

STRAIGHTEN BASIC SKILLS (SbS) – Intellectual Output 01

Success indicators for effective delivery of work-related basic skills training to low-skilled workers and the unemployed



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Summary of National Experiences – Working Paper

Using knowledge generated in the course of several significant projects undertaken in and around the European Basic Skills Network, the following working paper identifies key social, economic and cultural factors that contribute to the success of work-related basic skills provision. The resulting success indicators are drawn from the combined experience and knowledge of all SbS consortium members and the associated partner organisation.

SbS consortium:



Institut National de
Formation et de Recherche
sur l'Education Permanente
(France)
www.infrep.org



Büro für berufliche
Bildungsplanung (Germany)
www.bbb-dortmund.de



BEST Institut für
berufsbezogene
Weiterbildung und
Personaltraining (Austria)
www.best.at



National Institute of Adult
Continuing Education
(England and Wales)
www.niace.org.uk



Instytut Român de Educație a
Adulților (Romania)
www.irea.ro



Folkeuniversitetet (Norway)
www.folkeuniversitetet.no

Work-Related Basic Skills Training Success Indicators

Work on Intellectual Output 01 confirms what the project partners suspected in terms of the complexity of the factors influencing the success of basic skills training for low-skilled workers and the unemployed. There is no single ‘golden bullet’ or recipe for success, but we can identify the following factors as having a significant influence on the successful delivery of work-related basic skills training.

National Legal Framework

National law or other legal regulations provide the backdrop for education and training in a range of contexts. Legislation, however, continues to be adapted and is not sufficient to ensure the success of work-related basic skills training on its own.¹ Whilst a favourable legal landscape is required, other factors are also essential to successful delivery.

Regular Funding Systems

Work-related basic skills training needs sustainable, accessible and regular funding mechanisms. In some countries training or education voucher systems have been successful. European, National and Regional funding schemes often have complicated tendering and application processes and offer limited funds for specific projects. Where funding is easily accessible and widely available – such as the Norwegian Basic Competence in Working Life (BCWL) programme and the French *Compte Personnel de Formation* (CPF – Personal Training Account) scheme – high uptake and long-term stability of the programme has been observed.²

National Policy Strategy

National policy can be helpful in providing objectives for national and regional training initiatives. Such policies need to outline clear roles and responsibilities for organisations, and the initiative requires continued evaluation through a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. National policies should also have an appropriate and sustainable financial basis to ensure their longevity.³

National Quality Assurance Standards – Frameworks, Guidelines and Quality Marks

¹ Austria’s ‘LLL: 2020’ report into Lifelong Learning; Romania’s ‘Law of Education, no.1/2011’ Article 333, and; the French Law No. 2014-288 of 5 March 2014 on vocational training, employment and social democracy demonstrate recent and on-going advances in educational law that contribute to the evolving training contexts throughout Europe.

² Norway’s BCWL programme involves over 6,000 participants and a fund of approximately €12 million. This fund has been steadily increasing since its inception ten years ago, despite political changes.

³ Such national policy currently includes: the Austrian Initiative for Adult Education; the Romanian National Strategy for the Professional Development of Adults 2014-2020; the German National Strategy for Literacy and Basic Education of Adults; and the United Kingdom’s *Skills for Sustainable Growth* strategy in England.

National quality guidelines include a range of quality assurance regulations, such as: quality marks for Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, competency standards for basic skills, and quality requirements for trainers, tutors and other personnel who provide basic skills training.⁴ Such quality guidelines are helpful for the advancement of work-related basic skills training but they should not be too prescriptive or prevent training organisations from delivering learning programmes that are tailored to the needs of the learners.

National and Regional Policy Making and Networking

Networking between organisations at both national and regional levels was observed in nearly every country involved in the consortium. It was found that the most successful networks involved a range of different organisations including employment agencies, educational institutions, trade unions, employers' representatives, employees' representatives and civil organisations.⁵

National and Regional Campaigns - Visibility and Social Stigma

In recent years, national and regional campaigns – such as 'Courage to Learn' in Austria, 'Reading and Writing – Key to the World' in Germany, and 'Learning at Work Week' in the UK – have helped to raise public and political awareness of basic skills training. The question of whether there is social stigma attached to low-skill levels requires further investigation. Similarly, the ability of basic skills campaigns to remove this perceived social stigma has not yet been addressed in the evaluation of such campaigns.

Supportive Agreements between the Social Partners

Knowledge and experience from all members of the consortium highlighted the importance of supportive agreements between social partners involved in basic skills provision. In particular, links between councils, local authorities, training providers and private companies can facilitate and strengthen basic skills initiatives in the workplace.

Productive Links between Employers and Training Enterprises

Productive links between employers and training enterprises, including the development of appropriate and desirable incentives for employers to take part in up-

⁴ Such as the National Funding and Standards Framework for VET Providers in Austria; the Competence Goals for Basic Skills for Adults standards in Norway, and; the National Occupational Standards in the UK.

⁵ Outstanding examples include the National Agency of the Fight against Illiteracy (ANLCI) in France that unites public and private partners in highlighting literacy issues, and the North-Rhine Westphalia Network of Literacy and Basic Skills that involves both the Minister of School and Adult Education and the Network for Work-Related Basic Skills in Germany.

skilling their workforce, is a key determining factor for success. Consortium partners recognise that good links between employers and training enterprises often feature:⁶

- Tailor-made incentive packages for employers;
- Awareness training within enterprises and specially trained delivery staff;
- Advice, guidance and support for employers and training enterprises;
- Use of the 'language of training enterprises' to create cohesion;
- Excellent organisation and company-wide motivation;
- A whole-organisational approach;
- Investment in basic skills that are relevant to both employers and enterprises;
- Reinforcement of the practical benefits of basic skills training;
- High expectations with plenty of support to enable achievement;
- Training that is focused, adapted to employer settings and highly relevant to workplace scenarios;
- Negotiation between employers and training enterprises on course objectives and resources.

