

## Kick-start Your Soft Skills (KYSS)

### Abstract

In a rapidly evolving labor market, soft skills are - besides hard skills - indispensable. They have a huge influence on the proper functioning of employees, both in the workplace itself and in interactions with colleagues and customers. Research shows that young adults underestimate the importance of soft skills at the workplace. They don't see which skills employers find important. This skills gap applies to all European countries in which this was investigated (World Economic Forum, 2015; Vandeweyer, 2016). In addition, a relevant part of the youth does not or does not adequately control some of these generic working qualities (Vansteenkiste, 2016). It is therefore a challenge to encourage young people and to guide them in the development of the soft skills they need at the workplace. We target young adults who are on the job market, including students and graduates of higher education (HBO5, bachelor, master). There are already tools available for this target group, but only assessment tools in a commercial setting, no guidance tools that aim and support the development of soft skills. We see a need for tools that can already be used in higher education in the guidance of young adults, e.g. during internships and work-based learning. With these tools to guide the development of soft skills, we aim to prepare young adults for proper functioning at the workplace and thus protect them from unpleasant experiences or even quick dropouts from their first work experiences. Kickstart Your Soft Skills (KYSS) aims to encourage and support young adults to foster their professional development in the field of soft skills. For workplace counselors the project provides materials and methods to coach these young people. By extension, the tools are also likely to be used in career counseling and development of generic competences of older employees.

### Who are we?

The AP Educational Research Unit has experience in instrument development and validation, mixed-method research, and design-oriented research. We already developed self-assessment and feedback tools for learning skills and motivation and also for soft skills, but the latter until now only for youngsters below 18. We also have experience in European projects: Erasmus+, Interreg, as well as ESF. We are part of a university college with 11.000 students, mainly with professional bachelor programmes.

### Target group

We would like to focus on young adults (21 and above, with a higher education degree) who enter the labour market and on their supervisors before, during and after entering the labour market: their supervisors in higher education, in service organizations, and in the professional field, including mentors, supervisors, and HR in general. We are open to broadening the target group.

### Objectives

- Young adults gain insight into relevant generic work qualities (soft skills, professional skills, and work attitudes) to be successful in the workplace. We also want to pay attention to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
- Youngsters reflect on their own soft skills: what talents do they already have, for which soft skills they are less talented, ...
- Young people are given tools to further develop their soft skills.
- Supervisors are given tools to coach young people in an appropriate way in the development of relevant soft skills in the workplace.

### Partner search

We are looking for partners who want to collaborate on the chosen challenges and preferably also have expertise in these matters. We are very interested in partners who have already carried out R & D projects around the development and coaching of soft skills, whether or not in combination with workplace learning. We would like to

- introduce the partner(s) to the tried-and-tested tool and the methodologies we have already developed to strengthen entry into the labour market for young people up to the age of 18;
- get acquainted with the tools and methodologies of partner(s);
- jointly design and develop (a) new relevant tool(s).

### Contact

Herman Van de Mosselaer  
 Project manager education research  
 Artesis Plantijn University College Antwerp  
[herman.vandemosselaer@ap.be](mailto:herman.vandemosselaer@ap.be)