

ENGLISH EDITION 

# 2 Seas Magazine

**SPECIAL FOCUS**

November 2014

INTERREG IV A 2 MERS SEAS ZEEËN



**A cluster initiative:**

Soft Skills | Training | Enabling | Progression & Sustainability



2 Mers Seas Zeeën

INTERREG IV A

FRANCE - ENGLAND - VLAANDEREN - NEDERLAND



Programme de coopération transfrontalière 2007-2013 cofinancé par le **FEDER**  
Cross-border cooperation programme 2007-2013 part financed by **ERDF**  
Programma voor grensoverschrijdende samenwerking 2007-2013  
medegefinancierd door **EFRO**



Work experience programme, SUCCES project



Education Shop visit, SUCCES project

03

## EDITORIAL

04

## INTRODUCTION

04

Definition of Soft Skills

06

## CHAPTER 1: The Big Issue

06

The EU Situation

07

Raising Awareness with Individuals

08

The Role of Local Networks

08

It Doesn't Stop There

08

Conclusions

09

## CHAPTER 2: Working in Parallel

09

The Education System

12

Public Sector Support

15

Employers Responsibilities

17

Conclusions

18

## CHAPTER 3: Getting In and Getting On

19

The Importance of Transition Points

20

Embedding Enterprise

21

The Need for Collaboration

23

Conclusions

24

## CHAPTER 4: The Return on Investment

24

A Business Case for Soft Skills

26

Societal Change

28

Benefits to the Individual

28

Conclusions

29

## CLUSTER RECOMMENDATIONS

29

Make Employers the Main Priority

30

Start as Early as Possible

30

Improve Collaboration Between Key Parties

30

Supporting Recommendation - Development of a soft skills alliance



**Deborah Waddell**  
Confederation of British Industry

Whether you are a politician, educator or employer, we all want our people to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, not just in work, but also in life. To achieve this, training and education systems must do more to prepare learners for life outside of the classroom, or we risk wasting our greatest asset.

There is no bigger issue facing our economy today than getting the education and skills system in the right shape to meet rising demand for a highly motivated, highly skilled workforce to underpin our future economic success.

A recent survey of more than 500 business leaders from across Europe found that most (54%) think young people lack 'soft skills' such as confidence, teamwork, self-motivation, networking and presentation skills (*Closing the Gap Between Business and Education, Junior Achievement Young Enterprise Europe, Citi Foundation, 2011*). Meanwhile, more than two-thirds believe that their countries' education systems are either not at all successful or not very successful when it comes to developing financial and entrepreneurial skills amongst young people.

The journey we all make from school to the workplace can be a very daunting transition so equipping our schools, colleges and universities to produce students with the grit, ambition and emotional intelligence needed to build successful careers is essential. A closer relationship with the business community would accelerate the improvements we need. The curriculum needs to be tailored to meet the skills needs of industry and to do justice to those making the transition from education to employment.

This is where the STEPS Cluster, thanks to its cross-border approach that gathers some important voices across a range of sectors and organisations, can add considerable value to ensuring the importance of soft skills is communicated widely to businesses, educators and policy makers, throughout Europe. This collaborative and inclusive project will directly address the needs of businesses and the disconnect in skills that jobseekers possess and the skills that employers need, supporting workforce development that will contribute to economic growth and increased social inclusion.

This project and others like it cannot operate in isolation and it's not enough for business to stand on the side lines. Firms must also play their part. As demonstrated by the STEPS Cluster, through knowledge developed in partnership, investment in skills development needs to continue within the workplace and this is where employers can have a significant impact on their personnel, benefiting both the employer and employee. By improving the collaboration between education and business, at as early a stage as possible, in the future graduates will possess the skills, and importantly soft skills, desired by employers through a reformed education system and continued investment in the workforce.

We have got to make sure that everyone has access to an education pathway that will enable him or her to fulfil his or her true potential. Progress has been made but the need for genuine reform of the system remains imperative and all sectors - education, public and private, need to contribute to this process. We, in industry, need to welcome initiatives such as the STEPS cluster project as they seek to provide practical solutions to key issues that inhibit growth in our economies and help unlock the potential of our people, allowing them to play a positive and sustainable role in society.

**Deborah Waddell is Director - South West CBI**

# Introduction

STEPS (Soft skills Training Enabling Progression and Sustainability), was developed in response to the INTERREG IVA 2 Seas Thematic Cluster initiative. The rationale behind this initiative is to pool experience and expertise from partners working on projects of a similar

theme, that have already been realised under the 2 Seas Programme, in the programme period 2007-13.

All partners in the STEPS Cluster have previously been involved in the SUCCES, iLAEBOR and Crysalis projects. Medway

Council, Mentor, OCMW Kortrijk and Maison de l'Initiative de Grande Synthe all contributed to the successful delivery of the SUCCES project. Syntra West, Scalda and Pro work were active partners in the iLAEBOR project and Plymouth College of Art in Crysalis "the revival of textiles".



All three of these projects complement each other in terms of having used soft skills training successfully as a key mechanism to enable beneficiaries to develop personal and employability skills necessary to access the labour market, education, volunteering and self-employment. The STEPS Cluster is an amalgamation of all these project partners, with the key objective of raising awareness of the value of engaging

with soft skills training for jobseekers, employees and employers alike.

This publication is the consolidation of partners' previous activities, results and outcomes from the projects funded in the 2007-13 programming period and research undertaken within the STEPS Cluster Project. The publication should be seen as a discussion regarding the role and importance of soft skills at the

level of the individual and equally at societal and business level. Each chapter explores an aspect of soft skills which has become apparent through the delivery of partner activities, as essential to moving the debate forward. Where appropriate, reports and projects undertaken by institutions and organisations outside of the partnership have been referenced in support of the findings and conclusions made by the STEPS Cluster. The publication has also been led by the discussions held in the Regional Preparatory Events which provided valuable insights and which have been reflected throughout this publication.

**PROJECT RESULTS**  
**iLAEBOR**



## Definition of Soft Skills

It was apparent from an early stage of the project that the term 'Soft Skills' was not widely understood and, in fact, carried often differing connotations for different audiences and stakeholders. Whilst we are not in a position to offer a final definition at this stage of the project it is important to outline some parameters for the purposes of this publication. The members of the STEPS Cluster partnership refer to soft skills in the

**Over 80**

Number of participants aged 12-18 engaged in the education programme

**5**

Number of cross boarder skills tours

**60**

Number of participants attending skills tours

**3**

Number of cross boarder professional's programmes

**45**

Number of participants attending professional's programmes

broadest sense of the term. That is to say, that when using the term throughout this publication we are referring to learnt skills, inherent intelligences and developed behaviours. The diagrams below help to illustrate this in more detail providing a broad distinction between hard and soft skills, as well as outlining the underlying intelligences which manifest themselves within each soft skill.

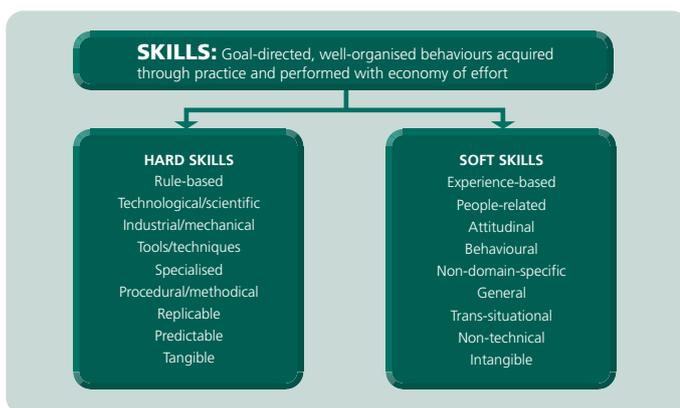
As can be seen, the subject matter is complex and for the purposes of this publication we have not limited the discussion, so as to explore and

consider as many views as possible. Whilst not defining soft skills at this point in the project, we have built the discussion around a number of shared understandings:

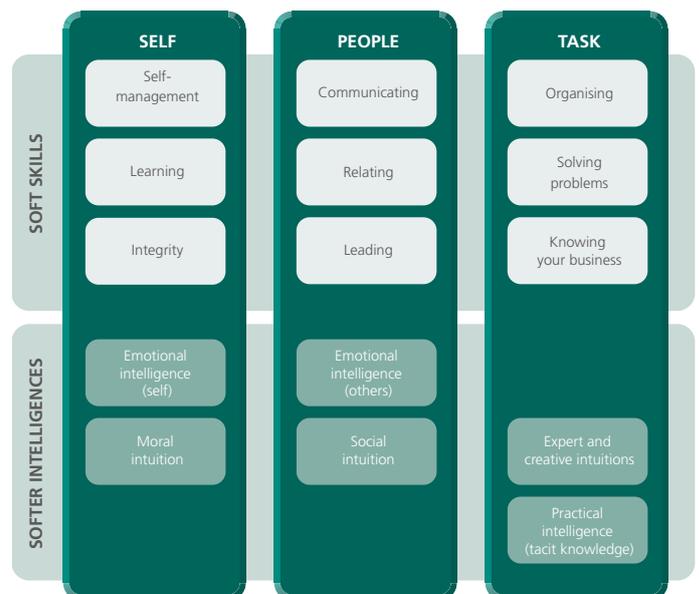
- » Soft skills are not soft. In fact more and more they can be considered as the "hard skills of tomorrow"
- » Soft skills should not be viewed in isolation and a 360-degree approach needs to be taken, as they impact on every aspect of life
- » As a partnership, the interest lies within tangible, measurable impact

- » It is helpful to view the project in terms of human capital rather than simply skills development.

Definition of skills, and some general characteristics of the domains of 'hard' and 'soft' skills



Composite map of soft skills and softer intelligences



(Source: CIPD report Using the head and heart at work, A business case for soft skills, 2010)

# Chapter 1

## The Big Issue



Eurostat, Unemployment statistics 2014

### The EU Situation

The economic crisis has reached nearly every corner of the European Union. As a result unemployment rates have soared to an all time high, creating a sustained and highly damaging impact on the European labour market.

Whilst an improvement has been seen in unemployment rates in recent months, the crisis is far from over. **The unemployment rate across the EU28 was 10.1% in August 2014, with an estimated 24.642 million unemployed citizens.** (Eurostat, Unemployment statistics 2014). The impact of this is felt by certain groups more so than others. For example, **youth unemployment** rates are over double than of the overall unemployment rate and were reported to be **21.6%** in the same period, representing 4.989 million unemployed young people (under 25), in the EU28. (Eurostat, Unemployment statistics 2014). Similarly, *The European Commission Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Quarterly Review, 2014*, highlights the disparity across society with long term unemployed figures rising despite falling unemployment overall.

Recovery of the current situation is clearly a key priority. The Common Provisions of the Treaty on European Union enshrines the aims of full employment and social progress, the combating of social exclusion and discrimination and the promotion of

social justice and protection, equality and solidarity. (Treaty on European Union, (Consolidated Version) Article 3, (ex Article 2 TEU)).

In line with these fundamental objectives and in order to create an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe (Article 1 Treaty of European Union (Consolidated Version) ex Article 1 TEU), the EU is working to stabilise, reduce and improve the current position. Employment is one of the key focus areas of the Europe 2020 strategy, with a goal of achieving 75% of the active population (aged 20 to 64) in work by the end of the decade. Youth unemployment also has a special focus – through enhanced partnership and agency working, the youth unemployment rate needs to be dramatically reduced in order to affect a real impact on overall unemployment statistics. (European Commission Employment & Social Affairs report ISBN 978-92-79-47684-9).

