



STAY TUNED

BOOSTING THE FREQUENCY OF QUALIFICATION

Solution Story // Implementation Journey

Aveiro

As part of Stay Tuned, the team from the city of Aveiro, Portugal, were aiming to develop and implement a new way of working with teachers and schools, being more collaborative and using the wide range of expertise available across the city. They sought to encourage people to work in a responsive and networked way, rather than working in isolation (physically and professionally).

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01. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT?

The team in Aveiro came into the Stay Tuned project with the recent “social diagnosis” in their minds. The Municipality Social Diagnosis (May 2015) was a detailed and extensive study that related the increase of failure and school leaving to social, economic and ideological situation of families and the school community.

It also identified several causes which the team regarded as their main challenges regarding that policy issue, including issues with difficult family situations, the educational process itself and with the overall governance of the components needed to tackle this issue.

The social diagnosis generally identified a trend towards increasing behaviours that representing risk indicators for school drop-out and Early Leaving from Education and training (ELET).

The main areas that the team wished to work on were that most of the current models for preventing ELET in the city had focused on purely academic/school based elements (e.g. help them do their homework better) and didn't consider the “whole child” (e.g. family or social circumstances) when considering how to tackle specific problems.

02. WHAT WERE THEY WORKING TO IMPLEMENT?

In response to this social diagnosis, the team developed their Social Development Plan for the municipality, which defined a set of city-wide actions based around a number of thematic axes. The team identified at the start of the project that they needed to focus on some specific actions in order to have something clear for Stay Tuned and to focus on the “whole child” aspect.

The focus of the team meant they identified four specific actions to bring together under the Stay Tuned project, which would aim to address the above focus. The team stated

that, “To ensure horizontal, vertical and territorial integration in our urban strategies/action plans we have to consider a holistic vision. Therefore we intend to articulate several municipality projects to promote a ‘genuine solution to complex urban problems’ ... ”

They did this diagnosis with several teachers and some of the stakeholders who make part of the local working group, plus some additional stakeholders from outside. They identified four key projects to work on:

Focus Group: Creating a group with children and students who are themselves at risk of ELET or are involved with ELET prevention measures.

Technical & Professional Support: creating a network of professionals across the city to work together with teachers to jointly develop solutions when working with students at risk of ELET

Parental Engagement: creating closer relationships and better understanding between schools and parents

Skills Development: working with teachers to increase skills and capabilities in terms of working to prevent ELET.

Key Policy Themes for Aveiro:
Informal Learning and Schools as Communities
Training and Development of Teachers

03. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION?

A big challenge for the Aveiro team was to deal with all the different kinds of approach that all their different stakeholders have.

They knew that achieving compromise and (more importantly) commitment between teachers, municipality, university and other professional stakeholders was going to be a challenge.

The team were also very aware of the need for a cross-city, integrated approach to the work, given the complex nature of school failure and ELET. The team were clear that complexity of social behaviour and varied social backgrounds

were a key factor in success or failure of young people at school, and hence also for their Stay Tuned projects.

They certainly understood that this was not a typical approach for many teachers, and that a tendency existed to focus purely on the academic side – their students studies. As Adriana Simões from the social affairs department in the Aveiro team put it, “we understood that teachers do not share this point of view about bad results – don’t ask ‘what is behind these bad results, what is behind this bad behaviour?’ So we try to change the starting point: to ask ‘why?’ ”

Key Implementation Challenges for Aveiro:
Stakeholder Engagement
Maintaining an Integrated Approach

04. WHAT WAS THEIR DELIVERY APPROACH? HOW DID THEY TACKLE THE BARRIERS?

The rationale was that by implementing these measures, the team in Aveiro would be providing direct support and new skills to teachers (from across the professional spectrum), as well as working in the context of students’ wider circumstances, via parents and the direct focus group. The team intended this to provide a whole-life focus when thinking about the student, and a whole-

system focus when thinking about the support.

Adriana Simões and the team knew that a multi-disciplinary team would be needed to provide all this. They established a local stakeholder group with the required people to cover all the disciplines and experience needed then led by example and initiated work with two schools to test the approach.

Colleagues from the University of Aveiro held training and development workshops with teachers from the two partner schools. A range of stakeholders and professionals were involved in the development of this programme; it involved input and activities to help the teachers develop a more specific understanding of the importance of understanding and working in the context of the social background of the students in their class, particularly when dealing with issues and trying to address the early signs of educational failure in students. They were not “one-way” training sessions, but a collaborative discussion and workshop to explore the issues teachers encountered with students and exploring possible different ways of considering the what the right course of action might be.

Following the training, they established a regular meeting with each school, where the core project team sat down with teachers and worked together on specific cases. This was a core way to build both understanding and confidence in the teachers involved.

By working on live, real cases, the project team got to see and understanding the details

of specific challenges faced by the teachers and the teachers had the opportunity to explore possible actions with a much wider range of professionals. The teachers were able to consider responses that considered the students' whole life circumstances and to draw on the expertise from the network to explore a wider range of possible responses to help the students.

A key aspect to how they did this was their awareness of the situations in the schools and with the wider stakeholders. The conditions in which they were working. This was key to dealing with the challenges they faced – although much of it was about working with stakeholders, the success of this was down to the team's understanding of the sensitivities and the specific circumstances that people were operating in.

The team needed to understand the context for their implementation work, in the same way that the teachers needed to understand the context of the student when trying to implement their response to potential issues facing the student.

Key Implementation Themes for Aveiro: Conditions for Implementation Open Working and Stakeholder Involvement

05. WHAT WORKED? AND WHAT DIDN'T?

The team had a productive initial engagement with potential ULG members, working through a win-win exercise with the group. They wanted to establish how all partners could benefit from the collaboration. They found this to be an effective way of exposing the priorities and the issues from all sides and putting them openly on the table: making them explicit to all parties. Discussion around these areas meant the partners started to build the trust and relationships they needed to run a successful implementation and jointly deliver the projects.

