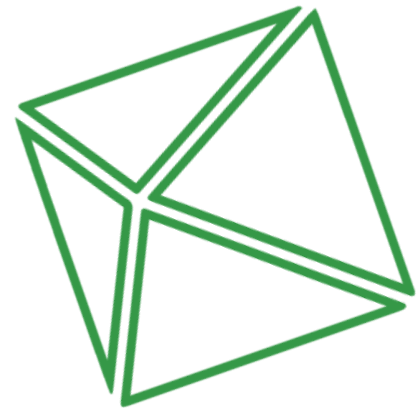
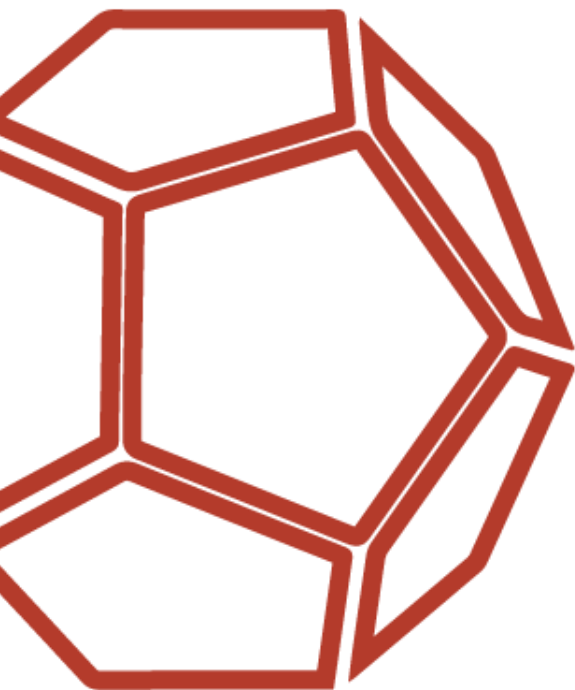




ECSTR 

Employability Competences for
Students Through Implementation
and Recognition of Activities

Implementing and Developing Recognition of Non-Formal Learning Systems



UNIVERSIDAD
DE GRANADA



Vilniaus
universitetas



Vilniaus universiteto
Studentų atstovybė





The document is the delivery of the project “ECSTRA: Employability Competencies for Students Through Implementation and Recognition Activities” (n° 2020-2-LT02-KA205-007038) funded by the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for the Youth programme.

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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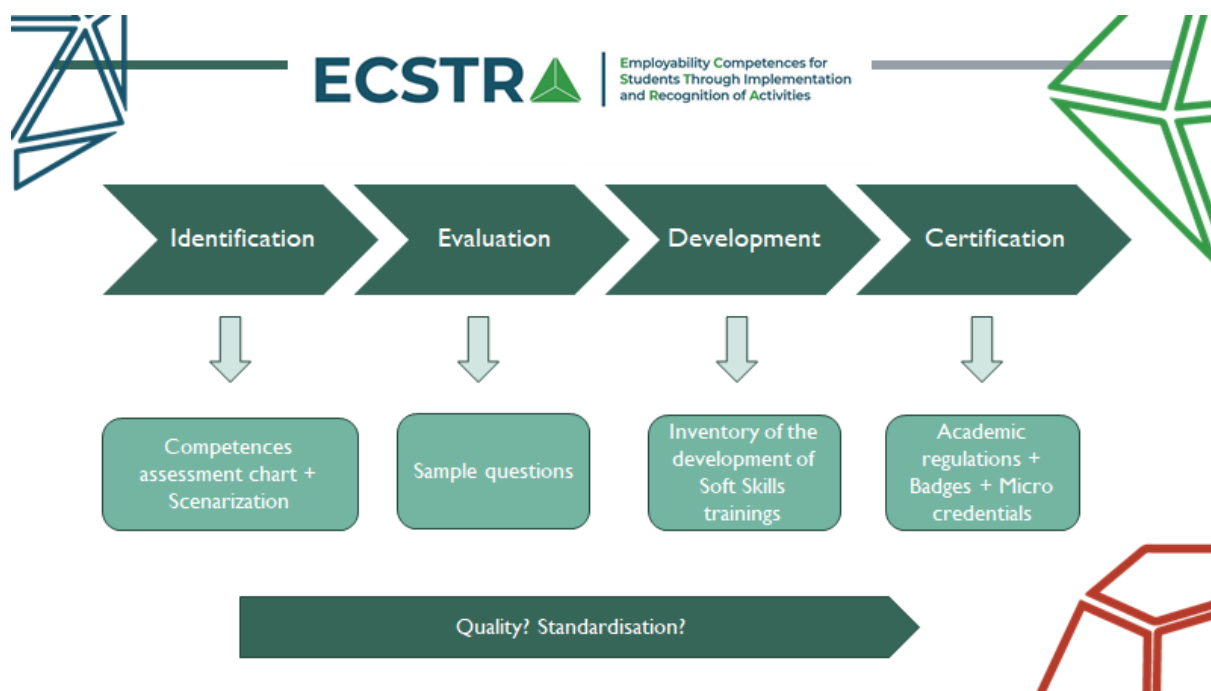
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Non-formal competences recognition framework



INTRODUCTION:

The necessity to acquire and develop soft skills such as the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship has become essential in order to tackle the 21st Century issues. Formal competences, which refer to the knowledge and know-hows acquired during the academic courses have already shown their limits in terms of employability. In an increasingly competitive labour market, students must be able to adapt their employability skills in order to become less vulnerable in the future.

The goal of the ECSTRA project consists in helping students to acquire crucial competencies (entrepreneurship, collaboration, complex problem solving, sustainability and social innovation) through volunteering activities (supported with trainings on different topics related to community management). This approach would involve solving real-life problems through social innovations. In other words, the ECSTRA strategic partnership highlights the relevance of extracurricular activities and the benefits they bring, embrace innovative pedagogical approaches and focus on positive societal impact and youth organisations.

To achieve this objective, the three partner universities of Vilnius, Granada and Saint-Etienne and three student organizations have to fulfil the following tasks:

1. Enabling communities to take the initiative and tackle challenges themselves (creating social initiative canvassing guidebook and template, training community managers);
2. Enabling students to lead initiatives with sustainable long-term impact (providing support for running initiatives, creating e-trainings for initiative coordinators and volunteers, preparing volunteer management guidebook);
3. Improving non-formal competencies recognition systems so it would benefit young people (make recommendations for non-formal competence recognition, create non-formal competence recognition auto-approval standards for initiatives and competence assessment task bank).

The project ambition is that all produced results would not only become everyday good practices for each partner organisations but should also be widely used by other youth organisations, as well as higher education institutions in a near future.

