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THE SKILLS4LIFE TRAINERS' GUIDE

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Introduction to this Guide

This Training Guide is for educators working with children and young people in secure (or community) youth justice settings. It has been developed as part of an EU Erasmus funded Project by partners in Italy, France, Greece, and the UK, however, it can be used by any educators working in settings supporting children and young people transitioning back into communities.

This Guide is designed to support educators who are implementing the Skills4Life Curriculum in their settings. It is recommended that you read this Guide before implementing the Curriculum in order to familiarise yourself with some of the underlying evidence and theory that sits behind the development of the Curriculum. It also supports you in some of the challenges you may face when implementing the Curriculum in challenging secure youth justice settings and how you may overcome them.

The Training Guide is written with you in mind, the context you work in as well as the children and young people you work with. In this way, this Guide and the Skills4Life Curriculum together are a unique resource designed to help you best support your learners and prepare them for life after being in a custodial setting.

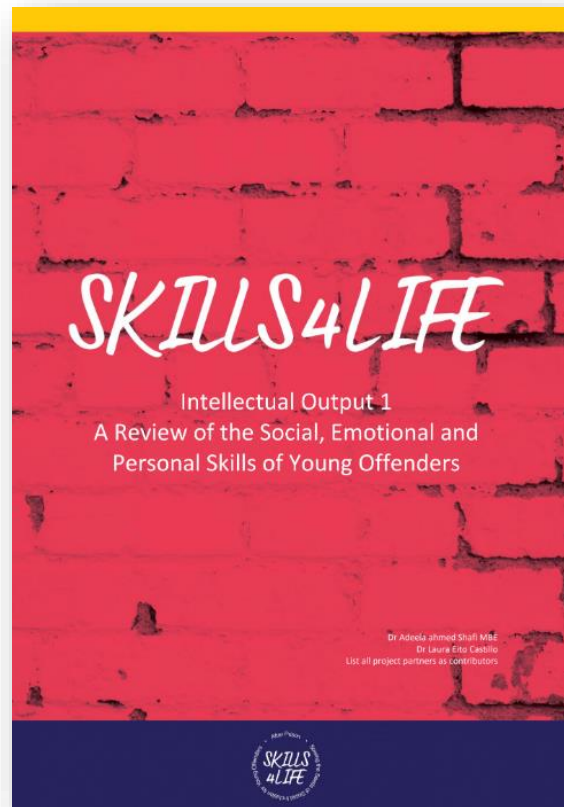
Why have a Curriculum – a theoretical understanding

It is useful to know some of the theoretical underpinnings that serve as a foundation for how this Curriculum was developed. It will give you a deeper understanding of some of the design of the content and activities in the Curriculum. This section in the Training Guide gives you some detail of these and are drawn from a more fuller Literature Review which was conducted for this Project. You can find this document on our [Skills4Life website](#).

The Role of Prison Education in Desistance

There is much evidence which suggests that engaging in educational opportunities in prison (and outside) helps children and young people to seek alternative and non-offending life choices (Lanskey, 2015). However, children and young people in conflict with the law are often disengaged with education and learning (ahmed Shafi et al., 2018) which presents challenges for them in benefitting from educational opportunities. Disengagement is often driven by emotional barriers, and we know that young people in custody have complex emotions, some of which are directly related to being incarcerated (ahmed Shafi, 2020). These emotions need to be considered in any programme to eliminate those barriers and promote engagement.

Thus, building a good relationship with young people in conflict with the law is crucial to encourage engagement (Baker, 2017) and suggests how educators in the custodial setting can play a key role in re-engagement. This good relationship is built



with a willingness to understand the young person's experiences, showing genuine interest and creating an atmosphere of trust because supportive relationships act as a promoter of engagement (O'Carroll, 2016).

In the UK context, Her Majesty Inspectorate of Probation (2016) found that those young people who had been successful in resettlement believe that interventions which provided problem solving solutions for daily life situations were especially helpful for their resettlement. But often support and programmes focus in one specific skill, instead of seeing the young person in a holistic way. Furthermore, recent research on desistance from crime have found that improving these skills is not enough in preventing reoffending, as other factors such as agency and identity have an important role (Wigzell, 2021). Therefore, attention to personal development skills is needed. Training in, for example, social skills can improve conflict resolution or resistance to peer pressure (van der Stowe et al., 2016). Research has shown that these programmes are effective when they include active and practical components where the young people can practice the skills they learn (United Nations, 2018).

Desistance Theory and the Role of Individual Agency

It is important to promote engagement with a programme for it to be effective. These ideas are supported by the United Nations (2018), which highlights that programmes based on desistance theory need to promote motivation, human capital - such as self-efficacy and agency - and social capital, which includes factors such as supportive relationships and employment.

Participating in prison education can promote a positive identity (Szifris et al., 2018). In their theory of prison education, Szifris et al. (2018) argue that "prison education can provide the structural opportunity required to develop a new identity". However, this only happens when two key elements are present:

- where the facilitator/educator promotes a culture of growth and development within the programme
- where the children and young people are engaged with the education programme

These ideas are supported by the findings of Munford and Sanders (2015) who explored the development of a positive identity in young people who had been in contact with multiple institutional services, including youth justice. They highlighted that due to their often-difficult circumstances, they lacked opportunities to test out

different identities. They had often dropped out early from education, which limited their opportunities. Those who had been able to reengage with education found that it allowed them to experience others sense of self. However, this only happened if they felt secure and had strong safe relationships with the relevant adults working in those settings.

