



STATE OF THE ART

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Stay Tuned
Boosting the Frequency of Qualification

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1. Introduction

1.1. Stay Tuned & URBACT Implementation Networks

The transition from policy and strategy into delivery of tangible results remains a challenge for cities and governments. The creation of a new type of network to support cities in making this transition is a major step for URBACT. It signals a willingness to move into what is traditionally more difficult territory.

To this end, the URBACT III Programme has introduced a new kind of transnational exchange network, to focus on implementation of strategy and local action plans within cities. The Stay Tuned network is one of seven new networks approved in autumn 2016 and this network will focus on the theme of reducing Early School Leaving (ESL).

This report sets the context for this project, including an overview of the current position of ESL-reducing schemes, as well as covering the implementation challenges that are likely to be experienced by city partners. References in the text are listed at the end of the report.

2. Early School Leaving

2.1. Context & Definition

Early School Leaving (ESL) is not a new problem. There have always been differences of opinion on the value of schooling and on the form that schooling should take. The breadth of educational options on offer to young people is now greater than ever before, incorporating a wide variety of opportunities to suit different learning styles and aspirations. This should ensure that a large majority of young people will successfully complete their schooling.

However, there is still a significant number of youngsters starting their adult life with few or no formal qualifications or skills as a result of leaving school early. This has significant consequences for both the individual and society more generally, including an increased risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, as well as the mental and physical health problems that that may cause.

The definition of ‘early school leaving’ at an EU level refers to ‘those young people who left education and training with lower secondary education or less, and who are no longer in education and training’. This is measured as young people (18-24) who reach early adulthood without upper secondary qualifications and are no longer in education or training. Figure 1 shows the rates of ESL in nation states across the EU.