The need to identify a real key for change is confirmed by the ongoing dissatisfaction recorded within the business community regarding the supply of suitably skilled individuals. Business surveys throughout Europe, and in particular the UK, continue to cite a lack of skilled young people as a barrier to recruitment and business growth (Kaplan, 2014). More precisely, the issue is not a lack of 'qualified' individuals but a lack of suitable candidates with appropriate skills, competencies and attributes. These are collectively known as "Soft Skills" and, as evidence would suggest, represent a labour market skills gap.

The STEPS Cluster partners are acutely aware of the widening gap between the demand for and supply of skilled individuals. Our collaborative experience has demonstrated that "skilled" individuals are not simply qualified individuals, but rounded individuals who possess soft skills which enable them to navigate key transition points in their lives, progress within the labour market, and provide a competitive advantage for their employers.

If the need for soft skills is so evident, why is this not widely recognised with formal support for soft skills training and development? The experience of the STEPS cluster concludes that there is a fundamental issue, lack of awareness. In consolidating our approach within the cluster, the partners have addressed this head on. We have firstly realised through our collaborative approaches that the generic term "soft skills" needs to be explained to our target audience in order to raise awareness as to the value of soft skills, particularly within an employment context. As defined by the EU Skills Panorama glossary, "Soft Skills are cross-cutting across jobs and sectors and relate to personal competences e.g., confidence, discipline, self-management and social competences e.g., teamwork, communication, emotional intelligence". The Cluster has learned by evaluating and analysing their individual experiences and formulating a common cross-border approach to tackling these issues, that the educational and commercial demand for suitable technical skills and accredited

qualifications must be balanced and complemented with the personal and social competences, or “soft skills”, to ensure an individual can apply the technical skills effectively and operate at their peak performance. Indeed this is an evidence based approach (Professor Sadler-Smith, Research Report November 2010 – Chartered Institute of Professional Development, Using the Head and Heart at Work – A business case for soft skills).

We have learned through our Cross-border Workshops, Regional Preparatory Events and engagement with employers, that the “marketing” exercise of the value of soft skills must be demonstrated to show tangible returns on investment, with concrete benefits to business for investing in human capital. We aim, through further activity of the Cluster, to launch a pilot scheme with a number of employers across the Cluster regions, to measure the impact and social and economic returns of soft skills investment. In a competitive commercial environment where technological advancement in “hard” capital level the playing field, the Cluster suggests that it is the human capital that can make the difference to the bottom line, productivity and business viability. Already, the cluster has learned so far, through actively seeking the opinions, findings and needs of employers that among some of the most sought after competences are a good work ethic, positive attitude, flexibility and pro-activity, optimism, excellent communication skills and being a good team player. The cluster therefore concludes that whilst technical skills may open the door to employment opportunities, soft skills are the key that turns the lock of future development opportunities, sustainable and fulfilling employment and peak performance, both personally and professionally. The STEPS Cluster realises that the need for soft skills is a vital thread that runs throughout the life cycle of every individual and that an improved partnership between early years care providers, educational and academic institutions, employers and training organisations needs to take place, in order for the labour market skills gap to close more permanently.

## Raising Awareness with Individuals

Analysing our collective results, the STEPS cluster acknowledges, that in many cases

there is work to be done at the level of the individual in the first instance. Individuals participating in the STEPS partner projects are often not aware of the importance of soft skills or are not aware of the soft skills they possess, in some instances both statements may be relevant. As such they find it difficult to develop and deploy these skills. One of the tools we have used to encourage a self-awareness of soft skills capability and capacity is the Comet Competency Assessment.



**Tool Kit: COMET**  
**Competency Assessment**  
**Partner: Syntra West,**  
**Bruges, Belgium**  
**Project: iLAEBOR**

### COMET

The competency measurement tool, or COMET, was designed and developed within numerous European projects. As a training provider of vocational training and education in 22 sectors to many different kinds of target groups, Syntra West has an HR Services department, specialised in training strategies and competence assessment in companies. During the years, this expertise in HR matters, company-specific competency dictionaries and sector-specific competency profiles has been used many times in many EU projects. The COMET tool is an assessment tool, that basically is an empty box. One has to fill it with the right competency profile one desires to assess. The first step is thus to develop such a profile with competency clusters, competencies and (measurable) indicators. Then, this information is uploaded easily into the tool, and the assessment can begin.

Assessors can assess not only their own competencies, but they can also be assessed by peers, colleagues, superiors, etc. In this way, the person assessed gets a good overview of both their own insights as well as the perception on him or her by others.

In two of our trainings, Syntra West recently introduced the competence assessment tool to our students, with

two important goals: one of them is obviously the assessment itself, that allows students to assess themselves and their progress throughout the year. Their mentors, teachers and internship providers also assess them. Each assessment round (3 to 4 times a school year) is followed by an open, personal discussion where both parties (students, educators) can feedback on the past and future progress.

A second advantage or goal of the tool comes in much earlier, i.e. during the first sessions of training, and is about creating awareness. As from the beginning of the school year, clear expectations regarding both the hard, technical skills as well as regarding these other and equally important soft skills are set out to the students. From that point teachers and staff start to stimulate understanding about why soft skills are so important to be successful in the labour market, both as self-employed and as an employee. Skills like cooperation, communication, effectiveness, entrepreneurship etc. are boosted, assessed and enhanced throughout training. The competence assessment tool is a helpful instrument to help stimulate both awareness and progression in this matter.

Time and again it has become clear to the STEPS partnership that the earlier an individual can be shown the meaning and importance of soft skills, the better. The Clusters’ consolidated approach is that the need for soft skills arises as soon as the child is born. As Alan Wilson, Founder of Every Family Matters/ Develop Your Child explains, “Because it is at this point they start interacting and communicating with the world. The challenge for most parents these days is they have little or no emotional intelligence – not their fault by the way. To quote Lee Buscaglia, *‘One cannot give what he does not possess. To give love you must possess love. To love others you must love yourself.’*” Essentially, the more a parent can build self-belief/self-worth in a child the more empowered they become, enabling them to make sensible and appropriate life choices. Bullying or peer pressure will not affect them – they can say ‘no’ and walk away. Later in life they are less likely to be drawn into anti-social activities and behaviours. They will be able to form mutually respectful relationships, not just with themselves, but with other people. These well

balanced and responsible individuals with make huge contributions to society as a whole, where they decide to employ their skills” Our programme starts with addressing the need for confidence and self-esteem and these attributes need a sound foundation. That foundation is to love yourself”. (A 56 page independent evaluation from Canterbury Christ Church University is available here <http://developyourchild.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ParentChampion-Programme-Evaluation-April-2013.pdf>)

## The Role of Local Networks

Moreover, the Cluster has highlighted a common need to embed and engage with local networks, in order to raise awareness of this vital issue and provide support to gain the necessary skills. If an individual is not supported from a young age within the family to recognise and develop soft skills then they can become disengaged and detached from formal support and education structures. As such they become hard to reach, potentially moving further away from the labour market. The STEPS Cluster partners work closely with local providers and networks to identify and communicate with these individuals, giving them the opportunity to reconnect with the labour market. It is within these targets groups i.e., students, students in danger of exclusion, people with multiple and complex adverse personal circumstances and long term unemployed citizens that the STEPS Cluster has found the need is greatest.

We have established as a Cluster, that organisations that want to target the hardest to reach groups have to actively reach out by adapting their communication methods. Using accessible language, little amounts of text and pictures in written communication is a first requirement. Spreading information on the services provided is the second requirement, by making use of existing channels like neighbourhood papers. To be sure that the information reaches the right target groups, one must bring – literally – the information into the lives of the people. Setting up communication networks with intermediate organisations has proven to be very successful. A network like this could include a range of local organisations: neighbourhood initiatives,

Salvation Army, community centres, non-governmental organisations active in the broad field of welfare and shelters.

Bringing them together in a network and facilitating this is not only very effective in reaching the hardest to reach. It also holds other advantages:

- » intermediary professionals work daily with their clients/guests/visitors so have a more familiar relationship with them and they are better placed to propose activities not previously considered by the client;
- » no need to introduce - again - another social worker, which can become frustrating;
- » broader reach in less time; a more sustainable approach because the intermediate professionals will support the activities.

It was clear from the outset that in order to engage hard-to-reach individuals it was important to work with and through channels that they were already familiar with. As such the Cluster partners in our approach, have worked alongside referral agencies who are trusted by people and who understood the needs and ambitions of each individual. As a cluster, we drew on the knowledge gained through our extensive project experiences. Our approach is supported by educational professionals; “ Students have a wide range of life experiences. They come with their issues and troubles and are typically hard to engage. For most, their confidence is at rock bottom and negative attitudes to learning have developed. Support needs to be built up slowly to create a positive experience, in which they can learn new skills on their own terms. The level of education is a step up from what they are used to, but it’s delivered so quietly their achievements far outstrip what they previously believed themselves capable of”. Peter Wentworth, Head of Education at Mount Tamar School, Seymour House Provision.

## It doesn't stop there

The Cluster believes that there is a need to pay specific attention to the damaging impact the current economic situation is having on youth unemployment.

We propose integrating a soft skills led approach into current systems, to bridge the gap between leaving education and entering employment. In this way, we can make a significant contribution to the focus and priorities of the EU Youth Guarantee and support the recommendation that there is a need for improved collaboration between key stakeholders in this area. This is explored more fully in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 1 - Conclusions

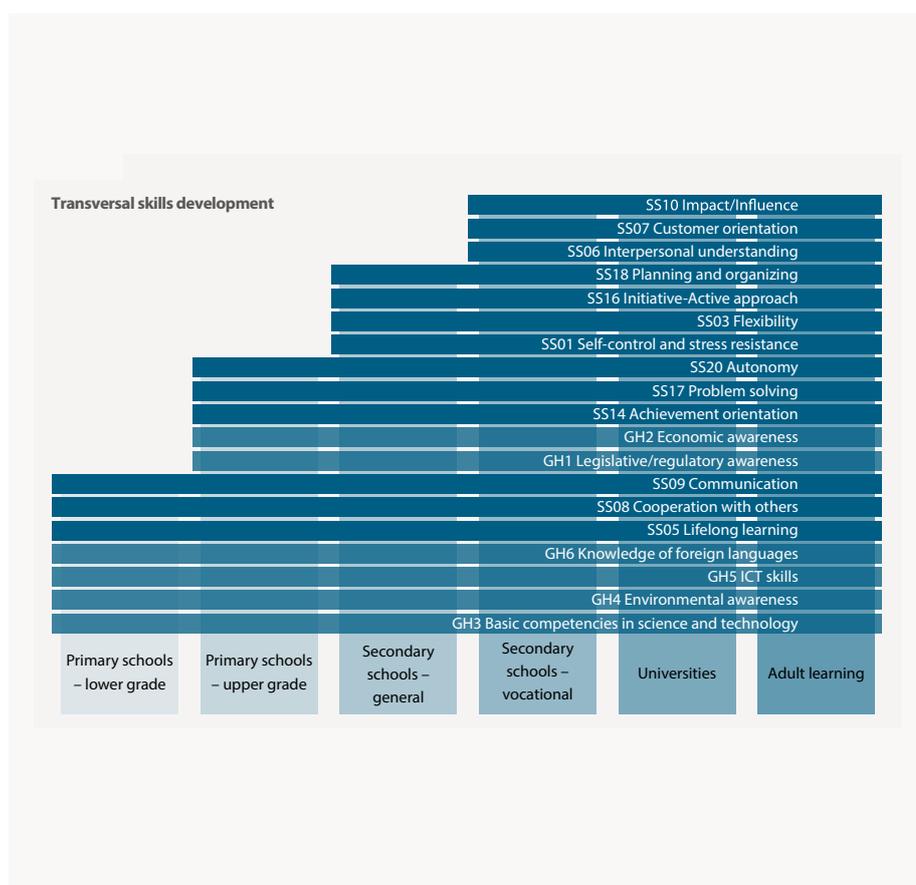
There are a number of key conclusions which can be drawn from this chapter discussion:

- » The **economic crisis** across Europe is alarming and is manifesting itself through higher levels of unemployment than has been experienced previously
- » **Youth unemployment is particularly high**, with this age group being disproportionately affected compared to other age groups
- » Despite high levels of unemployment business continue to experience difficulties in recruiting suitable candidates meaning that there is a **disparity between supply and demand**
- » The emerging issue does not centre around a lack of qualifications in potential candidates but rather a **lack of soft skills** to make the individual work ready
- » In order to address the issue it is fundamental that individuals understand the importance of soft skills and this means **raising awareness**
- » **Local networks** can be a successful way to connect with disengaged individuals as they are already trusted and have effective communication channels in place
- » It is apparent that a **connection needs to be made between hard and soft skills** and between **training and the workplace** in order to be most effective

# Chapter 2

## Working in Parallel

RPIC-VIP (2011), *Transferability of Skills across Economic Sectors: Role and Importance for Employment at European Level*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union



into work similarly concluded that whilst students learn an abundance of taught, technical skills the same emphasis is not placed on soft skills development. In particular, it highlighted a lack of collaboration between employers and educational institutions as a critical issue. Notably there was a correlation between business vacancies and youth unemployment, with the highest proportion of businesses unable to fill vacancies due to a lack of skills based in countries with the highest levels of youth unemployment (2014).

