

Integrating social support into training: feedback from a programme at regional level



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EMPLOYMENT
SUPPORT

SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

EMPLOYMENT
MEASURE

EVALUATION

LOCAL APPROACH

LOW LEVEL OF
QUALIFICATION

YOUNG PERSON
IN DIFFICULTY

For those who "have been excluded from the labour market", joining an integration and training scheme is often accompanied by social support, aimed at resolving difficulties linked to their living conditions. A programme set up at regional level has enabled training organisations to experiment with the integration of this social component. Support thus becomes multi-dimensional and individualised, with the goal of reducing breaks and "seams" that can lead people to quit. This Céreq Bref presents a qualitative evaluation of this programme, which provides an insight into its implementation and reception, as well as the factors contributing to its success or failure.

The task of labour market integration and training professionals is to provide the support needed to overcome the obstacles encountered by those excluded from the labour market. A distinction is to be made here between employment support, which concerns the construction of a career plan, the acquisition of skills and the search for a job, and social support, which seeks to resolve a cluster of difficulties regarded as "peripheral obstacles" and which stem from individuals' personal circumstances (problems with health, housing, mobility, etc.). These two types of support can be provided together throughout the entire integration process, in both the prequalification and qualification stages; generally, however, they are provided through two different channels. This edition of Céreq Bref focuses on a trial conducted as part of a regional skills investment pact, in which the social support formed an integral part of a remobilisation scheme that aimed to assist those excluded from the labour market into training or employment.

Backed by central government from 2018 onwards, the regional skills investment pacts seek to offer an improved response to the problems encountered by individuals said to be "excluded from the labour market" by working to make their career trajectories more secure. From this perspective, the integrated "Prépa rebond" ("Getting ready to bounce back") scheme combines within the same training offer both the prequalification and vocational qualification stages in order to limit the breaks in individual trajectories. It is also recommended that, alongside the training component, a social support component be included in the scheme. The innovation lies in the integration of this social component, in which a long-term approach is adopted to resolving the social difficulties that

trainees encounter by providing both social support and employment support to guide them into training, qualification and employment. The trial scheme presented here (see Box 1) is one example of these so-called innovative training offers. The qualitative evaluation of the scheme [1] (see Box 2) sheds some light on the way in which training organisations incorporate the social support and on how it has been received by trainees. It has enabled us to identify three types of support situation that vary according to the mode of implementation and the trainees' profiles: support that remobilises and provides security, support that has only limited effects and support that fails to mobilise or provide security.

Multi-dimensional, individualised support

Since the 1980s, employment policies have combined intermediation with support work in order to integrate job seekers into the labour market. However, there was a change of approach in the 2000s. Since then, the emphasis has been on helping individuals achieve a degree of autonomy in order to develop their ability to contribute to their own employability.

Support programmes aim to equip trainees with the tools and skills required to adapt to developments in the labour market. By assigning a dedicated social support worker to each participant, the "Prépa rebond" scheme "formalises the individualised support function by recognising the time-consuming aspect of the work required to overcome the peripheral obstacles to access to training or employment". The teams charged with the task of developing a multidimensional support programme designed to "remove" these "obstacles" emphasise its individualised nature and generally aim to act on various

1 Presentation of the “Prépa rebond” integrated scheme

Developed and trialled in the metropolitan region since March 2020, the “Prépa rebond” integrated scheme is a so-called “all-in-one” scheme that aims to combine remobilisation, the construction of a career plan and training leading to a qualification for those persons considered to be furthest from the labour market, aged over 16 and with few if any qualifications. It is implemented in 4 stages as recommended in the project specifications: the screening stage (lasts two weeks, the aim being to identify participants’ motivation and to outline the various stages of the scheme to them), the construction of a career plan and its approval, the entry into a training programme leading to a qualification or employment and a follow-up three months after leaving the scheme. The scheme aims to link these stages together “without a break” for participants by putting in place “seamless” pathways. To that end, the scheme has introduced a number of innovations: an expanded circle of referring bodies in an attempt to reach the most precarious groups, dual support - social support and employment support – provided along the entire pathway in order to limit drop-outs, an attractive remuneration of 850 euros per month for all participants, a fairly lengthy programme lasting up to 18 months as required, the use of teaching and learning tools regarded as innovative in order to win over groups less inclined to learn, extensive coverage in isolated rural areas facilitating access to training programmes and close collaboration between the training organisations providing preparatory courses and those providing training leading to qualifications in order to ensure pathway continuity.

