



# TRAINERS' GUIDE

**DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS THROUGH APPRENTICESHIPS**

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## TRAINERS' GUIDE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS THROUGH APPRENTICESHIPS

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## Partners



University  
of Humanities  
and Economics  
in Łódź

**University of Humanities and Economics in Łódź (AHE) – Poland**, is an accredited higher education institution, which in addition to traditional university programmes (BA, MA, MSc, PHD) provides also postgraduates studies and courses for various target groups, included adult unemployed jobseekers, youth, students, disabled, seniors, teachers, trainers, people of various professions, migrants, children, disadvantaged youth, unemployed. As one of the largest private universities in Poland, AHE has 23 faculties and offers a wide choice of subjects, over 100 courses, including 5 of them in English. [www.ahe.lodz.pl](http://www.ahe.lodz.pl)



**Friesland College – Holland**, is an open educational institution with respect for all religions and cultures in society. It is involved with and listens to its students; has a passion for teaching and is innovative. Students can choose from a wide variety of courses, job opportunities, facilities and activities at Friesland College. These are

provided throughout the province of Friesland by a small teaching and support staff of 1000 persons. They are active in several locations, the largest two being located in Leeuwarden and Heerenveen which are in Friesland, the north of The Netherlands. [www.frieslandcollege.nl](http://www.frieslandcollege.nl)

**KSPMC – Lithuania**, Kaunas vocational training center is a public institution, with 1.700 students and 70 teachers. Its main activity is primary and continuous vocational training, specialties construction, social nursing, special needs students, adult training. The organization aims to become a modern institution, responding to challenges of globalization, European integration, and promoting the attractiveness of vocational training to all target groups. Teachers develop their own qualifications, creating new teaching curricula and materials. They want to increase the professional and vocational level in society and amongst young people and increase the chances of young enterprises by offering knowledge and role models. The institution has broad experience in working with different target groups to combat school dropouts and youth unemployment through increasing the entrepreneurial skills of young people and trainings in adult education. [www.profcentras.lt](http://www.profcentras.lt)



**Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierri – Spain**, is a subsidized High School for Science and Technology and Vocational Education and Training (both EQF level 3 and 5) in the Basque Region. Each year the school provides education for over 400 full time students and 1000+ adult part time learners with a staff of 45 people. Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierri focuses on serving local Industry and is committed to the integral and lifelong learning of its students. The Centre promotes Innovation in Technological and Pedagogical Projects and aims to offer a quality service to the Public, meeting the local training needs of young people, the local universities and institutions. [www.txorierri.net](http://www.txorierri.net)



**IDEC – Greece**, is a training consulting company located in Piraeus. Its activities consist of training, management consulting, quality assurance, evaluation and development of ICT solutions for both private and public sector. IDEC has been active the last 20 years in the field of EU projects. It has long experience in European policies regarding lifelong learning and in particular EQF, ECVET, Europass, EQAVET, validation of non-formal and informal learning, work based learning & apprenticeship schemes and in national reforms of education and training systems. [www.idec.gr](http://www.idec.gr)



**IEK DELTA – Greece**, has been established in 1971 and soon became the leader in Vocational Training in Greece, certified by the Greek Ministry of Education and the E.U. With 47 years of experience in private education, offering Post-Secondary Training Programs of Level 5, its goal is to ensure the quality of the provided knowledge and high levels of professional rehabilitation and employment. [www.iekdelta.gr](http://www.iekdelta.gr)

## Introduction

In recent years there has been a notable shift in the skills that employees are required to have. Employers increasingly privilege soft skills over hard skills. Soft skills are currently described as some of the most important core competencies. They are a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual, emotional and practical skills, and can be applied across employment contexts. EU (2016) classifies soft skills as ‘Key competencies for lifelong learning’.

Nevertheless, there is no definitive list of soft skills, but one can find common elements. Soft skills can be divided into three main groups:

<b>Personal skills,</b>	i.e. Learning skills, Tolerance to stress, Professional ethics, Self-awareness, Commitment, Life balance, Creativity/Innovation
<b>Social skills</b>	i.e. Communication, Teamwork, Contact network, Negotiation, Conflict Management, Leadership, Culture Adaptability
<b>Content-reliant/ Methodological skills</b>	i.e. Customer/User orientation, Continuous improvement, Adaptability to change, Results orientation, Analytical skills, Decision-making, Management skills, Research and information management (Cinque, 2016).

The optimum method to approach students and to provide them with the chance to develop the soft skills that are needed at work is work-based learning and apprenticeships. Work-based learning and apprenticeships constitute a shift from transmission models of teaching -learning about- to experiential learning -learning for- and provide the opportunity to integrate hands-on experience with theory.

The DESSA project aims to develop an apprenticeship scheme for the acquisition of soft skills by students in upper secondary and higher vocational education and training.

As part of international and partner cooperation, we have developed an apprenticeship scheme that supports students' soft skills by using elements of gamification and including the role of a natural mentor. These two elements, gamification and natural mentoring methods, help to keep the apprentice engaged, motivated and comfortable.

The project is implemented by 6 partners from 5 countries (Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Poland and Lithuania), representing four VET schools, one university and one adult training company. To help trainers of secondary and higher vocational schools, we have developed a guide that allows them to support the development of soft skills by apprentices by using gamification elements and introducing the role of natural mentor.

In the first and following chapters, we refer to the results of surveys conducted among entrepreneurs, to the effects of focus group meetings with representatives of various professional sectors conducted in partner countries, and to the best practices of apprenticeships in all partner countries.

In the second chapter, based on the results of our research, we show the importance of developing soft skills. We present the characteristics of those soft skills that were selected by entrepreneurs in the survey, during focus group meetings and based on an analysis of best practices.

In the third chapter of the guide, we present a scheme of apprenticeships that takes into account the development of apprentices' soft skills. The apprenticeships allow trainees to enrich their soft skills using a natural mentor and gamification elements.

Chapter four is devoted to explaining the role of a natural mentor. We show the responsibility that a natural mentor takes on during apprenticeships. We distinguish the role of a natural mentor and the role of a supervisor. We also present examples of how a natural mentor works in a practical aspect and **what role a natural mentor plays in the apprenticeship scheme.**

Chapter five describes the methodology of educational activities based on gamification in the context of the apprenticeship scheme.

Chapter six discusses the methods to monitor the progress of interns during apprenticeships. This part also contains instructions on the online platform created in the project for students and apprentices, and refers to the orientation guide, which is dedicated to supporting the independent development of apprentices in the field of soft skills.

Chapter seven include exercises and examples of how to develop soft skills, and information on supporting activities based on gamification with the role of a natural mentor. There are also practical tips for trainers on how to inspire apprentices to develop soft skills in relation to the competencies indicated as most important by entrepreneurs in the research conducted during the project.

The last section, 'Sharing experiences and recommendations' provides concrete examples of the application of the apprenticeship scheme within partners' countries. It emphasizes the particular challenges they faced and their recommendations.

The guidebook includes references and annexes, where the reader can learn about the results of our project activities (survey results, best practices).





## Chapter 1 – Initial research on soft skills

As part of the Dessa international project, which concerns the development of a traineeship scheme for vocational and secondary school students as part of education and the acquisition of soft skills, an anonymous **survey** was conducted among entrepreneurs in partner countries. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information on the importance of soft skills for entrepreneurs and to find out which skills are particularly important for the development of an enterprise.

In addition to the surveys, **focus group** meetings (focused interviews/discussions) with entrepreneurs, representatives of education institutions, and students were organized in each partner country. Focus group meetings took the form of round table discussions with different types of experts in apprenticeship, soft skills, innovative learning, stakeholders, policy makers, company owners, businessmen and businesswomen. The participants in the focus groups were invited to give suggestions and advice on the development of the apprenticeship scheme for soft skills. These meetings focused on interviews based on a joint discussion on the importance of employees' soft skills and the need to support soft skills during apprenticeships. Opinions were collected on which soft skills are particularly important in specific work situations. The participants of the meetings commented on how to motivate and support the development of apprentices' soft skills. The aim of the focus group interviews was to broaden the knowledge obtained in the surveys regarding the need to develop the soft skills of apprentices, but also to identify why and when particular soft skills are important. In addition, an important purpose of the meetings was to indicate methods of developing the soft skills of apprentices and to construct the plan of apprenticeships.

An important source of knowledge in the DESSA project was the partners' experiences of **the best practice** of apprenticeships. Each partner prepared a description of the best practices from various institutions and professions, which focused on methods supporting the

development of apprentices' soft skills. These experiences allow for the construction of an apprenticeship scheme that supports the soft skills of the apprentices.

### 1.1. Surveys for entrepreneurs – results and conclusions

The DESSA project assumed that developing students' soft skills would enable students to better adapt to the expectations of entrepreneurs. To check this and understand the importance of soft skills for entrepreneurs, we conducted surveys in each of the partner countries – Lithuania, Poland, Greece, Netherlands and Spain. The effects show why soft skills are so important, which competencies are particularly valuable and whether it is worth supporting employees in their development. The survey conducted in partner countries clearly shows that entrepreneurs are aware of the importance of the soft skills of employees. These competencies are valued, and employers try to motivate their employees to expand them. All respondents admitted that they value employees' soft skills and notice their importance to the company's development. It is worth pointing out those soft skills that were often mentioned in the responses of respondents from different countries include **communication** skills. Communication penetrates all areas of employment. All activities are preceded by some form of communication, in the form of acceptance, reports or enquiries. It is worth noting that every employee is aware of their role, and the employer controls the development of soft skills through effective communication with the team.

Respondents also mentioned the ability to **cooperate and carry out teamwork**, as well as **the ability to motivate**. These skills influence the atmosphere during the implementation of tasks and determine their effects, improve the business climate, and often determine the effectiveness of employees.

Entrepreneurs value **the creativity and innovation** of employees, which can also translate into the ability to **solve problems, adapt to changes and be willing to develop**. This group of skills is particularly important in the changing conditions of the labour market, in the face of changing social needs, as well as in the situation of new challenges that characterize modern societies. Entrepreneurs, therefore, see the importance of training employees in the field of soft skills, but some train them on their own and try to develop soft skills during the implementation of professional tasks.

More information about the results from surveys can be found in the ANNEXES.

### 1.2. Focus group meetings – results and conclusions

Focus group meetings (focus interviews) with different types of experts in apprenticeship soft skills and innovative learning took place – stakeholders, company owners, businessmen and businesswomen. About 10 people took part in such events in each country (Poland, Greece, Spain, Lithuania, the Netherlands). Most meetings took place remotely via video link. The aim of these meetings was to exchange information and to discuss the need to support soft skills among apprentices during apprenticeships, as well as to gain knowledge about which soft skills are valued by employers from various professional sectors and why. Another goal of the focus group meetings was to work out an apprenticeships scheme that would allow the development of trainees' soft skills.

Participants represented different professions. There were meetings with company workers, production workers, representatives of the technical, construction and IT industries, representatives of the service industry, medical representatives, lawyers, managers, educational representatives, psychological counsellors, mentoring persons and also students. Focus group interviews/discussions showed the importance of the soft skills of employees. These soft competencies are significant in various professional areas and in various professions.

### Some reflections from focus group meetings in partner countries

**Lithuania:** Above all, soft skills should be appreciated, this can be achieved through courses, seminars, but also awards, assessments, and further career opportunities. Employees can be sent to competitions of excellence and rewarded. Discussing the year's results and talking to each employee or apprentice is essential at the beginning of the season. In addition, the expectations of the labour market are motivating, as employers appreciate employees with soft skills.

#### Poland:

There are some interesting suggestions about developing the soft skills of apprentices:

- ✓ conversing with employees, giving tips, praising the employee,
- ✓ building strategies in teamwork, planning, clarity of message from the managing person,
- ✓ the general atmosphere of work and the implementation of tasks is important,
- ✓ creating an opportunity for the employee to do the task that he or she thought of. The employer proposes tasks that the employee performs according to his/her idea,
- ✓ giving feedback on the task. It is important to reflect on the effects of the action,
- ✓ allowing apprentices to carry out the task on their own
- ✓ contact with the user and solving a real problem
- ✓ discovering the sphere of values of the person.

**Greece:** Companies said that they encourage the development of employees' soft skills by assigning the leadership of a project team, or changing their duties regularly and giving them new assignments. Another company said that they use Study Technology, so their employees learn how to read effectively. Other participants answered that they develop the right environment in the company, which promotes the development of soft skills, and that employees are given targeted tasks, which aim to develop one specific soft skill and they also let their employees take initiative in completing the assigned task. One participant said that their company provides incentives, which can range from simple financial incentives, to stocks in the organization and further educational development of the employee. Other participants answered that they forward relevant links to books, articles and videos that concentrate on the development of soft skills. One thing that all participants agreed on is

that the development of soft skills mainly depends on each person, since they are the ones who have to try to be engaged in their tasks and personal development. So, communicating what soft skills are and explaining why they are important for the company and for each individual is important.

**The Netherlands:** The important point regarding apprenticeships is to encourage trainees to continue and to **reflect after each work** situation. The internship coordinator should be **a role model** and show students the joy of work that contributes to self-development. The coordinator should devote a lot of time to **reflection** as in many cases reflection is something that students do not care for at first, but later mention it as an important part of their education. During the internship, students should be increasingly open to the new situation and overcome their barriers. Giving students some space helps them become more independent and encourages students to step out of their comfort zone. Students should be given the freedom to explore and the right to make mistakes. However, the facilitator should first make sure that the students know that they can always lean on him/her. So, they should be given the confidence to have the courage to try new things, and a coordinator should allow them to make their own choices about solutions to problem situations and in what they do.

**Spain:** The entrepreneurs felt that they're encouraged all the time to develop their teamwork, and their goal and project planning (problem-solving) skills, but there's never enough time to really go into how to improve weak spots. Sometimes they work on their personal goals and motivations, and they are encouraged to take initiative in all kinds of work, but when personal circumstances are problematic or someone's personality is not developed, more specialised or individual training is necessary. The participants felt that much more emphasis is placed on soft skills than before, with a lot of work put into transversal modules such as the Work Orientation and Entrepreneurial modules in the VET centres in Spain. However, more can always be done. The truth is that even though some apprentices need to develop their soft skills more than others, all receive the same programme - usually because of restrictions in time and space. All participants agreed that they would send their apprentices on soft skills courses.

#### Proposal and suggestion collection during focus group meetings

Participants were asked to give suggestions on the development of soft skills through apprenticeships. They said:

- ✓ that an organized educational programme should be developed, which would be discussed and agreed upon between the company, the VET centre, and the student.
- ✓ specific tasks should be given to students, which would help them develop their skills, e.g. give them a small project and assist them in completing it, with the help of their superiors, but at the same time giving them space to develop their own plan and actions.
- ✓ other suggestions were to continually encourage the students and guide them throughout the apprenticeship, give them access to online resources, give them incentives (e.g. days off from work), offer opportunities for further training, and in general have a positive attitude and support them.

- ✓ students should be encouraged to take initiative. Entrepreneurs should ask students to incorporate their ideas as they are so important. Students should believe that they will be able to deal with difficulties and that they will know how to resolve problems. It is important to create space for students' development.
- ✓ an important role is played by reflecting on the completed tasks and on the use of soft skills.
- ✓ A very interesting proposal to try peer-to-peer coaching has been advanced. The trainees talk and work in small groups and give each other feedback. If they do this weekly or daily, they will get used to it. They develop their coaching skills.
- ✓ Often, the motivating system consists of referring to the analysis of one's own experiences.  
It is important to refer to the past of the person and their experiences, but also to the future, as the person imagines the expected future, referring to professional work. Here, analysis concerns the sphere of values, goals and personal resources. It is important to cover the internal motivation of a person, why he/she wants to work in a given profession, what he/she expects, what is important to him/her.

#### Identified factors that favour the development of trainees' soft skills

- Allowing apprentices to make mistakes
- Creating the space to grow and learn from everyday activities (safe learning environment)
- Getting feedback from others (also from peers)
- Independence is very important to develop soft skills.

At this stage, important factors contributing to the development of the soft skills of apprentices were highlighted. These include, above all, *creating a safe environment* in which the apprentice can *take the initiative* and undertake an independent task. It is important to *positively motivate* him/her in the implementation of these tasks or projects and encourage him/her to solve problems on his/her own. *Cooperation with other apprentices*, group work, and mutual support play an important role. In addition, developing soft skills involves *reflection, analysis, and evaluation upon completion of the assignment*.

From the statements in focus groups, we can conclude that the development of soft skills requires certain conditions. First of all, it is important that the trainee receives some knowledge about which soft skills are particularly valuable in the chosen profession and in what situations they are important. Second, there should be some space for personal development. In addition, trainees should receive support in this area by participating in specific tasks and projects that allow them to become aware of what soft skills they have and which they should develop. These activities should be monitored and the trainee should reflect on them and on what they have learned. An important role in this process is played by the natural mentor, who is a person whom the trainee trusts, and from whom the trainee receives support and feedback. In the DESSA project, we propose a scheme of activities

supporting the development of soft skills, taking into account the role of a natural mentor and tasks that include elements of gamification. These tasks are challenges for trainees, they allow them to gain knowledge about themselves, they contain elements that support self-reflection and end with self-assessment.

It is therefore essential to develop methods that motivate and support the development of apprentices' soft skills. These competencies do not appear separately, but are connected with each other. For example, creativity is important in adapting to change. Communication may have various forms. It may be communication in a team. Another communication challenge is the precision of e-mail messages or communication in other online media.

Different soft skills can be important depending on the situation and profession. The need for soft skills may vary depending on the person and his/her situation.

The conclusion is that it is impossible to practice certain skills separately, without the context of the practical situation. It is, therefore, worthwhile to relate the training of soft skills to specific professional situations in which they may turn out to be important. Students participating in a focus group meeting indicated that they are often unaware of the importance of soft skills during their studies. Only through participation in apprenticeships is the role of such skills in professional work revealed. It also turns out that many people do not realize that keeping a job or getting a promotion often depends **on the level of soft skills**. It also shows that poor awareness in this regard is the result of the poor development of soft skills in the education process. Therefore, it is an area that requires special support and attention from trainers, educators, mentors, tutors. Therefore, the topic discussed in our guide book is very important.

Apart from addressing knowledge concerning the importance of soft skills of employees, focus groups were aimed at developing a scheme of apprenticeships and collecting opinions from meeting participants on how to support interns in developing soft skills. The focus interviews indicated various ways and methods of supporting soft skills, of evaluating the development of apprentices in this area, and of motivating apprentices to assume responsibility for their own development. During focus group discussions, companies, teachers, in-company trainers, students agreed that **practical training** is of paramount importance for the future employment of young people. Apprenticeship should become a pathway to an explicitly defined goal – acquiring a recognized qualification – but this pathway should be well signposted. All stakeholders (the State, employers' organizations, and trade unions, VET providers, and companies) must get on board. They must use the full potential of apprenticeship, not only to overcome youth unemployment, but also to attract more learners of all ages to vocational training, and improve skills for employability – including soft skills.

Further information about the focus group meetings can be found in the ANNEXES of this guide book.

### Best practices – results and conclusions

Referring to the project research and knowledge gained, we can identify certain factors supporting the development of the apprentices' soft skills. Summarizing best practices (see



examples in the ANNEXES), we contend that the following categories should be included in the apprenticeship scheme to support the development of participants' soft skills:

- **Challenges based on assignments and projects**
- **Development of personal resources and possibilities**
- **Creating spheres of initiative and independence**
- **Defining goals and expected results**
- **Organizing group work with peers and co-workers**
- **Introducing methods stimulating the development of soft skills**
- **Mentoring of apprentices and introducing natural mentors**
- **Monitoring, evaluation and self-evaluation of apprentices**

The indicated categories relate to the development of apprentices' soft skills. They do not refer to strict professional knowledge and hard skills, but they support the learning process, encourage responsibility, increase motivation, teach reflective skills, and thus help in general professional preparation. They do not refer to specific professions, but constitute a general plan for the personal development of apprentices. We outline each category below.

- **Challenges based on assignments and projects**

This includes creating challenging situations that allow trainees to develop soft skills. These challenges may take the form of tasks to be implemented or projects. Their practical nature is important, but they should also contain a problem to be solved, which requires the development of personal strategies and personal commitment. It is also good for the assignment to include aspects of a new experience. The evaluation of these tasks focuses on the analysis of personal development in terms of acquiring specific soft skills.