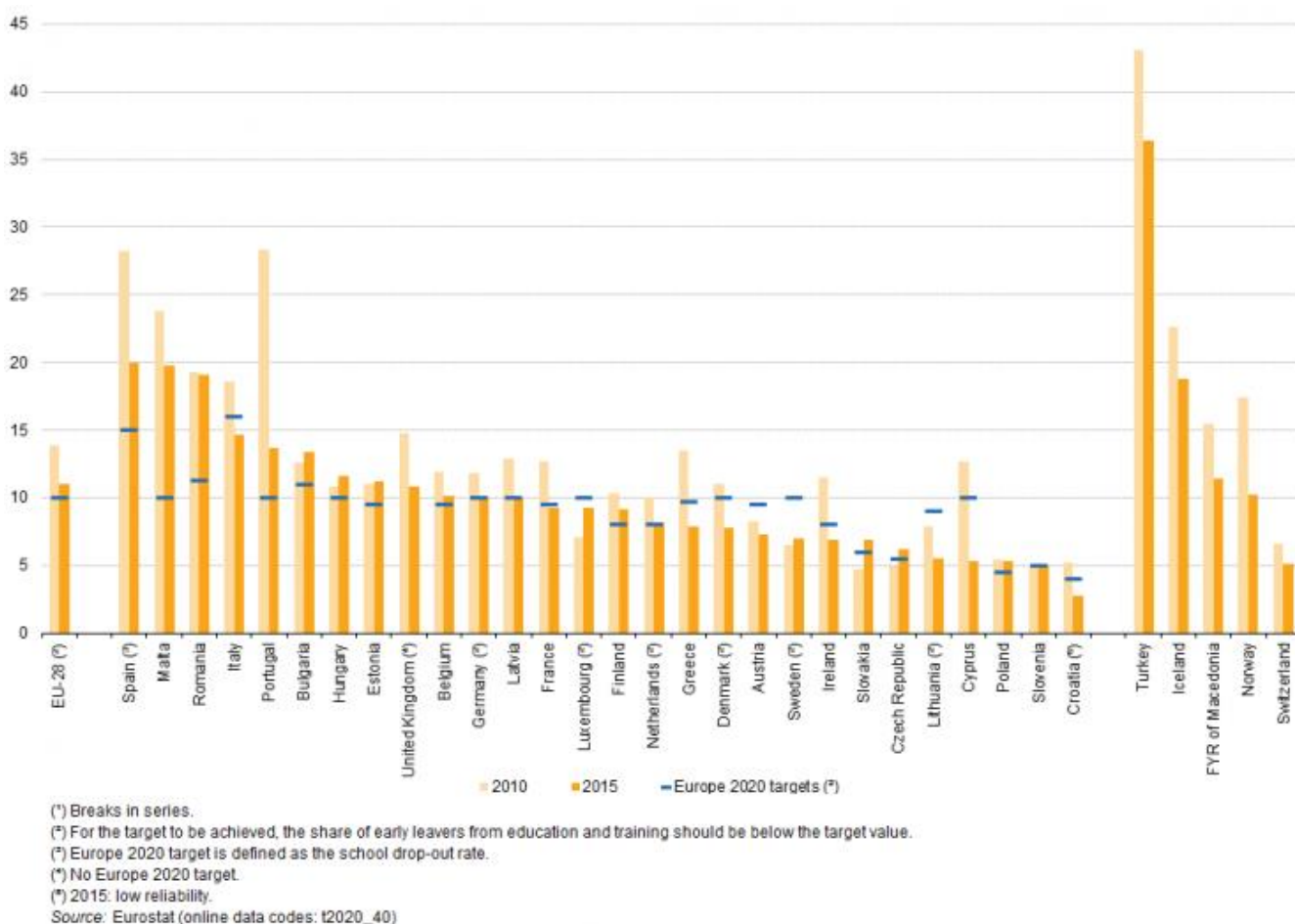


Figure 1 - ESL % rates in EU member states 2009 & 2014

There are variations across EU member states in the practical meaning of ESL, but there is broad consensus that it is a shared challenge. In 2012 more than 2 out of every 5 early school leavers were unemployed; of whom it is reported that approximately 70% would like to work^[1]. However, as an increasing number of jobs lie within the knowledge economy, only around one in ten jobs will be accessible for them in the future. This rapid change in the nature of work and the gradual demise of the traditional “career-for-life” leaves many young people with an unclear view of the world of work and leads to a challenge in aligning educational achievement with choices for future employment.

Further action in the area of Early School Leaving is clearly necessary if we are to ensure the future prosperity of European cities and their populations.

2.2. An Integrated and Complex Phenomenon

As described by Lyche (2010)^[2] the causes for early school leaving are highly complex and highly interrelated. There has been extensive research on the factors that lead to dropout and these are classified into three categories: **individual or social factors**, **school factors**, and **systemic factors**. From an individual or social point of view, educational performance, such as low grades, and certain types of student behaviours, such as absenteeism, lack of motivation, or delinquent behaviour are solid predictors of dropout. Such predictors are now widely accepted and understood and inform ESL policy.

These factors are strongly connected to the student’s background, be it past experiences in education (e.g. whether they participated in pre-primary education), or family background (e.g. living with one or two parents, family SES, and parental engagement). School structure and size as well as certain school practices (e.g. a highly bureaucratic and impersonal environment) influence the process of disengagement. In combination with systemic factors, such as the use of year repetition or the lack of apprenticeship places in vocational education and training, all the factors above have an impact on the dropout rate as well as on each other.

Preventive measures must address not only the direct visible cause of dropout but also the underlying causes that influence the cumulative process of student disengagement that ultimately leads to the decision of a student leaving education or training prematurely.

2.3. An Integrated View of ESL

The EU measure of ESL provides a solid reference point for measurement of those who have left school and reached early adulthood without upper secondary level qualifications. However, active measurement of the drop-out rates at different levels/ages is also important if we are to understand the exact nature ESL within a particular city context. This understanding is necessary if ESL is to be tackled effectively.

The time for the full results of policies to be seen is often 5+ years in the case of monitoring at the EU-defined (young adult) level, particularly if the root causes are to be tackled earlier in school. For that reason, a more in-depth and more widely inclusive definition and set of measures needs to be used if it is to support effective implementation of integrated action plans.

In addition, any ESL-reducing project must recognise the importance of developing relevant knowledge, skills and abilities in young people, not solely on completion of a number of years in school (school participation being only a proxy indicator of the employability of an individual). There is also the related issue of making assumptions that completion of upper secondary or further level (formal) education is necessary or indeed appropriate for all young people or all career paths. Furthermore, with the economy in many countries shifting to a more entrepreneurial and SME-driven model, the role of traditional qualifications is coming more and more into question. For the purposes of this project, this cannot be tackled in the mainstream, however, it must be acknowledged as a relevant consideration if a truly holistic approach is to be taken.

