and governments. In some countries international partners can assist with some costs.
  - The answers will be different for different types of programmes.
  - Financing decisions will have an impact on quality. This may involve trade-offs.
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## **What needs to be financed, and how?**

The main elements that need to be considered are:

- Payment for learners.
  - The costs of training in the workplace.
  - Deciding which enterprises will take part.
  - The mentors or supervisors of training in the workplace.
  - The classroom-based learning that is part of the programme.
  - Supervising and assuring the quality of the work-based learning.
  - Assessing the work-based learning.
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## Payment for learners?

Depending on the type of programme, the options are:

- No wage - learners are students.
- An allowance, but not a full wage.
- A wage, but one that is less than that of a qualified worker.
- A wage, plus a wage subsidy or some other form of cost offset for the employer.

Issues to consider:

- If a wage is paid, will it provide an incentive for **both** learners and employers to take part?
    - Not too high given the lower productivity of learners.
    - Not so low that learners are discouraged from taking part.
    - Giving learners a reward for skills acquired
  - If an allowance is paid, who will bear the cost?
    - Employers? Government?
  - If employers' costs are offset, options include:
    - Tax rebates for training costs; direct wage subsidies; social payment reductions.
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## Meeting the costs of training in the workplace

This issue overlaps with the question of wages during training. The incentives for employers to take part need to be considered. Options include:

- Discounting training wages for learners' lower productivity.
- Government subsidies, tax relief, relief from social payments.
- A national training tax for firms that do not provide training.

### **A hint:**

- Costs to employers will vary according to the length of the programme, the amount of training provided, the level of the skills being taught, and the nature of participants.
    - Costs can be higher if disadvantaged or disabled participants are targeted.
    - Quality training delivers high skill levels which in turn lead to greater productivity, and so lower overall costs.
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## **Deciding which enterprises will take part**

Options include:

- No selection or screening of enterprises.
    - This option may allow more enterprises to take part, but will have an impact on quality
  - Screening by employers' chambers or by educational institutions.
    - If the conditions imposed on enterprises are too restrictive, the number able to take part will be reduced.
    - If employer organisations do the screening, they will need resources to do this. Do their own resources allow this? Do they have enough members? Will they need extra funds?
    - Schools or colleges will need to allow teachers the time to do this. This has implications for their costs.
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## Workplace mentors or supervisors

Questions include:

- Will they be required to have particular skills, experience or qualifications?
  - This have an impact on quality, but may reduce participation by enterprises, and increase their costs.
- Will enterprises be provided with compulsory or voluntary training or other support to help mentors or supervisors?
  - Either employer organisations or educational institutions could do this.
  - Whoever does it, it will require both time to be allocated, and resources such as handbooks, training guides and skill lists.
  - How can arrangements be put in place to allow educational institutions or employer organisations to fund this? Will special funds be needed?

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## Classroom-based education and training

Questions include:

- What will the learning in educational institutions cover?
  - Vocational theory? General education? Practical skills?
- If educational institutions provide practical skills training, is this just to cover skills gaps that some employers cannot provide?

**Bear in mind:**

- The more practical training that educational institutions provide, the higher their costs.
  - The more practical training that employers provide, the lower the costs to government, and the higher the costs to employers.
    - This is closely linked to the issue of how the costs of training in the workplace can be met.
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## Supervising the quality of work-based learning

Options include:

- No visits to firms to check employment conditions and training quality.
    - This is cheaper, but has an impact on quality.
  - Visit enterprises to check on employment conditions (e.g. correct wages paid; health and safety; hours of work) but not training quality.
  - Visit enterprises to monitor progress, check training quality, and help them to improve it.
    - Employer organisations, schools and colleges or government training departments are options.
    - The more frequent and detailed the visits, the higher the costs.
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## Assessing work-based learning

Options include:

- No assessment.
  - This may be appropriate if programmes are brief, and focus on work experience and career choice.
  - However it will normally be less appropriate if the work-based learning is part of a formal vocational education and training programme.
- Employers do the assessment and inform schools, colleges or apprenticeship authorities of the outcomes.
- Employers' chambers or similar organisations do the assessment.
- Schools or colleges do the assessment.

**Bear in mind:**

- Assessment is about **both** monitoring progress and quality **and** certifying achievement.
  - Costs are higher if assessment is more frequent.
  - If assessment is left until the end of the programme, problems such as skill gaps and poor training will not be able to be addressed.
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## Section 7: Governing work-based learning

### What is governance?

Governance of work-based learning is about:

- **Who makes** policies and decisions.
- **Who can enforce** policies and decisions.
- **How** policies and decisions are made.

Governance is about strengthening **commitment and ownership**.

- **Not just** the day to day management of programmes.
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## **What should governance include?**

Governance can cover policies, collective agreements, rules and regulations about things such as:

- Programme content.
  - Who can take part in programmes.
  - How and where learning takes place.
  - Financing.
  - Trainers' qualifications.
  - Assessment: where and who by?
  - Who awards qualifications.
  - Quality assurance.
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## How are policies, rules, regulations and decisions to be made?

- **A less effective, model:**
    - Government ministries and agencies control everything at a central level.
  - **A more effective model for work-based learning:**
    - Decisions are made collectively: all stakeholders - government and the social partners, local or regional bodies - working together.
      - Governance bodies and structures are in place that allow collective decision making and policy formation.
      - Seeking advice, and consultation and communication with stakeholders are ongoing.
    - Key information is shared between all stakeholders.
    - Policies are developed and decisions are made at the most appropriate level:
      - Some national; some regional; some local; some at industry sector level.
        - Good governance also allows individual enterprises and schools and colleges to have a say in decisions that affect them.
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## **The basic building blocks of work-based learning governance**

- A national body including the social partners and government that:
    - Provides advice.
    - Forms national policies.
    - Sets goals and objectives.
    - Gives a strong voice to employers.
  - Bodies that include, and preferably are managed by the social partners and that can make decisions about, and develop policies for, particular industry sectors.
  - There can be many variations on these building blocks. There is not a best model.
  - Do these building blocks exist?
    - If not, how could they be created?
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## What next?

The discussion will have generated a number of options, or a list of things that need to be done. These will be the basis of your recommendations to policy makers and of strategies for action. They will build on the weaknesses and gaps that you have identified

**Step 1:** Work out your priorities: decide which ones are the most important.

**Step 2:** What steps need to be taken to implement these priorities?

Some of the ways that priorities could be implemented:

- Starting a capacity-building project.
- Holding a series of workshops in different regions, in different industry sectors, or with different stakeholder groups.
- Developing a vision and selling it to stakeholders.
- Forming a policy writing group that includes key stakeholders.
- A survey to gather information on need and demand, available resources, and the willingness of enterprises to participate.
- Creating some practical tools that employers, students and teachers can use.
- Creating new legislation or regulations.
- Running a series of training courses for stakeholders.
- Seeking help from an international agency.