

WLife workplace onboarding needs analysis

What we learned from 48 responses in Finland, Estonia and Latvia, and what it meant for the training programme and the Recipe Book.

Purpose and sample

During the first phase of WLife, the partners used the same 10-question questionnaire in Finland, Estonia and Latvia. We wanted to understand how new employees and trainees are introduced to work, how tasks are explained, how understanding is checked and what happens when people need different kinds of support.

A total of 48 responses were collected: in Estonia in March–April 2025, in Finland in May–June 2025 and in Latvia in August 2025. Respondents included employers and workplace representatives, team leaders and mentors, young workers and learners with workplace experience. Not everyone answered every question, so the number of responses varies between 43 and 48.

The questionnaire was not intended as a representative sector survey. We used it to check whether the needs described in the project application were also visible in everyday work, and to help us plan the training programme and Recipe Book.

Main finding

Workplace onboarding works best when learning is practical and another person is there to support the newcomer. The picture becomes less consistent when instructions need to be written down, used again, adapted to different people or checked afterwards.

For WLife, the question was how to keep what already works in hands-on learning and make good guidance easier to repeat and share.

Where onboarding stands today

For the project, we scored the current state on a scale of 1–5, one score for each of the ten questions. A high score means the practice is systematic: planned in advance and applied consistently. A low score means it is ad hoc or missing. Each answer option was given a level on that scale, and the score for a question is the average of the answers given to it. Which option counts as which level is our own judgement, not an external standard. Figure 1 shows the ten scores on one wheel. It is a way of seeing the pattern in the answers. It is not a validated measurement scale.



Figure 1. Workplace onboarding practice across the ten questions, scored 1–5. 5 = a systematic practice, 1 = the practice is missing.

Six findings

1 Practical learning is the strongest part of onboarding

Practical learning alongside an experienced employee is common. 28 of 48 respondents (58%) said this was their main way of introducing a new employee to work.

The same goes for task training. Of 47 responses, 23 (49%) start with simpler tasks and gradually increase the difficulty, while 17 (36%) work alongside a mentor before moving towards independent work. Only 7 (15%) expect quick adaptation without a separate training period. This is worth keeping; the task is to make it easier for different mentors to do in the same way.

2 Much of the guidance is still verbal

Documentation is far less consistent. 14 of 48 respondents (29%) have no proper documentation and pass information on verbally. 22 (46%) rely mainly on demonstrations and practical exercises. Only 12 use written or digital instructions, manuals, videos or digital platforms.

Onboarding then depends on which experienced employee happens to be available, and on what that person remembers to explain.

3 Understanding is not always checked directly

Understanding does get checked, but mostly through the mentor. 25 of 48 respondents (52%) said a mentor observes the work and gives continuous feedback, and 10 (21%) hold follow-up discussions.

But only 2 (4%) use a formal knowledge or skills check, and 11 (23%) rely on the newcomer to ask when something is unclear.

What this means. Don't rely on silence. Ask the person to explain or show the next step.

4 Most rely on a single way of explaining

31 of 48 respondents (65%) named practical learning with a mentor as the way they support different learners. 7 (15%) make no specific adaptation. Only 8 (17%) combine written, visual and practical guidance, and 2 (4%) mention plain language and materials in several languages.

5 Responsibility for guidance sits in different places

Among 46 responses, 17 (37%) said team leaders delegate onboarding to experienced employees, 13 (28%) said the team leader organises onboarding and supports the newcomer daily, and 15 (33%) involve the team leader in assessing progress. There is no single model here, and the answers do not suggest one is needed.

What this means. Whoever guides the newcomer should work from the same basic principles about what to explain and what to look for.

6 Follow-up is uneven

Of 46 responses on measuring onboarding success, 16 (35%) said it is not systematically tracked. Others use a practical evaluation before independent work (28%), newcomer feedback (20%) or scheduled follow-up discussions (15%).

The same is true of improvement: of 47 responses, 17 (36%) said onboarding has not changed for a long time, while others run feedback surveys, digitise materials or set up mentoring programmes.