We should also be mindful of the need for ESL reduction to be fully integrated into the local development plans of the city or region. An increase in skills and qualifications across the board does not de facto result in instant, wholesale increases in employment prospects. Staying in school longer and gaining a higher level of qualifications and skills benefits the individual directly, increasing their confidence and employability. They are more employable than others around them. But on a systematic level, if the number of qualified young people in a city increases, an increased employment rate will only follow if there is a sufficient supply of jobs at an appropriate level in the right places. Geographical mobility is less typical amongst many groups who also have higher risks of ESL.

The challenge for cities is thus to understand their desired results for any ESL-reduction project: is the result to simply increase the skills of its population or to also employ those skills within the local city economy? A city which wishes to retain the skills locally will, for example, need ensure that their local economy evolves to make best use of the increased skills base or risk young people leaving the area to find employment elsewhere or staying local but still unemployed or under-employed.

In practical terms, the way cities define ESL in their context must consider the skills and abilities of young people in the workforce, not just solely the completion or otherwise of a number of years in school. The overall purpose of ESL reduction at a city level needs to be clearly understood in order to achieve the right results. Reducing ESL is itself not the end goal.

3. FROM STRATEGY TO DELIVERY

3.1. Instruments for tackling ESL

In order to tackle ESL, one must take into account the nature of the problem: that it is complex and multi-faceted. Leaving school before completing upper secondary education is the outcome of a progressive and cumulative process of disengagement. It is triggered by problems that can be related to the course of study and other school-related factors (inflexible education pathways, high rates of grade repetition, unhealthy school climate, bullying, poor relationship with teacher), but also health, personal difficulties, socio-economic challenges, the lure of the labour market...

The reduction of early school leaving to less than 10 percent of the relevant population by 2020 is a headline target in the Europe 2020 strategy^[9] and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training.

It is well established that some groups of young people are more at risk of ESL than others, for example boys, young people from a migrant background, young people with a low socio-economic background, disadvantaged minorities (including Roma). These are indicators of *risk* of ESL and not *determinants*, but it stands to reason that successful actions will have a greater overall effect when they target groups who are most at risk.

Lyche (2010) found that successful measures implemented to tackle ESL address several risk factors and involve action both within and outside of school simultaneously. In addition, she also highlighted that, on the whole, measures that do not target specifically the students themselves and the underlying causes for dropout seem to have a very low success rate.

In acknowledgement of this, the Education Council of the EU adopted a Recommendation in June 2011^[3] on policies to reduce early school leaving. This highlighted the need for evidence-based and comprehensive interventions to reduce ESL. It also noted that, in order to be effective, actions against ESL need to address all levels of education and should operate across sector and departmental boundaries, involving stakeholders from different areas such as youth, social services, housing, welfare, employment and health. The Recommendation further indicated that activities should focus on a combination of Prevention, Intervention and Compensation measures, which are thus defined:

- > **Prevention** - all measures taken to influence the risk factors possibly leading to ESL before the first symptoms arise.
- > **Intervention** - addressing emerging difficulties at an early stage and seeks to prevent them from leading to ESL
- > **Compensation** - offering opportunities for education and training for those who have dropped out

This approach requires integrated, comprehensive action plans. Local authorities have a crucial role to play in implementing policies in this way - good results in reducing ESL can only be obtained if a comprehensive strategy is in place, based on strong and continuous political commitment of all stakeholders in its implementation, at all levels. It is of crucial importance to strike the right balance between central and local

measures, and between preventive, intervention and compensation measures. This balance can be intricate, difficult to define and complicated to maintain.

To that end, a Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving was established in December 2011 to help European countries cooperate to implement such comprehensive policies. The final report from this Working Group (2013)^[1] sets out a clear picture in terms of the key causes and policy messages for developing strategies to reduce ESL. This built on the Prevention-Intervention-Compensation structure and also brought in the need for strong governance and cooperation and also robust use of data and measurement (see Figure 2 below).

