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# Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work

Lessons from across Europe

Luxembourg:  
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# Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work

Lessons from across Europe

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# Foreword

This Cedefop study is placed in the context of the European economy gradually starting to recover in 2010 from the deepest recession since the 1930s. To overcome the crisis and to stimulate the economy, the EU budget 2010 provides funds to boost the recovery, to improve labour market activity and to increase overall EU competitiveness. However, parallel to the recovering economy, Europe will have to deal with the consequences of the crisis, such as an increased level of youth unemployment as well as the subsequent difficulties young people face in entering a labour market that remains somewhat unstable and turbulent.

Statistics suggest that national labour markets are not easily accessible for young people/youth at risk. Since the first quarter of 2008, in the wake of the global economic crisis, unemployment – especially for young people – has increased sharply in the EU. In November 2009 <sup>(1)</sup>, youth unemployment (under-25s) was 21.4 % in the EU-27 compared to 16.6 % a year earlier (November 2008). At the same time, the level of early school leavers remains high (15.2 % in 2007) <sup>(2)</sup>.

It is clear that no country can respond to the crisis in isolation as even the best national policies are likely to prove less effective without policy coordination and cooperation between countries. Young people should be an integral element in national and European education, training, employment and social policies. It is not only justified but also efficient to invest in young people in order to support their social inclusion, active participation in lifelong learning and smooth integration into working life.

In response to this crisis situation, policy-makers should utilise targeted interventions that provide support for young people to complete their education and training and to become easily integrated into the labour market. Work towards developing more open and flexible lifelong learning systems that engage all youngsters in formal, non-formal and informal settings should be fostered to

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<sup>(1)</sup> Eurostat Newsrelease 5/2010 (8.1.2010):  
[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-08012010-AP/EN/3-08012010-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-08012010-AP/EN/3-08012010-AP-EN.PDF)

<sup>(2)</sup> EU labour force survey (the latest EU-level statistical data on early school leavers is from 2007):  
[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/userfiles/115\\_Early%20school%20leavers\\_2009-07-20.xls](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/userfiles/115_Early%20school%20leavers_2009-07-20.xls)

remove obstacles to their employment and employability during the economic crisis. It is also of paramount importance to promote careers guidance as well as better interaction between education providers, labour market institutions, social partners, service users and national authorities.

This Cedefop study draws attention to guidance measures and initiatives applied across Europe to support school completion and education-to-work transitions of young people at the risk of dropping out of mainstream education and training. One of the core messages from the report is that coordinated approaches must be combined with outreach work to identify and reach those individuals who are in most urgent need of support (hardest-to-help groups). The partnership between different parties needs to be based on mutual trust and respect but also needs to place the interests of the young people first. In this setting, guidance professionals and teaching staff providing guidance services should learn how to establish a good working relationship with the at-risk youth. Further, parental involvement together with competent teachers, guidance practitioners, youth and social workers, and health care providers, is the backbone of support in the young person's transition process.

We trust that this report will inspire future action in the Member States on improving guidance service provision to support at-risk youth's smooth transition from adolescence into meaningful adulthood, with career and learning opportunities, partnership and parenthood, financial and residential independence.

Aviana Bulgarelli  
*Director of Cedefop*



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## Executive summary

Nine out of ten new jobs in Europe will require medium or high level qualifications, yet one in seven young people leaves formal education without completing the upper secondary level (Cedefop, 2008a). Alongside this skills mismatch, fundamental changes are taking place in terms of economic activity, job and career patterns, and education systems. As a result, young people in Europe face increasing uncertainty and have a greater need for high quality information and guidance services. These services are particularly important for at-risk groups.

This Cedefop report presents the findings of a study carried out in 2009 on guidance policies and practices in Europe that support young people at risk. Specifically, the report examines guidance measures (formal, informal and non-formal guidance) that aim to support school completion, those which aid reintegration of disengaged young people, and measures to ease the transition of the young from school to work. The study takes account of both mainstream provision and specific projects which fall within the definition of guidance adopted by the Council of the European Union (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004).

This research has shown that reforms have taken, and are taking, place across Europe to transform education and training systems, to meet better the needs of young people who have already dropped out or are at risk of doing so. Such reforms have included, for example, the creation of alternative learning options, the development of more comprehensive and tailored delivery methods, widening choices, providing better and more targeted support, addressing barriers to participation, and making practical changes such as tracking young people more effectively. These reforms appear to be making a difference as official statistics indicate that the number of early school leavers in Europe is declining, albeit at a much slower pace than anticipated (see footnote 2 in the Foreword).

While successful practice has been identified, more needs to be done, not least due to the high costs associated with early school leaving. The analysis suggests that coordination, a strategic overview, and long-term, sustainable, funding are often missing and are too focused on project-based approaches. There is growing recognition that effective practice in efforts to prevent early school leaving comprises a professional approach, joined-up structures, personalised guidance, and thinking 'outside the box' when considering ways of supporting young people in their transition from education to the world of work.

Such approaches need to be combined with outreach work to identify and reach those in most urgent need of support (hardest-to-help groups).

Guidance is an indispensable ingredient in any policy that seeks to speed up the education-to-work transition. Successful guidance policies take into consideration the specific situation of each individual and recognise that early school leavers are a heterogeneous group, from diverse backgrounds and with varied needs and aspirations. While access to professional guidance should be made available to all, it is particularly important for at-risk groups. Further, the role of guidance provided through informal and non-formal routes (by family members, friends, peers, tutors, mentors, etc.) cannot be underestimated, especially in the absence of professional guidance.

Guidance professionals and other front-line staff working with at-risk groups have a challenging job in learning how to establish with young people a professional partnership, based on mutual trust and respect but placing the interests of the individual young person first. Front-line support staff need to be appropriately selected, trained, coordinated and then supported continuously.

Involving parents in their children's education and development is beneficial, for the child, the parent, the school and the wider community. Support for children to achieve at school decreases the likelihood that they will disengage and, in many cases, establishes a solid foundation for learning throughout life.

A multi-agency approach is central to effective delivery of career guidance and personal, social and academic support for young people. It also prevents the chances of young people 'slipping through the net', or missing out on support appropriate to their needs due to lack of coordination across the range of support services offered. Another key ingredient of successful guidance policies targeting at-risk groups is the involvement of young people in designing such policies and approaches.

Successful preventive approaches take a long-term view, are systematic, comprehensive and adequately targeted, funded and resourced. Early interventions, as soon as signs of difficulties are detected, are critical to avoid the cumulative development of problems. Effective preventive approaches also focus on guiding young people through key transition points. Area-based approaches have the potential for reducing the level of early school leaving, although funding too often tends to be spread too thinly to make a real impact.

The reintegration of a young, disengaged person into mainstream education, training or employment begins with an assessment of their needs and aspirations. The process then continues with their participation in learning and continuous review of their progress through to employment. It is important that

the journey does not end when the young person enters employment but that support is received through to their first steps in the mainstream.

The education-to-work transition comprises two interrelated elements that help young people take career decisions: the development of career management skills and the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the world of work. This second aspect is important for all young people, though particularly so for those who have been disengaged.

There has been a transformation and expansion in guidance delivery mechanisms and options. These now range from multi-agency service centres addressing the guidance needs of young people in a holistic manner, to sophisticated, integrated online information and communication tools. Careers information alone is sufficient for many but this is not the case for most disaffected young people, who need to be supported in a more holistic manner.

This Cedefop study suggests that young people need to be empowered through a relationship which sees them as resourceful individuals. Practitioners have an important role to play in promoting high expectations, as career aspirations developed during teenage-years can have lifelong significance. It is important to recruit, and support the continuous development of, talented and committed individuals for such roles.

Guidance should not be seen as one of many approaches to supporting transition: it should be seen as an integral part of any approach to tackling this problem and it is important that guidance moves from implicit to explicit policy response. It should also be seen as a continuum: guidance is not about supporting a young person at a specific point in their life only, but is something that extends over time and out into the community and the workplace.

It is important that young people are aware of guidance support on offer and understand what difference it might make. Further research could be beneficial to demonstrate the cost-benefits of guidance and its role in prevention, reintegration and facilitating transitions. The examples identified in this report need to be communicated to policy makers, to ensure that they learn from practice and do not reinvent the wheel.

It is important that teachers and trainers are able to assist young people to develop career management skills and apply them in both the transition into work and throughout their working lives. Concerns have been raised that the guidance offer that accompanies initial vocational education and training (IVET) is not at an equivalent standard to the mainstream education offer; as such efforts need to be focused on ensuring that the same quality is available to young people pursuing a vocational route.



In the context of demographic change, there is merit in ensuring that working life familiarisation is perceived as a two-way process: an opportunity for young people to acquaint themselves with the world of work as well as an opportunity for employers to familiarise themselves with the local talent pool.

In the current economic crisis, it is important that employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are given the necessary support to be able to offer apprenticeships and traineeships. This is where dedicated coordinators from schools, VET establishments and reintegration programmes can offer real added value, for example by coordinating placements and helping young people to adjust to them.

# 1. Introduction

A recent skills needs analysis published by Cedefop concluded that nine out of ten new job openings in Europe during 2006-10 would require medium or high level qualifications (Cedefop, 2008a). A new labour market forecast is being carried out by the European Commission to take into consideration the effects of the financial crisis, which is further reinforcing the need for high level skills and qualifications in order to remain competitive in the slack labour market. At the same time, one in seven young people in Europe leave the formal education system without the necessary competences and qualifications for successful labour market entry. They leave without completing upper secondary education, the level considered the minimum required for active participation in the knowledge-based economy.

Alongside this mismatch in educated workforce supply and demand, fundamental changes are taking place in Europe in terms of economic activity, job and career patterns and education systems. Economic activity is now strongly reliant on services and information, where previously manufacturing and distribution were the key industries and sources of employment. Education systems are becoming increasingly complex, as the number of study pathways has increased, more tailor-made solutions have been made available and second-chance opportunities have been created. People increasingly mix working life with periods of learning. The student population is becoming more diverse and education and training systems are having to adjust to the requirements of globalisation and internationalisation, increased migration, and rapidly changing occupational profiles resulting from technological and economic developments. The result of these changes for young people is a shift 'from certainty to contingency and from predictability to impermanence and fluidity' (Stokes, 2000).

The complexity of these changes highlights the importance of providing high quality information and guidance services to young people. This is particularly important for at-risk groups who require assistance in navigating their way from learning to employment. However, even where strong guidance services exist, young people can experience difficulties in accessing them. As a result, those who could most benefit from mainstream guidance services are often the least likely to use them.

For the last two decades the Member States of the European Union have piloted innovative ways of assisting vulnerable young people to face this

increasingly complex set of challenges as they move towards the world of work. A range of programmes and support schemes has been put in place to assist them to stay in school or to make the transition to post-compulsory education or training or employment. Other initiatives provide a continuum of support along which a young person progresses towards employment. Opportunities for return to education and training (for example second chance schools), aided by guidance, have been created at a rapid pace, particularly in the current decade. Measures have also been introduced to provide alternative training opportunities for those young people who prefer a more practical approach to learning, and opportunities are being created for young people to acquire skills that allow them to manage their careers.

This Cedefop report presents the findings of a study carried out in 2009 on guidance policies that support young people at risk. Specifically, the report examines guidance measures that aim to support school completion, those which facilitate the reintegration of disengaged young people, and measures to ease the transition of the young from school to work.

The study was undertaken in the context of the European policy priorities on lifelong guidance and early school leaving. It builds on the earlier work of Cedefop and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on guidance provisions for young people (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; OECD, 2004a; OECD, 2004b). The study also adds to the policy reviews carried out as part of other European level projects on early school leaving (GHK, 2005; Stokes, 2000; Walther and Pohl, 2005) and career management (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network ELGPN, Sultana, 2009a; Watts, 2009).

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the study objectives and describes the methodology used.

## 1.1. Study aim and objectives

The purpose of the study was to identify and examine established and experimental guidance measures that support young people at risk. The research mapped out areas for further development potential for guidance policies and services available to at-risk groups; it provides policy-makers and guidance practitioners with recommendations and key messages for future action.

The study covers the European Union (EU) countries, plus Iceland and Norway. Examples have also been included from Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; these case studies were prepared and provided by the European Training Foundation (ETF).

Three types of initiatives have been examined:

- (a) preventive guidance measures that support school completion. The measures under this theme include practices that aim to identify potential early school leavers and target them with programmes that offer them guidance, counselling and other support to help them to overcome problems and avoid early school leaving;
- (b) reintegration measures that offer disengaged young people an opportunity to return to education or training, or facilitate access to the labour market. The examples chosen incorporate strong guidance and counselling elements;
- (c) measures to facilitate education to work transitions through working life familiarisation and career management skills. This theme considers initiatives that allow young people to become acquainted with the world of work, as well as programmes that help them to analyse their on-the-job learning experiences in the context of professional and personal competences and career management skills.

The aim has been to provide illustrations of both established and new, innovative practices, not to collate an all-inclusive inventory of measures implemented in the study countries. The common thread running through all examples is the strong presence of guidance, which in this study is understood as a broad framework of support. The study is built around the definition of guidance adopted by the Council of the European Union, which refers to services designed to assist individuals of any age to make occupational, training and educational choices and to manage their careers <sup>(4)</sup>. Guidance covers ‘a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills’ (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004). These services can be available on an individual or group basis, and might be delivered face-to-face or from a distance, for example helpline and web-based services (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004).

However, the concept of guidance in this study also covers informal guidance (guidance provided by family members, peers, friends, etc.) and non-formal guidance (guidance provided on a non-formal basis by teachers, tutors, mentors and other professionals working with young people).

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<sup>(4)</sup> Guidance is ‘a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used’.

This study covers projects, programmes and policies that target compulsory school-age children and young people that belong to the age group, as defined by Eurostat, to describe early school leavers (18 to 24). The particular focus of the study is on 15 to 24 year olds at risk of social exclusion. The European Commission defines social exclusion as ‘a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competences and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination’.

## 1.2. Study method

The study has been carried out in three stages: background research and mapping, case studies, and analysis. The background research and mapping summarised the EU policy background and explored the scale and scope of the problem of early school leaving. The availability and accessibility of mainstream guidance services to young people was also analysed to set the scene for the targeted measures which are the focus of this study. This initial stage also included an extensive mapping exercise, involving a review of European studies, publications and summaries of guidance and other expert networks, project websites, and a selection of national research and policy reports. Approximately 180 country reports were reviewed. Many Euroguidance network members also provided important inputs by offering suggestions of successful practices in their respective countries.

The background research and mapping was followed by case studies, which built on the case study suggestions made from the earlier research, and criteria produced as part of the first stage. They also provided more detailed insights to inform key findings about trends and successful approaches. The case studies are primarily from 13 countries (Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Finland and the UK), although this report includes examples from most EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

The final phase of the study analysed the findings from the two earlier stages and presents the results, with conclusions and recommendations for further action.

## 2. Guidance context

The need to improve the provision of guidance has been recognised in European policy on lifelong learning, social inclusion, early school leaving, and individual sectors of education and training (vocational, higher and adult education and training). Progress has also been monitored at European level and it has been stressed that there is still more to be done. Funding has been made available to support further action.

Against the background of pan-European commitment to improving guidance services, this study begins by examining mainstream policy and provision of guidance services to young people. In a brief review of mainstream guidance availability and accessibility for young people, a context is identified in which the targeted measures described in the following chapters are delivered. It is also important to highlight the role played by mainstream career guidance services in aiding the transfer from education to employment.

The EU context is described in more detail and is followed by a section outlining Member State responses in terms of mainstream guidance provision delivered in schools and by education providers, as well as by public employment services.

### 2.1. EU policy

Assisting Europe's youth to make a smooth transition into work and giving them the skills to manage their career paths through their working lives is a priority for the European Commission and the Member States. European cooperation in education and training has paid significant attention to the contribution of guidance (Watts, 2006). Education, training and employability were recognised by the European Lisbon Council in March 2000 as integral to economic and social policies. Since the Lisbon Council meeting, the European Commission and the European Council of Ministers have highlighted the importance of high quality lifelong guidance provision in a series of different communications, declarations and resolutions. The Commission's 2001 Communications on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001b), the 2002 Council resolution on lifelong learning, and the 2004 Joint Interim Report of the Council and the European Commission on the Implementation of the Lisbon strategy, all confirmed guidance as a priority

theme and urged Member States to support learning at all ages through guidance measures.

Similarly, joint actions in vocational education and training have stressed the need for Member States to strengthen career guidance provision, policies and practices (The Copenhagen declaration, 2002; the Maastricht communiqué, 2004; the Helsinki communiqué, 2004). Guidance has also appeared on the higher education agenda (the European higher education area, Achieving the goals and European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2005) and the adult learning sphere (the Council Conclusion of May 2008). All of these policy documents have stressed the role that guidance can play in promoting social inclusion, improving efficiency of investments in education and training, and aid education-to-work transitions and job mobility.

In May 2004, the European Council adopted a Resolution on guidance throughout life. This spelled out priorities for guidance within the framework of the Education and training 2010 work programme. It invited the Member States and the Commission, within their sphere of competences, to develop policies and concrete actions to improve guidance provision throughout life. The work of an expert group on lifelong guidance, established by the European Commission in 2002, has resulted in the development of three common European reference points for guidance systems. These are intended to enable Member States to benchmark and develop their existing provision within a lifelong learning policy framework, with an aim to support their life pathways in a knowledge-based economy and society.

Recent evaluation reports on the implementation of the Resolution of 2004 have concluded that progress has been made in Member States but further efforts are required to improve the quality of guidance services, provide fairer access focused on individuals' needs and aspirations, and coordinate and build partnerships between existing forms of guidance provision. In response, the EU Council of Minister in its Resolution (21 November 2008) provided instruments to assist the Member States in introducing career guidance service reforms within their national lifelong learning strategies (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2008). The Resolution highlighted that longer periods of active employment and better opportunities for study and work abroad (through EU enlargement and the globalisation of trade) require individuals to adapt their skills and develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context, to safeguard their career paths. The importance of guidance is also stressed by the growing number and complexity of transitions, the mismatch between persistent unemployment and difficulties in recruiting in certain sectors and the exclusion

experienced by various groups of the society. This is also discussed in Section 3.2. Four areas for reform have been identified:

- (a) encouraging the acquisition of career management skills;
- (b) facilitating access to guidance services for all sections of the population;
- (c) developing the quality assurance of guidance provision;
- (d) encouraging coordination and cooperation between all the stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.

The Resolution also provided a political mandate for the work of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) and Cedefop.

In addition to political commitment, the Commission has also provided a range of funding opportunities to enhance and upgrade guidance policies, systems and practices. Resources have been made available through the European Social Fund, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Phare, enabling exchanges of good practice within Europe, and the further training of guidance professionals (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). It has also supported several initiatives: formulating the European CV; developing Ploteus as the EU's Internet portal of learning opportunities (Ploteus, 2009); creating the EURES website to link all public employment services in Member States; and mobilising the Euroguidance network as a source of information, responding to the needs of guidance workers to be familiar with other countries' education, training, guidance and labour market systems and programmes (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004).

## 2.2. Mainstream guidance for young people

Schools are one of the main settings for formal career guidance services. Historically, school-based career guidance services have concentrated on schools at lower secondary level and have targeted young people making choices about their educational pathway (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). Five models of curriculum-based guidance delivery are apparent in the study countries (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; EACEA et al., 2008):

- (a) guidance as a separate subject in the curriculum, including space in the weekly or semestrial timetable (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Norway, Romania and Spain);
- (b) career guidance embedded in other broader, specialist subjects concerning personal wellbeing and social education (e.g. Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Malta and Poland);



- (c) career guidance integrated in most subjects of the curriculum (e.g. Denmark, Estonia and Hungary);
- (d) career programmes covered through seminars and workshops (e.g. France, Malta and Poland);
- (e) optional career guidance subjects for young people (e.g. Portugal and Slovakia).

The review carried out as part of this study of mainstream school-based guidance provisions has confirmed that the traditional career guidance via personal interviews is being replaced by a curriculum-based approach, a trend highlighted already in 2004 by the OECD and Cedefop. Guidance services are also increasingly being delivered by schools, together with external partners or by establishing career information centres. Guidance can also be provided through a variety of media and there is an increasing tendency to make use of the Internet for such services. These services are discussed in greater length in Chapter 6.

Public employment services also play an important role in providing career guidance. First, the work of PES is to help jobseekers, particularly persons from disadvantaged groups, move towards employment. However, in recent years there has been a trend towards a personalised approach, providing a service tailored to the needs of the individual jobseeker. This includes an assessment of each individual and the provision of targeted support. In particular there has been an increase in the range of services that include career guidance elements.

Across Europe, the role of the PES in supporting young people varies greatly (Sultana and Watts, 2005). In some countries, such as Germany, formal arrangements exist between PES and schools. In other cases the role played by the PES is less formal. The support and services provided includes:

- (a) delivering career guidance and information in schools and educational institutions, including presentations about the labour market, employment opportunities and the services available to them through the PES;
- (b) managing careers information offices for groups or individual young people;
- (c) coordinating, often in collaboration with other partners, specific programmes for certain groups of young people, such as early school leavers and drop-outs;
- (d) providing student work-related programmes that involve work skills development.

There are a number of challenges for PES providing career guidance in schools. Differences in the style of career guidance between PES and school personnel have been recorded in several countries, with guidance in schools

emphasising open choice, while PES staff tend to focus on the more opportunity structures available and stress realism in decision making (Sultana and Watts, 2005). Further, the delivery of career guidance to young people in schools may be considered more an additional or extended function of the PES and, in times of high unemployment, it is reduced or stops altogether. This has been the case in Cyprus, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Another important point to note is the increasing focus on self-support. Within the context of personalised services, there is greater emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of jobseekers, acknowledging that individuals should take responsibility for their own job-search activities. Selected groups, however, may require additional support in identifying their skills and interests in the labour market. The move to a self-service system has freed up time in PES to work with more at-risk groups, including persons with low skills and early school leavers.

### 3. Background

Both the personal and social costs of early school leaving have increased in the last few decades. It is now widely recognised that business and society benefit when young people are able to leave school with the qualifications they need to succeed in the world of work (CBI, 2008).

As a result, school completion is viewed as a major policy objective in Europe. There is considerable European and national emphasis on increasing school completion rates and achieving ever higher levels of education and training, with the target of achieving universal completion for upper secondary education. The rationale is clear. Europe's economic future does not just depend on ensuring there are enough highly qualified graduates: to secure long-term prosperity, all school leavers, not just high achievers, must be well equipped for success in life and work.

The European Union has introduced a range of measures geared towards supporting young people to complete upper secondary education. These measures are linked to the Lisbon Agenda, which identified the European Union's intention to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world by 2010. The Education and training 2010 work programme developed as part of the Lisbon Strategy introduced a series of five benchmarks, including one for reducing the EU early school leaving average to 10 % by 2010. The follow-up to the 2010 work programme, the Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, adopted by the European Council in May 2009, states that the proportion of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 % by 2020.

This section of the report outlines the context for the study by:

- (a) discussing the definition of early school leaving and the variations in national and international definitions;
- (b) assessing the scale and scope of the problem of early school leaving in Europe, and summarising the consequences of early departures from the education and training system;
- (c) illustrating the increasingly complex transition for young people from education to work;
- (d) examining the role of guidance in the transition.

### 3.1. Early school leaving

#### 3.1.1. Defining early school leaving

Although there has been a clear and growing focus on school drop-out, various definitions exist for early school leaving. It is not possible within the context of this study to go into detail about the differences but it is important to bear in mind that the EU definition differs from other international and many national ones. The European Union defines early school leavers as 18 to 24 year olds who have only lower secondary level education and are not in further education and training <sup>(5)</sup>. However, the OECD definition encompasses 20-24 year olds with education below upper secondary education. The situation is further complicated by variations in the length of compulsory education across the different national education systems. This study uses the EU definition of early school leaving but takes account of national contexts in identifying and discussing good practice examples.

#### 3.1.2. Scale of early school leaving

When the Education and training 2010 benchmark was established in 2001 at 10 %, almost one in six young people aged 18-24 were early school leavers. Since then, there has been a reduction in the rate of early school leaving of three percentage points, from 17.6 % in 2000 to 14.8 % in 2007. By 2007, every seventh person was classified as an early school leaver and around six million young people finished schooling with less than upper secondary education. Progress has been slow and the target will not be achieved within the current timeframe <sup>(6)</sup>. As a result, the EU continues to encourage the Member States to allocate significant resources to student retention efforts, as well as reintegration and second-chance measures.

The patterns of progress are diverse between EU countries (see Figure 1), and Europe tends to show a north/south divide on this issue (European Commission, 2009b). In 2007 only six Member States had reached the

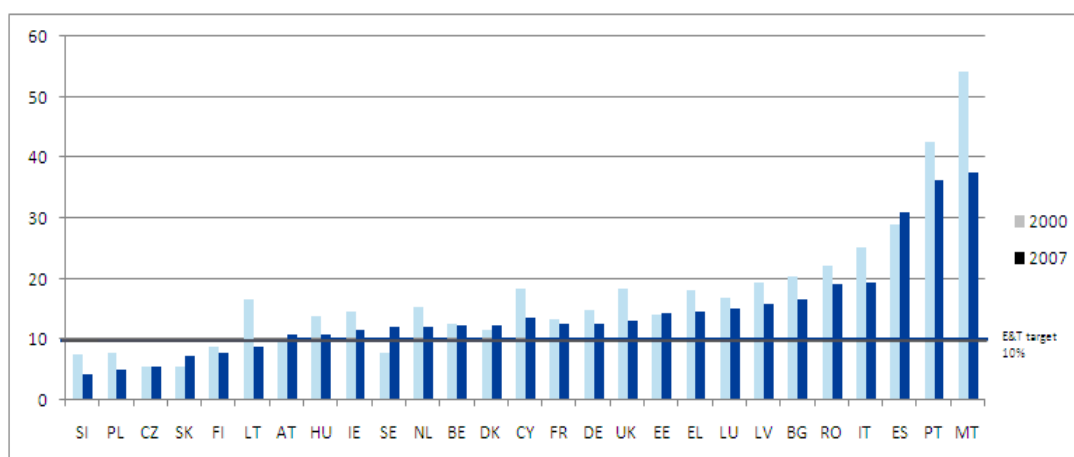
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<sup>(5)</sup> According to the Eurostat definition, early school leavers are the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with, at most, lower secondary education and not in further education or training. It refers to persons aged 18 to 24 in the following two conditions: the highest level of education or training attained is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c and respondents declared not having received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consist in the total population of the same age group, excluding no answers to the questions 'highest level of education or training attained' and 'participation to education and training'.

<sup>(6)</sup> The benchmark must be seen as indicative due to the associated caveats (see GHK, 2005 for further information about shortcomings in statistics on early school leaving). Further, 12 new countries have joined the EU since the introduction of the benchmark. The increased levels of mobility and migration must also be taken into consideration.

benchmark target and five of these were already below the target in 2000. Five of these six countries joined the EU in 2004: the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Finland is the only longer-standing EU country, where the early school leaving rate was below the Lisbon target throughout the reference period. Early school leaving rates are also below the target in Iceland and Norway. The southern European countries Spain, Italy, Malta, and Portugal, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, which recently joined the EU, remain furthest away from the EU benchmark. Some of the greatest reductions in the proportion of early school leavers have been seen in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia. A reverse trend has been witnessed in six EU Member States, with the most significant reversal in Sweden.

Figure 1. **Early school leaving in the European Union, 2000-07**



Source: European Commission, 2008e.

The rates for candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are not included in Figure 1, but they also vary significantly. Croatia has the lowest level of early school leavers in Europe; in 2007 the figure stood at 3.9 %. In contrast, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, every second member of the population aged over 15 years has little or no formal education and national data indicates that there are only two students per 100 inhabitants (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ministry of Education and Science, 2004). In Turkey, the rate has reduced drastically since 2000 (from over 58 % in 2000 to 48 % in 2007), but it is still significantly above any rate in the EU. The early school leaving rates have improved as a result of the extension of compulsory education from five to eight years.

Figure 1 does not show regional differences, which in some cases are substantial. For example, the differences between the Spanish autonomous communities are vast, with some regions having achieved the 2010 target and others having some of the highest rates of early school leavers in Europe. Societal attitudes towards education and training, historical context and differences in education and welfare regimes are some of the factors contributing to regional and national differences in early school leaving rates.

### **3.1.3. Scope of the problem**

Many young people do not persist with education or training that rejects them (Stokes, 2000), or where they do not feel comfortable, or feel they do not belong. Some simply react by dropping out. The young people who respond in this way come from diverse backgrounds; not all of them leave or 'underachieve' for the same reason, and the reasons are not even always negative (Dhillon, 2007). This means that early school leavers are not a homogeneous group. Indeed, many respond to a mixture of push and pull factors, though there are some who are considered more at risk of dropping out than others.

For example, gender has a significant influence on rates of early school leaving and young men are more likely to be early school leavers than young women. In 2007, the early school leaving rate for young women in the EU-27 was 12.7 % while the rate for young men was almost 17 %. Only in Bulgaria is there a slightly higher number of young women than men who leave school before completing at least upper secondary education. Gender differences across Member States varied from small variations (0.1 percentage point difference in Romania, 1.4 in Austria, and 1.5 in Germany) to significant variations (7.9 percentage point difference in Greece, 8.1 in Luxembourg, and 10.5 in Spain).

