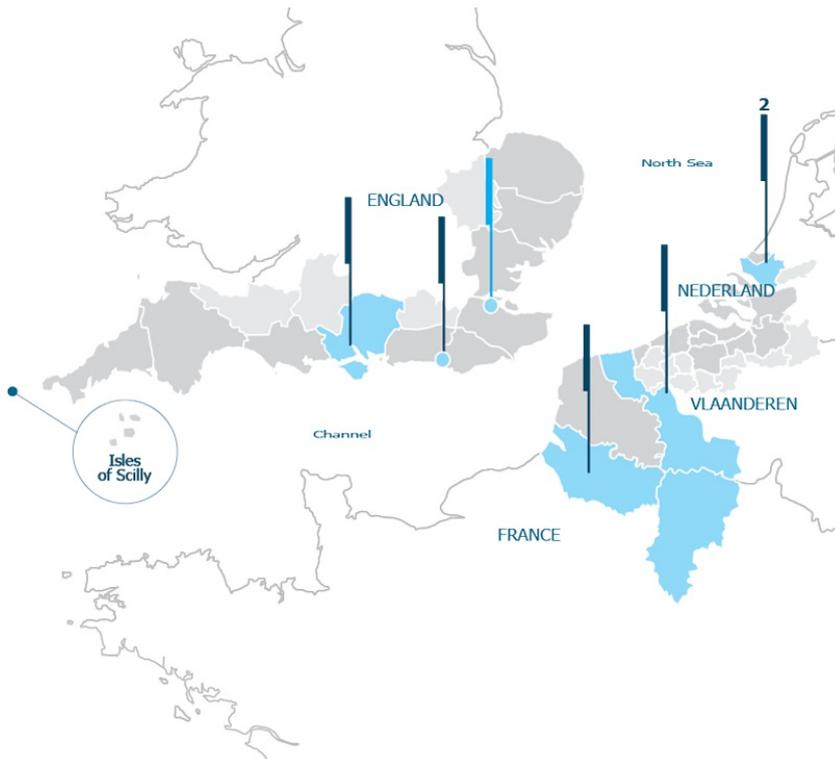


# GAPS

## Filling the GAPS (Graduate and Apprenticeship Placement Scheme)



### ■ Project summary



GAPS aims to enhance and improve employment within the 2 Seas area by developing new skills and strategies for young people. The project gathers together 3 local authorities - Brighton and Hove, Medway and Rotterdam, each facing rising youth unemployment rates. Young people in these areas risk suffering from long-term unemployment and social exclusion. Of particular note for employers across the 2 Seas area is the absence of soft/life skills in many of the young people they recruit. The GAPS project activities will achieve the following aims through: - Closer dialogue with employers to develop innovative new strategies that address employers' skills needs and

inspire confidence for employers to engage with young people. - Cross-border work placements of up to three months, which include language training, promoting the value of such an exercise to both young people and employers. - Creation of a web portal that will host and facilitate GAPS project activities, during and after its lifetime, acting as an on-line recruitment resource to advertise work placements and job opportunities.

### ■ Activities

#### What was the project trying to achieve?

The main aim of the project was to enhance and improve youth employability within the 2 Seas area by placing particular attention on the promotion of young people's soft skills and promoting cross-border work placements (mobility). To put it differently, the main aim of the GAPS project was to reduce youth unemployment mainly in the partnership area. By youth, initially, the project referred to young people in education/training, unemployed and recent graduates. The seven main objectives were: 1- To develop sustainable & flexible cross-border 'Skills & Employment Strategies' that successfully engage employers and lead to the creation of employment for young people 2- To enable young people to gain life/soft skills that increase

their employability & meet employer skills demands 3- To create employment through apprenticeships 4- To produce the results of a research that quantify & evidence the success of GAPS activities in order to further engage employers & young people with GAPS 5- To convince employers and young people of the value of the project & gain commitment to GAPS activities, ensuring they are sustainable and ongoing 6- To develop a web portal to host GAPS activities and act as a living productive legacy of the project 7- To produce an online 'GAPS tool kit' that can be used across the EU to support the development of skills & employment strategies in localities.