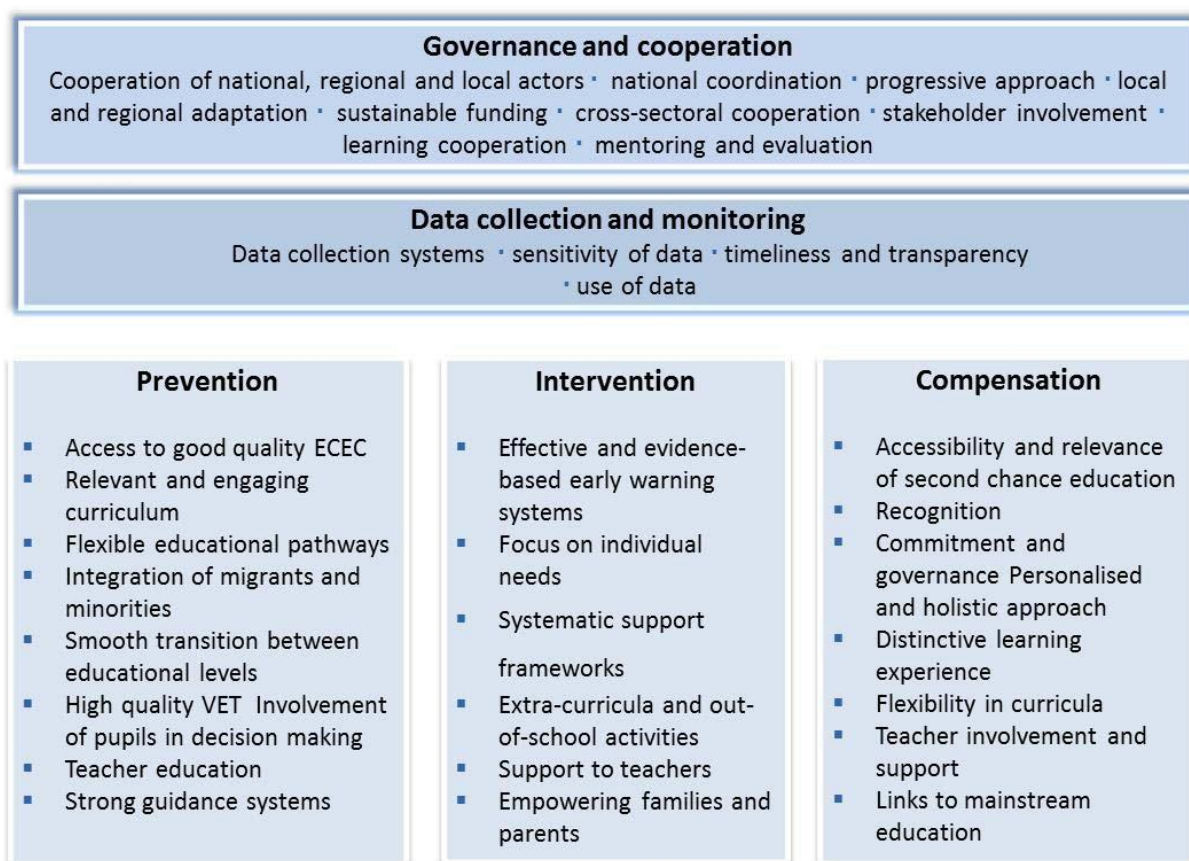


Figure 2 – Comprehensive measures against ESL (Thematic Working Group on ESL final report, 2013)

The report also stressed the importance of evidence-based policies, stating that:

“An accurate understanding of the scope and reasons behind ESL is necessary to design and implement targeted policies against ESL. Collection of data and information should cover all levels and types of education and training... Accurate quantitative data on the number of early school leavers and those at risk of ESL is required to estimate the scale of ESL. A wide range of data is important for both understanding ESL and targeting policies.”

It further explores the specific data required, considerations of appropriate methods for collection and management of data, examples of current practice and a checklist on comprehensive policies for reducing ESL.

The report concludes that there are many policies and activities in place across member states which already draw on these approaches but that “developments are not happening everywhere at the same pace in all countries” and that “sustained political support is needed to ensure that positive trends continue”.

Further information can be found on the Early School Leaving pages of the Commission’s website: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/early-school-leavers_en.