- **Development of personal resources and possibilities**

The projects and assignments for apprentices are about discovering and developing personal resources that may be relevant to a trainee's professional career. Previous experiences, observations or reflections may be important, but it is also worth paying attention to the area of interests, passions, values, interpersonal skills that trainees have or want to develop.

- **Creating spheres of initiative and independence**

Independence means the space to implement creative activity. It consists of creating situations (e.g. tasks, projects) in which the apprentice can show initiative, act independently, make his/her own choices, implement his/her own ideas. This allows the mentor to support the creativity of apprentices and encourages them to take responsibility and to become more open to changes. During apprenticeships, such tasks should be supported by the mentor and the apprentice should be encouraged by him/her to be creative.

- **Defining goals and expected results in the area of soft skills development**

Before each challenge (project), it is important to define its goals and expected results. In the case of tasks related to expanding personal resources, the apprentice also identifies goals that are related to the development of selected soft skills which are key in future professional work or important for himself/herself.

- **Organizing group work with peers and co-workers**

Organizing group work provides an opportunity to develop many important soft skills. First of all, group work requires communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, but also involves the exchange of information, sharing ideas, and creativity. The group builds relationships; group members support each other, and also learn from each other. Group work allows for sharing responsibility, but also motivates action, so it is worth organizing the tasks and projects of interns in groups or involving them in the work of existing teams of employees.

- **Introducing methods stimulating soft skills development**

The internship plan should introduce methods supporting the work of soft skills. These include the project method, discussions, creativity techniques, coaching tools, but also those that support planning, building a vision of one's own development, assuming group work or other methods supporting reflection, self-reflection and self-assessment. First of all, in the DESSA project, we propose methods that enable gamification, which will be described in the next chapter. The second important methodological solution, which is also included in the apprenticeship scheme, is the inclusion of the role of a natural mentor.

- **Mentoring of apprentices and introducing the natural mentor**

The role of the natural mentor will be described in another chapter. First of all, the natural mentor motivates the apprentice to develop soft skills during apprenticeships.

- **Monitoring, evaluation and self-evaluation of apprentices**

All stages of the apprenticeship should be monitored by the apprenticeship tutor, but in the apprenticeship scheme proposed in the project, we assume the inclusion of a natural mentor and the apprentice's participation in the evaluation. The reflective discussions of the trainees with a natural mentor are important. Tasks and their effects are assessed, as well as the apprentices' progress in developing their soft skills. The trainee describes what lessons were learned and which soft skills they developed. Evaluation and self-evaluation are not a summary or assessment, but a guide to further development. They define what the student wants to learn.

Further information about focus group meetings can be found in the ANNEXES of this guide book.





## Chapter 2 – Why we should develop soft skills

The possession of soft skills by workers is one of the factors that determine the success and improvement of the quality of work in enterprises. Undoubtedly, a company's development depends on employees' soft skills and significantly affects the success of the company. One should also not forget the important role that these competencies play in other areas of life.

### 2.1. What are soft skills?

Soft skills are often also referred to as transversal skills or competencies, key skills, core skills or life skills. It is a concept for which there is no universally accepted definition. Most people have a personal idea about the meaning of “soft skills” and it is clear that they are different from “hard skills”. Hard skills are recognised as technical (theoretical or practical) know-how and skills which not only have visible results when activated but can also be easily classified in steps or progressive units of learning and easily evaluated in terms of the results.

Soft skills, however, are not so easy to define or evaluate in quantitative terms and their development has been characterised as something either innate (a character trait or natural talent) or developed intuitively or naturally through life experience or as a much hoped-for side effect of the traditional learning process. Soft skills are, inter alia, a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence, which enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals by complementing hard skills. The Collins English Dictionary defines the term as *desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude.*

Nowadays, it is widely recognised that it is possible to promote the acquisition, development and consolidation of soft skills (or personal development) in training programmes/paths, mostly by supporting and guiding people in the process of personal development and in work-related use of their social-emotional skills.

## 2.2. Which soft skills are really important for entrepreneurs?

In the DESSA project, we asked entrepreneurs from various countries which soft skills are the most important for them and for the functioning of their enterprise. The conducted surveys and meetings of focus groups allowed us to identify the 10 most frequently indicated soft competencies. We created a list of the soft skills that were **highlighted and repeated as important in the collected surveys and also indicated during focus group meetings**. These are:

- Communication skills
- Cooperation/Teamwork
- Conflict resolution
- Problem-solving
- Creativity/innovation
- Adaptability to change
- Motivation skills
- Willingness for personal development
- Time management skills
- Negotiation skills
- Leadership
- Confidence

## 2.3. Characteristics of selected soft skills

- Communication skills

The ability to communicate turned out to be extremely important both in the surveys collected and during the focus group meetings. Communication means being able to understand others and being understood. Professional communication concerns the ability to communicate in a group, but also to communicate with different recipients in different ways. Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. Communication skills involve listening, speaking, observing and empathizing. It is also helpful to understand the differences in how to communicate through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and digital communications, like email and social media.

*„Seek out opportunities both on and off the job that require you to use communication skills. This will help you keep good skills fresh while also allowing you the opportunity to practice new skills.”(1)*

### How to develop communication skills:

- ✓ Developing communication skills requires paying attention to how we communicate with others and how we read the messages of others.
- ✓ One of the methods of supporting communication is to offer an analysis of the ways of formulating verbal messages and learning the principles of effective communication.
- ✓ Also, receiving feedback from trusted associates about verbal or non-verbal communication can assist an individual to improve his / her communication.
- ✓ Communication requires contact with people; therefore, group work supports the process of communication between people in the team, promotes the observation of others, teaches empathy. Providing the opportunity to work with others will also help to improve communication skills.

- **Cooperation/Teamwork skills**

*“Employers believe that highly collaborative teams will achieve greater productivity, higher morale, less counter-productive conflict, and better customer relations.” (2)*

The ability to work in a group is now a highly valued personal resource, as many tasks and professional problems are carried out in teams. Working in a team involves efficient communication, mutual contact, sharing responsibility for tasks, but also entering specific team roles. Working in a group teaches cooperation, shared responsibility and empathy. Everyone on the team is important, but people should know their role and be aware of joint responsibility for the effects of tasks.

*“Successful collaboration requires a cooperative spirit and mutual respect. Employers typically seek employees who function effectively as part of a team and are willing to balance personal achievement with group goals.” (3)*

*“Teamwork skills are essential to your success at work, no matter your industry or job title. Working well with clients, colleagues, managers and other people in your workplace can help you complete tasks efficiently while creating an enjoyable environment both for yourself and others. An organization that emphasizes good teamwork skills is typically a healthy, high-functioning workplace.” (4)*

Team members have different skills and talents with which they can support each other. It is important that everyone knows the goals of teamwork and accepts each other, it is good to know the common possibilities, but also the limitations.

### How to cooperate successfully:

- ✓ Good group collaboration requires open communication between team members and the sharing of important information.
- ✓ It is also important to establish certain rules of cooperation between participants.
- ✓ Another important aspect is identification with the group and definition of the group goal.
- ✓ Group collaboration requires plans, deadlines, and the separation of responsibilities for tasks.
- ✓ When distributing tasks, it is important to take into account the predispositions and capabilities of each team member.
- ✓ Team members will cooperate better with each other if they establish positive relations and take care of the atmosphere of cooperation.

- **Conflict resolution**

*“Conflicts in the workplace can arise when two or more parties have different objectives, opinions or styles. Conflict resolution is the art of addressing those differences and finding common ground that enables everyone to work together peacefully. Sometimes, the person who resolves a conflict may be a neutral party or mediator while at other times, they may be someone involved in the conflict who takes an outside perspective to find a solution.” (5)*

The ability to resolve conflicts determines success at work, effective implementation of tasks, and overcoming difficulties. In resolving conflicts, it is useful to develop communication skills, effective problem-solving, but also creativity, awareness and the ability to deal with emotions.

### How to resolve conflicts:

- ✓ When resolving conflict, it is worth staying calm, distancing yourself from the emotions it evokes.
- ✓ An important stage is talking about the problem that caused the conflict and determining what is happening.
- ✓ Conflicting parties need to agree that they wish to find a solution to the conflict.
- ✓ Often the cause of a conflict is a misunderstanding. It is important for those involved in the conflict to share their thoughts and feelings, without blaming each other.
- ✓ In a conflict situation, it is good to find a resolution or to agree to a compromise solution.

- ✓ Sometimes a different person who is not involved in the situation is needed to resolve a conflict.

The ability to resolve conflicts requires other soft skills, such as communication based on active listening. The ability to solve problems or to think creatively is predicated on a person's readiness to change perspective. It is also important to develop self-awareness and insight into our own emotions.

- **Problem-solving**

*"Problem-solving skills help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution."*

*„When employers talk about problem-solving skills, they are often referring to the ability to handle difficult or unexpected situations in the workplace as well as complex business challenges. Organizations rely on people who can assess both kinds of situations and calmly identify solutions". (6)*

Problem-solving is important in those situations in which difficulties arise that we cannot overcome in a known way, but have to implement a new solution, an action plan.

Problem-solving is related to other soft skills. Above all, it requires creativity. Often problem-solving is related to group work, communication, and decision making. Problem-solving is essential in every profession and at every level.

#### Good advice on how to learn problem-solving:

- ✓ Expand technical competencies
- ✓ Look for opportunities to train yourself in the ability to solve various problems
- ✓ Observe others while they solve similar problems
- ✓ Discuss problems in a group and find solutions as a team
- ✓ Use creative thinking
- ✓ Be brave and open!

- **Creativity/innovation**

*"Creativity is the ability to think about a task or a problem in a new or different way, or the ability to use the imagination to generate new ideas. Creativity enables you to solve complex problems or find interesting ways to approach tasks. If you are creative, you look at things from a unique perspective. You can find patterns and make connections to find opportunities. There is some risk involved with being creative, but you can show you are self-motivated to try things that have not been done before". (7)*

Creativity prepares people to face an uncertain future. A creative approach means generating ideas, seeking variations, and being prepared to make adventurous choices. Creativity has its roots in daily life activities. It is not only expressed by art and it is not only reserved for particularly talented people and geniuses, but everybody has the capacity for creative thinking, generating ideas, and looking for innovative outcomes and activity. Creativity can be thought of as embodied imagination and being a person who uses imagination. It means to be able to predict, to plan, and to foresee possible future consequences. Imagination is the capacity to conceive possible or impossible worlds and events that lie beyond this time and place. (8)

Creativity and innovation are becoming especially important in a world full of new challenges, needs, and opportunities. Creativity helps us to find new solutions to problematic situations, discover our own passions, it motivates us to act. Creativity requires openness to new things, the courage to take on the risk of uncertain results, a commitment to action, and at the same time it gives great satisfaction. A creative worker allows the institution to develop. The trainer can stimulate creativity by using **methods to encourage the identification of new and innovative solutions** for problems and to create new outcomes. Creative training requires that learners take risks because the effects of their activities are unpredictable. Creativity is also founded on experimentation. Some experiments succeed, others fail.

#### Good advice on how to support creativity:

- ✓ Believe in your potential
- ✓ Develop your potential and resources
- ✓ Be brave and courageous with new projects
- ✓ Take on challenges
- ✓ Visualize your ideas to use your imagination
- ✓ Look at various situations from different points of view
- ✓ Try to find more than one solution for any problem
- ✓ Cooperate with others when you solve problems
- ✓ Talk to others while you are looking for new ideas
- ✓ Be open!
- ✓ Don't be afraid of making mistakes, sometimes they are a source of new ideas and may inspire new ways to solve problems.

- **Adaptability to change**

*“Being able to adapt to changing environments and work processes can be a desirable trait to employers. Having adaptability skills means you are open and willing to learn new things, take on new challenges and make adjustments to suit transitions in the workplace. Being adaptable in the workplace can be important when working on projects, developing strategies and implementing different approaches to doing your job.” (9)*

*“Employees in a leadership role often have to manage unusual circumstances where there are no explicit instructions. They must learn how to rest upon their own judgment and have the confidence to make difficult decisions.” (10)*

Adaptation to change means being flexible, open and understanding the need for change, adjusting to new operating conditions.

Employees are now required to quickly adapt to change. Sometimes they are expected to respond to change. It is one of the most valued and useful skills in the modern world. This skill can be acquired. It is important to understand how we react to changes, what we usually feel, how we are doing, what we need to adapt to, and accept the change. Adaptation to change therefore requires the broadening of self-awareness, self-reflection and developing appropriate response strategies.

#### How to adapt to change:

- ✓ First, accept the change. Changes are inevitable and if we are dealing with them, then it will be better for us if we come to terms with them sooner and act in accordance with the new reality.
- ✓ Second, start thinking positively. Writing bleak scenarios will not help you at all.
- ✓ Third, take care of yourself. If you are directly affected by change, you must not leave yourself behind. If you are happy, you will start infecting the rest of the team with a positive aura, so your work will be more enjoyable and effective. (11)

- **Motivation skills**

The simplest definition of motivation boils down to wanting. (12) People want a change in behaviour, thoughts, feelings, self-concept, environment, and relationships. (13)

Motivation is strongly associated with energy, its processing and expenditure (14). Motivation is an important factor in working life. It stimulates action and makes it much easier to overcome difficult moments, solve problems and develop our skills. Motivation is divided into internal and external motivation.

Motivation means that we can act towards our own goals, but it can also be the ability to motivate others. A motivated team of people works more effectively, so this skill can determine the quality of the tasks performed. Also, a single employee who is internally motivated to act will be more effective.



It is very important to strengthen our motivation, because it is a driving force, it allows one to engage in activities, achieve a goal, develop oneself.

Motivation helps us to change behaviour, develop competencies, be creative, develop talents, and boost engagement. The benefits of motivation are visible in how we live our lives. (15)

There are two types of motivation – **external and internal**. External motivation is based on distinguishing the child / student / employee: financial and material rewards, praise. Penalties may also be external motivation: reprimand, disciplinary proceedings. External motivation is a response to the expected punishments and rewards from the environment. At work, the external motivation of the boss may be strengthened, for example, by a good salary, promotion, additional bonuses for good performance of tasks.

Internal motivation is based on getting satisfaction from the task itself. An example of internal motivation is learning to increase knowledge or undertaking voluntary work because of the satisfaction derived from helping others. Internal motivation gives more lasting effects, is related to the autonomy of a person, improves creative activities. Therefore, employers who want to strengthen the creativity of employees should also create opportunities to develop their internal motivation. The same goes for trainers, coaches and teachers. Research shows that good employees are those who are internally motivated, not just relying on rewards or avoiding punishment.

#### How to improve internal motivation:

- ✓ One of the most important factors enhancing internal motivation is the autonomy of action. Therefore, internal motivation will be deepened by independent tasks and projects, in which a person can demonstrate creativity, initiative and implement his/her own ideas.
- ✓ Motivation can be enhanced by setting the goals that we want to achieve, building a vision of our future activities, determining in which direction we wish to go and what effects we want to achieve. (16)
- **Willingness for personal development**

*“Personal development is a lifelong process. It is a way for people to assess their skills and qualities, consider their aims in life and set goals in order to realize and maximize their potential.” (17)*

*“Successful personal growth requires motivation, the desire to improve, and the willingness to strive to make changes.” (18)*

The need for personal development is combined with involvement in activities that can support this development. Personal development is combined with a vision and a plan for the future. A person involved in development broadens their self-awareness and becomes cognisant of their strengths and weaknesses, their own values and goals, which are also reflected in their professional activities. The desire for personal development helps an individual to learn new things, overcome limitations and difficulties, as well as to be open and flexible in the event of change. Personal development is also important on



a professional basis, it makes a person more involved in tasks, he/she is motivated to work, participates in additional training, is open to changes, and also increases the level of his/her competencies (including soft skills). Lack of willingness to develop results in routine and professional burnout.

#### How to improve personal development:

- ✓ Creative visualization is very helpful, defining a vision of your own future, for example, for the next 3 years, and indicating the stages of this development.
- ✓ Personal growth also involves counselling, coaching and reading.
- ✓ A very simple and useful method for personal growth is to look at your behaviour and your life with an open and unbiased mind. This will show you what changes you need to make in yourself and in your life.
- ✓ An important method of supporting the will to self-development is discovering a passion that can be pursued, preferably a passion that can be combined with professional work.
- ✓ The willingness to develop oneself will also be related to the fact that the employer has such possibilities and that the employee knows that they are available for him/her, e.g. participation in additional projects, training courses, other courses.
- ✓ The will of self-development will be related to the fact that the person knows his/her possibilities and the abilities that he/she can develop.

- **Time management skills**

*“Time management is the process of planning and controlling how much time to spend on specific activities. Good time management enables an individual to complete more in a shorter period of time.” (19)*

Time management requires good organization and planning. It is also important to focus a person on tasks and responsibility for a selected area of activity. Time management requires setting priorities, goals, and being systematic. Good time-planning changes stress and tension. It also allows one to work out a time area for neglected things that are important to us. Good time organization increases the possibilities of a person and facilitates the achievement of goals.

#### How to manage time:

- ✓ It is important to make a list of goals and tasks to be accomplished and set deadlines for completion
- ✓ It is worthwhile to break up long-term tasks into stages
- ✓ Additionally, prioritizing tasks can be helpful
- ✓ Giving up or reducing activity that makes us waste time

- ✓ Ensuring that you use the favourable hours for a given job
- ✓ It is worth developing the awareness of the person to understand what helps him/her in the implementation of tasks, whether he/she prefers to work under pressure or to break down tasks into parts
- ✓ One of the time-planning methods may be to define a vision for one's own future and to choose important goals and values. This approach allows you to plan professional and personal activities that are worth undertaking, as well as to build a strategy for their implementation.

- **Negotiation skills**

*"Negotiation skills are qualities that allow two or more parties to reach a compromise. Negotiations occur frequently within the workplace and may occur between co-workers, departments or between an employee and employer. Professionals may negotiate contract terms, project timelines, compensation and more. Negotiations are both common and important, so it's helpful to understand the types of negotiations you might encounter as well as how to improve your negotiation skills." (20)*

*"Successful negotiators control the process of negotiations and come away with a result they're satisfied with." (21)*

Different forms of negotiation are important when people have different positions on the same issue. Negotiation can be very useful in resolving any differences that arise between one party and the other, e.g. employee and employer, employee and employee, employee and customer.

#### How to improve negotiation skills:

- ✓ Identify the final goal - it is very important to define where we are going, what our real objective is.
- ✓ Practice building rapport - negotiating requires understanding the other party's needs, building relationships means respecting and listening to the other party.
- ✓ Be willing to compromise - the art of negotiation is also associated with finding a compromise and the readiness to accept certain concessions
- ✓ Practice - The more often we practice negotiations, the better we conduct them, so it is worth practicing negotiating, as well as taking part in tasks preparing for negotiations

- **Leadership**

*„Leadership traits refer to personal qualities that define effective leaders. Leadership refers to the ability of an individual or an organization to guide individuals, teams, or organizations toward the fulfilment of goals and objectives. It plays an important function*

*in management, as it helps maximize efficiency and achieve strategic and organizational goals. Leaders help motivate others, provide guidance, build morale, improve the work environment, and initiate action.” (22)*

#### **The five most important elements of leadership:**

- ✓ setting the course of action,
- ✓ providing inspiration
- ✓ building teams
- ✓ setting an example
- ✓ being accepted

Leadership is important in group work. It means making decisions, allocating tasks, and motivating the group to act. Leaders should have self-esteem, communication skills, as well as organizational skills. Leaders define the direction and strategy of action, therefore they create a certain vision of the future. Being a leader also means having the ability to build a team that will work together. Leadership is also about motivating and inspiring, releasing energy in people. Leadership is necessary to create change and management is necessary to obtain results systematically. (23)

#### **What qualities should a good leader possess:**

- ✓ Enthusiasm – it is important for the leader to show it, to set an example and take a positive approach to all tasks.
- ✓ Honesty – is understood as a personality trait, faithfulness to external values, honesty and nobility.
- ✓ Firmness – it is important that the leader is demanding, persistent and resistant to adversities. He/she cares more about respect than popularity. He/she creates high standards that he/she himself/herself follows.
- ✓ Fairness – a leader should be objective, should reward and punish to gain results, not sympathy, and should treat everyone equally.
- ✓ Cordiality – A truly good leader engages not only the mind in his/her work, but also the heart.
- ✓ Humility – is very important because it teaches you to listen to others and protects you from ego growth.
- ✓ Self-confidence – it is important to believe in yourself, because it also works well for subordinates.

