

Thinking Space Paper No.10

An activation programme for NEETs

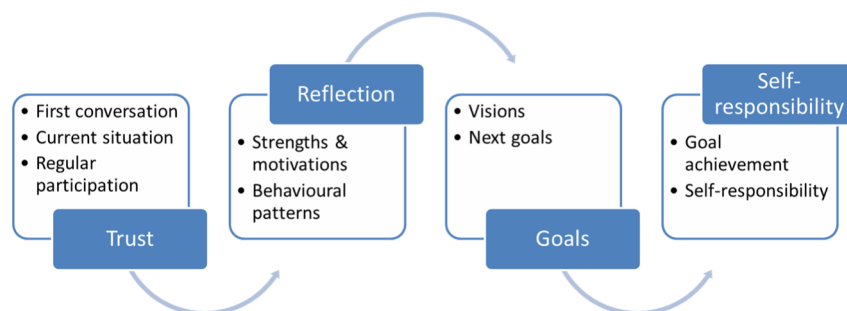
Dunja Buchhaupt, Silke Schoolmann, Sylvie Feindt, KIZ Sinnova, March 2020

The following paper presents activation measures for a support programme for NEETs. The activation approach was developed and tested by KIZ in cooperation with underserved youth and shows how disadvantaged target groups can be motivated to (re)integrate into the labour market. The concept of activation essentially follows the three principles that the participants in a programme should understand and internalise: Getting to know yourself, breaking up unhelpful behavioural patterns and taking responsibility for one's own life.

In the daily work with NEETs such as early school leavers, activation means first of all helping young people to get to recognise themselves and understand their underlying behavioural patterns. Questions such as: *Who am I? What motivates me? How can I reorient myself?* are essential questions that should be dealt with in step by step in soft skill trainings. To be able to answer these questions honestly, it also means helping young people to work on their self-esteem and enabling them to take responsibility for their lives. Old behavioural patterns need to be recognised, broken up and replaced to generate personal growth and take the next steps towards a self-determined life. This is a long process and, in some programmes, NEETs are given two years to reorient themselves and find a way back in to schooling, professional education of the labour market. Participants who suffer from problematic living conditions (violence, noise, ...) are offered residential training in a residential project with integrated integration advice. In the timeframe April 2015 to November 2019 144 NEETs participated in the programme, with 31% of them being women. The participant structure was characterized as follows:

- 56% migrant background
- 26% with problematic living conditions
- 20% without graduation
- 27% with conspicuous social behaviour or psychological problem
- 38% refused or left other programmes.

The central task of coaches in a project with NEETs is therefore on a superordinate level to facilitate this personal growth. Looking at it in a systematic way four phases in the activation process can be identified:



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Phase 1: Building trust: Coaches establish contact with the participant and inquire the current situation of the young person. An initial interview takes place and - if necessary - measures are taken to actively involve

absent participants in the programme (telephone calls, outreach, etc.). In this phase trust should be built. Regular attendance of the meetings by the participant is key.

Phase 2: Reflection: In this phase the participant begins to reflect on himself and his own strengths and weaknesses. *Who am I? What do I want?* should be answered in this phase with the help of the coach. It is important that the coach provides support in answering these questions, but the participant is responsible for finding the answers himself. The participant should also become aware of certain behavioural patterns in this phase and actively work on them.

Phase 3: Goal setting: With the help of the values, drivers and objectives that have been developed in phase 2, the programme focusses on creating a vision for the future for the participant. Questions and issues to be answered in this phase include: What are the very own visions of the participant for his/her life and what is the first step to achieve them? On which concrete starting points does the participant want to work, which goals does he/she want to achieve?

Phase 4: Self-responsibility: The final phase serves to consistently implement the vision of phase 3 and to make the participant fully responsible for his actions.

NEETs often bring difficult personal stories to a programme and usually the coaches are faced with a large, emotional task. Have to gain the trust of the participants and ensuring their participation in the programme, the overall principals of activation can then quickly get lost in the daily routines and requirements. Consequently, many coaches get stuck with the participants in phase 1 of the activation.

The principals of *activation* should therefore be more strictly integrated into the tools and elements that the coach uses in the daily work with the young people. The principals should be the main focus when the NEETs start to open up, participate in the project and trust is built up (phases 2-4). Programme elements could for instance be the integration of regular joint cooking, joint sport activities, internships, or programme conferences¹, the elaboration of weekly and monthly goals, a bonus system or the organisation of own free time. All activities have the objective to give the participant the opportunity to get to know himself better and to take personal responsibility. A nice example is cooking. If the participants arrive at a certain time (it is their responsibility to be on time), they can participate in the decision what will be cooked. The objective is not only to teach them to take responsibility for their own actions, but also to consider their own preferences when eating. *What do I feel like eating today? What would I like to try with the team?*

When it comes to communication, coaches talk about different ways of conducting a conversation. These include one-on-one conversations, six-eye conversations, group conversations and individual counselling. Other forms could be e.g. walk-and-talk or the joint creation of a vision board.

To sum up, *activation* should follow the three overarching principals, as the NEET at the end of a project should look more self-determined and self-confidently into the world of work and one's own life. It is important to gain the trust of the participant at the beginning of a project. This can be time consuming and often requires a lot of patience and empathy (e.g. disadvantaged young people). However, once you have reached phase 2, real growth takes place and there is a real change for personal growth and labour market integration.

¹ For further information: Thinking Space Paper No.9_Project conference