I. Benchmarking practices:

1) Background:

In Europe

As a response to the lifelong learning challenges in education and training degrees, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the 2006/962/EC Recommendations on “Key competences for lifelong learning” based on the “Key Competences for Lifelong Learning-A European Reference Framework”. In this declaration, members states will deploy “efforts to develop education and training systems to implement and disseminate this Recommendation (...) as a reference to facilitate peer learning and the exchange of good practices.”¹

In terms of governance, the European Commission has established an ET 2020 Working Group on adult learning, comprising national experts, representatives of European social partners and civil society members aiming to “exchange and analyse information, and develop policy guidance in the field of adult learning”. On the other hand, a network of National Coordinators has been set up to promote “adult learning, provide policy advice and support, and gather and disseminate best practices”²

¹ European Commission, “Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying the document. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for LifeLong Learning” Brussels, 17/01/2018, available at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018SC0014>

² European Commission, “ ET 2020 Working Groups” Available at :

https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-working-groups_en

As a result of these elements, some Erasmus and PROGRESS (EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation programme) projects tried to systematize and structure the premises of this recommendations. One of the biggest examples is the Erasmus Strategic Partnership project “ECBS for European Cross-border skills”³. Among its multiple objectives, this project aims to develop “tools for articulating and assessing the transversal skills developed in cross-border contexts and to facilitate the exchange of best practices among higher education institutions involved in cross-border projects and collaborations” for bachelor, master and PhD students. In this realm, the YES ME (Young Employment System for Mobility Project in Europe) Project contributes to the « definition of innovative tools to encourage the international mobility of vulnerable students ». ⁴

In France

French legislation has also recognized the place of soft and hard skills in the labour market and the change of paradigm it entails: the modifications on the Professional Training Law of March 2014, the Labour Law of August 2016 and the 2018 Law of Professional Career freedom⁵ are significant examples of this.

One of the major changes concerning the importance of skills, with a specific focus on the hard skills, is related to the implementation of the personal training account or CPF (compte personnel de formation). This account is created for any active worker or job seeker older than 16 years old, allowing them to fund “certified” life-learning courses/lessons to encourage interbranch professional mobility by taking part of structured courses. This system has been put in place so that professionals can adapt to a constantly changing socio-economic environment.

Under this framework, universities and other life-learning institutions were able to adapt their curricula and to propose non-certified short courses, strongly connected to the soft skill development of students and professionals. This appropriation of the CPA framework by universities encouraged important changes on the law, specially concerning the funding of non-certified modules.⁶ In this regard, in 2015 the French Government has launched the Employability and Skills Network or RES (RES, Réseau Emplois Compétences) in order to connect different stakeholders and make them reflect on the needs of employability, training and professional development and how to tackle this. RES is one of the 7 networks coordinated by the Prime Minister’s Strategic and Prospective Bureau, called “France Stratégie”

³ See <https://european-crossborder-skills.eu/en/index.html>

⁴ Commission Européenne, “ YES-ME Description des compétences transversales et personnelles nécessaires pour l'emploi », Bruxelles, Mai 2012, available at : <https://www.skillpass-game.com/sites/default/files/2017-02/YES-ME%20-%20Description%20des%20compe%cc%81tences%20transversales%20et%20personnelles%20ne%cc%81cessaires%20pour%20l'emploi.pdf>

⁵ The 2018 Law on Professional Career Freedom obliges universities to publicly certify and include in the National Registry for Professional certification all the modules and courses provided by them.

⁶ France Stratégie, “Compétences transférables et transversales. Quels outils de repérage de reconnaissance et de valorisation pour les individus et les entreprises ? » Paris, April 2017, available at : https://www.strategie.gouv.fr/sites/strategie.gouv.fr/files/atoms/files/gt2_competences-ok.pdf

Universities play a major role in this strategy. According to the 2013 education orientation law, schools must “become the places where knowledge, skills and culture be born”⁷ and universities should build up pre-professional and transversal skills. The first test was done in 2021 with the implementation of the University Bachelor of Technology in the Universities’ Institutes of Technology based on a double assessment mechanism based on quantitative grades and technical/soft skills evaluation.

At Université Jean Monnet

According to the Academic Regulation Chart of 2020-2021⁸, “any UJM student who carries out a community project under the framework of an association recognised by the university or who participates in a voluntary activity, may submit a request for soft skills recognition during the semester”.

The skills, knowledge and abilities acquired in the context of this voluntary activity can be recognised in two ways, which cannot be combined during the same semester: students can either choose a bonus of 0 to 0.35/20 points on their overall average, or 3 credits outside the curriculum as part of a certification issued by the university in the form of an attestation of university studies. Despite the existence of this recognition mechanism, some problems have been identified: the number of candidates is extremely low in regards to global student population⁹ and the lack of legitimacy in the labour market.

In Spain

Spain has hardly addressed the issues concerning soft skills and their recognition, related to lifelong-learning processes or complementary curricula developed throughout university education. Certification and recognition of students in extracurricular activities is very ambiguous and is ultimately conditioned by the specific regulations of each of the universities.

There are several laws (Volunteering Law, University Law, etc.) in Spain that should consider this topic but, on the contrary, they are very inaccurate and out of date.

⁷ République Française, “LOI n° 2013-595 du 8 juillet 2013 d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'école de la République (1) », Paris, Juillet 2013, available at :

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000027677984/>

⁸ ANNEXE 3 : VALORISATION DE L'ENGAGEMENT DES ETUDIANTS

file:///C:/Users/bl102396/AppData/Local/Temp/UJM-RGE-21-22.pdf

⁹ According to UJM Student Affairs department 419 students asked for the recognition of their activities over the academic year 2021/2022 (except for Telecom and the Institutes of Technologies which directly manage the recognition process). None of them have asked for the attestation of university studies. Therefore, the bonus was chosen by all the students.

According to the Spanish Law which regulates the University, LOMLOU, there is an article 93 related to "University culture", where it is said that students may "obtain academic recognition for their participation in cultural, sports, student representation, solidarity and cooperation university activities".

By Royal Decree 43/2015, Spain only enables in the Curriculum that students obtain a recognition of at least 6 credits on the total of their own academic curriculum, for participation in the aforementioned activities of the LOMLOU.

At the same time, this Royal Decree 43/2015 recognises three types of volunteering that are strongly linked to the University, but always translated into ECTS credits recognition.

- Cultural volunteering
- Sports volunteering
- Educational volunteering

According to the Spanish national law (Law 861/2010), the number of credits recognised for non-official university studies (courses organised by faculties, etc.) and for professional or work experience may not exceed 15% of the credits of the degree.