Subsequently, aligned with the Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school^[4] the European Union’s ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy produced their recommendations on taking “A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving” (2015)^[5]. This saw these policy messages developed into an approach across five thematic areas, with policies to reduce ESL “being embedded in an overall inclusive learner-centred vision of education”. Each area was further expanded in the accompanying ‘European Toolkit for Schools’^[10]. This intends to support front-line teachers and educationalists in addressing ESL in their own member states. Further details are available at www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/toolkitsforschools.htm

The five thematic areas for the Whole School Approach to tackling ESL are:

- > **School Governance**
competent and effective school leadership and governance
- > **Learner Support**
a stimulating and conducive learning climate
- > **Teachers**
supportive relationships as a major agent of educational success
- > **Parents & Families**
a stimulating home environment and parental engagement
- > **Stakeholder Involvement**
a multi-faceted response to a multi-faceted problem

These thematic areas provide a key focus for the actions undertaken by schools and education authorities in tackling ESL. They also reflect the integrated approach advocated by URBACT. The effective use of Data when designing and targeting activities in an element which cuts across all these five themes. Where there are solid predictors of ESL risk and early warning indicators of ESL issues developing these should be used to inform the specific design of ESL-reducing activities and also be continually tracked to monitor progress and success rates and reasons.

These elements serve to illustrate the complexity of devising and deploying successful implementations to combat ESL and which will yield demonstrable results. But they also provide a framework for structuring the work, focusing activity effectively and interpreting the results.

Effective responses to ESL include **Prevention, Intervention and Compensation** activities at all levels, covering the five thematic areas of **Governance, Learner Support, Teachers, Parents & Families** and **Stakeholder Involvement**. Good **Data** should inform the design of ESL-reducing measures and help to manage the delivery, evaluation and adjustment of activities.

3.2. Actively reducing ESL

There is significant activity in ESL-reduction in all member states. For example, both Portugal and the Netherlands have achieved significant reductions in their ESL rates in recent years, Portugal from a greatly above average rate, the Netherlands from a below average rate, demonstrating that results can be achieved from a starting point at either end of the spectrum.

Ten EU cities formed an action planning network under URBACT II to develop approaches to tackling ESL. The resulting PREVENT network (urbact.eu/prevent) concluded in 2015 with a set of policy recommendations and defined city action plans, with a focus on parental involvement in schools as a mechanism to encourage continued study and engagement with education amongst students. Three of the city partners in Prevent (Tallinn, Nantes and Sofia) are now partners in the Stay Tuned network and their experience during PREVENT is influencing their work on implementation. This previous work is also a key point of reference for Stay Tuned, as a natural progression into implementation for the action plans from that project.

However, despite this activity, only a relatively small amount of successful practice is reviewed and evidenced in detail and there is little research focussing on which interventions really work. As a result, it is difficult to discern the relative importance of implementation approach versus policy.

An example of useful analysis of a successful programme is the Dutch Government's "Anval op de Uitval" (Drive to Reduce Dropout Rates) Programme^[7], which started in 2002. This programme was both successful and (being at national level) better reviewed and evidenced than many. In addition to ongoing reviews of the programme, the Centre for Public Impact have developed a useful case study (2016)^[8] on the programme. This highlighted some of the key elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the programme and its delivery, including strong political commitment, clear objectives and measurement and comprehensive policy and results monitoring by academic researchers. Unique identification and central databases of students and their progress is also a key factor in this example and many of the other more successful policies in place in member states.

The publication of qualitative analysis of the success or failure of projects is essential to ensure that expertise is not wasted. A full analysis is particularly necessary as it is clear that barriers to success in one country may not exist in another and so strategies used in an unsuccessful project may provide positive insight elsewhere.

Clearly, not all programmes can be transferred between countries easily. For example, whilst the broad concept of vocational training and education (VET), is supported throughout the EU, the nature of its delivery varies. In Germany, VET is seen as a key aspect of the country's efforts to reduce ESL. However, its success is not easily replicated. VET has been an inherent part of the German education system since its development in the 18th Century and it is valued by the population as a rigorous preparation for a range of professions such as nursing and engineering. Although the structure of the courses can be copied, it is not possible to transfer to a different country the cultural values built over many generations.

Similarly, The Mother Tongue Education approach in Sweden is regarded as an effective method of engaging young people from groups that experience high ESL levels. Using this approach, pupils whose mother tongue is not Swedish can study in their native tongue in parallel with study in Swedish. However, the success of this approach stems from a cultural belief that multilingualism is a benefit to society and

should be encouraged. Again, the structures of the provision may be replicated, but its overall success depends on cultural value which cannot be developed overnight.

Implementation of successful approaches to reducing ESL also means that the practice has to become embedded within the normal operation of the city. Transferring of funding and resource into mainstream routes is often poorly done, resulting in good practice fading away as project and focus moves on. “Anval op de Uitval” Programme is again a good example of where funding has been systematically moved from ‘project funding’ into the main education funding streams as practice has become fully embedded. This is crucial to the long term success of any initiative being implemented to tackle ESL.