The recently launched project, Grass: Grading Soft Skills, is funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme and is exploring the value of attaching a formal grading system to the delivery of soft skills. The project is “focusing on representing soft skills of learners of various ages and at different levels of education in a quantitative, measurable way, so that these skills can become the subject of formal validation and recognition”. (2014)

This could indeed be a solution for the integration of soft skills across the education system. A number of initiatives delivered by the STEPS partners provides a growing body of evidence that soft skills can be integrated into the education system to both engage young people and to improve their employability.

Chapter 1 developed an understanding of the economic climate in which we are operating and the impact this is having on both supply and demand within the labour market.

It has become increasingly apparent to the STEPS Cluster partners that there is a growing skills gap.

The *Transferability of Skills across Economic Sectors: Role and Importance for Employment at European Level (2001)* report considers this issue following extensive desk and field-based research. It acknowledges that there are a number of ‘actors’ influencing the skills agenda and that instead of working collaboratively to address the issue they are working in parallel to each other. In some instances

this even means working against one another, albeit inadvertently.

### The Education System

Some would say that the evident skills gap is a result of a failing education system. The experience of the STEPS Cluster partners is not that the education system is failing per se, but, more precisely, that it is failing to integrate soft skills at an early enough age to have a positive impact on the holistic development of the individual which will, in time, impact their levels of employability.

The *Transferability of Skills across Economic Sectors: Role and Importance for Employment at European Level (2001)* report suggests that initial education is the weakest point in the development of skills, including soft skills. It recommends that soft skills should be integrated at as early an age as possible and proposes the above model: The McKinsey and Company report *Education to employment: Getting Europe’s youth*

## The impact of early integration of skills within the classroom



of pupils are above the National Expectation in Reading



of pupils are above the national Expectation in Maths



of pupils retested in year 2 reached the expected level



of pupils leave early years with good levels of development

Plymouth School of Creative Arts report



### Case Study: Plymouth School of Creative Arts

**Partner:**  
Plymouth College of Art,  
Plymouth, UK

Over recent years the political decisions made regarding the UK education system have inadvertently reduced or even removed arts education from the National Curriculum. Plymouth College of Art is well aware of the value of arts education not only to the individual but also to society and so decided to take decisive action.

In May 2012 Plymouth College of Art received permission from Central Government to establish Plymouth School of Creative Arts, which opened its doors in September 2013. The creative school is a 4-16 all through school and is the only one of its kind in the country.

The ethos of the school is about developing creative thinking and problem-solving skills within the

students. This is achieved through a nurturing and facilitated approach to learning in which the student is fully engaged. It is through the development of these skills that students are open to learning other, more technical skills and can reach their full potential. The early integration of these skills within the classroom is already proving to have a significant impact. Local Authority moderated data for the schools shows that:

*“Progress in Reading, Writing, Maths and Science is good in year 2. This is addressing under performance based on the previous results. 63% of children are now above National Expectation in reading and 49% are above National Expectation in Maths.*

*Phonics Assessment showed that 73% of children in Year 1 achieved the threshold, compared to 69% nationally in 2013. 100% of children who needed to be retested in Year 2 achieved the expected level, compared to 85% nationally in 2013. Progress in Foundation Stage was good with 65% of our children are leaving the Early Years Foundation Stage with a Good Level of Development compared to 52% Nationally and 57% in Plymouth in 2013.”*



Plymouth School of Creative Arts



**Case Study:**  
**The Gazelle Colleges Group**

**Partner:**  
Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth, UK

**Participating Partner:**  
City College Plymouth



Regional Preparatory Meeting, Bruges 2014

The Gazelle Colleges Group consists of 23 colleges across the UK, committed to transforming further education by developing new learning models focused on providing students with commercial, entrepreneurial learning opportunities. The colleges sit at the heart of their local entrepreneurial ecosystems, breaking down the barriers between business and education by developing innovative partnerships with local employers and community stakeholders, to equip

students with the skills, capabilities and confidence to make or take a job.

As a Gazelle Colleges Group member, City College Plymouth is committed to ensuring that its students not only learn the essential technical skills for their chosen industry but also develop the employability and entrepreneurial capabilities and qualities required to be successful in gaining and sustaining employment or self-employment.

Students have the opportunity to take part in unique projects, workshops and competitions as part of their chosen course of study ensuring that they are fully prepared to make a significant and successful contribution in today's challenging world of work.



Partner presentation, Bruges 2014



Project Expo, Bruges 2014

## Public Sector Support

Almost without exception, the STEPS Cluster partners have found that public sector delivered or funded projects place an increased emphasis on soft skills development, by contrast with formal education. This is generally because these projects are working with harder-to-reach, sometimes excluded, individuals and focusing on soft skills is a proven means of engaging these target groups.

When individuals have had a negative experience within the formal education system they can be discouraged from engaging thus limiting their opportunity to develop new skills. This in turn may prevent them from entering the labour market or may mean they are not able to keep up with the pace of change once in work because they are not open to new learning.

Whilst it is positive that these publicly-funded programmes acknowledge the importance of soft skills, in some instances these projects appear to operate in isolation. Whilst they use soft skills to engage and develop the individual, the progression routes into formal education and work are not always evident. There is sometimes no explicit link between the soft skills a person has developed and how these can help to move them forward on their path into higher education or work.

It is the experience of the STEPS Cluster partners that the most effective programmes are those which link the development of soft skills to clear, measurable outcomes associated with education and work. They place the learner at the centre of the learning but also identify clear progression pathways with them. The learning is far from 'soft' but is focused around using soft skills to enable the learner to achieve their full potential.



**Case Study:**  
**Have a Go Activities**  
**Partner:** Medway Council, Kent, UK  
**Project:** SUCCES

Many people have lost the desire to learn, and some are even fearful of learning, because of deeply negative experiences as a young person or young adult. In Medway, 'Have a Go' sessions at the All Saints Community Project offer an example of how to re-engage people, through creative, attractive and innovative methods of delivery. These are necessary to draw people in, and as a result the

learning experience takes place almost unrecognised.

Local people share their craft skill and lead others to try it themselves at neighbourhood centres. Within a relaxed and familiar environment the participants quickly build confidence and self-esteem by seeing almost immediate results. This opens their minds to new possibilities as they become aware of their skills and potential. At the neighbourhood centre, they then get to learn about more formal training and other softer skills development activities they can become involved in. This process is holistic because it allows individuals themselves to stay in the driver's seat of their progress, beneficiaries taking the next step at their own rate, if they choose.

*Here are some comments from local Medway beneficiaries who have experienced "Have a Go Sessions" at All Saints Community Project;*

*"I love having a general chat – it gets me out of the house and lifts my moods – a depression lifter!"*

*"I enjoy the Have a Go Sessions – I would be lost without our Friday morning group."*

*"Lots of fun and a good opportunity to make friends. A sense of achievement when you make something good."*



Succes project visit 2011

# OVER

# 80%



## on the Momentum course

come away with a changed outlook  
and are motivated to make personal  
changes in their lives.

Momentum Course



**Tool Kit:**

**Momentum Course**

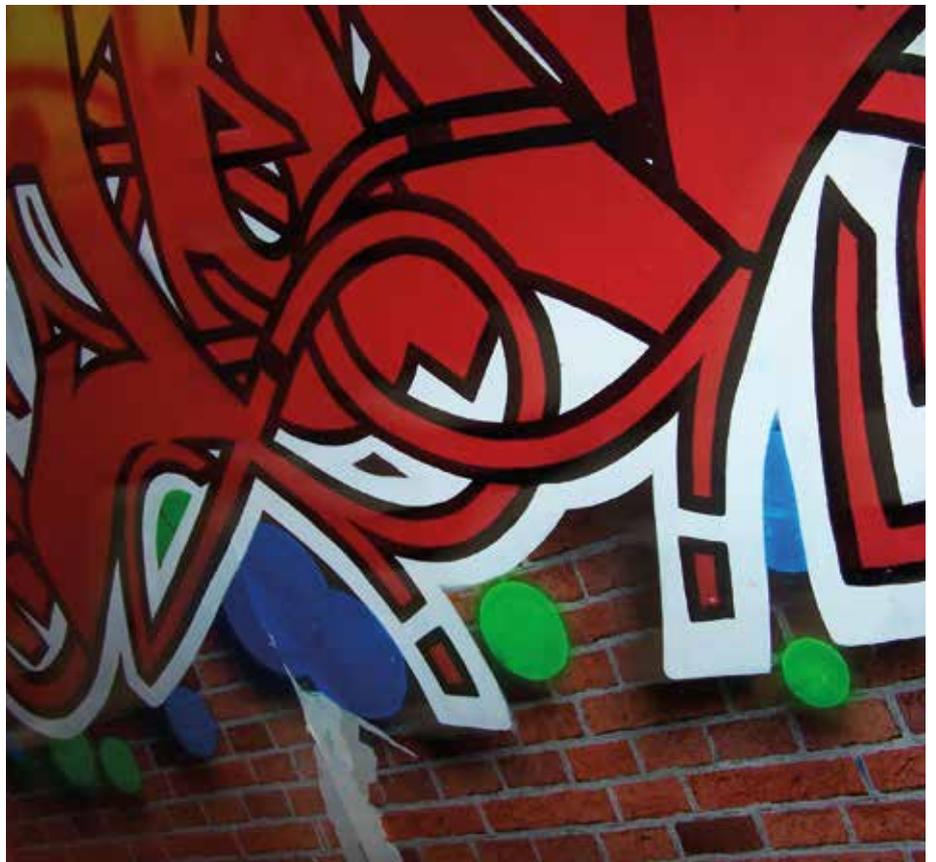
**Partner:** Medway Council, Kent, UK

**Project:** SUCCES

labour market is profound. Over 80% of participants on the Momentum course (and these learners were some of the furthest from the work place) come away with a changed outlook and are motivated to make personal changes in their lives.

The Momentum course is a fully interactive day where learners participate in activities and discussions and, with gentle coaching, are helped to identify realistic, small steps that can be achieved which will improve their outlook, confidence and motivation. Using coaching techniques, as opposed to training, tutors, together with the learners, can explore the extent of their underlying issues which may prevent them from engaging or developing and can identify how they can be open to learning.

