

# Making soft skills visible and relevant for students

# Hello!

---

## Who am I?

- Dr. Karen Verswijvel – Thomas More, Belgium
- Expertise in educational sciences (MSc)
- Expertise in communication sciences (PhD)
- Teaching soft skills

## Contact?

- [Karen.verswijvel@thomasmore.be](mailto:Karen.verswijvel@thomasmore.be)
- LinkedIn



# Hello!

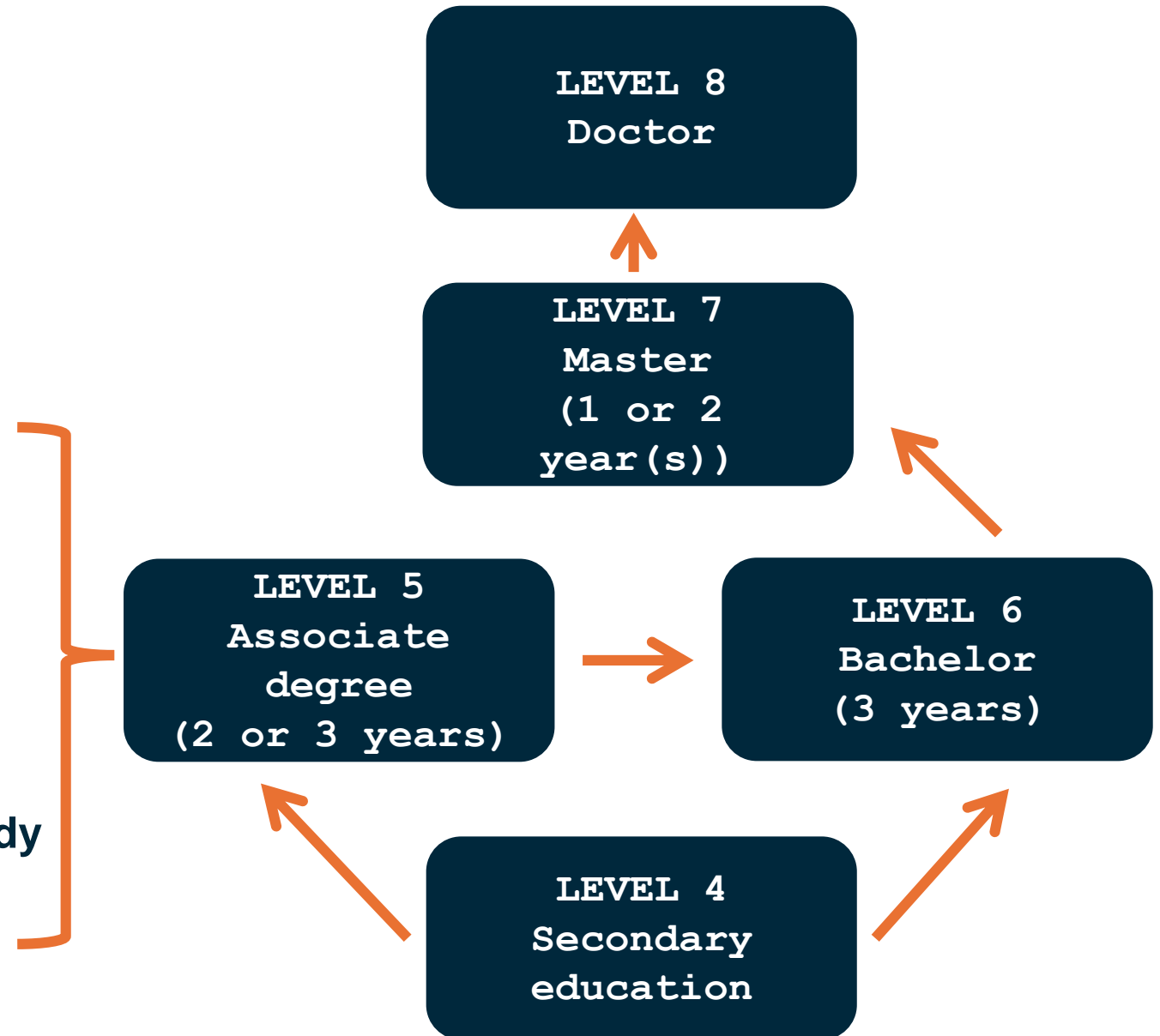
---


## Associate degrees in IT

- Programming
- System and Network Management
- Internet of Things

## Workplace learning (one third of total study load)

- At a company or simulated environment





“Hard skills will develop over time, on the condition that there's a sufficient foundation. However, if someone lacks the appropriate soft skills, we say no. This applies not only to job interviews but also to workplace learning.”