Youth work and youth empowerment through non-formal and informal learning

The main challenge facing any of us trying to empower young people through non-formal means is ensuring quality engagement from the young people. Engagement is considered key to learning and academic success (Crick, 2012; Fredricks, Filsecker, and Lawson, 2016) and it has been shown to have benefits with regards to delinquent behaviours such as truanting, substance abuse, and eventual offending (Hirschfield and Gasper, 2011; Wang and Fredricks, 2014).

It is important to note that many young people in conflict with the law have dropped out of school already, and this adds an additional layer of challenge to reengagement with education (ahmed Shafi et al., 2018).

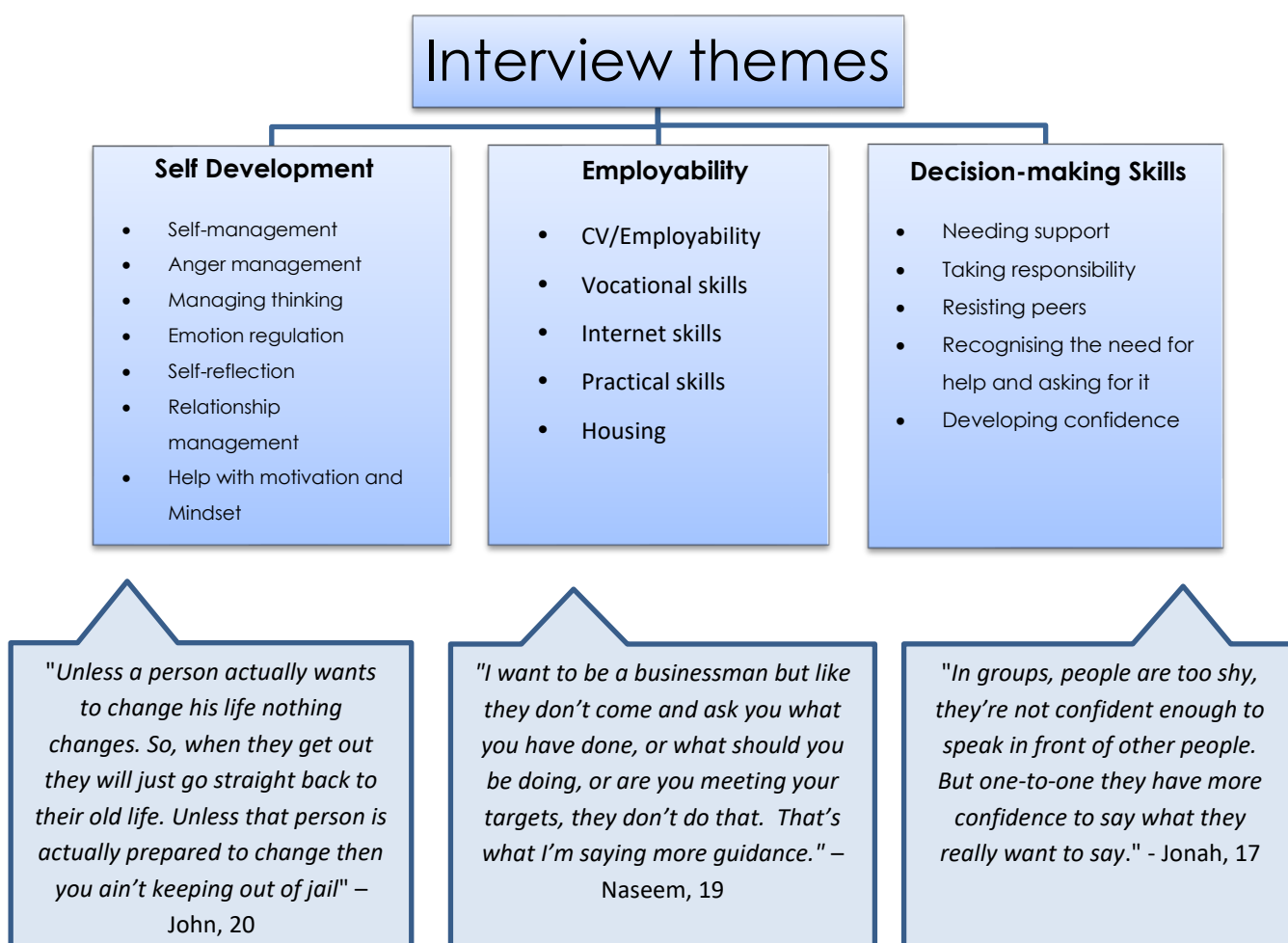
This is where non-formal learning can play a crucial in the reengagement process as it can help to create an environment in which a learner is not simply reactive but is proactive and, importantly, allows them to draw on their existing knowledge and background. Skills4Life employs non-formal education for this very reason, it gives the young person a chance to reflect on their lived experience in a way that is less structured but more exploratory. Skills4Life draws on the following principles of non-formal learning:

- **Use of practical activities** - to promote proactivity and motivation
- **A space free of judgement** - to promote self-confidence and self-efficacy
- **Open discussions** – to promote reflexivity and self-exploration
- **Learning-centred approaches** – to generate strong engagement

Our data gathering has indicated that students have a strong understanding about the need for formal education as this has been reinforced through their schooling and their experiences at secure settings. They have also mentioned however, the challenges they faced with the structures of formal learning, and this is where Skills4Life may be able to offer an opportunity for educators to create a new impression of what education can mean for these young people.