What respondents added in their own words

"Companies mostly hope that people will adapt to the working environment by themselves. If companies show interest in us, young people will show interest in companies."

Learner, four workplace placements

"This is meant for medium and large companies. In small companies all the processes work differently."

Employer representative

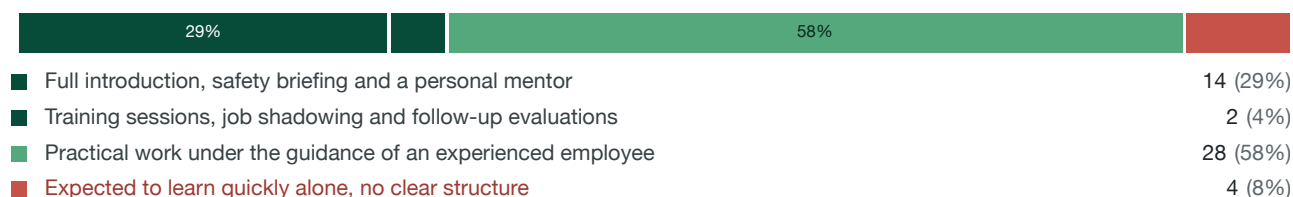
"Never be shy: always ask if you don't understand something."

Young worker

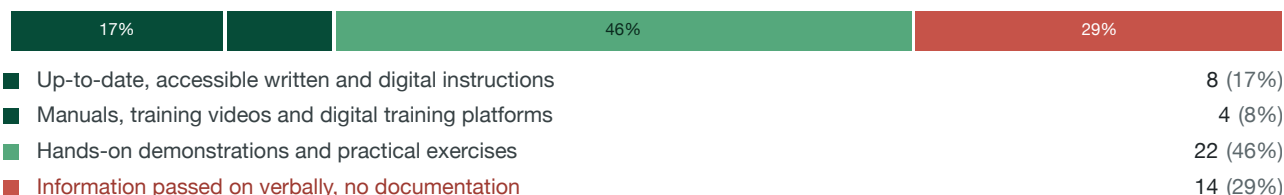
Question by question

■ Systematic ■ Structured ■ Informal ■ Partial ■ Practice absent

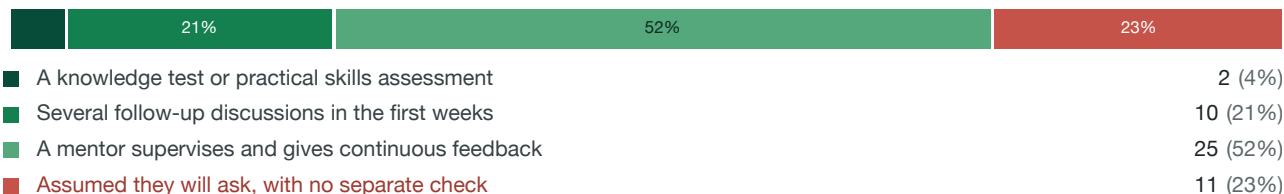
Q1 Structured start



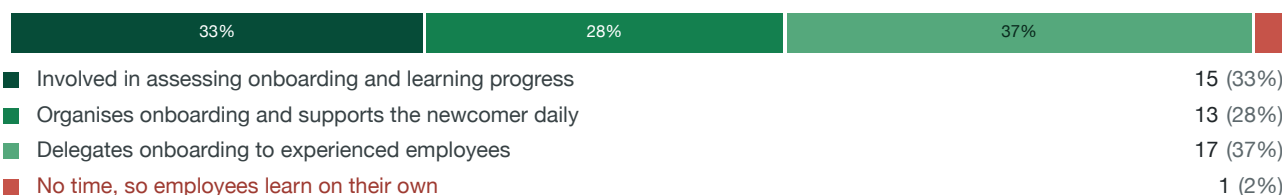
Q2 Materials and documentation



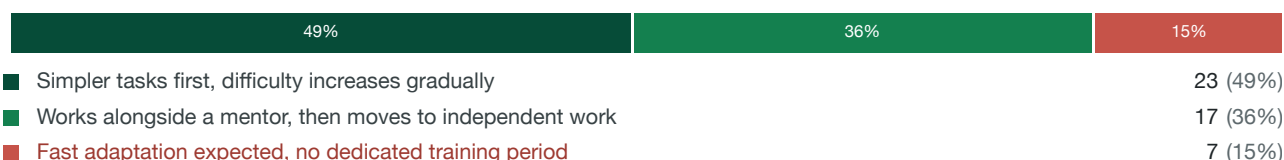
Q3 Checking understanding



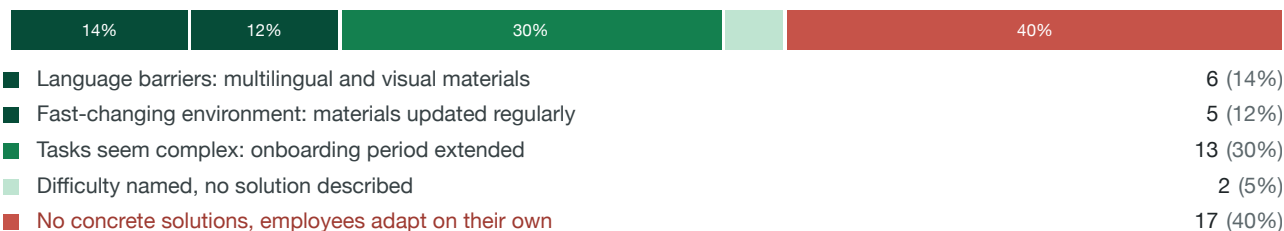
Q4 Role of the team leader



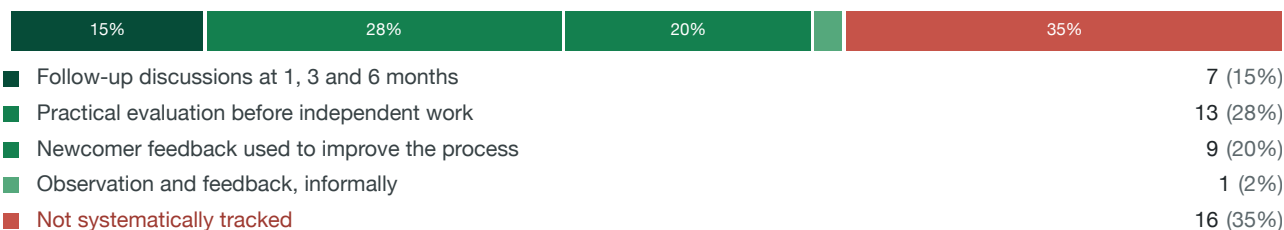
Q5 Practical training



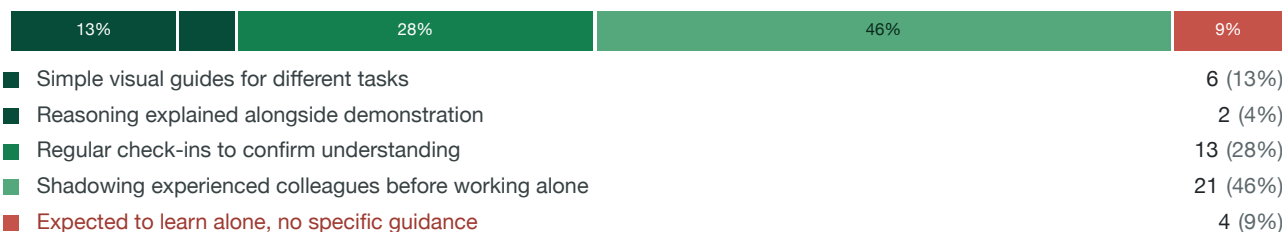
Q6 Solving difficulties



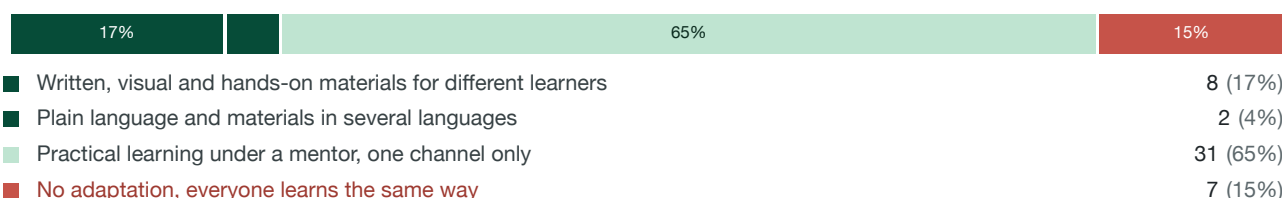
Q7 Measuring success



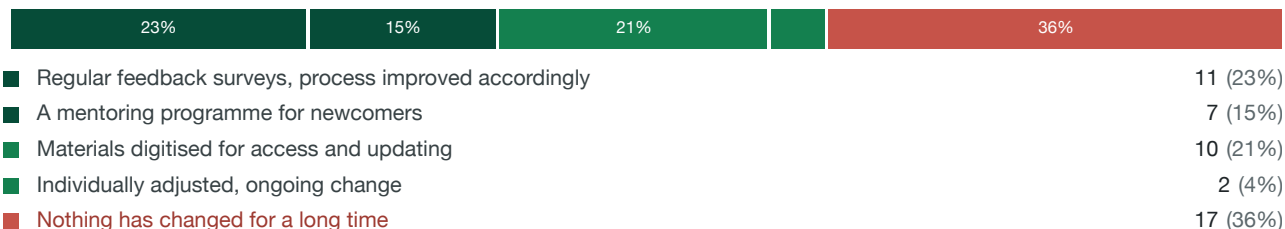
Q8 Support for beginners



Q9 Differentiation and language



Q10 Continuous improvement



From the answers to the two outputs