There is also a recognition of credits for participation in university activities. These are validated as optional credits attesting the student's participation and do not award any real number of credits. A distinction should be made between the different types of university activities, strongly linked to the volunteering law (Law 45/2015) and the Royal Decree 43/2015, but they must be done inside or within the University:

- Cultural activities
- Sports activities
- Student representation activities
- Cooperation and solidarity activities

Some Spanish universities recognize 6, 9 or 12 ECTS credits of extra-curricular activities but they are not specifically non-formal competences at all. In this sense, the University of Granada is leading a Project in order to recognize through complementary curriculum some non-formal competences. There are no non-formal competences described at the national level and that is

the reason why UGR is discussing if Tuning should be their cornerstone or not as a valid European parameter.

In Lithuania

Lithuania has no extensive experience and practices on soft skills recognition within formal higher education content, so each higher education institution has the autonomy to set the ways of soft skills recognition.

In Lithuania, voluntary activities are being conducted under the Law of Voluntary Activities of the Republic of Lithuania, which was adopted in 2011. Article 12 of the Law states that participation in voluntary activities may be recognized as practical work and/or learning experience for the volunteer, depending on the objectives and nature of the activity.

It is needed to mention that the Law of Higher Education and Research of the Republic of Lithuania does not consider appropriately the recognition of voluntary activities. As a result, recognition of voluntary activities within the national legal basis is understood more as the recognition of informal learning. Also, here is a positive trend: since 2016, during the national centralized admissions to Lithuanian higher education institutions, voluntary activities are being credited with extra points (0.25–0.5 extra points, which can be added to the final admission competitive score).

Taking a panorama picture towards Lithuanian higher education institutions, Lithuania has no university which has a full and extensive recognition of generic competencies and soft skills and extra-curricular activities are not being credited.

2) Reference framework on Soft Skills

In Europe

Most reference frameworks based on the combination of labour market needs and the contextual needs of a specific “labour situation”. Bearing this in mind, governmental and European agencies, labour unions, public employment agencies and other public domain stakeholders use a list of different frameworks to define, structure, quantify and certify transversal skills.

In terms of European Standards, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have adopted the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. For each of these domains, some soft skills can be taken and adapted to a particular situation. This document lists 8 key competences¹⁰:

- Literacy competences.
- Languages competences.
- Science, technological, engineering and mathematical competences.
- Digital competences.

¹⁰ Direction générale d'Éducation et Culture, “COMPÉTENCES CLÉS POUR L'ÉDUCATION ET LA FORMATION TOUT AU LONG DE LA VIE Un Cadre de Référence Européen” December 2016, Bruxelles. Available at: https://competencescles.eu/sites/default/files/attachements/keycomp_fr.pdf

- Personal, social and learning competences.
- Civic competences.
- Entrepreneurship competences.
- Cultural awareness and expression competences.¹¹

Following the logic of European Standards, the aforementioned PROGRESS “Yes-Me” project, which operationalizes the European Framework proposes to consider “soft skills” in regards to a double concept of “transversal skills” and attitudes¹²:

- Cognitive competences: enhance the diagnosis and the analysis of a subject.
- Relational and communication competences: The promotion of connections with others, soft behaviour and the styles of communication.
- Strategic and organization competences: in a problem-solving context, how to act autonomously
- Attitudes: personality traits¹³

Domains	Examples
Cognitive competences	Recognize personal mistakes
	Context analysis
	Collecting information
	Personal needs identification
	Results Self-Assessment
Relation and communication competences	Teamwork
	Client communication
	Play roles
	Listening
	Create and maintain relations with others
	Rule respect
	Mediation
Strategic and organization competences	Autonomy
	Prioritization
	Assertiveness
	Urgency management
	Problem solving
	Stress management
	Learning auto-management
	Resource optimization
	Project load work
	Complexity management
Attitudes	Autonomy (Pragmatism, proactivity, investment, enthusiasm)
	Leadership (constructive, assertive, passion, ambition)
	Personality traits (trustworthiness, curiosity, humbleness, adaptability, etc)

¹¹ European Commission, “Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying the document. Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for LifeLong Learning” Op. cit.

¹² Young Employment System for Mobility in Europe project, “Yes-Me Project Guidelines”, Turin 2011, Available at : <https://conseil-recherche-innovation.net/projets/yes-me>

¹³ Commission Européenne, “ YES-ME Description des compétences transversales et personnelles nécessaires pour l'emploi » Op. Cit.

Source : Commission Européenne, “ YES-ME Description des compétences transversales et personnelles nécessaires pour l'emploi », Bruxelles, Mai 2012, page 9.

The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, also known as EntreComp¹⁴ offers a tool to improve the entrepreneurial capacity of European citizens and organisations. The framework aims to build consensus around a common understanding of the entrepreneurship competence by defining a list of 15 competences divided into 3 distinct areas, learning outcomes and proficiency levels that current and future initiatives can refer to. ‘Ideas and opportunities’, ‘Resources’ and ‘Into Action’ are the 3 areas of the conceptual model and they have been labelled to stress the entrepreneurship competence as the ability to transform ideas and opportunities into action by mobilising resources.



The Tuning project put in place in 2000 as part of the Bologna Process aims at converging (tuning) educational structures and learning systems throughout Europe on the basis of diversity and autonomy. The Tuning approach is thus in full compliance with the EQF for HE (Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area) by making European higher education more transparent.¹⁵

According to Tuning, learning outcomes are expressed by levels of competence to be obtained by the learner. On the other hand, Tuning also highlights the fact that two types of competences

¹⁴ EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework:
file:///C:/Users/bl102396/AppData/Local/Temp/lfna27939enn.pdf

¹⁵ The Tuning approach consists of a methodology to (re-) design, develop, implement and evaluate study programmes for each of the Bologna cycles
http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/Publications/ENGLISH_BROCHURE_FOR_WEBSITE.pdf

can be defined: subject-area related (i.e., specific to a field of study) and generic competences (common to any degree course). To make levels of learning comparable the Tuning subject area groups have developed cycle (level) descriptors which are also expressed in terms of competences.

In France

Since the law of April 23 2005, compulsory education programmes have been defined on the basis of a common base of knowledge and skills. Renewed and enriched by the 2013 law, this base is the French translation of the European recommendations on cross-curricular skills.

On the national side, in France there are different frameworks to define relevant soft and hard skills and the ways to certify them. Most of them are attached to the professional branch they are related to. To have an easier assessment, the *Jobs and Positions operational directory*¹⁶ published by the French national employment agency “*Pôle Emploi*” presented a definition of 531 skills defined by professional position to promote interbranch professional mobility, simplifying the procedures, decontextualising the skills and taking them out of a given context.