interdependent aspects, such as participants’ living conditions, health, mobility and self-confidence.

The social support is envisaged first and foremost as a means of accelerating the process of accessing rights and is intended, through the intense pace of the exchanges, to tighten the “safety net” formed by the social protection programmes around participants. For example, one social support worker acted as an institutional guarantor for Célestin, aged 22, who had been living on the streets before joining the scheme, so that he could obtain a place in a young workers’ hostel: “In this case, we were in close contact with the local employment information and advice services for young people and the hostel just to say: ‘There you go, the lad’s been there for several weeks, it’s going well, the situation is stabilising’”. In addition to assistance with the procedures involved in making medical appointments or making an application to register as a disabled worker, the health support is intended to be a means of changing the stigmatising attitudes towards health problems. This support work puts physical capacities at the heart of clients’ career plans (by considering retraining, for example, the adaptation of work stations, etc.). Similarly, in order to help participants with the rulings on geographical mobility, the support the teams provide often combines an administrative dimension (help in obtaining government assistance to take the driving test or with personal mobility, registration with a vehicle hire association or driving school) with work on attitudes in order to help participants picture themselves in a new place. Working on participants’ apprehensions, fears and personal experiences necessarily involves the teams in forging relationships of trust. This is all the more true since the long-term integration into the labour market that the scheme is intended to encourage is conceived as arising from individual choices made in full knowledge of the possible fields of employment. However, participants doubt their own capabilities and almost all of them have a negative self-image. The restoration of self-esteem is regarded as a prerequisite for any career

**Extract from the scheme specifications*

plan, which often leads the support staff to work simultaneously on job search techniques and self-discovery and self-expression activities (computer exercises, drama activities, sport). To that end, the support workers are encouraged to create synergies with other local schemes, services and actors but find themselves confronted with the regional inequalities in training provision. While the scheme was conceived as a means of mitigating the lack of training provision in rural areas, it is not sufficient to compensate for pre-existing inequalities. Apart from this dimension, other factors also contribute to the creation of disparities in the provision of support.

Differences in implementation and diversity of target populations

The survey has revealed two types of factors giving rise to variations in the impact of social support: differences in the way the support is implemented, on the one hand, and, on the other, the diversity of the target populations.

With regard to the first aspect, the training organisations have made relatively contrasting choices when selecting the personnel charged with delivering the social support, or rather with “directing [clients] to the appropriate organisations depending on the difficulties encountered”.* This is a task that requires solid knowledge of the resources available in the various areas of social provision in a specific territory. However, it seems that the effectiveness of the support is strongly influenced by the status and qualifications of the professionals recruited.


At all the sites surveyed [1], the social support is entrusted to women aged over 40 who have often landed up in the training sector following voluntary retraining. However, this apparent uniformity conceals a diversity of choices made by the training organisations (TOs) with respect to staff qualifications and contract type. At one of the sites, the TO requires its staff to be functionally flexible. Thus the social support worker takes on the role of trainer, devoting one half-day a week to her support role and the rest of her schedule to training proper. Conversely, at the other sites surveyed, the social support and training functions are quite separate and carried out by different employees who are properly qualified for their respective roles (psychologist and employment advisor).