There is also evidence that minority ethnic and migrant groups are over-represented among early school leavers in most study countries. In 2005, the rate of early school leaving among non-nationals, as defined in the Labour force survey, was 30.1 %, while the rate for nationals was 13 % (European Commission, 2008e). Non-national early school leavers make up over 40 % of all early school leavers in Greece, Iceland, Italy, Malta and Spain. The smallest differences between nationals and non-nationals are found in countries which have comprehensive education and training systems that prioritise equity, equal access to education and permeability of study pathways (European Commission, 2008e) <sup>(7)</sup>.

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<sup>(7)</sup> It is essential to bear in mind that in some countries an important proportion of young people who are classified as early school leavers may not have been educated in the host country's

Young people from the Roma and traveller communities have been identified as at-risk groups in numerous study countries. Drop-out rates are high among Roma students for example in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Hungary and Romania, where members of this community often live in socially and economically deprived areas. For example, children from poor families in Hungary face serious barriers to enrolment that originate from the selective education system, in which schools are encouraged to favour children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Szira and Nemeth, 2007). There is also a tendency to place children from disadvantaged backgrounds, Roma children in particular, in special education institutions. Segregated education is often characterised by low expectations and many teachers are not sufficiently trained to work in heterogeneous multicultural classes (ibid.).

Young people from travelling families regularly feature among early school leavers in Ireland. This small community, which represents little more than 1 % of the school-age population, accounts for one in six of all unqualified early school leavers in the country. A range of complex factors leads young people from travelling families to drop out from education: lifestyle, cultural, economic and social reasons. A key factor is the perception among the adult traveller community, particularly with regards to young adult males, that they should be earning an income rather than participating in formal learning (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2007).

There appears to be a noteworthy geographical dimension to the problem too (Nevala, 2008). In most European countries, early school leaving is an issue for inner city areas. In France, for example, urban areas with high levels of unemployment and poverty are more likely to have high numbers of drop-outs than other parts of the country. Young people in Austrian towns and cities are twice as likely to drop out early as those in rural regions, with drop-out rates standing at 12 % and 5 % respectively <sup>(8)</sup>.

In contrast, young people living in remote rural areas of Romania have lower school completion rates than their peers living in cities. A national study concluded that, at the end of 2006 almost 20 % of pupils in lower secondary schools in rural areas were registered as drop-outs in comparison to only 5.5 % in urban areas (Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, 2008). This trend is also pertinent to small, isolated villages in Hungary.

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education system. This is particularly relevant for countries which have seen a more recent influx of immigrants from outside the EU, such as Spain.

<sup>(8)</sup> Based on information provided by the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUK) in April 2008.

Other factors impact on disengagement from school, those commonly associated with early school leaving are often related to the individual, the socioeconomic background and the external environment (GHK, 2005). Young people who are not in education, employment or training are disproportionately likely to have experienced poor attainment at school, low motivation, truancy, homelessness, poverty, lack of family support, health problems, special educational needs, disabilities or unemployment in the family. Many have had negative experiences of school and faced issues such as bullying, exclusion, behavioural difficulties, and stress. Some young people from relatively poor backgrounds find it difficult to progress into further education or training as they struggle to cope financially or they feel pressure to begin contributing to family finances. For some young people, finding an opportunity to earn money, by whatever means, becomes a priority over continuing their education or training.

Individual schools also tend to differ greatly in terms of the number of early school leavers and the educational performance of students (Traag and van den Velden, 2008). This implies that the school environment (physical, social, school atmosphere) and the teaching staff (expectations, style of delivery, understanding of the needs of and experience in working with marginalised groups) play a part in raising aspirations and supporting school completion. Further, a significant proportion of young people leave school early as a result of disaffection with the system, skills limitations (such as poor basic skills) or due to the lack of availability of alternative forms of learning opportunities (BCA, 2003). Many drop-outs, and sometimes their parents too, have low expectations for themselves. They tend to have short-term life plans and cannot envisage a future career pathway, only an extension of their present situation (Stokes, 2000). Some researchers argue that some young people make a conscious 'choice' not to participate, for example, by adopting an 'anti-learning culture' as a means of gaining credibility and status with peers (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

The Community Health Systems Resource Group (2005) supports this perspective by identifying that early school leaving is typically not based on a single decision made at a specific moment; usually young people choose to leave school even though they know that education and training can increase their chances of getting better jobs and higher earnings in the future (European Commission, 2008e). Employment conditions for young people have an important role to play in their decision, as the availability of employment opportunities for the low-skilled can be a disincentive for young people to stay in school. The strong economic climate of the early part of the current decade pulled many young people prematurely into the buoyant labour markets of countries such as Ireland. Tourism, traditional maritime sectors, retail and agriculture provide jobs



in the Mediterranean coastal communities even for those who have not completed compulsory education. In Greece, one of the primary reasons for an early departure from education is involvement in a family business or another family related matter. Early school-leaving is relatively common among pupils whose parents run a micro business or are self-employed.

Labour market opportunities can provide a comparative advantage for the low-skilled in contexts where employment opportunities are geared towards the skills and interests of the early school leaver (Eckstein and Wolpin, 1999). A number of studies point out that early school leaving is not a negative choice in all cases; it can allow some young people to focus on their real career interests and start their career early (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2008). However, evidence implies that, in the long term, earnings and employment opportunities are more likely to be constrained (Walther, 2002a) and that labour market experience does not make up for an initial deficit of educational credentials (OECD, 2005). Young school leavers tend to become locked in a cycle of recurrent unemployment and low-skilled, short-term employment more often than young people with higher level qualifications (Stokes, 2000). Female school leavers tend to be particularly vulnerable to this (OECD, 2005). In fact, few people seem to benefit from leaving school early, and many suffer from 'multiple disadvantage', being affected by more than one of these issues. The next section takes a more in-depth look into the social and economic consequences of early school leaving.

#### **3.1.4. Consequences of early school leaving**

Early school leaving has far-reaching individual, social, economic, cultural and political implications. These include short-, medium- and long-term effects and can be direct or indirect (Psacharopoulos, 2007; Walther and Pohl, 2005). Private costs impact on individuals and are easier to observe than other costs impacting on society as a whole. A feasibility study on the cost of school failure, carried out by the European expert network on economics of education (Psacharopoulos, 2007), demonstrates that the trend of young people dropping out can result in lower employment rates, increased welfare payments, lower productivity, and lower tax revenues (see Figure 2). These social and economic costs and implications are briefly discussed, although it has not been possible to discuss wider social implications, such as the impact of early school leaving on active citizenship, family, etc., in this report.

Figure 2. **The cost of school failure**

<b>Private</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher unemployment incidence and unemployment duration. Higher own discount rate, i.e. valuing less present relative to future income, thus be willing to invest in human or other capital</li> <li>• Lower initial and lifetime earnings, and own health status</li> <li>• Less risk aversion and lifelong learning participation</li> <li>• Lower lifetime satisfaction</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased criminality</li> <li>• Lower positive spillover effects on coworkers and lower rate of economic growth. Lower intergenerational effects on children and parents, and lower public health status. Lower social cohesion</li> <li>• Higher unemployment</li> </ul>
<b>Fiscal</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower tax revenues</li> <li>• Higher police and criminal justice expenditure</li> </ul>

NB: 'Higher' or 'lower' is defined relative to a control group situation of non-school failure, however the latter is defined.

Source: Psacharopoulos, 2007.

Many young people who leave school early want to work to earn money. However, one of the main barriers young people came across when looking for work is their lack of experience. Many school leavers are unable to find a job until they have experience, but they struggle to get a job to get experience in the first place. For this reason, unemployment is far more common among school drop-outs than their more highly educated peers. According to the 2007 Labour force survey, unemployment among lower secondary school graduates in the EU at 13.2 % was more than five percentage points higher than that of young people who had obtained an upper secondary level qualification (7.9 %). Once in employment, the earnings of those who have completed upper secondary education are approximately one-third more than the earnings of those who left after completing lower secondary level (Psacharopoulos, 2007). Others have estimated the rate of return on a year of schooling at between 10 % and 20 % (Carneiro and Heckman, 2003; Psacharopoulos, 2007).

Supporting the acquisition of high level skills is even more important in the context of the current economic climate. In financially difficult times, companies downsize their recruitment campaigns and benefit from the greater availability of qualified candidates on the job market (European Commission, 2008a). Unemployment has been rising sharply in the European Union since March 2008 and the statistics show that young people have been particularly vulnerable (Eurostat and Hijman, 2009). Youth unemployment increased by 3.9 percentage

points between the first quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 in the Euro area, to reach 18.4 %. In the first quarter of 2009, 4.9 million persons aged 15-24 were unemployed. In the first quarter of 2009 youth unemployment ranged from 6.0 % in the Netherlands to 33.6 % in Spain.

Higher unemployment rates and the associated social costs (e.g. increased welfare payments) are not the only type of negative consequence of early school leaving. Eurostat statistics show worrying results on the health and wellbeing of school drop-outs. In Lithuania, nearly a third of people with a lower secondary qualification at most have a long standing illness while the proportion is only 12 % for people with an upper secondary qualification. American studies have shown that the life expectancy of early school leavers is 9.2 years shorter than that of high school graduates (Youth Forum Jeunesse, 2008) and the mortality rate of high school drop-outs is more than twice that of those with some college education (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2006). There are several ways in which more and better education influences health outcomes. For example, education can change health-related behaviour, including decisions regarding diet, smoking and alcohol consumption, and the better educated are more likely to exercise and obtain preventive care (Psacharopoulos, 2007).

Young people not in education, training or employment also run a higher risk of becoming involved in crime and anti-social behaviour than those engaged in learning. A British study has found that nearly three in ten (29 %) male and one in twelve (8 %) female drop-outs at the age of 16-18 were involved in crime between the ages of 17-30, three times the rate among all young people (CBI, 2008).

It is also important to invest in support for this age group. Children and young people represent the highest leverage point for investments to build human capital because the benefits of investments have the longest possible period to accrue (World Bank, 2009). This has been confirmed by many national studies. For example, Ecorys in the Netherlands has calculated that the cost of early school leaving for Dutch society can reach EUR 1.8 million per person over the course of his/her lifetime.

### 3.2. Education-to-work transitions

The decisions a young person makes in the first few years after leaving education have a huge impact on their future prospects. Although the initial transition is only the beginning of a working life that normally lasts several decades, many studies have shown that initial job outcomes have a lasting effect

on career development. Transition is a significant step, and it is essential that young people are equipped with the knowledge and support they need.

Defining the transition process helps to understand the nature and scope of the difficulties it can encompass. Müller and Gangl (2003) describe the process as 'the period between the end of individuals' primary involvement in education or training and their stable settlement in a work position'. Brauns et al. (2001), distinguish between two stages in the transition period: first, the search for initial employment after leaving education and training and, second, the early career stage after initial employment experience. They define two types of risk for young people within the transition from education to work: access to first employment and instability of initial employment.

### **3.2.1. The length of transition**

Table 1 offers an illustration of the length of school-to-work transitions in selected OECD countries, for 1995, 2000 and 2005 (Quintini, 2007). It shows that more than half of European young people are without work one year after leaving school. It often takes one to two years or even more for young people to find their first job after finishing education, and there are large differences in the average length of the transition across countries. The average time taken to find a permanent job ranges from just over a year in countries such as Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and Austria to over four years in Iceland. The length of school-to-work transition in Iceland, Italy and Norway is over three years.

While the EU average (unweighted) remains relatively stable, the situation varies across individual countries. Between 2000 and 2005, more than half of the countries saw an increase in transition period length. The increases varied from two months (Belgium) to 32 months (Iceland). Countries such as the Czech Republic, Germany and Norway also saw an increase in the length of transition (10, 10 and 11 months respectively). In contrast, countries such as Italy, Slovakia and Finland all saw a significant reduction in transition (19, 23 and 23 months respectively).

The factors affecting transition from education to employment are diverse and policy developments require flexibility to tackle them. Challenges range from the increasing choice of study and career pathways, and the destandardisation of youth transitions, the types of entry level employment available (temporary and part-time work and also low-paid work) and external influences such as the processes of internationalisation and globalisation underpinned by ICT frameworks. Responding to the rapidly changing conditions of the wider economy is necessary for both educational and employment structures, and the risks of a mismatch in the interface between education and employment, which can be

exacerbated by the fact that the pace of change within education is slower than that of the world of work. The principles of participation and active citizenship have been identified as affecting youth transition (Walther, 2002b), with youth policy across Europe and beyond incorporating these elements in terms of community and social, political, educational and, ultimately, employment participation.

Table 1. **Excepted length of school-to-work transitions in selected EU countries, 1995, 2000 and 2005**

Country	Duration in months			Country	Duration in months		
	1995 <sup>(a)</sup>	2000 <sup>(b)</sup>	2005 <sup>(c)</sup>		1995	2000	2005
AT	6.2	7.5	16.7	IE	21.0	20.9	16.8
BE	15.5	11.3	14.3	IT	62.4	70.5	51.3
CZ	19.9	19.9	29.3	LU	6.1	16.0	15.0
DK	41.4	30.9	22.0	NL	19.4	11.9	17.2
FI	28.0	56.8	34.2	NO	44.6	30.7	41.8
FR	22.3	17.2	23.0	PL	45.7	45.7	36.3
DE	22.7	29.4	39.2	PT	25.8	19.6	24.8
EL	37.9	32.3	20.5	SK	60.1	60.1	37.2
HU	40.8	30.2	28.5	ES	59.8	28.1	30.1
IS	21.5	26.6	58.0	UK	33.9	30.7	31.8
				<b>EU average <sup>(d)</sup></b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>29.4</b>

(a) 1993 for Denmark and the UK; 1994 for Luxembourg and Portugal; 1996 for Finland, Germany and Norway; 1997 for Hungary.

(b) 2001-05 for Czech Republic and Poland; 2002 for Ireland and Slovakia. 2003 for Norway.

(c) 2003 for Denmark and the UK; 2004 for Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal.

(d) Unweighted average.

Source: OECD Secretariat estimates based on the European Union labour force survey.

Education-to-work transitions are also affected by a range of contextual factors. In each country, influencing variables are different: labour market conditions, industrial structure and occupational change, population skills levels and education system structures, employment protection legislation and youth cohort sizes. Other related issues include the levels of young people leaving school without a basic education qualification, as well as the nature of skills acquired in school and their suitability for the world of work. All these factors influence the length of the average transition period and can contribute to the differences between European countries in transition times.

The current economic crisis has made the transition from school to work even more difficult for young jobseekers, in particular early school leavers (OECD, 2009a). Youth unemployment rates have increased substantially in the

past 12 months. As a result, even many graduates from FE, VET and HE institutions, who normally would find jobs relatively quickly after graduation, have now struggled to make the transition into the labour market. Consequently, young people with low levels of education are the ones having the toughest time finding a job, as they now have to compete for a smaller number of available jobs against their qualified and skilled peers.

It is expected that countries will continue to be affected by the consequences of high and persistent youth unemployment for some time after the recovery is well underway. This is likely to make school-to-work transitions longer, across European countries.

For these reasons, employment and labour ministers in the OECD countries (OECD, 2009a) have called for:

- interventions to help young people to get a firm foothold in the labour market, while improving their skills to promote their career prospects. This includes job search assistance and guidance for young jobseekers;
- appropriate education and training policies, which are seen as essential in ensuring smooth transitions from school to work. These should include actions to prevent early school leaving.

The consequences of a problematic transition for young people from education into the labour market can be varied and far-reaching (OECD, 2009b): youth unemployment, underemployment, risk of recurrent unemployment through the lifetime of an individual and associated problems relating to social exclusion (OECD, 2005).

### **3.2.2. Aiding effective transition**

The transition of young people into the labour market has been a central policy question for a number of years. In 1996, the OECD's Education Committee launched the Thematic review of the transition from initial education to working life (OECD, 2000), responding to increasing levels of concern about youth unemployment and those at risk in the transition from education to working life.

The review found that there is no standardised policy response to the problem; countries tailor their policy development according to their specific situation. The review identified six key features of effective transition, towards which countries should direct their policy-making:

- (a) a healthy economy;
- (b) well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study;
- (c) widespread opportunities to combine workplace experience with education;

- (d) tightly knit safety nets for those at risk;
- (e) strong or effective information and guidance;
- (f) effective institutions and processes.

In some countries, reforming the system supporting transition is seen as a partial solution. This can include introducing initiatives such as accreditation of prior learning that recognises experience and competences, and implementing the school-to-work or transition curriculum (OECD, 2004a). The latter can include elements such as teaching about work and further education and training routes, self-awareness, and such transition 'life-skills' as decision-making, self-presentation in curriculum vitae and selection interviews.

The Review and other studies (including Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; OECD, 2004b), outlined the importance of guidance services in supporting young people in key transition points, which is especially true for those who leave school early, without qualifications. Indeed, for the vast majority of young people across Europe, the transition from education to the world of work is relatively smooth. However, for some, transition can be difficult and these young people may require additional support and guidance to navigate their way successfully through the various pathways leading from education into work. The next section goes on to explore the role of guidance in supporting education-to-work transitions. This issue is becoming increasingly important, given the changing nature of education, learning and employment opportunities and the blurring of boundaries between them.

### **3.2.3. Guidance in education-to-work transitions**

The increasingly open nature of access routes to employment have created a complex range of pathways from learning to work. Further, young people tend to enter the labour market and start a family later in life, and they switch backwards and forwards between work and learning (European Commission, 2001a). The choices facing young people today can be overwhelming as they have more options and more freedom than at any time in history. Stokes (2000) argues that there is also less structure, less certainty and less support in making the transition to adulthood. Young people appreciate their freedom and choice, but they also want, or need, a framework that offers support and guidance (Stokes, 2000). Guidance services are integral to the successful progression of young people from education to the world of work but they must respond to the wide range of needs of today's young people.

Schools are one of the main settings for career guidance services for young people. Historically, school-based career guidance services have concentrated on schools at lower secondary level and have targeted young people making choices

about their education pathway (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). School approaches to guidance have been seen as too limited, as such provision tends to be a personal service provided by schools themselves (OECD, 2004a). The limitations of mainstream guidance services at schools include high costs, focus on short-term educational decision-making, and poor links to the labour market. OECD has suggested that school-based career guidance must adopt a broader approach that takes into consideration the need to develop career management skills (OECD, 2004a). This means the ability to make effective career decisions and implement them. Such an approach, according to the OECD study, must be embedded in the curriculum, incorporate learning from experience and involve the whole school.

The concept of education-to-work transition is shifting from an approach that simply tries to match the skills and interests of young people to particular jobs or courses to one that places more emphasis on active, continuing career planning and management. A variety of different personal support systems, career-related services, arrangements and agencies are required to assist young people in the transition process. Further, not only does guidance need to address the initial needs of young people to support their transition into work from education, but also to offer a grounding for their longer-term career development, and to ensure they have a solid foundation on which they can base a lifetime of learning and professional development.

Tailoring the delivery of guidance measures for young people to facilitate their transition is a key issue for those implementing youth policy. There are many examples of innovative approaches which have been developed to support and guide young people into the labour market or back into education or training. Some operate in mainstream settings, such as schools and formal education systems, while others are delivered in a community, assisting those young people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion, e.g. through community outreach centres. All have the central aim of easing the progression of young people as they leave the world of formal education systems and embark on their working lives.

This study explores the variety of these policies, project and programmes available for young people in European countries to access mainstream and specialist guidance services, including Internet-based information systems, collaborations with public employment services and other partners to deliver joined-up career and support services, and other tailored support services to potential and actual school leavers. The following sections will show that guidance does not work in isolation but it often works alongside social exclusion, education and training, and employment policies. The remainder of the report will also demonstrate that guidance is not always a dialogue; it also about actions to prevent exclusion and provide routes out of exclusion.



## 4. Supporting school completion

### 4.1. Introduction

The reasons for disengagement are varied and young people who drop out of school come from diverse backgrounds. Most disengaged school leavers are usually the hardest to reach and the most unwilling to respond to the services and opportunities provided for them (Britton et al., 2002). This is one of the reasons why EU and national policies pay growing attention to the need to develop a more proactive and preventive approach to school engagement. The Commission's Communication on efficient investments in education and training highlighted the cost of inaction as another important reason to adopt a preventive approach (European Commission, 2002a). Since then several European and international studies have confirmed that, while there is clearly a cost involved in any preventive action, the cost associated with high numbers of drop-outs can be much greater (Wößmann and Schütz, 2006; Psacharopoulos, 2007; European Commission, 2002b). This was also confirmed by the recent Communication on new skills for new jobs, which states that preventing early school leaving and improving the educational attainment of young people is crucial if they are to acquire key competences necessary for progressing their skills (European Commission, 2008d).

The over-arching goal of preventive approaches is to increase school completion by helping those who are likely to drop out of education or training. This can be done by raising aspirations, improving the wellbeing of all young people at school, and identifying those at risk of disengagement early and providing targeted intervention. Such approaches seek to address the reasons why young people disengage from school and usually target either the individual or the education and training system. Person-centred approaches address individual circumstances, motivations and capabilities to stay in education or training and cope with transitions between different levels of education. Preventive approaches target structural aspects of education and training systems, addressing issues such as giving young people opportunities to succeed in alternative forms of education, increasing permeability of study pathways, availability and quality of mainstream guidance and counselling services, and the length of compulsory education. Preventive policies should not be seen as add-on extras to the 'core business' of schools but central to the retention of young people. However, in practice, many early interventions rely on

project funding; this study has looked into both mainstream and project-based examples of preventive approaches.

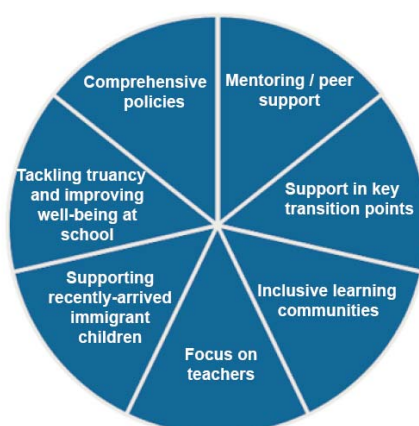
The study has focussed on examining specific guidance-oriented approaches to prevent early school leaving. A range of different guidance-oriented policies, projects and programmes have been introduced to increase school completion. Investment in guidance and counselling services is seen as one of the key preventive strategies to reduce rates of school drop-out because policies with strong guidance elements can motivate learners, help them to overcome problems, and prove effective in raising aspirations. Guidance can also help young learners to find their place in increasingly complex learning systems and can provide them with relevant information to inform future career choices. Therefore, guidance, support and counselling can have a significant impact on young people's decision-making and can reduce the possibility that they will make premature or ill-informed decisions that could lead to drop-out.

Guidance-oriented approaches to supporting school completion are discussed, followed by an analysis of the factors that can help to make these policies successful. There is some degree of overlap between approaches and it must be taken into consideration that the role of guidance is stronger and more apparent in some cases than others.

#### 4.2. Types of guidance-oriented approaches

Guidance-oriented approaches introduced with the aim of reducing early school leaving have been divided into seven categories in this study. These range from

Figure 3. **Types of preventive guidance-oriented approach**



Source: GHK Consulting, 2009.

grassroots level mentoring and peer support projects to the provision of training to teachers and comprehensive national policies to prevent early school leaving. This section starts by looking at the role of mentoring.

#### **4.2.1. Mentoring**

Mentoring has become an increasingly popular method of providing support and guidance to those in need and projects can now be found in different settings across society, targeting a wide range of people. Mentoring programmes aim to provide a structured and trusting relationship, bringing young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement (Youth Mentoring Network, 2009).

EU policies have also recognised the value of mentoring. The new EU strategy for youth, 'Investing and empowering' promotes mentoring as an effective tool in empowering young people in their personal, academic and professional lives (European Commission, 2009a).

There are many different definitions of mentoring. Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) define mentoring as 'offline help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. Mentoring can be split into two main categories: natural mentoring and formal mentoring. In natural mentoring a sustained relationship develops naturally between a coach, teacher, neighbour, or other adult and a young person. Formal mentoring consciously creates a relationship between a mentor and a mentee to help the young person to access support which may not otherwise be available. This study has examined formal mentoring programmes in school-based settings <sup>(9)</sup>, which aim to improve wellbeing at school and to support education transition, thereby preventing young people from leaving school early.

Relevant mentoring projects and programmes are universally present across all European countries. As part of this study mentoring projects were reviewed from countries such as Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. They were found to provide concentrated support for a range of young people, all of whom have different needs and requirements. Examples were found of mentoring projects that target specific groups, including:

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<sup>(9)</sup> Mentoring projects can take place in a variety of different settings, depending on the project, the people involved and the local facilities. These can include: school-based mentoring programmes, juvenile detention centres, adult prisons, faith-based organisations, community centres, the workplace, other community settings (such as, cafes and libraries), or in the virtual community. Mentoring can also be provided by a range of different providers from community groups, companies, NGOs to state authorities and schools.

- (a) young migrants and young refugees (e.g. the Nightingale project in Sweden);
- (b) young people at high risk of disadvantage and social and economic exclusion (e.g. the mentoring activities of the Rainbow Association in Slovenia);
- (c) young people from ethnic minority groups, including young members of the Roma community (e.g. the scholarship/mentoring projects in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia);
- (d) young people making the transition from school to further education, training or employment (e.g. Rise and follow your dreams, Denmark).

Through mentoring programmes, these specific groups of young people can access targeted and individualised guidance and support, which may not be available to them elsewhere. They can benefit from external advice and contact with people who may be from outside their usual social, economic and cultural background. Mentees can gain an insight into the different opportunities open to them, which they may not have known about or known how to access in their day-to-day lives. The projects can also bring together people who may not have otherwise met, enabling them to learn about different people's lives, which can have a positive impact on their aspirations and understanding of the world. For example, mentoring represents one way of familiarising children and young people from under-represented groups with the opportunities higher education can bring. This is illustrated with an example from Sweden which also identifies how mentoring programmes targeting immigrant families can support wider social goals by fostering dialogue between established community members and new arrivals and by enhancing the understanding of mentees and mentors of different cultural, religious and social realities.

Research has shown that young people with strong support networks are more likely to be resilient in the face of life difficulties, as well as more socioeconomically successful than those who have no one to turn to (Werner, 1993). One Danish mentoring project, the mentor as a network creator (*Mentor som Netvaerksskaber*) was established around the ethos that mentoring should teach young people to build and use their own support networks. Young people at risk of dropping out of their vocational studies were supported by trained mentors whose fundamental aim was to engender independence, teaching young people to learn to help themselves. One of the key activities was to create a supportive network, for example by asking them to identify people related to their education, free time, family and friends that could support them. Follow-up

confirmed that three-quarters of participants established and used their own networks to find support; most (70 %) remained in education.

### **Nightingale, Sweden**

The Nightingale mentoring programme was first introduced by the University of Malmö in 1997. The rationale was for university students to provide support to children aged between 8 and 12 who come from schools with large numbers of pupils from ethnic backgrounds.

Today, the aim of the scheme continues to be based on the concept of 'mutual benefit' by fostering interaction and solidarity between students and children from different ethnic and social backgrounds. The idea is that the mentor acts as a positive role model to the child and helps to build up their self-confidence. The founders of the project believe that this form of activity can enhance the understanding of the similarities and differences between people from different cultural, social and ethnic groups. Further, to improve diversity in Swedish universities there is a need to recruit students from different cultural and social backgrounds, which have little or no tradition of continuing into higher education studies. The Nightingale scheme is one way of familiarising children from disadvantaged backgrounds with the opportunities that higher education studies can bring them. The goal is that the child will perform better in and out of school and will be more likely to apply for a place at a university later in life.

The mentors meet the child once a week for two or three hours during one school year. They then take part in leisure activities together. Around 90 university students act as mentors every year and each student has one mentee.

So far, around 1 000 children and 1 000 students have participated in the scheme. According to Malmö University, the project has generated clear and visible benefits for both mentees and their mentors. Positive results for the children include an opportunity to have access to an adult who listens and is able to offer support. Other benefits include improved self-confidence and an opportunity to do things, which some children would not have been able to do without the project. Participation has also helped to improve many children's Swedish language skills.

Positive results for mentors include opportunities to gain new experiences and an insight into the lives of people and children from different socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The project has also enabled many mentors to address their own ideals and prejudices and they have recognised the important contribution they have made to the education of their mentees.

The Nightingale project is still hosted by Malmö University but related Nightingale projects have been introduced in Lund, Helsingborg, Kristianstad, Växjö and Borås. In 2005, the university received EU funds (Comenius) to initiate the project in six other European countries: Austria, Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

Based on information from <http://www.mah.se/thenightingale>

Mentoring does not have to be a static process. Many mentormentee partnerships cover a range of different activities from discussing school and homelife issues, to compiling CVs and making future career and/or education and training plans, organising work experience and arranging outings together. Activities should be tailored to the individual and should take into account the needs, age and interests of the young person to ensure their full participation and to promote a sense of enjoyment in taking part in the programme. The mentoring project run by the Rainbow Association in Slovenia gives mentors and their mentees the freedom to decide on the activities they want to pursue during their

weekly meeting. Many of the activities are informal. They go to a park, gallery, sports centre or swimming pool where they have the chance to get to know one another, build a relationship based on trust and discuss issues affecting the young person.