On the labour union side, Unions’ Observatories propose a framework to define skills for certain number of professional branches.¹⁷

These reference frameworks are supported by the results from national and union’s researchers and improved by the contribution of barometers results. These barometers are built based on private companies’ responses and put through by agencies and think tanks whose objective is to train new professionals.

2021 Soft Skills Demands from Company “Todo Skills” Barometers
1. Curiosity
2. Autonomy
3. Active listening
4. Oral communication
5. Respect
6. Trust
7. Positive attitude
8. Responsibility
9. Integrity
10. Problem solving
11. Innovation openness

Source : Todo Skills Barometer 2021.

¹⁶ The ROME was built by Pôle emploi teams with the contribution of a large network of partners (companies, professional branches and unions, AFPA, etc.), based on a pragmatic approach: inventory of the most common job/occupation names, analysis of activities and skills, grouping of jobs according to a principle of equivalence or proximity. (Information available on the site of Pôle Emploi : <https://www.pole-emploi.org/opendata/repertoire-operationnel-des-meti.html?type=article>)

¹⁷ France Stratégie, “Compétences transférables et transversales. Quels outils de repérage de reconnaissance et de valorisation pour les individus et les entreprises ? » Op. Cit.

3) How to assess soft skills in university contexts: towards a common approach?

In most professional development services and after the definition of soft skills in a situated context, individuals must give their feedback on different personal situations during a personal interview or through different methods (focus groups, twin interviews, scripted situations). Then professional development counsellors must draft a translation of these elements on some soft skills, taking into account the needs to increase, enhance or enroot them into practical situations.

The process of improving, enhancing or enrooting can be handed down through different activities. From the pedagogical side, some modules provided by external lectures can be a good help to boost this kind of skills. One example is the French “success modules”, which are personalized courses improving a wide range of soft skills: oral communication, stress management, time management, team work, written synthesis, fast reading techniques and emotional development intelligence, among other subjects. These cost-free modules are attached to traditional modules and are aimed to improved student competences in their daily life: enhance their work methodology, improve their efficiency and reveal their potential. Despite the subject being important, these modules are not mandatory and they do not give any certification for the student.¹⁸

Apart from the “success modules”, universities can work based on individualized counselling packages such as the UJM’s “Pack Reso” (“*Réussir son orientation*”, pack to foster your professional project) model, the SoftSkills Project from University of Rennes 1¹⁹ or PAREO programme of University of Montpellier 3²⁰. These models are based on a tutored personalized path to improve and enroot soft skills in a planned “professional project” scenario for one student. According to their needs, professional orientation agents can offer a wide range of services to attain the aim to improve some kind of soft skills (individual interviews, workshops, “success modules”, the participation to reorientation forums and the meeting up with professionals in the field)²¹

¹⁸ See UJM’s Professional Development Service “Cap Avenir” : <https://www.univ-st-etienne.fr/fr/formation/orientation-insertion.html>

¹⁹ The SoftSkills project from University of Rennes 1 offers training modules to consolidate their student’s soft skills appraisal. Some skills are promoted, such as teamwork, collaborative and remote work, group dynamics and networking, conflict resolution between peers, facilitation of meetings and work groups based on creative and participative methods, etc. These training modules are proposed on different modalities: “ Soft skills training scheme” based on regular courses, or “ on demand” modules. For more information: <https://suptice.univ-rennes1.fr/projet-softskills#section-2>

²⁰ PAREO or “ Passport for succeeding and be oriented “is a pre-university programme from the University of Montpellier 3. This programme aims to help high school students to improve transversal skill and to construct a professional and individual project associated to university courses. For more information : University of Montpellier 3, “ PAsseport pour Réussir et s’Orienter - Diplôme d’université

“Montpellier, September 2021. Available at: <https://www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/pareo>

²¹ See “Pack Reso” Presentation : <https://www.univ-st-etienne.fr/fr/formation/orientation-insertion/orientation-reorientation/pack-reso-reussir-son-orientation.html>

In more technological degrees, the assessment of soft skills can be included in the whole degree curriculum, as it is the case with the French Technological Bachelor. In these programmes, evaluation is based on grades and soft skills assessment at the same time to improve the pedagogical approach, the multidisciplinary and the adaptation of technological degrees to the demands of the labor market. Each module has a predefined group of soft skills to be evaluated. To evaluate them, teachers and professors must create a “Learning and Assessment situation” (Situation d’apprentissage et d’évaluation, SAE). These are given situations to identify the development of skills in “situated contexts” and the identification of strengths, weaknesses and tools to improve them.²²The “Learning and Assessment Situation” must be structured with Pedagogical Departments which help teachers and social workers to deploy evaluation scenarios. After the LAS, students must start a portfolio with documents and personal declarations to prove the improvement or the failing of the soft skills acquisition via different online platforms, such as ePortfolio.

These soft skills development and evaluation are based on the auto-perception and self-reflection of students, assisted by a professional agent. In this realm, agents need to encourage students to be reflective on their different professional and personal experiences for the experiment to be efficient. Tutoring practices and the professional development agents' closeness is central to the evaluation and the development of these elements.

4) Certification and recognition of soft skills: the French experience

Certification and recognition guarantee an effective transferability of soft skills. However, some skills are predefined in closed professional branch certifications in response to safety demands and national legislations. For instance, in the French Education Code, certificates can be assessed on three obligation levels (France Strategie, 2015: 58)

- A. Reglementary obligation: Official certification containing legal and reglementary obligations
- B. Market obligation: Certifications highly recommended by external stakeholders and the labour market.
- C. Social utility: Directed toward a homogeneous group of skills to reinforce professional development of individuals.

Individuals can validate informal and prior learning experiences individually or in blocs. Individually, the certification can be done based on the CléA (Interprofessional Competences and Interprofessional Branches Certificate)²³. CléA contains a wide range of knowledge and

²² Instituts Universitaires de Technologie, “Le B.U.T. dans une démarche d’Approche Par Compétences IUT de Saint Etienne et Roanne » Non-published

²³ République Française, “Décret n° 2015-172 du 13 février 2015 relatif au socle de connaissances et de compétences professionnelles » Paris, February 2015, Available at : <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000030236421/>

soft skills useful for a person in seven domains.²⁴ On the other hand, students, job seekers and even professionals can certify a skill bloc, considered as mandatory elements for a professional certification.

The education system must adopt these innovations during the bachelor restructuring process and the acquisition of soft-skills must be included in the curriculum.²⁵ French government actually encourages bachelor degrees to adapt their pedagogical offer with competences already existing in the National Inventory (RNCP) aside from the content and quantitative grading.