These workers are employed on different types of contract. While one of the TOs surveyed has joined the scheme with a stable team employed on open-ended (permanent) contracts, this is less true at the other sites. In one case, the organisation has opted for fixed-term contracts because of the financial constraints and the difficulties of recruiting staff in rural areas. In the other case, the TO routinely offers fixed-term contracts that run for periods of time shorter than the average duration of the support provided for course participants, which accounts for the high level of staff turnover. However, the professionals require a certain degree of stability if

2 The data used

The survey protocol comprised two phases. In the first phase, the political construction of the scheme and its implementation by the provider organisations were analysed on the basis of documentary work on the project specifications, the training organisations' responses to the invitation to tender and the 19 interviews conducted with funders, lead organisations and the professional staff in the training organisations that responded to the invitation to tender. In the second phase, the scheme's effects on participants' trajectories were analysed in terms both of expectations and perceptions as well as of access to employment depending on their profiles and on the ways in which the provider organisations implemented the scheme. The field work combined repeated semi-structured interviews with 69 scheme participants and 38 professionals (trainers, coordinators and support workers) and observations in three training organisations responsible for implementing the scheme. These qualitative data were supplemented by analysis of the administrative files submitted by these organisations. The assessment was conducted in three areas within a metropolitan region that differed from each other in the extent to which they formed geographical enclaves and in their principal sectors of economic activity. The field work was carried out between September 2020 and December 2021 against the specific background of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Characteristics of the 49 participants surveyed on three occasions:

Sex		Age			Referring bodies					Duration		Access to qualification		Status when surveyed	
															
M	F	- 18	18 to 25	+ 5	Local youth employment service	Employment service	Unité d'emploi	Training organisation	Other *	- 8 months	+ 8 months	Yes	No	Active	Departed
30	19	9	21	19	21	10	6	4	8	40	9	14	34	13	36

Example: Of the 49 participants surveyed, 21 were aged between 18 and 25 and 9 were minors.

Legend: *Other: word of mouth, self-referral.

they are to forge relationships of trust and acquire a good knowledge of the resources available in their areas, both of which are prerequisites for the provision of effective support.

The second set of factors giving rise to variations in the support provided is the relative diversity of the target populations in terms of age, gender and labour market experience. As well as individuals who are far removed from the labour market**, other participants tend rather to be on its margins, having had recurrent periods of precarious, poorly paid employment, while a third category consists of early school leavers who have just quit the education system. In other words, the groups regarded as "excluded from the labour market" do not constitute a homogeneous category. There are sub-groups within it who do not perceive the scheme in the same way. For the first and third groups, the training provides a reassuring environment within which they can take the time necessary to overcome the obstacles preventing them from accessing employment; the individuals in the second group, however, find themselves in more of an emergency situation, which prevents them from seizing the opportunity to benefit from social support over a long period in order to obtain a qualification. They are more likely than the others to drop out of the scheme quickly if a job opportunity, however precarious, presents itself. This financial emergency is particularly apparent among young women in the process of leaving the parental home or moving in with a partner.

Three types of integrated social support situations

Three types of situations emerge from the survey, depending on these various factors. In the first, the support helps course participants remobilise and gives them a sense of security; in the second, its

effects are more limited while in the third it is, on the contrary, demotivating and fails to give participants any sense of security.

A situation in which the support is experienced as reassuring is characterised by: regular in-depth meetings between the social support worker and participants, tailored to participants' needs; stable locations and support team; complementary profiles for employment advisers and social support workers; consistency of approach between the training centre's professional staff and those providing support externally. For example, while the employment advisers offer course participants guidance on how to put together their CVs and draft their accompanying letters, the social support workers focus, during bilateral interviews, on participants' skills, attributes and the peripheral obstacles to training and employment.

Example of a support situation that offered security and reassurance:

Léo, 16 years of age, has problems with his sight and has to wear very strong prescription lenses. He joined the scheme after he had failed to obtain an apprenticeship in carpentry. After several placements in various sectors, he opted for catering. His plan was accepted and he began a CAP in catering (a level 3 qualification) in an organisation providing training leading to qualifications. The support provided for him revealed that he had dyslexia, which was the cause of his learning difficulties. Moreover, the diagnosis of his eye problem enabled an application to be made for him to be officially registered as disabled.

