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Cooperation for better career development advice: a close-up on local stakeholder practices



Alexandra d'AGOSTINO
(Céreq)

Liza BAGHIONI
(Céreq)

Agnès LEGAY
(Céreq)

Laure GAYRAUD
(Céreq's associated
centre of Bordeaux)

Aline VALETTE-WURSTHEN
(Céreq)

CEP (Career development advice), which was introduced in France in 2014 in line with the recommendations of the Council of the European Union Resolution of 21 November 2008* on Lifelong Guidance, is designed to guarantee personalised support for all working people, whether currently in work or not, in implementing their career development plans. Its success depends on the development of interaction between providers in what are often compartmentalised areas of activity. A Céreq study examined the different practices of local stakeholders in several areas.



COACHING

**GUIDANCE
COUNSELLOR**

**ACTORS OF THE
EMPLOYMENT**

LOCAL APPROACH

**OCCUPATION IN THE
EMPLOYMENT SECTOR**

LIFELONG GUIDANCE

GROUPWARE

The objective of customising support, which is the central pillar of career development advice, involves considering both the needs and expectations of all working-age adults and the characteristics and resources of each local area. It also requires coordination between the different stakeholders in the fields of guidance, training and employment policy in order to guarantee a consistent and homogeneous service over the whole area. This coordination and cooperation between different stakeholders at national, regional and local level primarily involves the five providers responsible for delivering career development advice (see Box 1). These stakeholders have not previously been used to working together [3][4].

Careers guidance: regional competence and local specificities

Although there was already some cooperation between these bodies, it would appear that career development advice has helped to strengthen it at national level, notably with regard to the drafting of common specifications. The same cannot be said at the local level, where the degree of cooperation between stakeholders reflects the diversity

of situations. Since responsibility for career development advice was decentralised in 2014 (see Box 2), it has fallen to regional councils to create and develop these local synergies. Along with the Regional Public Guidance Service, the regional councils have to coordinate the actions of the different bodies involved in providing this service right across their regions. However, the content and organisational arrangements of this regional mission have not been clearly defined, which is reflected in a variable degree of commitment on the part of regional councils. Specifically, they each have the option, if they so wish, of devolving the coordination of guidance stakeholders to a sub-regional level, employing a geographical zoning system likely to encourage the development of local services. This variety of regional policies is further compounded by the very diverse socio-economic situations and positioning of local stakeholders. It is at this local level that career development advice providers and the other public guidance bodies operate, each one also being in a different location and having different spheres of operation. So just how connected are they across their areas, and to what extent is career development advice a driver for cooperation? The Céreq study conducted in six areas in three different regions provides an initial overview of the situation ([1], [2], Box 3).

* Council of the European Union Resolution of 21 November 2008 on: "Better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies".

1 Career development advice

Since 2015, all French people of working age, whether already in work or looking for a job, have been entitled to career development advice to support them in their plans for retraining, accessing training or finding a job. Career development advice comprises two levels of services: firstly, information tailored to the person's needs, and then personalised support. It is offered by five providers: *Pôle Emploi*, the APEC, the *missions locales*, *Cap Emploi* and the FONGECIFs/OPACIFs. From January 2020, new regional providers will replace the FONGECIFs/OPACIFs in providing support for private sector employees.

The role of cooperation in advisors' day-to-day work

Regardless of their place of work and the organisation they work for, advisors testify to the frequency and diversity of the contacts they maintain with other bodies in order to be able to meet clients' needs: the removal of external obstacles to autonomy (health, transport...), the drawing up of career plans (skills statements, work placements, etc.), implementation (accessing training, setting up a business, etc.). Advisors have to call on the services of several groups of stakeholders, or even look beyond other providers to those in the worlds of business (companies, chambers of commerce and industry), education and training (funding organisations and training bodies) and health and social care (departmental social welfare offices and municipal social action centres). In most cases, the professionals do not make a spontaneous connection between these contacts and the implementation of CEP. Furthermore, the fact that they have these contacts does not necessarily mean that they form part of a coordinated or *a fortiori* cooperative approach. Despite the dynamism of the professionals in the field, a shared objective of implementing career development advice does not seem to be sufficient to create new synergies between the providers in the same area. So how are such synergies developed?

Observation of the dynamics of the relations between the various stakeholders in the six local areas studied reveals three types of cooperation. It is interesting that each configuration characterises two areas, neither of which is ever in the same region as the other.

Configuration #1: when a local guidance service supports the dynamics of cooperation

The two areas in this first configuration enjoy both a dynamic economy and regional contexts relatively favourable to career development advice. The regional councils have, in fact, driven the creation of shared operational resources: a telephone platform, a digital portal, localised employment statistics, joint upskilling programmes, etc. Above

all, however, they have both organised the public guidance service on a local basis, in the form of local stakeholder coordination and development centres, which has been a key factor in developing cooperation. It has extended the range of partners and increased the visibility of certain providers of career development advice, for example authorised collecting organisations, such as the OPACIFs, and the disability employment service *Cap Emploi*. It encourages the sharing of information on service offers and provides a way for advisors to identify possible contacts and exchange details among counsellors. It is helping to decompartmentalise traditional areas of operation, particularly between the public employment service and the actors working directly with employees. Nevertheless, in both areas, the geographical scope of this local network does not correspond to any of the providers' spheres of operation, particularly the smaller ones of the *missions locales* (youth employment centres) and *Pôle Emploi* employment agencies. This mismatch adds to the impression that any specific issues which these providers may have simply get buried.

