



# STAY TUNED

BOOSTING THE FREQUENCY OF QUALIFICATION

## Solution Story // Implementation Journey Ghent

The team from Ghent, Belgium, have been working to develop and test a method of supporting school teams to create and implement a school-specific action plan to combat Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET). Through several phases, they developed and honed both their support to schools and the way in which they implement it.



## 01. WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT?

In 2016 all secondary schools in the city of Ghent signed a charter which formalised a commitment to reduced Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET).

At the same time, "Onderwijscentrum Gent" (the new Ghent Education Centre) was being established. This new unit brought together professionals from a variety of disciplines to coordinate the various strands of the new education strategy for the city.

This strategy had been developed to deliver the wide-ranging interventions needed in combatting ELET. A comprehensive plan, comprising over 30 major actions, the team decided to focus on a specific aspect for Stay Tuned, namely how to support schools to develop and implement a school specific action plan on ELET.

Through the charter, schools had made a commitment and initial engagements and the Education Centre set out to support them in realising that.

## 02. WHAT WERE THEY WORKING TO IMPLEMENT?

"Operatie Geslaagd" was the joint campaign established in the city to tackle ELET. Meaning "Operation Success" it combines the newly signed charter and the Ghent Plan on ELET, putting tackling of ELET as a priority public policy goal and with a specific focus on secondary education.



In terms of the specific part of the plan being followed within Stay Tuned, the aim was to test a new way of working with schools to provide individual support in developing an action plan for combatting ELET.

The first phase of this work involved working with six schools, also making a grant available to them (of around €15,000) to help realise their plan. The team focussed on working with schools where ELET was a particular problem and worked with the school teams, providing support and coaching to prioritise which elements to focus on.

All this was building on the local steering group that had been established over the previous two years prior to the full establishment of the Education Centre and Operatie Geslaagd.

The group was given increased prominence via the signing of the Charter and would form the basis of the city's Urbact Local Group (ULG) for the Stay Tuned project.

**Key Policy Themes for Ghent:**  
Training and Development of Teachers

## 03. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION?

Engaging whole school teams was difficult in the first phases. Signing up to the charter and subsequent discussions about a school's involvement in this specific part of the project was generally handled by the school director. There was no guarantee that individual directors had communicated with or involved their wider teams in the process.

The team in the Education Centre were clear that the schools needed to feel ownership of the action plans if they were to be successful. This needed to go beyond one individual, as the whole school team would need to be on board in order to deliver the plan and make changes that would stand the test of time.

Another barrier in the early stages was moving from general priorities to concrete school action plans. Maintaining commitment to continue with the plans and implement actions for the long term was also a challenge.

Schools generally found it easy to articulate their priorities but translating that into realistic actions plans and then move into implementation of these causes difficulties and resistance.

A further difficulty that the team gradually identified was in monitoring and measuring the effects of the school plans. This was a challenge for the project team but also at school level, as they tried to show progress.

**Key Implementation Challenges for Ghent:**  
Stakeholder Engagement  
Moving from Strategy to Operational Plan  
Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

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

The existence of the charter was a critical driver for initial engagement, as was the option of a grant agreement. The team from the Education Centre worked with each school to create a coalition, a core team with the school. The school received targeted support and advice, helping them to invest in professional development for the school staff and to develop their own action plan.

Each school was supported in assessing its own baseline position, creating understanding and ownership within the school itself. From that,

the priorities were defined and then the action plan develop in partnership.

Visualisation of the baseline position was included to help the school team and the Education Centre to develop a common understanding of the position.

After nine months of the initial pilot, a second phase was initiated, bringing in another six schools to the project. The challenges of developing the plans had been identified by this stage and adjustments were made to the



approach, based on the reflections of the team.

Again, this second wave of schools were selected based on the social deprivation indicators (as a proxy for likelihood of ELET). However, this second phase made other minor adjustments to the project, including some extra tools to help structure the methodology and additional meetings to inject additional guidance and follow-up. The team also recognised the importance of actively putting

the themes of ELET prevention on the agenda with the school, to maintain focus.

Following on from these two pilot phases, the team in Ghent eventually conceived a new version of the approach for phase 3. This was a new project, started in early 2019 to build on the experiences from the first two phases and create a more solid approach to the engagement of secondary schools across the city.