However, Early school leaving is a problem that will never be fully “solved” – it can only be managed, reduced and kept as low as possible. Projects and initiatives are introduced, create changes, improve outcomes and then make the transition into business as usual, to enable the next priority area to become the focus. Changing demographics, dynamic job markets, shifting economies all mean the causes and effects of ESL will also shift over time. Activity to ensure ESL rates are low must also shift in synch with these changes to ensure ongoing success of young people in education and training.

Minimising ESL and creating a highly skilled and capable workforce is an ongoing task which doesn't have an obvious endpoint. Systematic changes need to be embedded as standard practice if successful implementations are to have sustainable results.

4. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

4.1. The URBACT Framework of Implementation Challenges

Implementation Networks within URBACT III have a standard framework for describing the Implementation Challenges encountered by cities that are working to implement strategy. For the purposes of Stay Tuned in that context, the four main challenge areas are:

- > Ensuring an integrated approach in the delivery of the strategy and related actions/projects
- > Maintaining involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery
- > Setting up efficient indicators & monitoring systems to measure performance
- > Moving from strategy to operational action-plan

These are not discreet challenges. Managing each of them cannot be done in isolation. If the implementation is to be integrated so will be the nature of the implementation challenges. However, considering each challenge area in isolation does help to analyse the specific aspects and consider what activities are required to tackle that challenge. But the effects of any activity on other challenge areas must also be considered as part of delivery planning and management.

The nature of these challenges will vary from city to city and each project partner will develop full definitions during the first phase of the project. The sections below provide an overview of the nature of the Implementation Challenges faced by cities and form a starting point for discussions within the network.

The URBACT framework has three further Implementation Challenges, which are deemed less relevant for the field of ESL and the city partners in question. These are:

- > Setting up Public Private partnerships for delivery
- > Designing smart public procurement frameworks
- > Enhancing funding of urban policies by exploring financial innovation

There are aspects of these challenges which may be considered by partners, but these will not be the main focus of any of the implementation projects within the Stay Tuned network: Procurement is a very tangential theme within the context of early school leaving with no direct impact on the solutions being implemented; Public-Private partnerships are limited to the stakeholder engagement and collaboration level (for example, schools working closely with local businesses when providing apprenticeships).

Financial innovation may provide a funding mechanism for parts of some city solutions and will therefore not be discounted entirely by partners, but again, it will not be prominent feature within action plans, and would likely only feature in one or two, even if this approach was adopted by some partners during the course of the project.

4.2. Ensuring the integrated approach in the delivery of the strategy and related actions/projects

As previously discussed, ESL is a multi-faceted problem and delivery of most solutions is not the responsibility of one team or agency. Developing strategy in an integrated and collaborative way can be a challenge enough for many city authorities. Turning those theoretical plans into tangible actions and thus into sustained change can be even harder and is often an insurmountable barrier. Truly integrated implementation requires a truly integrated team behind it. This may sound obvious, but even very fundamental systems and process in the implementation of projects do not heed this point and struggle to deliver as a result.

What's in it For Me?

In practice, this means that integrated delivery requires a shared and understood aims between all the partners involved as well as regular and effective communication. It also requires there to be mutual (or at least acceptable levels of) benefit for all the partners. People need a reason to support and deliver on a particular course of action. Careful analysis and understanding of all the stakeholders involved is critical, as is a coherent plan for engaging and or managing them to ensure appropriate support and decision-making.

There is a potential challenge where action plans, whilst agreed in principle, have not been wholly created and/or wholly supported by all those involved in their delivery. Partner cities will need to ensure that the key stakeholders and delivery teams are engaged and that there is a shared understanding and ownership of the delivery plan. Delivery of activities in a collaborative and wholly integrated way often results in a longer delivery time - the work involved in getting agreement and approvals across a range of partners and creating/coordinating capacity at the right time across multiple delivery actors can take time. Project sponsors and the key players from the various departments/agencies involved in the delivery need to be kept engaged, informed and supported during the whole project. This can be a challenge during extended delivery timescales, where interest can wane and attention shift onto new things.

4.3. Maintaining involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery

Successful stakeholder involvement is pivotal to success and closely linked to the above challenge regarding an integrated approach. From the outset, a clear stakeholder map, a proper understanding and a defined engagement & management plan for the stakeholders is critical to successful implementation.