Despite these similarities, the content and longevity of the local facilitation arrangements in the two areas differ. In one of them, they have been in place since 2016, and take the form of a facility for organising collective activities for professionals (upskilling workshops for stakeholders) and clients (employment or guidance forums, etc.), and also for developing shared tools (directories, for example). This operational focus is very much appreciated by participants. In the other area, the local guidance service set up in late 2017 does not really seem to be addressing advisors' everyday concerns. Its relative newness may explain why fewer concrete initiatives have been launched and why advisors have not appropriated them to the same extent in their day-to-day work. Thus in both these areas, the dynamics of partnership appear to be both encouraged but are still a work in progress. Many advisors are still not benefitting from these developments, which are ultimately dependent on continued political or, at the very least, financial backing for them through the regional councils.

Configuration #2: when regions no longer make guidance a priority

This second configuration covers two areas whose socio-economic situations are characterised by geographical isolation, limited training provision and fairly depressed labour markets. These two geographical areas have not benefitted from the localisation of regional guidance policy, the challenges of which appear to be less of a priority than those of social integration. In the absence of the technical and political support required

2 The role of the French regions in career development advice

to provide a local framework for all guidance partners, communication between the different providers has not developed to any great degree. Each remains focused on its traditional ways of working and the compartmentalisation between the operators responsible for social and/or labour market integration (*Pôle Emploi, Cap Emploi* and *missions locales*) and those that provide support for people already in work (APEC, OPACIF) is stronger than elsewhere.

The mobilisation of local public revitalisation initiatives is an important lever for action for career development advisors. But, in many cases, the removal of external barriers to employment is a vital prerequisite for the deployment of this approach. In one of these two areas, which has been particularly hard hit economically, career development advisors work more regularly with stakeholders in the area of social integration. And even when they do have contact with their counterparts in other service providers, they do not instinctively associate them with CEP. These inter-provider relationships are mainly bilateral and informal. Organised on the basis of the distribution of decision-making powers, they often revolve around funding for training. Such interactions are dependent on advisors taking the initiative to maintain networks based on their personal acquaintances. In the absence of organised coordination, geographical proximity is the determining factor. Local networking varies widely depending on the organisations involved, since they are not all present. In each of the local situations, the stakeholders note the absence of a partnership dynamic centred around career development and other guidance: different bodies working too much in isolation, insufficient harmonisation between situational analysis frameworks and uncoordinated decision-making principles. The urgency of the social situation and the lack of regional political leadership on guidance-related issues do not allow the stakeholder system to rise above its present fragmentation.

Configuration #3: when local problems become a driver for cooperation

The two areas here are characterised first and foremost by their socio-economic specificity: the local economies in these areas - one rural, one mountainous - are dependent on the seasonality of tourism and agriculture. A significant share of recruitment involves seasonal fixed-term contracts, which means that applicants often have to have several jobs, or even work in different occupations, over the course of the year. The stakeholders on the ground, with support from the levels above them, addressed this situation before the introduction of career development advice

The act of 5 March 2014 changes the distribution of competences in matters of guidance between the central state and the regions. Each regional council is responsible for setting up a regional lifelong guidance service to guarantee access for all to free, comprehensive and objective information on occupations, training, certifications, employment prospects and wage levels, as well as to high-quality networked guidance and support services. The regional executive is responsible for coordinating the activities of the agencies involved in this public service, a role that includes overseeing the implementation of career development advice (cf. Order of 16 July 2014, confirmed in the revised version of 29 March 2019). The March 2017 version of the career development advice handbook stresses that "*the coordination (of all members of the public lifelong guidance service, whether providers of career development advice or not) is particularly critical at level 1 of the provision of career development advice, which covers the provision of help-desk facilities, individualised information and referrals for beneficiaries [...] and is also desirable in the provision of advice and personalised support services*".

The three regions in the Céreq study saw a change of political majority in their councils in 2016 (one of these as the result of the merger of two regions in the territorial reform), which called into question in a more or less radical way the dynamics of the public lifelong guidance service at regional and local level. This was particularly the case in one of the regions where, in 2017, political and technical support for the public guidance service became a secondary concern and the provision of local facilities was discontinued. In another of the regions, political backing for the public lifelong guidance service was limited, but technical support was refocused around local experiments designed to develop synergies between the different stakeholders in a single area. In the third region, political leaders stopped driving forward the guidance element but did continue to fund existing technical arrangements. Responsibility for motivating stakeholders passed to the local level. With regard to their role in motivating stakeholders, the three regional councils have, through the Regional Training Research and Information Centres - Regional Employment and Training Observatories (CARIF-OREF), co-funded the development of collective resources as well as upskilling programmes for providers, including seminars at which operators could exchange views on the role of career development advisors, joint sessions presenting the services offered by different providers, etc.