- **Confidence**

*„ Confidence comes from feelings of well-being, acceptance of your body and mind (your self-esteem) and belief in your own ability, skills and experience. Confidence is an attribute that most people would like to possess.” (24)*

Self-confidence is about what we think about ourselves, how we see ourselves in different social roles. It affects how we behave in relationships with others, but also how we build the image of our future, what tasks we choose, what challenges we undertake.

#### **How to improve confidence:**

- ✓ Planning and preparation - planning and good preparation for a difficult situation increases self-confidence. It gives us a feeling of being in control of the situation and of getting our anxiety under control. It is therefore worth developing a planning habit.
- ✓ Learning and knowledge - expanding knowledge and learning new skills makes us feel competent in various new situations, including professional ones.
- ✓ Positive thoughts - a person's belief in success increases their chances of success. It is good to practice optimism and to monitor what we think about ourselves.
- ✓ Knowledge of our strengths - it is worth making a list of our strengths, because they allow us to believe in ourselves. A very useful role in their analysis can be played by a natural mentor, and by cooperation with him/her with regards to our personal development, which also helps to support self-confidence.
- ✓ Having a passion - passion makes us attractive to ourselves and to others. Having a passion and including it in our activity builds self-confidence and satisfaction.

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## Chapter 3 – Apprenticeship scheme

### 3.1. Apprenticeship scheme introduction

The DESSA apprenticeship scheme addresses: VET providers, companies involved in apprenticeship programmes, students enrolled in upper secondary and higher VET centres, and aims to keep the apprentices more engaged, motivated, involved, comfortable and more confident during apprenticeships.

The purpose of the apprenticeship scheme is to ensure understandable and adaptable apprenticeships in every country, to guide members of the DESSA project target groups to better quality apprenticeships by using the main and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and the DESSA project's research products.

### 3.2. Parties involved in the apprenticeship scheme:

- ✓ Vocational education and training providers (VET providers).
- ✓ Companies (employers).
- ✓ Students in upper secondary and higher vocational education and training (apprentices).

Companies (employers), VET providers and Member States explore the possibilities for setting up national pilot actions to develop a public-private partnership to foster the promotion and acquisition of soft skills. International organizations emphasize that close and direct cooperation between different stakeholders and involved parties is a key aspect in the implementation of good quality apprenticeship scheme.



### 3.3. Apprenticeship schem

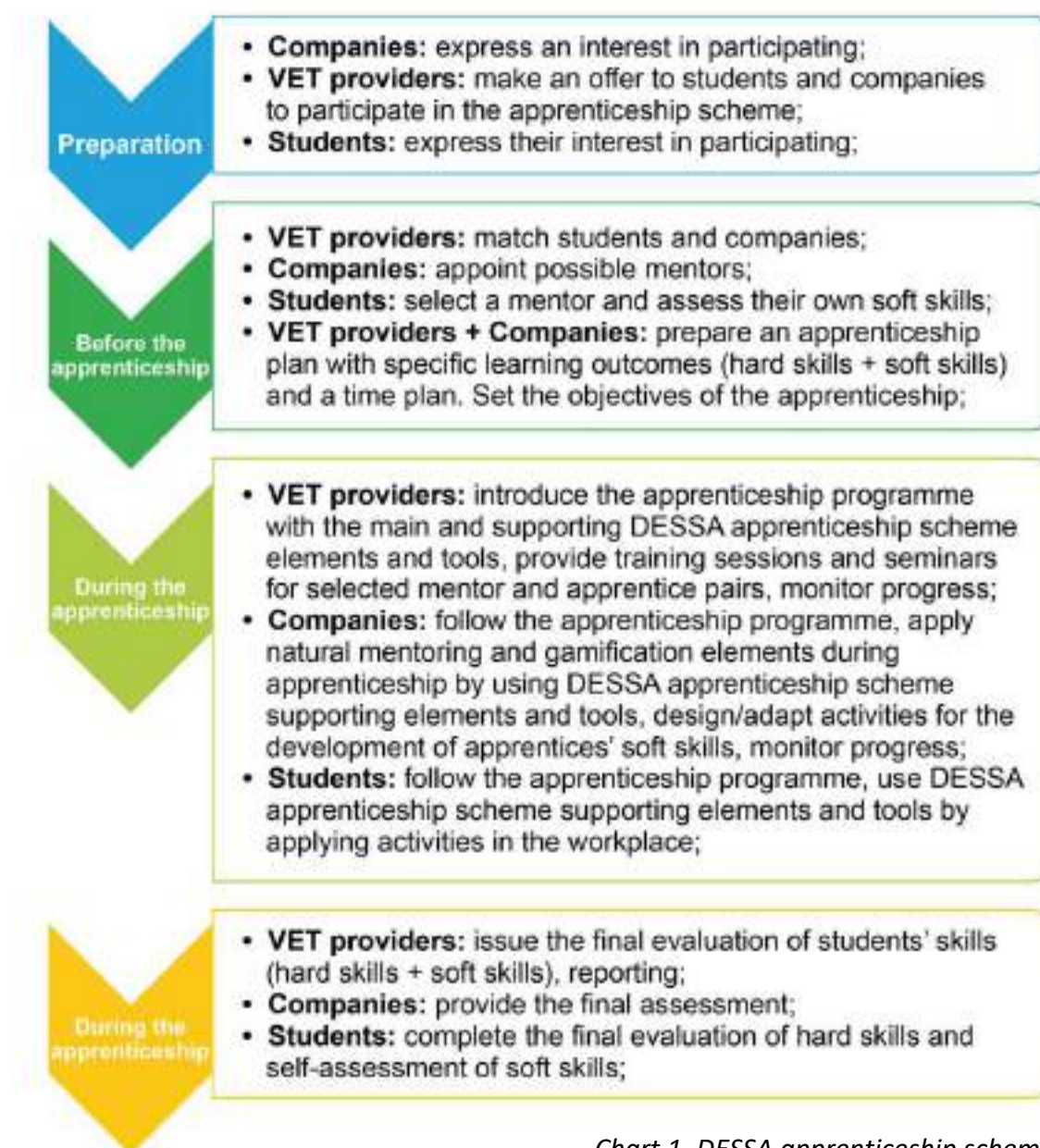


Chart 1. DESSA apprenticeship scheme chart.

The apprenticeship scheme consists of four main phases:

#### 1<sup>st</sup> PHASE “PREPARATION”:

- ✓ Companies express an interest in participating in the apprenticeship scheme, and collaborate with VET providers;
- ✓ VET providers make an offer to companies. VET providers make an offer to students to participate in the apprenticeship scheme, and provide a list of companies and possible apprenticeship positions;
- ✓ Students express their interest in participating in apprenticeship;

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PHASE “BEFORE THE APPRENTICESHIP”:

- ✓ VET providers match students and companies according to sector, speciality and available apprenticeship positions;
- ✓ Companies appoint possible mentors;
- ✓ Students select a mentor at the company by themselves. Students assess their own soft skills to determine which soft skills could be improved during the apprenticeship;
- ✓ VET providers and companies together set the objectives of the apprenticeship, prepare an apprenticeship plan with specific learning outcomes that includes hard skills (based on the main programme) and soft skills (based on the self-assessment results and the DESSA project programme), and formulate a time plan of the apprenticeship programme.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> PHASE “DURING THE APPRENTICESHIP”:

- ✓ VET providers introduce the apprenticeship programme with the DESSA main elements (gamification and natural mentoring) and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competencies", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide to soft skills", web platform). VET providers provide training sessions and seminars for selected pairs of mentors and apprentices. During the apprenticeship, VET centres monitor progress;
- ✓ Companies follow the apprenticeship programme, apply the DESSA main apprenticeship scheme elements (natural mentoring and gamification) during apprenticeship by using the apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competencies", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide to soft skills", web platform), design/adapt activities for the development of apprentices' soft skills and monitor progress;
- ✓ Students follow the apprenticeship programme, use the DESSA apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competencies", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide to soft skills", web platform), by applying activities in the workplace and to gain a better understanding of the importance of soft skills in the workplace;



#### 4<sup>th</sup> PHASE “AFTER THE APPRENTICESHIP”:

- ✓ VET providers issue the final evaluation of students’ skills;
- ✓ Companies provide the final assessment;
- ✓ Students complete the final evaluation of hard skills and self-assessment of soft skills to see which skills were improved during the apprenticeship programme;

### 3.4. Apprenticeship scheme main elements:

- Gamification;
- Natural mentoring



Chart 2. DESSA apprenticeship scheme main elements.

### 3.5. Apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools:

- Self-assessment of soft skills tools;
- Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills;
- Trainers’ guide;
- Web platform;
- Seminars for trainers in VET providers and companies.



Chart 3. DESSA apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools.

### 3.6. Benefits of the apprenticeship scheme for stakeholders

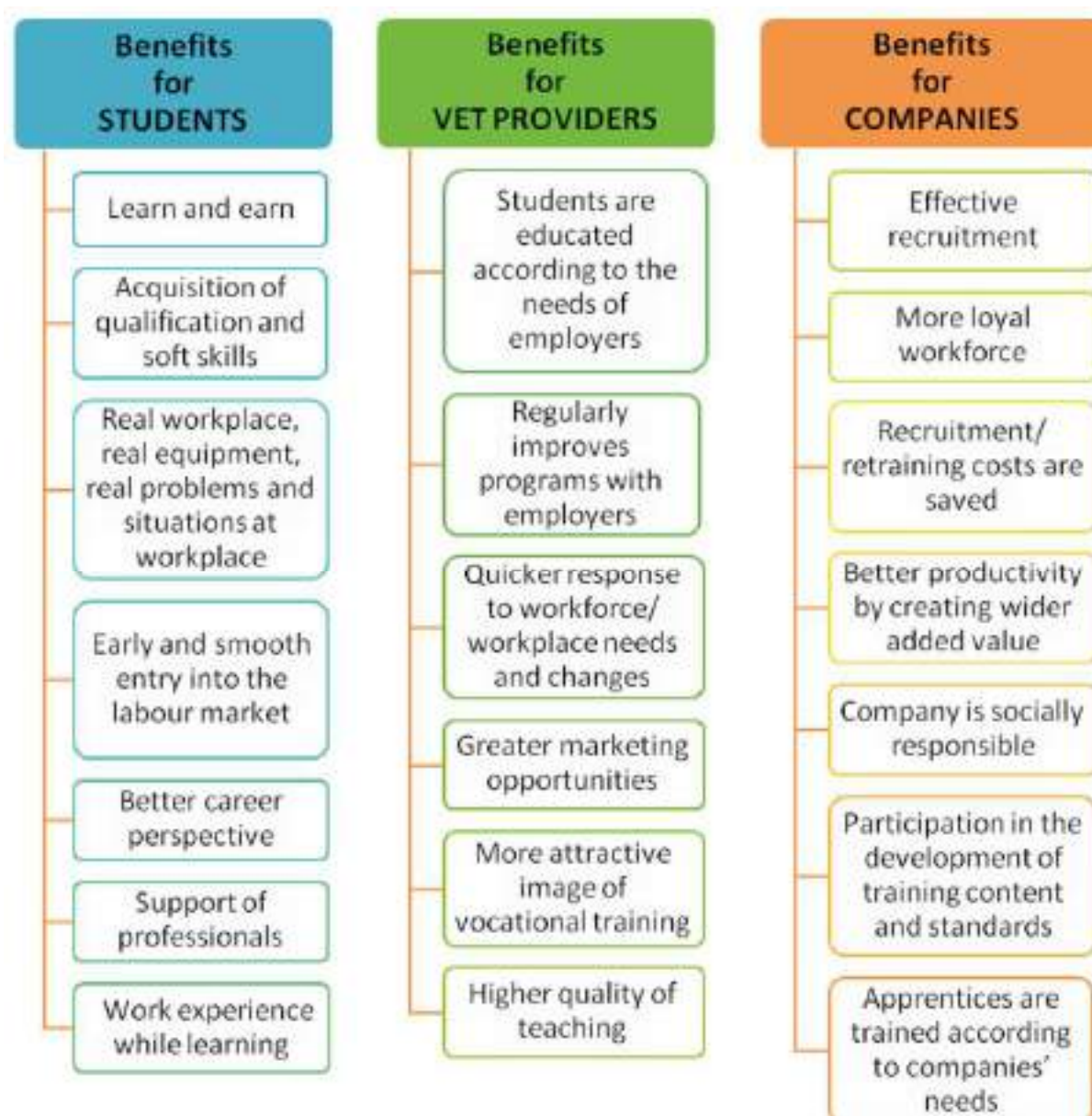


Chart 4. Benefits of the DESSA apprenticeship scheme for stakeholders.

DESSA project partners' research from different European Union countries shows that apprenticeships are an effective way to prepare qualified professionals for the labour market with a wide range of skills. The apprenticeship scheme meets the needs of employers and makes it easier for individuals to enter the labour market by enhancing their employability. The benefits of this collaborative form of training are felt by all involved parties: students, VET providers, companies, and also – states.

**Benefits for states:**

- ✓ Positive economic and social impact;
- ✓ Education adapts more successfully to business needs;
- ✓ More flexible vocational training system;
- ✓ Better response to changes in the labour market.

**3.7. SWOT analysis of the apprenticeship scheme**

*Chart 5. SWOT analysis of Dessa apprenticeship scheme.*

**3.8. Conclusions**

This purpose of the apprenticeship scheme, developed through the DESSA project, is to ensure understandable, adaptable and more effective apprenticeships in every country.

The scheme guides members of the DESSA project target groups to better quality apprenticeships that provide a clear vision, direction and action plan of how to train apprentices in soft skills. This training uses the main apprenticeship scheme elements (gamification and natural mentoring), as well as the supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competencies", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide to soft skills", web platform). This apprenticeship scheme is adaptable to every country and can help apprenticeship schemes in each country achieve their objectives by preparing highly qualified employees with a wide range of skills (hard skills and soft skills). Dessa apprenticeship schemes are designed around the real needs of the labour market, and they contribute to increasing the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, which fosters job creation and supports youth employment.

The "Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competencies" includes a theoretical foundation with links to practical foundations and guiding principles for the design, implementation and evaluation of the apprenticeship programme for the development of soft skills and competencies. The apprenticeship scheme has been created based on different European Union countries' experiences of apprenticeships, analysis and research.

This section of the guide introduced the main goals of the DESSA project's apprenticeship scheme, and the research conducted will assist in the smoother and more efficient implementation of the apprenticeship scheme.

Further information on the "Apprenticeship scheme" can be found in the "Apprenticeship scheme for the development of soft skills and competencies".

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## Chapter 4 – Methodology to use natural mentoring

During their apprenticeship, students find themselves on the road to self-development and preparation for their future career. While developing their soft skills they often have questions about which turn to take next on their way to reach their goals. During this important process of personal growth, it can help the student to have **a travelling companion**, someone who is familiar with the route and is committed to stimulating and supporting the student along his/her path. Having such support from the outside adds an extra dimension to the learning process of the student. This so-called ‘natural mentor’ can provide the student with a different perspective, share knowledge and give the student a helping hand when facing obstacles.

By using this apprenticeship scheme the student is encouraged to find someone he or she would like to learn from and is asked to find their natural mentor on their own. It could be any employee at the company of their internship with whom the student feels comfortable and who can aid his or her soft skills development. The regular mentor is normally found through mentoring programmes by using matchmaking techniques. The student’s supervisor during the apprenticeship can provide guidance and help the student think of a suitable candidate. However, the student is responsible for finding and recruiting the natural mentor. This brings us to the question: What responsibilities does a natural mentor have during the apprenticeship?

### 4.1. Responsibilities of a natural mentor during an apprenticeship

A natural mentor is a person who is willing to **share their experiences** and advice on developing soft skills with the apprentice. More importantly, the natural mentor is invested in the learning process of the student and is willing and able to help stimulate the student by actively showing support and asking the student self-reflective questions. It is also important for the natural mentor to provide a safe space for the student to talk openly and freely about his or her learning goals and further ambitions. It is a mentoring relationship that is



built on trust and mutual respect, and its aim is to help the student to become more self-aware and confident, and to have a pleasant, successful learning experience.

Within this apprenticeship scheme, students develop their soft skills by doing multiple assignments based on best practice. After each assignment, the student makes an appointment with his or her natural mentor to reflect on what has been achieved, by discussing the following questions:

- ✓ Describe the things that went well. Ask what exactly went well in this situation.
- ✓ Can you describe things that went not as well, and why did they not go as planned?
- ✓ Describe a positive aspect of how you worked on the presentation.
- ✓ What did you do to work your way towards your goal?
- ✓ Are there things you could do differently the next time? And what are these things?
- ✓ Who or what helped you to reach your goal?

These questions serve as guidelines for reflection on the assignment. Ideally the conversations between a mentor and a student will be more elaborate than just discussing these questions. It is the mentor's task to create more depth in the conversations with his or her student.

To do so the mentor will meet with the student every week to reflect on the experience of the student over the past week and to discuss recent developments. They work together as a team on creating learning goals. It is mostly the student's responsibility to think of specific learning goals, but the mentor is there to support and inspire the student to think about his or her aspirations, and to provide the student with food for thought. For example, if the natural mentor notices that the student is struggling with creating a learning goal, the mentor could ask questions that would inspire the student to think a little bit deeper about what it is that he or she wants to learn. The natural mentor could also reveal a little bit more about his or her own professional journey to help the student imagine their own path in the world of work.

The natural mentor will be part of the student's whole learning experience during the apprenticeship. The mentor has to be open and honest about his/her role in order to prevent malpractice, and be clear about the ongoing nature of the mentor/student relationship. The mentoring relationship is between a mentor and his or her student. If a supervisor were to discuss a student's situation directly with his or her natural mentor, without the consent of the student, the student could become less open with his or her mentor and this could adversely impact on the learning process. It is important to sustain trust between student and mentor and to let the student decide what he or she wants to share with his or her supervisor.

## 4.2. The difference between the natural mentor and supervisor

The natural mentor serves as an outside source for the student to develop self-awareness about their learning process. The natural mentor reflects on the assignments and learning goals of the student without having a personal agenda or influence on whether the student passes their apprenticeship or not. This is the task of the student's supervisor. The natural mentor is there only as a beacon of support and advice. He/she is someone that the student can confide in on a level which is more focused on the student's personal goals, instead of mandatory goals of the apprenticeship's organization or school. The relationship between a natural mentor and a student works on a deeper personal level and assists a student to mature on a personal level. The supervisor focuses on the learning objectives of their organization, while the natural mentor is focused on the personal learning process and learning efficiency of the student.

However, to be sure of the quality of the mentoring and guidance, and perhaps for safety reasons, the teacher should plan a conversation with the student and natural mentor once the student has found his/her natural mentor. This conversation would allow the different parties to get to know each other and to review the learning goals together as a team. It is recommended that the student and the natural mentor have their weekly conversations at the workplace, somewhere where they can talk one to one, openly and freely.

## 4.3. An example of natural mentoring

While reading the description on natural mentoring it can be a little challenging to get a clear picture on how such a mentoring relationship could take place and what it could mean for a student's personal and professional growth. The paragraph below is a real story written by a Dutch student on how she found her natural mentor and what this meant for her:

*"Sometimes changes in life happen so fast that it's hard to keep track. When I was a distracted kid at school, who spent more time in detention than in the actual classroom, I had the good fortune to come across a teacher who applauded me for the quirks I always saw as my flaws. This teacher reframed my restless attitude as something positive – energetic, enthusiastic and ambitious. This empowerment was overwhelming but it made me more confident and took me to a completely different path.*

*He later asked me to be his co-lead on a project. This role was also very new for me and he mentored me through the whole process. But when the project ended, I realized that I wasn't finished learning from his way of looking at managing your life. He is a man who keeps calm in almost every situation, sees me as an equal and has the life experience and advice that helps me find a new perspective.*

*That's when I realized that I wanted to continue having him as a sparring partner in my life. But asking this favour of him seemed like a huge step for me. It took me a while to muster up the courage, but when I finally felt confident enough, I asked him if he wanted to be my mentor and his response was unexpectedly excited. He told me that he had always felt like my mentor and that it would be a great honour to him. That's when my mind was fully blown with enthusiasm and I am proud to say that he is still my mentor till this day.*



*We now meet whenever I am faced with unknown territory and difficult questions about my career and life goals. Just being able to talk to somebody outside my first circle, who has a different and more neutral perspective, gives me insight and helps me make more informed decisions about these challenges. We also laugh a lot together and he treats me as an equal instead of looking down on me in any way."*





## Chapter 5 – Methodology to apply gamification techniques to the development of soft skills

### 5.1. What is gamification?

When you hear the word gamification, what is the first thing that comes to mind? What does it mean?