Despite the intention of connecting national frameworks for the recognition of non-formal competences and university policies, only Technological Bachelors are adapting their assessment policies in that regard. For the other degrees, current university policies encourage social, cultural and political engagement of students using average grades compensation (an increase of 0,35 points in the whole student average) or by a Certificate of University Studies (3 ECTS). Not all types of civic engagement are concerned by the two recognition systems: only voluntary work and the national programs of voluntary work called “civic service” are concerned. For national, artistic or sportive extracurricular activities, students are graded via the average compensation approach. Furthermore, entrepreneurial students can ask to be exempted from the internship, those entrepreneurial activities being able to replace it in their record transcripts.²⁶

II. The ECSTRA model:

In the face of new structural challenges connected to the labour market and the educational innovations proposed by the new Erasmus Charter, ECSTRA was born as a way to tackle these issues and answer to the demand for new schemes targeting recognition of socially-engaged activities. As a result, ECSTRA project and the frameworks created in it will help students involved in volunteering and entrepreneurship activities to develop key competencies valuable on the market by strengthening student initiatives and recognizing them at the institutional level. In order to achieve a non-formal competence recognition framework, ECSTRA proposes a four steps methodology for the recognition of these activities in students’ degrees.

1. Identification

The first step of this methodology is to define the soft skills which will be developed, treated and assessed in a specific context. This identification will start with a definition of them in a

²⁴ France Stratégie, “Compétences transférables et transversales. Quels outils de repérage de reconnaissance et de valorisation pour les individus et les entreprises ? » Op. Cit.

²⁵ France Stratégie, “Compétences transférables et transversales. Quels outils de repérage de reconnaissance et de valorisation pour les individus et les entreprises ? » Op. Cit.

²⁶ Université Jean Monnet, « Règlement General des Etudes 2021-2022 » Saint-Etienne, June 2021, available at : <https://www.univ-st-etienne.fr/fr/formation/reglement-general-des-etudes.html>

common way accepted by all interconnected stakeholders. After this definition, this identification process must include the construction of indicators, levels and possible application to practical cases, if possible.

The first step is also the most crucial. In other words, identifying which competences to evaluate by elaborating a competences assessment grid will enable universities to create a common base for a certain “defined” context. In order to get to this stage, different methodologies are proposed: reaching common points in grouped brainstorming activities, the use of canvassing events, focus groups, etc. As a good practice, a limited number of soft skills must be determined. This will help students to clearly identify them and associated them to their associative/participatory activities.

This participatory activity has also been applied in the ECSTRA context. After the analysis of different cases, ECSTRA will base its approach on five common significant soft skills applicable to each partner’s contexts.

After their selection, an assessment chart was built to name, identify, graduate and contextualise the soft skills associated with ECSTRA. The development of this assessment chart has been based on a mixed-sourced model based on the Tuning framework and the results of ECSTRA internal discussion. As a result of these discussions, five soft skills were selected to be included in the assessment chart:

- **Ability to communicate orally**
- **Teamwork**
- **Leadership**
- **Information and communication skills**
- **Problem solving/Mediation**

Evaluation grid for reviewer:

Ability to communicate orally	Level 1: Assertiveness and Accuracy	Level 2: Interaction	Level 3: Persuasion
Definition: Ability to express clearly and opportunely one’s ideas, knowledge and feelings in a speech, adapting to the audience and the situation to ensure good comprehension and attention in first language at least.	Expressing myself on known and usual subjects.	Able to ask for information on unknown subjects.	Easily managing and persuading audiences, adapting the message and the means employed to the characteristics of the situation

			and audience.
	Expressing my own ideas in a structured intelligible way.	Interacting with different interlocutors by adapting my expression, explaining, developing an idea, an opinion on various subjects, reporting on my activity.	
	Participating opportunely and significantly in informal; formal and structured conversations and discussions.		
Teamwork	Level 1: Integration into a group	Level 2: Proactivity into a group	Level3: Leadership in a group
Definition: Ability to actively participate and cooperate effectively in multi stakeholder teams working to achieve common goals.	Integrating into the group by adopting its codes and rules, knowing my role and carrying out my part of the work.	Contributing to collective work by providing information and making proposals.	Federating, ensuring the dynamic of a task force to achieve a production.
	Actively participating and collaborating in team tasks and promoting confidence, cordiality and focus on shared work.	Contributing to the consolidation and development of the team, fostering communication, balanced distribution of work, good team atmosphere and cohesion.	Thinking, producing together with and coordinating with different internal or external actors.

Leadership	Level 1: Positive management and basic project management notions	Level 2: Anticipation and advanced organisational skills	Level 3: Assertive and ambitious vision and ability to influence others
<p>Definition:</p> <p>Ability to take decisions and have relationships with a constructive management.</p> <p>More specifically, leadership is also the capacity to influence others, to anticipate the future and to positively manage and motivate people toward common goals.</p> <p>In a further extent, it also refers to designing and managing a project.</p>	<p>Listening empathetically, considering the expectations and needs expressed and providing the person with an appropriate response (service or advice)</p>	<p>Detecting needs not expressed by the person, helping to formulate them and proposing appropriate responses.</p>	<p>Proposing and implementing prevention procedures or measures that allow adaptations to hazards or to a particular work situation.</p>
	<p>Preparing daily actions and managing priorities according to deadlines and means available.</p>	<p>Planning weekly or monthly actions and mobilising resources according to the situation, adjusting if necessary.</p>	<p>Continuously developing an open and positive attitude, establishing a relationship of trust with the people I</p>

			meet, anticipating their future needs in order to best respond to their interests.
	Building relationships with individuals and groups, gaining trust and highlighting the benefits of collaboration.	Creating stimulating environments where others (aka. external stakeholders and members of the group) have real opportunities to contribute and ensuring that resources are available to enable others to achieve what is expected of them.	When faced with a complex problematic situation, making hypotheses on the causes and consequences, verifying them, deducing the course of action and acting according to my level of responsibility.
	Taking initiatives and communicating them with conviction and integrity, stimulating others.	Prioritising, planning and anticipating my activities and those of others, considering the global context and hazards.	Facilitating collaboration, cooperation and coalitions between diverse groups with different views in order to improve procedures.
			Exercising influence in

			my own surroundings to achieve desired objectives.
Digital skills	Level 1: Digital environment	Level 2: Basic digital tools	Level 3: Advanced digital tools
<p>Definition:</p> <p>Ability to use various digital tools in order to search for information and to communicate effectively.</p> <p>Utilising computer skills or Information and Communication Techniques (ICTs) as tools for expression and communication, for accessing information sources, for data and document filing, for presentation tasks, for learning, research and co-operative work.</p>	Using digital tools (smartphone, software, applications, etc.) to access location (GPS), production (photo, video), exchange (Social networks, etc.) and online information services.	Selecting applications and software according to my needs, producing content (dashboard, work contract, 2D plans, balance sheet, etc.); managing and promoting one's digital identity, interacting on social networks and platforms while respecting the rules of use, security and data privacy.	Producing and adapting content according to the target, the media (video, messaging, photo, etc.) and the digital tools.
	Using digital tools to search for, select and process information, use online services (using a mailbox, fill in a form, place orders, etc.) and use office automation tools and professional	Editing documents of certain complexity, creating slides presentations and simple web pages.	Interacting in collaborative mode (organising, co-producing, communicating, etc.).