The combined scholarship and mentoring project *Ultravaló* (For the journey) in Hungary is an example of a mentoring project which takes account of the needs of young people at different education stages. Students at lower secondary level are supported by their mentors in applying for upper secondary studies. Upper secondary level students are guided through activities that equip them with knowledge about further study, training and employment options. Young people in vocational schools are supported in their efforts to find a work placement, which is usually an important part of their studies. These activities have been put in place to prevent young people from disengaging from school.

These examples have shown that mentors can play a key role in assisting Roma students in schools, and thereby their academic performance. The mentors also monitor student progress and help control their attendance. They are able to understand better the student's personal situations and potential problems. Indeed, many mentors often act as 'second parents', encouraging and motivating students and providing help and advice to overcome personal or school-related difficulties (Roma Education Fund, [www.romaeducationfund.hu/](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/)).

At first glance these mentoring projects seem very similar. There is, however, anecdotal evidence to suggest that, in practice, small changes in project approaches can have a far-reaching effect on the way they support most vulnerable young people from the Roma community. The first difference concerns the selection process. The Hungarian mentoring project led by the Soros Foundation, accepted students from the Roma community only, whereas the new national programme selects students on the basis of their socioeconomic background. This means that a larger number of young people have the potential to benefit from additional support and the selection decision is no longer linked to ethnicity. However, the larger target group can reduce the opportunities for the most vulnerable members of the Roma community, who are often in most urgent need of support, to benefit from the programme.

Whereas the Soros Foundation project accepted joint applications from students and their chosen mentors only, the new national project accepts applications only from teachers who are in charge of the selection process. This takes away the flexibility of the project and the ability of students to choose their own mentor. Further, as schools are responsible for applying for funding (instead of the mentee and their mentor) the attitude and initiative of the head teacher

### Scholarship and mentoring projects, Hungary

One of the successful approaches to tackling education disadvantage faced by Roma children in Hungary has been the introduction of combined mentoring and scholarship projects. This approach has a relatively long history in Hungary, having been run in the past by several different agencies before it became a mainstream activity funded by the State in 2005.

The first Roma mentoring/scholarship project was introduced by the Soros Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), in the mid 1990s. It targeted disadvantaged Roma students, for whom it:

- offered scholarships for secondary level students;
- funded, recruited and trained mentors whose main task was to help young people with their homework, build up their aspirations, help them to understand the benefits of education and training and support their progress to the next education stage;
- organised summer camps for students and mentors;
- arranged networking events for participants.

The project ended when the foundation closed in 2005. It was a very successful project that managed to reach Roma students in most need of support. Students were able to 'select' their own mentor (one of the school teachers) and then submit a scholarship/mentoring application together with their chosen mentor. The group activities organised as part of the programme allowed young people to socialise together and created a sense of team spirit among all participants, mentors and mentees alike. Such activities also allowed Roma children to strengthen their Roma identity. The project also acted as a positive catalyst to improve the relationship between schools and Roma children.

In 2002, building on the success of the Soros Foundation project, the Budapest City Council decided to fund a similar project in the greater Budapest region, targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The project is still running and benefits some 250 students and 80 teachers each year.

In 2005, the Hungarian government decided to mainstream this practice of combining scholarship and mentoring activity, based on the broad principles of the Soros Foundation project. The programme is known as *Ultravaló* (For the journey) and the goal is to support young people from poor socioeconomic backgrounds. It has three eligible student groups:

- students at grades seven and eight receive help with their homework. During one-to-one or small group sessions mentors provide step-by-step explanations so students can easily understand how to solve problems and homework questions they might find difficult. In addition, the mentors are expected to help with the selection process for secondary level studies;
- students in grade nine continue to receive help with their homework. Another important area of work for mentors is career advice. They help students become more self-aware and to identify the options available to them in terms of education, training and employment;
- mentors of students of vocational education and training establishments help them with their homework, offer career advice and support young people in their efforts to find a work placement, which is usually an important part of their IVET studies. The mentors help young people to identify companies and organisations where they could complete their placement.

All mentees receive scholarships ranging from EUR 13 to EUR 17 a month (HUF 3 500 to HUF 4 500). Mentors also receive payments for their participation of similar amounts. In 2005, 20 045 students in 1 675 schools participated in the programme. They were supported by nearly 8 000 mentors.

Based on information from the Roma education fund (<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/>).



plays a significant role in the opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to take part. Some schools in the most disadvantaged areas have less information and less capacity and skills to write applications and therefore require support in these efforts, which the national programme does not have in place.

Many of the mentors who take part in these programmes are volunteers. This can often be an important factor in building a positive relationship with mentees; for some young people this is the first time an adult has actively chosen to interact with them without being paid for their time. In other cases, such as the Hungarian *Ultravalo* and the Danish projects, mentors are paid for the service they provided to the mentees. However, the payment is usually nominal and is a way of thanking the mentor for their participation.

In most cases mentors are adults: guidance counsellors, qualified teachers or social pedagogues. In other cases, young people are guided either by older students, former mentees ('buddies') or even their peers; this last approach helps young people to help each other. Students develop an encouraging and supportive relationship with other students, usually younger in age, for the primary purpose of providing broad support, guidance, and friendship (Mentoring + Befriending Foundation <sup>(10)</sup>). Peer mentoring can range from being target focused to informal 'buddying'. It can be used to tackle problems related to school work, social issues (such as pressure to drink or smoke) and other typical problems associated with growing up which can hinder progress and even lead to school failure.

Peer mentoring can also be used to resolve disputes, encourage friendships for children who may otherwise struggle to fit in their school and help address problems caused by bullying. Examples of such mentoring/mediation schemes can be found in Belgium (Flanders) and Austria. Peer mentoring can also be used to support school completion by raising aspirations and promoting career development. 'Rise and follow your dreams' is a mentoring project based in Copenhagen that aims to prevent early school leaving. It targets young people from grades six to nine who are supported by an ethnically diverse group of 20 to 29 years old individuals.

Many mentoring projects are small and they are often run by individual schools, education establishments or community organisations relying on volunteer support. Project budgets tend to be limited and a systematic, longitudinal approach to evaluation is often out of the question. Plenty of

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<sup>(10)</sup> Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. *What is mentoring and befriending?* Available from Internet: <http://www.mandbf.org.uk/about/definitions/> [cited 1.3.2010].



anecdotal evidence is available to illustrate benefits of mentoring but formal evaluations are rare.

### **RISE CPH (Rise and follow your dreams), Denmark**

Rise and follow your dreams, based in Copenhagen, is a mentoring project that works with young people from the sixth to the ninth grade of school. Its purpose is to ensure all young people enrol on, and complete, a youth education programme. Although the project supports young people from all backgrounds, most participants come from ethnic minority groups or immigrant families.

Generally, mentoring consists of a group of three mentors who work with a class in a school. Each mentor has 20 minutes to talk to the class and share their personal stories with the group. Stories can focus on how the mentor overcame some of the barriers the young people in the class may be experiencing. For example, they might explain how they convinced their parents that the career path they want wanted to pursue is a viable option. Young people are interested in hearing about such experiences as it gives them ideas of how to deal with similar issues in their own lives.

The 'story sessions' are followed by questions and answers from the young people. Mentors are aware that not all young people like asking questions in front of everyone and so they are allowed to write questions and drop them in a hat; this approach generates more questions which are then discussed by the group.

There are no specific rules for this kind of mentoring activity. A teacher can book the mentors for a two-to-three hour session. The mentors may return to the school every few weeks or may only visit the school once a term. The frequency of mentoring activities depends on the school's wishes and the availability of mentors and the young people.

Alternative methods of reaching young people have also been explored. Ideas from the mentors themselves have been introduced as a way of engaging with young people. One mentor developed and now delivers rap music workshops to young people.

Mentors are also active participants in educational fairs and careers events, where they talk to young people about their ideas for their future and the opportunities available to them. Having mentors on hand at formal events is an excellent way of engaging with young people. Sometimes at such events, young people are too nervous to ask adults any questions. By having other young people there, it may encourage young people to access the information provided and discuss the opportunities available to them. As well as working with the young people, and their parents, other project activities also include work with teachers.

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence to show that mentors have generated a number of positive impacts. Young people have thanked them personally for sharing their stories, describing how the mentoring has inspired them to pursue education and career opportunities. Teachers have also been pleased with the project's activities, as demonstrated by teachers requesting that mentors return to schools. Mentors have reported seeing real progress with some young people, particularly young people who have been considered as unmotivated by their teachers. In the workshops, mentors report that young people are more talkative and are openly thinking about the range of educational opportunities available to them.

By having mentors from all nationalities, the project is able to demonstrate that anyone, from any background, can access material on their education and their future. By sharing their experiences, mentors have inspired young people to think about the range of available opportunities and how they can pursue them. This process encourages young people to reflect on their education and their futures, through the provision of different experiences. Young people are able to apply these stories in their own lives and develop coping strategies for issues they may be facing. Exploring different ways of communicating with young people is also an element of the project's success.

However, studies have concluded that young people involved in mentoring are likely to experience a range of benefits, including improvements in their relationships with family and peers, an increase in their overall communication skills with others and a reduction in anti-social behaviour (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006). Some feel less isolated and more resilient and therefore better able to tackle setbacks in life. Others benefit from increased options and opportunities for participation. The Nightingale project demonstrated that mentoring programmes can provide positive influences for younger people who do not have a good support system available to them, increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem. The Danish Rise and follow your dreams project indicated that peer mentoring gives young people the opportunity to share ideas and concerns with other young people whom they feel they can relate to better than teachers, guidance counsellors and other adults. One of the project's success factors is the diversity of their mentors, with most of the participants coming from different nationalities and ethnic minority groups. They also appreciate having mentors relatively close to their age because young people tend value mentors who share and are willing to discuss similar backgrounds and experiences Philip, 2004 <sup>(1)</sup>).

Mentoring projects run by NGOs in Hungary, and subsequently the Roma education fund in countries such as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Serbia have shown that mentors can play a key role in promoting Roma students' academic performance, by providing additional support during regular extra-curricular sessions. This support can start from a basis of encouragement and going over what the student has learnt in class, to make sure they have fully understood the lesson and its content; it then progresses into other areas such as information, advice and guidance concerning career opportunities. An evaluation of a mentoring and scholarship programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, funded by the Roma education fund, found that mentoring has positive effects on the retention, achievements and transition rate of Roma secondary school students. Access to mentors has lowered early school leaving rates, the number of students with lower grades has decreased, and there are more Roma students achieving good results in all of the participating secondary schools (Roma education fund, [www.romaeducationfund.hu/](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/)). The retention rate of first year Roma students, who are traditionally the most at risk of dropping out of education, has risen from below 85 % to just under 100 %.

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<sup>(1)</sup> *Mentoring for vulnerable young people*. Available from Internet:  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/324.pdf> [cited 1.3.2010].

It is not just the mentees who benefit from mentoring. The mentors also have a chance to develop a range of skills and to demonstrate personal qualities that are important in life, such as commitment, responsibility and self-confidence (Miller, 2005). By participating in mentoring programmes, mentors can gain both practical experience and a sense of satisfaction that they have made a difference in someone's life (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006). Mentors can learn and develop skills which they can then transfer to their own academic and/or career pathways. The programmes also provide an opportunity to meet new people and to expand work and life experiences. Many mentors have highlighted the opportunity to give back to the community as an important positive factor; this is especially true when mentors have benefitted from mentoring in the past, perhaps when they were at school or as part of a community programme. This was confirmed by the Danish project Rise and follow your dreams. Money is rarely the main incentive for mentors to become involved in this project. Many feel that something was missing in their own life when they were growing up and this makes them want to contribute to the project. When mentoring is provided by teachers, as is the case with the Roma mentoring projects, it can also help teachers to self-evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching in the classroom, and potentially improve teaching methods (Lafferthon et al., 2002).

Communities can also benefit from mentoring programmes. As shown by the Swedish Nightingale project, mentoring helps to promote positive relationships between different members of the community and strengthen collaboration (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006).

Several factors can help to make mentoring projects successful. First, it is essential that recruitment is designed to ensure that the most appropriate mentors for the scheme are involved (US Department of Education, 2006). This does not necessarily mean those with the most qualifications or the highest skills levels. Young people may learn more from mentors who have life experiences which they can share (Youth Mentoring Network, 2009). There should also be a strategy for recruiting mentees to identify those most in need of support and to encourage them to take up the offer. Mentees should understand the potential benefits of taking part in the initiative and be 'signed up' to participating, since it has been shown that the most positive results occur when young people have chosen to take part rather than when they have been invited or referred by other organisations (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006).

After recruitment, it is also important to ensure the correct match between mentor and mentee. This may depend on the aim of the project: in some cases young people may benefit from exposure to a different social, cultural or ethnic group, whereas in others the ability to form a relationship based on shared

experience may be important. The matching needs to take account of a range of factors such as gender, language requirements, life experience and temperament.

Regarding the relationship between the young person and their mentor, it is important that they feel that they are equals, in contrast to the teacher-student relationship (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006). It has been found that mentees appreciate the chance to have an informal relationship and that they may feel more comfortable discussing certain topics with a mentor. However it is vital that boundaries are set and that both mentor and mentee understand the limits of the relationship and their responsibilities with regards to their partner. It is also important that projects take account of the need to manage the process when a mentor chooses to end their participation: the end of a mentoring relationship can cause mentees to feel rejected or let down and therefore cancel out the short-term benefits of their participation (Joseph Rowntree Foundation et al., 2004).

Effective management and governance structures should be in place for mentoring projects (Blaber and Glazebrook, 2006), including ensuring support is available to the mentors, engaging parents, and monitoring programme implementation. Continuous evaluation is also essential to ensure that the project is targeting and helping those in need in the most effective manner. Such projects also need to be followed up by programme coordinators to ensure schools and mentors are on the right track and providing appropriate support for young people. The mentoring projects led by the Roma education fund represent good practice, involving regular visits to schools and even parents.

#### **4.2.2. Supporting young people in key transition points**

Most children transfer successfully from primary to lower secondary level, which usually corresponds with the end of compulsory schooling. Further, in most European countries over 80 % of the population remains at school at least one year after the end of compulsory education (European Commission, 2009b), indicating that most young people also make a successful transition to upper secondary level education. Attendance rates, however, tend to decline in the second year of post-compulsory education, suggesting that transition was not as successful as first thought or that the students have not been supported sufficiently in their new educational path.

Some anxiety is inevitable in any change and children deal with this in different ways. A longitudinal study on the transition from primary to secondary level in the UK found that 84 % of young people feel prepared on entry to secondary school; the rest do not feel ready or feel worried or nervous about the change (Evangelou et al., 2008). Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may

be less able to cope with the transition from one level of education to another due to lack of support at home. Hence, while studies have found that the provision of guidance is essential for all age groups, it is particularly important at key transition moments in young people's lives (e.g. Bushnik et al., 2004; Darmody, 2008; OECD, 2004b and 2006; NCCA, 2008; Quintini et al., 2007).

The Member States of the European Union have introduced measures across different education levels to help students to progress from one level to the next and to ensure that problems which could lead to early school leaving are identified and effectively addressed. Examples of such measures include:

- (a) use of 'bridging materials' (e.g. information booklets) and sharing of information between schools;
- (b) buddy programmes and mentoring schemes;
- (c) shared projects and activities between local primary and secondary schools;
- (d) visits to schools by prospective teachers, children and their parents, and visits by guidance counsellors;
- (e) talks at schools, taster days and other joint social events between schools.

#### **Ambition to succeed (*Ambition Réussite*), France**

Various programmes are available in France to support young people moving from primary to secondary education and on to higher education. Ambition to Succeed (*Ambition Réussite*) networks were created in 2006 and can be found across disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The aim of these networks is to support young people facing the greatest difficulties in terms of accessing education and the area they live in.

Networks of nursery and primary schools have been established and grouped around secondary schools (*collège*) in the chosen socially and economically deprived areas. These networks reinforce continuity of support during the transition of pupils from one level to the next, therefore reducing the risk of students dropping out of the education system. The networks enable schools to identify students encountering difficulties with the educational system and target them with timely support. Additional, experienced teachers and teaching assistants (students training to become teachers) are available to those in need of extra help with their homework or with social or career related concerns. Various other support methods and programmes are offered, more pedagogical experimentation is encouraged and funds are allocated also for extra-curricular activities.

Each network is headed by the relevant lower secondary school, situated in close proximity to their network partners (nursery and primary schools). An executive committee has been formed in each cluster to aid cooperation between educational levels and cycles, and to coordinate effectively the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. Currently, the networks consist of 254 secondary schools and 1 700 primary and nursery schools (Direction générale de l'Enseignement scolaire, 2008).

For further information, see <http://eduscol.education.fr/D0049/CXJACC01.htm> or <http://www.educationprioritaire.education.fr/index.php>

Support programmes that address the transition from primary to secondary level at a more comprehensive level have been introduced in Denmark, Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands and the UK. In Hungary, the primary school curriculum has been modified to create a more supportive environment for fifth and sixth graders to prepare them for the transition. In Ireland, students from different classes and schools are mixed to provide them

with an opportunity to meet and work together. Danish vocational colleges collaborate with primary school aged pupils, as young as third graders, to familiarise them with vocational training options. In France, efforts have focused on providing transition support for the most disadvantaged.

The French case study shows that creating networks in areas where the rates of early school leaving tend to be high, can ensure an element of continuity for young people during transition. This can help to identify students experiencing difficulties and provide them with support to steer them to remaining in education rather than dropping out of school). Additionally, it is possible that young people do not receive appropriate or sufficient support at home to make decisions on their education and progression. The networks provide information and advice to young people, ensuring they have all they need for the process.

Guidance can also make a significant contribution when students choose a future education pathway in the transition from lower secondary school to upper secondary school. This is the stage when young people in many European countries have to decide between vocational and academic study routes. Guidance to support transition can help young people to make informed decisions about their future career or simply by making young people feel more at ease with change. Often, the right guidance at this stage can make the difference between young people disengaging from school and staying on.

The review of European guidance and support in the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary school around has shown that approaches vary. While some countries offer bridging courses, others offer events and mentoring to support transition, and some have introduced careers education into the curriculum at lower secondary school level. Countries such as Denmark, Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia offer bridging courses to increase the number of pupils who continue their education at post-compulsory level. These courses enable lower secondary school pupils who may not have achieved the required standard or who are missing certain qualifications to progress to post-compulsory education. The courses can also help pupils to mature and thus prepare them for upper secondary school, giving them the confidence to progress.

Bridging courses vary in length from a few months to a year. Typically, they aim to promote maturity in studies by making students more self-directed learners through the development of general, technical and academic skills. They also aim to develop maturity: in relation to work and careers by developing work-related skills; personal maturity by providing opportunities to develop communication skills, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility; and social maturity by developing 'people' skills and awareness of the world outside school.

For example, in Finland the 10th grade is aimed at young people who are not ready at the end of the ninth grade to progress to post-compulsory education. The course can also 'catch' students who start upper secondary courses but then drop out. The 10th grade curriculum is being further developed so that it can be organised in conjunction with vocational training institutions as a way of orientating young people to IVET and preventing drop-out. These courses are normally accompanied by career guidance support and tutorials.

In Ireland, the Transition year programme is intended to be a broad educational experience which encourages creativity and responsibility for oneself. As illustrated by the example, the main aim of the programme is to promote maturity, assist each individual to develop as a person and an independent learner, and to help young people to prepare for adult life, especially through contact with workplaces.

Studies on career guidance have found a frequent assumption that upper secondary students do not need further transition support (or as much as lower secondary level students do) as they have made specific educational and career choices already (OECD, 2004b). This assumption is especially made for students in vocational education pathways who receive less career assistance than students in general pathways. However, it does not take into consideration the increasing flexibility of IVET programmes, for example, in terms of improved access to higher education studies, or the wide range of career options and jobs that can flow from broadly designed vocational education and training (ibid). Further, as the focus of career services at this level tends to be on preparing young people for higher education studies, mainstream guidance services do not necessarily pay sufficient attention to the transition support required by vulnerable groups of young people who are under-represented in higher education institutes (HEIs).

### **Transition year programme, Ireland**

The subjects studied during the transition year range from essential core subjects, a tasting and sampling of other subjects, various distinctive courses designed to broaden students' horizons and some modules and activities specifically aimed at promoting maturity. The emphasis is on varied and continuous assessment with students themselves becoming involved in diagnosing their own learning strengths and weaknesses. Project work, portfolio work, oral examinations, project displays, personal logs, rating scales and exhibitions of students' work are encouraged.

Currently over 27 000 young people are following a Transition year programme in approximately 540 Irish schools. This constitutes a third of the age cohort. Students in the programmes have higher drop-out rates than the other school types, given the nature of their student intake. However, the Transition year programme has a positive impact on the academic performance of many students, although this is not the case for students who are not 'willing' participants in the programme (Smyth et al., 2003). Transition year participants are twice as likely to enter higher education than non-participants (ibid.). This is because many achieve higher grades in their leaving certificate as a result of taking part in the programme.

The review of transition support programmes identified a number of supplementary, usually highly targeted, guidance-oriented initiatives aiming to raise the aspirations of under-represented groups. Typically this takes place either through collaborations between upper secondary establishments and HEIs or even more frequently through role model and mentoring activities.

In France for instance, links have been created between secondary schools from disadvantaged areas and reputable higher education establishments (*grandes ecoles*). The schools organise preparatory classes for higher education and they have an agreement allowing secondary schools in disadvantaged areas to send pupils to study certain subjects through a non-standard and highly selective channel, and to arrange tutorship by business and industry professionals.

Role model and mentoring schemes usually aim to raise the attainment and aspiration levels of selected groups of pupils. This is normally achieved with the help of carefully selected under- or post-graduate students who act as role models and provide either group tutoring and one-to-one mentoring to those students who are either unmotivated and in danger of underachieving or generally under-represented in higher education. Numerous role model projects target ethnic minority groups (e.g. black and Asian minority groups in the UK and Roma students in the Czech Republic, Spain and Hungary) and many of these initiatives are either jointly funded and/or coordinated by NGOs or individuals HEIs with funding from education authorities.

However, few nationwide examples were found. One of these is the UK Aimhigher programme. Aimhigher partnerships receive government funding to break down the barriers which institutions and systems can unwittingly create for disadvantaged learners. Target groups include young people from neighbourhoods with lower than average HE participation, those from lower socioeconomic groups, and people from families with no previous experience of HE. Aimhigher is a means for collaborative working across the schools, further education and HE sectors. Activities include summer schools to give school pupils a taste of university life, taster days, master classes, visits to HE providers and one-to-one mentoring programmes.

Although parents and children should take every opportunity to get to know the next school level, these examples show how schools and authorities, as well as training providers and higher education institutes, also play a role in aiding the passage from one school level to another, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.



#### **4.2.3. Creating inclusive learning communities**

Family and community participation is a significant area of effective educational practice in Europe. One emerging trend in this regard is a supportive learning community approach which fundamentally constitutes a group of people who share common values and beliefs, and are actively engaged in learning from each other. The term 'learning communities' is interpreted in different ways but typically such communities are linked geographically or by shared interests, and they use learning and skills development to create more sustainable and socially cohesive communities in which individuals are connected, involved in learning and supportive of one another in their learning efforts. Activities to support inclusion are not necessarily linked to academic attainment, but encourage integration and can help to tackle issues such as poor attendance and low aspirations of both students and families.

The Cluster on access and social inclusion in lifelong learning, which brings together interested Member States to work on issues related to equity in education, has identified that learning community approaches are relatively common in many southern European communities. Many towns, cities and regions have realised that caring community members and other volunteers are capable of making an immense contribution to local schools. For example, in Italy, there are national (ESF-PON) and regional (e.g. *Scuole Aperte* in the region of Campania) funding streams aimed at increasing skills levels and school attainment, so reducing early school leaving in the most disadvantaged communities of Italy. These are based on a principle of horizontal and vertical networks of schools collaborating with local civil society organisations, churches and other grassroots-level actors. Further, opportunities for members to take part in learning processes have greatly increased as schools have opened their doors to parents and other community members. As a result, primary and secondary level school children in many of the poorest communities of Italy are supported and guided in their educational journey by networks of their local community members.

The learning community approach has been introduced in a more formal and coordinated manner in over 100 communities across eight Spanish regions. Based on similar approaches in the United States, they aim to transform school life by developing participatory education using objectives developed by the members of the local community (including teachers, parents, pupils and other stakeholders). Specific objectives are developed by each community, but everyone involved in the project works towards the same goal: to achieve the best schooling for every child and to set high education objectives for all. Volunteers from the local community constitute an integral part of the Spanish

### Learning communities, Spain

Reduction of early school leaving has become one of the key priorities for the Spanish Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport in the last few years. A national policy framework has been established to address this issue, together with a multi-stakeholder working group.

As part of the framework established to address early school leaving, learning communities have been introduced in a number of regions. They have been launched as an alternative to traditional teaching methods to tackle the problem of early school leaving. They are largely – although not exclusively – based in deprived communities.

Learning communities encapsulate the basic principles of 'dialogic learning'. This concept implies not just talking or discussing issues but promoting cooperation, motivation, self-confidence, solidarity and thus, instrumental learning of any kind. Learning communities are normally associated with pedagogic innovation, since the 'old' pedagogic methods may not have brought desired results. Key characteristics of all learning communities are the involvement of whole communities to foster educational success and the promotion of 'maximums' (high expectations) among young people.

Typically, the learning communities approach starts with a phase during which schools, students, parents and the wider community decide on goals for their community. For most schools these objectives concern reducing drop-out, improving school atmosphere, reducing discrimination and enhancing community cohesion. The process is normally supported by a researcher or a facilitator.

Once a plan is in place, the school community tries to engage the wider community to volunteer at the school. Volunteers include university students, older students, staff from local NGOs, family members or other members of the local community. They can assist in the organisation of school lessons or after-school activities. Volunteers have to understand the ethos of the learning community and work towards the objectives set by the community.

Central to learning communities is the focus on including young people from all groups and academic abilities, including those who are 'lagging behind'. To cultivate learning within young people who may be withdrawn, one of the many methods used by the teachers is interactive groups. Notably, the teacher changes to a 'coordinator' and utilises volunteers to work with young people. Volunteers do not need to be experts in the subject: their role is to ensure that there is effective collaboration within the group. Pupils are in heterogeneous groups, each group including at least one high-performing pupil who can help the others. Each group carries out a short activity, different from the other groups. This accelerates learning because the students are working all the time in varied activities. Working together also helps pupils to develop a sense of solidarity and an appreciation of the contribution that each pupil may bring.

Other activities in schools and the local community raise aspirations and create a spirit which encourages all the people involved in the community and its school life to transform difficulties into opportunities.

Learning communities are yet to be formally evaluated. Self-assessments by learning community schools, however, report that the project has helped to raise student achievements and self-esteem. According to the regional authorities in the Basque country, the learning community approach has had a positive impact on the school attainment of practically all schools that have chosen to take part in the project. In anecdotal evidence, young people, parents, teachers and local community members have given positive feedback. Young people enjoy the interactive group lessons and look forward to participating in them. Parents and local community members like being involved in young people's learning and consider that the attitudes of young people have improved. Teachers and schools have seen a reduction in absenteeism and fewer conflicts between teachers and pupils.

Based on presentations of the University of Barcelona, information from Ramón Flecha and a report prepared by the Cluster access and social inclusion in lifelong learning. Peer learning activity on Schools as learning communities (Measures to address diversity in the Basque Country) Bilbao, 8-10 October 2008.

learning communities in supporting children and young people during lessons and extra-curricular activities. The learning community approach was developed by researchers at the Special Centre for Research in Theories and Practices for Overcoming Inequalities (CREA) at the University of Barcelona.

Evaluations of similar initiatives in the US demonstrate similar, positive results. They have been found to be a powerful tool for social cohesion, community capacity building and social, cultural and even economic development.

Despite promising results, the transferability aspect of the Learning Community approach to larger cities has been questioned by many. They doubt how dipping into the knowledge of the local community is to be achieved in segregated urban areas where many parents have problems communicating in the language used at school. Concerns would arise in many countries from the inclusion of volunteers from the local community, without making full and time-consuming background safety checks on volunteers.

Volunteers are, however, crucial to the successful operation of the learning community, as they provide guidance and support for young people experiencing difficulties with particular topics. Using volunteers from a variety of backgrounds is another element of the learning communities' success. University students and local community members act as another positive role model for young people. They are able to see what people from their community are doing and have achieved, which in turn should raise their aspirations. Student volunteers can also provide information and discuss university life with the young people, giving them an idea of the opportunities available to them after school. This may 'plant a seed' and raise aspirations of progressing to further education and university.

#### **4.2.4. Additional teaching inputs**

Supplementary tuition and teaching assistants can help to tackle individual student problems before these are able to have a serious impact on their educational achievement and increase the risk of dropping out. Supplementary tutoring can take many forms. Some pupils receive tutoring individually and others work in small groups. Attention is focused on building student strengths or helping them improve their skills in areas that challenge them. Usually tutoring entails working with students on a particular reading, writing or numeracy skill but examples have also been found of tutoring projects directly linked to providing career-specific guidance.