It is also critical to identify which employers are best suited to integrate work-based basic skills training into the workplace. Suitable employers may have the following:

- A high proportion of low-skilled employees;
- A desire to invest in training for the workforce that includes basic skills;
- An attentiveness to the needs and development of the workforce;
- High levels of social responsibility;
- A need to up-skill the workforce as a result of restructuring processes in the company;
- Personnel in situations of radical change (e.g. potential redundancies or expansions).

Finally, it is recognised that basic skills training must be embedded in professional development strategies, such as in the GO2 project in Switzerland, to reach maximal effectiveness.⁷

Successful Cooperation between all Organisations Involved in Work-Related Training

Development of effective work-related basic skills training is dependent on the cooperation of all organisations, supported by a fundamental drive to achieve shared objectives. Labour offices and job centres are two of the key stakeholders. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) research report – 'Helpful Approaches to the Delivery of English and Maths for Unemployed Adults', commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills – shows that

⁶ Drawn from reports and projects including: 'Skills for Life – Make it Your Business Employer Toolkit', Department for Education, 2004; 'The Network for Workplace Language, Literacy and Numeracy (UK)'; the European Lifelong Learning Program LEONARDO DA VINCI and GRUNDTVIG projects.

⁷ The GO2 project encourages the development of basic skills in companies through specific and relevant scenario-based training that improves basic skills alongside professional development.

'pre-employment partnerships', based on close relationships between learning providers and Job Centre Plus offices, can be successful.⁸

Wide Range of Providers

Extending the range of work-related basic skills training requires recruiting a wide range of providers in the field of adult education, and particularly in basic skills. These include commercial, public, and non-governmental organisations, among others. It should be noted that a wide range of providers alone is not sufficient: regulation and quality criteria are required to ensure the highest quality of provision. Quality criteria and frameworks need to be in place to enable employers to select appropriately qualified and experienced learning providers that offer the highest quality training.

Professionalization of Trainers

In almost all countries involved in the consortium, there are no formal qualification routes for basic skills tutors. In Romania, for example, national requirements were established in 2010 that require those who teach/train adults following accredited (formal) courses to hold a teaching qualification. However, there are no subject-specific qualifications for adult trainers.⁹

The experiences of the consortium indicate that qualification of trainers is essential. The diversity of the adult learning sector calls for a range of skills including:

- The ability to overcome complex and specific barriers to learning;
- The ability to consult and negotiate with employers regarding the organisation and provision of resources and facilities;
- Knowledge of the working environment;
- The ability to tailor training to meet specific needs;
- Excellent and adaptable communication skills.

Flexible Programme Structure - Focus on Target Groups

Work-related basic skills training does not follow a fixed curriculum but is developed according to the needs and objectives negotiated between employers, employees and training enterprises. A flexible programme structure allows the focus to remain on the needs of specific learner cohorts and the challenges of the companies in which training takes place. In Norway, Basic Job Skills Profiles are established. The

⁸ In such schemes, learning providers place a staff member into Job Centre Plus Offices in order to: minimise waiting times for appointments, allow information and guidance to be provided quickly and raise awareness about the benefits of improving English and Maths skills.

⁹ Similar situations exist in other countries, but there have also been some qualification standards introduced over recent years. The Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (VOX) designed a model for teacher training customized to the needs of trainers who deliver basic skills to adults. The model was developed in close cooperation with pedagogical experts from training seminars and in 2009/2010 the model was implemented in cooperation with teacher training institutes at universities and university colleges. In France the ANLCl published a guide book called 'Basic education actors: how to professionalize oneself' (in French) that signposted existing professional development qualifications.

Profiles are used as a tool to facilitate the design of basic skills courses tailored to the needs of each work place and individual learner. Through the use of these profiles, employers can get an overview of the skills that need to be strengthened and employees can increase their awareness of their own training needs. This approach requires the Job Profiles to be tailored to each individual company with the best profiles being differentiated to different job roles and scenarios.

Particular Methodical and Didactic Approaches

Certain methodical and didactic approaches have proven useful in the work-related basic skill sector. These include, but are not limited to:

- 'learning to learn' initiatives;
- blended learning;
- collaborative learning approaches;
- 'bite-sized' approaches to delivery;
- innovation in embedding basic skills into vocational qualifications;
- integrating basic skills programmes in the workplace;
- experimenting with different formats of basic skills provision;
- teaching and counselling as a training strategy;
- formative and summative evaluation of training;
- integrating learning into workplace scenarios;
- taking into account current developments in working life;
- mapping reading and writing skills;
- individual support and feedback before, during and after the training;
- integrating a positive attitude towards training into a company's ethos;
- individually adapted training sessions that meet the needs of learners;
- intensive courses that consider the needs and background of learners;
- contextualisation of learning in real-life scenarios;
- training at work using real employment scenarios;
- embedding personal and social development (PSD) within learning;
- qualifications and personal development as incentives for high achievers;
- qualifications that support sustainable skills development;
- appropriate support for learners with a specific learning disability (SpLD);
- recording, tracking and reporting of basic skills performance;
- resource and feedback orientated learning.

Supporting Guidance Systems

Supporting guidance systems provide individual support to learners facing specific challenges. For example, the Austrian Employment Service (AMS) offers individual 'coaching' to increase the employability of migrant women. Evidence from evaluations of similar programmes in Germany and France suggest that supporting guidance systems facilitate the learning process for low-skilled workers and the unemployed. A crucial factor for the level of success achieved is the availability of individual resources to address barriers to learning and specific additional learning needs.