(as early as 2008 in one case and in 2011 in the other) and developed a partnership dynamic on an important local issue, namely safeguarding the labour market trajectories of seasonal workers, the challenge being to remove the barriers between stakeholders in the public employment service and those who work directly with employees (due to the multiplicity of contractual arrangements covering seasonal workers). In both areas, thanks to dedicated resources and oversight from the in-service training fund FONGECIF, these stakeholders introduced support and information schemes and comprehensive personalised assistance in the areas of housing, health, job-seeking and access to vocational training. Their approach has been resolutely operational: a one-stop shop, a system for monitoring individuals, funding for ad hoc training programmes, careers guidance days, job fairs, etc. The fact that these partnerships already existed facilitated the introduction of career development advice and the creation of synergies between providers: the teams already knew each other and were able to rely on their "organisational routines", particularly since turnover is low in these areas.

3 The study and the choice of areas for investigation

Céreq was commissioned by the joint management committee of the National Council for the Assessment of Vocational Training (*Conseil national d'évaluations de la formation professionnelle* - CNEFP) to carry out a study entitled "*Professionalism, systems of actors and territories: what effects of the Council on professional evolution (CEP)?*" (Professional competences, stakeholder systems and local areas: how are they affected by career development advice?). It focuses on the implementation of career development advice, the support provided for the development of advisors' professional competences and, lastly, the development of stakeholder systems at local level (Céreq Etudes n°22, May 2019). One of the study's main areas of focus, as set out in this issue of *Training & Employment*, is an analysis of the dynamic which may or may not exist in terms of cooperation between providers, or even more widely between stakeholders in guidance, training, and employment in the areas concerned. Another central strand of the study, namely the development of advisors' professional competences, was covered previously in *Céreq Bref* no. 377, published in May 2019 under the title: Career development advice, a new profession?

The study was carried out using semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders involved in the implementation of career development advice, both institutional stakeholders (public authorities and social partners) and providers (*Pôle emploi*, APEC, *missions locales*, *Cap Emploi* and the FONGECIFs/OPACIFs). It was conducted in three regions of metropolitan France and six local areas (two per region).

The locations for the studies were chosen in consultation with the CNEFP, using several criteria: the variety of socio-economic situations (rural areas and urban areas, sectoral specialisations, possible economic weaknesses) and the existence or otherwise of a diversified public service offering and its accessibility (providers of career development advice, training centres, etc.).

However, this joint dynamic around career development advice very soon came up against a questioning of regional policy on guidance, following a change in the balance of political power in the two regional councils at the end of 2015. One of them abruptly withdrew from the guidance policy put in place during the previous administration, particularly the strand on local

facilitation arrangements. In the other region, the withdrawal also took place but more gradually with regard to guidance issues; most importantly, the local facilitation arrangements remained very active as they had already been well established for some time. By virtue of their necessity and robustness, the support schemes for seasonal workers helped to spur on all the other cooperative relationships, particularly those relating to career and career development advice. Even though they are limited to a particular category of workers, the objectives of these initiatives are similar in nature to those of career development advice.

Céreq's analysis of these local situations highlights how stakeholders have (or have not) taken up the challenge of "preparing the ground for career development advice", which is a prerequisite for introducing it. At present, the actual amount of contact between providers of career development advice varies from region to region. Several types of cooperation are beginning to emerge between them, at the point of intersection between the local socio-economic situation, regional guidance policy and the pre-existing degree of proximity between stakeholders in the area of social and labour market integration. The analysis shows that a local guidance service can, if it drives the development of coordinated action, have a positive effect on interrelations around career development advice. However, it also shows that, even when such local facilities do not exist, stakeholders on the ground can organise themselves collectively provided they appropriate a set of unifying local problems. Through the implementation of career development advice, the process of developing a "local common good" [5] becomes the key to cooperation at local level.

→ Further reading

- [1] Le conseil en évolution professionnelle, un nouveau métier?, A. d'Agostino, L. Baghioni, L. Gayraud, A. Legay, A. Valette-Wursthen, *Céreq Bref* n° 377, 2019.
- [2] *Professionalism, systems of actors and territories: what effects of the council on professional evolution?*, A. d'Agostino, L. Baghioni, L. Gayraud, A. Legay, A. Valette-Wursthen, *Céreq Etudes* n° 22, 2019.
- [3] Politiques sociales régionales émergentes : le cas du décrochage et de l'orientation en Aquitaine, T. Berthet, in *Décentralisation et action publique: quels changements dans les secteurs de l'éducation et de la formation*, L. Gayraud (dir.), Net.Doc n° 145, Céreq, pp. 95-107, 2015.
- [4] Approche intégrée des politiques de l'emploi : les défis de la territorialisation et de l'individualisation, T. Berthet, C. Bourgeois, *Céreq Bref* n° 334, 2015.
- [5] Le bien commun comme construit territorial. Identités d'action et procédures, P. Lascoumes, J-P. Le Bourhis, *Politix*, n° 42, pp. 37-66, 1998/2.

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