Gamification may be a weird word, but it is a great way of amplifying the learning process. Gamification, as defined by Deterding et al. (2011) (3), is the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. It can also be defined as a set of activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements.

Gamification can be used in various contexts, including education, in order to engage and motivate learners. In recent years, gamification has also been adapted in business environments, because of its potential to “shape users’ behaviour in a desirable direction” (3).

### 5.2. Benefits of gamification

As stated before, gamification uses game elements and game techniques in non-game contexts. But why use these elements?

We all know that games have a strong effect on us (6). When we are playing a game, we feel happy and excited. We feel emotionally engaged and lose our sense of time. We feel competitive and want to win. In general, when we play a game, we have fun and that is what drives our behaviour.

The benefits of using gamification in learning environments have been recognized by many researchers. In general, gamification:

- ✓ **Increases motivation** of learners to participate in activities and enhances the learning experience. Through gamification, learners are enjoying the process and are focused on achieving rewards. Learners are relieved of the stress and enjoy the process.
- ✓ **Increases satisfaction and performance** of learners. When learners are given rewards or accomplishments, they improve their performance and are more satisfied.
- ✓ **Strengthens communication** process. Through gamification, learners are encouraged to interact with others in order to complete tasks, which are part of the process, thus strengthening their communication skills.
- ✓ **Increases engagement and commitment.** Trainers can create experiences and use game elements, which fully engages learners. When the latter feel positive about the process they turn into active participants.
- ✓ **Improves knowledge absorption and retention** and can also help with developing specific skills. The element of fun when applying game techniques is what helps learners consolidate faster what they have learned.

### 5.3. Gamification or Game Based Learning?

Gamification and Game Based Learning may be similar, in the sense that they both promote fun, engagement and motivation in learning, but should not be confused.

Game Based Learning means using a game as part of the learning process, with concrete learning outcomes. Students acquire knowledge while playing a game, which has a specific learning objective. This makes the process more fun and motivating.

On the other hand, gamification integrates game elements and techniques in non-game contexts. Gamification can be applied in the entire learning context, but does not mean you need to turn everything into a game. Gamification means applying game elements, not playing a game.

### 5.4. Gamification elements

To apply gamification, a mentor should first understand how gamification works, and recognize the power of games.

Games increase engagement and motivation mainly because they are fun, they are something that we enjoy. So, when we think about gamification, we think about making the learning process engaging and as fun as possible – like a game.

There are a lot of game elements (competitive or non-competitive) which can be applied in learning environments. For the application of the DESSA apprenticeships scheme, we have selected the most relevant ones, which can be used in apprenticeship environments:

Elements	Examples	Benefits	Application examples
<b>Achievements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Points</li> <li>- Badges</li> <li>- Leaderboards</li> </ul>	Learners feel satisfied and engaged when earning points and climbing to the top of a leaderboard. Leaderboards also promote competition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assign tasks which earn points.</li> <li>- After completing a certain set of tasks, participants receive badges.</li> <li>- Keep track of who earns more points and badges and display it on a leaderboard.</li> </ul>
<b>Rewards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bonuses</li> <li>- Prizes</li> <li>- Resources</li> </ul>	When rewards are scheduled into the learning process, students feel motivated and committed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give bonuses to learners when they complete a task ahead of time</li> <li>- Give prizes for achieving first place on the leaderboard</li> <li>- Give additional resources for completing extra tasks</li> </ul>
<b>Storytelling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quests</li> </ul>	A storyline engages participants and increases their curiosity. Completing quests increases their interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group tasks into quests and accompany them with an intriguing narrative.</li> </ul>
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schedule</li> <li>- Countdown</li> </ul>	A specific time frame to complete a task helps learners focus more on completing it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply a schedule for the completion of tasks.</li> <li>- If learners complete a task before the time ends, they receive a bonus.</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immediate feedback</li> </ul>	Giving positive feedback to learners increases their confidence and self-esteem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monitor the progress of a learner as he/she completes given tasks, and encourage them verbally to continue.</li> </ul>
<b>Personalization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avatars</li> <li>- Nicknames</li> </ul>	Personalization gives a sense of ownership to learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Let learners design their avatars or use nicknames which will be displayed on the leaderboards.</li> </ul>

## 5.5. How to apply gamification in an apprenticeship

There are four steps that can be followed in order to gamify an apprenticeship experience and engage the students into acquiring the targeted soft skills.

### Step 1. Understand the players

The first step is to understand the students, which will help with designing a gamification application that fits their background and needs. Trainers need, therefore, to analyse the students, their tendencies, their preferred learning styles and also the level of their soft skills. It is important to consider is the 'user' type of apprentices.

Bartle (1996) classified players in the MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) games into four types: achievers, explorers, socialisers, and killers. The paper investigated why different people play games with a large social aspect and what they hope to get out of the experience. Based on the player types by Bartle, Gerald (2018) proposed elements and ways by which you can apply gamification as means of motivating people.

- ✓ **Achievers** regard points-gathering and rising in levels as their main goal, and all is ultimately subservient to this. To gamify the learning experience for an achiever the following game elements can be used: leaderboards, badges, bonuses and a levelling system.
- ✓ **Explorers** delight when the game reveals its internal machinations. They try progressively esoteric actions in wild, out-of-the-way places, looking for interesting features and figuring out how things work. To gamify for an Explorer involves adding many details and intricacies. The game elements must have enough depth for these players to not lose interest too quickly.
- ✓ **Socialisers** are interested in people, and what they have to say. Inter-player relationships are important. Gamifying something for a Socializer is about finding ways to add more social opportunities. Socializers will react positively to most gamification attempts if it has some type of mingling component. On the other hand, Socializers do not always react well to leaderboards and competitive outlets.
- ✓ **Killers** get their kicks from imposing themselves on [and causing distress to] others. Gamifying something with a Killer in mind is very difficult. The issue is not that they are necessarily hard to develop something for, but that their preferences and habits can easily ostracize the other players.

Marczewski (2013) modified Bartle's player types to fit the context of gamification. He identified 6 player types according to what motivates them.

- ✓ **Socialisers** are motivated by Relatedness. They want to interact with others and create social connections.
- ✓ **Free Spirits** are motivated by Autonomy and self-expression. They want to create and explore.
- ✓ **Achievers** are motivated by Mastery. They are looking to gain knowledge, learn new skills and improve themselves. They want challenges to overcome.

- ✓ **Philanthropists** are motivated by Purpose and Meaning. This group is altruistic, wanting to give to other people and enrich the lives of others in some way - with no expectation of reward.
- ✓ **Disruptors** are motivated by Change. In general, they want to disrupt your system, either directly or through other users, to force positive or negative change.
- ✓ **Players** are motivated by extrinsic Rewards. They will do what is needed to collect rewards from a system and not much more. They are in it for themselves.

The main difference between Bartle's player types and Marczewski's gamification user types is that the latter accommodates the fact that unlike games whose players always want to play, gamification will have two different types of people: those who are willing to play for extrinsic rewards and those who are not (5).

These user types are theoretical, and people in the real world are likely to display characteristics of more than one of these types. In any case, they provide a useful guide in understanding how a gamified application can be designed in order to have a greater impact on the participants involved.

To collect all the above information, trainers can use interviews, surveys or observations. For the measurement of the students' soft skills, trainers can use the results from the self-assessment tools, explained in a previous chapter.

### Step 2. Define the objectives

The next step is to define what you want to accomplish through applying gamification elements.

In the DESSA apprenticeship scheme, the main objective of the apprenticeships is the development of soft skills. But the trainer should specify more precisely on which soft skills the apprenticeship is going to focus. These represent the specific objectives.

Things to consider during this stage:

- ✓ Which soft skills should the apprenticeship focus on?
- ✓ At which level?
- ✓ Which skills does the student need to improve?

### Step 3. Identify the resources

During the next step, trainers need to identify available and needed resources in order to gamify the apprenticeship.

Things to consider during this stage are:

- ✓ How will the progress of students be monitored?
- ✓ How will the progress of the students be measured? Will points, badges, awards be applied?

- ✓ How many points are going to be appointed for the completion of each task?
- ✓ If we apply prizes or bonuses, what are they going to be?

#### Step 4. Design and apply gamification mechanisms

At the last step, the trainer needs to decide on the gamification elements and activities which he/she will introduce to the student during the apprenticeship. Remember, mentors do not need to use all of the gamification elements proposed in this guide but can rather choose the ones that will have the best results according to the context of the apprenticeship.

#### Things to consider at this stage:

- ✓ Which gamification elements are best suited to the student?
- ✓ Which can be applied during the apprenticeship?
- ✓ How will the gamification elements help the student acquire soft skills?
- ✓ Which element will trigger the required reaction for the specific student?
- ✓ Is it fun?

## 5.6. Gamification and development of soft skills during apprenticeships

Gamification could prove to be a valuable tool for trainers, when they try to develop the soft skills of their learners. And that is because applying game elements to a learning procedure or in a series of activities influences the behaviour of students and increases their motivation for them. This creates an optimal base for learning in an easy and fun way, and students receive better results and develop their soft skills.

The combination of gamification with pedagogic approaches leads to a way of learning that is more engaging. Kim (as cited in Dale, 2014) outlined four types of motivational behaviours: express, compete, explore, and collaborate (2). This means that there are students who will be motivated through gamification to better express themselves, to compete with other students or colleagues, to collaborate with others and to explore different ways of learning. The students will be prompted to work as a team, discuss their opinions, accept one another's answers and make decisions, in order to receive badges or climb a leaderboard. The process of gamification alone is developing the soft skills of students, while when it is combined at the same time with activities targeting specific soft skills, it can enhance the whole learning experience and results.

## 5.7. Gamification into action! Examples of gamification applications

### 1) Design a game-learning path

Mentors can structure the apprenticeship as a learning path, with blocks that the student needs to complete in order to have access to the next block. Each block represents a task which will help the student improve his/her soft skills. After completing the task, the student gets to progress and gains access to the instructions for the next task.

## 2) Apply a point system

A points system can be applied, whereby students earn points for completing tasks. Other co-workers can give extra points to the students, according to their performance. After reaching a certain threshold, students can receive a small prize. The prize can be either tangible or intangible, small or big (e.g. a sticker, praise, a letter of recommendation, a sweet, etc).

## 3) Apply time constraints

When assigning a task to the student, you can set time limits. If the student completes the task in less time than the time given, then he/she receives a bonus. If the student does not complete the assignment on time, then he/she will have less available time for the next task. The bonus again can be tangible or intangible (e.g. a sticker, a sweet, more time for the next task, etc.)

## 4) Use a learning passport

A learning passport can be small notebook, where each page represents a different soft skill. Then when the student completes an assignment or other tasks connected with a soft skill, he/she can write notes about the experience in the learning passport and express how it helped him/her develop the specific soft skill. The mentor can then put a stamp on the page. If the company has more than one apprentice working, then, at the end of the week, the apprentice who has gathered the most stamps will receive a bonus.

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## Chapter 6 – Methodology for the assessment of learning outcomes

### 6.1. Assessment methods which could be used

Once the learning outcomes are identified, it is important to establish some criteria to evaluate them. The assessment methods are the strategies, techniques, and tools used to provide evidence that the standard has been met (1). At the same time, these procedures are used to obtain information about the teaching-learning process. In order to determine whether the expected result has been achieved, an important step in the evaluation process is choosing an appropriate method for collecting data that provides this evidence.

Evaluation is a process through which relevant information regarding trainees' learning procedure is observed, collected and analysed. It enables reflection, facilitates value judgments, and underpins the decisions taken to improve the teaching/learning process. There are different types of assessment methods and, depending on the phase of the evaluation process, it will be more or less convenient to use one type of method rather than another. Multiple methods can be used for the assessments. It may be difficult to assess using only one method, and the use of only one method may not be sufficient to capture all parts of an apprentice's achievement. Therefore, a combination of direct and indirect assessment methods should be used to evaluate each learning outcome. The first one consists of the assessment of materials produced by students for the purpose of learning and to demonstrate learning (papers, projects, presentations, tests), while the second one involves a report about learning rather than a demonstration of learning (surveys, interviews, focus groups).(2)

When selecting which assessment methods to use, attention should focus on those that will provide the most useful and relevant information for the purpose identified within the programme. Attention should be paid to the questions that need to be answered, the availability of resources, and the usefulness of the results.

The assessment of learning outcomes evaluates whether a trainee has met the objectives proposed for a specific apprenticeship, and therefore, their level of competence. What makes the DESSA methodology special is the fact that there is no specific assessment or evaluation: the personal development of the trainee is based on the thoughts and reflections that the trainees have shared with their natural mentors. Natural mentors can help trainees develop or improve specific skills just by asking them to reflect on their performance.

The assessment of competencies should combine, on the one hand, proof of the learning outcomes (performed by the trainee), which needs to be evaluated by the tutor, and on the other hand, proof of knowledge, developed together with the natural mentor. Performing well on technical situations doesn't necessarily mean that the trainee understands and knows about the task being carried out, and that is when the role of the natural mentor gains importance. A natural mentor should make the trainees think about their performance and why they have done it one way or another. A natural mentor helps trainees identify the difficulties faced when carrying out the activities, and seeks to encourage reflection on why the trainee has decided to act in a particular way and on what soft skills she or he has been using while performing the task.

According to FISS (Assessment and Apprenticeship Standards, 2014) (3), **“there are strong links between competence, learning and assessment.** Every act of assessment gives a message to apprentices about what they should be learning and how they should be learning. Assessment activities need to be constructed with this in mind. In this way, assessment fulfils two important requirements: measuring competence, and improving the learning/training process.

As mentioned before, there are several types of assessment methods, and each one will be carried out at one time or another. Among these we can find the diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, ipsative assessment, norm-referenced assessment, and non-criterion referenced assessment. (5) In this particular case, the following are presented:

Formative assessment (also referred to as assessment for learning) provides feedback that does not directly contribute to the achievement of a programme objective, but informs both the training process and the learning process. It is considered as feedback ‘without prejudice’. This assessment method gathers data during the learning process and enables the assessor to give input to the trainee's work at each stage. An example of this assessment method might be the feedback that the tutors provide on drafts made by apprentices.

Summative assessment (also referred to as assessment of learning) is carried out at the end of a learning experience and evaluates an apprentice's performance in relation to the standard that should be achieved. The results of this assessment are recorded and count towards the final appraisal of the apprentice. Summative assessment may take place either on the job (at the workplace) or off the job (with a learning provider or at an assessment centre).”

The methodology proposed here is, as previously mentioned, a combination of formative assessment (linked to the role of the natural mentor) and summative assessment (linked to the role of the tutor). That is:

#### Formative assessment

- ✓ Provides feedback to learners to adjust learning activities
- ✓ Is integrated into the learning process
- ✓ Helps in tracking how students' skills are being developed and changed with time.

#### Summative assessment

- ✓ Assesses learning at the end of a programme/module
- ✓ Generates a mark/grade
- ✓ Assesses only a sample of learning outcomes

#### Combination

- ✓ Written: tests, examinations, assignments
- ✓ Practical: skills testing; lab/workshop practice
- ✓ Oral: interviews, various formats
- ✓ Aural: listening tests
- ✓ Project work: individual/group; research/design
- ✓ Field work: data collection and reporting
- ✓ Competence testing: threshold standards
- ✓ Portfolio: combination of techniques

## 6.2. Monitoring of apprenticeships

### 6.2.1. What is monitoring?

Monitoring of apprenticeships means supporting the trainee during their apprenticeship period or, in other words, the ability to supervise what the trainee is doing so they can comply with the established plan. More specifically, monitoring helps ease communication and cooperation between centres, companies, apprentices and tutors. The monitoring of trainees is essential, since they will probably face difficulties when carrying out new tasks due to inexperience. In this process, apart from a trainee's tutor, there are others such as the natural mentors or family members who should help in this monitoring process. The aim of monitoring apprenticeships is to ensure that the trainee, with the supervision of

a third party, develops his or her abilities and soft skills in order to progress on a personal and professional level.

The process of monitoring apprenticeships should be carried out from the beginning to the end of the scheme. Within this monitoring process, apprenticeships should also be tracked at different stages, based on the learning outcomes the trainee needs to achieve at each stage. For more effective monitoring, the person in charge will have to evaluate the trainee at each phase. This process should not be interrupted since apprentices' soft skills could stop being developed without continuous monitoring by the person responsible. Uninterrupted observation will help correct any deviation detected and will also help the trainee take the right path to success during the apprenticeship period. Therefore, monitoring is strictly linked to assessment, as the trainee gets feedback at every stage based on the evaluation and the tutoring sessions with the natural mentor. With this method of assessment, the trainee will develop soft skills such as confidence, conflict management, adaptation, and communication with others. The interaction of the person responsible for monitoring with the apprentice is of great importance in order to see the problems the apprentice faces at different stages, how they deal with those difficulties, and to enable the responsible person to establish realistic criteria for future tasks. Thanks to monitoring, it is also easy to adapt and adjust the apprenticeship programme according to the development and performance of each trainee.

Depending on the circumstances, face to face dialogue between the tutor and the apprentice will not always be possible. This, as well as the improvements in new technologies in recent years and their impact on society, are the main reasons why digital tools have become an important part of the monitoring process. With self-assessment tools, for instance, trainees are able to evaluate their progress and then reflect on it with their mentor. These tools are also dynamic and interactive, and have become attractive to students as they have the sense that they are not being constantly evaluated, but just directed onto the correct path. It is important not to leave the trainee without support, so that motivation or desire to learn is not lost. At the same time, the apprentices' autonomy in what they do must be preserved.

When the apprenticeship monitoring is completed in a successful way, development in the "soft skills" of the trainee should be noticed. The relationship between the tutor and the apprentice may positively impact on the apprentice's skills. For this to happen, trust between the parties must be established and nurtured. With such trust established, the apprentice is better able to maintain motivation and to perform. For apprenticeship monitoring to be efficient, the active participation of the trainee is necessary. Through active engagement an apprentice is likely to gain skills which would probably not be attained through passive involvement alone. The development of soft skills, which is to say the development of personal characteristics related to communication skills, social skills, personality and attitudes, would probably lead to an improvement in the hard skills of the trainee. The enhancement of a trainees' skills will have positive consequences for their future.

### 6.2.2. Tools for monitoring

For the monitoring to be effective, it is also important that the communication between the parties involved is continuous. Tools such as iLearn (<https://www.ilearn-tool.eu/>) can track the programme's evolution. The iLearn tool focuses on the set up of digital tools to facilitate communication between schools, companies, apprentices, in-company tutors and school tutors. The tool enables the apprentices' tutors (at school and in the company) to continuously monitor and evaluate the learning progress of the apprentices, thanks to the active involvement of each trainee when publishing and updating his/her learning progress with digital proofs. It also includes a Chat for fast communication between apprentices and tutors, which allows effective monitoring of participants.

The DESSA project has created a complete **self-assessment tool** for each soft skill and the user is able to assess his/her level from predefined levels. The tool also contains an **Orientation Guide** for the improvement of soft skills.

#### How to initialize IO3 (platform and orientation guide)

During the apprenticeships, students and mentors are encouraged to use the soft skills assessment platform, which can be assessed using the following link: <https://selfassessment.dessaproject.eu/>

The self-assessment platform hosts two useful tools, the self-assessment tool and the orientation guide.

#### Self-assessment tool

The objective of the self-assessment tool for soft skills is to detect those that students possess and those that they lack. During the apprenticeship, students should complete the self-assessment tool at least twice. An assessment should take place at the beginning of the apprenticeship so apprentices can establish their initial skill level. The report obtained should be discussed with the mentor, who can then design activities appropriate for the apprentice, and which will focus on the soft skills that he/she lacks. The second time the apprentice completes the self-assessment tool is at the end of the apprenticeship. This enables the apprentice to see how his/her soft skills have developed.

To access the soft skills self-assessment tool, the apprentice needs to visit the webpage and create an account, by providing a valid email and a password.

## Create new account

[Log in](#) | [Create new account](#) | [Reset your password](#)


Email\*

A valid email address. All emails from the system will be sent to this address. The email address is not made public and will only be used if you wish to receive a new password or wish to receive certain news or notifications by email.

Terms of Use


You must agree to the terms of use in order to participate. Please find the terms of use [here](#).

☐ I agree with these terms

☐ I'm not a robot
 

Create new account

The next step is to go to the self-assessment tool tab and start completing the questionnaire.