What children and young people in conflict with the law are saying

The Skills4Life Curriculum is also based on the direct views of 80 children and young people from Italy, France, Greece and the UK. They were either in custodial settings preparing for release or had recently left custodial settings and were interviewed by the Project Team to understand their needs and what they believe would help best support them. A full description of this process and the findings can be found in our [Literature Review & Needs Analysis](#) document. This needs analysis highlighted further the need for support in personal empowerment skills but also in developing life skills such as financial management and career planning were also important. In the following diagram, we outline some specific themes that came out of the 80 interviews:



Key Question: “If I was in charge, I would...”

- ❖ *Ensure activities are purposeful and not random or aimless*
- ❖ *Not use isolation as it does not work. We need skills to help manage being with others even if you do not get on. It's not real life to be separated*
- ❖ *Sit down and plan futures with the young people*
- ❖ *Talk about serious courses/qualifications*
- ❖ *Sports and physical activities*

Figure 2: Interview themes, quotes from young people and key question from the 80 interviews conducted

It was also important to ask about what the children and young people felt worked well in the education offered in custodial settings and this is what the key themes were:

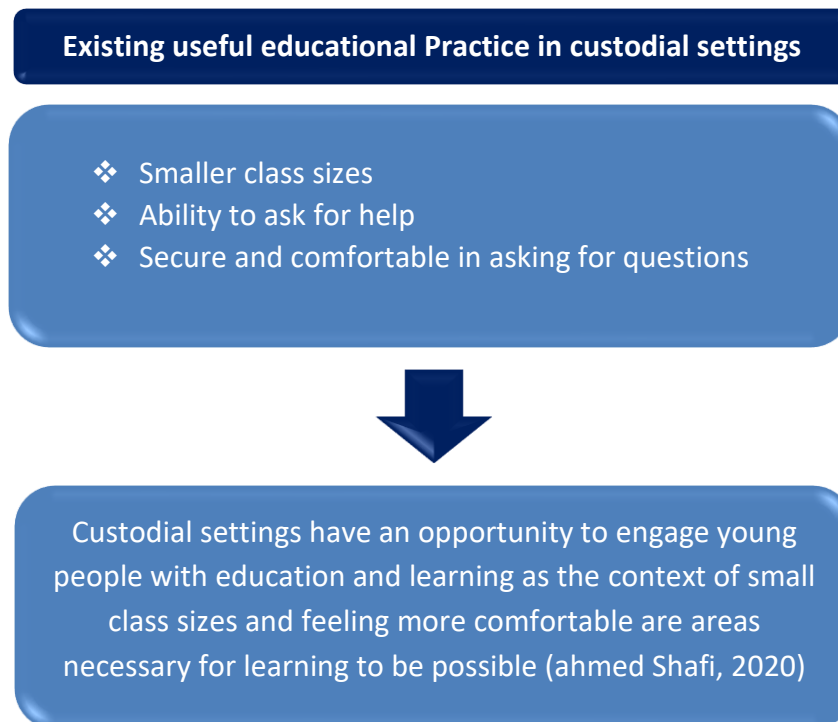


Figure 3: Existing useful educational Practice in custodial settings

And the below were the areas that the children and young people felt could be improved:

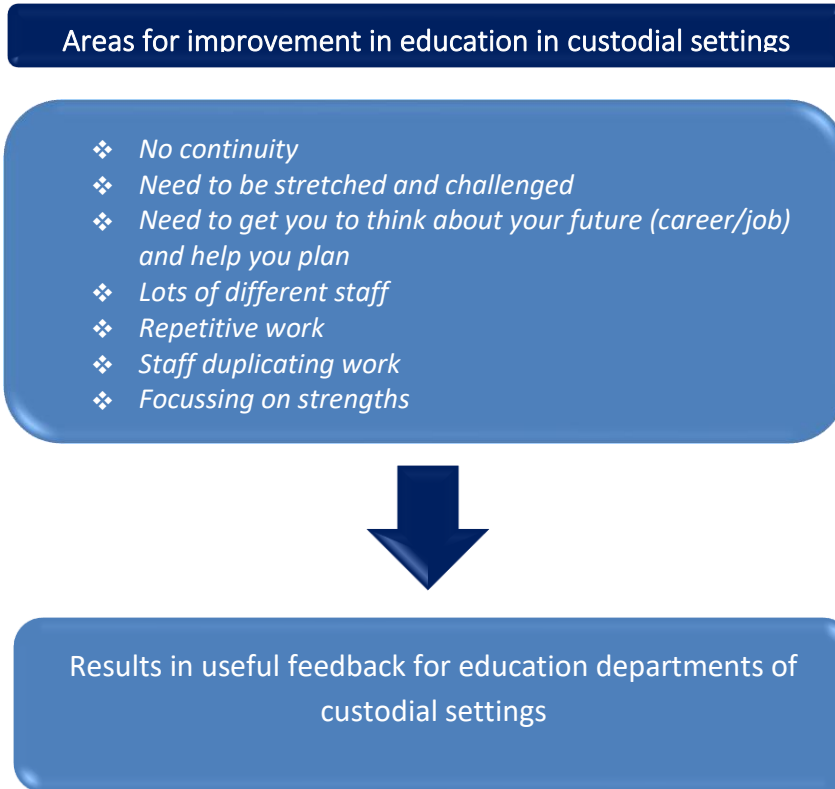


Figure 4: Areas for improvement in education in custodial settings

From these data sets, the Project Team sought to develop a curriculum that would be successful in a challenging secure environment with the diverse and transitional nature of participants and educators.

The Skills4Life Curriculum

Based on these theoretical understandings, the Skills4Life Curriculum focuses on, for example, personal empowerment and development as well as the practical skills required for life back in the community. Furthermore, the Skills4Life curriculum draws on the design, delivery and evaluation of previous programmes delivered in prison and other related services. This includes the development of cognitive and social

skills such as problem solving, self-regulation and conflict resolution is essential to reduce reoffending. It is important that these skills are taught in a practical way, such as role-playing, with a focus on situations that are relevant for young people in conflict with the law.

The following four Modules were designed as a result of understanding the literature and the Needs Analysis from the young people themselves:

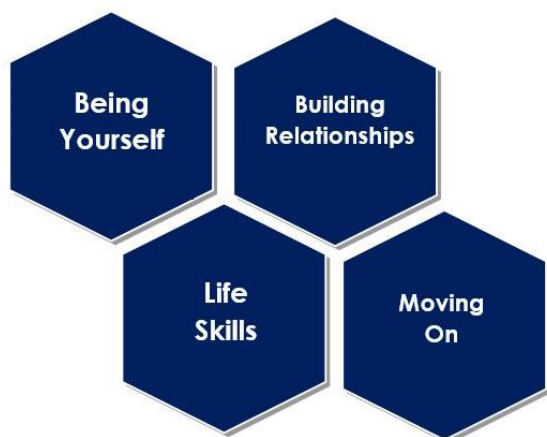


Figure 5: The Skills4Life Modules

1. **Being Yourself**
2. **Building Relationships**
3. **Life Skills**
4. **Moving On**

Contents of the Curriculum

Module 1: Being Yourself

The purpose of Module 1 is to focus on the young person feeling empowered in themselves as an individual.

The Sessions have been constructed to allow young people to explore critical elements of the self safely, through the use of case studies, examples and practical scenarios. As many of the young people receiving this curriculum will have difficult experiences in their past, great care has been taken to ensure this module avoids targeted self-examination in favour of a less direct approach, whereby the young people can reflect using external examples.

The module itself looks at a number of key concepts relating to the self, including self-image, emotional resilience, growth mindset and effective decision making. These concepts are then simplified and delivered in a way that is accessible to the student group.

By the end of the module, the young person should be developing some tools for self-examination that may help them to regulate their emotions and make better decisions upon release.

Educators should focus on encouraging quality self-reflection and allow plenty of time for the young people to ask questions and get to grips with the core theme of the session. Sessions have been designed for either one- or two-hour delivery slots and can be fit around the schedule of your institution

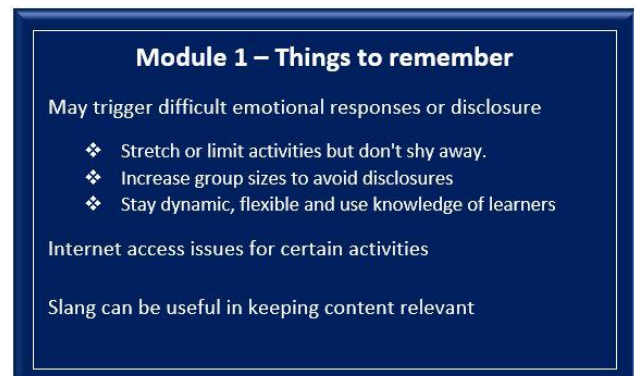


Figure 6: Things to remember for Module 1

Module 2: Building Relationships

Learning how to maintain healthy social bonds is fundamentally important for changing the paths of young people. They may have difficulty in finding positive social supports, in part due to the difficulty of maintaining positive attachments over long periods of imprisonment, that often lead them to antisocial peers for support.

Strong relational ties (especially family, but also peers, schools, colleges, work etc.) are considered one of the most powerful predictors of desistance from crime. The quality of offenders' pre- and post-incarceration relationships have a very significant contribution in the reduction of offending and in assisting their resettlement into communities.