Get Off My Land...!

In many cities, individual schools and educational institutions have a significant amount of autonomy in how they operate. This means that, in the case of the specific policy area of reducing ESL, cities have the additional complications of managing the implementation of a “single” action plan across a wide range of local partners, each with their own interests, territories and priorities. Consequently, the local decision-making around the implementation can be complex and time-consuming. Collaboration and exchange of practice at transnational level will therefore greatly enhance the ability to succeed in local implementations as best practice from across the partnership can be applied to all governance structures.

In addition, some of the governance approaches required may present a greater degree of uncertainty or risk. This will represent a notable cultural shift in some cases. The participation in a network with eight

other cities undergoing the similar activity provides both reassurance and support to each partner city, having the opportunity to draw on expertise from across the partnership as the implementation challenges are tackled.

Room to Manoeuvre

Securing political mandate to act but avoiding political encroachment on the day-to-day delivery activity and (re)planning can be another difficult balance to achieve. A high degree of political acumen is needed. Where politicians approve work to achieve an outcome and provide ongoing support to delivering that outcome, implementation can be effective. Where there is encroachment into the day-to-day monitoring and management of actions then projects invariably cannot respond quickly and effectively to any issues encountered and can therefore slowly fail.

Those putting projects into practice need the space and autonomy to be able to respond to unforeseen risks, barriers and issues arising during the lifetime of the project. On the flip-side, those delivering projects must maintain an effective and open dialogue with politicians and key stakeholders to ensure they are kept involved and that their information needs are met. The project teams and responsible persons must also know when they reach the limit of their decision mandate and be effective about seeking clarification or new decisions. A clear mandate with defined boundaries and scope is needed to allow freedom to act within the mandate, but which also provides a clear process for seeking revised decisions in the case of major unforeseen issues.

4.4. Setting up efficient indicators & monitoring systems to measure performance

Measuring the effectiveness of solutions to ESL is also challenging, not least because the timescale to visible results is often 5+ years for any pre-emptive, early interventions. Effectiveness of encouraging actual early school leavers to return to education is easier to measure, as the initial effects (returning to education) are visible and measurable and occur with a much shorter timeframe.

Where Did You Go...?

Longer-term tracking of the outcomes for these returning students can still be patchy. In addition, whilst the headline drop-out rate is normally known, the reasons and nature of any (further) drop-out of returning students are still poorly understood in the majority of cases. This makes targeting of intervention efforts more difficult to calculate. As mentioned earlier, centralised and accessible databases of students is a common mechanism to address this problem, although quality is mixed and such systems and processes pose their own set of challenges.

Following the Journey

Delivery and progress metrics also need to be defined and actively monitored. These in turn must be logically linked to the actions in the strategies and those to the expected results that should be achieved from those activities. The URBACT Results Framework provides a solid basis for this. Additional project & programme management methodologies will be required and progress towards the final goal must be measurable and followed closely. In terms of monitoring implementation and results, measures must consider and track the wide range of related factors which contribute to ESL in addition to the core educational activities and metrics.

Robust and effective programme and project management is essential if strategies are to be implemented effectively. Local governments are notoriously bad at this type of discipline. Experience shows that in many cases there is one of two extremes: either programme management either does not exist or is sloppy and does not track progress nor actively address risks and issues in a timely and appropriate manner, leading to project drift or scope creep; or alternatively, many local authorities who do implement programme and project management regimes do so in an overly bureaucratic or even draconian way, which places a restrictive emphasis on process, documentation, and bureaucratic decision making structures, thus effectively strangling the project so insufficient progress is made. A careful balance is required.

Implementing action plans effectively requires programme and project management approaches that are disciplined, efficient and yet flexible. This is especially the case when a degree of prototyping, testing or innovation is involved in the implementation. In these instances in particular, the decision making and management must be much more agile and responsive than traditionally used in government.

4.5. Moving from strategy to operational action-plan

The ultimate aim for each city is to improve the delivery of its strategies, through effective and well-delivered programmes of activities and action. However, taking such action can often present risks and uncertainty. Cities face constant challenge when moving from discussion, theory and planning, into the arena of committing resources and starting to take actions which begin to impact upon people.