The course has shown that the impact of soft skills training on personal progression in learning and the transition into the



Succes project visit 2011



**Case Study:**  
Gold Arts Award

**Partner:**  
Plymouth College of Art,  
Plymouth, UK

**Participating Partner:**  
Real Ideas Organisation, UK



Education programme workshop, Crysalis project

### Gold Arts Award - A new approach

In our experience many community based funding streams only support young people with basic qualifications and do not offer higher level qualifications (college programmes aimed at 16-18 year olds) or specialist provision. We have also found from experience that learning in informal settings is

often only possible at a basic level and is considered very separately to the delivery of qualifications in formal settings.

As such, Plymouth College of Art piloted the Gold Arts Award project with the support of the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO). The aim of the project was to show that it is not just the qualification

that matters but that, more importantly, it is the way in which that qualification is delivered that makes a difference.

The project worked with two cohorts of young people; one group of talented young people already engaged with the college and one group of young people who were previously disengaged from education. The programme offered an inspiring range of studio-based, creative activities over the summer period.



Local partner workshop

The programme was relaxed yet focused and showed how the Gold Arts Award, a higher level qualification, could be used to engage young people at all levels of learning and ability. The programme was used as a means of bridging informal and formal learning programmes, as well as moving from basic to higher level programmes. The programme was designed to ensure that the Gold Arts Award was recognised in academic terms rather than just as a hobby or bolt-on activity. All 22 students successfully completed the programme which clearly demonstrates the importance of blending learning styles and environments with formal qualifications to inspire and help young people excel throughout their learning journey.

## Employer's Responsibilities

Whilst employers regularly comment on the failings of the education system to produce work-ready students with the range of both hard and soft skills they require, the employers themselves have a significant role to play in addressing this.

It has already been mentioned that a closer working relationship between educational institutions and businesses would be beneficial for both parties. The *Transferability of Skills across Economic Sectors: Role and Importance for Employment at European Level (2011)* report goes further than this, stating that businesses have the most important role to play in the acquisition, development, recognition and assessment of soft skills (2011).

The report reaches some interesting conclusions:

- » Soft skills are clearly sought after by businesses, so if improved assessment tools could be used during the recruitment process not only would businesses identify the right people with the right skills but the education system would be more inclined to develop an accreditation system for soft skills so that they are recognised and identifiable.
- » The workplace is the most fertile ground for the development of soft skills as these skills are acquired through practical application and peer-to-peer learning.
- » There is a discrepancy between the amount and quality of soft-skills training offered in the workplace between large and small companies. Small companies, in most instances, do not have the capacity or financial

resources to accommodate such training and often feel that doing so will simply result in training staff up to move on to other jobs. (RPIC-ViP, 2011)

These conclusions resonate with the STEPS partners whose work has demonstrated that soft-skills are inherently practical and real-world oriented. Soft skills and softer intelligences are learned through personal experience, exposure, practice feedback and reflection, making the workplace an ideal environment in which these skills can develop and flourish. (1 Research report – CIPD “Using the head and heart at work” – A business case for soft skills.)

Several projects across the STEPS partnership have focused on the role of the employer and how soft-skills development can continue in the work environment.



Employers feedback, Bruges 2014



Since 2010,  
the talent  
toolbox  
has been  
ordered by

175

businesses &  
organisations

Talent Toolkit



**Tool Kit:**

**Talent Toolbox**

**Partner:** Mentor, Kortrijk, Belgium

**Project:** SUCCES

**Talent development in a box!**

In 2010, a learning network of 10 socio-economic initiatives in and around the city of Kortrijk, led by Mentor, developed a methodology for follow-up conversations with their low-skilled employees. The learning network was established thanks to a European Social

Fund (ESF) project. The methodology of talent development was based on a more thorough and holistic process of enquiry. This methodology, “the appreciative inquiry *advocates collective inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by collective design of a desired future state that is compelling and thus, does not require the use of incentives, coercion or persuasion for planned change to occur.*” (Source: Bushe, G.R. (2013) *The Appreciative Inquiry Model*. In Kessler, E. (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Management Theory*. Sage Publications.)

The learning network developed a user-friendly toolbox for employers or managers in the workplace, based on this talent development methodology. With the toolbox, follow-up conversations

with low-skilled employees are structured and tailored in a way that they are focused on talents instead of ‘problems’ or ‘flaws’. The toolbox consists of one user guide, 26 talent cards and one follow-up form. It has been developed and tested in 10 different social businesses and is adaptable to other businesses. Since 2010, the talent toolbox has been ordered by 175 businesses and organisations to use for their talent development conversations with employees. Businesses who invest in the use of a talent toolbox, invest in more sustainable employment of their employees, thanks to a better and more focused follow-up.

The primary differential between soft skills training and conventional skills training is that the person (and what makes them who they are) is at the centre. Rather than imparting knowledge or providing a skillset the trainer is endeavouring to shape, with their permission, the mentality and outlook of the learner.

Soft skills are generally the precursor to conventional skills training as they are able to unlock the latent learning ability in the learner. So, if someone has a new-found belief in their potential, for example, they will undoubtedly achieve a high degree of progress simply because they are eager and their mind is open.

## Chapter 2 conclusions

There are a number of key conclusions that can be drawn from this chapter discussion:

- » The emerging evidence supports the argument that a **skills gap** exists across Europe.
- » There are many parties who can instigate a change but in most instances they are **working in parallel rather than in partnership**.

- » There is one argument that the **education system is failing** to equip young people with the soft skills they need to enter and progress within the labour market.

- » The **early years of education are critically important** and soft skills need to be integrated as early as possible but this is currently not the case.

- » The **lack of collaboration** between education and business is a critical issue.

- » Discussions are ongoing with regard to the merits of attaching an **accreditation system** to soft skills to make it possible for these skills to be formally acknowledged by both educators and employers.

- » It is often the case that **public sector delivered projects** place a higher emphasis on the development of soft skills.

- » Whilst public sector delivered projects can effectively engage hard-to-reach audiences, the **routes to formal training and employment need to be more explicit** and better connected.

- » The most effective engagement and training programmes are those that show a **purposeful link between soft skills and education or work**.

- » The process and learning should not be 'soft' but, rather, focused on enabling the individual to **reach their full potential through the application of soft skills**

- » The **role of the employer is critical** and this needs to be acknowledged by the business community as a whole.

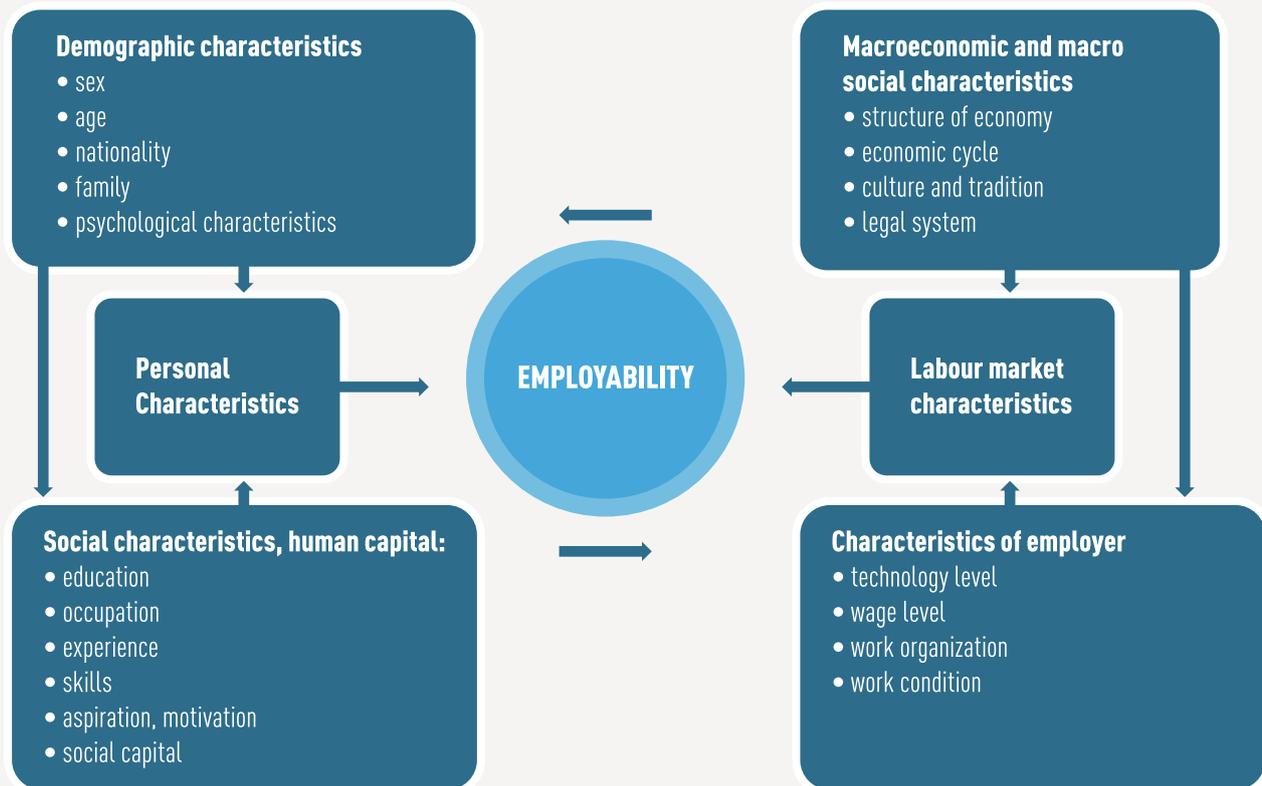
- » The workplace is a fertile ground for the development of soft skills due to the **practical applications** that can be made.

- » **Small companies in particular may struggle** to find the the finances and capacity to implement training and systems which identify and develop soft skills within their employees.

- » There would be considerable merit in **sharing assessment and development tools** across the key parties; educational institutions, employers and public sector training providers.



Crysalis project



Source: Kuchai, 2007, amended by authors.

Source: Kuchai, 2007, amended by authors

## Throughout the publication there have been many connections made between soft skills and employability.

These connections strongly suggest that whilst the terms soft skills and employability should not be considered interchangeable, they should be considered integral to one another. Evidence suggests that there is a correlation between an individual's soft skills and their employability.

The diagram above shows that the employability of an individual is directly affected by personal and labour market characteristics. However, the only factors that an individual has control over are the '*social characteristics, human capital*'. Importantly this includes education, skills and experience. The key questions, therefore, are how are these characteristics developed and who can influence them?

## The Importance of transition points

The McKinsey and Company report "Education to employment: Getting Europe's youth into work" highlights the importance of transition points for young people on their path from education to employment. It identifies three key intersections which will affect an individual's ability to enter the labour market; 1) enrolling in post-secondary education 2) building the right skills and 3) finding a suitable job (see diagram).

Evidently, and not surprisingly, the education you choose and the skills training you receive, are critical to your ability to secure a job; but more importantly, a job which gives you a high level of job satisfaction.

It is about more than simply developing soft skills for the sake of doing so. This is about the purposeful development of soft skills which improve employability and enable an individual to journey through life's transition points with confidence. It is recommended, therefore, through the collective experience of the STEPS Cluster partners, that real world experiences are used as much as possible throughout every stage of an individual's journey from education to employment.



