

EVA Skills:
"Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth"



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Project Partners

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The project in short

The project EVASKILLS- Evaluating the soft skills of unemployed youth aims at the transfer of best practices of competence assessment for young persons. Additionally, within the framework of implementation of the project, trainers and other vocational education and training professionals will be trained in the use of tools and methodologies for the evaluation of soft skills and thus their role will be enhanced, as they will be able to provide vocational training courses based on learning outcomes and the validation of previous non-formal and informal training.

The project's objectives...

- Systematization of existing approaches for the assessment of soft skills.
- Formulation of requirements for a suitable assessment methodology.
- Transfer of innovative methodologies for the assessment of skills.
- Improvement of vocational and integration opportunities for young people.
- Improvement of the role of vocational education and training professionals, with a subsequent focus on the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.
- Raising awareness with policy makers for the drafting of vocational education and training policies.

Whom the project addresses...

- Unemployed youth
- Vocational education and training professionals
- Policy makers involved in vocational education and training

1.2. Why develop and assess soft skills ?

It is increasingly difficult for young people with low or no formal qualifications to find a job. However, even without formal training or labour market experience, young person's gather social and personal competencies. These "soft" skills are essential for doing a good job. For some jobs, they may even be the most important elements of qualification. However, employers and those working with young people find it difficult to recognise and assess

these informal skills. Such assessment, though, is important to match employers with potential employees and to define training needs of an unemployed person so as to better satisfy the skill needs of a specific job.

The recognition & validation of non-formal learning is important for individuals as well as for businesses and society as a whole. If such methodologies existed, it would be easier for employees & companies to “keep stock of” their resources, thus providing a better basis for their practice & distribution. This first evaluation leads to the conclusion that structures & methods of competence assessment are indispensable in order to meet the changing requirements of the labour market.

Furthermore, the training of VET professionals in methodologies and tools for the assessment of soft skills is expected to strengthen their role in response to systemic changes such as the shift to learning outcomes & competence-based systems & the growing focus on the validation of prior non-formal & informal learning

1.3. The curriculum in short

The first part of the Curriculum defines Soft skills, Performance, Values and explains the European Qualifications Framework. And then there are a short description of Eva’s E-learning platform and how to assess soft skills.

Syllabus

Section	Topics Different levels
Development of Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Awareness of various types of verbal interaction (conversations, interviews, debates, etc.). ✓ Understanding the main features of written language (formal, informal, scientific, journalistic, colloquial, etc.). ✓ Awareness of the variability of language and communication forms over time and in different geographical, social and Communications environments.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ability to communicate, in written or oral form, and understand, or make others understand, various messages in a variety of situations and for different purposes. Communication includes the ability to listen to and understand various spoken messages in a variety of communicative situations and to speak concisely and clearly. ✓ Ability to read and understand different texts, adopting strategies appropriate to various reading purposes. ✓ Ability to write different types of texts for various purposes, monitor the writing process (from drafting to proof-reading). ✓ Ability to search, collect and process written information, data and concepts in order to use them in study and to organise knowledge in a systematic way. ✓ Ability to formulate one's arguments, in speaking or writing, in a convincing manner and take full account of other viewpoints, whether expressed in written or oral form. ✓ Disposition to approach the opinions and arguments of others with an open mind and engage in constructive and critical dialogue. ✓ Confidence when speaking in public. ✓ Willingness to strive for aesthetic quality in expression beyond the technical correctness of a word/phrase. ✓ Development of a positive attitude to intercultural communication.
<p>Development of Working in a team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Knowledge of available opportunities in order to identify those suited to one's own personal, professional and/or business activities. ✓ Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ability to work co-operatively and flexibly as part of a team. ✓ Being able to identify one's personal strengths and weaknesses. ✓ Positive attitude to change and innovation. ✓ Knowledge processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study. ✓ Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study. ✓ Adapt own behaviour to circumstances when working in teams. ✓ Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change. ✓ Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.
<p>Development of Handling changes/problem solving.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks. ✓ Can identify a problem. ✓ Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools. ✓ Ability to act proactively and respond positively to changes. ✓ Ability to structuring the Problem. ✓ Ability of looking for Possible Solutions. ✓ Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems. ✓ A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information. ✓ To look at each potential solution and carefully analyse it. ✓ Ability of making decisions. ✓ A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions

	<p>to specific problems in a field of work or study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ability to do the Implementation. ✓ Ability to checking that the process was successful. This can be achieved by monitoring and gaining feedback from people affected by any changes that occurred.
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The aims of the Syllabus

- Make effective use of relevant terminology, concepts and methods, and assessment for soft skills.
- Identify soft skills.
- Enhance soft skills.
- Develop the soft skills of communication, Working in a team, Handling changes/problem solving.
- Develop an awareness of the different assessment tools.

2. Definition Soft Skills

Soft skills are recognized globally as being critical to success in life in general for all individuals. Unfortunately, there are many persons and students who do not develop these skills to their fullest potential. Educators, however, believe that the teaching of soft skills is an essential component of the development of a child and these students should be given the chance to explore their social competences.

Soft skills can be described as the ability to, in relation to others, act in such a way that both their own goal and others goals will be achieved. This in conjunction to social norms, values, or expectations and not be viewed negatively by others. For the individual to function in society requires some degree of social competence. All people have some form of it, but different people have their social competences in different areas. A group requires different skills than required between individuals. It does not necessarily mean that an individual who is outgoing in a group have high social competences in all situations. Social competence is not a personality characteristic, but it is a skill (Mannberg, 2001).

A socially competent individual consists not of already attained skills, but individuals are constantly trying to develop and improve their skills. If an individual wants to change their soft

skills , it is not the personality to be changed, but old habits and patterns. People learn social patterns during childhood that have been adapted to the situations they grew up in. The patterns then become a habit that governs the individual and she/he wants to improve their soft skills , she/he must learn to act in a different way. In order to achieve a change you need basic self-reflection and empathy. (Mannberg, 2001).

Soft skills are culture-bound; there are different ways of being, and to regard the world and people in different cultures. It is also time bound and it is included in the social competences to be able to track their time. An awareness of what is happening and to take a position is part of competence. It is also environmentally-bound, a kind of survival skills, then there are different requirements and hazards in different environments. It means being able to see dangers and avoid or challenge them (Herlitz, 2001).

According to Herlitz, there are different parts of the social competences such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, ability to manage conflict, how individuals behave in different situations, empathy, loyalty, honesty, ability to inspire others, problem solving skills, ability to deal with change, emotional intelligence (EQ), thought ethics and humanity.

2.1. Identify assess and develop soft skills

For the individual to function in society it requires some degree of soft skills . All people have some form of it, but different people have their soft skills in different areas. A group requires different skills than required between individuals. It does not necessarily mean that an individual who is outgoing in a group have high soft skills in all situations.

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There is no widely held consensus about how to measure and assess soft skills . The assessment of soft skills can comprise a variety of methods, ranging from self ratings or self reports of behavior, values, and motivations; direct behavioral observations (in natural situations or under experimental conditions); behavior rating scales (to be completed by parents, teacher, employer, subordinates, or self); use of vignettes; interviewing; make observation job tasks and role play; hypothetical scenarios; interpretation of video clips; social network analysis and sociometric approaches; as well as computer simulations.

Ideally the measurement of social competencies should involve different assessment modes, combining self reports, rating scales completed by others, as well as observational data to obtain reliable and valid measures. Instead of direct assessments, multiple measures could be used as indicators of latent constructs, which would also facilitate comparative approaches of assessment and research.

The complexity in the conceptualisation of social competence set out above raises a number of difficulties for assessment.

Main principles of assessment

Validity	The extent to which the interpretation and use of an assessment outcome can be supported by evidence. An assessment is valid if the assessment methods and materials reflect the elements, performance criteria and critical aspects of evidence, and if the assessment outcome is supported by the evidence gathered.
Reliability	The degree of consistency and accuracy of the assessment outcomes; that is, the extent to which the assessment provides similar outcomes for students with equal competence at different times or places, regardless of the assessor conducting the assessment.
Fair	Assessment does not advantage or disadvantage particular students or groups of students. This may mean that assessment methods are adjusted for particular students (such as people with disabilities or cultural differences) to ensure that the methods do not disadvantage them because of their situation.