Module 2 is designed to support young offenders to maintain their relationships and encourage them to build a positive vision of their future which will not include offending. It aims to do this by helping young people to recognise the importance of healthy relationships and familial ties and the need to maintain and enhance one's pre- and post-incarceration relationships. This may be achieved though developing effective communication skills and recognising the circumstances that

trigger anger and the reactions to manage anger, with an aim to design a conflict resolution plan. Key areas of focus include:

- Family bonds
- Effective communication
- Anger management
- Conflict resolution
- Parenting skills

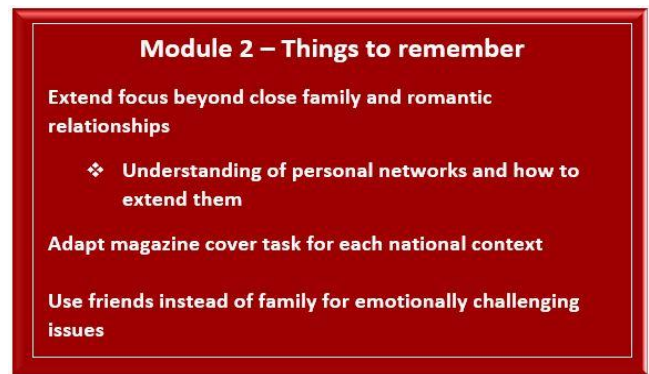


Figure 7: Things to remember for Module 2

Module 3 – Life Skills

Every one of us aims to live a happy, healthy and independent adult life. The skills that allow you to fully participate in adult life are called Life Skills. These can be defined as “a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations” (LSE). In other words, they are the skills that enable individuals to effectively handle issues encountered in their daily life.

Life skills do not develop without aid. They are acquired through the individuals’ family, school and work experiences. It is the institutions of society that are tasked with adequately equipping individuals with the needed capacities of citizenship. This module will focus on “applied” life skills, aiming to prepare young people in conflict with the law to make practical decisions about their everyday life experiences. This will have an immediate effect on their life and improve their reintegration opportunities after release, thus breaking the vicious cycle of lawbreaking and reducing the risk of reoffending. In particular the third module aims to help young offenders set goals, make decisions, plan ahead, present themselves and organize tasks with regards to crucial issues such as:

- Personal finances
- Active Citizenship
- Physical and mental health
- Employability

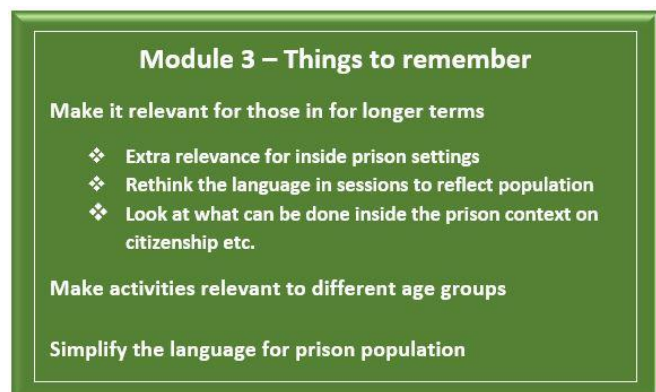


Figure 8: Things to remember for Module 3

Module 4: Moving On

Module 4 is the final and most hands-on module. The aim here is to take the lessons learned throughout the curriculum and apply them in a number of group and one-to-one sessions to design a bespoke plan for the next stage of life.

Upon starting this module, each young person will receive a booklet within which they will record their session outcomes and plan for their future. During the individual coaching sessions, the young people (or the facilitator) will fill the different topics in order to be ready before leaving the setting.

The main focal point of this module will be to ensure that young people know where and how to get the support they need to build a future upon their release from secure and community settings. They will have identified their needs in Module 3, and through this process will gain the contact details and information relating to support services that can provide these things. It is important to note that this module will also help young people to plan and organise their futures even if they have long sentences or are moving on to other secure environments.

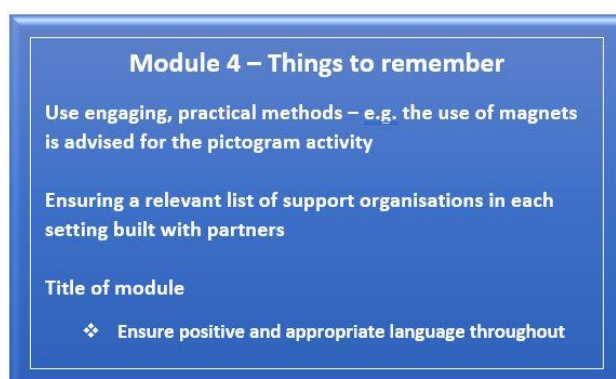


Figure 9: Things to remember for Module 4

Having something to take away with them is very important for the young person and will consolidate all of the learning they have done with Skills4Life.

Using the Curriculum

It is important that the Skills4Life curriculum promotes reflexivity and the development of self-confidence, self-efficacy, a sense of agency, and a positive identity. This should be done across all the session using specific pedagogies. Facilitators should aim to create a non-judgmental environment, where everyone's contributions are valued and treated with respect and everyone's strengths are highlighted. This type of environment promotes self-confidence and self-efficacy. To promote reflexivity, open and exploratory questions should be used across all the sessions. Finally, to promote a shift in identity towards a more positive identity, the curriculum should encourage the exploration of different identities. This could be

done directly using the 'Diamond nine' task. However, the programme and the facilitator should encourage a dynamic identity focused on growth and personal development, acknowledging the role of ethnic and cultural background.