### What were the activities implemented?

Activity 1: We shared and learnt about existing skills & employment strategies in the partners' area and whenever or wherever possible we tested and transferred them. Inter alia partners 5 shared the ATA (Apprenticeship Training Agency) model, the City Skills & Jobs Shop and the Alumni network. We visited the Albeda RDM campus, a partnership between employers/VET education/research. Partners 5 and 8 exchanged information on their employers' engagement strategies. Partners 8 and 9 also shared assessment and evaluation methods of international work experiences. PP9 presented the career guidance web-based tool Next Step. PP7 shared its mobility tools. The LP shared and reported (via the GAPS online toolkit) all the lessons learnt and challenges in engaging employers and young people based on the GAPS experience.

Activity 2: We developed a cross-border work placement delivery model. This is also described in the GAPS online toolkit. PP7 provided particularly support in devising and drafting the mobility contracts and the placement descriptions used for the placements along the project. All partners engaged in the delivery of cross-border work placements sending and hosting candidates, though not all partners contributed to the same degree. Among all partners, we delivered 140 cross-border work placements and nearly 230 local apprenticeships.

Activity 3: PP7 (ADICE) delivered the GAPS study in French (shared cost). Indeed, partner 7 worked in close cooperation with the consultant to deliver this, by analyzing and processing jointly the results of the questionnaires. Partner 7 was also in touch particularly with the LP during this process, providing space for remarks. Eventually 203 questionnaires were analysed. The outcomes of the GAPS survey were presented in the final event. Partner 6 did the layout of the GAPS survey (activity 3) while the LP paid for the translation of the study into English.

## ■ Results

### What were the key results of the project?

Activity 1: Setting up of the ATA, 'Skills & Jobs Shop' and Alumni service by PP5. PP9 developed and implemented the "Next Step" web-based tool. Significant exchanges of skills & employment strategies took place, such as the ATA, Next Step, the RDM campus, the partner 7 mobility tools, the Dutch accreditation system, partners 8 and 9 internal assessment methods of international work experiences and the H&S PP5 procedure. Some of these practices were piloted by the partnership. The GAPS online toolkit was delivered.

Activity 2: The GAPS mobility procedural documentation was conceived and put in place. 140 cross-border placements and nearly 230 local apprenticeships delivered among all partners. Additionally over 100 work placements were supported. Work placements were arranged in diverse sectors. All partners provided a supportive pastoral role. Some of these work placements ended up in a job offer.

Both employers and candidates were generally very satisfied with the experience. Good and long-term relations were built between partners and with GAPS employers that will be kept hopefully beyond the GAPS project. Activity 3: PP7 delivered the GAPS study with the support of partners (shared cost). From a qualitative standpoint, the results of the GAPS study provided invaluable information on the value of a cross-border and local work experience.

Communication: A successful and meaningful GAPS launch and final event took place in Rotterdam and Amiens respectively. The project was well disseminated via logos, leaflets, videos, newsletters, local articles, banners, cross-border and local stakeholders events and an informative and attractive GAPS website and Facebook page. LinkedIn was also activated for internal work-related discussions. A Twitter account was created. 10 partnerships meetings were arranged (including workshops). The GAPS website remains available with relevant information and resources as a legacy of the project.

### **Did all partners and territories benefit from the results?**

In general terms, the project made a positive impact in all partners' territories. However because not all partners arranged the same number of work placements, in particular the impact of activity 2 in all partners' territories slightly varied. Specifically, due to the lack of British candidates willing to move to the Netherlands, Dutch partners clearly benefited less from this activity in terms of hosting candidates. Still when a work placement took place, the GAPS survey revealed that this made a positive impact on trainees personally and professionally regardless of whether this takes place at the local or cross-border level. This result is remarkable as it leads to reflect upon the fact that we should not only focus on cross-border mobility (WHAT) as an intervention or action to promote employability and soft/life skills, but a greater focus should be placed on HOW this activity should be implemented in order for the recipients to benefit the most. According to our GAPS survey, the vast majority of (local and cross-border) trainees (85%) gave their work placement a rating of between 7 and 10. As for the activity 1, 3 and communication/dissemination, the impact was more balanced. All partners benefited from these results.