However, the project team admit they made an early mistake in assuming that the initial engagement was sufficient to mobilise the key stakeholders. Although they helped establish the mutual benefits, it turned out that the (minimal) immediate follow-up was not sufficient to maintain momentum and engagement from partners. They had a large range of stakeholders involved; this meant that reconvening large meetings on a regular basis (needed to manage and support the delivery of the action plan successfully) would not be possible in practice.

Instead, Adriana Simões and the team decided a more “strict” ULG was needed, comprising just the core project team and the stakeholders from the core delivery partners. This was someone from each of the two partner schools, the City Hall, the University of Aveiro and the other relevant social support institutions [need names here]. In doing this, they created a “virtual team” to run the project delivery. This tight group starting meeting and communicating regularly and dealing with the day to day decisions and activities related to the implementation to keep things on track.

The teachers training worked and along with the meetings in each school every three

weeks, has promoted a more productive working relationship and a willingness to collaborate across the network of stakeholders and professionals. Adriana Simões notes, “After the teacher training, they recognised that they need to reflect a little more on their methodologies. It’s maybe too centralised on academic results and not on the skills and abilities that the students also have and that can be also considered for a final quantified evaluation.”

That said, this path was not straightforward for the team... One of the school directors left their school not very long into the project. This created uncertainty for the teachers involved and for the project team in terms of the leadership, direction and support for the teaching staff. In fact, it was the participation of the teachers in the Stay Tuned transnational meeting in Aveiro which played a part in turning this around. The transnational exchange with people from across Europe helped one of the teachers from the Eixo school, to see things in a very different light.

The discussions and just the exposure to a completely different set of experiences and viewpoints, coupled with the activities to explore some of the problems and challenges facing Aveiro in different ways, meant that those teachers understood the project and the focus differently for the first time, and saw new ways of approaching the problems.

From that point, some of Eixo’s school teachers effectively became the main contact and a champion of the project within the school. This enabled the team to build strong relationships with both pilot schools and to establish the three-weekly meetings with each school. It has also enabled new additions to the project, in the form of new teachers becoming involved with the project.

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06. WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

The involvement in the transnational parts of the project can be a transformative experience for local stakeholders. Adriana Simões says that “to invite them to also participate in the transnational meetings, it makes all the difference - after the meeting in Aveiro I believe that both schools have a new visions about our work and about the project.”

In the case of Stay Tuned, the transnational meetings have provided time and structure for reflective practice, and this is what the team from Aveiro, teachers included have made great use of – exploring the shared views experiences of others and from that, reflecting on their own practice and approach.

Taking time out to review is crucial to development of practice and the time for this is often not made available in the busy day-to-day activity.

Resource is a key aspect – having the time to work on the project and to support others.

“We believe with this work and this project, we recognise that the municipality doesn't have enough human resource to work on this educational problem, so not it's not only a schools and families that have this challenge, it's also our internal lack of human resource that cannot allow us to do better.”

But she also makes the really important point that whilst resource is needed to run projects, collaboration itself doesn't have to cost money: “Money barriers are fake news! It's not necessary to have money in order to implement some kind of compromise between stakeholders.”

Lack of finance is often cited as a barrier to collaboration. It is true that a collaborative, co-creative process can take longer than an authoritarian approach.

But the financial argument is often used to mask an unwillingness to compromise, rather than an inability to make the time available.

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07. WHAT DID THEY CHANGE AS A RESULT?

Because of this ongoing, collaborative work to help resolve the challenges experienced by students (and hence by teachers), there is now much higher levels of sharing between teachers.

This ranges from gaining a shared solidarity from knowing that others also share the same concerns or experience the same weaknesses to exchanging information and learning about what has worked for them.

Teachers are now working closely with a wide range of other professionals to employ new and different strategies. This is partly as a result of the exchange amongst the network, but also from applying learning from the teacher development workshops.

There is a better understanding of the social background of students and its effect on their wellbeing and hence their studies.

08. WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE? WHAT DO THEY PLAN TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

The project has greatly improved the engagement of students at risk in the two pilot schools. The network of professionals across the city has been established and is connected to the pilot schools and providing support actively.

The team's next challenge is to be able to step away from the three-weekly meetings with the schools. The teachers are still not confident enough to run the meetings without Carla Rodrigues and Adriana Simões, both city hall professionals, and the core project team. This is where we see the issue of sustainable change coming in. The challenge now is to find a way to step back from the process and for the new way of working to be continue. Only then will the change truly have 'stuck'.

To roll out this approach further and engage more teachers in more schools, further funding will be required to cover the time involved in expanding the network. The team are already doing this informally (remember, collaboration is free!) but to take it to any scale does require more resources.

But there have been recent developments: the team have identified a follow-on project (PIICIE) that offers the potential to give support to a transition to a sustainable way of working; but with it comes the risk of continuing to provide a "temporary" focus through temporary, time-limited funding, rather than supporting focus on creating a sustainable change in practice.

However the project team have seen that the PIICIE project offers advantages: it is cross-municipality and provides the opportunity to expand the influence of this group and it's ways of working beyond the two schools in just one municipality. The team have worked to identify the "mindset" required for partners to work in this way.

The team are excited at the potential of a project which underpins the ethos of the new activity – the idea that working actively with a range of professionals from within and outside the school is normal; the willingness to seek support and input from others in the course of working with children and parents;

the willingness to openly share problems that are being faced and to work together to find sustainable solutions. They need to ensure the network within the city of Aveiro continues to

function effectively in supporting educational success amongst all of its young people. There will certainly be new challenges to deal with. But they are well on their way.