For the curriculum to have an impact, it is important that the young people engage with it. Some of the strategies highlighted, like doing practical activities or creating a non-judgmental environment, can help on that task. In addition, an authentic enquiry pedagogy could be used.

Key areas to consider when designing the usability of the curriculum

The empirical data lends support to the content of the Curriculum as well as added additional areas of focus. However, the data also revealed challenges in how the curriculum will be designed. Particularly, how it addresses and navigates the structural components and/or constraints of custodial settings which include the:

- Transient nature of learners*
- Skills of educators
- Leadership
- Resources – time allocations and structural constraints of settings

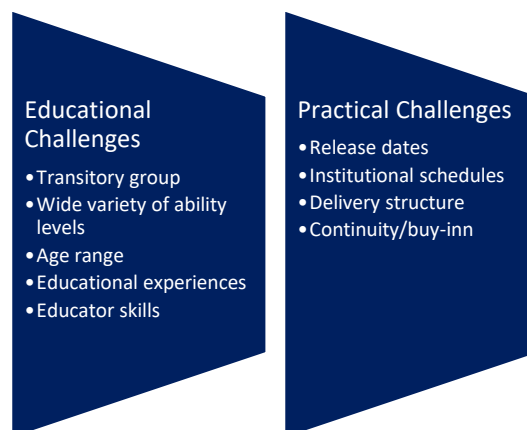


Figure 10: Commonly encountered educational and practical challenges encountered across participating countries

The Skills4Life Curriculum was designed for custodial settings with the profile of the learners as identified in the literature review and the skillsets of the educators and aims to address some of these challenges. The key was to design it, recognising that there are multiple entry points for learners, to upskill educators and so that the leadership dedicated to the implementation of the Curriculum ensuring appropriate resource allocation.

The next figure shows what people working in custodial setting Italy, France, Greece, Norway and the UK, have said about some of the challenges of implementing the Curriculum in their setting. These were grouped into curriculum issues, project implementation, resourcing and other structural issues. The colour coded key tells you which country identified which issue so you can check if this applies in your

situation. By knowing about these challenges, you can plan the best solutions for your setting and your learners.

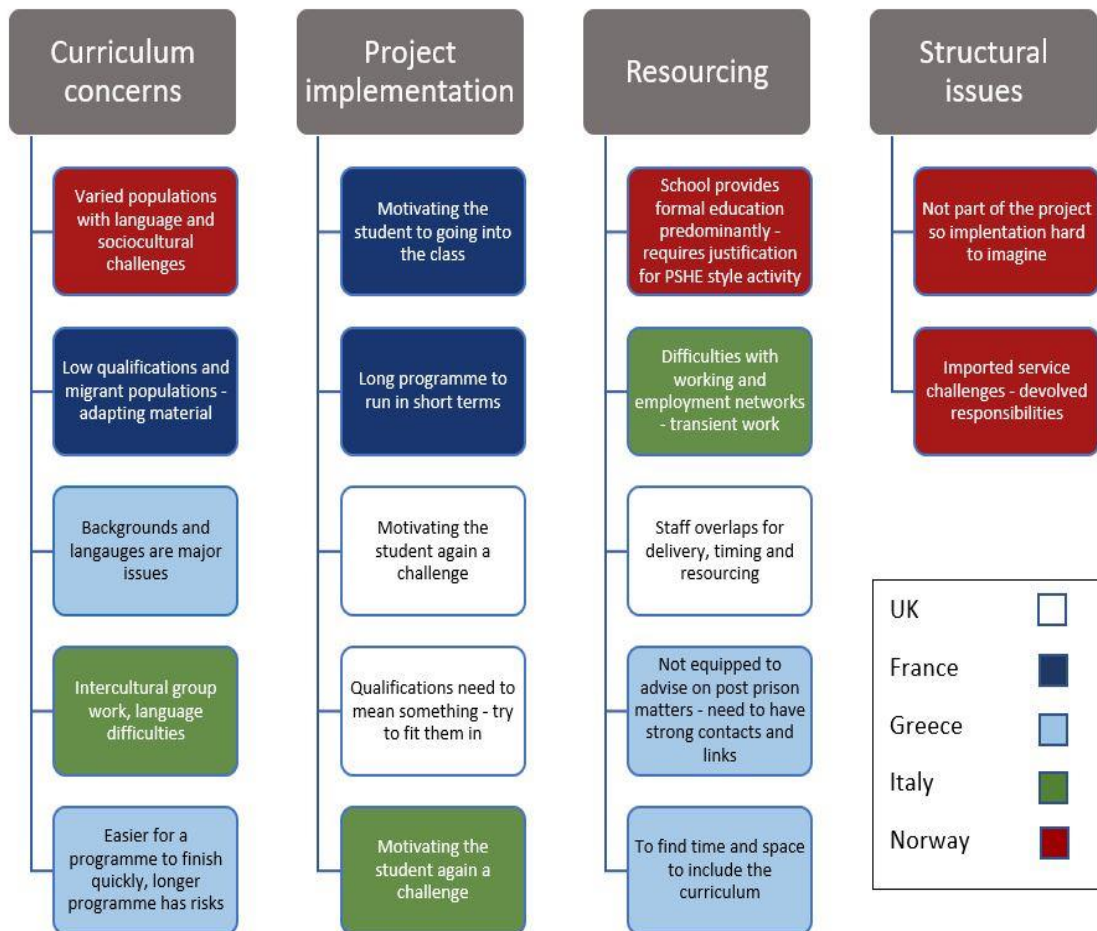


Figure 11: Challenges encountered by settings in the UK, Greece, Italy, France, and Norway