-

Industrial partner

# Young people's view on soft skills

- Soft skills are **unnecessary** ...
- ... or there is **no need to further develop** soft skills as the use of those skills **seems easy**

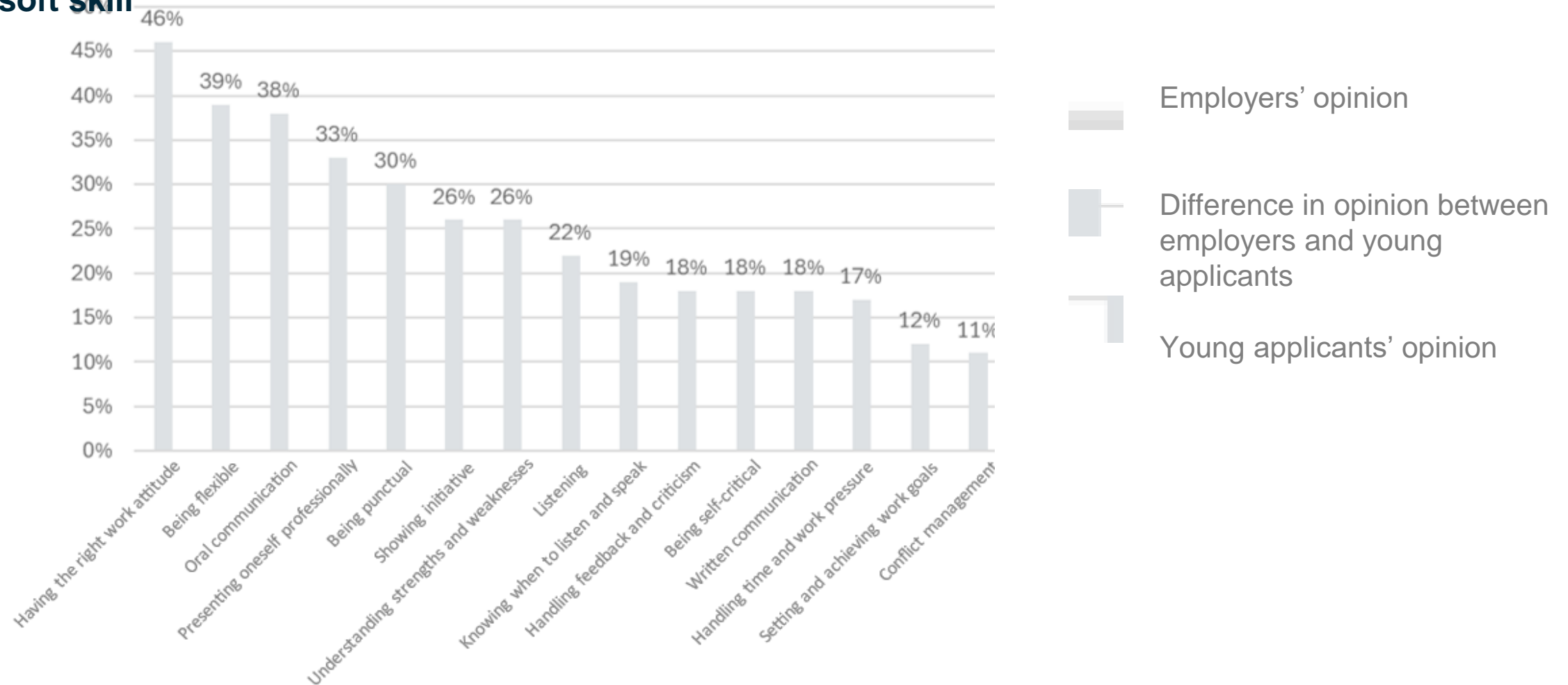


# What does research say?

- Vansteenkiste, S. (2017). Soft skills bij jongeren: cruciaal bij het vinden en behouden van werk. *Werk.focus*, 2017, 1-3, Leuven: Steunpunt Werk.
  - A study between December 2015 and January 2016 ...
  - ... **in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Luxembourg**
  - ... among 530 employers and 1171 young applicants
  - (Erasmus+ project App-titude)