The application already focused on the link between tasks, competence, independence and support, with EQF Levels 1–2 as a reference. The questionnaire added a practical workplace perspective. Suitable tasks are not enough: people can still struggle when instructions are unclear, too much information comes at once, understanding is assumed or the guidance does not fit the situation.

Table 1 shows each need and what it means for the training programme and the Recipe Book.

Table 1. Needs identified in the questionnaire and the design requirements they set for the training programme and the Recipe Book.

Identified need	Design requirement	Output
Practical learning and demonstration already work well	Build on hands-on guidance instead of replacing it	Training
Guidance depends heavily on verbal explanation	Make key guidance available after the demonstration through short text, pictures and video	Recipe Book
Understanding is sometimes assumed rather than checked	Build a simple understanding and progress check into guidance	Both
Newcomers need different levels and forms of support	Help the instructor adapt guidance to the situation and current support need without labelling the person	Both
Language and learner differences are weakly addressed	Use plain language, visual support and several language versions	Recipe Book
Mentors and team leaders carry much of the responsibility	Develop their competence in instruction, communication, feedback, psychological safety and supportive leadership	Training
Good practice depends strongly on the individual mentor	Create a common guidance structure that can be used by different instructors	Both
Onboarding is not systematically followed up	Include observable outcomes, checks and follow-up	Both

What the two outputs need to do

The questionnaire pointed to two things: the people who guide newcomers need practical guidance skills, and simple tools they can use while they work.

Training programme

By the end of the training, participants should be able to:

- explain the task and what a good result looks like;
- give information step by step;
- check that the person has understood;
- make asking questions normal;
- adjust guidance to experience and current support needs;
- use plain language, demonstration, pictures and video;
- understand the roles of mentors and team leaders;
- give feedback that supports greater independence;
- discuss what the task requires without labelling the person.

Recipe Book

The Recipe Book should provide:

- short guidance for common workplace situations;
- a starting point in what can actually be seen;
- guidance that can be adjusted to the support needed;
- the same simple structure for every situation;
- short text in plain language, with pictures, video and several language versions;
- examples of what to say and what to do;
- a simple way to check whether the guidance worked;
- a clear next step towards more independent work.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Ahlmanin koulun säätiö / AhlmanEdu (FI) · Yebisu Eesti (EE) · Bulduru Tehnikums (LV)