**UMJ Newsletter Spring 2018**

Understanding My Journey, Supporting Soft Skills Development for Young People (UMJ), is an innovative new project sponsored by Erasmus+ with the aim to support young people, and their practitioners in the recognition, development and evidencing of soft skills.

The project is being led by Ballymun Job Centre (Ireland) along with European Partners OAZA (Croatia), STRIM (Poland), Dianova (Spain), Anespo (Portugal), Action Synergy (Greece), IFOA (Italy) and REY Europe (UK).

We are a diverse partnership, in our organisational profiles & target groups. Each partner works with young people on initiatives that aim to increase employability and develop soft skills, such as work schemes and mobility placements. Whilst participants of these initiatives have reported significant changes in terms of their personal development during the interventions which they have taken part in, they are less able to articulate how they have changed using practical & tangible examples of soft skills. This barrier provided the basis for the launch of the UMJ project.

Over the next two and a half years, we will develop a toolkit for young people to enable them to tangibly assess their soft skills development. We will also produce a youth-orientated app to complement this and a guide that will enable youth practitioners to facilitate non-formal learning.

The kickoff meeting for the project was hosted by REY Europe in London in February, and provided a chance for partners to meet and discuss project plans. The two day meeting focused on reviewing the tasks for the project lifetime and getting to grips with a common understanding of Soft Skills Development.

All partners are now working on the first stage of the project which is to compile national reports on the understandings of soft skills by young people and their practitioners. We have engaged directly with these stakeholders in focus groups and through surveys in each partner country to gain a wider range of perspectives, and to identify trends, approaches and good practice.

One of the focus groups conducted by REY Europe revealed that students had generally heard about soft skills and could list a few which had improved as a result of the assignment-based nature of their course. The students anticipated a broader range of skills development as a result of their upcoming work placement, and those students with previous work experience could relate these activities to their soft skills development. However, their responses were broad and struggled to fully explain and describe specific examples drawn from their own experience.

Answers to a questionnaire sent to selected youth practitioners in Portugal by ANESPO, explained that most participants agreed that they had a good understanding of soft skills development and the majority would be willing to trial a toolkit. Out of all the questions, the most participants disagreed that the young people they work with have a good understanding of soft skills development.

The overall results of this research will be discussed at a roundtable event in Dublin in September 2018, details of the event and how to register your attendance will be available shortly. Be sure to follow our updates on the UMJ and partner websites and social media!

Our [facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Understanding-my-Journey-444140089376413/?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser) is now active under “Understanding My Journey”.