[Self-Assessment Tool](#) | [Introduction Guide](#)

[Help and Support](#) | [Log out](#)

## SELF ASSESMENT TOOL

Self-Assessment tool | [My Results](#) | [Introduction Guide](#)

Step 1

- 1 Introduction
- 2 COMMUNICATION
- 3 TEAMWORK
- 4 CONFLICT RESOLUTION
- 5 ADAPTABILITY TO CHANGE
- 6 PROBLEM SOLVING
- 7 CREATIVITY / INNOVATION
- 8 MOTIVATION
- 9 PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
- 10 TIME MANAGEMENT
- 11 NEGOTIATION SKILLS
- 12 CONFIDENCE
- 13 LEADERSHIP

Select user profile

Maria Dimitrakou

[Create another user profile](#)

### Introduction

The objective of this self-assessment tool for soft skills is to detect the ones that you possess and the ones that you lack.

Soft skills are regarded as general, transferable, core or key skills that can be applied across varied organisational and employment contexts and should be considered supplementary to established educational requirements (OECD, 2001 & 2012).

Soft skills are classified as 'key competences for lifelong learning' and can be divided into three main groups:

- a) Personal skills
- b) Social skills
- c) Context-related/interdisciplinary skills

All information and data received will be treated confidentially. With your approval you can access your individual report. The results of all questionnaires are processed and displayed in aggregated form. The report you will receive after completing the questionnaire shows your performance in key soft skill categories. You can access your report at any time.

**We kindly ask you to fill out the questionnaires, which should take about 15 minutes. With your support, reliable benchmarking data will be generated.**

Thank you very much for your support!

The DESSA team

### Introduction

The statements on the following pages refer to the statement "To what extent do the following statements apply to your current situation?" Please select for every

### The tool measures 12 soft skills:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Conflict resolution
- Adaptability to change
- Problem-solving
- Creativity
- Motivation
- Personal development
- Time management
- Negotiation
- Confidence
- Leadership

Each soft skill has 5 questions, which the apprentice must complete. For each question, the apprentice should choose whether he/she agrees or disagrees with the statement, eg.:

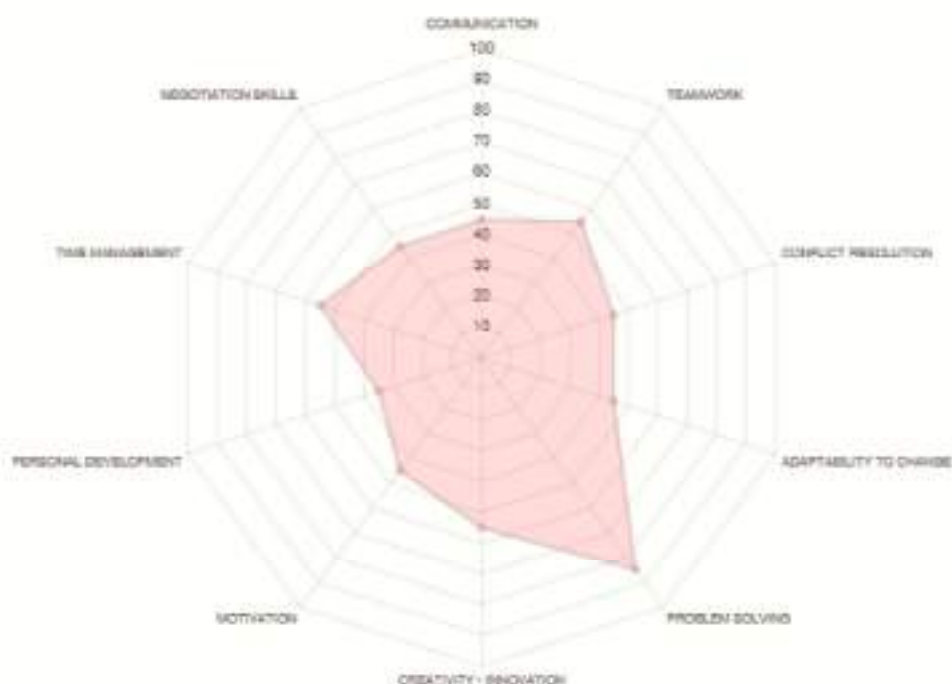
**When I am listening to others, I let them finish and try not to interrupt.**

- ✓ Strongly disagree
- ✓ Disagree
- ✓ Agree
- ✓ Strongly agree

When the student has answered all 5 questions that concern a specific soft skill, he/she can then click next and go to the questions of the next soft skill.

After completing all the questions for all soft skills, a report is generated, which contains information about the apprentice's level of soft skills.





## Section: COMMUNICATION

Score: 45

With a little more effort you can increase your communication skills!

### Suggestions For Improvement

1. Focus on listening when others talk.
2. Try not to have prefixed ideas about other individuals.
3. Be informed about the other person's interests, hobbies, studies.
4. Deal with working from distance, as if you actually are in a specific professional setting.
5. Interact with people even in unexpected places.
6. Participate in amateur drama classes.

The report includes a radar chart, thanks to which the student can have a visual representation of the level of his/her soft skills. Below the chart, the student can see his/her individual score in each soft skill and some suggestions for improving the soft skill.

The scores vary from 0 to 100, with 100 being the highest, meaning that the level of the student's specific soft skill is excellent, while 0 is the lowest score, which means that the student needs to develop the specific soft skill.

All information and data received will be treated confidentially. With your password you can access your individual report. The results of all questionnaires are processed and displayed in aggregated form. The report you will receive after completing the questionnaire shows your performance in key soft-skill categories. You can access your report at any time.

By pressing the 'My Reports Button', the apprentice can then choose to see all the soft-skills assessments which he/she has completed, in chronological order.

## Orientation guide

The second tool offered by the platform is the orientation guide for improvement of soft skills. The purpose of the guide is to highlight the importance of the 12 soft skills identified by the self-assessment tool, and assist in developing them, providing useful tips and examples, to anyone reading them.

It provides valid information, explains exactly what soft skills consist of, and offers tips and examples of activities aiming to develop and strengthen them. Keeping in mind contemporary needs and modern life's requirements, the guide serves as a concrete informative tool, in which everyone can find more or less everything they need, so as to be prepared for an interview, or a new work environment, or successfully deal with everyday setbacks and challenges.

The orientation guide can be downloaded from the respective tab on the DESSA platform.

## References

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3. Assessment and Apprenticeship standards (FISSS, November 2014); <https://fisss.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Understanding-assessment-in-Apprenticeships.pdf>
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## Chapter 7 – Instructions, examples and ideas to develop soft skills. Sharing experiences and recommendations

### 7.1. How to motivate apprentices to develop soft skills – practical tasks and exercises

In this subsection, we present exercises/tasks that allow trainers to encourage trainees to develop the indicated soft skills during their apprenticeship. There are rules for soft skills-focused tasks. The following material provides trainers with recommendations on what to pay attention to during training. Tasks can be modified depending on the situation during the apprenticeship and depending on the needs of the apprentices. They relate to the soft skills selected in the DESSA project. They may be implemented by the VET institutions and centres.

#### Introduction

You are a teacher, trainer, supervisor – a person responsible for the course of the apprenticeship – the following set of selected exercises is the answer to your questions related to conducting classes on soft skills. You already know from the previous parts of this guide that soft skills are important in the labour market, you know which soft skills surveyed entrepreneurs highlighted during the survey and focus group meetings. This chapter considers those soft skills. Out of many skills, the DESSA group of partners selected the 12 most important skills. They are so important that it is worth writing a few words about them. Many people say that hard skills, i.e. specialist knowledge and experience, are the most important skills at work. This is not true, but the fact is that, unlike hard skills, soft skills are much more difficult to develop and train. In focus group meetings and surveys, employers agreed that soft skills are extremely important and have a positive impact on both the company's development and the atmosphere in the workplace.

### Why? Because thanks to the twelve selected soft skills, the apprentice:

- ✓ adapts faster to a new place (communication and interpersonal skills);
- ✓ makes contacts with others more easily (communication);
- ✓ can cooperate with colleagues from work (cooperation, teamwork);
- ✓ copes with possible conflict more easily (conflict resolution);
- ✓ can approach a difficult task in an unconventional way (problem-solving);
- ✓ brings new ideas and solutions (creativity);
- ✓ is ready to change ways of thinking (ability to adapt to changes);
- ✓ motivates oneself and others (motivation);
- ✓ feels the need for self-realization and acquiring new knowledge (willingness to develop oneself);
- ✓ effectively manages his/her time (time management ability);
- ✓ is flexible in action, skilfully presents his/her opinion (negotiation skills);
- ✓ takes the role of a leader in the group (leadership)
- ✓ believes in himself/herself and invests energy in his/her development (confidence).

This chapter aims to provide knowledge related to the implementation of tasks for developing soft skills. An important element will be the way the exercises should be carried out to increase their effectiveness and to stimulate further development. Each exercise, regardless of the soft skill selected, can be used alone and bring real results, helping trainees develop in a given area. Carrying out all the exercises based on the prepared tasks and guidelines with the same target group will bring the additional effect of a deepened understanding of having a range of soft skills.

### The exercises are devoted to the following soft skills:

- Communication skills
- Cooperation/Teamwork
- Conflict resolution
- Problem-solving
- Creativity/innovation
- Adaptability to change
- Motivation skills
- Willingness for personal development

- Time management skills
- Negotiation skills
- Leadership
- Confidence

### 7.1.1. How to conduct exercises/tasks related to soft skills

The first step in organizing soft skills development tasks is to designate a space that will allow participants to move freely and ensure their comfort when performing tasks. An important element is adapting a space to enable you to work both with individuals and with groups of several people. The place/room should be properly lit, bright, and warm. It is worth paying attention to the need to have a table and a sufficient number of chairs.

In addition to having the right classroom, you should ensure that apprentices are provided with the materials they need to do the exercises. Before starting a soft skills activity, you should make an inventory of the essential materials needed. This will include flipcharts, pens, markers, cards. If a given exercise requires additional materials, organize it before starting the class.

Each of the proposed exercises should be carried out within a specific time frame. With each exercise, you will receive the necessary information on how to conduct the classes. All exercises provide guidance on how long the activity should last, which can help you schedule them. The atmosphere in the classroom is important. Maintain a positive attitude. Good communication is a key factor in shaping how your messages will be received. Remember that enthusiasm signals credibility - it gives a clear message that the speaker believes what he/she is saying. If we are seen as genuine it is easier for others to accept our ideas. If you are well prepared for the class and demonstrate good knowledge of soft skills, the apprentices will find you credible.

**Below are some tips on how to create a good atmosphere and increase your sense of authenticity:**

- ✓ **First impression.** This short moment can determine the success of the whole training exercise.
- ✓ **Nonverbal communication.** The way you send messages to the class affects how you will be received.
- ✓ **Friendliness.** Make the trainee feel that you value him/her. Show that your action is focused on his/her development.
- ✓ **Confidence.** Don't forget that self-esteem, uniqueness, and acceptance are the driving forces!

In developing soft skills, it is important to talk and get to know the other person, so talk to your trainees and create opportunities for interaction between them and other employees. If you still have any doubts, read the following advice about what to do during exercises.

- don't interrupt the apprentice;
- respect the opinion of the trainee;
- build a positive atmosphere during tasks;
- remember about the time frame;
- provide feedback and leave room for trainees' own ideas, projects and mistakes;
- inspire apprentices to reflect on the actions taken;
- create situations in which they can cooperate with others;
- support creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, appreciate innovation;
- refrain from excessive criticism and evaluation;
- give directions to your own solutions.

Also, pay attention to the rules that will prevail during the implementation of tasks. You can do it yourself, outlining the specific rules that will apply when performing the tasks. You can also create a contract with the trainee so that you have the opportunity to get to know the participant(s), and it can also serve as a "creative warm-up" before starting the exercises. If you decide to provide your own rules, make sure that they are clear and understandable to participants. They should concern behaviour during classes, which will include at least:

- ✓ confidentiality;
- ✓ lack of critical assessments;
- ✓ taking into account other people's feelings;
- ✓ respect for the opinions of other participants.

You can add other criteria to this list to help participants work openly and constructively.

### **7.1.2. Exercises/tasks for soft skills**

The general purpose of the exercises is to familiarize trainees with soft skills. The description of individual skills is based on substantive and practical knowledge. You outline the apprentice's natural mentor's role. The apprentice chooses the natural mentor himself/herself.

## Learning outcomes

- ✓ Identifying individual soft skills;
- ✓ Understanding the differences between hard and soft skills;
- ✓ Understanding the role of soft skills during the apprenticeship;
- ✓ Understanding the advantages of having soft skills;
- ✓ Learning about exercises that help to develop soft skills;
- ✓ Familiarizing trainers with the specification of developing the soft skills of apprentices;
- ✓ Showing the possibility of developing soft skills during apprenticeships;
- ✓ Introducing gamification elements during apprenticeship;
- ✓ Understanding the role of the natural mentor.

## Exercises: Communication skills

**Thanks to communication skills, the student can clearly express his/her opinion while communicating with the interlocutor. We divide communication into verbal and non-verbal. Complete the exercise below to gain the ability to distinguish these skills.**

### Exercise 1. The exercise is called "*newspaper clippings*".

- ✓ Estimated time to complete this task is up to 45 minutes.
- ✓ A minimum of two people work on this task.
- ✓ Prepare yourself before starting tasks. You need a newspaper, A1 sheets of paper, markers, glue, scissors, pens and a flipchart on which the task will be presented.

The task is to create a poster in which the apprentice will present nonverbal communication, and verbal communication.

Apprentices in groups choose a minimum of 5-15 pictures. The participants of the task stick pictures of verbal and non-verbal communication on a piece of paper. They can add descriptions.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Encourage groups to look at the task from a different perspective, to be unconventional in their poster creation. The more detail, the better. A creative approach to the topic will be an asset.*

After finishing their posters, each group verifies what they wrote and illustrated on the poster. They discuss the meaning of the communication in relation to their future profession.

Participants check which group has placed the most details. That group receives applause. This is the winning group.



**Reflection:** After the apprenticeship, the trainees discuss verbal and non-verbal communication with the natural mentor.

**Reflection with a natural mentor based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What do you pay attention to when communicating with another person?*
- ✓ *What is the importance of communication in your profession? What do customers expect?*
- ✓ *What role does verbal and non-verbal communication play in your future work?*
- ✓ *What would you like to improve in your communication style?*
- ✓ *What is your strength in communicating with others?*

**Exercise 2. Storytelling**

*The trainer should have a collection of pictures or/and photos.*

Storytelling is an important tool of communication, it is based on the transfer of knowledge formulated as a story, but above all, it allows the audience to identify with the characters in the story, stimulates the imagination of the audience, and appeals to emotions. Storytelling uses metaphors and thus has many contexts and meanings, stimulates the imagination and develops creative thinking.

**Task 1:** Choose one to three pictures from a collection that connects with you or grabs your attention. Share your photos with others (students, apprentices) and explain why you chose them, what values are associated with them (each participant does the same).

Then the group picks one story (gamification) based on arguments that convince other members of the group. After selecting, we analyse the messages that made the statements interesting for others. We build the features of an interesting story.

**Task 2:** Meet with other people (minimum 5 people in one group) and create a story that will connect your images, and at the same time produce a story from which you can learn something.

Present your story and explain what we can learn from it.

**Reflection with a natural mentor based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *How can I improve communication skills through storytelling?*
- ✓ *When can I use storytelling in my future career? What stories could these be?*
- ✓ *How can I perfect a form of story building and storytelling?*

## Exercises: Cooperation/Teamwork

The ability to work in a team/cooperation is currently one of the key soft competencies demanded by the labour market. It is so important to learn to cooperate, but also to divide responsibilities and undertake actions to reach a common goal. The following exercise gives you an opportunity to understand the importance of teamwork and the benefits it brings.

The exercise is called *"let's start at the beginning"*.

- Estimated time to complete this task is 45 minutes.
- Groups should have at least three members.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- The purpose of this exercise is to learn collaboration/teamwork skills.

The participants are divided into two or more groups of three (depending on the number of trainees). Groups have at their disposal everything that is in the room and what they have with them. Using all these items, they are to create a new logo for the team in which they cooperate/undergo apprenticeships.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Try to help the group with the task, but remember that they are the Creators.*

The next step in the exercise is to present projects to the other groups, explaining each part of a project, why they chose it and how it represents them.

**The element of gamification:** The participants choose the group that introduced themselves most effectively. The winning group draws "congratulations, creative team member" on a piece of paper for their colleagues. This allows the team to get to know each other better without having to invest in countless resources or a large amount of time.

After completing the exercise, the trainees discuss collaboration/teamwork with the natural mentor. What is it, what does group work consist of?

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What is the importance of cooperation in your workplace?*
- ✓ *What are the pros and cons of teamwork?*
- ✓ *Why do you like teamwork?*
- ✓ *What is your strength in teamwork?*
- ✓ *What would you like to develop in terms of teamwork and collaboration skills?*

## Exercises: Conflict resolution

Because conflicts are inevitable, especially when we are surrounded by people and spend most of our day with them - such as during an apprenticeship, learning to deal with conflicts healthily is an extremely important soft skill.

This exercise is called "*brainstorming*".

- Estimated time to complete this task is 40 minutes.
- Proposed joint work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- This exercise aims to teach conflict resolution skills.

Ask the participants to sit down forming a circle. Introduce a brainstorming task.

**Tips for the trainer:** *if necessary - explain to participants the rules of brainstorming - or talk about it in advance - ask them to prepare for this exercise.*

Brainstorming in this exercise will look at the causes of conflicts that may arise during work or that arise frequently.

**Ask participants about:** *Their examples of conflict resolution methods in the workplace.*

Write down the proposed conflict resolution methods on a flipchart.

For example, these could be: asking a colleague for help, asking a supervisor for a resolution, etc. You can deepen the discussion by asking what the path to finding a solution to the dispute looks like in each case, which methods are more direct and which are the most frequently used.

Ask participants to provide examples of conflicts they know from studies or previous practice and how they were resolved.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did this exercise give me?*
- ✓ *How do I perceive the conflict now?*
- ✓ *What has this assignment taught me?*

## Exercises: Problem-solving

Problem-solving skills are essential, not only in the workplace but also in everyday life. There are many methods of successfully solving a problem, e.g. by a systematic and structured approach to the problem. It is said that problems are a permanent fixture in our lives. Nobody can avoid them, but by learning the soft skill of conflict resolution, one can develop the ability of knowing how to respond to a problem and finding a solution to it.

The exercise is called "*what's your job*".

- Estimated time to complete this task is 120 minutes.
- Proposed group work – a minimum of 3 groups of 2 people.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- The aim of this activity is to learn problem-solving skills.

The task will be to tell a story related to the solution of a problem that took place during the apprenticeship. The title of the story is "Crisis at Work". The problem can be a real-life example, but the trainees can also suggest a problem they would like to discuss. It may be, for example, the problem of a lack of meetings with the supervisor, no breakfast breaks, no access to the Internet, etc.

For this task, trainees are divided into three groups.

**1 group** plays the role of the "Speaker" – the group outlines the problem.

**The second group** plays the role of "Listener to facts" – the group listens to the story and focuses on facts.

**Group 3** plays the role of "Listener to emotions" – the group listens to the story and focuses on feelings and emotions.

Listeners ask the speaker questions. They collect facts about a given problem. Then they exchange views and observations. Finally, all participants write down solutions to problems on the board.

**Tips for the trainer:** *After completing the story, help the apprentices ask questions.*

**Element of gamification:** The next stage is to change the roles so that each participant of the exercise has the opportunity to play each of them.

From among all the solutions, the group chooses the best one through discussion.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How do I perceive solving problems now?*
- ✓ *What has this assignment taught me?*

**Exercises:** **Creativity/Innovation**

**Creativity is the art of effectively solving, often unusual, tasks and problems. It is the ability to generate new ideas and to adapt to reality in a flexible manner. Creativity is not only limited to areas such as art or painting, it also applies to everyday situations in the workplace.**

**Exercise 1. Creative people skills**

Creative people develop certain skills that allow them to be creative. In this exercise, we refer to some characteristics of creative persons that we may also consider to be important in professional work. The task is to highlight those skills that the trainee sees as important. The exercise allows trainees to determine the direction of their own personal development, taking into account the potential for creativity.