### **What were the effects / outcomes for the territories involved?**

Regarding the activity 1, 3 and communication/dissemination, the effects for each territory involved were virtually identical. Each partner involved shared skills and employment strategies and learnt from others. The GAPS online toolkit was delivered and published on the GAPS website available for a wide range of actors. All partners' territories could use the GAPS study as a way to promote work experiences at large in its future traineeships/ internships operations. The project was also widely disseminated in all partners' territories. Once again the activity 2 might have produced slightly different effects in each territory involved. For instance, this activity allowed the city of Rotterdam (via Zadkine) to create long-term relationships with employers in the Bournemouth area (England). Zadkine has assessed this as a very positive effect. Additionally, Zadkine was very proud to hear the news of one Zadkine student becoming employee of the year and another student becoming employee of the month at the Carlton Hotel Group in Bournemouth. This effect is reciprocal of course, as the hotels in the Bournemouth area benefited from the talent of the Zadkine's students. Furthermore, in France, the effects were very positive particularly in the region of Picardie (Somme and Aisne) as most French hosting companies were accommodating for the first time a European trainee. More importantly, they remained open to collaborate together in the future. Many others were also

happy to host a trainee, but unfortunately we could not offer them a suitable candidate according to their expectations. Even organisations from the Oise also expressed their interest in the GAPS project, but this territory was not eligible in the programming period 2007-2013 under the Interreg IVA 2 seas.

### ■ Distinctiveness

#### **What was the real added-value of doing this cross-border project?**

For various partners, the real added value of doing a cross-border mobility project was the fact of learning from other practices, methods and approaches. Other partners agree that cross-border cooperation helps establishing new partnerships that are sustainable for the future and allow enriching our views and practices at country level. PP8 highlighted that compared to other destinations organizing mobility flows in the partners' areas have been easier in some respects. For PP6, considering this was the first time they participated in an Interreg project, an extra added value was realizing that it is doable to implement a common action with different practices in each country (for instance, trainees do not have the same legal status in the 3 participating countries). PP9 reported that the personal development of our candidates was equally an added value. Candidates enriched considerably from a humanist viewpoint thanks to cross-border mobility.

#### **Have any synergies been developed with other projects or networks?**

Due to the fact that employers were one of our final beneficiaries, synergies have been developed with them. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, new work placements are being arranged with the GAPS employers for 2015. Synergies have also been established with the Southampton Solent University. In return for their support during the lifetime of the GAPS project, we introduced them to various employers in France and the Netherlands in order to agree future placements.

#### **What are the key messages , key lessons learned you would like to share?**

Labour mobility is key to promote employability (economic reasoning) but it also enriches people's horizons and views (human development). Both are equally important. Work experience mobility is a very time-consuming activity; it's essential to have standardized procedures in place to manage adequately expectations and avoid disappointments. Building good relationships with partners is crucial. Understanding not only cultural differences but also the technical and financial capacity of each partner is fundamental. Ensuring that all parties involved understand well their responsibilities. Guaranteeing that all partners share common interests/needs/ambitions. The conception of the project (project proposal) is a crucial step. It is vital that all partners took part at this stage.

## ■ Project Information

<b>Title</b>	Filling the GAPS (Graduate and Apprenticeship Placement Scheme)
<b>Total project budget</b>	€ 3 700 320
<b>ERDF</b>	€ 1 850 160
<b>Priority &amp; objective</b>	Priority 1 e. Promote entrepreneurship and facilitate the development of employment and human capital
<b>Timeframe</b>	2011-06-01 - 2014-09-30
<b>Lead partner</b>	Medway Council
<b>Project Coordinator</b>	Solène FERREIRA(clem.smith@medway.gov.uk)