	applications (entering data).		
	Properly managing files, generating documents with a text processor, browsing Internet and using e-mail correctly.		Editing complex text documents, even utilizing macros, and managing spreadsheets through functions and references.
Mediation	Level 1: Empathetical and neutral mediation	Level2: Proactivity and self-reflection	Level3: Problem solving with complex critical issues and consensus building
<p>Definition:</p> <p>Refers to identifying, analysing and defining the significant elements constituting a problem in order to solve it effectively and with good criteria and collaboration with others.</p>	Listening to a complaint in a calm manner and passing it on with neutrality.	Assisting in the search for a compromise in the context of a disagreement, a tense situation between several people or a conflict of interest.	Supporting the search for solutions or agreements between groups or collectives with divergent issues or interests.
	Tempering or calming a tense or conflictual situation between two parties.	Using my own experience and criteria to analyse the causes of a problem and constructing a	In team, proposing and constructing solutions to problems in different

		more efficient, effective solution.	fields, with an overall long-term view.
	Identifying and analysing a problem to generate alternative solutions, applying learned methods.	Identifying and analysing a problem applying a problem-centred method.	

Auto-approval questionnaire for student:

Evaluation of ability to communicate orally		
Level 1: Expressing myself on known and usual subjects.	Am I able to express myself on known and usual subjects when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Expressing my own ideas in a structured intelligible way.	Am I able to express my own ideas in a structured intelligible way when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Participating opportunely and significantly in informal; formal and structured conversations and discussions.	Am I able to participate opportunely and significantly in informal; formal and structured conversations and discussions when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Interacting to ask for information on unknown subjects.	Am I able to interact to ask for information on unknown subjects when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Interacting with different interlocutors by adapting my expression, explaining, developing an idea, an opinion on various subjects, reporting on my activity.	Am I able to interact with different interlocutors by adapting my expression, explain, develop an idea, an opinion on various subjects, report on my activity when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Easily managing and persuading audiences, adapting the message and the means employed to the characteristics of the situation and audience.	Am I able to easily manage and persuade audiences, adapt the message and the means employed to the characteristics of the situation and audience when...?	Activity A

Evaluation of Teamwork		
Level 1: Integrate into the group by adopting its codes and rules, knowing my role and carrying out my part of the work.	Am I able to integrate into the group by adopting its codes and rules, know my role and carry out my part of the work when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Actively participating and collaborate in team tasks and to promote confidence, cordiality and focus on shared work.	Am I able to actively participate and collaborate in team tasks and to promote confidence, cordiality and focus on shared work when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Contributing to collective work by providing information and making proposals.	Am I able to contribute to collective work by providing information and making proposals when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Contributing to the consolidation and development of the team, fostering communication, balanced distribution of work, good team atmosphere and cohesion.	Am I able to contribute to the consolidation and development of the team, fostering communication, balanced distribution of work, good team atmosphere and cohesion when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Federating, ensuring the dynamic of a task force to achieve a production.	Am I able to federate, ensure the dynamic of a task force to achieve a production when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Thinking, producing together and coordinating with different internal or external actors.	Am I able to think, produce together and coordinate with different internal or external actors when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Directing groups, ensuring member integration and high-performance orientation.	Am I able to direct groups, ensure member integration and high-performance orientation when...?	Activity A

Evaluation of Leadership		
Level 1: Listening empathetically, considering the	Am I able to listen empathetically, consider the	Activity A

expectations and needs expressed and providing the person with an appropriate response (service or advice).	expectations and needs expressed and provide the person with an appropriate response (service or advice) when...?	
Level 1: Preparing daily actions and managing priorities according to deadlines and means available.	Am I able to prepare daily actions and manage priorities according to deadlines and means available when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Building relationships with individuals and groups, gaining trust and highlighting the benefits of collaboration.	Am I able to build relationships with individuals and groups, gain trust and highlight the benefits of collaboration when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Taking initiatives and communicating them with conviction and integrity, stimulating others.	Am I able to take initiatives and communicate them with conviction and integrity, stimulating others when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Detecting needs not expressed by the person, help to formulate them and propose appropriate responses.	Am I able to detect needs not expressed by the person, help to formulate them and propose appropriate responses when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Planning weekly or monthly actions and mobilising resources according to the situation, adjusting if necessary.	Am I able to plan weekly or monthly actions and mobilise resources according to the situation, adjusting, if necessary when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Creating stimulating environments where others (aka. external stakeholders and members of the group) have real opportunities to contribute and ensure that resources are available to enable others to achieve what is expected of them.	Am I able to create stimulating environments where others (aka. external stakeholders and members of the group) have real opportunities to contribute and ensure that resources are available to enable others to achieve what is expected of them, when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Prioritising, planning and anticipating my activities and those of others, considering the global context and hazards.	Am I able to prioritise, plan and anticipate my activities and those of others, considering the global context and hazards, when...?	Activity A

Level 3: Proposing and implementing prevention procedures or measures that allow adaptations to hazards or to a particular work situation.	Am I able to propose and implement prevention procedures or measures that allow adaptations to hazards or to a particular work situation, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Continuously developing an open and positive attitude, establishing a relationship of trust with the people you meet, anticipating their future needs in order to best respond to their interests.	Am I able to continuously develop an open and positive attitude, establish a relationship of trust with the people I meet, anticipate their future needs in order to best respond to their interests, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: When faced with a complex problematic situation, making hypotheses on the causes and consequences, verifying them, deducing the course of action and acting according to your level of responsibility.	Am I able to make hypotheses on the causes and consequences, verify them, deduce the course of action and act according to my level of responsibility., when faced with a complex situation...?	Activity A
Level 3: Facilitating collaboration, cooperation and coalitions between diverse groups with different views in order to learn to improve procedures.	Am I able to facilitate collaboration, cooperation and coalitions between diverse groups with different views in order to learn to improve procedures, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Exercising influence in your own surroundings to achieve desired objectives.	Am I able to exercise influence in my own surroundings to achieve desired objectives, when...?	Activity A