**List of skills of creative people:**

*Originality, Analysis, Decision Making, Ability to Synthesise, Making Connections, Seeing in New Ways, Elaboration, Flexibility, Fluency, Logical Thinking, Able to Regress, Able to Predict Outcomes, Transformation, Intuition, Sensitivity to Problems, Able to Define Problems, Questions Norms, Visualization, Finds Order in Chaos, Analogical Thinking, Avoiding Perceptual Sets*

**Part 1** The Trainer asks the participants to:

- Draw a circle around the seven traits you believe are the most important in your job
- Draw a square around the six you believe are the least important in your job
- Underline in black the five you believe YOU are the best at.
- Underline in red the four you want to improve

The participants then discuss their choice with the natural mentor. They decide which skills are important to them in their profession.

**Part 2** The Trainer asks the participants to prepare their plan of how they can develop one or more skills during their apprenticeship. Then they discuss their idea with the natural mentor.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What helps me to be creative, to start to do new things, projects?*
- ✓ *What is really important in my job and can motivate me to do new and creative things?*
- ✓ *What has this assignment taught me?*

**Exercise 2. "March, March Campaign".**

- Estimated time to complete this task is 3 days.
- Proposed work in groups of at least 3 people.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- The aim of this exercise is to learn creative skills.

Work in groups of 3. The task is to create an advertising campaign for the department in which the apprentices work. The work can be carried out on various types of media and in the form of presentations. The form of implementation is free, but it should be remembered that the project should be innovative and possible to implement. The campaign should aim to advertise the department and show it from a different perspective. The more details that are described, the better.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Remember that this is a creative task - so it is worth highlighting to the trainees that an unconventional approach to the topic will be a great asset.*

**The element of gamification:** choosing the winning group.

After completing the task, each group presents what they wrote. Participants compare which group has provided the most details and most clearly described the progression of their campaign. Finally, everyone chooses a winning group.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What is the purpose of the campaign?*
- ✓ *What does the project bring to the department?*
- ✓ *What can be implemented to improve the department?*

### Exercise 3. Sentences

**The Trainer ask apprentices to:** *Answer the following three questions. Include a minimum of 20 answers for each question.*

- *What if....*
- *Work is important to me because....*
- *I am surprised ...*

**Tips for the trainer:** *Support the apprentices, but don't complete the task for them.*

**The element of gamification:** The group collectively chooses the person they believe was the most creative in their responses.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did this exercise give me?*
- ✓ *Has my perception of creativity changed?*
- ✓ *How do I feel after these exercises?*

### Exercises: Motivation skills

**Motivation skills** are one of the core soft skills. Most employers want people with motivation skills. It is worth noting that the motivation to act determines the achievement of effectiveness in the place of apprenticeship.

The exercise is called **"hey history"**.

- Estimated time to complete this task is 45 minutes.
- Proposed individual work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- The purpose of this exercise is to increase the motivation to act.

Each trainee writes down the answers to the following questions on a piece of paper: Answer each question with at least 10 examples.

- *By motivate, I mean ...*
- *The morning motivates me by the fact that....*
- *I get up in the morning thinking about....*
- *Getting ready for work motivates me ...*
- *At work, I am motivated because....*

The leader collects the cards and redistributes them in random order. One by one, each person begins to tell a story containing sentences from the drawn cards. Finally, the group chooses the most interesting story.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Create a good atmosphere while doing this exercise.*

**Element of gamification:** choosing the winning person.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did this exercise give me?*
- ✓ *What is a motivation for me?*
- ✓ *How can motivation skills positively influence my job?*

**Exercises:** **Adaptability to change**

**Being able to adapt to change is a trait that employers pay a lot of attention to. Why? Because change is inherent in our world. Employers expect candidates to be able to cope with a changing environment, react quickly, and perceive new things on the market as an opportunity for the company's development.**

The exercise is called **"changing to be"**.

- Estimated time to complete this task 30 minutes
- Proposed work in groups of at least 3 people.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.



- This exercise aims to teach how to adapt to change.

Talk to the trainees about what change means to them. What could be the changes in their lives, whether it could be a change in their future job, changes that they want to incorporate into their lives, or any other change that comes to their mind. Ask the trainees to write down a minimum of 20 pluses and a minimum of 20 minuses of the current situation in their lives and the changes they need. Communicate that an important part of this task is to identify the emotions and feelings associated with the changes.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Try to encourage the apprentices to discuss, to think together about the emotions that accompany the changes.*

Reflection: After completing the exercise, the trainees and their natural mentor should talk about what they believe change is, and how to prepare for it. They should consider how to find solutions that will help them make changes.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *How do I perceive change now?*
- ✓ *Do I need changes?*
- ✓ *What emotions do I experience when making changes?*

**Exercises:** **The willingness for personal development**

Those in the labour market recognise that they must continuously expand their competencies and skills. In order for the trainee to be more successful in the future, he/she should be focused on personal development. Companies are also aware of dynamic changes and are looking for employees who are ready to enhance their qualifications and are aware that in a few years the workplace may look completely different than today.

**Exercise 1:** *This exercise is called "**mind mapping**".*

- Estimated time to complete this task is 40 minutes.
- Proposed individual work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- The aim of this exercise is to expand knowledge about personal development.

The apprentice's task is to present the slogan: personal development using a mind map.

Tip - A THOUGHT MAP is a Password (word) + symbolic picture

**Instruction for apprentices:** *Create a Map:*

- place a card horizontally
- the leading topic is in the centre

- branching from the main concept, basic information or simple informative drawings are provided.
- further bifurcation offers more detailed information and concepts.

**Tips for the trainer:** *if necessary - explain the principles of mind mapping to participants – or talk to them about it in advance - ask them to prepare for this exercise. Each participant presents his/her mind map to the group and describes it.*

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How do I perceive personal development now?*
- ✓ *What is important to me in regards to personal development?*

## **Exercise 2 Project for your self-development**

### **Part 1 Reflections**

- ✓ *How do you understand self-development?*
- ✓ *What is the most important aspect of self-development for you? Write down all factors.*
- ✓ *What have you done for your own development over the last year? Write down all activities.*
- ✓ *What do you want to do for your self-development over the next 6 months?*

### **Part 2 Invent our life in 2030**

What would have happened in the world by 2030? What would have happened in your life in relation to:

- Technology?
- Society?
- Style of life?
- Your profession?

Present your vision to other students.

### **Part 3 Process illustration**

Draw a scheme that illustrates the process of your development over the next 10 years. Looking at the scheme, think about the realization of your plans.

Choose one thing and illustrate its realization in detail.

### Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:

- ✓ What project would be useful to help realise your future plans?
- ✓ What conditions (factors) can motivate you to realise your plans?
- ✓ How does your plan link up with your current work placement? How can you develop yourself in the course of the apprenticeship, taking into account your development plans?

### Exercises: Time management ability

The ability to manage time is invaluable, both at work and in everyday life. In professional work, this skill is almost mandatory, because it includes, for example, the ability to delegate tasks, set priorities, goals, arrange meetings, work effectively in a group or keep deadlines. Accordingly, many different elements make up effective time management.

#### Exercise 1: "The future is today".

- Estimated time to complete this task 30 minutes.
- Proposed individual work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- Before starting the task, prepare a prize for the winning participant.
- The aim of this exercise is to learn time management skills.

Describe your day in five years' time in 15 sentences.

**The element of gamification:** The tutor informs the participants that it is a timed task. The person who completes the task first will receive a reward from the trainer.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Try to encourage the apprentices to reflect, suggest to them that the actions they take now and the goals they set themselves will have a real impact on the future.*

### Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How does planning affect our lives?*
- ✓ *Is visualizing the future difficult? If so, why?*
- ✓ *How do I perceive time management? How do I feel about it and what does an awareness of time management motivate me to do?*

#### Exercise 2: "Tomorrow is a day too".

The exercise consists of planning "tomorrow's practice day down to the minute". Every activity that will be performed tomorrow from the morning should be written down on

a piece of paper. You can even write down things like the morning toilet visit or taking out the trash - the idea is to teach your mind to organize your time in a very detailed way. It is important to go through this day with your plan ready, marking each completed activity with a triumphant tick.

After completing the task, the schedule of the day is discussed with the mentor, and then conclusions are drawn. Each student should list the activities that turned out to be positive, "useful" and "unnecessary" - taking up time.

**The element of gamification:** Each student analyses the planning - giving him/herself 1 point for "useful activities", and for "unnecessary activities" 0 points. The next element is counting the collected points. Each student who has obtained a minimum of 7 points may consider the task complete. Those who collect a minimum of 12 points receive one hour of break on three work days. Every student counts "unnecessary activities" and does 5 squats for each one.

It is possible to get a total of 3 hours of free time while working.

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How do we perceive this form of task implementation?*
- ✓ *How do I organize my time? How can I better manage my time?*

#### **Exercises: Negotiation Skills**

**Having negotiation skills is a key soft skill these days. Negotiation is the best course of action in the event of a disagreement with another party. At work, negotiating skills are useful both in professional and personal contexts.**

**This exercise aims to teach negotiation skills.**

The exercise consists of conducting negotiations and obtaining a satisfactory result on time - 10 minutes. Divide the trainees into groups of two. Then give them a choice of one of two themes.

1) Negotiate and convince your friend to lend you a car for the weekend. You have a very important reason: your girlfriend/boyfriend/family/friend from abroad is visiting you. You promised to show him/her around Krakow and take him/her on a trip, but your car is not working (or you had a collision, which was not your fault), and you cannot afford to rent a car. You know that your friend has a car - convince her/him.

2) Negotiate and convince a friend or colleague to lend you a computer/laptop for the weekend. You have a very important reason: you have to finish an important project for work/study over the weekend and your computer's operating system has just crashed. You will most likely have to reinstall all your system and software, but you won't have time for that because you have an important meeting tomorrow. You know your friend/colleague has a computer/laptop.

As a trainer, you can propose a different negotiation topic, for example one that relates to the situation of the apprentices. The more negotiating that is necessary in a particular scenario, the better.

**Element of gamification:** completing the task on time, the trainee has 10 minutes to negotiate. During this time, the trainee should achieve the intended goal.

**Tips for the trainer:** *Try to encourage the trainees to negotiate efficiently, think together how you can persuade the other party to enable you to achieve the desired effect.*

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How do I view negotiation now?*
- ✓ *What emotions do we experience when negotiating?*
- ✓ *What do I want to improve? What more do I want to learn about negotiation? What will I need in my work?*

#### **Exercises: Leadership**

The ability to lead is becoming an essential skill demanded in the labour market. Developing leadership skills involves developing specific features and attitudes such as courage, self-control, coherent decision-making and attention to detail. Thus, leadership is nothing more than contact with people and, more precisely, establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

The exercise is called **"prove yourself"**.

- Estimated time for this task is 20 minutes
- Proposed individual work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- Before starting the task, prepare a prize for the winning participant.
- The purpose of this exercise is to learn leadership skills.

Describe the characteristics of a leader.

What would you like to be respected for in your future company? For what actions will you reward your employees? When preparing your presentation, consider:

- defining minimum standards (those who fail to reach these standards will face sanctions);
- setting the expected standard (those who exceed the expected standard will be rewarded).

Consider what knowledge would help your future employees make independent decisions in line with the implementation of the company's vision.

**The element of gamification:** defining a framework of boundaries and preferences – role play

**Tips for the trainer:** *Support the trainees in their speech. Try to make them feel at ease and at the same time engaged in work.*

**Reflection with a natural mentor can be based on the following questions:**

- ✓ *What did I gain from this exercise?*
- ✓ *How do we perceive leadership?*
- ✓ *How does this skill affect my job?*
- ✓ *What could it mean in my profession?*

#### **Exercises:** Confidence

The ability to be confident, especially at work, is perceived as a personal asset. The fact of being aware of our competencies or knowing about our strengths and weaknesses facilitates development, the pursuit of the set goal and, consequently, helps one achieve professional success.

The exercise is called the "**alter-ego experiment**".

- Estimated time to complete this task 5 minutes.
- Proposed individual work.
- Before starting the task, prepare A4 sheets of paper and felt-tip pens.
- Before starting the task, prepare a prize for the winning participant.
- The goal of this exercise is to learn self-confidence skills.

Trainees select one person who participates in the exercise. The trainees are asked to pay attention to how the selected person looks, moves and talks. Then another participant takes on the role of the selected person. He/she walks around the room, may say something, ask questions, or make a gesture in a manner that mimics the initially selected person. In this part, you can suggest other exercises with imitating famous characters, expressing emotions, etc. Presenting the trainees in front of the group in drama scenes requires overcoming shyness and strengthening self-confidence. It is worth discussing with the trainees their emotions and feelings when they present themselves and each other before the group: what is difficult for them, what emotions they are exposed to, what can help them in such situations.

### The element of gamification: role playing

**Tips for the trainer:** *Introduce a positive atmosphere, try to make the group feel at ease, and ensure that the completion of the task does not take longer than the time frame set at the beginning.*

After completing the exercise, the trainees and their natural mentor should talk about what they believe is self-confidence. Is it easy to learn and work with this skill?

#### Reflection with a natural mentor based on the following questions:

- ✓ *How do I see my confidence?*
- ✓ *What importance can self-confidence have in my professional work?*
- ✓ *How can I increase my confidence? What can help me?*

### Learners assess/monitor themselves after each task

Questions that help a learner to self-monitor	Learners' answers
What have I been doing?	
How have I been doing it?	
What do I think of what I have been doing?	
How could I improve my approach?	

### Good tips/Recommendations for learners *Provide self-monitoring of your own task*

After preparing your own project/task, complete the sentences below:

- *Two things to watch out for during this task ...*
- *During this project I encountered the following problems: I overcame these problems by...*
- *The mistakes that I wish I had avoided during the project include...*
- *Two things that are worth doing before putting the project into practice are ...*
- *Safe and acceptable mistakes in this kind of project are ...*

### Self-monitoring

Reflection on the project's potential and possible modification/improvement

- Identify what is the strength of your project.
- Identify what is the weakness of your project.
- Determine how you can make your project more useful and valuable for recipients.



- Think about how you can modify your project to make it more innovative, interesting and attractive.
- Analyse what gives you the most satisfaction.
- Analyse how the project meets the criteria set by the teacher.
- Identify if the structure of your project is clear and logical.
- Consider how else you could solve the stated problem.

## 7.2. Sharing experiences and recommendations – examples of the application of the apprenticeships scheme (in partner countries)

### The Dutch example

Dutch partners of the DESSA project consist of a collaboration between VET institution Friesland College, one of the three VET institutions of Friesland, a northern province of the Netherlands. MentorProgramma Friesland, a supporting mentoring structure providing mentoring to students of all institutions based in Friesland, provided knowledge regarding mentoring.

The selection and creation of the Apprenticeship scheme started with involving the network with questionnaires and focus groups in which professionals and students with different expertise's participated. These were organized by the project leader and involved professionals of not only Friesland College, but also other institutions in the region through an open call and use of the already existing network. In the process it became clear that professionals deemed soft skills important and are more than willing to contribute to such a cause.

After this the project leaders worked in collaboration with student apprentices in order to work on best practices and translations. Weekly sessions of looking at the tools with students, working with the given feedback and repeating the process. This allowed the students to be a equal share in the development of all DESSA tools and made the tools more fitting for the target group.

In order to test out the different tools created by the DESSA consortium two pilots were organized for VET students. During the first year of the project while having multiple VET apprentices at MentorProgramma Friesland first tested the tools themselves, and later on tested the best practices in the form of workshops for others. These students were not yet doing their internship, but were able to test the tools and provide insight on the clarity and learning aspects of the best practices. The second year a big pilot was launched, while having some difficulties in entering companies where apprentices could test the tools. Therefore the tools and method was tested in the classroom in the form of workshops given by

students who participated the first year. These students were guided in the process by employees of MentorProgramma Friesland, mentors if you will.

The difficulty in this method was to implement the natural mentoring. The students giving the workshops as well as the employees of MentorProgramma Friesland who took part in the project took the role of the mentor by reflecting with the students during these workshops. VET apprentices also reflected with these employees on their own learning process.

The most important realisations of the pilot was the learning process of students participating. VET students really liked working on their soft skills and understood the importance after participating. The interactive and fun approach worked for them and gave them a better awareness.

### SWOT analysis

#### Step 1: Context

Company	Apprentices	Trainers
The pilot was held within a mentoring programme and in the classroom.	The apprentices of the mentoring programme have different studies, like Social Work and Business Administration. The classrooms where the students took part in the pilot were of VET students Media Design. The natural mentoring came from the trainers of the pilots and students from the first year.	In our case, the trainers had weekly sessions with the trainers for the pilot in which they collaborated with the students giving the workshops and doing the pilot training. They also supported the natural mentors like an intervention.

#### Step 2: Threats

The **risks** of implanting the pilot into daily activities where to make sure participating students did have the right guidance and were sufficiently facilitated doing certain activities in the Training guide. For example some activities need external materials or a larger group to perform. **External negative factors** include the COVID-19 crisis, the daily work of apprentices and the innovative part of the program, for example natural mentoring. The current crisis is something that was out of our control. Some companies closed their doors because of it.

#### Step 3: Opportunities

The opportunities were that soft skills is a theme which is trending within our educational system, which made it easier to convince teachers to be a part of the pilot. Next to this there is a lot of knowledge on mentoring in our team. This is not a new development, but it's a field of research which still has a lot of ground to cover and the years of experience made it more easy to implement it naturally.

#### **Step 4: Strengths**

The strengths of the pilot (and DESSA in general) are the tools created to support the development of soft skills VET institutions and companies who guide VET apprentices. There is an increasing urge to focus more on soft skills because of the ever changing working environment. Creating awareness for VET students through the self-assessment tool, helping the development by giving specific assignments and tips in the guides to improve soft skills and having a natural mentor to monitor and help during the process. It gives a practical method which can be used by all in need of developing soft skills.

#### **Step 5: Weaknesses**

The biggest weakness would be the unknown in the field of soft skills, which is just beginning to become more and more a world of it's own. From 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, transversal skills to soft skills. Next to this organisations differ in approach, time and other facilitating matters, as well as educational systems in different countries or even institutions. This makes it difficult to create one method which fits all.

#### **Step 6: Strategies**

The demand in the educational system gave us the opportunity to present the tools more to teachers and trainers, it created an opening which helped us with organizing the pilot. The DESSA team was involved in every step of the way, which also helped with spreading the word so more people could use the method.

#### **Step 7: Recommendations**

Working together with the target group and actively involving them in the process not only helped us, but also made it so much more interesting to create and test the tools. It gave us direct feedback. Other recommendations would be to keep it interactive while working with groups of students and explaining the whole system to companies involved. Lastly, the tools are innovative, so make sure to give people the whole story on soft skills, gamification and natural mentoring and explain how to make use of the tools available. Think outside the box.



# ANNEXES

## Survey report



### Lithuania – KSPMC

Respondents who completed the questionnaire all admitted that they value the soft skills of their employees (100%). The descriptive part of the questionnaire shows that **good communication** is an important skill, which contributes to improving the quality of work and creates a team atmosphere. All respondents also acknowledged the usefulness of the surveyed competencies and found that *employees having them positively affects the enterprise*. In response to the question: "What soft skills do you think are the most important?" 60% of respondents stated that employees should have **the ability to adapt to changes** as well as **the willingness and the need to pursue personal development**. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents mentioned soft skills such as the ability to delegate tasks, the ability to work under time pressure or self-awareness. In the next group of questions, respondents indicated that the scope of possessed social skills is important as it impacts on the **organization of work** and facilitates **cooperation**. According to the survey, the competencies in this area are primarily: **communication skills, motivation, adaptability to change, as well as the need for development and cooperation**. Respondents expressed a demand for employees with skills such as critical thinking or the ability to solve problems, arguing that this would contribute to the improvement of the business climate. Surveyed respondents stressed the usefulness of employee growth through participation in courses that develop soft skills.

When answering the question: "When recruiting new employees, do you take into account their soft skills?", 90% of respondents ticked 'Yes'. This proves that entrepreneurs are aware of the usefulness of having soft skills. To the question: "Do you support employees in discovering/developing soft skills - is it important for you ... (...)" respondents unanimously stated that this is an important issue for them and that they help/support their employees in this sphere. Such activities improve work efficiency, motivate and inspire employees. In response to the last question: "How do you support and motivate employees to develop soft skills?", 100% of respondents gave examples of supporting and motivating their workers. They mentioned training during work, bonuses and sponsorship of training, and thank you letters.



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### Poland – University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz (AHE)

In response to the first question: "Do you value your employees' soft skills?" respondents unanimously (100%) answered 'Yes'. The valued competency they pointed out was the ability to work in and **manage a team**, as well as **building relationships with customers**. In the next question, they were asked: "What soft skills do you think are the most important?" and 60% of respondents mentioned **communication** skills. This indicates that this is a very important competency, which improves the quality and effectiveness of customer relationships. Despite the



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differences in answers, **creativity, ability to resolve conflicts, willingness to develop and pursuit of development** were mentioned several times.