In recent years countries such as the Czech Republic, Greece, France, Hungary and Sweden have released funds to finance such activity. In Greece the provision of additional tutorials for children living in communities with a high

concentration of low income families has become an important and successful element of the country's policy on early school leaving. In France and Sweden similar efforts target students who experience difficulties with reading, writing and numeracy. To help combat early school leaving, the French Ministry of Education has introduced Individualised programmes for academic success (*Programme personnalisé de réussite éducative, known as PPRE*) in primary and secondary schools. It is aimed at students who display difficulties in learning French, mathematics and modern languages and who are subsequently in danger of leaving school without an upper secondary level qualification. Each student is assigned an individualised action plan to help them learn and develop, while taking into account their individual circumstances. Likewise, in 2001, the Czech Republic introduced preparatory classes for children from disadvantaged sociocultural backgrounds in an effort to improve school completion. The classes follow a special curriculum and each child is assigned their own individual educational programme. Group tutorials have been funded in Hungary to support low achievers. Research has found that most children who have had to resit a school year could have caught up with their fellow students simply with extra time to improve their basic literacy and numeric skills.

Another discernable trend concerns teaching assistants. Many of the countries studied have a long tradition of using teaching assistants to support pupils, including France, Finland and the UK. Typically, teaching assistants support students at risk of falling behind with their school tasks, answer questions and try to stimulate interest and enthusiasm. Teachers in charge of a whole class may not always be able to identify immediately if a pupil is falling behind or not understanding the work, whereas teaching assistants working with individual pupils or groups of pupils are ideally placed to recognise such circumstances and address them accordingly. Further, students receive more personalised instruction because either the assistant helps to give them more oneonone instruction or frees the teacher of some of his/her duties so that he or she can offer this to struggling students.

Teaching assistant posts have been created recently in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic to support the integration of Roma pupils from segregated classes into mainstream education. Assistants contribute to the transition by helping pupils to adjust to the school environment, actively communicating with students, their families and the wider community, as well as helping teachers with educational activities. A similar policy in Hungary focuses on recruiting teaching assistants from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

Initial and continuing teacher training has become an important part of the overall policy approach to encouraging school completion as dissatisfaction and

difficulties with school level processes are one of the main reasons young people drop out of school early. Access to good quality teacher-training is made all the more important by the fact that, in many countries, teachers are responsible for delivering career guidance: they will have a critical impact on the level of support and guidance young people receive from school. Moreover, teachers play a central role in identifying young people at risk of absenteeism or experiencing difficulties in school, as they are on the front-line of educational provision. As a result, it is vital that teachers are given appropriate training throughout their careers to keep up-to-date with the needs of their pupils, the labour market and the wider society.

European countries are increasingly recognising that reforms in initial teacher-training and increasing the participation rates of teachers in continuing training have a direct impact on national early school leaving agendas. It is also acknowledged that increased migration flows have significantly changed the population diversity of many classrooms, thus teachers need to be better equipped to work in culturally and ethnically diverse schools and support young people with increasingly diverse guidance needs. Countries with recent measures to improve initial teacher-training or expanded access to refresher courses include Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Sweden. The Spanish Government has announced that the new teacher training programmes will pay greater attention to early school leaving. In Italy, efforts are focused on refresher courses for teachers on guidance and counselling. In Sweden, the new Government has announced large scale reform of initial teacher training and has agreed to provide continuing education and training opportunities for qualified teachers during working hours (while they retain 80 % of their salary). Teacher training reforms in Bulgaria and Romania have focused on inclusive education. It is, however, widely recognised that more needs to be done.

Young people in schools in socially and/or economically disadvantaged areas are particularly in need of well-trained and experienced teachers. However, many schools with high drop-out rates are characterised by high turnover of teachers. This can create a climate of uncertainty among pupils, which can trigger feelings of dissatisfaction and disengagement with the school environment. A transitional teaching body also reduces the likelihood of young people at risk of absenteeism and early school leaving from being rapidly and effectively identified, and the necessary guidance and support offered. To promote continuity, new teachers in Portugal are now able to settle in one place for three years, which enables them to develop their work.

#### **4.2.5. Supporting recently-arrived immigrant children**

Support for recently-arrived immigrant children and their families can have far reaching benefits for the children themselves, their families, schools and the wider society. It reduces the likelihood of young immigrants dropping out of school early because of poor academic performance related to language difficulties or poor knowledge of the education and training system. Language difficulties can affect not only the ability of a student to study effectively, but can also lead to feelings of isolation and low self-esteem. Given progressive demographic change in the European Union, many countries have a established system to help immigrant children to settle into their new educational environment and the European Social Fund (ESF) has provided many with joint financing. The measures used vary between countries, depending on national preferences and context.

In countries such as Greece, France, the Netherlands and Sweden, immigrant children are given the opportunity to attend temporary reception classes if they do not have the required level of proficiency in the host language to cope successfully in the school system. Pupils are taught mainstream curriculum content and receive language tuition to minimise the risk of them falling behind. Students are then gradually integrated into mainstream classes. In Sweden, classes offer new arrivals Swedish language tuition and lessons on Swedish society (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2005). Pupils who have moved into regular classes and who require additional support can benefit from guidance services, staffed by support teachers and offered in Swedish or in the pupil's mother tongue. These are provided in small groups, but assistants can also help individual pupils during their normal classes. In Greece, Greek families who are returning to live in Greece can also attend integration classes to help with the transition.

Segregated reception classes are not supported by all; some argue that this hinders integration process into the host society. In some other countries, such as the UK, newly-arrived immigrant children are integrated into mainstream classes as soon as they have arrived, and supported in this by teaching assistants and other personnel. It has not been possible in this study to provide detail on the effectiveness of either one of these approaches but it has been found that there is little evaluation evidence available to compare them. What is also clear is that it is not only children who need guidance at this stage; it is also vital to inform the parents of immigrant children about the education system and its benefits. Such guidance can be provided, for example, by schools and authorities through interpreters, by making written information about the school system available in different languages, or through designed individuals with the

responsibility of helping immigrant children and their parents to familiarise themselves with the system.

The 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements have increased migration within the EU and led to a subsequent call for the development of targeted guidance policies addressing the educational integration of migrant children in the EU-15. In 2005, the Irish Department of Education and Science established a steering committee to coordinate its response to the education needs of migrants in Ireland. During the academic year 2006-07 over 1 250 new support teachers were employed to assist recently-arrived immigrant children in Irish schools; relevant information on the education system was translated into various languages. This can reduce feelings of uncertainty and isolation among migrant parents and children.

New measures are also being developed to support the education integration of asylum seekers. A growing number of Member States are lifting legal restrictions and offering asylum seekers above compulsory school age the opportunity to follow mainstream education and training or to take part in specifically developed educational and vocational programmes (GHK Consulting Ltd, 2009). There is, however, a significant divergence between practices concerning school education of children whose parents have come to the country as refugees (ibid.). In some, such as Denmark and Portugal, asylum seekers of compulsory school age are not allowed to register with mainstream education and training institutes, raising a need for guidance and integration support if their application proves successful at a later date. In others, children not only have the right to attend compulsory education but are also offered tutorials, and additional guidance and support. In Belgium, pupils can attend special reception classes, although they are often subject to long waiting times. In the Czech Republic, young asylum seekers attend a special class for a year to learn Czech and attain the education level corresponding to their age.

#### **4.2.6. Tackling truancy and improving wellbeing at school**

For many young people, truancy is often a symptom of deeper underlying issues. It is also frequently the first visible sign that a young person is encountering difficulties in some area of their life. Truancy is an indicator that a child is disengaging from school and that they need to be encouraged and supported to remain in education and move forward with their lives.

Research indicates that young people who are truants are more likely to drop out of school. Truancy has been found to be associated with substance abuse, gang membership and involvement in criminal activities. Studies indicate that, in many cases, several factors lead to a young person playing truant: family

problems, school climate, economic conditions, language barriers, health matters, and individual student needs (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2003). Truancy is a serious issue for young people as it can mean they achieve very little formal education, skills and qualifications. This makes it harder for them to participate effectively in the labour market and can cause social marginalisation and isolation.

Different countries across Europe are tackling truancy by working together with parents, law enforcement agencies, and social service agencies to identify students who are showing the first signs of absenteeism. Various policies and practices have been put in place: breakfast clubs, ICT registration systems, following up on absentees, parent 'pagers', collaboration between parents and young people, and changing the timetable of the school day (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). Several countries have introduced new attendance policies and early warning systems to minimise the number of truants and to identify young people at risk of absenteeism. For example, in Italy, the Netherlands and Austria, existing student registration systems have been improved or new ones created to monitor student attendance better and steps have been taken to enforce compulsory school attendance to prevent unnoticed absences. The German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg has launched the initiative Active against truancy in schools (*Aktiv gegen Schulschwänzen*) as part of the regional strategic framework to prevent early school leaving. The initiative helps to inform teachers, trainee teachers and the police about truancy; it encourages early identification of students at risk, so that they can be given appropriate support and guidance to minimise the risk of them dropping out of education altogether.

It is also recognised that measures to address truancy need to address the reasons young people are playing truant, rather than simply trying to enforce participation. This is where complementary measures, such as mentoring projects, supplementary tutoring schemes, alternative study pathways, career guidance and other interventions discussed in this report, play an important role.

Equally important are investments to promote the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, developing their social and emotional skills and improving the overall ethos of a school.

Bullying and discrimination at school can have a profound effect on both academic achievement and potential absenteeism. Young people subject to bullying or discrimination are more likely to be depressed, lonely or anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell, and even think about suicide (Limber, 2002). These factors are likely to lead to disengagement from learning and from school, which can subsequently lead to absenteeism and early school leaving. Moreover, research has also shown that children who bully are more likely to play truant



from school, be involved in fights, steal property, commit vandalism and drop out of school (Nansel et al., 2001 and 2003). It is important to establish effective and sustainable anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies to create a safe and productive school environment.

The study countries seek to combat bullying and discrimination through direct and indirect guidance measures. Wider policy measures introduced to improve school attainment and retention often indirectly seek to reduce the risk of young people suffering from discrimination or bullying. More direct anti-bullying and anti-discrimination initiatives, however, seem to address the problems more effectively.

For example, the Olweus bullying prevention programme <sup>(12)</sup> originates from Norway and has since been introduced in countries such as Iceland, Spain and the US. It comprises four components: school-level (setting up a bullying prevention coordinating committee); individual-level (developing individual intervention plans for involved students); classroom-level (post and enforce school-wide rules against bullying) and community-level (helping to spread anti-bullying messages in the community). Olweus emphasises the importance of taking a whole-school approach to tackling bullying.

Anti-discrimination measures have focused on specific issues. For example, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has implemented anti-homophobia policies and practices at strategic and practical levels. A network of experts has been established to raise the profile of the issue at strategic level. Other initiatives have sought to provide practical support for young people actively experiencing discrimination and/or bullying – the Gay school day project (*De Vrolijke Schooldag*) encourages schools to review their diversity policies and the Ministry has commissioned a website ([www.gayandschool.nl](http://www.gayandschool.nl)) with a helpdesk to provide schools with information and advice on this subject.

Anti-bullying and anti-discrimination initiatives are also increasingly using the Internet to make it easier for young people to access help and advice when they are in difficulty. Some young people may not feel comfortable going directly to an adult or face-to-face service and may instead prefer to look for information online. The charity Bullying UK hosts an extensive online platform to provide reliable information on a variety of bullying issues to young people and their parents (Bullying UK, <http://www.bullying.co.uk/>). The German website Student distress call (*Schüler-Notruf*) is an online portal, which provides free advice for problems relating to addiction, bullying, depression, violence and sexual harassment.

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<sup>(12)</sup> See: [www.olweus.org](http://www.olweus.org) [cited 1.3.2010].

Other measures have sought to improve the overall school environment to promote participation and engagement. In Finland, a national action programme has been introduced to promote wellbeing in schools; school mediation services and staff training are used in Belgium to advise on how to deal with violence in schools.

Limited information is available on the impact of many of the programmes and campaigns mentioned. However, an evaluation of the Olweus programme demonstrates that its activities (identifying the forms of bullying, effective supervision during recesses, discussion groups involving pupils, parents and school staff, and discussions between victims and bullies) usually result in a 30 % to 50 % reduction in the level of bullying (Conference on school bullying and violence, 2004). Marked reductions have also been seen in student reports of general anti-social behaviour and improvements in the social climate in classroom have been reported. The programme has also resulted in more positive attitudes toward schoolwork and school.

For these reasons, while anti-bullying and anti-discrimination programmes are not strictly 'guidance' oriented, they provide an important form of support for those children and young people whose education experience is negatively affected either by bullying or discrimination, or both.

#### **4.2.7. Comprehensive national policies**

Many of these approaches aim either to support a young person at a specific time in their life, to address a particular problem or to provide targeted support for specific groups of students by strengthening elements of education or training systems. This means that some of the responses are time-bound, project-based measures or targeted to address a specific concern, as opposed to operating within a joined up framework, both strategically and operationally.

A single school, training provider, authority or organisation cannot deliver everything that a young person needs. When projects, actions and programmes are developed within a strategic framework which takes a systematic approach to guidance and support, young people can be supported in their learning journey in a comprehensive manner. Such approaches also maximise synergies with other initiatives and external partners and allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness.

Several study countries have adopted a comprehensive policy framework to support school completion. These range from approaches based on improving the quality of the education system as a whole, to frameworks targeting specific geographical areas or groups of young people.

In countries such as the Czech Republic, Finland, Malta, Norway and Sweden, the policy frameworks are focused on the principle of improving the quality of the education system as a whole. This means that fewer specific measures are aimed at potential school leavers or those at risk; interventions are instead more often focused on mainstream guidance and counselling measures, IVET reforms and the provision of access to continuing training for teachers.

A selection of EU countries, including Ireland, Spain, France, Cyprus and the Netherlands, are using programmes to combat early school leaving that adopt an area-based approach, with a particular focus on guidance and individualised support. These programmes provide additional funding to enable schools to devote extra time and resources to young people at risk of dropping out. For example, in the Netherlands the Drive to reduce drop-out rates (*Aanval op schooluitval*) policy framework offers secondary schools financial incentives to introduce activities that support school completion. The activities are decided by each municipality with a cluster of local partners and they centre on guidance, early identification of at-risk groups, and alternative learning opportunities.

The example shows that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science using preemptive measures aimed at raising educational achievement early on. The policy is supported by various research studies. For example, the

#### **Drive to reduce drop-out rates (*Aanval op Schooluitval*), the Netherlands (<http://www.voortijdigschoolverlaten.nl>)**

One of the priorities of the Dutch education system is to make sure that all young people achieve at least a basic qualification. Therefore, the Government has set an objective to halve the annual number of new early school leavers between 2002 and 2012; from 71 000 in 2002 to 35 000 by 2012. Reducing early school leaving has been a priority on the Dutch government's political agenda since the early nineties. There was a focus on institutions, systems and processes until 2006, when the government announced new, ground-breaking set of practical measures to reduce the number of drop-outs.

*Aanval op schooluitval* (drive to reduce drop-out rates) is the framework for policy developments in this field. Among other activities, it makes additional funds available for secondary schools which are subject to a host of different but interrelated problems (increased risk of truancy, early school leaving, criminality and/or behavioural problems) to maximise school performance and help deliver bespoke support. Cooperation between key stakeholders (the state, municipalities, schools, youth services, business community, parents, social workers, police and judicial authorities) is encouraged. The policy targets two particular groups of young people: young men and ethnic minorities. The key activities include the following:

- extension of compulsory education and training obligation: the school leaving age has been raised to 18 and young people are obliged to attend a training course that leads to a basic qualification;
- student registration: an improved student registration system has been introduced, offering complete, reliable and up-to-date figures nationally, regionally and for each municipality and district. The new, improved system ensures that national authorities have regular and reliable information on the level of early school leaving. It also allows them to assess the effectiveness of new practices;

- municipal agreements: one of the flagship initiatives is the establishment of agreements ('covenants') with municipalities to reduce school drop-out. Through the agreements, any school that reduces its drop-out rate receives EUR 2 000 for each young person they have encouraged to stay in education compared to the previous year. Schools are free to choose their own method of reducing the number of early school leavers but partnership working, career guidance and one-to-one support are at the heart of most agreements;
- reinforced guidance and counselling: the programme emphasises the importance of career guidance. In the past, school guidance systems have let certain groups of young people down, particularly those who do not want to follow traditional paths and those studying in vocational schools. The programme is working to change this. Good practices are being collected and disseminated about effective ways of delivering career guidance and the sector is undergoing a period of change towards greater professionalisation.

New funds have ensured that upper secondary VET students benefit from similar support to VET students at the lower secondary level; they are also supported at the transition point and followed up afterwards. Further, experimental vocational pathways have been piloted since 2008, offering a continuous, seamless education programme, as opposed to the two-tier VET programme provided by the current system.

The number of special needs advisory teams has been increased and the government intends to have a special needs advisory team in every school by 2011. These teams comprise a range of different professionals, including youth services, social workers, the police and judicial authorities. The teams aim to identify at-risk young people and offer them timely support: too often the problems of young people are detected too late. Today, every ninth general secondary school has a team in place and around 70 % of upper secondary VET schools have established one. The advisory teams have proved particularly effective in vocational schools.

- Validation opportunities for employed early school leavers: the availability of work-based, vocational training places is being expanded with thousands of new places for under 23-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. The aim is to ensure that 20 000 early school leavers aged 18-23 have the opportunity to have the skills, experiences and competences they have gained at work validated. It is achieved through agreements with large employers (such as the Ministry of Defence) who will provide training programmes for these young people, together with opportunities to achieve accreditation.

Evidence indicates that the measures have been successful in reducing the level of early school leaving in the country: there was a reduction of 22 200 drop-outs between 2002 and 2008 (down from 71 000 to 48 800). The trend has continued since the introduction of the new programmes. In the past year, since the implementation of the municipal agreements (covenants), the number dropped from 53 100 to 48 800. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science reviews the effectiveness of the policies in schools and municipalities at the end of the programme period, with a view to promoting the most successful policies and discouraging the least effective.

Based on information from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (<http://www.voortijdigschoolverlaten.nl/>), Cinop (<http://www.cinop.nl>) and the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands.

Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis carried out one study which forecast that the cost of the programme will be covered by expected reductions in crime, social security payments, etc. (Cinop, [www.cinop.nl](http://www.cinop.nl), 2008).

The Dutch policy approach represents good practice in the way it promotes collaboration between key players and supporting local solutions under the national framework policy. Dissemination of good practices across the country can be challenging and it is good to see that these efforts are made possible by

dedicating resources – financial and personnel – to identify which programmes are most effective in reducing the number of drop-outs.

Another country with a strong focus on prevention and providing guidance is Croatia, which has adopted a holistic approach to vocational guidance and counselling to help prevent early school leaving. Indeed, vocational guidance and counselling is seen as a key tool to help prevent social exclusion and to identify at risk groups of the population in the early stages of their disengagement with the education and training system or the labour market.

Within the Croatian education and training system, vocational guidance is administered through a step-by-step approach. A vocational intentions survey is carried out annually among the final year pupils of primary and secondary schools, which enables expert teams in each school to identify priority groups who may require special attention. Support is offered in several forms, depending on the individual's needs (vocational guidance information, counselling, self-assessment, etc.). Local and regional PES offices (Croatian Employment Service, CES) also organise regular group and individual information sessions. Parental involvement in information and decision-making is also encouraged. Vocational guidance and counselling centres, managed by the CES, target young people who are making decisions about their future career pathways and adults who are changing careers (possibly because of restructuring, health issues or personal choice).

### 4.3. Guidance to prevent early school leaving

The examples of guidance-oriented policies, practices and projects in this chapter have demonstrated the numerous different approaches used to prevent young people from disfranchising from learning. The review has also showed that most preventive guidance policies are person-centred and that few approaches addressing structural weaknesses have a strong element of guidance.

This section examines areas of effective practice which underpin the approaches to supporting school completion. These include the need for early interventions, to raise aspirations and to involve parents in the learning process.

#### 4.3.1. Early intervention

Many of the case studies and the reviewed literature suggests that timely intervention at school is necessary to avoid disengagement setting in, and that the transition from primary to secondary school is often a time when many young people start to disengage from education. Workers in secondary level schools, or

in associated support services, feel they can tell almost as soon as the young people come in who are at risk of becoming drop-outs. This stresses the importance of cooperation between primary and secondary schools as it can lead to early identification of problems (e.g. attendance and behaviour problems). The Croatian Employment Service (CES) has stressed to staff and users the benefit for society of the appropriate support being provided to young people who show signs of difficulties while still in education and training. This is preferable to spending large sums of public money after they have dropped out of school early or have left with few or no skills and have become unemployed adults.

Research evidence suggests that there are clear differences between individual schools in terms of how engaged they are in preventing early school leaving (*Research as evidence*, 2007). Schools that have an inclusive school ethos and that understand the value of careers education, and of skilled staff in delivering it, tend to be more open to acknowledging the issue of early school leaving and undertaking measures to address it.

#### **4.3.2. Addressing specific target group guidance needs**

Early school leavers are a heterogeneous group of young people, who may share certain common needs but will also be subject to different specific requirements. Research suggests that guidance-oriented early school leaving policies need to adopt a flexible and versatile approach, better to cater to the needs of all young people (Launikari and Puukari, 2005). Bespoke guidance solutions can have a significant impact, even if only provided in initial guidance stages.

Immigration, and in certain cases repatriation, has changed the demographic composition of different EU Member States. Guidance practitioners and teachers are faced with the challenge of learning to communicate and interact with people from increasingly diverse backgrounds. However, evidence has shown that many feel insecure or ill equipped to handle this situation (Kasurinen et al., 2005). Providing guidance to immigrant students requires a precise set of skills and initial and continuing teacher training should have a greater emphasis on an inter- or multicultural approach (McCarthy, 2001).

New groups with specific guidance needs are also emerging. With EU enlargement some western European classrooms have witnessed an influx of new arrivals from the EU-12 and teachers have had to adopt new learning styles and support strategies. However, those working at 'ground level' have often found that the necessary solutions are not delivered on time. This issue also has relevance for countries from which mass migration originates. Anecdotal evidence from schools in Lithuania suggests that children whose parents have left the country to work elsewhere in Europe display higher rates of early school



leaving than their peers and will need to be targeted with alternative support measures.

Young people from Roma/Gypsy and traveller communities are at risk of dropping out of mainstream schooling for a range of reasons. They may experience discrimination at school or be subject to bullying from their peers. They may have low aspirations, either for cultural reasons (education not valued within the family or community) or for economic reasons (they have a defined career path in the family business and feel ready to move on to work rather than pursuing education). They may find it difficult to form relationships with teachers and or pupils for reasons of cultural differences or simply because they are not able to attend regularly. Language can also present a barrier and their itinerant lifestyle (if they do travel) may make it almost impossible to maintain continuity in their learning. Further, young people from these communities may also experience the problems met by young people, and in particular early school leavers, from any background.

Guidance measures should be able to cater for the specific needs of these minority groups. The guidance process should start with by identifying the young person's needs, both in terms of learning and personal development, and should continue to offer support tailored to the young person's circumstances. For example, if the young person has an itinerant lifestyle, distance or e-learning might be offered as an alternative to attendance at a specific course. Where the young person has specific gaps in basic or life skills due to their previous interrupted learning, support should be offered to fill these gaps. Practical factors should also be addressed, for example by providing financial support in return for participation, or addressing transport difficulties. Further, the culture within the organisation(s) offering guidance and learning opportunities to the young person should be one of acceptance and free from prejudice.

#### **4.3.3. Importance of raising aspirations**

Several case studies demonstrated that aspirations are clearly a key part of a young person's decision about if and how to progress in their learning; however, their choices, decisions and behaviour are also influenced by a range of other social, economic and contextual factors (Learning and Skills Council, 2009).

The importance of raising aspirations among young people is their influence on educational achievement and life outcomes. Even though the aspirations change with the child's age, good results at school are an important step on the way to success across a broad range of future life choices. Parents and family are the most important influences on children but young people and their parents

are also affected by the type of neighbourhood they live in (Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Team, 2008).

Mentors, buddies, role models, outreach workers, and community-based volunteering organisations can play a part in making young people aware of the opportunities available to them, building up the skills and confidence necessary to achieve these goals. Aspirations can also be raised through exposure to new opportunities and through parental involvement (CREA, 2008). Children whose parents hope and expect them to do well in school are more likely to do so than those whose parents lack high education expectations (Downey, 2002). A parenting style balancing expectations, warmth, and responsiveness promotes school success more consistently than permissive or authoritarian styles.

#### **4.3.4. Parental involvement**

The active involvement of parents in the development and educational progression of their children can have far-reaching positive effects. It is widely acknowledged to play a vital role in motivating students to remain in education and strive to achieve qualifications (Learning and Skills Council, 2009). A German study over the decade 1985-95 used archival data of 641 young people in age groups 12 and 15 years, to examine the interplay between parenting, adolescent academic capability beliefs and school grades (Juang et al., 2002 in Hutchinson and Parker, 2009). It found that parents demonstrating more interest in their child's schooling, with higher levels of aspirations for them, had children with higher levels of self-efficacy and academic belief. A British study found that a lack of parental interest leads to higher levels of early school leaving (DfES, 2008). Research has also shown that parental involvement in a child's schooling is more influential than other family background indicators such as social class and level of parental education. These views are acknowledged by several EU policy papers which agree on the vital role that active parental involvement can play in motivating students to remain in education and pursue higher level qualifications (European Commission, 2006a; European Commission, 2008e and 2008c).

Parental involvement has been identified as creating a range of benefits for everyone involved, including the child, the parents, the school and the wider community (Hall and Tyson, 2009). Research has highlighted the significant role of family support and parental involvement in promoting achievement at primary and secondary school levels, as well as preventing early school leaving, offering benefits to parents themselves, and also aiding social inclusion.

Parents also benefit from greater involvement in their child's education. Greater involvement allows parents to understand the education system better



and can improve their self-confidence in their ability to navigate the process. It can also increase the likelihood that they will pursue lifelong learning opportunities themselves. Further, greater parental involvement in schools can lead to greater social cohesion in the wider community, bringing people together who may not normally have met.

Mainstream education policy is increasingly recognising the importance of parental involvement and the associated benefits. Examples of programmes promoting engagement of parents in their children's education can be found across Europe. Individual projects or initiatives are being carried out by schools and parents independently of national or regional programmes.

### Examples of methods to engage parents

- Listening to parent feedback and actively communicating with parents through printed newsletters, e-mail/Internet communication, messaging, meetings, etc.
- Encouraging parental participation in school improvement efforts and involving parents in school decision-making, to give parents a sense of shared responsibility.
- Organising school meetings in the evening and at weekends to accommodate families' work schedules. Organising family and community events and open days.
- Inviting parents and other family members to volunteer in school, either in a classroom or in after-school activities (see for example the Spanish learning community).
- Inviting the family members of immigrant children and children from cultural and ethnic minorities to share their experiences with pupils and/or their parents.
- Staff development can help teachers to understand the benefits of family involvement and show them how to remove barriers to involvement (Downey, 2002). It can also explain techniques for improving communication between home and school.
- Making parents feel welcome. Sometimes the first time a parent comes to school is when a child is in trouble. Schools can help reduce tensions by making initial contacts with parents friendly and respectful. Schools can also reduce distrust by arranging contacts in neutral settings, away from the school (Downey, 2002).
- Organising after-school classes for parents (e.g. programmes helping to build parenting skills, trust between families and schools and educating parents about the importance of education for their child's future) or school-family partnerships. Such programmes are common in southern Italian regions where ESF funding is being used by networks of schools to arrange after-school programmes for students and their parents.
- Arranging group trips to further education and training establishments.
- Overcoming language barriers. Reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special arrangements. This can include translating materials into a parent's first language, having someone (e.g. another teacher or parent) to communicate with parents in their first language and helping them identify language classes they could attend.

Based on information CREA, 2007b; CREA, 2008; Downey, 2002.

Initiatives first begin by addressing the reasons behind the lack of parental interest in taking part in their child's education. In certain cases parents may not be able to take an active role due to practical difficulties such as working hours or language issues (CREA, 2008). Others simply do not know how to participate

and/or collaborate effectively with the school. Parents of older children (secondary school level) may no longer feel able to influence their children or may find it difficult to communicate with them (CREA, 2007b). Some parents may simply lack interest in their child's education or wish their child to move quickly into employment (for instance, to support the household with an income). There is also evidence that some parents whose children have low levels of achievement are more reluctant to contact teachers than parents whose children are doing well at school (CREA, 2008).

Individual schools and school networks have developed numerous initiatives to help improve parental involvement in their children's education.

Schools need to be active and creative in developing ways of increasing parental participation. The education system represents an important journey in a child's life and parents should be encouraged to participate in their child's learning development and to be supportive of their needs.