The Will to Deliver

The governance and decision-making structures needed to support the delivery of such solutions can be difficult to establish, particularly if the solutions are new and innovative, breaking new ground or testing new approaches. Politicians can become hesitant when it comes to putting a set of unfamiliar activities into practice; senior managers can start to see the barriers as real and less manageable obstacles; front line staff begin to feel the challenge of having to work differently; citizens become uncomfortable at something different occurring in their neighbourhood.

Thus, changes which deliver immediate benefits that are visible and widely understood are far more palatable and easily accepted by both politicians and citizens alike. Unfortunately, this works against the implementation of more significant changes that disrupt the status quo but which are often necessary if implementation of new policy is to be effected within a reasonable timeframe and with a decent result.

The example from the Netherlands (“Anval op de Uitval”) highlights that ongoing reductions of ESL become progressively more challenging as ESL rates become lower – those cities with relatively high ESL rates have many opportunities and practice examples to draw upon; those with relatively low rates have to be more innovative and ambitious in their solutions in order to make even small reductions. Moving into the territory of tackling ESL amongst the most challenging and hard-to-engage cohorts often means long term systemic problems need to be resolved.

Making it Stick

Another aspect is the transition from implementation *project* to ongoing *business as usual*. Many changes introduced by projects fail to become sustained in the longer term because this transition planning either never occurs or because key sponsors move onto the next priority without first securing the new practice as the norm. Systematic funding through normal mechanisms also needs to be in place to ensure successful approaches continue beyond and time-limited funding. A particular challenge for many of the cities is that

the (necessarily) integrated nature of the solutions means the responsibility for funding may also be distributed. Securing funding for all aspects of a solution of this type can be a challenge when there are different opinions about who is responsible and hence who should pay!

Coupled with that is the fact that city administrations are under increasing financial pressure. This presents two challenges. The first is simply that competing funding pressures can mean successful but yet unestablished practices get squeezed out. City administrations still tend towards favouring existing funding and structures when faced with tough choices - diverting funding from old / out-dated practice and onto new and emerging practices is still deemed too risky by many. This is particularly the case where a new practice takes place “up-stream” as a Prevention or Early Intervention activity designed to reduce or replace an existing Compensation activity. Cities are too often unwilling to divert enough funding to the new measure, resulting in it never becoming truly established.

The second challenge is that financial pressures mean local government structure and models of delivery need to change significantly in the coming years in order to be financially sustainable. Conflicts and unintended consequences can arise when running an implementation work programme that is testing new approaches, whilst simultaneously making significant changes to local operating models during the lifetime of that work programme. The necessary changes to funding models and working structures can result in changes to one area undermining the ongoing sustainability of solutions in other areas. Another reason why integrated actions plans need to be delivered in a collaborative way.

Collaborate to Innovate

However, moving to delivery of action plans in a collaborative and integrated way is still not yet standard practice in many cities. Many of the practices and behaviours needed to achieve this shift to collaborative and integrated working can be unfamiliar and challenging. Key methods such as open innovation and user-centred design are becoming much more common place within city administrations, as are the concepts of collaborative and social innovation.

All of these have similar routes and basic values, which are echoed in the approaches to be taken within the Stay Tuned project. Rapid testing of solutions, agile & iterative processes and a focus on collaboration and user-engagement are all inherent in various partner action plans and the overall approach for the project embraces this type of thinking. However, in reality city administrations still struggle with these concepts in practice, even if they do commit to using them in principle. The reality of delivery often feels very different to taking decisions in principle and the required ways of working can conflict with fundamental norms and behaviours.

In terms of achieving impact through the delivery of innovative actions, Gott (2014) highlights that “User involvement in design and refinement makes the innovation better and easier to embed in city environments”. He goes on to discuss how success in trialling and adopting new practices requires that “Leadership needs to be generated in communities not just in city authorities”.

Whilst in many ways, this simply re-emphasises the implementation challenges listed here, it normally requires significant changes in behaviour and practice to achieve leadership out-with the city administration and to involve ‘external’ users in the refinement and implementation of solutions. Both these things require skills that until recent years, were not frequently found within city administration. Even now, truly effective examples are not yet widespread.

The collaborative and supportive nature of the Implementation Networks will, however, enable cities to draw on peers and mentors during their implementation projects, both strengthening their capabilities around implementation and improving their technical practices relating to ESL.

As a result, the Stay Tuned project has the challenge of a limited amount of well documented examples on which to build, but also the opportunity of being able to significantly influence and improve the practical knowledge and evidence base in the field of reducing ESL.



5. REFERENCES

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