### Case Study

**Partner:** OCMW, Kortrijk, Belgium

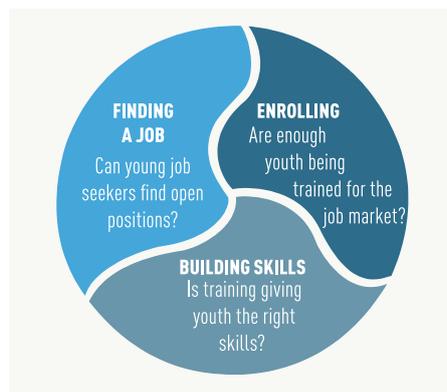
**Project:** SUCCES

### The integration of soft skills in work experience programmes is an explicit choice and an excellent opportunity.

OCMW Kortrijk works every day on the sustainable activation and (re-)integration of its clients into society. The clients are usually a long way from the labour market. It is important to ensure that the taught skills are actually acquired and can be included in their career

backpack, step by step. Therefore, soft skills are integrated in a natural way through counselling, both individually and in a group, or during work placements. In OCMW's opinion, soft skills training is most effective if provided during the work placement programme. People are encouraged to spend a percentage of their work experience time in training. People also get assistance by being taught methods to 'learn to learn' or how to keep a good balance between work and family. Sometimes it is the first time that people are approached in a positive way. For this it is important to first win the participant's confidence. After all, soft skills are very close to the person's life. The approach and what is taught, including soft skills, cannot be the same for everyone. All participants have different backgrounds, different histories and different needs. What people do have in common is the added value that this approach has proven in recent years. Not only professionally, but also personally.

Because soft skills are inherently practical, the more that training can be real-world oriented the more readily these skills will develop and the more closely they will be aligned to the needs of the labour market. The Kaplan report "Graduate Recruitment, Learning and Development White Paper" recommends the 70-20-10 model with training and development programmes being 10% formal/course-based training, 20% mentoring and 70% on the job experience. This model suggests that competencies are best developed when training flows into practical experiences, implying that training should be vocational, comprising 10% knowledge and 90% skills and attitude (2014).



McKinsey & Company, 2014



**Tool Kit** "Etre et Savoir Etre" - "Soft Skills in Action"

**Partner:** Maison de l'Initiative, Grande-Synthe, France

**Project:** SUCCES

The aim of this activity is to identify the barriers to securing sustainable employment and to overcome them, in order to increase an individual's employability. This is done through:

- » Promoting a win-win relationship between the employer and the job seeker
- » Ensuring a "skills balance" between supply (skills an employer is looking for) and demand (skills that a job seeker has) The expected impacts of the tool on the end-user or beneficiary are:
  - » Increased ability to express one's motivations
  - » Better understanding of life and the realities and requirements of the working world
  - » Better integration within a team and understanding of what it is to be a "team player"
  - » Increased confidence and awareness of one's strengths and capabilities

The programme structure is:

Activities take place in group and individual settings. Work placement allocation is carried out by Maison de l'Initiative staff and the job-seeker is advised to sign up to free membership of Maison de l'Initiative services to take advantage of other offers and employment opportunities.

#### 1) Group Phase

- » An active phase of reflection: to discover and highlight one's strengths and areas for improvement
- » A preparation phase for employment

#### 2) Individual Phase

- » Individual interviews

#### 3) Evaluation Phase

- » Interview preparation and advice

## Embedding enterprise

Undoubtedly the education system has a responsibility to ensure that students are work ready and graduate with a portfolio of hard and soft skills which are necessary to enter the workplace. There seems to be a level of dissatisfaction from both students and employers regarding the preparedness of graduates for the workplace. An extensive report by McKinsey and Company showed that only 20% of young people were satisfied with the support and advice they had received; and even then this result was driven by the determination of the individual rather than the quality of the support available.

The STEPS Cluster partners have recognised that the most successful delivery frameworks, whether formal or informal learning, are those which embed not only soft skills but, more specifically, enterprise. When qualifications and projects are directly linked to business, satisfaction levels are higher and the outcomes are more sustainable and students can apply their skills to the real world.

Embedding enterprise through soft skills development makes the journey from education to employment seamless, and enables an individual to navigate life and work transitions with ease.



**Tool Kit:**  
**Company to Learn**  
**Partner:** Scalda, Middelburg,  
Netherlands  
**Project:** iLAEBOR

In August 2011 Scalda started, in Middelburg, with the educational concept, we now know as Company to Learn (C2L).

In C2L first year students from different courses form teams and are led by a second or third year student and coached by a teacher. During every period of eight weeks each team has to work out a real life assignment, given by a commissioning party. The assignments are very different from each other. They may vary from organising a charity event to making a publication on the financial situation of students. The similarity between the assignments is that they are real and have to be executed. Each week the first year students spend three hours of their timetable on C2L. The students that lead the teams as a 'director' receive instructions on management techniques during another hour. The C2L activities

are not 'knowledge driven'. In fact C2L is all about developing soft skills, this is the reason why it fits in the curriculum for different courses.

Amongst other things, the students have to:

1. write application letters and have application interviews to get into a team
2. work together in a team
3. communicate effectively
4. be creative
5. evaluate themselves and fellow students
6. make and give presentations
7. be accurate
8. solve problems

Since the start almost 400 students have participated in C2L. Evaluation of results point out that most of the students feel stimulated to perform in this educational structure. Almost without exception students state that they developed their general competences (soft skills) through C2L. Because this has also been noticed by the staff of Scalda, the C2L concept will remain in the timetables and teachers are continually working on further improvements of the model. In August 2014, three years after the first students started the programme, Scalda will also offer C2L to its students in Terneuzen.



Participants from SUCCES project



**Tool Kit: 3E's Partner:**  
Plymouth College of Art,  
Plymouth, UK

It has become more and more important to equip graduates with business related skills and not simply subject specific skills. Plymouth College of Art has responded to this with an innovative programme.

Plymouth College of Art's students will become master craftsmen in their chosen discipline. However, increasingly this is not enough to secure a job in a dynamic and competitive market.

Therefore, we have introduced the 3E's programme, focusing on Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability. The aim of the programme is to give every degree student a firm understanding of the skills required to enter the workplace and, in some instances, establish their own business. These skills are applicable to all our students regardless of their artistic discipline and are embedded in curriculum delivery from year one.

Through a range of creative tools and delivery methods the students develop an understanding of the skills required within the 3E's programme and learn to implement these alongside their technical skills.

This form of holistic teaching places equal importance on hard and soft skills and shows the student the integration between developing these skills and progress to employment. When delivered as part of the curriculum, Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Employability are fully embedded in the learning process.

## The need for collaboration

The problem, as has been discussed, does not simply lie in one area and responsibility must therefore be shared in order to find a shared solution. Consequently, as much as changes are

required within the education system so are improvements required within the workplace itself.

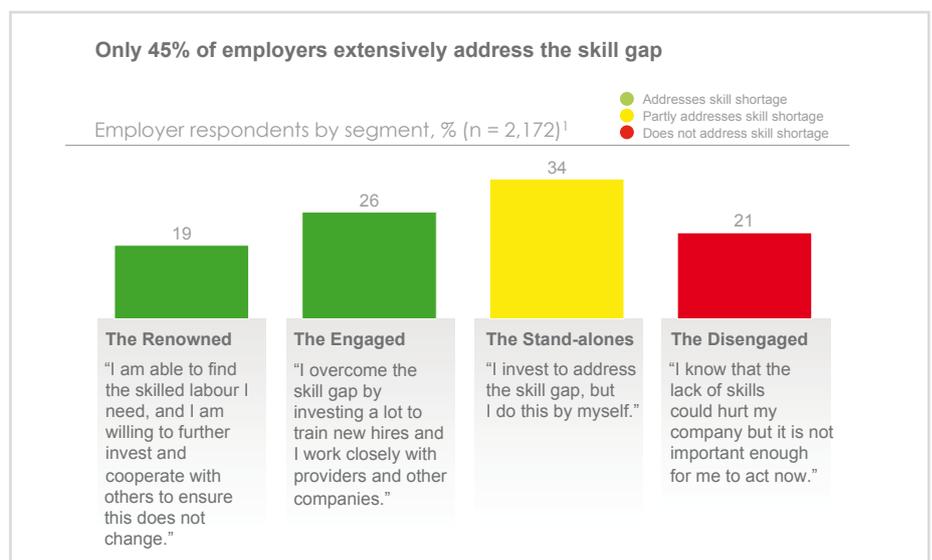
There needs to be increased collaboration between employers and education providers to ensure supply matches demand. Importantly, collaboration of this nature will also enable the acknowledgement and development of soft skills to continue within the workplace. The Kaplan report "*Graduate Recruitment, Learning and Development White Paper*" concludes that there are two key stages within a graduate's early career; at recruitment and two years later. The recruitment stage, according to the report, is where soft skills are of greatest importance, thus reinforcing the term "recruit for attitude train for skills". However, the report revealed that after two years of employment the employer placed greater emphasis on technical skills than soft skills.

The research and experience of the STEPS Cluster partners would contest this, as other evidence clearly shows the importance of soft-skills development and application at all stages of an individual's career. In fact the article "*Why soft skills matter, Making sure your hard skills shine*" argues that "whilst your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come", making a clear connection between soft skills and a career rather than simply a job (reference Mind Tools).

The need for soft-skills development does not stop at a designated age or predetermined stage in someone's life or career. Therefore, it is essential that employers invest in soft skills development beyond the education system. Doing so facilitates the growth of an employee, opening their mind to gaining new skills, both hard and soft. This is not easy for all businesses due to limited resources and finances. The McKinsey and Company report showed that small businesses in particular struggle to provide suitable investment in soft skills development and training (see diagrams below). Given that the European economy is underpinned by small, even micro businesses, this is a concern and highlights a clear need to value and embed soft-skills development in the workplace.

Some companies have found the apprenticeship model offers an affordable solution. It allows companies of all sizes to work alongside the education system to develop and train young people with practical skills making them work ready and employable. Knowledge exchange naturally takes place between the educational provider and the business, giving even small businesses access to training tools and best practice models which they may not otherwise be able to access.

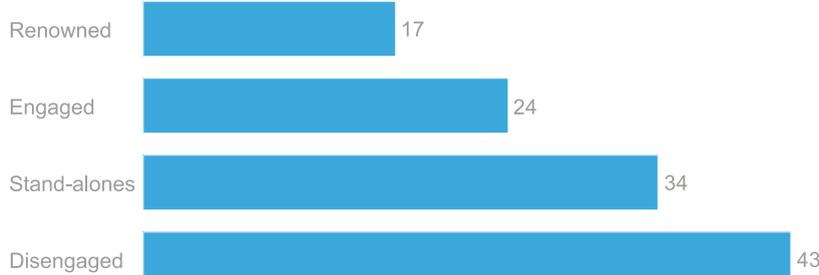
The continued investment in soft skills development is not only for the benefit of the individual, it has a lasting and measurable benefit for the business. This will be discussed in further detail in chapter four.



McKinsey & Company, 2014

## Small businesses are overrepresented in the disengaged segment

Proportion of businesses of 1-19 employees in each employer segment, %



McKinsey & Company, 2014



### Case Study: Apprenticeships

**Partner:** Medway Council,  
Kent, UK

**Participant:**  
Jennifer



### Case Study: Small Employer

**Partner:** Medway Council,  
Kent, UK

**Participant:** Medway  
Voluntary Action

Jennifer is a 19-year old apprentice. She was keen to learn new Business Administration skills. In addition, however, it was necessary for us to ensure Jennifer also understood the need for 'soft skills' such as having a strong work ethic, good time management, appropriate behaviour and dress code, a positive/flexible attitude and most important, confidence in her own ability. This required support from her supervisor who reinforced the importance of these skills at appropriate opportunities including induction and at 1:1 meetings. Nearing the end of her apprenticeship, Jennifer is well aware of how to demonstrate her soft skills in both applications and interviews.

We are a small employer in Medway and want to do our best to support people, particularly young people, to get jobs. We have therefore taken on apprentices to provide them with real work experience whilst gaining their NVQ (National Vocational Qualification). It has been a delight to watch them develop but a learning curve for us all in ensuring that soft skills are explicitly communicated to our apprentices as expectations, such as getting to work on time, being a team player and communicating appropriately, as they underpin effectiveness in the workplace. Gaining jobs on leaving us is now a reality.