Respondents also stated (100%) that employees with soft skills have a positive impact on the company. Respondents stated that communication, learning skills and cooperation skills are the foundation of effectiveness. A good atmosphere helps to generate new ideas and solve problems, as well as to accomplish tasks. It was emphasized that this is the basis for the development of the company. Others (75%) stated that it is important to invest in employee development, because it translates into an increase in competencies and, consequently, an improvement in the quality of work. Most respondents, nearly 90%, pay attention to soft skills when hiring a new person, and 80% responded that having these skills affects employee promotion. One of the respondents explained his answer: "If an employee had deficiencies in relationships, motivation or ethics, he would not be my employee ... (...)" The answers to the question about the impact of soft skills on the development of the company indicated that having skills such as **empathy, good communication and teamwork** speed up the development of the company and ensure its stability. The last two questions were about supporting employees in developing soft skills. Most respondents (90%) replied that they support employees in discovering/developing them. When asked how they do it, they answered that they motivate employees, send them on courses and offer financial bonuses.



#### Greece – IIEK Delta and IDEK

The completed surveys showed that all respondents (100%) appreciate their employees' soft skills. According to the respondents, possessing skills such as efficiency or **cooperation** in times of intense competition in the labour market are **as valued** (or sometimes more) by employers as possessing qualifications (hard skills). **Communication** skills and the ability to adapt to changes are among the most often chosen answers to the question: "What soft skills are the most important for you?". Next, employers chose **creativity and innovation, as well as self-awareness**. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents chose team management, internal motivation, the pursuit of personal development or cognitive skills as the most desired skill. A company which cares about financial profit, a good position on the market and thus the development of the firm, more often hires employees with soft skills. To the question: "Does the possession of soft skills by employees positively affect the development of the company?" 100% of respondents said yes. They stated that such employees are more flexible, take the initiative and easily adapt to changes. Respondents suggest that people with the described skills work outside the box, have emotional intelligence and make a positive impact on the effectiveness of the company.

Respondents answering the question: "Would you be ready to send your employees on a soft skills improvement course?" unanimously (100%) said yes, while for the next question: "Do you take into account the level of their soft skills when promoting employees?" only

60% of respondents said yes. One of the most important answers from the survey was: "A talented manager is one who has soft skills as well as knowledge and other skills (hard skills)". This statement shows how important it is to combine soft skills with knowledge and experience. In the question about providing an example of the usefulness of soft skills at work, respondents replied that having soft skills has a great impact on team management, coordination and dealing with everyday problems. At the same time, the possession of soft skills implies mutual respect, honesty and kindness. All respondents (100%) declared that they support workers and their motivation, adding that the provision of such support is very important in the functioning of the company. To encourage and motivate employees to improve their soft skills, entrepreneurs are willing to send employees for training and on courses that develop these skills. An important motivating factor, according to the survey, is rewarding such employees by giving them the opportunity to participate in seminars or using programmes such as Erasmus.



### The Netherlands – Friesland College

The respondents completing the survey unanimously (100%) stated that they value soft skills among their employees. In their opinion, having such skills ensures balance in teams, thanks to which members work better together, plan and organize set goals. It also has an impact on increasing the company's value, but as one of the respondents pointed out, it also increases the chances for personal development of employees.

The question: "what soft skills do you think are the most important?" resulted in various answers. However, the most frequently given answers were: **communication skills and cooperation**. When asked why these skills are the most important for them, respondents replied that it is vital for them that employees are able to **cooperate, react to changes, solve problems together and support each other**. None of the respondents mentioned readiness to delegate tasks, leadership, negotiation skills and team management as the most valuable skills. An entrepreneurial attitude and willingness to cooperate with others is one of the answers to the question about the positive impact on the company's development. Interestingly, in response to the question concerning the most important skills possessed by the employees, none of the respondents indicated team management. This skill is suggested when talking about improving the quality of the company's functioning. In response to the question: "Do you take into account certain qualities and soft skills when hiring new employees/trainees", the majority of respondents said yes, claiming that it is very important and even necessary for the proper functioning of the company. To improve these skills, some companies offer, for example, workshops or training. This response was also elicited in response to the question: "How do you support and motivate employees/trainees to develop their soft skills?" Forms of support that were mentioned included: help in the field of conversation, opportunities to look for new challenges, knowledge bases, meetings, as well as participation in the above-mentioned trainings or seminars.





### Spain – POLITEKNIKA IKASTEGIA TXORIERRI S.COOP

All respondents (100%) confirmed that they value the soft skills of their employees. Survey respondents indicated that soft skills are very important, but they should be balanced with hard skills. The different types of skills, when complementing each other, will help to improve both.

**Self-awareness, the ability to change, and communication skills** were the most frequently given answers to the next question: "What soft skills do you think are the most important?". **Motivation** was also seen as important, thanks to which employees want to challenge and improve themselves, as well as a **positive attitude, which** is important in achieving company success in the labour market. None of the respondents referred to the willingness and pursuit of development or negotiating skills as important soft skills. All respondents stated that the possession of soft skills by new employees positively affects the development of the company. Such skills, along with technical knowledge, underpin effective operation in the labour market. In reply to the question: "Would you be ready to send your employees to a soft skill training course?", 90% of respondents answered 'Yes'. One of the arguments explaining the positive answer was the fact that such courses and training are always helpful, even if they are purely theoretical, because in the future employees can use the acquired knowledge and develop it in the company environment. Only one respondent replied 'No'. In his opinion, a worker can acquire soft skills based on his own experience and during work, and theoretical courses alone would not be effective. The same respondent, as well as others (100%), indicated that they take into account the level of soft skills during hiring. In their opinion, soft skills are necessary in order to communicate with others both within and outside the company, and it is necessary to have a certain level of empathy and communication standards for this. To the question: "What effect do the soft skills of employees have on the company's development?", respondents said that the impact of soft skills is significant because they help to create **a balance between hard skills**. They added that a poorly motivated employee does not add enough value to the company, even if he/she is an employee with extensive knowledge. To the question about providing an example of a situation in which an employee's soft skills helped with the completion of transactions/negotiations, etc., respondents recognized that in order to properly perform their duties, skills like **teamwork, team management, communication and leadership** are important. The aforementioned skills significantly help in solving difficult situations/negotiations. The last question in the survey was: "How do you support and motivate employees to develop soft skills?" Respondents replied that they support and motivate staff by showing support and appreciating hard work. They also give greater autonomy in decision-making and are willing to send employees for additional training.

## Focus group meetings report



### Lithuania (KSPMC)

During the focus group meetings, participants stated that soft skills underpin success in personal and professional life, and are essential for an individual when he/she tries to obtain any kind of job. Enterprises generally hire new employees, in particular recent graduates, more on the basis of their soft skills than their hard skills. This is also the case in the technical professions, such as engineering, as companies, in order to be competitive, need to create good and effective teams and a collaborative working atmosphere. The quality of products provided by any industry is not only based on the materials chosen, the technology used, and the expertise of workers who contributed to the fabrication of the products, but also on the quality of the enterprise as a whole. This quality strongly depends on the human resources involved and the capability of people to positively interact to achieve a common goal: the company's success.



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### Poland – University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz (AHE)

Focus group meetings were divided into three parts. Participants from various industries took part in each meeting. The first meeting was attended by representatives from education, administration, and law. The first part showed that teamwork is the most important soft skill. Participants of the focus group meeting emphasized that teamwork means focusing on another person, acting as a choir. A well-functioning team is one that produces outputs greater than is possible by people acting individually. Teamwork means listening to others, finding one's place in a group, and encouraging empathy among employees to enable the recognition of the needs of the group. There should be synchronization in the band and that is why it is important for someone to set the rhythm of the group like the conductor of a choir. Another important element of a team is the division of tasks between participants and maintaining timeliness in the implementation of tasks that have been accepted. Lack of timeliness causes stagnation, some people wait for others to complete their tasks and teamwork becomes inefficient. Therefore, the team is also the individual responsibility of employees. Another soft feature indicated as important was identifying with the tasks that are being carried out. It means being involved as if we were doing it for ourselves. The relationship with the customer, the recipient of the product, and the right attitude towards him/her are important here. The focus group meeting participants pointed out that different soft skills can be important depending on the situation we are in. Work under pressure looks different in a crisis, such as the COVID 19 pandemic, than in a calm situation. During the COVID 19 crisis, the importance of creativity was emphasized, and because the discussion took place during a pandemic, this creativity turned out to be very important. Creativity consists in adapting to the developing and changing world, and helps one to keep up with it. Creativity requires openness, and solidarity in a crisis, which again refers to group skills.



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Representatives of the medical industry took part in the second focus group meeting. They were nurses, rescue workers, but also those responsible for the education of nurses. Therefore, the discussion was focused on the specificity of the soft skills of nurses, medical care workers, and rescue workers. Participants of the meeting stated that without soft skills such as communication and cooperation, it is impossible to practice their profession. Teamwork is important in the hospital and in other medical facilities. Another skill indicated was resilience to stress, as well as the ability to manage time. Another feature mentioned was creativity, which is important especially in the circumstances created by COVID. We have been coming up with brilliant ideas to survive a pandemic. Teamwork requires good communication, which is important in conflict resolution. In addition, communication is important in very different situations with different people: patients, family, the elderly, children, those in palliative care, hearing/visually impaired patients, or those who have suffered a stroke. Often, we have to put effort into this communication. To communicate at all, we have to be willing to communicate. Non-verbal communication skills are important: body, gestures with which we can express respect, or dislike. Another important feature in medical professions is empathy combined with active listening without judgement without assessing someone's views or behaviour. Sometimes the patient just wants someone to pay attention to him/her and not to instruct him/her. It is important to be able to listen with understanding and to be able to offer feedback and good advice. Assertiveness also plays an important role in the work of a nurse, which means that a person does not succumb to pressure from the medical community. The profession of a nurse is professionalism plus soft skills.

The third meeting was attended by representatives of the construction industry, IT industry and consulting industry. Problem-solving skills play a huge role in the construction industry. Each employee at various stages of their career encounters problems with a dissatisfied customer or a dissatisfied investor. Problems within the group also arise. Therefore, teamwork is an important skill. Construction services are associated with hard skills. However, employees must work together to complete a given stage of construction. Typical individualists don't work here. Group communication as well as investor communication is also important in this industry. Effective stress management is crucial, because the construction industry is very stressful. There is a lot going on, and there are tight deadlines. Mistakes occur on construction sites, which are not necessarily the mistakes of employees. In the construction industry, a leader plays a significant role and it is he/she who has problem-solving tasks and is responsible for group management. However, lower-level employees working in small groups must also solve problems among themselves. In problematic situations, it turns out that creativity, negotiation skills, but also teamwork are important skills. Empathy helps one relate to another person and understand their situation.

In the IT industry, on the other hand, the most important thing is to understand the problem, and also to find out what is really bothering the user and whether it really is an obstacle. A creative approach is very important, as it helps to improve the quality of equipment and system operation. Therefore, workers need to analyse the problem and not try to cover it up. Communication skills are important. Before a problem can be solved, the customer who reports it must be well understood. We do not require the user to be able to present his/her difficulty in a complex way. The basis of reporting is a conversation and open communication. It was noticed that communication within the group and communication with a client are completely different things. Adapting to a group looks differently than

adapting to customer requirements. In the IT industry, there is not always direct contact; IT workers often need to be able to write a clear and coherent message in an e-mail or in messenger/chat, and not everyone can formulate a message so that other people can understand not only its meaning, but also the motivation and reasoning behind it. That is why creative solutions must be sought.

People from the career counselling industry recognised that communication, regulation of emotions, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution are very important. Motivation is also very significant. Consultants work with people who have not worked for many years and suddenly return to the labour market and it is hard for them to find work. Soft skills needs may vary depending on the person and his/her situation, so it is worth making a map of his/her needs to refer to specific soft skills.

The conclusion of these three meetings was that soft skills are essential in different professions. The soft skills valued most across the meetings were similar, but these skills had different meanings in different work situations. Some professions are based on soft skills, such as the job of a nurse or a medical guardian, in others, soft skills are a significant supplement to hard skills. Soft skills are very important in situations of managing others, cooperating, and carrying out tasks. It turns out that different soft skills will be crucial in standard situations, and different when there is a change in the environment (an example is the COVID 19 pandemic).



#### Greece – IIEK Delta and IDEK



All participants of the focus group meetings agreed that soft skills are very important and, in some cases, even more important than technical or hard skills. They all believed that soft skills benefit not only the employee/student, but also the company itself. Furthermore, all agreed that soft skills are very

important for the professional lives of trainees, since almost all companies value soft skills when selecting their future employees. Participants believed that soft skills contribute to the further development of individuals and companies, since “the better the players of a team, the better the team”. Participants were then asked to identify the soft skills that they thought are the most important and that trainees or employees should possess. The soft skills which were identified as the most important were: *collaboration, creativity, time management, ability to work under pressure, adaptability to change, professional ethics, negotiation skills, personal growth, conflict resolution.*



#### The Netherlands (Friesland College)

Students, entrepreneurs, education representatives, and mentoring persons were invited to the focus group meetings, which allowed for the gathering of different opinions on the development of soft skills during internship. The students played an important role at these meetings and they indicated what their needs for apprenticeships were. The aim of the

meetings was to get as much input on the development of soft skills from the personal experience of trainees and professionals in the work field. The participating trainees were asked to answer from personal experience during their internship. Trainees stressed that developing soft skills was very important. They were not aware of this until they began their apprenticeship. The trainees found that what helped them especially during the internship were the situations when they could interact with others by organizing an event at which they could present their own ideas. Moreover, they would like to learn more flexibility and be able to present their own ideas. It was very good when, during the internship, they had the freedom to implement projects and could make decisions themselves. A decent working environment is one that encourages the development of one's life and competencies.

The participants of the meeting indicated the following soft skills of employees as particularly important for the functioning of their organisation:

- Motivation is the key word; without motivation, people cannot grow;
- Communication as a broad concept, but most of all, the ability to listen to the other person is important;
- Curiosity and critical thinking are of great importance;
- Adaptability, we cannot do anything without this soft skill in the future. Companies are changing, students need the adaptability to follow company changes and trends;
- Analytical way of thinking - Trainees get information from so many sources. These soft skill helps to separate relevant information from the rest;
- Intercultural sensitivity.



#### Spain – POLITEKNIKA IKASTEGIA TXORIERRI S.COOP

The people taking part in the focus group meetings mentioned in particular the ability to work together in a team, problem-solving, communication skills and constancy/discipline/persistence as some of the most important soft skills. Attitude and self-motivation were also mentioned as important, as were: self-discipline and initiative, the very important skill of tuning into and supporting others (empathy, respect, motivation, how to read and lead or harmonise with others), and the ability to work together effectively. The word responsibility came up several times. Overall skills discussed included: the ability to delegate tasks, ability to resolve conflicts, ability to work under time pressure, adaptability to change, communication skills, contact network, cooperation, creativity/innovation, leadership, learning skills, motivating yourself to work, negotiation skills, own time management, professional ethics, self-awareness, team management, and willingness and pursuit of development.

All agreed that there are many factors involved. When working under pressure, a person's ability to tolerate and adapt to challenges is fundamental, but so is someone's personal

motivation (their way of interpreting events, resolving problems, and their own capacities, etc.). The ability to manage one's own time, to stretch one's limits and to look for help and support (communication) is important. Again, self-awareness and adaptability to change (people skills) are also factors which can determine if someone pushes on towards their goals or drops out before reaching their goal. At this point in the discussion, the group once more discussed the importance of self-motivation; knowing what one wants (goals and objectives) is essential, as is a strong belief in oneself and the people/resources around one. The people who best connect with themselves, others and the world around them usually succeed.

The discussion also led to the question: *what do employers value most - hard or soft skills?* Everyone felt that hard skills (the ability to do what the job demands technically, etc.) are essential. People who are more skilled at a certain task are undoubtedly going to have access to more jobs. But it was also felt that one needs soft skills - to present oneself well to get the job at an interview. They also mentioned that if there are equally well qualified and skilled apprentices then the main differential is the level of soft skills. And what most people don't realize - that to keep a job or to get promoted and advance, soft skills assume a huge importance in one's career. In general, in their opinion, employers value people with the ability to work hard and get the job done, which involves all of these things. Being able to work well with the others in your team is basic and involves many of the things already mentioned. Employers want someone with the right qualifications obviously – but they also want someone able to get on well with their colleagues and superiors (good communication), who is enthusiastic, able to deal with pressure, flexible, and is able to take initiative and solve problems. Teamwork is a given. Companies know that a well-rounded employee will perform better and help them achieve their goals. The conclusion reached was that *soft skills are more important than hard skills since the latter are easier to learn*. During the discussion some other soft skills were mentioned as highly important apart from those included in the survey, such as a positive attitude, commitment and critical thinking. They highly valued the previously mentioned teamwork, communication, self-awareness, self-motivation, adaptability and initiative.

Confirming what they had previously mentioned, they highlighted: the importance of attitude and a healthy self-awareness which translates into balance and motivation/discipline/persistence/commitment, the importance of good interpersonal dynamics including effective communication (both of which elements leads to better teamwork and responsibility), the importance of being flexible or adaptable – the ability to face challenges, show initiative, display energy and enthusiasm, and work under pressure, to be able to solve problems (which includes critical thinking and planning, resourcefulness, attitude and a lot of creativity).



## Examples of the best practice of apprenticeships in partner countries

In this section, we present selected examples of best practice in the partner countries relating to apprenticeships. These examples show some variation, but also different methods used in different countries to support the development of apprentices' skills during the placement, including soft skills. By presenting the best practices, we want to show the importance of various factors in the apprenticeship course and their effectiveness.

### Lithuania

*Erasmus+ mobility project "Quality and efficiency" No. 2019-1-LT01-KA116-060100*

*The best practice of 12 builders in Denmark, CELF vocational training centre.*

The aim of the project is to improve the quality and efficiency of the training of specialists through internationalization activities. The project promotes higher quality training and efficiency of specialists. Rapid technological change requires continuous improvement of specific professional skills, including for VET professionals. The project enhances the competitiveness of the project participants in the labour market, boosts their career opportunities and enables them to be mobile in the European labour market.

Method – practical training, duration 30 days. 12 apprentice builders worked in a team with support of a tutor from Denmark and built a construction from bricks, concrete, wood.

Time: 11 November 2019 – 11 December 2019

At the end of the placements, students were evaluated by CELF, a Danish vocational training centre. Hard skills (80%) and soft skills (20%) were evaluated. After the placement, the apprentices filled out a questionnaire <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eac/mobility> and their soft skills were evaluated. Soft skills form part of best practice: Communication, teamwork, learning skills, time management, adaptability to change, ability to delegate tasks, ability to resolve conflicts. Tutors of VET CELF and accompanying personnel from Kaunas supported the development of soft skills.

Our organization's goal – to pay great attention to people with special and adaptation needs in the labour market and society. Achieving these objectives is intended to ensure the mobility of students and professionals. It has long been observed that during a foreign traineeship young people gain new communication skills. Such traineeships increase apprentices' motivation to work and to learn, enhance their self-esteem, and foster their integration into society, and so on. The receiving partner was the CELF vocational training centre in Denmark.

*Erasmus+ mobility project "Developing the necessary skills for the labour market" Nr. 2017-1-LT01-KA116 034846. The best practice of 10 assistant nurses in Budapest, Lingua-Vár Education Centre.*

The aim of the project is to improve the quality and efficiency of the training of specialists through internationalization activities. The project promotes higher quality training and efficiency of specialists. Rapid technological change requires continuous improvement of specific professional skills, including for VET professionals. The project enhances the



competitiveness of the project participants in the labour market, aims to boost their career opportunities and enables them to be mobile in the European labour market.

Method – practical training, duration 30 days. Assistant nurse trainees undertook internships in Hungary, Budapest, Árnas and Corvin Nurseries. Activities: maintaining order for children's groups (maintaining cleanliness and hygiene); Kindergarten games (help to dress and undress, take care of children in the yard); preparation for lunch, meals (help with breakfast, lunch, dinner, arranging tables); preparing for bedtime (helping children wash their bedding); trainees participated in various group and individual therapies, workshops: canine therapy (used by a specially trained dog to enhance motivation), dance, colour and movement, motor disorders, speech therapy and other specialisations. They visited a special needs institution for students with mental and physical disabilities. Trainee activity was monitored and various methodologies and tools were used. In order to ensure effective learning, the school places great emphasis on mutual cooperation between staff and pupils' parents.