Evaluation of Digital skills		
Level 1: Using digital tools (smartphone, software, applications, etc.) to access location (GPS), production (photo, video), exchange (Social networks, etc.) and online information services.	Am I able to use digital tools (smartphone, software, applications, etc.) to access location (GPS), production (photo, video), exchange (Social networks, etc.) and online information services, when...?	Activity A

Level 1: Using digital tools to search for, select and process information, use online services (using a mailbox, fill in a form, place orders, etc.) and using office automation tools and professional applications (entering data).	Am I able to use digital tools to search for, select and process information, use online services (using a mailbox, fill in a form, place orders, etc.) and use office automation tools and professional applications (entering data), when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Properly managing files, generating documents with a text processor, browsing on the Internet and using e-mail correctly.	Am I able to properly manage files, generate documents with a text processor, browse on the Internet and use e-mail correctly, when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Selecting applications and software according to your needs, producing content (dashboard, work contract, 2D plans, balance sheet, etc.); managing and promoting your digital identity, interacting on social networks and platforms while respecting the rules of use and security.	Am I able to select applications and software according to my needs, produce content (dashboard, work contract, 2D plans, balance sheet, etc.); manage and promote one's digital identity, interact on social networks and platforms while respecting the rules of use and security, when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Editing documents of certain complexity, creating slides presentations and simple web pages.	Am I able to edit documents of certain complexity, create slides presentations and simple web pages, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Producing and adapting content according to the target, the media (video, messaging, photo, etc.) and the digital tools.	Am I able to produce and adapt content according to the target, the media (video, messaging, photo, etc.) and the digital tools, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Interacting in collaborative mode (organising, co-producing, communicating, etc.).	Am I able to interact in collaborative mode (organising, co-producing, communicating, etc.), when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Editing complex text documents, even utilizing macros, and managing spreadsheets through functions and references.	Am I able to edit complex text documents, even utilizing macros, and managing spreadsheets through functions and references, when...?	Activity A

Evaluation of Mediation

Level 1: Listening to a complaint in a calm manner and passing it on with neutrality.	Am I able to listen to a complaint in a calm manner and pass it on with neutrality, when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Temporising or calming a tense or conflictual situation between two parties.	Am I able to temporise or calm a tense or conflictual situation between two parties, when...?	Activity A
Level 1: Identifying and analysing a problem to generate alternative solutions, applying learned methods.	Am I able to identify and analyse a problem to generate alternative solutions, applying learned methods, when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Assisting in the search for a compromise in the context of a disagreement, a tense situation between several people or a conflict of interest.	Am I able to assist in the search for a compromise in the context of a disagreement, a tense situation between several people or a conflict of interest when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Using your own experience and criteria to analyse the causes of a problem and constructing a more efficient, effective solution.	Am I able to use my own experience and criteria to analyse the causes of a problem and construct a more efficient, effective solution when...?	Activity A
Level 2: Identifying and analysing a problem applying a problem-centred method.	Am I able to identify and analyse a problem applying a problem-centred method when...?	Activity A
Level 3: Supporting the search for solutions or agreements between groups or collectives with divergent issues or interests.	Am I able to support the search for solutions or agreements between groups or collectives with divergent issues or interests, when...?	Activity A
Level 3: In teams, proposing and constructing solutions to problems in different fields, with an overall long-term view.	Am I able to propose and construct solutions to problems in different fields in teams, with an overall long-term view, when...?	Activity A

It is highly important to contextualise the notions included in the assessment chart. That is the reason why it is essential to promote the debate on previous and, if possible, similar student experiences to “contextualize” the application of the aforementioned skills. In other words, the identification of soft skills also needs to consider the need to imagine some key student initiatives and to deduce the resulting skills.

Three graduation levels of mastery for each skill have been drafted, from the most basic competence to the top key competence. Each level of graduation is also subdivided in multiple sub criterion in order to illustrate a more logical and accurate progression possible.

To illustrate the concrete application of these skills, it is possible to take the example of a food packages distribution by a student solidarity association. The objective in this case is to observe if the students, in this particular event are able or not to use the soft skills previously highlighted and to meet the criteria of teamwork and leadership regarding organisational skills.

2. Evaluation

Evaluation is the second step of ECSTRA methodology. Within this approach, in the evaluation phase, individuals are encouraged to understand their practices based on the competences assessment grid and to reflect on the extent to which the skill is developed while assessing themselves.

The second objective of the project approach is thus to assess the students’ soft skills in context.

Ideally, the aim would be to set up some kind of personalised support for students, managed by career centres. However, this solution has its own limits as every career centre in each university neither has the same material, financial or human resources, nor the time to do so.

In order to solve all these management delivery problems, a self-assessment system has emerged as an interesting evaluation option together with a portfolio approach.

A portfolio approach consists in compiling the work and achievements of each student in a single space. In our case, to differentiate it from the academic portfolio, a personal development tab displaying any extra-curricular activity or student commitment would be implemented, working as a student logbook. This makes it easier to see the student's progress and to identify any areas for improvement. This process seems to be the most suitable and relevant regarding soft skills assessment because of its structure following the EU Commission’s logic of micro-credentials.

Elaborating sample questions within an auto-approval questionnaire could be also a possible option. Based on students' experiences, they have to fill in a questionnaire where they must reflect on the learning experience within the activities deployed.

One of the best practices identified in the project is the "Student Affairs" auto-approval standards certificate²⁷. After a phase of "associated activities" participation, students can obtain some credit by filling in a form.

However useful and innovative, these tools present some technical problems. First of all, questions verbalizing competences used in the questionnaire are extremely generic, making it irrelevant for many students. A crucial issue the coordinators will have to face is how to encourage self-assessment and self-reflection of students. Another aspect making the Student Affairs' model flawed is the fact that this certificate means everything and nothing at the same time regarding its legitimacy on the job market. Apart from that, students might not use this tool because they consider it illegitimate or time consuming without any real impacts on their professional or academic development. As an example, UJM students involved in associations never asked for this certificate and prefer to get a bonus at the end of their semester.