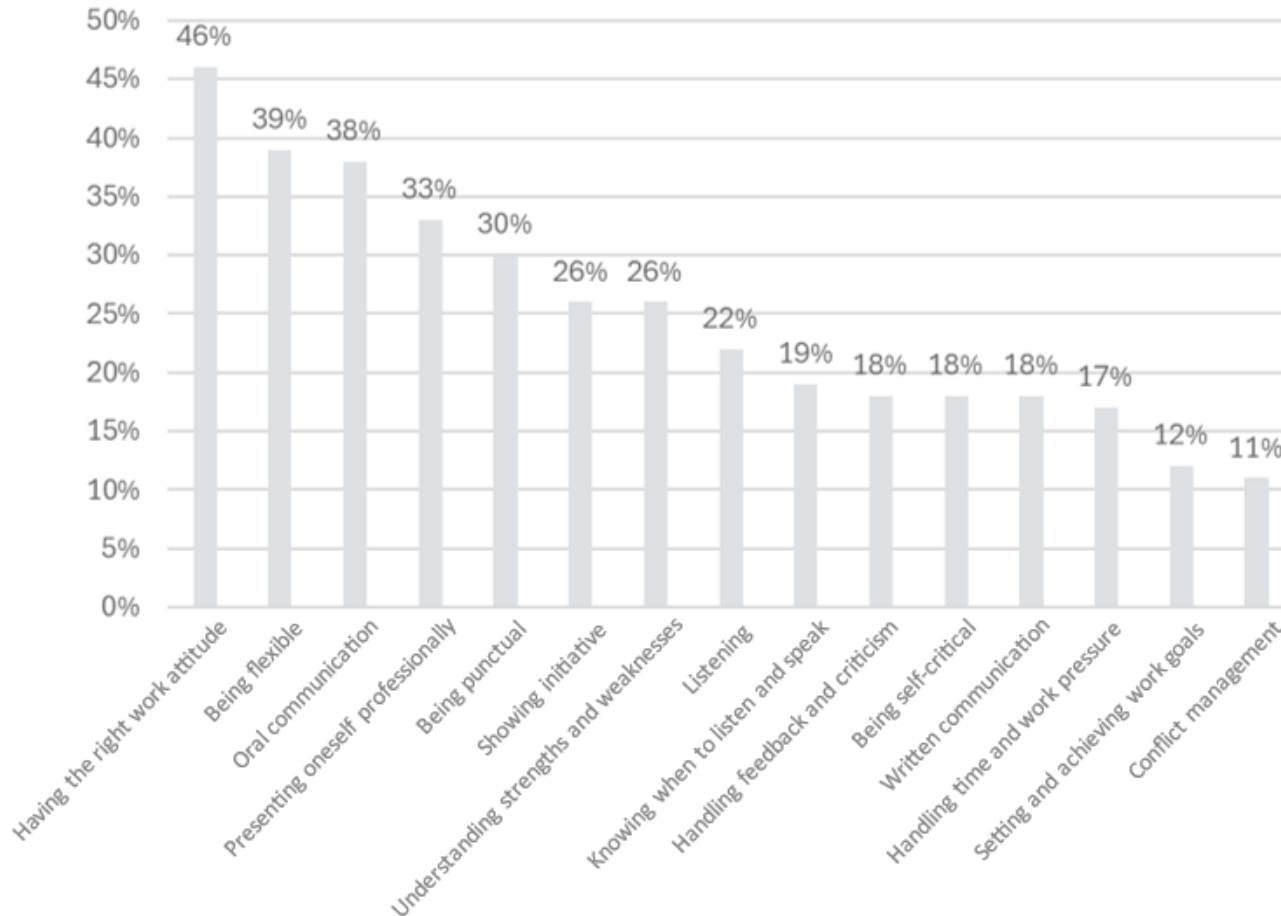
# What does research say?

Percentage of respondents who believe that young applicants do not (or struggle to) possess a soft skill



# What does research say?

Percentage of employers indicating that they did not hire a young applicant due to an issue with their soft skills





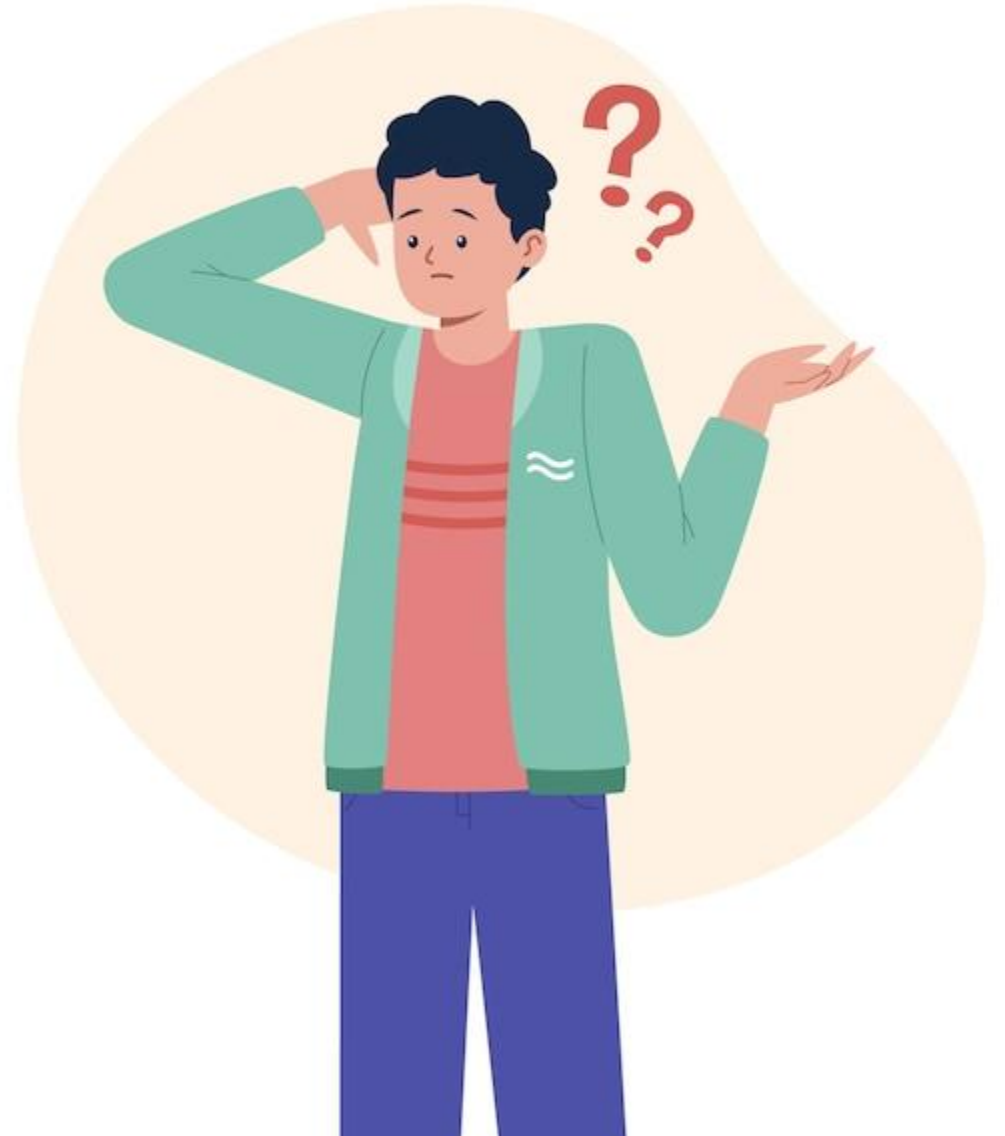
“Soft skills get little respect but will  
make or break your career!”