#### **4.3.5. Managing, training and supporting guidance staff**

Guidance professionals, outreach workers, teaching assistants, personal advisers and other front-line staff and volunteers working with at risk groups have the challenge of dealing with many young people experiencing multiple barriers to participation. Such professionals need to be appropriately managed, trained and supported to reach their full potential. A recent study among 20 000 teachers and support staff found that teaching assistants reduce teachers stress levels and improve classroom discipline but do not boost pupils' progress (Institute of Education, 2009). The researchers believe that the main reason is that less than a quarter of teachers have been trained to manage teaching assistants, even though more than half of teachers do so. These findings support the argument that professionals and volunteers working with disaffected young people should have access to relevant training; this was also confirmed by a recent Cedefop study on professionalising career guidance (Cedefop, 2009b).

#### **4.3.6. Other policies to prevent early school leaving**

Guidance-oriented policies are not the only type of action taken to reduce early school leaving. Research has shown that extending the length of compulsory education can have a positive effect on school completion rates (GHK Consulting Ltd, 2005), although longer compulsory schooling does not necessarily translate into a sustainable improvement in levels of knowledge, skills or aptitudes (Wolf, 2002). Nevertheless, many European countries have, over the past decade, progressively increased the length of compulsory education: Bulgaria, Italy,

Netherlands, Poland and Romania. Many other governments are planning similar changes.

High quality early childhood education has also been proven to have numerous benefits for both individuals and for wider society. Research has shown that it provides children with a solid foundation for more effective future learning, thereby minimising the risk of early school leaving. A series of European policy documents (European Commission, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2006a; European Parliament, 2007) has highlighted the importance of the development of social competence through early childhood education and care, in particular for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Financial measures have been used in several European countries to encourage young people to remain in education or training. Measures have included: scholarships for students in vocational establishments (Latvia and Slovenia); financial incentives to allow students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to remain in education (Ireland, Spain, Slovakia and the UK); means-tested mainstream education grant and loan schemes (Denmark and Finland); support to attend VET training programmes for early school leavers (Hungary); and financial incentives for schools to ensure all students sit and pass their final exams (Iceland).

## 5. Reintegrating the disengaged through guidance

### 5.1. Introduction

The background presented in Chapter 3 showed how young people who are grouped under the headings of 'disengaged' and 'early school leavers' reflect a great number of sub-groups. The process of dropping out of school can be caused by a wide range of factors, including social, economic, institutional or personal factors.

Whatever their reasons for disengagement, for those young people who have dropped out of school, there are a number of barriers and obstacles to returning to formal learning or making the transition to further education, training or employment. For instance, the majority of these young people will have low self-esteem and in certain cases, may feel that their fate is to fail. Previous negative experiences of formal schooling and a sense of failure and rejection mean that many lack confidence in their ability to learn or lack direction. Further, their individual circumstances may mean that they have multiple reasons for becoming disengaged from formal education and training or employment, such as overcoming addictions, managing family life, offending behaviour and maintaining their financial situation.

As a diverse group with complex individual circumstances, at-risk young people have a diverse range of needs. They may lack knowledge of the opportunities available to them or where to go for help and support (Stokes, 2000). They may not have been able to work within the teaching and learning methods employed in formal education but prefer a kinaesthetic approach to learning through work placements and traineeships. They may also have such a complex range of needs that they need a completely alternative approach and a fresh start to learning. These young people require guidance to help them navigate their way back to learning and to support them in their reintegration journey.

Over the past decade, the policies of the European Union have highlighted the need to offer early school leavers the opportunity to pursue qualifications. Policies also recognise the important role played by guidance in second-chance education. In the 2004 Resolution on strengthening policies, systems and practices in the field of guidance, the European Commission acknowledged that

guidance services can provide significant support to young people returning to appropriate education or training after dropping out of school (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004). In a similar manner, the 2007 Action plan on adult learning emphasised that second chance opportunities supported by guidance should be available to those citizens who enter adult age without having a qualification (European Commission, 2007a). The Education and training 2010 working group on social inclusion called for an integrated approach to initiatives to detect and follow up those at risk (European Commission, 2003a). It recommended that such initiatives should be based on the equality principle (treatment, opportunities, outcomes) and take into account a wider context of social support (e.g. social welfare, health, employment).

Member State practice follows the recommendations of the Commission and its expert working groups. In this chapter, we will review a range of reintegration measures introduced by the study countries to help at-risk young people overcome their barriers to participation. These range from short-term solutions for young people at risk of dropping out, to holistic and innovative alternatives for the hardest-to-reach groups. Many initiatives have been introduced since the various recommendations of EU policy papers; however, many mainstream projects were introduced as pilot initiatives already in the 1990s.

The first part of the chapter is descriptive and illustrates the range of initiatives introduced by the study countries, including short summaries from some successful/interesting examples. Further details about these projects can be found in the Annex. The second part of the chapter is more analytical and looks at key elements of successful reintegration programmes and the role of guidance in these approaches.

## 5.2. Initiatives and support methods

Reintegration initiatives have a common aim, which is to support young people at risk or those who have already dropped out of education. The wider, social rationale is to combat social exclusion and marginalisation of school leavers. However, their more specific objectives vary. Some focus on reintegration to the formal education system, while others focus on the more direct transition to employment. These initiatives provide young people with an alternative learning environment, offer them a chance to regain their self-confidence and develop a plan for the future, as well as helping them to fill gaps in their knowledge and skills. All the examples included in this chapter have a strong guidance element.

The reintegration approaches have been grouped into six categories:

- (a) tracking measures to identify, support and monitor young people at-risk (including a case study example from Denmark);
- (b) short-term, specialised support to facilitate reintegration into formal education (including a case example from France);
- (c) holistic interventions for young people with complex support needs (examples are provided from Ireland and Lithuania);
- (d) online learning and support platforms facilitating reintegration (featuring a case study from the UK);
- (e) other second chance measures (including examples of traditional second chance schools in Greece, all day schools in Germany and Greece and the second chance opportunities offered by the Portuguese validation system);
- (f) guidance and training measures to aid access to employment (including case examples from Germany and Poland).

The review commences with tracking measures, which can be used to monitor progress into further learning.

#### **5.2.1. Tracking measures to identify and monitor young people at risk**

Tracking and monitoring measures can be used to identify young people who have dropped out of education and training and offer them targeted support. There has been a sharp increase in the number of European countries investing in these electronic monitoring systems, which allow authorities to monitor learner outcomes and progression of young people from one education level to another. The rationale for investing in such monitoring system is the information that it can offer to authorities, guidance counsellors and other partners working with young people about the participation of young people, at-risk groups in particular, in learning.

The systems usually include information about the 'learning location' of each young person in the age group and the geographical area the initiative covers. The learning location can be a school, training provider, specialist programme or an employer (through an apprenticeship). The system 'warns' authorities about those who have dropped out so that relevant support workers can get in touch with the young person as soon as she/he has dropped out rather than wait until their problems have escalated further. In some cases the system also permits the identification of those at risk of dropping out.

The discussion of the use of tracking measures is focused on an example from Denmark. Other examples of these methods are also drawn from other countries in later text. The Danish example shows how these tracking measures

work in practice: how young people's participation is monitored, who is responsible for contacting early school leavers, how the first contact is made and what type of support is offered to young people.

### **Tracking and delivering targeted support for early school leavers, Denmark**

Municipalities in Denmark have a legal responsibility to contact young people under the age of 25 who have dropped out of mainstream education. Although the tracking provision has been in place for some time, it was not stringently enforced until the 2003 Guidance in Education Act. This Act extended municipalities' obligation to contact young people through the youth guidance centres (*Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning*, YGCs), increasing in frequency from twice a year to a limitless number of contacts or until the young person decides they no longer want to be contacted.

Overall responsibility for tracking young people rests with YGCs, which are regulated and funded by the municipalities. Guidance counsellors are employed by YGCs but are often based in schools and have specific responsibility for tracking young people who have dropped out of school.

The tracking process begins with preventive work carried out in schools through the YGC guidance counsellors. Mandatory guidance activities are organised for all pupils from the sixth to the ninth year of school and throughout general and vocational secondary education. However, guidance during this period is largely aimed at pupils at risk of early school leaving. The Guidance counsellor meets with at-risk young people on an individual basis in school. Discussions largely focus on the young person's thoughts about their future, what they are interested in, and any particular education programmes they would like to follow. Other issues or problems may also be discussed. During the guidance process, the young person keeps a logbook, where they can record their interests and discover their own identity; as they progress, the logbook entries begin to focus on education and training and the future.

The tracking process begins when the guidance counsellor uses an electronic database to monitor young people whom they consider at risk, or young people who have dropped out of school or an education programme. If there is no information on the school the young person is attending, or if a teacher records that a young person has dropped out, the guidance counsellor will contact them.

Guidance counsellors have the freedom to choose how they will contact the young person and the timing of each contact. The first contact tends to be 'light touch' and friendly, for example through a postcard, although a range of more contemporary communications methods have also been piloted (e.g. Facebook). This initial contact is followed up by a formal letter to remind the young person that they have a right to pursue education and training. The next step is to make a telephone call to the young person at home and perhaps to talk to their guardians. If this does not work, a letter is sent to their guardians and finally, the last resort is to visit the young person at home. This is not a favoured action as it is considered too intrusive.

During the discussion with the guidance counsellor, the young person is reminded of the right to pursue education and training. The reasons the young person dropped out of a particular education programme may also be discussed. Guidance counsellors present the benefits of education and training and future prospects. They have a bank of knowledge about programmes and can identify the most appropriate for the young person. They may suggest mainstream education and training provisions, specific programmes or certain types of schools, such as production schools (*produktionsskolerne*).

Both established and pilot tracking projects have been identified in a number of countries, including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden. This is an established practice in countries such as Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Tracking schemes have recently been piloted in countries such as the Netherlands and Finland. The legal framework for establishing a Lithuanian pupil register (*Mokinių registras*) was adopted on 8 February 2008 and, in Spain, the new national Plan on the reduction of early school leavers (*Plan para la reducción del abandono escolar*, 2008) contains financial provisions for regions to establish tracking measures.

The responsibility for tracking measures can be allocated to a range of organisations, including municipalities, regions, job centres and education or training establishments. Legal responsibility tends to be allocated to national or regional authorities, while responsibility for implementation generally lies with organisations working directly with young people, such as education and training or information and guidance providers.

In a number of countries, this responsibility has been formalised by law, as in Denmark. In Sweden the responsibility also lies with the municipalities, who are obliged to monitor young people until the age of 20. They must use measures that help young people to access education or employment if they are inactive during the period, stretching from the end of compulsory education (aged 16) until the age of 20.

Responsibility for implementation is delegated to organisations 'on the ground' in the Netherlands, where education institutions are legally obliged to inform the municipality of any young person, aged up to 23, who has been absent from school for more than one month and does not have basic educational qualifications. The municipalities then have a responsibility to support the early school leavers to return to education and obtain a basic qualification. The information gathered in this new student registration system also allows the authorities to access reliable and up-to-date information on the level of early school leaving. This ensures that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is able to assess the effectiveness of new policies and practices. Information is available for each region, municipality and district, and the data is linked to area-specific socioeconomic data.

In Belgium, a truancy reduction plan has been introduced in Flanders in the hope of reducing the number of early school leavers. Schools are obliged to provide the Flemish Department of Education with the names of all students who have enrolled, for the Department to monitor the enrolment of all students under the age of 18.



Although responsibility may be formally allocated to certain bodies, collaboration by key partners (authorities, employment services, support agencies, education and training providers) helps to ensure that there is a comprehensive network in place to monitor and offer support to young people at risk. One of the key successes of the Irish Pathways tracking project, which works with early school leavers aged between 15 and 20, is said to be the positive links which have been built up with service providers, referrers, parents and the young people.

New technology, in the form of electronic databases, is used to ensure partner organisations have access to up-to-date information on young people at risk, although this is dependent on the timely addition of updated information. For instance, Danish guidance counsellors have reported that teachers in vocational schools are sometimes slow to enter pupil details: on occasion an entry has taken 20 days or longer to come through. This hinders the tracking, as guidance counsellors are unaware they have dropped out. Similar problems have been encountered in Italy, and the key stakeholders have chosen to resolve these problems by creating closer cooperation with local schools.

In addition to working with partner organisations, Danish guidance counsellors also aim to work closely with the young person's parents, in particular parents of foreign origin. Nationally, as part of the efforts of youth guidance centres, meetings have been held with parents to inform them about the education system and opportunities for young people in Denmark, and supporting material has also been produced in seven different languages.

There is strong anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that tracking measures have been effective in helping to tackle the problem of early school leaving, providing the intervention takes place soon after a young person has dropped out and they are supported in their journey back into learning or guided towards alternative learning opportunities. However, few formal evaluations are available to prove this finding, although authorities in countries like Denmark are establishing more robust evaluation systems. Evaluations of the Irish Pathway project nevertheless showed that this form of measure can offer an effective solution for more than three quarters of beneficiaries. However, allocating legal responsibility for tracking does not prevent differences in the quality of services provided by municipalities and other partners. In many countries, including the Nordic countries, municipalities have had responsibility for tracking but great differences are apparent in the ways they have approached this obligation.

### 5.2.2. Short-term, specialised support

Short-term, specialised support measures can be used as a way of facilitating a young person's return to formal education or their transition into further education/training or employment. These measures offer both learning and personal development within an alternative environment to formal schooling. Relay classes (*Classes Relais*), offered in both France and Luxembourg, are a good example of this type of provision.

#### Relay classes (*Classes Relais*), France

Relay classes were created in 1998 by a partnership of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice (notably with the Office for Youth Judicial Protection), local authorities, schools, and other recognised interests. The Classes host many young people who are acutely demotivated with regards to learning, leading to their disengagement from the learning process. Many have complex academic, behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties and the majority come from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Most of the participants are in the process of dropping out, are at risk of social marginalisation or have already rejected traditional schooling. For many the Classes offer last chance, as many are pupils who have already received all the support and guidance available at their school.

- Relay classes aim to offer support and an opportunity to learn in a sheltered, conflict-free environment. They have four main objectives:
- helping pupils to reinvest in learning;
- helping young people to form a constructive relationship with education and society;
- supporting pupils to acquire the basic level of skills and competences, including civic competences;
- reintegrating young people in a general, vocational, or professional education/training pathway.

Pupils experiencing difficulties are identified by schools' pedagogical teams and social workers, who provide a report on the educational progress of at-risk pupils to local/regional educational inspectors. This report is then analysed by a regional or local education commission which decides whether the young person should join a relay class or an alternative support system.

The classes aim to provide both educational and social support and a number of different methods and activities are employed to offer an individualised service to participants:

- differentiated curriculum and teaching methods within a group environment;
- individualised pathways, which can include practical work experience;
- small group sizes, generally between six and twelve pupils per class;
- progressive timetable, adapted on a case-by-case basis;
- linking with extra-curricular measures;
- logbooks, which detail the pathway followed, pupil progress, teacher comments with examples of work completed, and notes by the pupil and their family (where possible).

Relay classes are run by a team of teachers who have volunteered to teach them and counsellors who work in close contact with social workers and healthcare professionals. The partners offer supplementary activities that guide and support young people in their learning pathway. The activities are designed to take into consideration the specific situation of each individual.

Depending on the local context, the classes can take place either on school premises or at other appropriate locations. Some authorities choose to organise classes in an apartment or other out-of-school location, which only remotely resemble classrooms. The decision to make attractive rooms available in a non-school environment helps many young people to cope with the reintegration process.

Through specialised, temporary support (in Luxembourg from six to twelve weeks and in France up to a year), often in a non-school environment, young people can be supported to boost their self-esteem and renew their interest in learning. The aim of the classes is to fill the gaps in the students' knowledge and help them master the regular curriculum for their respective years, enabling them to rejoin their year groups. The classes also aim to provide young people with social support and the activities emphasise the need for socialisation, as well as improving the pupil's competences and skills. Importantly, the activities are designed to take into consideration the specific situation of each individual, rather than adopt a single approach.

As well as the close contact with parents, social workers and healthcare professionals, there is close cooperation with the young person's original school to ensure their effective reintegration into the formal system. In France, 'guardian teachers' are designated in the pupil's original school to assist this.

Participation in relay classes in France is voluntary and must be agreed by pupils and their families. The agreement is often formalised through a contract. Parental involvement is also an important part of the measure and the interventions aim to help parents and families to renew contact with the education community and to build closer relationships between both parties.

The French experience has shown that relay classes provide a temporary and adapted reception for pupils in lower secondary education who are at risk of becoming marginalised in the system. They have played an important role in the fight against early school leaving, in particular through their variety and flexibility. A solution is typically found for nine out of ten participants. The experience from these classes has contributed to the creation of other complementary measures, including relay workshops (*Ateliers Relais*) and, more recently, relay modules (*Modules Relais*).

### **5.2.3. Holistic interventions for complex support needs**

Holistic interventions, offering disengaged young people a second chance to access education and training or to support their transition to employment, have been found in a number of European countries. Holistic approaches to reintegration aim to identify and address the full range of barriers and issues the young person is facing. They aim to support their beneficiaries in terms of developing self-confidence, learning key 'life skills', identifying their personal goals and developing the motivation to pursue these. They are put in place to help those in need of the most support. Target groups tend to be young people experiencing multiple disadvantages; those who have left school early but who have additional support needs alongside their low level of qualifications. These

may be social, behavioural or emotional problems, poor life skills, inability to cope with mainstream education or lack of motivation to participate, or other problems related to the individual (health, substance misuse, offending) or their individual circumstances (caring responsibilities). The interventions aim to help the young person with their personal challenges while they start the reintegration process into learning or employment.

### Youth schools (*Jaunimo Mokyklos*), Lithuania (<http://jaunmok.ipc.lt/>)

There are 25 youth schools in Lithuania, offering alternative provision to young people who have left general education. The schools are available to young people aged 12-17 and support those who have not adapted to the regular school system or lack motivation to complete their education. They are also designed for schoolchildren with learning difficulties, those in need of support to socialise and integrate with peers and young people who prefer a practical approach to learning. Particular target groups include young people from compulsory schools, from the first stage of professional schools (IVET), young people without basic education and young people who are not in education, employment or training. They support around 2 000 young people each year.

The youth schools have two broad aims:

- provide basic education and seek to maximise the number of pupils obtaining basic education;
- enrich the personal experience of pupils, prepare them for further learning, professional career, social and cultural life.

The total number of pupils in Youth Schools varies between 50 and 130 but class sizes are between eight and twelve pupils. Classes are delivered during the daytime, in the evening, or a combination of the two. Support provided at the schools is diverse, ranging from information and advice to pedagogical, psychological, social and health support. In addition to basic education teachers, it is compulsory for a youth school to employ a social pedagogical worker, psychologist, special pedagogical worker, healthcare specialist and teacher assistants. Many youth schools also employ VET teachers, psychotherapists, special pedagogical workers, and physical education coaches.

All learning is individualised and integrated with after-school, pre-vocational and work placement activities. On entering the youth school, a learning plan is developed through discussion with the individual young person, their parents and the school. This three-part programme is reviewed and assessed on a periodic basis. Within this programme:

- the basic education curriculum can form up to 60 % of learning activities, with an enhanced portfolio of arts, physical education, technology and information technology;
- up to 40 % of learning consists of practical activity modules, integrated with IT, pre-vocational training and project work. Professional career and personal development modules are also available;
- additional study offers, depending on the direction chosen by a youth school, can be oriented towards artistic, sport or technology education and connected to pupils' interests.

While the basic education curriculum is taught in classrooms, other forms of learning take place in a variety of locations: classrooms, outdoors, and other spaces in and outside the schools.

The combination of theoretical and practical learning is considered to be one of the success factors of the youth schools (Vilnius Pedagogical University, 2005). The beneficiaries remain involved in education and are motivated to continue learning through practical activities and by being able to choose their own education pathway. This helps them to take ownership and to feel in control of their own learning. Further, youth schools are granted some freedom within the school curricula, enabling the education and training they provide to be tailored to the needs of the individual young person.

The relatively small size of youth schools and their classes is also considered to contribute to their success. Young people receive more individual attention and are able to interact more freely with the teacher.

A further strength of the youth schools is specialist support for young people with specific problems. This support enables them to deal with problems in their day-to-day life and tackle any obstacles that prevent them from learning.

Such programmes were established, for example, in Ireland and Lithuania some 15 years ago. In Lithuania, the Youth schools initiative (*Jaunimo Mokyklos*) demonstrates the importance of providing specialist support to young people with learning and behavioural problems. It ensures that young people receive individual attention, within small groups, providing both practical and theoretical learning, with freedom in the way they work with school curricula. Each young person follows an individual learning plan and can proceed at an appropriate pace.

In Ireland, the Youthreach programme has been working since the early 1990s with 15-20 year old school leavers. It demonstrates a number of the strengths of holistic projects, including the flexibility of the programme, bespoke to each young person, and the supportive and structured environment in which it is delivered. The project is also committed to giving young people opportunities to succeed; they are seen as 'resilient, resourceful people' as opposed to difficult young people.

The factors that make these two programmes successful are similar. They include programme flexibility (from curriculum to delivery and pedagogical and engagement methods), individual learning plans, teaching basic and life skills, transition support, and multi-disciplinary teams. The supporting, all-inclusive ethos and welcoming atmosphere are also very significant in aiding the development of learning relationships and a sense of belonging or attachment. A survey carried out among participants in the Lithuanian Youth Schools found that participants do not feel isolated as they become aware that there are other people suffering from similar problems and they are accepted as they are, without prejudice (Republic of Lithuania ..., 2005). In the Youthreach project, engagement is encouraged through a mentoring process. Staff members are assigned to learners as their 'key workers' and planned time is set aside for the mentors to engage in mentoring sessions with their learners.

Evaluations demonstrate that both programmes are successful at providing a supported reintegration journey for their beneficiaries (Department of Education and Science, Ireland, 2006). Over three-quarters of Youthreach participants in Ireland progress to the labour market or to further education or training. Estimates from Lithuania suggest that around 95 % of youth school pupils wish to continue learning in another education institution or enter employment after participation in the programme.

### Youthreach, Ireland (<http://www.youthreach.ie/>)

In Ireland, one child in ten leaves school without qualifications and almost one in five leaves without completing the leaving certificate. These young people are at particular risk in the labour market: unemployment is 47.5 % for those who enter the labour market without qualifications, compared with 9.6 % for those with a leaving certificate (National Development Plan [www.ndp.ie](http://www.ndp.ie)).

The Youthreach programme targets young people aged 15 to 20, who are alienated from the formal system, economically disadvantaged, socially vulnerable and at risk of long-term unemployment. Its primary target group is young people who are unemployed and have no qualifications from Junior Cycle <sup>(13)</sup>.

Youthreach offers a structured programme based on four key stages:

- induction/engagement: the young people's needs are identified and an individual learning plan is negotiated;
- foundation: young people are supported to overcome their learning difficulties, build confidence and gain a range of competences essential for further learning and employment;
- progression: more specific support through education, training and work experience options;
- transition: young people prepare for their next phase of life, usually in work or in further training or education.

During the engagement phase, a mentor is allocated to the young person (a member of the Youthreach staff). This mentor offers pastoral care to the young person and, through the development of a strong relationship, supports them to develop their confidence and motivation. Before the individual learning plan is developed, students undertake a profiling exercise to help them to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses and to formulate their own goals. The individual action plan is then based on the strengths identified and builds on areas they enjoy learning about, as well as working on areas of identified need. The plan describes the actions to be taken to achieve the young person's goals, including:

- academic or vocational options (subjects or courses to be studied, activities to be involved in);
- support to be provided in the centre (e.g. individual counselling, guidance, work experience);
- local services or agencies that will be worked with (e.g. addiction counselling, money management).

Through the provision of counselling and guidance, young people are able to explore their own interests and identify their competences for future training and employment opportunities. The learning goals set are realistic. This process allows young people to increase their self-esteem and to become more confident in accessing further education and the labour market.

The individual plans are flexible and allow learners to work at their own pace. Learners and staff are seen as equal partners in the programme, which encourages open dialogue between them. The flexibility is extended to learners who decide they want to leave the programme to work: they are offered the chance to continue their education and training on a part-time basis.

One of the key findings from Youthreach evaluations is the positive relationship between staff and learners, which was 'characterised by mutual learning and respect'. Linked to the overall structure of the programme, the evaluations reported that 'a positive climate is cultivated and activities take place in a supportive and structured environment' (Department for Education and Science, Ireland, 2006).

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<sup>(13)</sup> Junior Cycle consists of the first three years of secondary level education for students aged 12 to 15 in Ireland.

Lithuania and Ireland are not the only countries using the youth school approach. Similar interventions have been also established in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy and Slovenia. In Italy, Learning recovery and development workshops (LARSA) have been established for young people who could not cope with mainstream education and the Project learning for young adults (PLYA) is a similar initiative in Slovenia. The latter aims to help young people to rejoin their peers, develop working and learning habits, and motivate them for learning. Production schools (*produktionsskoler*) and youth workshops (*nuorten työpajat*) are examples of other well established national second chance measures for disengaged young people in Denmark and Finland, respectively. Similar approaches can also be found in Austria (Project Gaaden), Belgium (Time Out projects) and Iceland (*Fjölsmiðjan* production centre for school leavers and Personal profile and support project).

#### **5.2.4. Online learning and support platforms**

A particularly innovative approach to supporting the hardest-to-reach early school leavers has been developed in the UK, using a virtual online community as a learning platform. NotSchool.net began as a university research project and is now a national project which has supported over 5 000 pupils in the UK and has since been introduced in Ireland, New Zealand and Sweden.

The project does not have the explicit aim of helping young people return to mainstream education, but aims to revive an enthusiasm for learning for young people who have dropped out of school; in doing so, it helps construct a pathway to further education and/or employment. Access to the project is only available as a last resort; all forms of alternative education must have failed or be considered unsuitable for the young person before they can be referred to the project. For this reason the target group consists of young people who are hardest to reach and often experiencing multiple disadvantages.

The NotSchool.net project represents an excellent example of good practice for young people who are unable to cope with traditional schooling; as learning is presented in a different format their willingness to participate is maintained. Evaluations have shown that the approach has helped 96 % of participants acquire recognised qualifications or credits towards qualifications. Allowing young people to choose the subjects they want from a wide range of varied topics also shows them that it is not like school. Accreditation of their coursework is initially carried out without participants being aware, to aid their re-engagement. Additionally, having a mentor working with a small group of learners enables a greater focus on their needs, helping to ensure they remain involved in the



learning. Young people receive support also from their 'buddies' and subject experts.

### **NotSchool.net, UK (<http://www.inclusiontrust.org/notschool/>)**

The NotSchool.net project aims to engage teenagers who are out of school in learning. It offers alternative education provision for young people who cannot cope with traditional schooling or other measures such as home schooling or specialist units, through a virtual online community.

The project is led by Inclusion Trust, a notforprofit education charity. Partner organisations include the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the World Wildlife Fund and the Science Museum, who have contributed stimulating study material. The core team based at the Inclusion Trust is responsible for overall coordination of the project as well as strategic work. Day-to-day operation is undertaken by teams at the local authorities which have signed up to use the model.

To ensure that NotSchool.net remains a last resort, young people must be referred by a relevant agency (they cannot selfrefer) but both the young person and their family must agree before a person can participate in the project.

Shortly after acceptance on the project, young people are invited to an induction session with their parents, where they are able to meet members of their local support team. After the induction, the young person's mentor devises a bespoke individual learning plan together with the young person. Each young person has the freedom to decide which areas of learning they will follow, how long they will spend on each area of learning and where they will learn.

The project offers over 150 subjects (including comics, music, and wrestling) and learning plans may contain any subject, based on the young person's interests. They are reviewed every six weeks and amended as necessary. Once the young person has successfully engaged with the project, mentors provide 'soft' guidance to encourage take-up of more conventional subjects such as English, maths and science, with a view to gaining GCSEs <sup>(14)</sup>.

Learners can study and access resources at any time, any day of the year and can also submit their work through the online system at any point they wish. They are supported by a team of personal mentors, subject experts and virtual 'buddies' who variously direct, assist, assess and encourage them (Duckworth, 2005). There is also a support hotline which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is manned by the project mentors who are qualified teachers.

Using the right support and terminology is fundamental to Notschool.net and the project avoids the use of terms associated with school such as student. Instead young people are referred to as 'researchers'.

An accreditation system has been developed which rewards creativity, selfdirection and problem solving. Young people can earn informal awards to help raise their self-esteem and can also submit work for assessment against official awards which are NVQ <sup>(15)</sup> equivalent and part of the national framework.

The project demonstrates a very good success rate in supporting transition from inactivity to further education and employment. This has also been confirmed by external evaluations (Duckworth, 2005). In 2004/05, 50 % of participants found places at college or in other further education, a quarter (26 %) found collegelated employment such as modern apprenticeships and 18 % entered full-time employment. In the same year, nearly all participants (96 %) obtained national, recognised qualifications. During this time only 1.7 % of beneficiaries dropped out, which has been described as extraordinary, given the fact that the project works with young people who have failed to integrate into all other forms of education. Some participants are working beyond levels expected nationally for their age, and many have continued into higher education. Young people have also reported positive emotional and social outcomes as a result of the project. This includes raised confidence and self-esteem, problem-solving skills and a renewed interest in learning.