**Key Implementation Themes for Ghent:**  
Building Strong Action Plans  
Open Working and Stakeholder Involvement  
Project Monitoring, Evaluation and Decisions

## 05. WHAT WORKED? AND WHAT DIDN'T?

The methodology around the baselining process and visualisation of the position and priorities was effective and helped to establish a clear and common view of the starting point. However, the difficulties in translating the priorities into a tangible action plan made the first phase less effective than hoped.

By increasing the number of meeting contacts with each school from three to five, and introducing more guidance and follow-up activities, the traction with plans was increased in phase 2, with ELET more consistently on the agenda for the schools.

A template for the action plan and a checklist containing an overview of factors to take into account during the development and implementation of the action plan were created. These were discussed with the school teams to aid the process and proved to be effective.

The involvement of schools with high ELET rates in the early phases of the project was a

positive result for the team in the Education Centre. Achieving impact with such schools had the potential for big results in terms of ELET reduction in the city.

However, it gradually became clear that by targeting the schools in which the Education Centre were interested, and by offering grants to support these schools, they were not creating a shared vision and value set on which to build the project. Just because ELET was a priority for the Education Centre, that didn't necessarily mean the same was true for the school team.

Equally, the funding on offer through the grant could distort motivations. It was easy for a school to be involved and there was less commitment than if they were funding and resourcing it themselves, as a school priority.

In essence, the grant agreements brought early engagement, but not long-term commitment. The action plans would have to have a lifespan beyond the grant agreement if they were to be successful.

## 06. WHAT DID THEY LEARN? WHAT DID THEY CHANGE AS A RESULT? WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE?

In reviewing the first two phases, the team realised that whilst providing some enabling funding, the grant agreements were actually introducing an unhelpful motivation in the project. Equally, targeting the schools with the highest ELET rates, whilst strategically logical also meant that the team were not always working with the most willing school teams.

Consequently, the team took a slightly different approach in setting up the latest iteration of the project. For the third phase, entry into the project is now voluntary for schools – it is open to all. Schools can register to participate, giving them access to free professional development and support and free coaching.

The team also removed the offer of a grant agreement. So now there is no direct financial aspect to the support. However, the hope is this will mean the schools involved are much more motivated to participate for their own benefit, rather than just for the benefit of the wider strategy.

In response to the difficulty of moving from overall priorities to specific actions, the team have also introduced a longer 'inspirational' phase before starting the individual support. This is intended to increase participation and engagement and to help school teams to understand the possible opportunities and options before moving into building a specific action plan.

This includes group training and face-to-face "intervision" activities: A 'peer coaching' activity with a small group of professionals or managers who have a professional context or challenge in common.

In addition, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was set up in order to provide a common learning platform to all participants in the project, with the opportunities for further exchange and interaction as part of that.

Learning between colleagues is creating engagement and greater awareness of what is happening already. This gives space for teams and individuals to build on solid foundations when they develop their plans.

There are now 16 schools enrolled in the current project. Each one has been asked to register with a core team, including a policy worker, student counsellor or coordinator (i.e. middle-management) and three teachers. The inclusion of a diverse core team in the early inspirational phase (and not just the school director) aims to ensure there is broad-based engagement, understanding and support within the school before moving on to developing and implementing action plans.

All of the core project team will be enrolled on the MOOC, but it is open to all members of the school teams. Again, this helps to broaden engagement across the whole school team, not just a 'narrow' project team.

This has created a positive working atmosphere and good engagement of core teams during the kick-off and supervision sessions. This was seen across schools in the project. Specific focus on the MOOC during the face-to-face sessions also helped to boost and animate that as a virtual community, providing peer support and exchange through alternative routes.

## 07. WHAT DO THEY PLAN TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

Following the initial phase of supporting and upskilling the group, the cohort move into individual support next year, with coaching on the job to finalise and then implement their action plans.

The MOOC had a real boost in dynamics after the first couple of supervision sessions, but it still needs further work to ensure that teams gain the full value from it. The community building potential of the MOOC and the 'inspirational' trajectory is also not yet fully realised and the team wish to maintain the visibility and engagement with it.

There is still much to be done on monitoring and evaluation between now and the end of the project in June 2020. This will assess the effect of the implementation of school action plans in the short term and on ELET rates in the long term.

In the Ghent Education Centre a new thematic working group focusing on professional development is also starting up. Lessons learned during the pilot projects and the inspirational trajectory will be translated to other topics addressed in the Ghent Education Centre in the future.