-  
Peggy Klaus



# So ...

- Take the time to **reflect on your soft skills**
- Take the time do **develop your soft skills**



# Take the time to reflect on your soft skills

- Kickstart Your Soft Skills questionnaire (KYSS-questionnaire)
  - Developed by AP university of applied sciences and arts Antwerp (Belgium)
  - Measures 16 soft skills

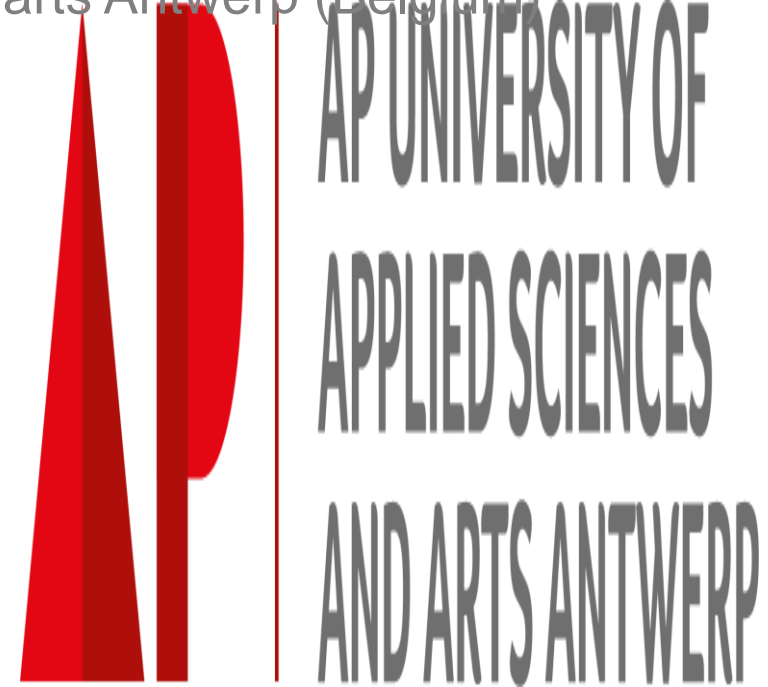
## Do the KYSS test

### Introduction

Want to get a picture of your own soft skills? Then first select which soft skills you want to assess for yourself. Select a minimum of 8. Each soft skill is assessed on the basis of 6 to 7 questions. Answer honestly for yourself: that way you also get a better idea of your strengths and your weaknesses. After answering you will immediately see a feedback report that you can download.















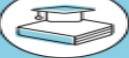

Interactive	Problem solving	Information processing	Personal
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathy	<input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-reflection
<input type="checkbox"/> Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Result-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Analysing	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning & organising
<input type="checkbox"/> Diversity	<input type="checkbox"/> Digital skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation	<input type="checkbox"/> Customer-oriented	<input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to learn	<input type="checkbox"/> Independence

