

Ballymun Job Centre piloted the Understanding My Journey paper-based Toolkit (Intellectual Output 2) and the web-based App (Intellectual Output 3) with participants on their in-house training programme IN-VEST, an ICT taster course for young people. The activities from the Toolkit's Leadership and Positive Attitude skill sections were integrated into IN-VEST's existing soft skills and project management modules and completed as a group in a classroom setting while the App was used on an individual basis with IN-VEST participants in a career guidance setting. Feedback was collected from the IN-VEST participants, BJC career guidance practitioners, and the IN-VEST course tutors who work for An Cosán, a community education organisation. BJC also piloted the Practitioner Guide (Intellectual Output 4) with the An Cosán tutors and BJC guidance practitioners. The IN-VEST participants' highest education level on the European Qualifications Framework was either Level 2 or Level 4. The participants were between the ages of 16 and 30 with 13 males, 5 females, and one person identifying as other.

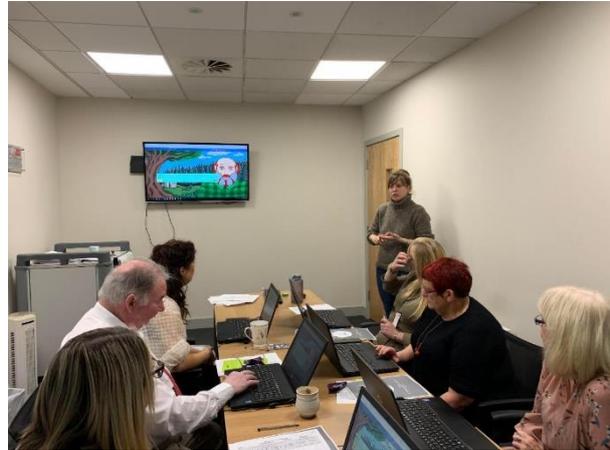
After piloting the Toolkit (IO2), the IN-VEST participants said they found it beneficial and user-friendly. Many of the participants enjoyed completing the Reflecting & Evaluating and Leaving the Journey components of the Toolkit as it helped them to gauge their distance travelled and showed them things about their skillsets that they hadn't noticed before. Participants also noted that the Toolkit gave them a new perspective and greater context on the need for these skills. BJC and An Cosán practitioners found the content of the Toolkit very useful particularly in a group setting and found the abundance of visual exercises allowed all participants to engage regardless of literacy levels. The practitioners also found the Moving On section to be an effective tool for guiding participants' self-reflection on their soft skills developments and accomplishments.

When piloting the App (IO3), the IN-VEST participants appreciated its step-by-step approach to soft skill development with Andreea Bogatu, 30, noting "The app reconfirmed to me the importance of soft skills in our lives." Participants also responded well to having the input of a trusted individual in the self-assessment component and noted that the App encouraged them to question themselves in a positive way through providing real-life scenarios. Of the Positive Attitude section of the App,



Ana Tiron, 28, said, "While completing the Positive Attitude skill, I really liked the idea of a daily diary of positive aspects. It really puts life and the world into a completely different perspective. Sometimes it is hard to find the one positive trait that would make our day brighter but actually reflecting on it can help you notice aspects you never saw or thought of before. And the app helped me get a clearer image of this thought." In addition, participants found that the App's content complemented the paper-based Toolkit very well and liked the use of the mountain journey as a metaphor for soft skills development. Stephen O'Connor, 23, said, "By using both graphics and text it helped you look at things from a few different angles. The mountain was a good metaphor for overcoming a difficult challenge."

The feedback on the App from practitioners was also very positive. They noted that the App has a very clear structure which facilitates explaining abstract concepts to clients. In addition, practitioners found that using the App as a career guidance tool helped to start a conversation with their clients regarding the concept of soft skills and their own soft skills. BJC Career Guidance Practitioner Mandy Creevy remarked, “As we went through the description of each soft skill it opened up a conversation between myself and the young person as they gave examples of how they demonstrated various soft skills in the past. This made the process flow very freely and honestly as they had the opportunity to recap on various situations and also some situations that they are currently dealing with but unsure how to handle. It gave them the opportunity to approach a situation differently and to think about the outcomes they would like to achieve.”



Overall, practitioners appreciated that the App provided them with a different approach to working with clients which in turn equips clients with new skills to handle various situations that may arise in their professional or personal lives.

When piloting the Practitioner Guide (IO4), practitioners found it easy to use with a nice flow between sections. They also said it effectively mapped the essential elements, provided good guidance on how to integrate the UMJ tools into their guidance and teaching practice, and provided useful external resources. Dragana Soro, IN-VEST tutor from An Cosán, said, “The Practitioner Guide provides excellent support and explanation of how to use the UMJ Toolkit with a good breakdown of the sections within the Guide.”

Based on the overwhelmingly positive response to the UMJ tools from both young people and practitioners, the Ballymun Job Centre decided to integrate the use of the tools into the curriculum for IN-VEST 2, a pre-apprenticeship training programme that is a follow-up to the original IN-VEST programme and will run until 2022. BJC guidance practitioners will assist IN-VEST 2 participants with using the tools throughout the programme in order to prepare them for work experience placements. It is envisioned that the participants’ improved awareness of and ability to articulate their own soft skillsets will have a long-term impact on them by preparing them to confidently pursue employment or education opportunities upon completion of the IN-VEST 2 programme.



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