Partner presentation, Bruges 2014



Crysalis Professionals Programme, Plymouth



Crysalis Skills Tour, Plymouth



**Tool Kit:** Discover Talents  
**Partner:** Mentor, Kortrijk, Belgium  
**Project:** SUCCES

## Two birds with one stone: discovering talents by observing in the work place.

The guide 'Discover Talents' is a translation of the assessment for vocational orientation by Mentor to an easy to use method to discover talents in low skilled people. Everybody has talents, but these talents are not always obvious. Sometimes, people are not aware of the talents they have, and sometimes, even people living or working near to them do not always see these talents. As a result, the talents of that person are not recognised and/or utilised. Therefore, it is important to discover talents, both for the person themselves, for the employer and for society. This is not always easy, especially not for people who have already experienced a lot of rejections and disappointments throughout their lives and their past work experiences.

As an employer or close colleague, you often see your people busy at work. You can encourage them to discover their talents by supporting them and observing them during simple tasks in their work.

Observation is not the same as perception. Perception is a collective name for seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting. We perceive what happens around us in the world with each of our five senses. We constantly do so, without thinking and without making any effort. Observation is a way of gathering information. Therefore, the aim of observation is to gather information. Observation is a special form of perception that meets three conditions:

### 1) Purposeful

During the observation, our attention is focused on a small part of our environment. We address those people who can give us an answer to a question that we have asked ourselves. As a result, we will pay more attention to certain things and will overlook certain other things.

### 2) Systematic

We are not satisfied with what we accidentally perceive in a specific situation. We try to obtain information at different moments and in different situations. In this way, we try to eliminate coincidences as much as possible.

### 3) Objective

Our observation must fit in as closely as possible with reality and contain as few elements as possible that are added by the observer themselves. We often spontaneously add all kinds of elements that in fact were not perceptible in reality. In addition, we do not all see the same things, even if the stimuli we receive from the environment are identical. The interpretation of what has been observed does not happen during the activity itself, but later on. However, the fact that people want to assess other people's behaviour almost immediately, is a human feature. This should nevertheless be avoided as much as possible.

So, observation is not as easy as it seems, and even hides a number of pitfalls. To avoid all these pitfalls, Mentor has developed a user guide that is easy to read, helps observers to discover talents in the person they observe and gives a few tips and tricks on how to discuss the results with the person they observe. This guide is aimed at coaches for neighbourhood oriented activities but can also be used by employers or close colleagues that guide the employee.

## Chapter 3 Conclusions

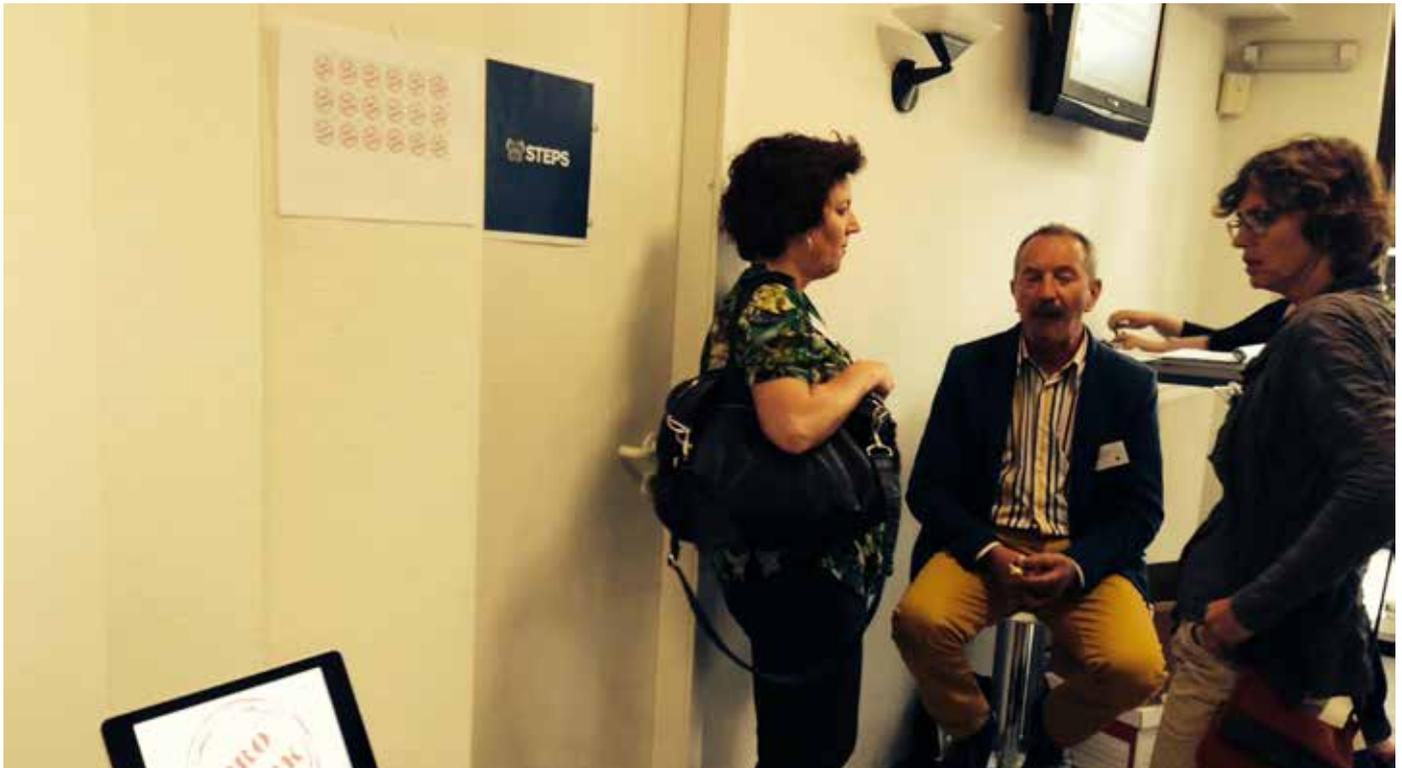
There are a number of key conclusions which can be drawn from this chapter discussion:

- » The terms **soft skills and employability** should be interconnected for maximum value and impact.

- » There are many important transition points in an individual's life where soft skills are acutely important, not least the **transition from education to employment**.
- » An individual's journey through this and other transition points will be improved if soft skills are developed with a **purposeful link to employability** from the outset.
- » **Soft skills are inherently practical** and, therefore, better developed when applied to real world oriented experiences.
- » Many students and employers are dissatisfied with the **lack of preparedness** of graduates when entering the labour market.
- » The most successful delivery frameworks are those which **embed enterprise** within the soft skills portfolio in order to make the transition from education to employment seamless.
- » No-one party is wholly responsible and **collaboration is required** across policy, education and employment for real change to be felt.
- » Investment in soft skills is necessary **throughout an individual's life** and not just at specific ages or intersections.
- » The **apprenticeship model** has been an effective way of stimulating collaboration between education and employment as well as making natural links between hard and soft skills.

## Chapter 4

# The Return on Investment



Local meeting Pro work, 2014

The CIPD report *Using the head and heart at work, A business case for soft skills, 2010* stresses that “*Soft skills are crucial to business and life..... They help us to connect as human beings, maintain relationships, understand and influence others and manage and control ourselves.* These skills are fundamental to all aspects of life and, when applied, can offer significant advantages within the world of business.

### **A business case for soft skills**

Soft skills focus on those elements of training that require changes in behaviour and thinking. Some organisations today recognise that the soft skills training of their employees plays an important part in maintaining relationships with their customers or clients and for developing a successful business. It not only helps improve service to customers and clients, but also shows the interest that an organisation has in the professional development of their employees, which in turn leads to higher employee investment.

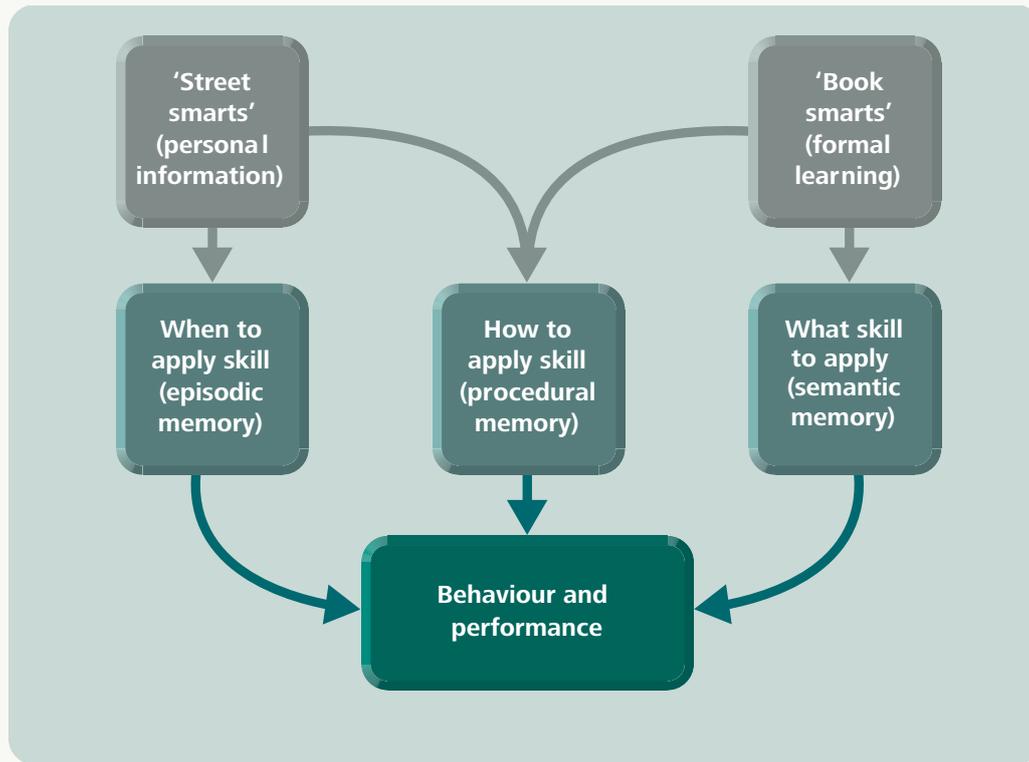
Many organisations, both profit and non-profit making, who have been engaged with the STEPS Cluster partners, point out that soft skills are more highly recognised in the list of requirements for all kinds of jobs. These organisations have found that soft-skills training in areas such as cultural sensitivity, business etiquette and good communication skills (telephone etiquette, email etiquette, information gathering and listening skills) makes a greater impact on clients, customers, and also on colleagues when compared with development of purely technical skills.

Consequently, soft skills play a vital role for professional success; they can help the individual to excel in the workplace and help the business to prosper in the process. The McKinsey Quarterly concluded that businesses who have the “... *inclination to use the ‘soft S’s’ of style, skills, staff and shared goals’ will outperform, by virtue of their energy, focus and motivation, those manager-run companies who tend towards a traditional reliance on strategy, structure and systems, and the associated*

*bureaucracies and ponderous decision-making systems.*” (CIPD, *Using the head and heart at work, A business case for soft skills, 2010*)

The CIPD report goes on to discuss the added value of soft skills and emphasis that the greatest return is seen when soft skills are used to enhance hard skills, as touched upon in Chapter 3. “We know that there is a dividend in productivity, performance and engagement from the ability to deploy softer skills and, more importantly, to link these with the technical and task skills in a compelling mix.” (CIPD, *Using the head and heart at work, A business case for soft skills, 2010*). This is illustrated in the diagram on the following page.

The relationship between street smarts and book smarts



Adapted from Sternberg et al (2000)

Further studies show the intrinsic connection between good communication and people management skills (soft skills) and business survival, productivity and profitability. The studies described below are extracts from the report ROI Statistics for Investment in Soft Skills, Core Coaching, Brian Whetten, 2010:

#### Study one

One study of 968 firms, representing all major industries in the United States, showed that organisations whose managers effectively managed their people – that is, they implemented effective people-management strategies and demonstrated personal competency in management skills – had, on average, a decrease in turnover of more than 7 percent, increased profits of \$3,814 per employee, \$27,044 more in sales per employee, and \$18,641 in stock market value per employee, compared to firms that had less effective people management (Huselid, 1995; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999).