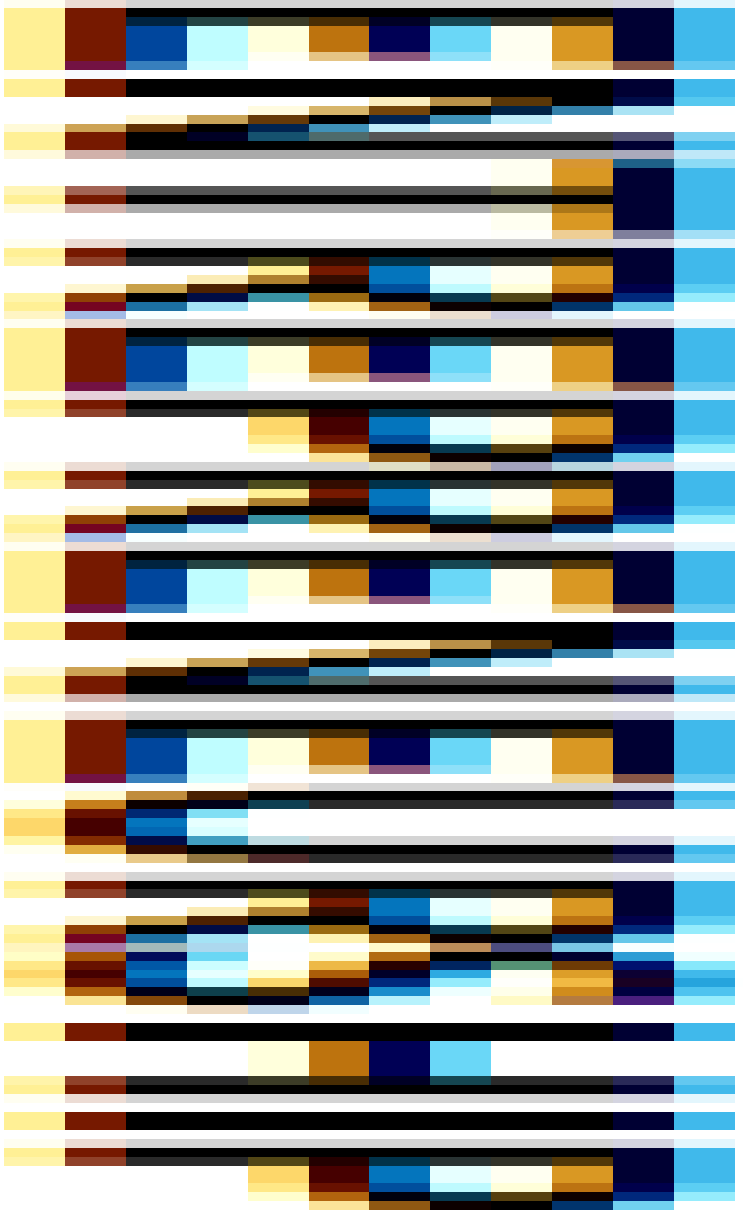
Next



# KYSS-questionnaire – what?

- Select at least 8 soft skills

INTERACTIVE	PROBLEM SOLVING	INFORMATION PROCESSING	PERSONAL
<b>EMPATHY</b>  The extent to which you pay attention to the feelings and needs of others, respect them and respond appropriately.	<b>FLEXIBILITY</b>  The extent to which you adapt your behaviour or way of working to changing situations.	<b>CREATIVITY</b>  The extent to which you develop new and original ideas, solutions or methods.	<b>SELF-REFLECTION</b>  The extent to which you reflect on your own behaviour and take account of feedback from others.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>  The way you communicate information and ideas in writing and/or orally.	<b>RESULT-ORIENTED</b>  The extent to which you think about the results you need to achieve and actively work to achieve them.	<b>ANALYSING</b>  The extent to which you evaluate and make connections between different types of information.	<b>PLANNING &amp; ORGANISING</b>  The way you set goals and priorities and how to achieve them.
<b>DIVERSITY</b>  The attitude you have towards people with a different background to yours and how you deal with them.	<b>DIGITAL SKILLS</b>  The extent to which you have the knowledge and skills to deal with ICT and new developments in this area.	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b>  The extent to which you evaluate and assess information in an objective manner in order to come to your own well-founded conclusion.	<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>  The extent to which you follow agreements, rules, norms and values.
<b>COOPERATION</b>  The way you behave and treat others when working together.	<b>CUSTOMER-ORIENTED</b>  The extent to which you take into account the wishes and needs of customers and act accordingly.	<b>WILLINGNESS TO LEARN</b>  The extent to which you are prepared to develop and expand your knowledge and skills through learning.	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>  The extent to which you take initiative in performing your tasks and are proactive in your work.



# KYSS-questionnaire – feedback report

## YOUR STRENGTHS

1



### RESPONSIBILITY

●●●●● 5,00/5

You realise that, as an employee, you are part of a greater whole. You are convinced that following rules and being accountable leads to a smoother process and a better result. You take responsibility and communicate openly about your work. You follow agreements conscientiously and you are an example to others.

2



### RESULT-ORIENTED

●●●●● 4,16/5

Congratulations, your focus on results is your strength! You start from the results that are expected of you or from the goals that you set yourself. You work towards these goals in a focused way. You have the necessary skills to make quick adjustments when needed and encourage others to do the same.

3



### CRITICAL THINKING

●●●●● 4,02/5

You find it important to be critical with information and do so consistently. You use channels that provide quality information and you consult more than one source. You make time to compare different alternatives before forming an opinion. Others recognise your critical attitude and regularly ask for your feedback.

## YOUR WORKING POINTS

1



### COMMUNICATION

●●●●○ 1,54/5

You find communicating to others a challenge. The language itself (spelling, grammar) is not the main problem. Getting your message across clearly is more difficult. The way in which you present things sometimes comes across wrong to the other person, causing your message to get lost.

2



### INDEPENDENCE

●●●●○ 1,73/5

You have a fairly passive attitude to your work. You do what you are asked to do, but rarely take the initiative. At best, you may identify problems or suggest improvements, but otherwise you let others take the lead. Keep in mind that autonomy may be expected of you in the future or in another job.