For more information, see: <http://www.inclusiontrust.org/notschool/> [cited 15.12.2009].

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<sup>(14)</sup> General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) is the name of an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14-16 in secondary education in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

<sup>(15)</sup> National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are work-related, competence-based qualifications. They reflect the skills and knowledge needed to do a job effectively, and show that a candidate is competent in the area of work the NVQ framework represents. NVQs are based on national occupational standards.



The project's success is visible in its continued growth over the last nine years. The project has been promoted as an example of good practice by most education authorities in the UK, and Notschool.net pilots have since been introduced in Ireland, New Zealand and Sweden.

#### **5.2.5. Other second chance opportunities**

This section looks into second chance opportunities offered by traditional second chance schools, all-day schools and validation systems.

Traditional second chance schools can be found in most European countries, including, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia. Normally they are targeted at those who have not completed compulsory education. Guidance plays an important role in some of these schools, but not to the same extent as it does in youth schools and other innovative measures. This is primarily because traditional second chance schools tend to attract school leavers who are keen to return to education, including young parents who left school to care for a child but are now ready to return to education.

In Greece, second chance schools (*ΣΔΕ/SDE*) have proved hugely successful as particular emphasis is placed on acquiring the basic skills required to enter the labour market. Greek second chance schools are aimed at people aged over 18, who have not completed compulsory education. Participants study for a period of 18-24 months to obtain a lower secondary education leaving certificate (*Apolytirio Gymnasiou*) but work to a flexible curriculum, which allows them to choose what best fits with their needs and interests. The second chance schools focus in particular on basic qualifications and personal skills, important for accessing the labour market.

All-day schools are another type of second chance/alternative school form, allowing school leavers who cannot, or do not want to, attend regular school classes to pursue compulsory school certificates outside normal school hours. They have proved a success in Germany, Greece and the UK, although again the relative contribution of guidance to these initiatives is not always apparent. All-day schools in Greece seek to improve the educational, cultural and social role of the school, as well as its 'openness' to society. They do so by encouraging creative learning, enriching study programmes and experimenting with new forms of school organisation and management. In addition, the lengthening of school opening hours in Greece provides additional support to working parents who are often unable to help their children with homework and other school work.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is the recognition of an individual's competences, regardless of how and where these were developed. Validation can support marginalised groups by helping them to increase their

self-awareness and self-esteem; it also enables them to create an evidencebase of their skills and competences to support applications for education or employment opportunities. Legal and regulatory changes enabling young people to have their informal and non-formal learning recognised to gain access to secondary and further education, can also be seen as second chance measures.

Although the majority of validation initiatives are aimed at adults, there are also a number of initiatives across Europe available to young people. Some of these provide a second chance for early school leavers and others with limited formal education, enabling them to gain access to education and training when they do not meet qualification eligibility criteria. Such approaches are relevant for young people who have gained experience in the workplace or through a hobby and even young people who have undertaken relevant studies at non-formal training institutions. Validation provides an opportunity to recognise and evidence

### **Recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC), Portugal**

The Portuguese national system of Recognition, validation and certification of competences (RVCC), established in 2000 with support from the European Social Fund, aims to improve the qualification levels of young people and adults aged 18 and above. The system was introduced to help reduce the high number of Portuguese people who had not completed lower secondary education (in excess of three million in 2000) (ESF, 2004). RVCC is delivered by a national network of new opportunities centres, of which there are now over 450 (New opportunities website, <http://www.novasoportunidades.gov.pt/>, 2009).

There are two types of RVCC, for educational and professional RVCC routes:

- the educational route offers eligible individuals the chance to access basic or lower secondary level qualifications. Staff at the new opportunities centres support the individual to undergo the RVCC process, which involves three stages: recognition, validation and certification of competences. Although the individual must carry out their own reflection and self-assessment of their competences to prepare their portfolio, the staff provide guidance and support throughout the process from the point of engagement to the point of certification, including professional assessment of the portfolio, before it is finally assessed by the certification jury;
- the professional route enables individuals to access professional qualifications through validation of competences obtained either through work experience or in other environments. It is based on the same three stages as the educational route and individuals again receive support to complete the process from the new opportunities centre staff.

Both routes enable individuals to proceed to further education and training opportunities.

Today, RVCC is celebrated as a major success: almost 90 000 people eligible for the scheme gained a recognised certificate between 2000 and 2006 (ESF country profile, Portugal). A 2003 survey of individuals who had undergone the RVCC process between 2001 and 2002 found that most felt that it had helped to improve their self-esteem and selfknowledge. Two thirds were considering undertaking further study and 13 % had already returned to formal education. Further, 15 % of the RVCC beneficiaries employed on fixedterm contracts had been awarded permanent contracts six months after receiving their certificate (European Social Fund, 2004).

their experience and potential and provides an access route to formal education or training, or a chance to shorten their study period through exemptions. Recognition of the young person's skills can also increase their self-esteem and motivation. In Portugal, for example, validation is used to support early school leavers to attain formal qualifications, either through validation alone or by combining the process with tailored training, taking into account the experience they have gained outside formal education.

The draft European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning stress the importance of providing information, advice and guidance. Candidates need information on what the validation will bring in terms of benefits, what the process involves, what the expectations will be from their participation, and what they can do after completing the process. Guidance is also important to help people to overcome any fears they may have. It is particularly important to at-risk groups who may be less familiar with training and validation schemes, have low self-confidence, and do not believe they can succeed.

A research project (Krichewsky, 2004) reviewing how validation professionals should be trained to respond to the needs of 'highpotential drop-outs' (individuals experiencing social difficulties but who are involved in social exchanges and informal learning) also noted that, for this group, lack of self-confidence and fear (of failure, of the processes involved) can be a barrier to participation in validation. Individuals may worry that the process will confirm that their skills and experience are inadequate and may be put off by a system resembling formal schooling (if they have had negative experience of formal education). The report stresses the importance of ensuring that validation professionals are trained to support and guide the target group and prepared to support them to overcome the barriers they face.

Individuals may encounter a number of barriers to validation access, depending on their circumstances; these include costs and lack of awareness of the opportunities available. It is important for targeted validation initiatives to take actions to overcome these barriers, such as by providing financial support and carrying out awarenessraising activities. In Denmark the low-skilled are entitled to access validation at no cost and the Portuguese RVCC system is also free of charge. In order to engage specific target groups, validation can be offered or disseminated by a range of partners, including employment offices or third sector bodies.

#### **5.2.6. Guidance and training to support employment**

Support for early school leavers does not necessarily have to focus on helping them return to formal schooling. In contrast to their experience of formal

education, some early school leavers thrive in the world of work, where they are able to develop relevant skills (CBI, 2008). For these, support to enter employment may be more appropriate. Nevertheless, young people from vulnerable groups often need additional support when trying to access employment because early school leavers are generally more likely to find themselves in low-paid, insecure jobs and in a cycle of recurrent unemployment (although there are national variations) (OECD, 2008; Walther, 2002a).

A number of labour market reintegration projects provide help for these groups to make the transition to employment, usually through vocational training, work-based learning and guidance. Labour market integration programmes for at-risk young people have been found in, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. These programmes range from simple job-search assistance to more specialised support, such as intensive guidance to help to identify suitable career direction and in finding employment. Many projects provide a similar continuum of support to education reintegration interventions but with a focus on labour market integration. Usually these programmes also provide 'after-care'; the young person is also supported by his/her mentor during their first months of employment.

### **Competence agencies (*Kompetenzagenturen*), Germany**

Competence agencies were established to improve the social and professional integration of young people living in deprived areas. They aim to support young people whom the traditional system has not been able to help in the transition from school to the labour market (BMFSFJ, 2007). The agencies make use of a range of regional networks, alliances and resources to find innovative solutions to the problems faced by the young people. Partners include child and youth agencies, employment agencies, schools and other local interests

One of the primary tasks of competence agencies is to help young people looking for support to enter employment. 'Casemanagement' forms an integral part of the approach. Special case managers in each agency work with the young person to develop an individual support and qualification programme. Their specific activities include:

- outreach and preventive work;
- helping young people access opportunities for integration and qualifications;
- assessment of competences and the development of integration and education plans;
- continuous management of individuals under the case worker's care.

Case managers contact young people through youth centres, Streetwork (a nationwide federal association of regional social workers), local youth meeting points or through family contacts (<http://www.kinderjugendhilfe.info>, 2009). They are responsible for monitoring the implementation of plans and supporting young people in the long term. Critical to this support is consideration of the young person's personal and family environment and the regional context.

Competence agencies have established themselves as important partners for job centres. They provide their specific knowhow and competences in handling the case management strategy with young persons who are difficult to integrate.

The case manager approach has proved particularly valuable as the long-term approach allows them to 'follow-up' young people. The case workers can contact young people once they have started or have dropped out of requalification courses. Should a drop-out occur, the follow-up process enables the case worker to find alternative provision quickly and prevent disengagement.

In Germany, competence agencies were set up in 2006 in recognition that certain groups of young people face considerable difficulty in accessing the labour market. These groups include young people with few or no qualifications, young people with family and social problems, and young offenders. The agencies have adopted a case management approach and also rely on collaboration with the local job centres.

A similar case manager approach has been adopted by an Austrian job coaching project which works with long term unemployed young people aged 15 to 25. Each young person is assigned a personal coach, who guides and supports them with the relevant authorities; if the employment integration process is successful, this continues with the new employer and the new job. The project begins with an eightweek training period involving communication, social and basic skills. This is followed by an interview process and a work placement.

Another initiative with a focus on aiding young people's transition to the labour market is the voluntary labour corps (VLCs) in Poland. VLCs have adopted a role as 'holistic job centres' where young people are supported in a comprehensive manner in their efforts to find work. They target young people at risk of social exclusion and also offer support to a diverse range of groups, including secondary school pupils and graduates, university students and young people who are unemployed or likely to become unemployed. Similar to the competence agencies, VLCs focus on providing individualised guidance and support and recognising the wide range of needs of their target group, by offering services which help the young person to develop both professionally and socially. To address the young people's full range of support needs, the voluntary labour corps, like the competence agencies, also work closely with relevant partners including the police, psychological and addiction clinics.

Other similar labour market programmes include Integration pathways in Belgium, First opportunity in the Czech Republic, Programme 10 000 in Slovenia and One-stop-shops in the UK.

### 5.3. Effective reintegration programmes

The examples described in the previous section demonstrate a wide range of effective practice, from approaches supporting return to education to projects aid access to the labour market. The initiatives are targeted at a broad range of young people with different needs and in different circumstances. Fundamentally, the examples show that young people have the best chance of reintegrating if they follow a supported journey, in which they are guided all the way through the

process until they have settled in education, training or employment. Throughout, they need to receive support in as holistic a manner as possible to address their diverse needs, wishes and aspirations.

Across the range of examples identified, it is also possible to identify a number of common features and elements that make them successful. These common factors are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. **Elements of successful reintegration routes**



Source: GHK Consulting, 2009.

### 5.3.1. **Guidance**

Guidance plays a central role in measures to reintegrate young people into education, training or employment. It is a crucial element in a support package to help young people to identify and understand how to overcome the barriers they face in accessing education or employment. Further, guidance can support them in developing their self-esteem by recognising their own strengths and formulating goals for the future.

Tracking measures are an example. Tracking alone is not enough to ensure young people who have dropped out are able to reintegrate into education and training. Tracking provides a means of identifying young people at an early stage, before disengagement is entrenched. However, tracking must be accompanied by a robust system of guidance and other support measures, to enable them to address and overcome the issues which led them to drop out of school.

Guidance can be provided in a variety of ways, such as through professional counsellors, through mentors or by members of teaching staff. Professional counsellors or mentors are often an essential part of the support programme and they complement the work of pedagogical staff to support young people in their personal development alongside their learning. However, where young people have built up a strong relationship of trust with their teacher or trainer, it may be that this is the person they feel more confident to talk to when seeking advice and guidance (Friel and Coulter, 2004 in Gordon, 2007). Where teaching staff are involved in delivering guidance, it is clear that they require appropriate training (Stokes, 2000).

For instance, NotSchool.net mentors are qualified teachers who help young people to plan and organise their learning journey, as well as aiding their learning, by communicating with the young people, monitoring progress, answering questions and providing constructive feedback. NotSchool.net also employs 'buddies', successful exparticipants or undergraduate students, who act as paid online support to a group of young people. Their main task is to offer consistent encouragement and help for the participants. Young people are able to talk to their 'buddies' in an informal manner, which provides a valuable form of peer support.

At the Lithuanian youth schools, specialist support is available for young people with specific problems. The presence of a psychologist and social pedagogical worker was found to be one of the strengths of youth schools according to the survey carried out in 2005 (Vilnius Pedagogical University, 2005). This is fundamental to supporting young people and guiding them back onto the 'straight and narrow'. Through support from psychological counsellors, young people can discuss their emotions and personal problems, identifying their interests and skills, and tackle obstacles that prevent them from learning.

An evaluation of the Slovenian reintegration initiative Project learning for young people (PLYA), which works with young people who have dropped out of school and are unemployed, found that the programme's success depended greatly on the mentors providing support to its participants. The evaluation found that it was important for the mentors to undergo training to help them to understand the social and psychosocial causes and characteristics of drop-outs, as well as the principles and delivery of modern curricula (Zalec, 2008).

Many of the initiatives reviewed, including German competence agencies, have adopted a 'case management' approach or have allocated dedicated key workers, mentors or buddies to the individual beneficiaries. The importance of this one-to-one support and the development of a strong relationship between the



young person and the person supporting him/her are vital in enabling the young person to feel valued in the learning environment (Zalec, 2008).

### **5.3.2. Environment**

A key element in engaging young people, particularly those currently disengaged from learning, is to offer something not associated with their previous experience of formal schooling. What has proved effective includes providing young people the opportunity to study outside a school environment by offering a different, new and often practical environment where students are treated as young adults and given respect, trust, responsibility and freedom. Second chance schools, for instance, need to be alternative schools rather than alternatives to school.

The NotSchool.net initiative, where young people learn in an online environment, is perhaps the most 'alternative' of all the examples discussed in this chapter. This project has recognised the importance of establishing the initiative as an alternative to school, for instance in the use of language (young people are called 'researchers' rather than students and there is no reference to other terms associated with formal school such as teacher or classroom). In addition, support is available through a 24hour hotline, seven days a week, as project experience has shown that difficulties do not always arise during conventional school hours, but in the evenings and weekends when many young people are likely to study.

It is also important to ensure that the environment offers an atmosphere of safety and security. For instance, the supportive environment of Lithuanian youth schools helps young people to feel more comfortable and therefore interact more freely with their teacher; they feel more confident to ask questions, to ensure they understand fully the content of the learning. Similarly, the ethos of Youthreach centres in Ireland is centred on warmth, respect and order to enable the beneficiaries to regain their self-esteem and motivation (Gordon, 2007). Giving young people more responsibility and freedom to determine their own learning pathway has proved effective.

Physical environment also matters. Some French authorities have chosen to organise relay classes in an apartment or other out-of-school premises, moving away from classroom based learning.

### **5.3.3. Tailored, person-centred approach**

It is clear that a 'onesizefitsall' approach is not appropriate for support to at-risk young people. Where the young person has dropped out for institutional reasons (the traditional system may be unable to address the needs of those who cannot engage with traditional methods of learning, who have personal, family or other



difficulties – Stokes, 2000) it is important to find an alternative way for them to learn, which fills gaps in their knowledge and is appropriate to their interests and plans for the future. Where they have dropped out for personal or contextual reasons, these need to be taken into account in the learning process and appropriate guidance and support provided.

A person-centred approach is adopted in a number of the examples reviewed and commences with personal assessment to help the young person to reflect on what they want to achieve and how they can do this. The Irish Youthreach initiative, for example, shows how the development of individual action plans ensures the programme is based on the needs of the young person, their interests and strengths, as well as presenting a route to achieving their identified goals. It is then the role of the key worker or mentor to monitor progress against the young person's plan and help them to ensure they are able to meet their goals. This role should be supportive but it is also important to challenge the young person and provide them with objectives to work towards (Stokes, 2000).

#### **5.3.4. Celebrating achievement**

Early school leavers tend to have a lack of confidence in their own abilities and a sense of failure because of their negative experience of formal education (Stokes, 2000). An important part of a person-centred approach is to enable the young person to experience success, giving them opportunities where they can succeed. The focus of reintegration measures should be on achievement, rather than failure.

In the UK, NotSchool.net has a system of informal and formal accreditation, enabling young people to experience success from the start of their participation in the programme. Informal awards granted by the project are not recognised nationally but they help to raise the self-esteem of young people and encourage them to work towards nationally recognised qualifications. The awards enable them to see their progress and, for many participants, this will have been the first time they have received any recognition of their learning. This will give them a confidence boost and demonstrates to them that hard work leads to positive rewards. They will then feel more confident to start work towards formal qualifications.

The Youthreach programme promotes achievements by giving responsibility to young people, allocating tasks and acknowledging achievements, for example through award nights, trips away and inhouse certifications.

### **5.3.5. Flexible delivery**

Flexibility in the organisation(s) delivering the reintegration initiative is also important, so they can tailor the support provided. To ensure all those in need of support receive it, procedures should be robust, but not rigid. For example, the Danish legal provision for tracking early school leavers now (since 2003) obliges guidance counsellors to make a limitless number of contacts with the young person (or until the young person decides they no longer want to be contacted), where previously only two contacts per year were required. Guidance counsellors are given flexibility in the way they contact the young people. They use their judgement to decide the best approach, both in terms of when and how to contact them. Another example of flexibility in delivery is the Lithuanian youth schools, which are granted (under the guidelines for bringing children back to school) additional freedom when working within the school curricula. This flexibility allows them to tailor education and training to the young person, taking account of their personal and family circumstances.

### **5.3.6. Multi-disciplinary teams**

The range of support provided through reintegration measures requires staff with specific skills and experience. Alongside education and training provision, support services are an integral part of the programme on offer. Across the initiatives identified, staff come from a range of backgrounds including teaching, vocational education and training, psychological support, youth-work and welfare. In the Austrian Project Gaaden, which supports students with a long history of non-attendance at school, beneficiaries are supported by both specialist teachers and educational psychologists.

As well as ensuring project teams comprise staff with differing professional experience, a multi-disciplinary approach can be developed by providing training to front-line staff (i.e. teachers/trainers) to enable them to take on additional responsibilities such as counselling. For instance, the NotSchool.net mentors are qualified teachers and are recruited from diverse backgrounds in terms of their age, gender and expertise; it is recognised that mentors from different backgrounds can support participants in a range of different ways. Primary school teachers are particularly successful at developing literacy and numeracy skills, while secondary school teachers bring more experience of accreditation and further education and training.

Multi-disciplinary provision can also be achieved through strong partnerships between local actors (social services, employment services, employers, education and training providers, etc.). The voluntary labour corps in Poland have

adopted this approach and the multi-agency approach is discussed further in Section 5.3.7.

#### **5.3.7. Collaboration with key partner organisations**

In addition to providing a range of support and learning opportunities within the reintegration measure, it is important for partnerships to be established with relevant organisations outside the individual initiative. In Finland, youth workshops (*nuorten työpajat*) offer training to people at risk of social exclusion. The workshops typically occupy middle ground between the education system, work and social and health services. Cooperation with the relevant authorities in these areas is a key factor in motivating young people to take part and aiding their transition to mainstream education or employment.

A multi-agency, joined-up approach can be introduced by using a one-stop-shop model, where all relevant services are housed under one roof. For instance, an integrated one-stop-shop support service provision for young people is seen as a successful strategy in England, where it is expected to make spending on youth services more efficient as well as making these services easier to access (CBI, 2008). In the London Borough of Bromley, Prospects Services Limited provides a multi-agency, one-stop-shop for central Bromley and outreach projects in nearby neighbourhoods. The integrated support offered to young people includes: careers guidance, writing CVs and job applications, health information and advice, advice on drug use, legal help, access to health workers, access to the Internet and IT, access to job vacancies, and housing help. All staff – including youth workers, personal advisers, administrative and managerial staff – are based at the one-stop-shops and employed by the same company, allowing common work practices and codes of conduct. Further, joining up the youth service with Connexions resulted in a larger staff base and enabled the service to be provided until late every evening and on Saturdays. Finally, joint purchasing of equipment and combining mail shots allowed for significant efficiency savings. The success of the Bromley one-stop-shop model has led other local authorities to request integrated service models as their preferred option.

The involvement of young people in design and delivery is one of the most challenging aspects of effective practice but the Notschool.net case study showed that it can be fruitful.

#### **5.3.8. Basic skills and a mix of practical and theoretical learning**

It is likely that the young people targeted by reintegration initiatives will have a mix of learning needs, including gaps in their basic skills (language, literacy and numeracy) and life skills (e.g. coping mechanisms, appropriate behaviours)

(Gordon, 2007). According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), young people without basic skills, who do not have a positive attitude to work, will find it difficult to find employment (CBI, 2008). Reintegration measures, therefore, need to incorporate basic and life skills as appropriate to the needs of each individual.

Across the examples identified, there is also evidence that a mix of practical and theoretical learning is particularly effective in supporting the target group. Practical workshops are a key element of the programme offered at Danish production schools, which focus on enabling young people to 'learn by doing', also seen in the Lithuanian youth schools, which adopt a three-part programme comprising basic education, practical learning and additional courses chosen according to the young person's interests.

In Slovenia, the Project learning for young adults (PLYA) initiative supports young people through project-oriented learning. With the support of a mentor, participants choose their own project theme and how they will learn, which increases their motivation to carry out the project (Zalec, 2008). PLYA focuses more on the knowledge and skills young people can gain by carrying out the project than by the actual educational content (Bozic, 2007). For example, participants develop skills such as critical thinking, team-working, and creativity; by discovering their own talents they are supported to formulate a career plan (Zalec, 2008).

#### **5.3.9. Aiding access**

In addition to social and learning barriers, the target group for reintegration measures may need help to overcome practical barriers to accessing the support offered to them. For instance, where finance is a barrier, grants can be provided to participants, as is the case in Ireland under the Youthreach initiative. Other barriers might include caring commitments; offering classes in the evening or providing access to childcare can assist access. Classes provided by the Lithuanian youth schools are delivered during the daytime, in the evening, or a combination of the two. Provisions are also in place in countries such as Germany, Greece, Italy and Malta to offer learning opportunities outside normal school hours.

Where practical factors cannot be addressed by the initiative itself, collaboration with local partner organisations (e.g. in relation to housing issues, substance misuse or offending) is vital.

#### **5.3.10. Motivation**

An OECD report on Motivating students for lifelong learning (OECD, 2000b) indicated that children rarely lack curiosity, but the appetite to learn for some

young people tends to shrink as they reach their teenager years. Some disengaged young people may not want to participate or be interested in taking part in the opportunities available to them. However, studies suggest that forcing young people to take part will not lead to improvements in their attainment and participation (CBI, 2008). Project coordinators working with school leavers have come to the same conclusion. For example, experience from the NotSchool.net project has found that, where there has been any attempt to coerce the participant to learn, either by attempting to impose the rigour of timetabled or supervised work, or an overbearing parent or carer, young people have been less likely to become very active in the project. In short, learning and engagement stem from a desire to learn (Ultralab, 2007).

Therefore, it is important that unmotivated young people are helped to see the value of participating in education, training or employment and are empowered to improve their life situation by taking ownership of their decisions. By giving the young person a chance to decide what support they will receive, for example through the development of an individual learning plan, their motivation to participate can be increased. A number of the examples start out with the development of a personal plan for the young person and show that this first step can help to engage them in the project.

Further, many of the initiatives reviewed are voluntary for the young people who join them. Relay classes in France, for example, require consent from both the young person and their family, before they can take part.

## 6. Supported education-to-work transition

### 6.1. Introduction

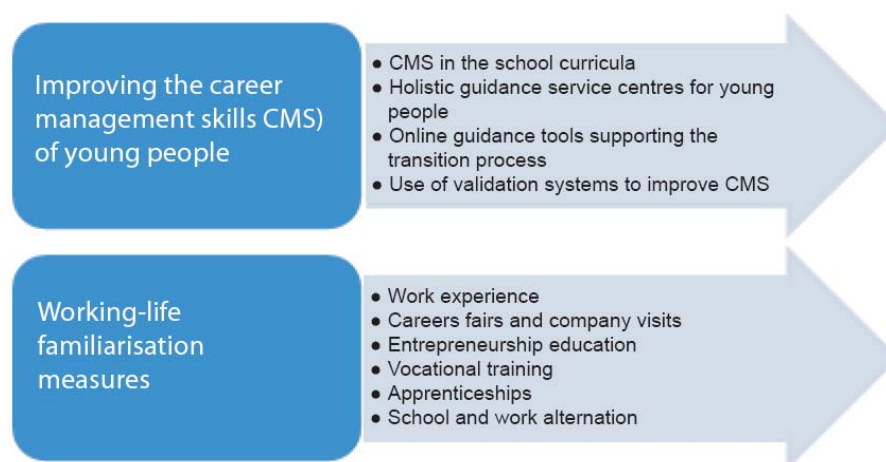
The previous two sections of the report have looked into policies and practices surrounding the early school leaving agenda. They have identified ways of preventing disengagement and examined solutions for those who have left education early or are at risk of doing so. The aim of this section is to explore the types of policies, projects and practices adopted by the study countries to support the transition of young people from education to work. Although particular attention has been paid to young people at risk of social exclusion, this section takes a wider approach and includes mainstream measures. This is because the transition from education/training to work can be challenging for all young people, not only those from vulnerable groups.

Several EU policy documents have identified the need to support young people in their transition into employment. The 2005 European youth pact stressed that integrating young people in society and working life, and making better use of their potential, are essential for ensuring sustained and sustainable growth in Europe (*Conclusions of the Council ...*, 2006). The Commission's Communication on young people's participation in education and employment emphasised the need to invest more and earlier in youth education, to improve transitions from education into work (European Commission, 2007b). The new EU strategy for youth, Investing and empowering, reinforces this message, recognising that young people's transitions have become significantly longer and more complex. It urges Member States to coordinate their employment policies in line with the four components of flexicurity (European Commission, 2009a) <sup>(16)</sup>. Guidance and counselling are also indicated as important accompanying measures (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2004; European Commission, 2009; European Training Foundation, 2003) as they provide key support at a time when young individuals have to make decisions that can have an impact on the rest of their lives. Youth policies also promote the need to equip young people with skills to help them choose their career path, as well as building a solid foundation for the lifelong development of their career.

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<sup>(16)</sup> These include flexible arrangements concerning employment contracts, promotion of active labour market policies, responsive lifelong learning systems and modernisation of social security systems.

Figure 5. **Types of transition policy**



Source: GHK Consulting, 2009.

This study has categorised two types of measure introduced by European countries to support transition: interventions that aim to improve the career management skills of young people; and working life familiarisation measures.

The first section introduces the concept of career management skills (CMS). As CMS is an emerging concept, its definition and rationale are examined first. The section then goes on to explore practical examples of approaches in Member States to support the development of such skills. The second section examines methods that have been employed by the study countries to give young people the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the world of work.

## 6.2. Improving career management skills

There is growing recognition that career guidance practice needs to advance from simply assisting young people to make decisions regarding certain jobs or courses, to the much broader task of enabling and developing career management skills (CMS) (OECD, 2004a; Sultana, 2009a). Therefore, CMS is not just an element of career guidance but is an approach to it.

The concept and scope of career management skills vary from one EU Member State to another, as highlighted at the EU peer learning event on the theme, held in Vilnius in 2009 (Sultana, 2009a). Definitions vary between authors and countries. Some see it as 'the skills of understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and needs and wants; of being able to identify relevant opportunities, and access information on them; of being able to take career-

related decisions; and of being able to present oneself effectively in order to gain access to courses or jobs' (Watts, 2009). Others prefer a more pragmatic definition, conceptualising CMS in terms of career services such as personal guidance, job placement and change. Some EU countries do not have a commonly-agreed definition (e.g. Slovenia and Austria).

Despite the different interpretations of the meaning of CMS, there is significant common ground. Most EU members agree that CMS relates to a wider view of a person's development, moving the focus from skills to 'meta-competences' that are not occupation-specific but are transferable, thus helping young people better to manage their learning and work (Sultana, 2009a). Observers also recognise that career management skills roughly correspond to 'personal management', 'exploring learning and work' and 'life/work building' (Haché et al., 2006). Career management skills also fit easily into the four learning categories specified by the well-known Canadian DOTS framework: decision-learning (D), opportunity awareness (O), transition learning (T) and self-awareness (S). Another common point is that career guidance incorporating CMS moves from informing short-term employment decisions to enabling longer-term career development and career management (OECD, 2003a).

Drawing on these commonalities, the following definition of CMS was proposed by the European lifelong guidance policy network: 'Career management skills refer to a whole range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions' (Sultana, 2009a).