#### Study Two

A study of German firms in 10 industrial sectors produced similar results: 'Companies that place workers at the

core of their strategies produce higher long-term returns ... than their industry peers' (Blimes, Wetzker & Xhonneux, 1997).

#### Study Three

A study of five-year survivability in 136 non-financial companies that issued IPOs in the late 1980s found that the effective management of people was the most significant factor in predicting longevity, even when accounting for industry type, size, and profits. Firms that did a good job of managing people tended to survive; others did not (Welbourne & Andrews, 1996).

#### Study Four

A study by Hanson (1986) investigated the factors that best accounted for financial success over a five-year span in 40 major manufacturing firms. The question being addressed was: "What explains the financial success of the firms that are highly effective?"

The results revealed that one factor – the ability to manage people effectively – was three times more powerful than all other factors combined in accounting for firm financial success over a five-year

period! We repeat, good management was more important than all other factors taken together in predicting profitability."

*"Soft aptitudes', are now the only way for individuals and firms to stand out in a crowded marketplace..." (CIPD, Using the head and heart at work, A business case for soft skills, 2010)*

Effective use of soft skills is something that is important throughout the hierarchy of an organisation. Management is no exception as we see and managers who invest in their people can expect to yield great returns through fostering a culture of soft skills development and training.

*"Good soft skills, which are in fact rare in the highly competitive corporate world, will help you stand out in a setting of routine job seekers with average skills and talents. Soft skills like effective communication, the ability to work in teams, flexibility and strong interpersonal skills are what enable a person to move up the ladder".* Theo Grefkens, CEO Foundation Pro Work.



local workshop Pro Work, 2014



**Case Study:**  
**Partner:** OCMW, Kortrijk, Belgium  
**Participant:** Semra Filiz

Semra Filiz is a work experience coach in Kortrijk, Belgium. She supports 50 people every year on an individual basis and prepares them for job counselling.

**How would you describe the people you work with?**

Our people have been unemployed for a long time, have little or no work experience, and often have had a difficult life facing multiple problems: besides not having a job, they have family problems, financial problems, problems with housing, education and debts.

**Why are soft skills such an important topic in the program you work on?**

Because we notice that people from our target group – due to their difficult life history - have often had fewer opportunities to develop their soft skills. They lack self-reliance, motivation, work attitude, self-esteem, basic trust in other people, social skills, communication skills, ... Yet we see that these are essential skills to improve their living conditions and to obtain and retain a job.

**Can employers profit from investing in soft skills?**

They certainly can. We invest in soft skills to make people stronger and job ready. Yet we see that at the end they don't get hired because there are always candidates that present themselves

better – on paper or in real life. There are however many organisations that provide – for free - on-the-job support for underprivileged people. The further development of soft skills is included in these services. Making use of them gives chances to disadvantaged people. They frequently offer financial advantages and allow the employer to exhibit some corporate social responsibility to their stakeholders. And in our present and future society, there is no better advertising than that.

**Societal change**

It is not just essential to note the role soft skills play in enabling people to enter and progress within the labour market. There are also significant implications for society as a whole.

A study of workers followed over 20 years found that employees who were better at empathising with others, that is, demonstrating a key aspect of emotional intelligence - were more successful in their work, as well as in their social lives (Rosenthal, 1977) (2010 Brian Whetten, corecoaching.org). If a greater number of people are able to express and manage their emotions then the more cohesive and collaborative a community will be.

Improved communications can help to connect communities and cultures, where empathy and compassion enable different groups to respect one another and reach a position of shared values and behaviours. In so doing, the presence of soft skills as a societal level makes for a more harmonious, empathetic and prosperous civilisation.



**Tool Kit:** Wiseguys  
**Partner:** Mentor, Kortrijk, Belgium  
**Project:** SUCCES

**Wiseguys: a successful initiative with sustainable results and social return on investment**

For this project, we were inspired by the ongoing success of all types of home parties. The great advantage of these home parties is that people, friends and acquaintances among themselves can recommend and sell products better than any vendor could ever do. With 'The Wiseguys' we wanted to respond to this. People who live in a vulnerable situation, are best suited to recommend the right products (in this case social services).

By training a number of key figures in neighbourhoods, community centers, service centers, families ..., we wanted to get the necessary information about a number of specific issues to the intended audience. Unlike, for example a formal letter from an official service or an announcement in the town newspaper, the same content explained by a friend, someone on the same level as you, is easier to remember and will 'stick' more. Friends speak the same language, literally and figuratively, and are therefore more likely to be listened to. We wanted to maximise the expertise of these 'experts' through a number of topics so we put together tailor-made

for them, to reach the hardest-to-reach people in their own environment.

We reach not only the participants with the training (the Wiseguys), but also a wider target audience: those who are referred by the Wiseguys. The existing range of social services and assistance is thus spread among socially-vulnerable people. Barriers are reduced; ability to cope is increased. By breaking through social isolation, we work on social inclusion and participation. Finally, we also facilitate access to employment and training, and we improve the social position of people.



local workshop Pro Work, 2014



local workshop Pro Work, 2014



#### Case Study:

**Partner:** Medway Council, Kent, UK

**Participant:** All Saints Community Project Trust, Linda Fiddymont



#### Case Study:

**Partner:** Mentor, Kortrijk, Belgium

**Participant:** Filip

Volunteering Programme is a 13-week programme of activity that includes training in Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety and Child Protection/Safeguarding. Following initial training a tailored Personal Development Plan is discussed and set up with the volunteer and a placement agreed.

During the 9 further weeks of volunteering regular meetings are held to discuss progress and skills developed, together with future development and continuation of volunteer placement if this is a route the individual wishes to pursue.

#### Benefits to the Individual

- » Opportunity to try work placement in a field of work that interests them
- » Gaining a reference for job applications
- » A mentor to discuss their personal development with time to spend with them
- » Gaining confidence and potentially new soft skills
- » Development of skills and knowledge from the workplace

#### Benefits to Society

- » Increased skills of individuals
- » Capacity increased in the community
- » Sense of community built by those volunteering together
- » Improvement of prospects for the future and role models for others
- » New ideas from a range of different people
- » Builds cohesion

### The Wiseguys' time to speak

Filip (59) is retired and a volunteer in a local neighbourhood centre in Kortrijk. In 2011 he entered the 'Wiseguys' course, a training for key figures in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Filip: "My entire life, I struggled with poverty, even when I was employed. After my retirement, I decided to take up volunteering in a neighbourhood centre, where I worked in the bar and helped during neighbourhood activities. Soon it became clear that disadvantaged people trusted me, as I was one of them, and very often they came to me for advice, instead of to the professional outreach workers of the neighbourhood centre. So when one of the outreach workers asked me if I was interested in training on social services in the city of Kortrijk and how to act when people ask for my help, I was very interested. The initiative was called 'The Wiseguys'."

"In 10 training sessions with a very diverse group of 16 people, we visited different social services in Kortrijk, in the field of working, education, housing, health and welfare. Going to the locations with the entire group and meeting the people that worked there, really helped us to have the confidence to walk in there and ask questions. We also got several training modules on social skills, how to set boundaries, how to deal with people in very disturbing circumstances. These modules helped us to not take over the problems of the person, but to refer him or her to the most suitable services for their specific situation."

"Since I am a 'Wiseguy', I can easily refer people to the right service and sometimes I even join them if they are insecure and want some company. Youngsters that don't know their way to the local Job Shop, people that want help with their mental problems, families that face an eviction from their house, ... I've dealt with all of it. The satisfaction comes from knowing that you can give good advice and that you can help people find their way to the professional services that are already there, but sometimes are hard to find or seem out-of-reach. And for the people that graduated as a 'Wiseguy': almost all of the 'younger' Wiseguys have entered vocational education or found a job, and all the 'older' Wiseguys keep on volunteering in several initiatives!"

### **Benefits to the Individual**

Soft skills are not only relevant to an individual at the point of entry to the labour market. They affect, and can improve, every aspect of an individual's day-to-day life, at every stage of their life's journey. As such, a 360-degree approach is required, with soft skills at the core of learning and development throughout a person's life.

When woven into the very fabric of an individual's life, education and career, the presence and application of soft skills can have a profound effect. They become more rounded and are empowered to take control of their lives. This enables them to make reasoned decisions, build lasting relationships and make a valuable contribution to their communities.

It is, therefore, helpful, in this context, to consider soft skills as a series of intelligences:

*Practical intelligence* - an individual's ability to find the best fit between themselves and what the environment demands of them to succeed in everyday working life.

*Emotional intelligence* - can help individuals to consciously perceive, identify, understand and manage their own emotions as well as those of others.

*Intuitive intelligence* - are affectively charged judgements that arise through rapid, non-conscious and holistic

associations. These can be broken down further to include; Expert, Social, Creative and Moral intuition.

It is through the development and application of these intelligences that individuals are empowered and can shape their own destinies. In doing so they gain a sense of fulfilment which far exceeds any monetary gains.

*"To invest in soft skills via EU projects is vital, because these skills create opportunities for individuals, stimulate progression in career development, help to grow beyond money motivation and empower individuals, thus creating opportunities for personal growth and professional development".*

**Theo Grefkens, CEO  
Foundation Pro Work**

### **Chapter 4 Conclusions**

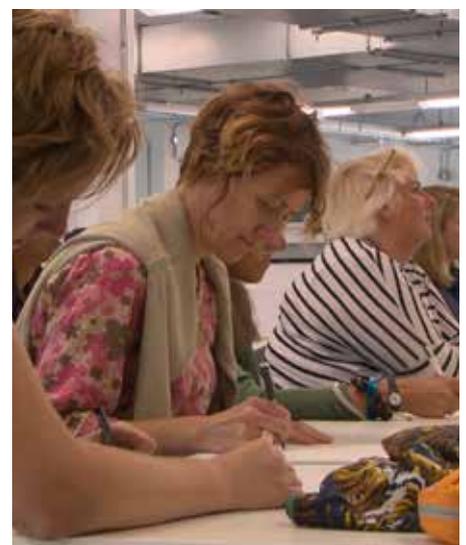
There are a number of key conclusions which can be drawn from this chapter discussion:

- » There is substantial evidence to show that the application of soft skills results in **tangible benefits with a measurable return on investment.**
- » There is a **business case for the investment in soft skills** within the workplace as it is increasingly the only means by which a business can differentiate itself and stand out in a crowded market place.
- » The greatest return is seen when soft skills are **developed and applied alongside hard skills.**

- » The most important skills within business which directly link to productivity and profitability are consistently reported to be **communication and people management.**
- » Soft skills enable an individual to offer a **valuable contribution to society** thus building stronger, more diverse and sustainable communities and cultures.
- » A **360-degree approach** is required to place the development and application of soft skills at the heart of life and business.
- » Soft skills do not simply enable an individual to access the labour market but rather to take control of their life as an **empowered individual with sophisticated practical, emotional and intuitive intelligences.**



Crysalis Professionals Programme, 2014



Crysalis Professionals Programme, 2014

# Recommendations

Throughout this publication there have been many findings presented and a range of conclusions have been drawn. These have been drawn from a range of activities which have consolidated the results from previously funded projects in the 2007-13 2 Seas programme period and research carried out through the STEPS cluster.

Preparatory meetings hosted by each partner provided a platform to launch the Cluster and discuss the theme of soft skills with local practitioners. Through this engagement process the partnership drew together a group of stakeholders to further the discussion during the Cross Border Practitioner Workshops, which proved to be particularly important in identifying the role that soft skills can play in supporting the needs of the business community. At all stages of the project the partners have drawn on their past experience and referenced external reports on the subject matter to pool expertise and identify the actions required for the future.