Troubleshooting and FAQs

This section has been written with the support of sixteen educators working in secure custodial settings from Italy, France, Greece and the UK who took part in the piloting of the Skills4Life Curriculum. The purpose is to identify common issues that educators may face in implementing the Curriculum in their settings and offers some solutions.

1. What if I am unable to implement all the curriculum in the order stated?

Although there is a deliberate design behind the order of the modules, the curriculum can be taught flexibly, and it is fine to adapt. You may have to follow the order which keeps the young person most engaged. It is important however to ensure Module 4 is last due to the nature of the content.

2. What should I do if learners do not engage?

This is a common problem across all subjects, if some parts are hard for the students to engage in because it's a hard subject to talk about, you could go to another task and maybe return to it later.

It is important to find the "hook" which interests the group and work from there. Consider relevant rewards within your setting and take breaks. Enlist the help of popular staff and young people who have completed the curriculum sessions.

Sometimes, you may need to change the session or just wait till next time.

3. What do I do if I have a new set of learners but you are in Module 2 now?

You may have to have more than one cohort at any one time, so all learners get the best benefit from the sessions.

You could alternatively ask the 'experienced' learners to help you help the new learners 'catch up', giving the existing learners some responsibility and new learners an opportunity to integrate into the group.

4. I have learners with different ability levels in one group?

This is very possible. The good thing about this curriculum is that it does not operate on 'ability levels'. Rather, most of the activities are based on experiences, discussions, and interactions. When you get to the modules where ability becomes important, you can aim to get learners into ability level groups or pairs.

5. What should I do if a learner is released before the end of all the modules?

Use your judgement and focus on the most important sessions in your opinion. Try to anticipate this in advance however, and you may be able to supplement with additional individual tutoring sessions. Enlist the help of agencies working with the young person after release to assist in delivery using Module 4 Handbook. Or provide the learner with some of the activities that they may try and do once they have left at their new place.

6. Not all my learners can read or write.

The curriculum is designed to include little in the way of writing. Staff can assist young people in writing the Module 4 Handbook or use alternative forms of recording the information. Consider adapting any tasks that require writing into a conversational format. Team up with a partner who can support the person having difficulties.

8. We have no computer/ projector available to show the presentations?

Each session is designed so you do not have to use presentations. But if you feel you want to use something, then the option is to print out the tasks/activities and follow them in that way.

9. What if the learner does not want to discuss the planned issues but instead wants to discuss a personal issue (for example, a family problem)?

Listen to the young person. Opening up is a sign of trust and must be dealt with carefully, they may not do this again. Steer young person back to topic carefully towards the end and prepare them for the next session. Safeguard yourself against

“secondary trauma”. If it is possible, offer the learner the opportunity to talk in private or after the session, especially if it could be distressing for other learners in the group.

10. What would you do if your full group does not attend a session?

Get creative with the session structure! Consider a bespoke session for that group, or choose a different topic. Alternative, use this as an opportunity for the class to learn the sessions to teach it to the others.

Consider exploring why the rest of the group are not attending, it could be they are not enjoying it or they do not find it useful, or indeed some other significant reason. It will help you to plan the following sessions.

Skills4Life Project Planner

Setting name:	
Setting type:	
Master trainer name:	
Other team members:	

This document enables you to:

- Develop a S4L Curriculum Timeline
- Plan An Action Table
- Track Modules
- Track the Sessions (week by week)
- Map other work you do on to the S4L Curriculum to avoid duplication and see how it complements S4L

Project Timeline

This Gantt chart will help you to keep track of the Skills4Life curriculum as you begin to use it

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
Training						
Setting plans for delivery						
Identify groups						
Run workshops						
Gather feedback						

Action Table

This table will help you plan your implementation with clear milestones.

Action	Completion date	Notes/Challenges	Completed?
Complete all training for trainers			
Decide what day and time these sessions will take place			
Decide how long will the sessions be			
Identify the young people			
Have all the resources ready			
Begin Curriculum			
Record how many students completed			

Module Tracker

This tracker will help you to reflect on your sessions. Fill in each part on completion of a module, refer to your session tracker to help with comments.

Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4
Complete? <input type="checkbox"/>	Complete? <input type="checkbox"/>	Complete? <input type="checkbox"/>	Complete? <input type="checkbox"/>
How would you rate the effectiveness of this module? (1 = Went very poorly, 5- Went very well)	How would you rate the effectiveness of this module? (1 = Went very poorly, 5- Went very well)	How would you rate the effectiveness of this module? (1 = Went very poorly, 5- Went very well)	How would you rate the effectiveness of this module? (1 = Went very poorly, 5- Went very well)
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Comments:	Comments:	Comments:	Comments:
Which was the best to deliver in this module and why?	Which was the best to deliver in this module and why?	Which was the best to deliver in this module and why?	Which was the best to deliver in this module and why?
Comments:	Comments:	Comments:	Comments:
Which was the most difficult session to deliver and why?	Which was the most difficult session to deliver and why?	Which was the most difficult session to deliver and why?	Which was the most difficult session to deliver and why?
Comments:	Comments:	Comments:	Comments:

Weekly Skills4Life Session Tracker

This tracker is designed to help you think about sessions week to week and make changes as you do.

Week	Module	Session	Students	Session score					Comments on the session <small>(What went well? What could be improved?)</small>
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	
				1	2	3	4	5	

Curriculum Mapper

Use this mapper to assess which aspects of the S4L Curriculum maps on to work you are already doing. This ensures that a) there is no duplication and b) that all work done at your setting is incorporated and complement the S4L Curriculum.

Mod	Title	Session Outline	Other work you may be doing that maps on to or complements the session
1	Where life takes you...	This opening session is designed to enable educators to facilitate the young people in considering how life can take different pathways and that all life experiences are a form of learning.	
1	Developing resilience/ Getting to know agency	This session may be best split into two smaller sessions. The first is designed to develop tools and mechanisms to cope with setbacks and challenges is an important life skill. In the second part of the session agency is explored as key in shaping one's direction and navigating the challenges to achieve a goal.	
1	Managing ourselves/ Managing our emotions	The first part of the session uses active games and activities aimed at improving self-control, following rules and good communication. In the second part, participants explore their own emotional responses to various stimuli by labelling emotions and identifying how the protagonist in the scenario could better manage that scenario	
1	Knowing yourself	This session uses a range of media suitable for the various learners in the group to reflect on their life story and what they think or want to be in their life. This is explored using artistic means, such as writing, audio or role play, depending on the skills and appropriateness for individual learners.	

1	Mindset and Motivation/ Making decisions	<p>This session aims to help learners identify their own mind set and if it is fixed, explore ways in which they can move towards a growth mindset.</p> <p>The second part of the session explores the processes of making decisions and identifies some tools to help make effective decisions.</p>	
2	Healthy relationships	The first session focuses on the skills and the respective ways to develop and maintain healthy relationships, irrespective of their context and their nature (peer relationships, family relationships, etc).	
2	Family ties	This session focuses on the role families can play on the development and growth of their members. Young people will develop skills which will support them to build and maintain healthy family relationships.	
2	Effective communication	This session focuses on the development of skills for effective communication. Strategies for effective communication including active listening and empathy are addressed. Special attention is given to techniques to achieve nonviolent communication.	
2	Anger management	This session focuses on the development of skills to manage anger. Participants will understand and become aware of the circumstances and events that trigger anger so that they manage it effectively.	
2	Conflict resolution	This session focuses on the ways to deal with conflict through assertive, non-violent communication. Participants will learn to critically look at conflict resolution strategies, to analyse the causes of conflicts and to manage them in respectful nonviolent ways, for example through mediation.	
3	Financial management	This session focuses on the practical aspects of budgeting. It will help young people identify and prioritize personal financial goals; outline the steps to achieve those goals; understand the importance of budget planning and get acquainted with the tools and methods to create a budget plan.	

3	Physical and Mental Health	This session focuses on physical and mental health. Following from Module 2 and its focus on social health, this session will help young people understand the connections between different kinds of health; learn how to maintain a good physical health; and discuss and overcome the taboos around mental health.	
3	Active citizenship	This session focuses on introducing young people to the basics of Active Citizenship, helping them understand their rights and obligations as members of a society. They will be introduced to concepts such as right, participation and responsibility. They will get acquainted with the importance of voting and with the role of a volunteer.	
3	Employment goals	This session focuses on employability issues and especially on setting employment goals. The importance of properly preparing documents for a job application will be highlighted with a focus on CV writing.	
3	Personal presentation	This session focuses on how to present oneself in the work environment, especially in the context of a job interview.	
4	Taking stock	This is an opportunity to take stock of everything the young person has discovered during the first three modules to identify their needs in order to be ready for their release.	
4	Individual coaching session 1	During this session, the coach will work on the needs identified during the first session. It is an important phase as all the work the young person and the coach will do in the following sessions will be based on this first analysis. It can involve housing, job, rehabilitation, education.	
4	Who can help me?	This session will focus on who can assist young people, before, during and after the release process. The young person will be able to prepare a directory with the names and addresses of all the entities they should contact to meet their needs. This will also be an opportunity for some to reconcile with close relatives or family.	

4	Individual coaching session 2	This session will be dedicated to help the young person to be able to find out who can help them, before and after their release and to create an address list of the persons or organisations identified.	
4	Planning next steps	<p>The last group session will focus on the steps to take before and after release.</p> <p>A discharge booklet will be given to each young person who has followed the training, in which they will find all the steps, contacts, model letters, etc.</p>	
4	Individual coaching session 3	This last individual session will focus on the planning of the release. The coach and the young person will review together what the young person has to do before and after their release, in what order and with which support.	

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