The growing interest in CMS stems from national and EU policy objectives to improve employability and promote social equity and inclusion (Sultana, 2009a). These objectives are particularly relevant to young people, who have been affected by a sharp increase in unemployment since the first quarter of 2008 (Eurostat, 2009). Further, at a time of economic crisis, traditional career guidance services that provide information and carry out one-to-one interviews when students leave school are not able to achieve success in the job market (OECD, 2003a). There is growing concern that traditional services cannot adequately address the specific needs of many young people, particularly those at risk of leaving school early due to psychological and socioeconomic factors – such as, low self-esteem, poor performance at school, and certain prejudices embedded into the local community. The use of career management skills would enable young people to analyse their own strengths and weaknesses with regards to the labour market, thereby helping to increase their employability and promoting equality.



CMS also allows for the lifelong development of the skills necessary for 'managing one's non-linear career pathways', which are needed for full participation in knowledge-based economies (Sultana, 2009a). Put simply, the world of work is changing: there are fewer (if any) jobs for life; there is greater competition for vacancies; there are fewer graduates in traditional graduate jobs; there is greater flexibility regarding roles and tasks; and, most important, there is a pervasive need to continue learning new skills to stay employable. CMS can help young people to face these challenges, enabling them to identify labour market opportunities and acquire relevant and transferable 'meta-competences'.

Countries which have incorporated the CMS approach into broader national strategies have often done so to enhance economic competitiveness. As part of its integrative approach, Scotland has launched the initiative Curriculum for excellence. Other EU Member States (France, the Netherlands and Austria) have avoided 'policy overload' by mapping CMS into the European reference framework of key competences for lifelong learning (Sultana, 2009a).

Despite key policy references to CMS in several national policy documents across EU Member States, none have yet developed a CMS national framework. However, research indicates that many countries have extensive experience in supporting the development of career management skills through other direct and indirect measures. Measures can be grouped into four categories:

- (a) integrating a career management skills approach into guidance provided at school;
- (b) holistic guidance service centres for young people;
- (c) online guidance tools supporting transition;
- (d) validation systems to improve career management skills.

These categories are further examined, beginning with the different ways in which the study countries have used the CMS approach in school curricula. These findings are primarily based on the conclusions from the recent peer learning event on career management skills, hosted by the European lifelong guidance policy network. The later sections are based on a wider review of relevant literature and make use of pertinent case studies, prepared to provide a practical illustration of the themes concerned.

### **6.2.1. Career management skills in school curricula**

The integration of career management skills into national education systems <sup>(17)</sup> has taken place at different rates across EU Member States. Although CMS courses and themes are most often provided at secondary school level, some Member States have also integrated career management skills into primary school curricula (Sultana, 2009a). In Malta, CMS is taught as part of the personal, social and career development (PSCD) curriculum in primary schools. In the Czech Republic, CMS teaching at upper secondary and further education levels includes established subject areas such as economics, languages and civic education. In decentralised education systems, CMS practices tend to vary between schools, which are often able to choose whether to teach CMS as a separate subject or to integrate it into the curriculum. There are four main strategies for integrating CMS into a curriculum.

First, CMS can be taught as a separate subject, whether optional or mandatory. It is allocated a specific time within the school timetable and is often delivered by specialised staff. However, this could create an image of CMS being no different from other subjects and not necessarily linked to longer-term career choices. This approach may also encourage the use of traditional teaching and assessment tools and methods, instead of focusing on innovative and self-reflective learning. It may also overcrowd the curriculum.

Second, CMS can be taught as a compulsory transversal theme across the curriculum (e.g. 'curriculum infusion'). This allows for greater inclusion of CMS in the school curriculum, than if it were taught as a separate subject. This approach has been used in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Sweden. However, it requires highly motivated teachers who have been trained to integrate CMS themes across a wide range of subjects (Sultana, 2009a). In many cases only specialised guidance teachers possess the necessary knowledge and skills. Some countries (Denmark, France and Austria) have engaged various stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and career advisors) to help address this problem.

Third, CMS can be integrated in extra-curricular activities. This is often delivered through career workshops after leaving school (Sultana, 2009a). This has been successfully used in France. Extra-curricular CMS activities are well-resourced, prepared in advance and use specialised staff. Students are often highly motivated and seminars/workshops can be tailored for the needs of specific target groups (young people at risk or with disabilities). This approach

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<sup>(17)</sup> The findings of this section are primarily based on a Peer Learning Event reflection note prepared by Sultana, 2009a.

involves separating curricular and extra-curricular activities which may minimise the value placed on CMS activities by students and other stakeholders.

Fourth, several countries have adopted a mixture of two or all three approaches (France, Malta, Austria and Finland). This maximises the benefits of all approaches, but can also risk redundancy as all CMS methods and themes are used.

Further, schools and career centres have increasingly used a broader range of teaching methods to deliver CMS. These have included formal instruction, counselling experiential learning, computer-based resources and online platforms such as Facebook. The peer learning event on career management skills highlighted three innovative methods of delivering CMS: teaching CMS in collaboration with youth and community-based organisations outside formal education (see Career Scotland); external specialised agencies involved in teaching CMS at schools (Portugal, Sweden); and teaching CMS through the use of ICT (webcasts, videoconferencing and social networking) (OECD, 2004a; Sultana, 2009a). There has also been progress in assessing career management skills learning. Schools generally opt for non-formal, formative and continuous assessment methods that employ a wide spectrum of tools. In Denmark, students develop a personal 'education book' similar to a portfolio in which they record their achievements, as well as their emerging career interests and objectives (OECD, 2004a). Paper-based and web-based portfolio systems are also used in other countries such as Austria, France and Turkey. Other countries have chosen formal examinations (Czech Republic), action plan self-assessment (Sweden) or competence assessment through perceived proficiency in certain tasks (Austria). In general, CMS assessment has depended on the country's curricular tradition.

In certain countries CMS is taught by specific teachers, who may or may not have had any training (the Czech Republic and Estonia). In others, specialised staff conduct CMS-related activities (Malta). ESF funding has been used in some Member States to train specialised CMS counsellors. Several Member States involve different stakeholders: parents, employers and other professionals (such as, career counsellors and psychologists).

#### **6.2.2. Holistic guidance service centres for young people**

There is a confirmed need for a variety of different personal support systems, career services and agencies to assist young people in transition. Many Member States have responded to this challenge by establishing careers information centres, usually managed and operated by networks of different partner organisations providing services to young people.

Careers information centres are one-stop-shop facilities providing comprehensive support for young people, or a wider target group. These centres can help young people to make better-informed decisions about education, training and employment options, building a solid career management skills foundation.

Young people can access information on a range of different themes: potential careers; learning opportunities; and financial support schemes. Centre staff provide support and guidance to identify potential job opportunities, as well as help filling out application forms and compiling effective CVs. Many centres also offer counselling and some have adopted a case worker approach to ensure continuing and comprehensive support for their clients. Some career information centres have prioritised the provision of psychological support for young people and their families. Services are normally free and are provided by a range of personnel, including specialist careers advisors, psychologists, former teachers and other staff members from community and government agencies.

Careers information centres can be found in Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. In many countries, these centres have been established over the past five to eight years, and many have been jointly funded by the ESF. For example, ESF funding has supported establishment of over a hundred counselling centres in Czech schools: the centres bring together school psychologists, special school pedagogies, and educational counsellors.

One of the more successful and well-researched and evaluated careers information networks is Connexions in the UK: this has radically changed the way in which young people are supported during their teenage years. The fundamental idea behind Connexions is that it works together with other key stakeholders to ensure a more cohesive approach to the delivery of support and guidance to young people in their progression towards employment.

#### **Connexions, UK (<http://www.connexions-direct.com/>)**

The Connexions service was established in 2001 by the Department for Education and Skills with the aim of raising the aspirations, participation and achievement levels of young people by providing impartial information, advice and support. Connexions centres are formed around multi-agency partnerships, which bring together the services offered by health services, police, probation and youth services, agencies working with young offenders and substance abusers, voluntary and community organisations and careers companies (Joyce and White, 2004). The target group is people aged 13-19 and 20-24 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are yet to make the transition to adult services. The objective is to help them to make the right choices by (Department for Education and Skills, UK, 2004):

- helping to remove barriers to learning and progression, such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, bullying, money, health and youth offending;
- providing high-quality career related information, advice and guidance. The agencies also help with problems such as barriers to employment, education or training.

The Connexions services are delivered primarily by a network of personal advisers who are either contacted via a Connexions onestop shop or access point on the high street, or via a school, or college (Joyce and White, 2004). Instead of delivering a blanket service to all young people, personal advisers are expected to tailor their support to the young person's needs. The support services are agreed with individual head-teachers and college principals, to make sure that they build on the work carried out by staff in schools and colleges. The level of support needed varies considerably, ranging from information on learning and career options to in-depth, one-to-one support over an extended period of time. Personal advisers are linked with other support services so that they can refer young people to more specialist services where necessary: this ensures that young people are no longer passed on from one agency to another but there is continuity (Joyce and White, 2004).

The work of personal advisers is diverse and includes advice, guidance, information and support on a range of education, training, employment and personal issues. Guidance is provided through verbal and written advice or information, personalised action plans, referrals to a specialist, and practical support.

In addition to personal advisers, the agency offers other interactive services. Connexions Direct offers a more flexible and easily accessible multi-media service that complements the local, face-to-face advice. The website ([www.connexions-direct.com](http://www.connexions-direct.com)) offers quick access to information and advice on a wide range of topics. Connexions advisers are available for confidential advice and practical help via telephone, web chat, and e-mail or text message. Such advisers are based in a central contact centre and available to support young people seven days a week, 18 hours a day (from 8am to 2am).

According to several surveys carried out among customers of Connexions, the majority of young people contact Connexions to discuss work or learning issues, although the number of young people who want to discuss personal matters (e.g. families, mental health, money, etc.) is on the increase. This is thought to be a consequence of increased confidence in raising such matters with the advisor and an increased knowledge regarding the remit of the Connexions service.

During its eight years of service the scope of Connexions has increased and it has become a brand that is recognised by young people. Personal services provided by advisors, together with more flexible delivery methods (Internet, text messages, call centres), ensure access. The call centre receives around 25 000 telephone calls a month and the websites has nearly 600 000 visitors per month (Lambley, 2007).

The 2004 evaluation concluded that nine out of ten young people (91 %) were very or fairly satisfied about the service they received at Connexions, both in terms of the advice and support as well as how they view the adviser (Joyce and White, 2004). Connexions service is said to have influenced the way young people participated in education. The customer satisfaction survey, carried out in 2004, found that two-thirds of beneficiaries (67 %) reported that Connexions 'had helped them to either decide what to do or have a better idea about what they could do' (Brunwin et al., 2005). Generally, it was felt that Connexions' primary contribution in education was that it helped young people to overcome a range of education related difficulties (e.g. helped young people to return to education by getting them in touch with teaching staff and other specialist workers). In terms of personal benefits, according to the survey the service of Connexions had produced a range of benefits for young people, such as increased confidence levels, improved interpersonal skills, a positive change in behaviour or attitude, and improvement in personal circumstances.

Based on information from the Connexions website (<http://www.connexions-direct.com/>) and an evaluation report: Joyce, Lucy; White, Clarissa. Assessing Connexions: qualitative research with young people. Research report No. 577. Department for Education and Skills, 2004.

The fundamental concept behind many career information centres is that they work together with other key stakeholders to ensure a more cohesive approach to delivering the support and guidance young people need to progress to employment. Such a collaborative approach has not been easy to achieve in most contexts and the set-up phase requires time and resources before a true partnership can be established. Difficulties have been encountered, for example, in Hungary although examples of local and regional multi-agency guidance initiatives, which have been set up with Phare or ESF support, can be found. Even relatively long-established networks, such as Connexions in the UK, still experience practical difficulties in operating as a multi-agency partnership, and evaluations have shown that areas in which different agencies fail to work together show gaps in the support networks available for young people (Joyce and White, 2004).

It is important to note that many career information centres aim to help all young people, not just those with problems. As such they tend to be different from many counselling services, which often serve young people (and their families) who are encountering specific difficulties.

In many countries, youth organisations are also involved in providing comprehensive careers advice. In Ireland, youth information centres have been established by a network of youth organisations and they offer information to young people on a wide number of issues, including employment matters, local community services and education and training opportunities. A counselling service is also available in the adult education sector to help clients assess their current situation and look at the options open to them for the future. In Estonia, a network of regional youth information and counselling centres (*maakondlikud noorte teabe- ja nõustamiskeskused*) has been operating since 1999. In Norway, the Youth Information Service has a broad remit of providing information, advice, guidance and referrals to young people aged 14-20.

Turkey has a long tradition of career guidance and has a well-established system of guidance and counselling services in both education and the labour market. Over the past 50 years more than 200 guidance and research centres (RAM) have been set up and form a distinct pillar in the Turkish guidance system. A further 40 career information centres and 20 job and career counselling services are run by the public employment service (ISKUR).

The RAM acts as the main coordination unit for schools in the regions and the central administration of the Directorate for Special Education, Guidance and Counselling (MONE). Among the various tasks that RAM perform is to provide support to school guidance services and, more specifically, on career guidance (organising career days or fairs) preparing for university entrance examinations,

and the preparation of written materials for basic and secondary education schools. The distinctive feature of RAM is their comprehensive and integrated approach of personal, social and career guidance. MONE has also recently developed a new web-based career information system and RAM will become one of the major access points; this is likely to extend further their career information function.

### **6.2.3. Online guidance tools for at-risk groups**

Use of online career information services is now considered a core element of the career guidance offer in many European countries. As well as signposting organisations, providing information, advice and guidance services, online portals can also provide information on education, training and employment opportunities, and easy-to-use interactive assessment tools, to assist young people in making career decisions.

Our research found nearly 60 examples of Internet-based career platforms and portals in 24 countries (this figure excludes public employment service portals). These Internet-based measures comprise three main types:

- (a) signposting, which provides information/links to other types of online career guidance provision and identifies where young people should go for careers advice, including other web based services;
- (b) information, on education and training opportunities and/or the skills requirements of various sectors or occupations which help increase young people's awareness of available opportunities;
- (c) interactive assessment tools, to help young people to make decisions by matching their skills and capabilities to potential career pathways, which can lead them into transition learning and/or employment.

The range of information covered by these web-based career guidance services varies. Some specifically focus on providing information on education opportunities while others include information about careers and employment opportunities. Where services are developing, they are responding to the lifelong learning agenda or to the need to identify career and/or training pathways between education and training and related job opportunities.

Most of the platforms are universal services rather than facilities targeted at vulnerable young people. Technological developments and the social inclusion agenda are, however, shifting the way in which online guidance services are delivered. Almost all study countries are trying to broaden access to career information and guidance without labelling their target group as hard to reach, using diverse and often innovative strategies (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). For



example, several Member States have introduced multi-media tools to increase the attractiveness of guidance portals for young people. Onisep ([www.onisep.fr](http://www.onisep.fr)) is a popular French facility used by more than six million lower and upper secondary school pupils, parents and information and guidance professionals. It combines providing information with blogs, chat facilities, podcasts and videocasts; the Onisep database includes 15 000 training options, 20 000 contact details for various establishments and 500 professions. The multi-media tools are used to communicate information about jobs and careers to young people. The site also includes quizzes to help users identify key skills and interests and their suitability for different education/career pathways.

In countries such as Ireland and Sweden, Internet portals include interactive matching tools where young people are able to explore opportunities relative to their skills, competences and interests. Such facilities help young people to identify jobs and careers that suit their interests and identify the necessary education and training to access these jobs. The sites also allow young people to access interactive tests to help them develop self-awareness by thinking about their own interests, goals and skills. For example, the career matching service of Career directions in Ireland ([www.careerdirections.ie](http://www.careerdirections.ie)) takes young people through a series of questions about themselves, their qualifications, interests and skills. The results lead them to a list of matched professions, using a colour coded 'traffic light' system.

Both Onisep and the Lithuanian web portal AIKOS, provide targeted or tailored information for specific groups at risk. The AIKOS website provides information for young people who have dropped out of education, including on where to go for further advice, guidance and assessment.

Some observers have criticised Internet-based information services for simply reproducing paper-based systems. Nevertheless, such approaches provide a cost-effective means of providing services to raise awareness about education, training, employment and other opportunities that might be available for young people. Further, research shows that many young people want to manage their own careers and are inclined to use services that are free and convenient (Rainey, 2008).

While Internet-based services are typically seen as a means of extending career guidance, successive reports have highlighted the lack of access to computers (and the Internet) as a barrier to web based information and interactive assessment tools. This is particularly the case among poorer families, those with no phones, and for people living in remote areas in countries where the use of Internet is not yet widespread (Barnes, 2008; OECDa, 2004a; OECD, 2008).



### **AIKOS, Lithuania ([www.aikos.smm.lt](http://www.aikos.smm.lt))**

Using ESF support, the Ministry of Education and Science launched the AIKOS site in 2005; it was relaunched in 2009.

The site contains information on education and training programmes and institutions in Lithuania, qualifications, licences, occupations, admission rules for vocational and higher education schools, the situation in the labour market, classifications, Europass certificate supplements. It also includes education and labour market statistics: number of students and job opening; current situation in education sector (number of programmes, qualifications, institutions, licences, other; trends in education sector) new programmes, qualifications, institutions, licences, etc.

It has customised pages for specific target groups, including early school leavers. Others targets include: pupils' parents; career information (guidance) counsellors, policy-makers, employers, disabled, immigrants, (ex)inmates.

Young people who have dropped out of education can find information on:

- support, advice and instructions on using the website and a starting point in choosing a profession;
- information about various occupations, listing alphabetically, by keyword, the most important professions according to education area and sub-area;
- information on study programmes: a search of vocational training programmes, with search facilities defined by various criteria;
- information on schools: schools of general education, vocational schools, admission rules and procedures;
- information on employment possibilities: numbers of pupils, vacancies and unemployed people by education area and sub-area;
- links to organisations for professional counselling, tests on professional suitability, data on average monthly wages by occupation and other links.

The key strengths of the AIKOS portal are:

- information is customised to very specific user needs based on the requirements of particular target groups;
- advice and information on the portal is comprehensive and covers a wide range of potential interests;
- the portal provides extensive links to other relevant institutions and websites. This enables users to access detailed information on education and training programmes and various providers of learning opportunities.

The information on the portal is based on various registers and databases from education and the labour market, as provided by the project's partners <sup>(18)</sup>. The Centre of Information Technologies of Education is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the AIKOS portal, which is updated on a regular basis. All areas of the portal have a search function, enabling users to locate specific information. This is particularly useful for users who may be less familiar with some of the terms associated with career guidance and education.

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<sup>(18)</sup> The Ministry of Education and Science, Department of Statistics to the Government of Lithuania, Lithuanian Youth Technical Creativity Centre, Lithuanian Labour Exchange (PES), Lithuanian Labour Market Training Authority, and the Centre of Information Technologies of Education.

#### **6.2.4. Formative validation tools and career management skills**

Section 5.2.5 has already examined how validation (identification and recognition of an individual's competences, regardless of how they were developed) can be used as a 'second chance' measure to support the reintegration of early school leavers. However, validation has a dual dimension as it also offers young people an opportunity to develop their career management skills and can help them to make informed decisions about their future.

There are a number of examples of validation measures across Europe which are specifically targeted towards young people, in particular those engaged in extra-curricular activities (such as sports and other hobbies, voluntary activities and membership of youth groups). Young people can gain a wide range of skills and competences through such activities, including 'soft skills' (team-working, communication, organisation and leadership skills), which can be hard to measure, and which may not be recognised through formal education qualifications. Validation presents an opportunity to capture and record young people's achievements outside formal learning.

In 2004, the European Council recognised the clear distinction between the identification and the validation of non-formal and informal learning (*Draft conclusions of the Council ...*, 2004). While the identification process 'records and makes visible the individual's learning outcomes', it does not lead to formal certification or the award of a diploma. However, validation is 'based on the assessment of the individuals' learning outcomes and may result in a certificate or diploma'. The distinction between identification and validation can also be referred to as 'formative' or 'summative' validation and this is the terminology used for this study. The examples discussed here tend to focus on formative validation and offer young people a chance to reflect on their competences and strengths and to record them using tools such as portfolios, rather than enabling them to access a formal qualification. In other words, formative validation mechanisms can act as a guidance tool for young people as they help them identify and record their skills and competences, reflect on the learning from such activities, consider future learning and employment options, and thereby help them to learn to manage their own careers. Further, for individuals (such as potential and actual school leavers) who may have experienced difficulties in taking tests and examinations in a formal school environment, less 'formal' approaches, can prove to be a suitable approach to identifying key skills and competences.

The German ProfilPASS is an example of a formative validation initiative based on a competence portfolio. The initiative promotes the concept of career management skills, enabling young people to reflect on their own activities and

identify their strengths and weaknesses. They then have the opportunity to formulate future aims.

### **ProfilPASS for young people (*Profilpass für junge Menschen*), Germany**

ProfilPASS is a developmental instrument based on self-assessment supported by guidance professionals. The system aims to review, document and assess informally acquired competences, regardless of where they were acquired, and record them in a competence portfolio. ProfilPASS also seeks to identify the individual's educational, professional and life goals and to encourage their achievement.

ProfilPASS was first offered as a validation tool for adults. In May 2007, ProfilPASS for young people was introduced on nationally in Germany. This bespoke competence portfolio is available to young people aged 14 and above and has been tailored to meet the specific needs of this group. It comprises two elements: the ProfilPASS folder itself and the tailored support to complete the process, which is provided by a guidance professional.

In practice, ProfilPASS for young people offers the chance to identify and document the competences they have developed outside of their formal education, e.g. at home with the family, through leisure activities or employment. It is divided into three systematic steps, incorporating both self-reflection and support from the guidance professional:

- 'My Life' stage involves preparing an overview of the different activities the individual takes part in. This includes family, school, leisure time, internships, training and employment;
- 'My Strengths' stage encompasses analysis, by both the individual and the guidance professional, of the competences and skills they develop through these activities. A summary is then prepared of the individual's particular strengths;
- 'My Aims' stage identifies the individual's goals for their future personal development.

Various guidance activities are used to support young people to complete the portfolio; these can be on a one-to-one basis and also in groups. Group work has been found to be the most effective method for young people who are (long-term) unemployed or seeking training opportunities, while one-to-one guidance has been identified as more effective for students in higher school years or apprentices.

The young people can benefit from participation in the initiative during project and activity weeks at school; during afternoon activities at all-day schools; as part of measures for young people under the age of 25, such as the Injobs initiative; and as part of volunteering activities in sports clubs and church associations.

A number of specific activities are used to help young people to identify their competences and abilities:

- life puzzle: the individual makes a list of all the relevant significant people in the different areas of their life to build up a comprehensive support network of important figures;
- a day in my life: this activity enables individuals to give an insight into the different activities they take part in. As part of this mapping exercise, individuals list all the places, situations, activities experiences and people involved in a particular day;
- individual overview: the individual is provided with a diagram of a person on which they list all their strengths (outside of the person) and characteristics (inside of the person). This process allows the individual to think about the activities, completed learning processes and acquired skills and competences;
- jobs in my environment: this exercise gives young people an insight into the multi-faceted nature of professional life. The individual creates a list of the jobs people do within their personal milieu.

The information for this case study has been compiled from the the ProfilPASS website (<http://www.profilpass-online.de/>) and from the ProfilPASS for young people information brochures ([http://www.profilpass-online.de/files/101-430a\\_web.pdf](http://www.profilpass-online.de/files/101-430a_web.pdf)).

As stated on the initiative's website, the ProfilPASS is 'more than a ring binder'; it can bring significant benefits for participants. For instance, during the preparation of a ProfilPASS, young people learn how to make a realistic assessment of their own skills and competences, develop an increased willingness to take on responsibility, improve their communication skills, and use the process to identify their career choices.

Another example of a formative validation initiative which leads to the certification of a young person's competences, is the *Attestation de compétences* (Certification of competences) developed by the Luxembourg Federation of Scouts, in collaboration with the national Ministry of Youth. This competence certificate has been developed to enable young people who have undertaken a leadership, training or *animation* role in a youth organisation over a certain period of time, to gain recognition for the work they have done. Although the application for the *attestation* is prepared by a member of staff at the youth organisation, it is based on an interview with the young person to identify the tasks they have undertaken and the competences they have developed in doing so. This interview enables the young person to conduct self-evaluation, although they should be supported by feedback from the staff member.

The appraisal process undertaken to prepare an application for an *attestation de compétences* supports the young person in becoming aware of, and articulating, their own competences. The final certificate also serves as formal recognition of the value of their participation in youth work or voluntary service, which could be used to support a job application. The process as a whole can motivate the young person and encourage a positive attitude towards further education and training. It can also present an opportunity to prepare a plan for future personal development and learning.

A third example of validation for young people can be found in Finland. The Recreational activity study books developed by the Finnish Youth Academy offers young people a chance to identify and record the competences they have developed and what they have learned from their extra-curricular activities. The system does not measure the young person's competences and does not aim for formal accreditation, but it can aid access to formal education if the young person wishes.

Recreational study books again offer young people a chance to record the skills and competences they have developed outside school. The process is based on inputs from both the young person and an adult, who confirms the validity of the information, in place of a formal system of measuring or accrediting the young person's competences. It is clear that young people appreciate the value of the study books as simply a process to reflect on the activities they have

carried out during their youth, since most participants use it to create a personal record, rather than a tool to access education, training, employment or qualifications.

### **Recreational activity study books, Finland**

The Recreational activity study book is a portfolio/CV, which enables young people to evidence their learning from activities outside formal education. It is also currently being developed and piloted as a web-based portfolio, piloting in 2009/2010.

The study book collects information about activities, competences and learning gained in nine spheres (Savisaari, 2005): regular participation in leisure activities; holding positions of trust and responsibility within NGOs; activities as a leader, trainer or coach; participation in a project; courses; international activities; workshop activities (apprenticeship); competitions; and other activities.

The entries in the book are always written by an adult who is either responsible or well aware of the particular activity; the young people themselves fill in the self-assessment part. The focus is on describing what, and how, things have been learned rather than what has been done. The adult making the entry adds his/her contact details in case someone wants to verify the validity of the information.

The recreational activity book does not measure the competences presented by the young person and there are no examinations associated with it. The system does not aim for accreditation of the young person's competences, because the Youth Academy wishes to preserve the principles behind a young person's voluntary activities, e.g. the desire to spend time and learn with others. Findings from surveys among young people who have used the book have found that their priority in doing so was to create a personal record of the activities they have undertaken during their youth.

However, the book can be used to identify and credit non-formal learning when applying for employment or for a place on a formal education course. The Youth Academy has a formal agreement with 250 formal educational institutions on how to value and credit entries within the book.

Over 80 000 recreational study books have been distributed to date and around 5 000 young people take up this activity each year.

This case study is based on an interview with the Finnish Youth Academy (May 2009) and information from a case study written by Lauri Savisaari from the Youth Academy in 2005 in the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The European Guidelines for validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2009a) stress the importance of providing information, advice and guidance throughout validation. Research has shown that the process of identifying and assessing one's skills and competences works best with guidance from a third party (ProfilPASS). Individuals may not be aware of the competences and skills they have developed, through activities within the home or hobbies, for example, and experts can help to identify competences which the individual might have overlooked. Guidance can enable the validation candidate to develop a comprehensive, realistic summary of their competences and abilities, strengths and weaknesses.

For example, the Luxembourg *attestation de compétences* description booklet stresses that the process for preparing the attestation should be based on a dialogue with the young person, enabling them to carry out self-evaluation, supported by feedback from the member of staff preparing the attestation on their behalf. The booklet explains that this process of open dialogue makes the process educational in itself, aiding critical reflection and analysis of what the young person has learned and achieved (Bodeving, 2009).

It is also important to ensure that validation is not seen as a finite procedure and to offer the beneficiary further guidance to support their future plans. Once his/her competences have been identified and recognised, the individual should be supported to formulate next steps in personal learning or career development (Krichewsky, 2004). This important step of motivating the young person towards further development is also mentioned in the *attestation de compétences* description booklet (Bodeving, 2009).

Validation should also be tailored to the needs of its target groups; providing guidance means each procedure can be tailored to the beneficiary (Cedefop, 2009a). In addition, the tools and processes employed should be user-friendly for the target group (Keogh and Nevala, 2009). While the German ProfilPASS was originally developed for adults, the variant for young people has been adapted and the language used is easy to understand (although it does not actually use young people's vocabulary or slang). In addition, ProfilPASS counsellors must undertake specific training to deliver the ProfilPASS for young people and for adults.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning can bring a wide range of benefits, including less tangible outcomes, such as support for a young person's personal development. It can also represent a key tool in supporting the development of career management skills, by enabling young people to identify their competences and strengths, as well as their goals for future development. Individualised, tailored approaches, accompanied by professional guidance are key elements of successful validation measures.

### 6.3. Working-life familiarisation

To aid the transition from education to employment, young people need to develop skills and competences relevant to the workplace and to understand how the working world differs from education and training. They also need to be supported to make informed career choices. Working-life familiarisation measures, such as work experience placements and entrepreneurship education,

plus vocational training pathways incorporating an element of workbased learning, including apprenticeships and alternation training programmes, can all help to meet the needs of young people and prepare them for the world of work. This section examines a range of working life familiarisation initiatives and identifies the benefits each one can present for young people:

- (a) the benefits provided by compulsory education systems that offer young people an opportunity to undertake work experience;
- (b) how careers fairs and company visits can help young people;
- (c) how entrepreneurship education can offer people from disadvantaged groups a route out of social exclusion;
- (d) continuous VET reform to offer vocational training as a valued, alternative study path;
- (e) the value of apprenticeships and how to support the transition from school to an apprentice programme;
- (f) school and work alternation initiatives as an alternative study route.