**In the sense that they have had virtually no experience of paid work for several years.

→ Further reading

[1] P-Y. Bernard, V. Gosseaume, K. Meslin, M. , Roupnel-Fuentes, J. Walker, Évaluation qualitative du dispositif Prépa Rebond Dispositif intégré en Pays de la Loire, Rapport final, DARES, 2022.

[2] A. Arbelaez Ayala, A. Bucher, P. Givord, L. Lima, M. Morel, Troisième rapport scientifique de l'évaluation du Plan d'investissement dans les compétences », DARES, 2022.

This collaboration between advisers and support workers continues with the professionals (social workers or specialist instructors) who provide participants with support outside the training organisations. Early school leavers and the long-term unemployed are the main recipients of this type of support, which enables them to mobilise or remobilise their resources, and to construct or reconstruct their career plans in order to picture themselves on a training course, in an occupation or in a job.

The situation in which the support has only limited effects has certain similarities with the previous one in terms of the stability of the professional staff and the consistency of the various interventions. However, it has only limited effects because of the participants' early departure from the course. Regardless of the quality of the training, two categories of participants in particular are involved in these early departures. For some, the initial enthusiasm and mobilisation they experience on entry into the scheme give way to feelings of demotivation resulting from a loss of meaning or thwarted plans. The group most affected by this comprises male early school leavers unable to motivate themselves to construct yet another career plan after repeated failures. For others, a sharp conflict arises between staying on this trajectory towards a training programme and leaving for a job that pays more money than the scheme can offer. This is more likely to happen in the case of young women who are changing their plans, deciding to cohabit with a partner and leaving the scheme for better paid work. Despite their departure, they all declare themselves satisfied with the support they received during their time in the scheme.

Example of a support situation with limited effects:


Sophie, 18 years of age, cohabits with her partner in his parents' house; he is a manual worker in a food processing factory. She does not have a driving licence. She joined the scheme for the promised support in order to decide what she wanted to do. Various placements in painting and decorating confirmed her in her choice of house painter as her future occupation and she decided to move in with her boyfriend. She began her training but quit after two weeks out of disappointment. She subsequently had a few spells of temporary work in order to follow through on her plan to move in with her boyfriend. Although she has withdrawn from the scheme, she does not reject it and is still in touch with her support worker.

The support proves to be unsettling when the implementation of the scheme is characterised by inconsistencies and dysfunctions. The turnover among training centre staff and their deployment to different functions, as well as the irregular meetings, changes in schedules and the regular arrivals of new staff are demotivating and unsettling factors for all course participants, and particularly for those experiencing psychological social, economic and work-related difficulties. The scheme then no longer makes any sense. In all cases, this type of support quickly leads participants to the exit door.

Example of an unsettling support situation:

Yvon, 29 years of age, living in accommodation sublet from a charitable organisation, has various family, health and psychological problems. Referred for entry to the scheme in March 2021 by the Unité Emploi, the agency responsible for supporting recipients of the minimum income allowance (RSA), he was initially enthusiastic but then a few health problems disrupted his attendance on placements in sales work. Demotivated, destabilised and unsettled by the constant arrival of new, younger participants in the scheme, as well as by the high level of turnover among the training staff, Yvon quit the scheme 4 months later without any training and without a job.

— T In the case of this trial scheme, the integrated social support clearly emerges as a key element and both staff and course participants are agreed that this function should be insourced. However, its success is not automatic. It functions at its best when the training organisations offer their employees stable employment conditions, favour complementarity of functions over the deployment of staff to a range of different roles, dedicate staff with specific skills to this function and coordinate the support measures in such a way as to ensure consistency with those implemented by other professionals both inside and outside the training organisations in order to offer scheme participants wide-ranging support. — ●

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