3

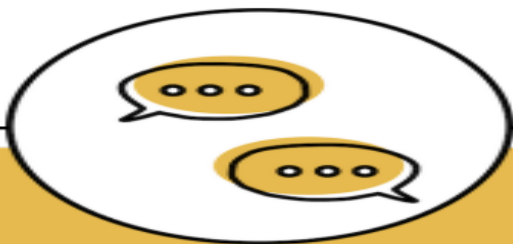


### COOPERATION

●●●●○ 2,37/5

You see the added value of working together and take a constructive role in the team. You are open to feedback, try to contribute yourself and help others along. In practice, you do not always take cooperation for granted and resolving conflicts remains a challenge. There is still room to work on your skills.

# KYSS-questionnaire – feedback report



## COMMUNICATION

The way you communicate information and ideas in writing and/or orally.

**1,54/5**



### FEEDBACK

You find communicating to others a challenge. The language itself (spelling, grammar) is not the main problem. Getting your message across clearly is more difficult. The way in which you present things sometimes comes across wrong to the other person, causing your message to get lost.

### TIPS

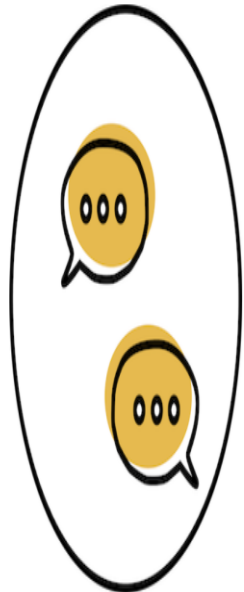
1. After a conversation, meeting or presentation, ask your discussion partner(s) if your story came across clearly and what you should improve.
2. Try asking questions about what the other person said and summarise it, or ask questions to check whether you understood the other person correctly.
3. Before a presentation or meeting, write down in detail what you want to say exactly. This helps to formulate your message concisely and your conversation partner will understand you

**MORE TIPS**

**“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” - Shaw**

# KYSS-questionnaire – feedback report

## Communication

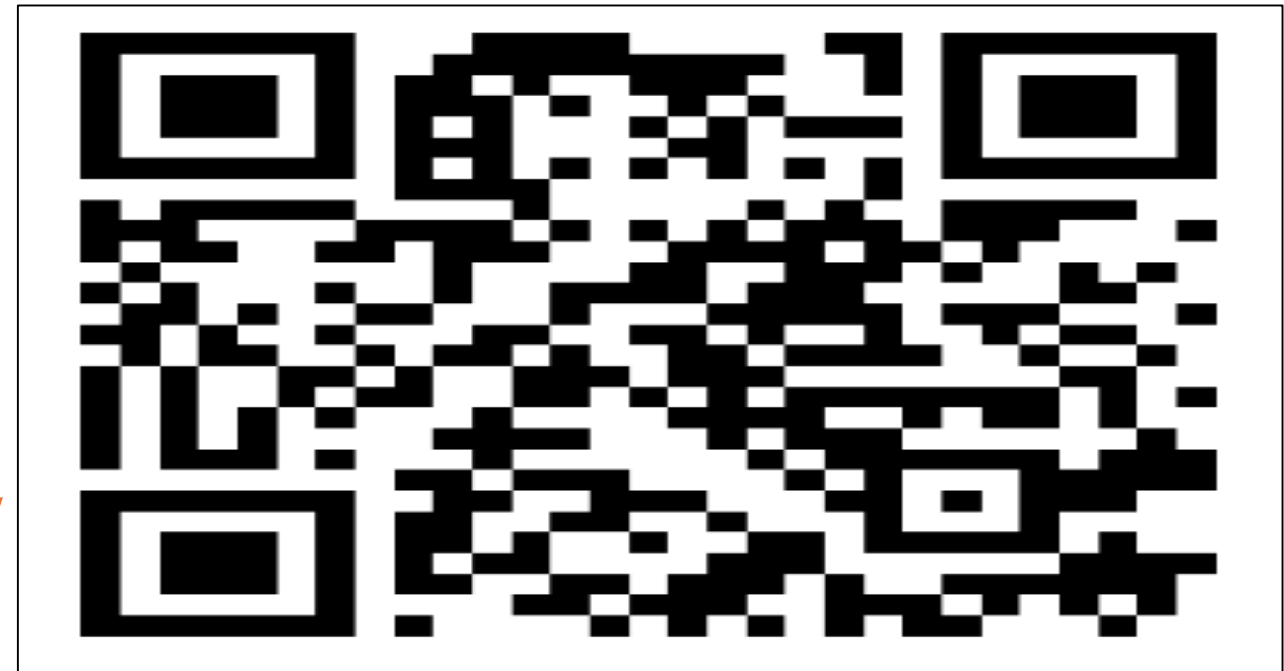


Communication

The way you communicate information and ideas in writing and/or orally.