Objectivity is also a matter of conflict. The evaluation can be completed in a non-objective way. To overcome this problem, some solutions can be offered as a peer review system. To do so, a functional administrator makes predefined accesses through the "request peer review" function. This functionality is also based on a predefined competency framework (although some flexibility may be considered). Then, the student can share his portfolio with a peer to get a review. Prior to using the platform, students will receive guidance on the competency-based approach and the use of the portfolio. Regarding the appointment of the functional administrator of this system in the case of UJM, the project coordinators may be able to manage this aspect. The pedagogical department could also take care of this to a lesser extent depending on the number of students involved. As an example, The UJM Institute of Technology, has already tried to implement this method which has proved to be successful as students really do their best to pull each other up by being at the same time both critical and constructive.

Implementing a peer review system may appear challenging as well. First, some might consider this approach to be contrary to the principle of self-evaluation. Moreover, the essential need for reviewers is to have a previous in-depth knowledge of the initiatives led by students and to understand the concepts of soft skills and non-formal competences.

Within the ECSTRA project, a self-assessment grid will be delivered and could be accompanied by an "ePortfolio" methodology. After filling in their ePortfolio on a dedicated platform, students could have access to the auto-approval standards. The results of their

²⁷ At UJM, the Student Affairs department has already implemented a few years ago their own auto-approval questionnaire for students enabling them to indicate which competences they managed to develop during their volunteering activities. Following this, one of the option available is to obtain a specific UJM certificate stating they were involved X amount of time in this or that activity. In addition to that, they also had to fill in a portfolio-based form to justify with more details and justifications the time they dedicated to their activities, whether to obtain the certificate or some extra credits/bonus.

evaluations would then be accessible to their peers collaborating with them on a common project. This would indicate the student's scope for improvement and leave a trace on the student's record. Proofs of students' involvement can be problematic in a certain way because of the difficulty to define which ones can be accepted. To add to that, the psychological impact on the volunteer after self-evaluating him/herself shall be taken into account. Students might be sceptical regarding the portfolio approach as it an intangible resource.

3. Development

Development of soft skills is the third phase of the recognition model. After the awareness raised during the evaluation phase, agents need to have access to a list of modules to improve, start or accelerate the development of the aforementioned soft skills. This is an essential step in order to monitor the relevance of soft skills training practices. This will be based on some specific workshops already available in the list of courses delivered by Career Centres or Professional Development Departments and the potential proposals of new training. As a matter of fact, some new training courses could be set up. Hence the importance to collect feedbacks on these modules because they will enable these departments to develop good practices.

It is highly important to base this development on the specific list of modules, training sessions and personalised services already existing in each partner universities and managed by their career centres, departments which should be seen as key contacts. In order to widen access to trainings and workshops, institutions should carry out a synthesis of the available resources. Then, they have to deploy a communication strategy towards students to disseminate these opportunities.

As an example, at UJM, the career centre (Cap Avenir) aims at providing students with the adequate support to succeed in their professional project. To do so, Cap Avenir has implemented different tools and service available for any student:

- A platform dedicated to professional integration: Career Centre UJM by Jobteaser,
- Individual interviews,
- Group workshops,
- Modules or workshops for professional integration (Activ'Skills program and Modules de réussite Soft Skills for instance)
- PPP (Personal and Professional Project Module),
- Different events (meetings with professionals; "RDV Pro" days of the UJM Foundation)

4. Certification

The last step of this methodology is the Certification. Following the analysis of the evaluation phase and the improvements done during the development phase, agents need to have some kind of certification attesting of the individual "development" of a certain soft skill, for their achievements to be valued by potential employers on the job market during their professional

development career.

Certification allows agents to legitimise and recognise the skills developed in the associative, entrepreneurial or professional activities.

In the scope of the ECSTRA project, different models of certification formats can be considered based on the micro-credentials system promoted by the European Commission.

The first option would be to award students digital badges and integrate them within the e-portfolio platform. Awarding e-badges would be an interesting choice, as this kind of certification could be completely transferable at the European level and integrated within the Europass CV as well. The second option is to award a certificate of associative commitment issued by the student's home university. If agents follow the procedure of the methodology delivery for this kind of skills, these certificates will be easily issued.

Despite its simplicity, this type of certification brings a certain deal of problems when it comes to the recognition of these non-formal skills. First of all, the self-assessment grid might not be compatible with the current model of “associative practices certification” already existing in France. Another source of conflict is the fact that soft skills are unquantifiable competences. As a result, a “physical certificate” or diploma would not appear as very relevant in the eyes of employers.

The diploma supplement can also be used as an additional certification to the standard qualification. Indeed, this tool aims at providing a better understanding of the student studies that were successfully completed. A diploma supplement is therefore an integral part of the micro-credentials format.

A “micro-credential” as defined by the European Commission is “the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards.”²⁸

Any actor, whether education and training institutions or employers able to “design, deliver and issue for formal, non-formal and informal learning” are known as “providers of micro-credentials”.

To describe a micro-credential, the Union has defined some standard elements mentioned on each certification, such as:

- 1) Identification of the learner;**
- 2) Title of the micro-credential;**
- 3) Country/Region of the issuer;**
- 4) Awarding body;**
- 5) Date of issuing;**

²⁸ Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability

- 6) Learning outcomes;**
- 7) Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes;**
- 8) Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential;**
- 9) Type of assessment;**
- 10) Form of participation in the learning activity;**
- 11) Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential.**

In France for instance, it is explicitly mentioned in the academic regulations of each faculty that student associative commitment can be rewarded either by granting this kind of certificate as free ECTS credits within teaching units, or by requesting a bonus of 0.35 points as a maximum on the semester grade average.

Another relevant and existing tool of certification is the APEL system implemented in France since 2002. This process enables to award credits to professionals for full or partial recognition of a diploma. To do so, candidates have to prove the skills and knowledge acquired through their prior professional or associative experiences via an application file and an oral examination in front of a jury. Nevertheless, this option does not concern students interested in recognising student initiatives, but professionals with a long-time experience in their job position.

CONCLUSION:

First of all, the ECSTRA project is a pilot scheme which has enabled all of its stakeholders to exchange on their internal practices regarding non-formal competences' recognition first of all, but also to start thinking on a systemic change towards common standards of recognition. The ECSTRA methodology developed over the academic year 2021/2022 is fully in line with a social innovation approach that all the partner institutions are aligned with.

Although more reflection and structural actions are needed to really start the change, a real political will has emerged from our institutions to continue the work that has been started in order to respond favourably to the European Commission's recommendations on social and pedagogical innovation.

On the other hand, we are fully aware that this transformation can only be achieved through pioneering initiatives such as ours which could potentially raise the collective awareness of all

European higher education institutions.

This complex subject could not have been properly addressed without the careful monitoring and regular consultation all of the partners involved have diligently provided.

The objective has always been clear: to respond to the needs of our young people currently experiencing a difficult and uncertain socio-economic situation and to give them relevant tools to improve their employability.

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