Time: 18 February 2018 – 18 March 2018

At the end of the placements, trainees were evaluated by Lingua-Vár Education Centre, in Budapest, Hungary. Hard skills (80%) and soft skills (20%) were evaluated. After the placement, trainees filled out a questionnaire <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eac/mobility> which aimed to evaluate soft skills. Soft skills form part of best practice: communication, teamwork, learning skills, time management, adaptability to change, ability to resolve conflicts. Tutors of Lingua-Vár Education Centre and accompanying personnel from Kaunas supported the development of soft skills.

## Poland

### Academic Center for Artistic Initiatives in Lodz

The best examples of apprenticeships relate to situations wherein apprentices are later employed in (cultural) institutions. Both apprentices and institutions have benefitted from apprenticeship schemes. Trainees have acquired soft and hard skills. They **put their own ideas** into a company's development. Both sides benefited from this practice. Apprentices have acquired key competencies that they can use in their professional work. In addition, the apprentices' creative views turned out to be very valuable to the company and at the same time the apprentices benefitted from self-development. It was significant that the apprentices were persons from the outside, **bringing a glimpse from the client's side**. The method used during apprenticeships was based on teamwork involving the inclusion of a trainee in already functioning teams. Methods encouraging creativity, interdisciplinarity and combining competencies were used, including creative thinking methods, discussion and SWOT analysis. Work under the Kalwana method (timeliness, team roles, task assignments) was also carried out. The monitoring of apprentices' work, observing how they performed tasks, and discussing tasks were important. Tutors helped to direct conversations, analysed work results, made corrections, and provided feedback.

Soft skills form part of best practice: These soft skills include group work, communication, seeking information and putting it into practice, analysis and inference, public speaking, creativity, coping with stress, finding oneself in non-standard situations, responding to

a crisis, negotiation, problem-solving. Soft skills were supported by mentoring, constant contact, responding to each trainee's needs, conversations, adding him/her to already existing teams, and through the substantive support of employees.

### Center for Creativity and Entrepreneurship (Department of AHE, Lodz)

Soft skills training is organized at the Center for Creativity and Entrepreneurs. Participants take part in the training and then observe the work of trainers with different groups. Then the training participants enter the role of trainers. People interested in a trainer's work register for training, but also people who work with people on a daily basis, e.g. administrative, who have decided that such soft skills training would increase their personal competence. Good practice is associated with contact with a training situation, where the participant faces situations which he/she does not encounter on a daily basis and he/she learns to cooperate with people. This training generally prepares people to work with people from various professions. It allows an individual to open up to people, see her/his barriers and overcome them. Participants on the training programme confront their emotions, observe emotions, say what they feel, and outline how they find themselves in a given situation. They have a chance to learn about their own operating patterns and see many different solutions to problem situations. The training involves reflection on one's own activities. The next stage of the training is observation of various groups and co-conducting classes with an experienced person. The last part is a conversation with trainers. The conversation summarises the training and has the character of self-evaluation. The apprentice determines in which direction he/she wants to develop in the future. The apprentice expands his/her awareness of emotions in relationships with others, develops creativity, flexibility and openness, works in a team, perceives his/her own limitations and barriers, he/she has the opportunity to exceed them, change his/her attitude. Methods used: observation, participation in workshop tasks, self-evaluation, realization of workshop tasks with the group, designing exercises developing soft skills. People who participate in training are AHE employees - from various departments dealing with customer service, AHE teachers, AHE students, but also department managers, school directors. They include people who received / are receiving education in pedagogy, psychology, political science, as well as teachers, headmasters of vocational schools. Also included are teachers who want to develop students' soft skills in training. The training is attractive to insurance agents.

Training has been conducted continuously since 2002. The training and apprenticeship are unique because we do not teach patterns and learned behaviours, we prepare trainees comprehensively. Participants are confronted with real problems. They solve open tasks, deepen their sensitivity, are encouraged to pay attention to other people and learn to be open to the needs of others. In addition, trainees construct their own soft skills exercises. The observation of trainees' progress during their workshops, conversation, self-evaluation is important. Soft skills form part of the best practice: Openness, creativity, empathy, self-awareness, team communication, ability to cooperate. Soft skills are supported through feedback from trainers, feedback from the group. During the training, the group determines how it perceives a participant's behaviour in terms of soft skills.

## Greece

### *EnterMode internship model*

*Designed by a consortium of 14 organizations across Europe, the EnterMode internship model is an output of the EnterMode Erasmus+ programme, Knowledge Alliances for HEI.*

The EnterMode model provides a holistic approach for the development of students' entrepreneurial skills during their internship. The model is accompanied by a trainers' guide, addressed to company mentors and HEI tutors. The purpose is to enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of the students. Entrepreneurial competencies were chosen by the EntreComp European framework. The model blends many methods for the development of a student's skills. At the beginning, the student is given **a challenge** by the company, which he/she must complete during the duration of the internship. The challenge is relevant to the normal activities of the company and is based on learning outcomes suggested by the EntreComp framework. The action plan is then discussed between the **company mentor** and the student. During the internship, students **receive mentoring and guidance** from the company. They are also offered an **online serious game** designed by the project, which helps them develop their competencies. Company mentors are encouraged to participate in a community of practice, where they can discuss and receive advice from experts and HEI tutors. The model is at piloting phase and will be implemented in 40 cases around Europe - it combines many methods - challenge based learning, serious game, mentoring, incubation. There is a **constant monitoring and evaluation** of the progress of the students, which involves self-assessment, a logbook, a report from the mentor and a final evaluation from the HEI. The EntreComp framework describes 15 competencies (soft skills), e.g., creativity, communication, mobilizing others, etc.

*INKOMPASS internship programme, offered by Papastratos, member of Philip Morris International.*

INKOMPASS is a 2-cycle internship programme, which enables students to find their way through challenges and cultural diversity. They work on **real business projects**, build an international network and **receive personalized coaching**. The purpose is to build the skills of the students during the internship, so they can be employed in the future in the company. The programme has 2 stages. In the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, the student is given a real business challenge in partnership **with senior leadership**. Then they go back to their studies and during the 2nd stage they explore thoroughly their area of interest. During the internship, they receive personalized guidance from **company mentors**. It combines on-the-job training with personal coaching. Students are encouraged to **take initiatives and are given chances to present their findings to the top management**. At the end, according to the student's performance, he/she may be employed in the company. The progress of the intern is constantly being measured by setting KPIs and delivering progress reports. *The soft skills that from part of best practice:* time management, self-presentation, effective communication, creativity and many more. Interns are **supported** through constant coaching.

**Name of the best practice:** *Mentoring programme, University of Ioannina. This best practice was presented by Efi Geronimaki, Director of the Centre of Career Development & Employment at the University of Ioannina.*

The Mentorship programme brings together students with mentors from companies, on a volunteer basis. Each mentor is assigned to one student and he/she gives advice, sets goals for the student and gives him/her assignments regarding his/her future career. The mentors guide the students and give them valuable **advice about their future**. The purpose is to help students develop their soft skills, which are necessary for their future careers. Mentors help students set their **own goals**, make decisions and reach those goals. The mentorship programme lasts 4 months. Approximately 40 students per year are matched with a mentor. Before the beginning of the mentorship, both students and mentors receive training from the University's careers office. The training of mentors focuses on describing the role of the mentor, learning techniques to give feedback, and knowing today's students. During the students' training, the head of the Careers Office presents soft skills and explains why they are important and why the mentorship should concentrate on the development of these skills. Students are also given a logbook of skills development. The logbook has a progression scale on the development of soft skills, where the student can make notes on his/her own progress. The logbook also has some examples of activities that will help students progress with their soft skills development. After the mentorship, students are invited to carry out a metacognitive exercise, whereby they think and write about what they learned and how they learned it. The progress of the mentoring process is monitored by the Careers Office. At the end, the students are asked to **evaluate the whole process** of mentoring and to think **about what they have learned** and why these learned skills are useful. The soft skills on which the mentoring focuses **depends on the student**. At first, each student is presented with the notion of soft skills and learns why they are important. Then, he/she can check the logbook and learn more about the level of his/her soft skills. The soft skills are then developed through the help of the mentor.

**Name of the best practice:** *This best practice was presented by Christina Berbery, Owner of the Nails & Pleasure by Christina company, which welcomes students for internships by IEK DELTA.*

At the beginning of the internship, each student is teamed up with one of the company trainers and is invited to join a team. During the internship, the company trainer oversees the progress of the student and helps him/her **integrate with the other employees** in the team. The purpose is to train the student **in a real work environment** and pass on the knowledge and experience of the company's trainer. Students learn not only all forms of nail care, but also how to **collaborate with others** and work in a team. The method used is the incorporation of the student into the company with the help of a trainer. The student has the chance to experience work in a real working environment and is guided by an expert. During the internship, the student becomes a **valuable member of the team** and is **involved in all company activities**. We measure the progress of the student during the internship, with the intent to continue collaboration even after the end of the practice. During the internship students improve: *communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, initiative, creative thinking.*

## The Netherlands

### *Giving a workshop to peers.*

The student was asked to create and give a workshop to his fellow students about a subject that was close to his heart. The exercise provided the student with a way to learn how to give a workshop and to connect to his **passion** in a different way. The student was asked about his passion and was guided on how to create and give a workshop. This best practice was performed at the end of this student internship, in July 2019. We realized that this student had not been able to organize anything for himself during his internship and the coordinators wanted to give him this opportunity. This particular best practice was unique because it connected the student's passion for kickboxing with being able to stand strong. The students were reflecting on progress throughout the organization of, and holding of, the workshop. The student's peers were asked about the workshop given. By complementing the student on the things that went well and enabling him to be an active part of the learning process, we improved his soft skills. He was asked what he learned, felt and what he would do differently the next time.

The following soft skills came up during the practice: self-awareness, leadership, communication, creativity. This best practice gave the student confidence and a different perspective of the things he learned at school. It also made him aware of the things he already learned by putting them into practice.

### *A presentation to the coordinators.*

The student was asked to create a presentation to the coordinators at the company about something he or she learned at school and which could be connected to the way of working at the office. Through this exercise, the student becomes more aware of the things he or she learned at school and gets to be in a position of teaching others about this. The coordinators can also learn from the student's knowledge. The student was asked to think about something that could be of service or use for the company. The student was in charge of the way of presenting, finding time to do the presentation and the subject. The presentation is scheduled at the beginning of the internship, to make the student think about what he or she could bring to the company. It puts the student in charge instead of him/her being just the intern. The student learns how to translate acquired knowledge into practice, and gains valuable experience by presenting. The student reflects on his/her own progress and is provided with feedback from the coordinators.

The soft skills that form part of best practice: professional ethics, creativity, presenting, leadership, customer focus, learning skills. Complimenting the student and engaging with the presentation by asking questions supports the development of soft skills. This exercise allows the student to put his/her education into practice and gives the student insight into how to incorporate this knowledge into his or her internship.

### *Interviewing co-workers.*

Students were asked to do short interviews with their co-workers at their internship company. In this way, students get to know their work environment better, learn about what the different co-workers are working on and where their expertise lies. This also narrows the gap between co-workers and interns, and the student learns where to go with his or her

questions. The students were asked to write down five questions and to schedule and do the interviews themselves. This exercise was scheduled at the beginning of the internship, so the students learned about their working environment early. The exercise provided a different way for students to get acquainted with their working environment and co-workers. It was possible to measure what the students learned, through the interviews.

The soft skills that form part of the best practice: learning skills, communication, cultural adaptability, networking. The coordinator was available to assist students in relation to the interviews and helped the students with questions and post-interview reflection. This helped students get to know their working environment and made them aware whom to ask for help learning skills in the working place. They knew whom to ask certain questions because they knew where different expertise lay among their co-workers.

## Spain

### *Collaborative Service Learning*

Our students have been involved in a learning project that combines collaborative learning and service to people from the Coordinating Federation for Persons with Physical and Organic Disabilities in our region (FEKOOR). This practice makes the participating students feel motivated, and the project seeks to solve the daily problems that the FEKOOR users face. Students act collaboratively in the design and manufacturing of simple tools that are easy to produce and which are really useful for FEKOOR users. The project improves FEKOOR users' quality of life. The method we use is collaborative service learning, and this service gives meaning to learning by allowing it to be transferred to the real world in the form of action. Students get involved in real-life projects, where they need to develop their soft skills as well. Students from the following VET courses were involved in the project: Industrial Automation and Robotics, Telecommunication and Computing Systems, Environmental Education and Control, Mechanical Manufacture Design, Mechanical Production Scheduling and Sales Management and Commercial Spaces. This learning method was developed during the academic year 2019-2020. We chose for the project a technological component that would allow the students to easily design and manufacture products and services that have as their final objective a more inclusive society in which everyone can have an independent life, can enjoy a similar degree of wellbeing as others, and manage their own lives with equal opportunities. This project also helped the students develop the values of solidarity and commitment to others and to the environment. Throughout the whole process, students were evaluated by teachers and also through self-assessment questionnaires.

The soft skills that form part of best practice: teamwork, commitment, time management, personal development and growth, communication, initiative, creativity, critical thinking, autonomy, acknowledging of real-life problems, independence, problem-solving, social skills.

The experience of the training itself already consists of continuous evaluation and support of soft skills. We also give the students tutoring sessions. The students are involved in different VET studies, although during the project they have to **work collaboratively**. This makes every **student learn from students** coming from different academic backgrounds (that is, a student from Sales Management can learn how a student from Production Scheduling works, and so



on). This opens up new possibilities and learning methods for everyone involved, and at the same time encourages the learning or development of the soft skills that each student will need during their apprenticeships by getting involved in a **real-life project**.

### *ILEARN tool*

The ILEARN tool is based on an application or platform on which students, school tutors, company tutors, etc., come into contact with each other in a more efficient and rapid way. The focus is based on the responsibility of the students, as they have all the information they need on the platform and, therefore, they are the ones that are in charge of all their activities, assignments, etc.

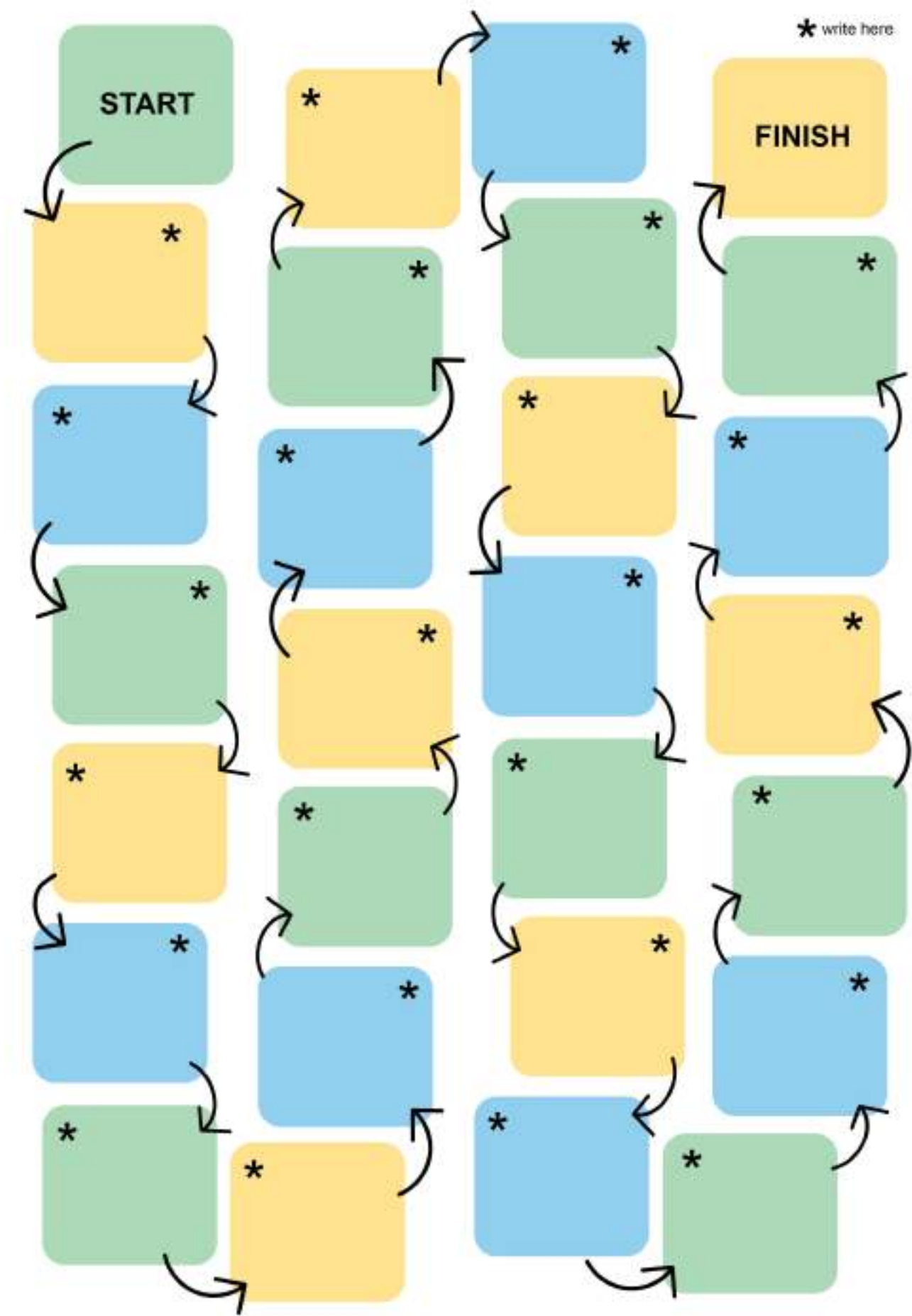
The activity combines CBL (challenge-based learning) during the apprenticeship with the initiative of a completely new platform that will provide students with more accessible information. This project promotes dual training by creating a digital platform that eases the communication and cooperation between centres, companies, apprentices, tutors within the company, as well as tutors from the training centre. The methodology used is based on the usage of the platform in order to focus the responsibility of the activities, assignments, etc. on the students. The students are the ones to contact their teachers and tutors if any kind of question arises about the activities that they need to carry out during their time at the company. Moreover, with the CBL methodology they will also improve their personal capabilities through the communication and direct contact with the labour market and with workers. The project involved companies throughout the region and in other countries, VET centres from diverse countries and students who participated in the dual training. The activity has been developed since 2018 and will continue up till 2021. What makes this project unique is the approach provided by the platform. Through the use of this kind of application, students learn to be more responsible as they are the ones that take charge of all the activities or assignments in order to pass the training. In other words, the focus of this project is on the growth of the students as capable members of the labour market.

The project has been measured through evaluations and feedback to company tutors and students on the apprentices' capabilities. The activities that the students have carried out are evaluated in reports from the tutors and via students' self-assessment

The Soft skills that form part of best practice: teamwork, time management, personal development and growth, communication, initiative, creativity, critical thinking, autonomy, acknowledging of real-life problems and problem-solving, giving solutions, independency, cultural knowledge, social skills, etc. The support of these soft skills was possible by following students' personal growth through evaluations, and giving tutoring sessions throughout the duration of the project. Moreover, the platform provided all the facilities to carry out these activities easily. This challenge-based learning was tested with students doing dual studies in the area of Mechanical Production Scheduling.



ANNEX Gamification templates: 1. Learning path



## ANNEX Gamification templates: 2. Point system

Milestones:

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Goal to receive final prize: \_\_\_\_\_ points

	Points required	Achieved	Prize earned
1		YES/NO	
2		YES/NO	
...		YES/NO	

		Points earned by:			
	Tasks	Mentor	Another employee	...	...
Week 1	a)				
	b)				
	c)				
	d)				
	Total points of week 1				
Week 2	a)				
	b)				
	c)				
	d)				
	Total points of week 2				
Week 3	a)				
	b)				
	c)				
	d)				
	Total points of week 3				
	Total points earned				

**ANNEX** Gamification templates: 3. Apply time constraints

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_

Task	Deadline (date/time)	Achieved on time	Bonus/ Penalty given
a)		YES/NO	
b)		YES/NO	
c)		YES/NO	
...			

ANNEX Gamification templates: 4. Learning passport

LEARNING  
PASSPORT

Soft Skill:

Assignment:

Notes:

Action performed on:

(date)

(place for stamp)