As a result of this consolidation activity, the STEPS Cluster partnership have one core recommendation to make, supported by a suite of wider recommendations:

## **Recommendation - Make employers the main priority**

It has become increasingly evident, through results from the projects that make up this cluster and other field research carried out through the STEPS Cluster, that employers hold the key to bringing about significant change leading to lasting impact, in this area.

The demand for work-ready individuals with a balanced range of hard and soft skills is as critical as ever and is driven by the business community. Employers have a clear understanding of the employee profile they require to meet their business needs and to support growth, but there remains a lack of understanding and capacity to determine how this can be achieved and the role

the business itself can play in developing the employee's skill profile.

If employers can be effectively engaged with the development and implementation of soft skills training then the impact will be felt at all levels, from the individual, to the wider society and the economy, if implemented effectively and extensively. The STEPS Cluster has identified four main barriers which prevent this from happening in the current climate:

1. There is a widespread lack of understanding around the term soft skills. Whilst employers, educators and training providers appear to have shared aims and ambitions they do not always use the same terminology. This can be off putting and limits potential interactions.
2. Employers are not always clear on the tangible, financial benefits soft skills bring to the company thus making them reluctant to invest in development of staff.
3. Employers, particularly SMEs, do not have the financial and human resources nor the expertise to develop and deliver soft skills training programmes within their organisations. They do not often have access to affordable tools that enable them to integrate soft skills training into their workforce development plans.
4. There is not an existing best practice model or set of tools which is readily available for businesses to adopt, making it difficult for them to know how to proceed without guidance.

The STEPS Cluster partners recommend the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a set of pilot activities which directly seek to overcome these barriers and propose a best practice model for employers, comprising four distinct stages:

**Design** - Extensive consultation needs to be undertaken with the business community to agree a definition of

soft skills and appropriate associated terminology. Alongside this, a robust evidence base needs to be built to show reliable and up-to-date data demonstrating the tangible return on investment which can be achieved through the development and application of soft skills, within the workplace.

This will lay the foundations for the pilot activity, ensuring a common, cross-sectoral understanding of soft skills and heightened appreciation for these skills. This will establish a clear set of expectations from businesses, and steer the design of the project.

**Development** - A shared toolkit needs to be compiled consisting of assessment, development and progression tools which are consistent across all sectors (education, public and employment) so that learning can continue within the workplace, for the benefit of the individual and the employer, with a particular emphasis on small enterprises (SMEs).

It is understood through the work of the STEPS Cluster partners that much of this material already exists within the education and training sector. However, it is not currently presented in a manner which is easily understood or accessible to the business community. These materials need to be repurposed for the business community so that there can be a seamless transition from education (both formal and non-formal) to employment.

**Implementation** - A series of tests, during a pilot activity phase, need to be undertaken to understand the optimal environment (referring to behaviors and support structures) within the workplace that enables hard and soft skills to be fully integrated for maximum impact and returns. It is recommended that this involves a cross section of businesses by size, type and nationality to thoroughly test the effectiveness of the toolkit being developed.

This will ultimately empower employers to develop the "T-Shape employee profile" (transferable skills across the

horizontal bar and job specific skills along the vertical bar) with tangible benefits for all parties, in terms of economic growth and a more highly skilled workforce.

**Evaluation** - Throughout the implementation phase the employers participating in the pilot activities need to be encouraged to analyse and appraise the toolkit and process, providing honest feedback regarding its effectiveness. By using this "live-testing" methodology the resulting toolkit can be improved, to provide a best practice model, for full and extensive dissemination.

Whilst some of the most important gains can be made by affecting a positive behavioural change when it comes to soft skills training and development among employers, it is not simply enough to address the soft skills agenda at the employment stage. Through the consolidation of the results from cluster activities and previous project results,

the STEPS Cluster has identified two further areas for attention leading to an additional recommendation which supports the core recommendation:

### Start as early as possible

The development and integration of soft skills needs to start as early as possible in an individual's life journey. This requires a fundamental shift of emphasis in the education system across Europe. Soft skills need to be acknowledged, taught and deployed within early years education and then continued throughout life. Soft skills should not just be the domain of informal training activities but should be core to the formal education system, also. There are a number of pioneering models which are already evidencing the impact of this approach and which should be explored and adopted.

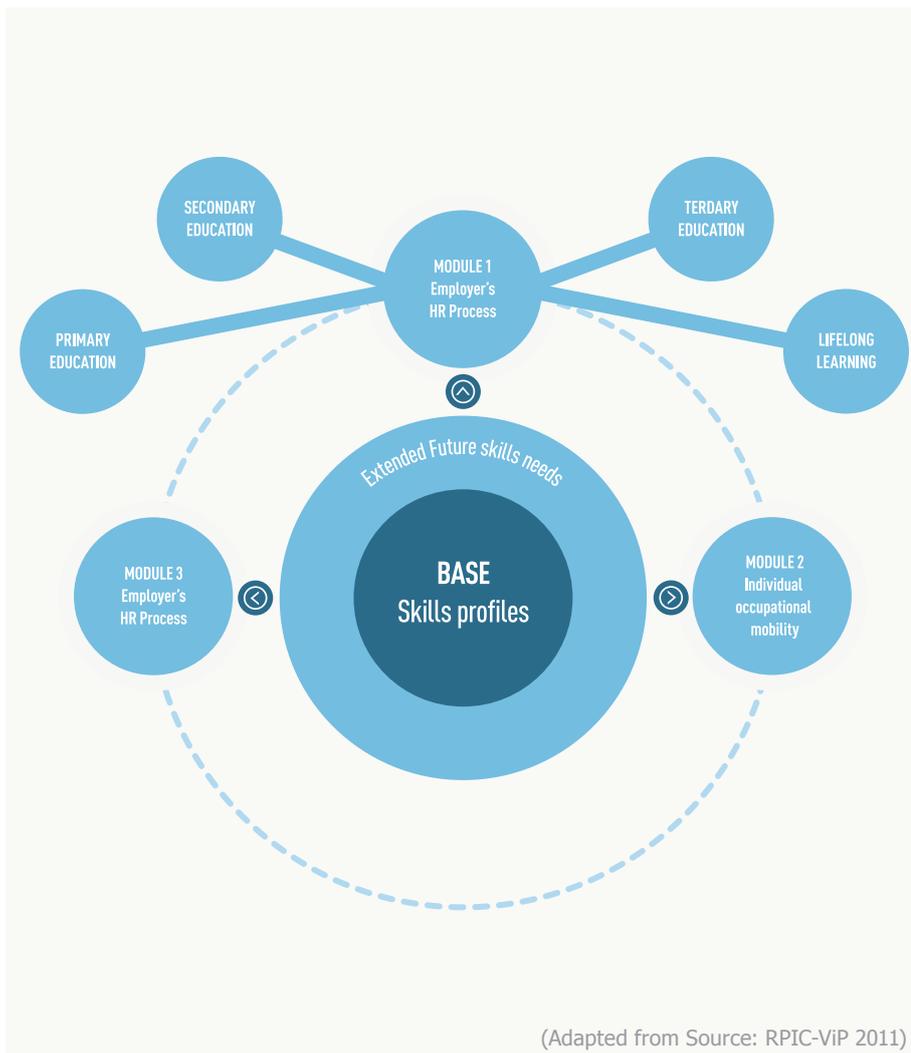
### Improve collaboration between key parties

To bring about lasting change the responsibility does not just lie with one party but rather, it is about achieving collaboration, between all parties. This applies to the education system, public sector services and the business community. To achieve purposeful development and deployment of soft skills all these parties need to have a shared awareness and keen desire to collaborate. This will only be possible if, at a policy level, decision makers liaise across departments (education, community, business) to avoid a siloed, disparate way of policy making, employing a far more holistic approach, involving the key people and sectors, from the outset.

### Supporting Recommendation - Development of a soft skills alliance

The formation of a Europe-wide, cross-sector soft skills alliance will aim to bring together the key stakeholders identified throughout the initial project results phase. The alliance will have the specific remit of developing a communications strategy which shares and disseminates learning, knowledge and tools to a wide ranging audience implicated in the development and furtherance of the soft skills theme. As seen in other sectors, an alliance that builds critical mass and a platform to engage with decision makers will facilitate a process of continuous evaluation and ensure that the soft skills agenda is at the forefront of discussion relating to educational development and business growth. The alliance will become a recognised authority on soft skills, providing a voice for the subject. The strength, diversity and expertise of the alliance will enable further projects to be initiated and the founding work of the STEPS Cluster to be further sustained.

In order for any of these recommendations to become concrete actions there needs to be continued and extended support from policy makers, businesses and funding bodies. If this is achieved then we will see the development of highly effective individuals contributing to a thriving economy and more balanced, inclusive society.



**Managing Editor:** Véronique Weyland-Ammeux,  
Director of the INTERREG IV A 2 Seas Programme.

**Authors and contributors:** Hannah Revell, Rachael Fulford, Oliver Raud,  
Lieselotte Verplancke, Justien Jonckheere, Hanne Denoo, Jan Weststrate,  
Laurence Olivier, Tessa Grefkens, Theo Grefkens.

This issue is produced in the framework of the Cluster works, and coordinated by  
the INTERREG IV A 2 Seas Programme.

This cluster is led by Medway Council. The cluster partnership also gathers  
Plymouth College of Art, Syntra West, Scalda, Mentor, OCMW Kortrijk, Pro Work  
and Maison de l'Initiative.



The contents of the publication reflects its authors' view and do not necessarily reflect the opinions  
of the institutions of the European Union.

The text in this publication is for information purposes only and is not legally binding.

This publication is entirely financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the  
INTERREG IV A 2 Seas Crossborder Programme.



## "Investing in your future"

Crossborder cooperation programme  
2007-2013 Financed by the European Union  
(**European Regional Development Fund**)

STEPS is fully funded by Interreg, an initiative that was initiated by the European Union in 1989 and that strives to stimulate cooperation between specific EU regions. Interreg IV covers the period 2007–2013. Strand A of Interreg helps to finance projects that stimulate cross border cooperation. Within Interreg IVA 53 programmes have been initiated. One of those programmes is the 2 Seas programme, which supports cross-border projects in the coastal regions, adjoining the Channel and the North Sea, of France, England, Belgium and the Netherlands. In the first

semester of 2012, after the closure of the 9th Call for Proposal, the Interreg IVA 2 Seas programme reached its maturity with 86 approved projects. Most of the approved projects are well under way and the first results are being delivered. Therefore, the 2 Seas programme decided to launch capitalisation actions during the course of 2012. STEPS is such an approved capitalisation action aimed at consolidating, valorising and disseminating the various Interreg IVA 2 Seas projects on which the STEPS Cluster is based.

For further information on the 2 Seas Programme,  
please visit our website: [interreg4a-2mers.eu](http://interreg4a-2mers.eu)

### **INTERREG IV A 2 Mers Seas Zeeën**

Secrétariat Technique Conjoint / Joint Technical Secretariat / Gemeenschappelijk Technisch Secretariaat Les  
Arcuriales - 45/D, rue de Tournai - 5<sup>e</sup> étage - F-59000 Lille

**T : +33 (0) 3 20 21 84 80 - F : +33 (0) 3 20 21 84 98 [contact@interreg4a-2mers.eu](mailto:contact@interreg4a-2mers.eu)**



The Interreg 2 Seas Programme is an EU funding programme which promotes crossborder cooperation between partners from France, England, Belgium (Flanders) and The Netherlands. It aims to develop the competitiveness and the sustainable growth potential of maritime and non-maritime issues through the establishment and development of cross border partnerships.