### More tips

1. Learning to communicate, and more specifically learning to listen, to express yourself and to present, is a matter of doing. The more you do it, the better you will become. 2. Do you have problems with writing? Reading newspapers, magazines and books helps to develop your language skills. 3. After a conversation, meeting or presentation, ask your discussion partner(s) if your story came across clearly and what you should improve. 4. Try asking questions about what the other person said and summarise it, or ask questions to check whether you understood the other person correctly. 5. Before a presentation or meeting, write down in detail what you want to say exactly. This helps to formulate your message concisely and your conversation partner will understand you better. 6. In case of a difficult message, try to think in advance what your message is exactly and try to stick to it in the conversation. Let yourself be guided by what you have to say and focus less on how the other person reacts. 7. Don't be afraid to be asking about the core of your conversation partner's message is clear to you. Also try to respond to non-verbal signals. 8. Try to challenge yourself by seeking out more difficult situations, for example by verbalising a difficult problem or explaining an idea of yours to a group of people. 9. Be careful not to talk too much and listen too little, or to overlook someone who is quiet and does not dare to speak up. 10. Use your strength to help others communicate. 11. Also dare to engage in connective communication in case of conflict: actively listen to the others in the conflict, ask questions and try to get to the heart of the problem.





# KYSS-questionnaire - where?

- <https://kickstart.goleweb.be/en/take/3563>



# Take the time do develop your soft skills

- Throughout your professional career
- Throughout your **academic career**



# Hello!

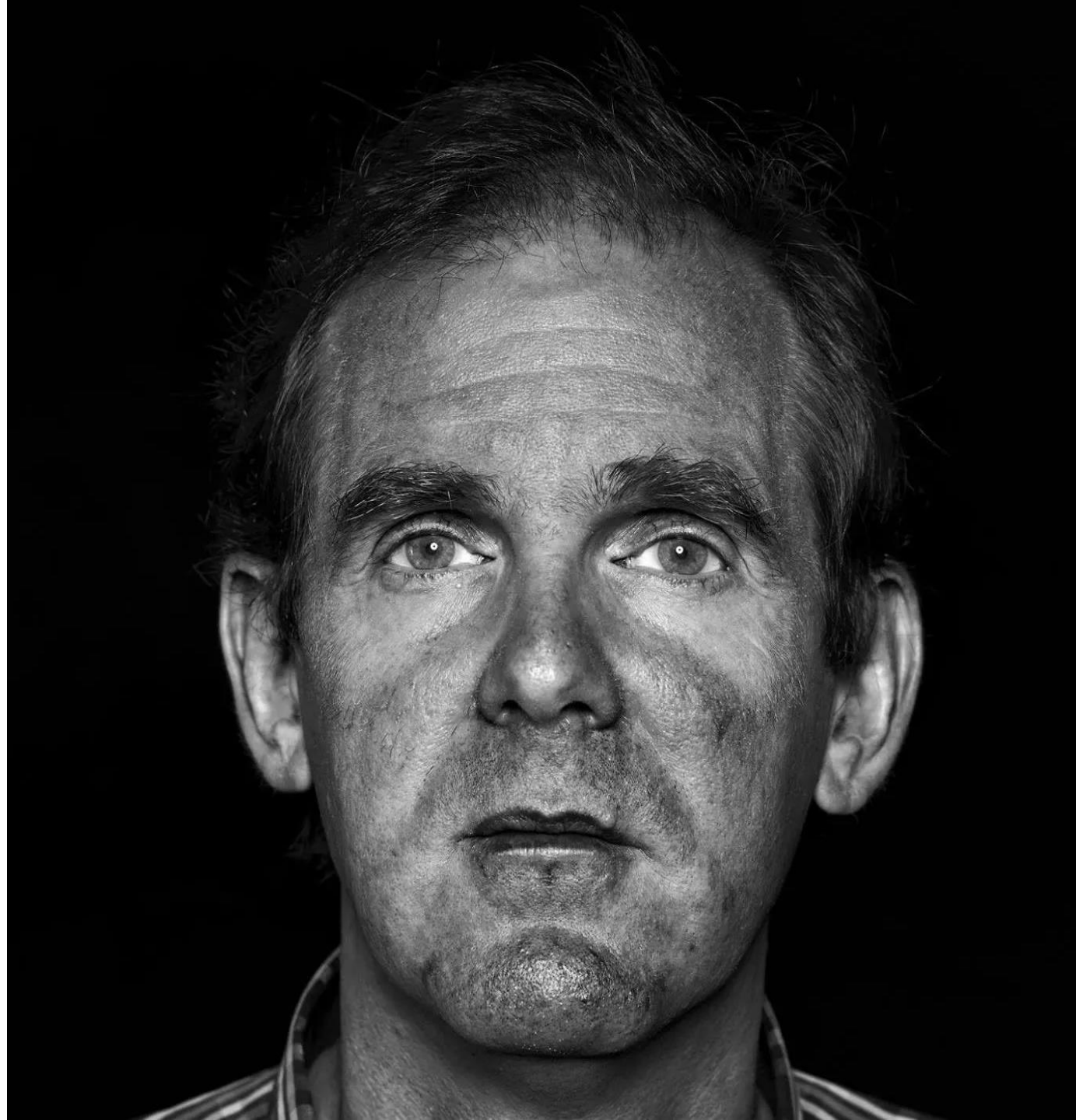
---

## Who am I?

- Maarten Van Lint – Thomas More, Belgium
- Expertise in electronic engineering (MSc)
- Coordinator workplace learning
- Teaching embedded systems / projects