2.2. Soft skills and EQF

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) ¹ acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. Agreed upon by the European institutions in 2008, the EQF is being put in practice across Europe. It encourages countries to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF so that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to an appropriate EQF level. An EQF national coordination point has been designated for this purpose in each country.

The core of the EQF concerns eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational. This approach shifts the focus from the traditional system which emphasises 'learning inputs', such as the length of a learning experience, or type of institution. It also encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

Based on the recommendations of a Commission services appointed working group, 8 different key competences have been identified: communication in mother tongue, communication in another language, basic competences in maths, science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, interpersonal and civic competences, entrepreneurship and cultural expression.

3. Training material and the online platform

Eva's E-learning training platform will provide the vocational education and training needed for professionals with the potential of participating in e-learning classes, as their physical presence is not always possible. It will also include a cooperation area, which will provide the foundation for the exchange of views and experiences, alongside a useful library of resources.

The aim is to educate/train the trainers, social workers and people who provide services in the professional integration support system, experts for training programs and decision makers in innovative methods of competence assessment.

The platform will include:

Toolkit on soft skills. This toolkit will address unemployed youth and will contain a wealth of tools and methodologies for the enhancing of their soft skills , which will allow unemployed youth to improve their chances of finding a job.

The toolkit on soft skills is designed for VET professionals and career advisors to be used on teenagers or young people that either have no or low qualifications and/or are unemployed. The main target is to enable target groups to reveal young peoples' potential as to soft skills and thereby, supporting them into finding access to the labour market.

The toolkit focuses on three selected competencies:

- communication skills
- working in a team

- handling changes/problem solving.

These soft skills belong to the most required in working life. At the same time, tools of assessing these skills are most required. Therefore, this manual provides tools related to assessing and developing these skills.

Toolkit user guide: The guide will describe analytically the way that the tools can be utilized in order to help unemployed youth cultivate their soft skills.

In general, the Toolkit user guide consist of practical guidelines for trainers from the preparatory phase and implementation to evaluation, good advices and common mistakes and practical examples of using toolbox.

Assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, know-how, skills and competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification.

Basic skills (key competences)

The skills and competences needed to function in contemporary society, e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing and mathematics.

Curriculum

A set of actions followed when setting up a training course: it includes defining training goals, content, methods (including assessment) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers.

Formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Knowledge

The facts, feelings or experiences known by a person or a group of people.

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.

Non formal learning

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.

Skill

The knowledge and experience needed to perform a specific task or job.

References and other useful sources

<http://www.careersportal.ie/interviews/> http://www.actdu.org.au/archives/actein_site/basicskills.html

<http://www.americasdebate.com/>

<http://debate-central.ncpa.org/http://www.belbin.com/>

<http://reflectionsofmyteaching.blogspot.co.at/2012/04/l2l-teamwork-from-pe-to-mfl-to.html>

<http://mindlifesuccess.com/team-roles/http://pbl-online.org/pathway2.html>

<http://gsh.lightspan.com/gsh/teach/articles/design.project.html><http://marshmallowchallenge.com/Instructions.html>

<http://skyscrapermodels.us/>

<http://www.currell.net/models/illinois.htm>

<http://www.papertoys.com/chrysler-building.htm><http://www.gobookee.net/short-stories-for-teaching-problem-solution/>

http://www.education.ucsb.edu/webdata/instruction/hss/Story_Telling/Story_in_Teaching.pdf

<http://jobsearch.about.com/>

Links

DG education & culture on EQF details:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture

How to measure social competencies

http://www.ratswd.de/download/RatSWD_WP_2009/RatSWD_WP_58.pdf,

<http://www.projectatlas.org/publications/assessingwork.pdf>

Research on their importance from the employers' side

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_092054.pdf

Non Cognitive Skills and Personality Traits: Labour Market Relevance and their Development in Education & Training Systems

<http://ftp.iza.org/dp5743.pdf>

European commission

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568>