## Contact?

- [Maarten.vanlint@thomasmore.be](mailto:Maarten.vanlint@thomasmore.be)
- LinkedIn



# Throughout academic career - approach

- Workplace learning (one third of total study load)
  - Sem. 01: Introduction to the job
  - Sem. 02: Project at school
  - Sem. 03: Getting “a job” (workplace)
  - Sem. 04: Workplace in industry

# Throughout academic career - approach

- Workplace learning with a focus on **combining hard skills and soft skills**
  - Discussed soft skills (implemented)
  - Lifelong learning (implemented)
  - Self-regulated learning (pilot)

# Discussed soft skills

- E.g., **project at school** (setting up a computer network), **where students must ...**
  - Work in a team
  - Write down a manual
  - Organize meetings
  - Reflect on the project, the team, and the person himself/herself
  - Give each other feedback
  - Handle conflicts
  - Give a presentation



# However, ...

- Students only apply soft skills where it is required
  - The separate courses
  - The parts in workplace learning where it is required
- Insufficient integration of soft skills

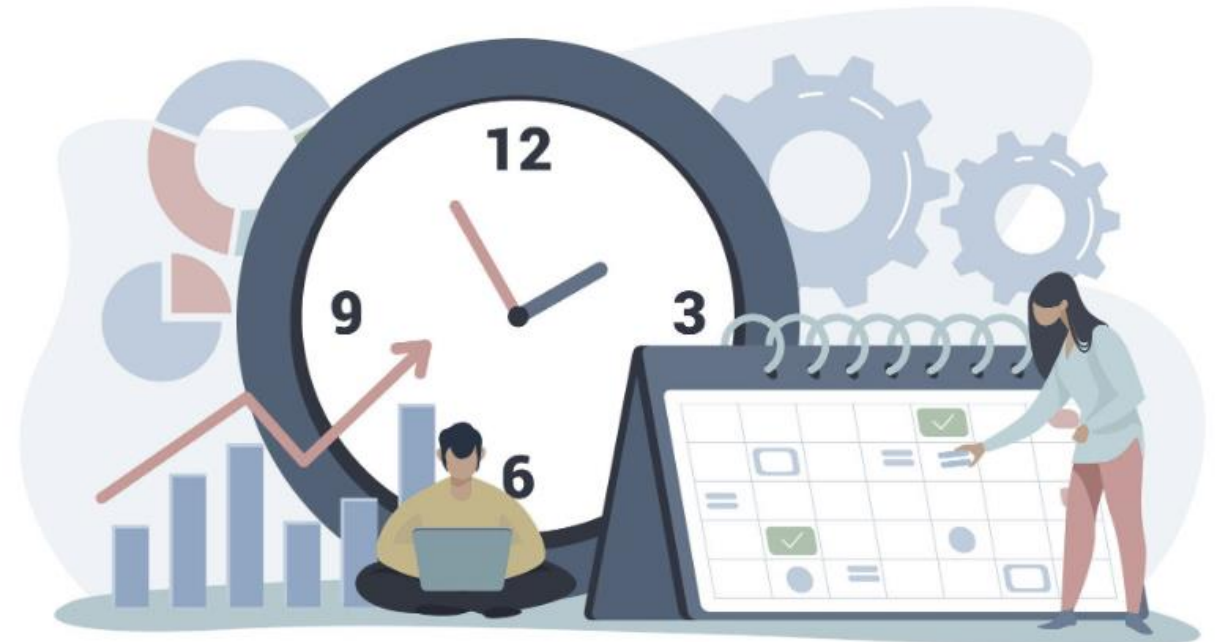
# Next iteration ...

- Why not integrate it in the whole curriculum?
- Hurdles to take
  - Convince technical teaching staff (probably support/coach the at the beginning)
  - Every staff member must enforce consequently
  - Not only during courses but during the whole study (@ home when studying: **self-regulated learning**)



# Self-regulated learning

- Self-regulated learning as students easily have problems with ...
  - Taking (the right) initiative
  - Planning
  - Structuring
  - Review material at home



# Self-regulated learning

- From the startup of the programs coaching was provided
  - How to plan studying?
  - How to prepare for exams?
  - Discussions on progress (in group and in person)

**Instructor directed ↔ student directed**

# Self-regulated learning

- Problems when only coaching
  - Some students overestimate themselves
  - It is advisory → students cannot be forced
  - Effort @ home is minimal

# Self-regulated learning (pilot)

- E.g., video presentations which should be reviewed at home

- Next session

- ☞ Q&A and feedback on course material

- ☞ Test (to force them reviewing)

- ☞ Practice makes perfect

- Intermediate discussion

- ☞ Has their learning method improved?

# Thanks!



[Karen.verswijvel@thomasmore.be](mailto:Karen.verswijvel@thomasmore.be)



[Maarten.vanlint@thomasmore.be](mailto:Maarten.vanlint@thomasmore.be)