#### **6.3.1. Work experience opportunities in compulsory education**

The 2004 Cedefop and OECD research projects on career guidance found that many EU countries offer different forms of work placement opportunities (work shadowing, company visits, work experience). As part of the secondary school curriculum, these connect their career education programmes more directly and experientially to the world of work (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004; OECD, 2004a; OECD, 2004b). In Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Austria Finland, Sweden and the UK (England) the curriculum for compulsory education provides extensive work shadowing and work experience opportunities for young people (based on a review of country reports EACEA et al., 2008). Such work placements last approximately one week in Austria, up to two weeks in Germany, Luxembourg, Finland and the UK (England) and can last more than two weeks in Denmark and Sweden. The arrangements are well-established practices in all of those countries apart from Austria, where such provisions were made available in 2005.

Countries such as Belgium (Walloon), Bulgaria, Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Portugal have less extensive provision to familiarise young people with working life than those just mentioned (OECD, 2004a). Estonia and Latvia, for instance, organise an annual 'work shadowing day'. Such taster days act as tools to improve young people's understanding of the world of work, especially in the absence of more extensive work placement schemes.



The review of examples and much of the literature show that work experience can have many benefits for both young people and employers. First, it can provide young people with an opportunity to improve their understanding of the world of work. Although many secondary level students are already involved in working life (e.g. working for a family business or doing after-school, weekend and holiday work), these jobs are not necessarily taken to develop skills: more often they are to earn pocket money or to help the family business. Well organised and executed work experience periods aim to place more emphasis on 'learning than earning' and can help young people to gain knowledge of the world of work.

A work experience placement can also offer a structured learning environment, giving the young person the chance to add to their skills profile, supplementing those developed during school study and extra-curricular activities. It can also provide an opportunity to apply knowledge gained at school to real work situations. Providing structured work placement, however, requires an effort from the school, the young person and the employer to ensure appropriate preparation, support during the placement and follow-up afterwards. In the Swedish example of a structured work placement programme, preparatory activities include lessons by career guidance counsellors about the purpose of the work experience, information on the selection criteria and other practical details.

#### **PRAO (praktisk arbetslivsorientering), Sweden**

Swedish schools have been organising work placements for children of compulsory school age for several decades. This programme is known as PRAO (*praktisk arbetslivsorientering*) and the aim is to give pupils tangible experiences of working life and an opportunity to grow.

Visits to local companies and organisations are arranged for pupils in the eighth grade to gain some understanding of what is involved in various professions; they take place in the final year of compulsory school (ninth grade). The placements can take as long as three to six weeks and students may work in a factory, office or other locations.

Surveys and studies among young people indicate that they appreciate the PRAO programme. A recent study among 750 ninth graders found that just over a third of the surveyed young people (36 %) ([www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)) had a good work placement and 61 % felt that compulsory education should include more practical placements. Another study from 2006 concluded that 70 % of young people felt their placement had worked out really well.

Undertaking work experience can also help young people to increase their awareness of the types of careers available and to gain an insight into the demands of jobs (e.g. importance of timekeeping, customer care, appearance, etc.). Work experience can help young people to understand how learning at school is important for getting a job and to find out what skills employers look for when they are hiring someone to fill a job vacancy.



Work experience can also give young people the opportunity to find out about a career they think they are interested in. It can help them to develop a greater understanding of their own interests and skills. These factors can then help young people to make a better-informed decision about their future career (whether they want to pursue a vocational or academic pathway, enter employment, etc.).

Good work experience can also help young people to develop self-evaluation skills, building confidence to reflect and learn from experience. It can promote a positive attitude to learning and enable young people to develop practical problem-solving skills. German work experience placements aim to provide an insight into the working world and help guide young people in a career direction. Two or three long traineeships, usually following classroom preparation, are offered in almost all the *Länder* of Germany (in cooperation with companies, chambers of commerce and schools). Some *Länder* have published complete teaching manuals and have prepared material to support the work placements. Workplace visits are also organised, mainly within the framework of subjects related to initiation into working life, as well as other subjects such as chemistry, physics, German or geography.

A well-organised work experience placement, with appropriate planning, application and follow-up, can help develop career management skills. For example, the placement can help familiarise young people with job search skills by gaining experience in making applications.

Further, practical work experience has the potential of helping to improve the young person's employability, being valued by future employers. In some cases, the employer may provide the young person with a reference on completion of their placement. There may also be a chance to pursue further opportunities (e.g. summer jobs or other traineeships) with the placement provider. Finally, having a good company or organisation name on their CV can give the young person extra credibility in the future.

### **Work placement programme, Iceland**

The Work placement programme is intended for students in grades 8-10 who do not necessarily have any severe learning difficulties but who have not adjusted to a mainstream school environment. The programme aims to increase the wellbeing of students in their school life by giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their skills outside the academic environment. In this way, and through the preparation of an individual timetable based around the work placement, the programme aims to boost the self-confidence of participants and restimulate their interest in learning.

For young people with special needs and those who have not adjusted to a mainstream setting, work placements can offer significant benefits. The Work placement programme in Iceland is intended for students in grades 8-10 who have not settled in well in their current school.

Work experience schemes can also be beneficial to the organisations and companies involved, with opportunities to:

- (a) promote the company and build links with local schools that can help to attract school leavers into jobs (develop new recruitment channels);
- (b) help improve the employability of young people coming onto the labour market;
- (c) promote the value of vocational qualifications;
- (d) permanent staff can gain experience of being in a supervisory position;
- (e) keep up-to-date with developments in education.

Despite the diverse benefits, the literature review confirmed the finding of the OECD study (2004a) on career guidance by suggesting that students in many EU countries still have too few, or no, opportunities to take part in work experience. This is particularly true for a specific group of countries but differences are also evident between regions and municipalities in countries, which have well established work experience programmes. This is because, in many cases, the organisation of these activities is not mandatory, and depends on the initiatives taken by individual guidance staff, schools, municipalities and/or regions.

Evidence also suggests that some actors are debating and questioning the usefulness and necessity of work placements for young people. In Sweden, experiences range from one municipality to another; some schools have closed down their work experience programmes in recent years, although, in some cases, this has not happened without huge resistance from pupils themselves. Other commentators claim that work placement periods are more important today than ever before due to the smaller number of summer and part-time work opportunities available to young people.

### **6.3.2. Careers fairs and company visits**

Special events such as careers fairs and company visits can provide valuable experience for young people, offer an opportunity to explore different fields of work and career paths and also to seek employment. They enable young people to meet and talk to representatives from different industries and to find out what is required (in terms of skills and qualifications) to access certain occupations. Careers fairs and workplace visits take place universally across the study countries, although the level of access to such services varies considerably from

one country and region to another. Visits and fairs usually focus on the final year of lower secondary education.

Examples of such special events were explored from Belgium, Cyprus, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy, Latvia and Malta. In Belgium, company discovery weeks have become established practice in the German speaking area of the country and their success is based on strong collaboration with the local business community.

### **Company discovery weeks (*Schnupperwochen*), Belgium**

The Institute of Vocational Training for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (IAWM) has been organising company discovery weeks (*Schnupperwochen*) during the two weeks of the Easter holidays for the past 16 years in the German-speaking area of Belgium. The 5 000 young people in compulsory education aged 15 to 18 are personally invited – via their schools – to visit one or several participating companies. They may spend anywhere from a few hours to several days in companies, and even work in them for a trial period. In 2008, more than 800 young people and 275 companies participated.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the career fair Educational rendezvous has become a major national event, showcasing the ability of VET schools to produce students capable of competing in the global market.

### **Educational rendezvous, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the career fair Educational rendezvous has been held at the Skopje Fair for the last three years. Schools are invited to the event to present themselves to the public and to provide further information to pupils in the eighth grade who are looking for a secondary school to attend in the following academic year.

The fair also acts as the largest recruitment event of its kind in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, bringing together vocational students and potential employers. The three-day event attracts up to 30 000 visitors and is primarily organised by students for students. Throughout the fair VET students can demonstrate their leadership and business skills through a range of competitions, which include writing business plans and public speaking. Leadership is provided through the VET student organisation MASSUM and the event receives support from USAID's secondary education projects, as well as from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Ministry of Education and Science.

In Italy, Cyprus and Malta, such activities take place through sectoral organisations. For example, since 2004, following the creation of the national guidance committee, the Italian Ministry of Education has encouraged schools to participate in the national *Orientagiovani* day organised by Confindustria, a body representing Italian industries. This represents a series of events organised at regional level by the local Confindustria associations. In each Italian province, the industrial associations, in collaboration with schools, training centres and

universities, provide pupils and teachers with an opportunity to meet entrepreneurs and reflect on skills and professional choices together.

In some countries, such activities are part of the curriculum. In Portugal, for example, at the end of the third cycle of basic education (lower secondary education), seminars, company visits and vocational guidance fairs are included in the school project subject of the curriculum. Further, individual learning providers have established their own projects to allow their students to familiarise themselves with the world of work. For example, the Kandinsky College in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, has launched a working life familiarisation project. Here students pay short visits to workplaces; take part in work placements; are made aware of the preparation they need to make when applying for jobs; are given a chance to rehearse applying for a job (become aware of methods of applying for jobs, and learn to identify their own and job related attributes); and learn how to handle interviews.

Special careers events can bring benefits to young people, although they should be seen as one transition support measure among many. They enable participants to learn about the options available to them in terms of the transition to further education, training or employment and therefore help young people to make better informed decisions about their learning and career pathways. Participants can gain better understanding of what certain job roles might entail, may discover a career path they had previously been unaware of, and may even be able to establish contacts for future work experience or to apply for positions when they become available.

### **6.3.3. Entrepreneurship education**

In the past 10 to 15 years, entrepreneurship education has grown dramatically throughout the world, particularly in those countries already known to be entrepreneurial such as Australia, Canada and the US, but also in many European countries. This growth is reflected in the development of numerous new entrepreneurship curricula, study programmes and initiatives, as well as increasing research activities on enterprise education in general, and on its various effects (Schoof, 2006).

Entrepreneurship education is decisive in assisting young people to develop entrepreneurial skills, attributes and behaviours, as well as developing enterprise awareness and understanding that entrepreneurship represents a career option (Schoof, U, 2006). With regard to the wider impact, it has been acknowledged that spreading an entrepreneurial attitude among young people in everyday life (school, work, home, etc.) can help them to overcome barriers and develop self-confidence (European Commission, 2001a). Setting up a business is also seen

as a way for young people to gain autonomy and flexibility, to start their own career, and to apply innovative ways of thinking (ibid.).

### **Secondary school level entrepreneurship education programmes, Europe**

Shadowing and training opportunities for young people (e.g. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Germany, Poland, Slovenia and the UK ). For example, the Students sitting in the boss's chair (*Schüler im Chefsessel*) project in Germany enables students and teachers in selected regions of Germany to have the opportunity to spend one day with an entrepreneur and to observe closely the typical everyday business and tasks of an entrepreneur. Subsequent to this visit, students have to write an essay on their experience, which is assessed by an independent regional jury. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a number of VET schools provide students with the opportunity to take part in work-based learning directly in industry: this can include shadowing an employee to find out more about their job;

Visits from entrepreneurs (e.g. Belgium Flanders, Germany, Malta and the UK). In the UK, Businessdynamics is a business education and enterprise charity that aims to bring business to life for young people. Volunteers from companies introduce students, aged 14-19, to the opportunities and challenges of the business world and to improve their key skills in preparation for the world of work;

Setting up mini enterprises in schools (e.g. Austria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Malta). The Co-ops in schools project (Scoops) in Malta tries to link school to work, emphasising entrepreneurship and self-employment. It was launched in October 1995. It provides students with an opportunity to organise themselves into cooperative units to run, manage and market their own creative projects, and to create for themselves a viable self-employment option. They are supported by a team of mentors, specially trained in setting up and running cooperatives. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a number of VET schools have established a 'real school company' through a USAID grant-scheme for investment in basic infrastructure and business planning. The 'real company' produces goods for the local market, offering student work experience and skill development (albeit limited to a narrow field of tasks);

Entrepreneurship education in the school curricula (e.g. Greece, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia). In Poland, an introduction to entrepreneurship is a compulsory at ISCED level 3 (two teaching hours in a period of three years). In Malta, an entrepreneurship education pilot project started in six primary schools in April 2007 and is already a part of the curriculum at secondary level;

PR-campaigns, competitions and awards, media coverage, youth business events (e.g. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the UK). PR-campaigns, events and competitions are another way of raising the profile of entrepreneurship for young people. Blue skies is an interactive road show from the UK, which helps students understand how running their own business can become a reality. It brings students face-to-face with successful young entrepreneurs in a lively, fun environment.

Entrepreneurship education is seen to have an even greater role in today's society where young people can no longer expect to find traditional job-for-life careers but different career pathways (e.g. contract employment, freelancing, periods of self-employment, etc.) (Dearing, 1997). The findings of various studies propose that entrepreneurship education has a positive impact on young people's self-assessment as well as on their general occupational aspirations and achievement. Entrepreneurship education can help to equip young people to develop the attitudes (e.g. more personal responsibility) and skills (e.g. flexibility

and creativity), necessary to cope with the uncertain employment paths of today's societies (Schoof, 2006). An evaluation from the US has also highlighted that youth entrepreneurship programmes have been particularly effective at keeping students from low-income urban backgrounds on the academic track and can be a significant force in driving them towards high achievement and leadership (United Nations, 2000).

Secondary school level entrepreneurship education programmes have been found in Austria, Belgium (Flanders), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK.

A number of these projects involve mentors or volunteers from business, who young people may be able to identify with as role models. The opportunity to test out their own entrepreneurial ideas through initiatives which allow young people to set up their own business, may also provide them with the inspiration to pursue this as a career option. It can also support them in gaining skills and qualities important in the world of work and, for those that are interested in doing so, it can provide them with the knowledge and skills required to set up their own business.

Further, across Europe, innovative projects funded through ESF and through the Equal initiative (Theme C) have shown that entrepreneurship can offer people from disadvantaged groups a route out of social exclusion. Enterprise can also be a way for young people at risk to make the transition to the labour market, as demonstrated by the success of the Prince's Trust in the UK, which provides business start-up support to young people who have a business idea. The aim of setting up a business may provide at-risk young people with the sense of direction they need to engage again with learning and, for some, may represent a relevant alternative to formal education.

#### **6.3.4. Vocational training as a valued study path**

There is evidence that vocationally-oriented training pathways can encourage young people to remain in or return to formal education (Cedefop, 2009c) and there is an increasing interest in such programmes across Europe. For young learners who are less interested in traditional, academic study routes and prefer a 'learning by doing' approach, it is important that they are able to access alternative forms of learning, including vocational qualifications. Vocational qualifications usually include on-the-job training, enabling young people to work with employers and build effective relationships, as well as allowing them to learn and practice new skills in an authentic working environment.

IVET (initial vocational education and training) reforms are occurring across almost all Member States in response to the assumption that the availability of a wider variety of choice may increase young people's motivation to stay longer in education or to return to formal education. While these developments cannot be regarded as guidance initiatives as such, many of them are relevant to the study's education-to-work agenda. Further, recent evidence implies that individualisation and modularisation requires increased orientation and guidance services, especially for those who are unable to manage increased responsibility for their learning pathways.

VET reforms have not been studied here in detail. However, a brief list of the types of reform being introduced is provided here, followed by a more detailed examination of two specific VET-oriented routes which are of relevance to this study (apprenticeships and school and work alternation initiatives):

- (a) increasing modularity and flexibility: VET has been diversified in several countries and educational routes have been set up which are more accommodating to a wider range of students. There have been developments in the individualisation, modularisation and flexibility of IVET pathways in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden (Cedefop, 2009c);
- (b) easing access to IVET for early school leavers: several countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia and Hungary) have strategies to aid access to vocational learning for school leavers who do not hold a compulsory school certificate, or to offer short courses leading to apprenticeship certificates or to prepare the learner for final upper secondary examinations;
- (c) improving the appeal of IVET courses: qualitative improvements have been made to the content of IVET provisions, enhance make vocational pathways more attractive (Spain, Latvia and Sweden). In Spain, initial vocational qualification programmes (*PCPI Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*) were created in 2006 as part of the Organic Law on Education. The new programmes now lead to recognised qualifications unlike previous IVET programmes;
- (d) improving the permeability of vocational pathways: reforms have also taken place to ensure IVET courses lead to formal accreditation, so improving the permeability of study pathways (Spain, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands).

Vocational education and training reforms seek to ensure that VET options are a valued alternative to academic pathways. It is important to ensure that learners are able to access vocational qualifications and that the benefits of

vocational options can be clearly seen (as in accreditation of courses). It is also important to ensure that the courses offered suit learner needs, for example, through flexible, modularised learning pathways. It is important too, to find ways of promoting the value of vocational learning, on a par with academic qualifications.

However, it is widely acknowledged that early school leaving rates are generally higher among VET institutions than in academic upper secondary schools. There is also a need to strengthen mainstream guidance provision in IVET establishments as it is often less extensive than at lower secondary level and in general upper secondary routes. However, a key strength of vocational education and training is the link to the workplace and future employment; work-based learning allows young people to understand how the theory they learn in the classroom is relevant to a job.

Particularly interesting vocational guidance measures help inform young VET students and engage young people in vocational pathways. Good practice examples can be seen in Finland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Netherlands. In Finland, the Career start programme (*ammattistartti*) is aimed at school drop-outs and young people who have not decided on their career direction. The programme allows young people to try out different vocational routes and courses, visit work and training places, and access professional career guidance and other support options to explore different career and job opportunities before selecting their study or employment route. The programme lasts for 20-40 weeks, depending on the needs of the individual, and students are able to move easily from courses offering preparatory instruction to courses leading to certification, which will take into account prior learning during the preparatory phase. Originally introduced as a pilot project in 2006, the government has now decided to introduce it as one of the mainstream activities in the education-to-work transition agenda.

In the Netherlands, the importance of guidance in vocational education and training has been recognised by the national framework for policy developments in early school leaving (*Aanval op schooluitval*). The programme aims to improve the guidance system in vocational schools, with a particular emphasis on transition support, follow-up services and a greater professionalism within the guidance sector. A number of special needs advisory teams have been set up in schools to identify at-risk young people and offer them timely support to overcome their difficulties. Teams are formed from a range of different professionals, including youth services, social workers, the police and judicial authorities.



In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, career centres have been set up as part of the internationally-funded Secondary school activity (SEA) project. The centres were initially piloted in a few schools in 2005 and have now been established in all 57 VET schools in the country. They provide a dedicated 'space' for guidance to support the career development of VET students. The career centre consists of a meeting room within the school where students can go to take part in relevant activities and access information and support. USAID provided essential resources, including printed and audio/visual materials. The centres are led by the VET student organisation MASSUM and are staffed by a teacher within the school who has undergone some training. The centres organise a range of activities encompassing both internal development (tests on interests and abilities, CV writing, interview preparation, public speaking) and practical work (establishing and running mini-enterprises and visits to companies).

#### **6.3.5. Apprenticeships**

The aim of apprenticeships is to provide high-quality work-based training, combined with learning in an educational institution or training centre <sup>(19)</sup>. Apprenticeships offer an alternative to full-time, classroombased education and a route into employment. For some young people, the ability to earn money while continuing their education may also be appealing. For employers and the economy as a whole, apprenticeships offer a solution to skills shortages. Some at-risk young people may find that apprenticeships offer the alternative learning environment to formal education they need and provide an alternative to dropping out of education altogether.

The value of apprenticeships is recognised across Europe and a number of countries are beginning to develop new (innovative) apprenticeship models/schemes, or are modernising existing apprenticeship systems. Apprenticeship schemes have been recently (re)introduced in Denmark, Estonia and Sweden. In Denmark, a new apprenticeship was introduced in 2006 and is now part of the government's strategy for reducing the number of early school leavers. Apprenticeships are aimed in particular at students who may struggle or lack motivation to complete more theoretical school-based education in the absence of practical insights. The scheme has proved a great success.

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<sup>(19)</sup> The Cedefop definition of apprenticeships is 'systematic, long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an educational institution or training centre. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation' (Cedefop, 2008b).

Apprenticeship schemes in Germany, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland are being expanded and modernised. In Italy, the apprenticeship route has been strengthened to improve both take-up and the quality of provision to ensure that young people who drop out of education have an opportunity to obtain a well-recognised qualification. Higher level apprenticeships have also been introduced to enable graduates from apprentice routes to obtain higher level qualifications. In Greece, the guidance and counselling system for apprentices has been improved and information and counselling offices (KPA) have been set up in different parts of the country.

Others countries are improving the systems in different ways, such as focusing on learner retention or by introducing incentives for employers to recruit apprentices. Research shows that learner retention can be improved through the introduction of a more learner-centred approach. This includes arranging sessions at appropriate times to improve attendance, developing a relationship between staff and learners to encourage open discussion of concerns, recognising learners' achievements and helping them to identify opportunities and formulate plans for the future (Jones and Simister, 2007). Providing information and guidance to the learner from the initial point of engagement through to induction and beyond can also play an important part, as guidance can help to ensure that potential apprentices had realistic programme expectations. Further, the integration and teaching of key skills at the start of the programme is found to be effective.

To increase the number of employers offering apprentice places, certain countries have provided specific employer incentives (Germany, France and Austria). In France, tax exemptions have been introduced for individuals and employers. A relationship between learners, providers and local employers may also increase the number of employers interested in engaging in apprenticeship programmes. In Austria, this has been achieved through a strong local network. The Career catching counsellors project in Styria, Austria, aims to improve young people's access to information and guidance concerning apprenticeship places and other training opportunities. It is seen as a highly successful model for helping young people to progress from education into the labour market.

The project demonstrates the importance of forming networks of key stakeholders to ensure that young people are able to access the most appropriate opportunities and to ensure that employers are able to benefit by receiving the most suitable candidates. The case study highlights the importance of building strong relationships and channels of communication between these key players and extending guidance beyond the young people themselves.

### Career catching counsellors project, Austria

The Career catching counsellors project has two main aims:

- to provide guidance and support to young people (aged 14-16) looking for an apprenticeship, and/or young people deciding their future study or career plans;
- to establish a network of all key partners in the region.

Although the focus is on supporting young people to access apprenticeships, the counsellors will also support young people to access employment or further training, if this is what they want to do. The emphasis is on providing a solution to individual needs, which relies heavily on close collaboration with relevant partners (Interview, Marion Höllbacher, 2009).

The network involves a variety of different organisations and individuals across multiple sectors: the Styrian provincial government; schools and other educational institutions; employer organisations; individual companies; trade unions; and the labour market service. It is run by the Styrian Economic Society (*Steirische Volkswirtschaftliche Gesellschaft*) in cooperation with the Federal State of Styria and is cofinanced by the Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture and the European Social Fund (ESF).

The network delivers a range of initiatives, working with young people, parents, schools, companies and institutions in the region. For instance, they maintain databases of apprenticeship opportunities, coordinate work experience placements, hold information evenings for young people and parents and provide support and resources for student advisors and teachers in schools (OECD, 2003a).

The project also runs drop-in centres for young people who are in need of information and support. At the centres, counsellors guide young people making decisions about their future, both through individual guidance sessions and through longer-term one-to-one support:: ([www.stvg.at/stvg/index.html](http://www.stvg.at/stvg/index.html)).

The project aims to help young people to choose the right apprenticeship/traineeship for their needs and interests and to access appropriate support in their local area. The activities undertaken by the project also help the counsellors to place the right young people with the right company for their apprenticeship; therefore it is important to build good working relationships between schools, young people and the companies offering traineeships and apprenticeships. Intensive contact with parents and cooperation with regional institutions are also seen as important elements of the project, as they maximise the support and opportunities available to young people.

In relation to practical support for young people, a fundamental part of the project is individual information interviews. They encourage young people to make practical and proactive decisions about their future and to avoid potential uncertainty. Intensive contact with parents and cooperation with companies and regional institutions are also seen as important elements of the project, as they maximise the support and opportunities available to young people. The first contact with young people is often achieved through public relations activity targeted at schools, for example, through regional media, or referrals.

Career catching counsellors also give presentations in schools to explain what the service offers; following this, young people access the service on a voluntary basis. The counsellors also support in-school vocational guidance teachers and deliver their own lessons as well on specialist subjects, such as interviews. By contacting young people while they are still at school, the project helps to identify and support young people who are at risk of dropping out (Interview, Marion Höllbacher, 2009).

The project has developed a number of activities and tools to help motivate and prepare young people for the labour and apprenticeship market. It also offers activities that seek to improve access to guidance and information. Specific initiatives include the creation of a database of apprenticeship opportunities and coordination of work experience placements. The project has also created networks of employers willing to speak at schools, information evenings for young people and their parents, and support and resources for school student advisers and careers teachers (OECD, 2003b).

The Career catching counsellor project is a model in Austria for further development of guidance projects intending to ease transitions from school into the labour market and it has been chosen as a best practice model by the OECD. The impact of the project has been positive and, according to the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, the percentage of young people searching unsuccessfully for an apprentice position has decreased since the introduction of the project.

#### **6.3.6. School and work alternation initiatives**

Similar to apprenticeships, the concept of school and work alternation (also referred to as alternance training) is based on learning by doing in conjunction with a theoretical framework. According to Cedefop (2008b, page 27), alternance training is: ‘education or training combining periods in an educational institution or training centre and in the workplace. The alternance scheme can take place on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis. Depending on the country and applicable status, participants may be contractually linked to the employer and/or receive a remuneration’.

Such training differs from traditional internships, which do not always provide theoretical knowledge. Alternance training also differs from apprenticeships in two key ways:

- (a) apprentices are contractually linked to the employer and receive remuneration (wage or allowance); this is not always the case for alternance training;
- (b) the employer assumes responsibility for providing an apprenticeship with training leading to a specific occupation.

Further, the examples of alternance training identified in this study primarily offer work-based learning in the form of short-term placements or internships, rather than as a continuous part of the training programme.

School and work alternation initiatives are closely linked to the transition from school to work. By spending alternating periods in a school or training centre and in the workplace, young people are able to learn about career opportunities and develop skills and knowledge relevant to employment.

There are two main arguments to support school and work alternation. First, learning theory suggests that some pupils benefit much more from practice-based learning than purely abstract and cognitive learning. As a result, pupils who do not always perform well in theoretical learning contexts can develop other types of skill, increasing their self-confidence and motivation to learn. Second, there is evidence that alternating school and work aids the transition from education to work, as pupils can more easily link their theoretical knowledge to workplace requirements (Schuetze, 2003). Alternation programmes offer increased motivation, better understanding of vocational options, improved adaptability and greater employability.

Alternation programmes can also bring significant benefits to employers, as they ensure that people leave education with relevant skills and competences for the workplace (including ‘soft skills’ such as team working and communication skills) as well as theoretical knowledge. For education and training providers, introducing alternation schemes means that they are able to offer young people a

flexible and rich learning programme catering for different types of learners. This can help to overcome the problem of early school leaving.

This study has identified study and work alternation initiatives in Germany, France, Italy and the UK.

### **School and work alternation, Italy**

The lack of opportunities to develop practical skills in secondary schools has recently been recognised as a weakness of the Italian education system. For this reason, the government passed a law in 2003 to promote of 'school and work alternation' in all types of secondary school (law 53/2003). The principle of school and work alternation in secondary schools was restated in the 2005 law for secondary school reform (which has yet to take effect), which made it mandatory for young people to be enrolled in formal education or training until the age of 18.

The overall purpose of these reforms is to contribute to reducing school-drop out and to help pupils familiarise themselves with working life, making them better equipped for the transition from school to work. More specifically, the objectives of the secondary school reforms are:

- to introduce more flexible learning systems for pupils aged between 15 and 18;
- to enrich the learning experience with cross-cutting skills and equip pupils with skills that are required in the workplace (for example, team working, communication, planning and problem-solving);
- to help pupils to test their work aspirations and motivations.

Although the reform is still being implemented, during the school term 2007-08 nearly 50 000 secondary schools had already activated some school and work alternation projects (INDIRE, 2009).

The law provides general guidelines on the objectives of school and work alternation, indicating some general principles to be followed by secondary schools. For instance, there are requirements to create a new body within the school and new staff roles to support pupils and to liaise with external businesses. Businesses participating in the project are also required to appoint an internal tutor to be responsible for the pupils during the time spent in the workplace.

Schools and businesses must also cooperate closely on the definition of the objectives and specific tasks to be provided through the work experience, which must be in line with the education activities of the school and real working life of the enterprise. Aside from these general guidelines, schools are free to develop their own specific models for the alternation measures, including the duration of the work experience, the specific educational objectives and the assessment system.

The Chamber of Commerce has proved to be an ideal partner for schools offering school and work alternation programmes. The chamber worked together with schools to define the core modules, which include the following two examples:

- career orientation path: this module is for pupils aged 15 and lasts for between 90 and 110 hours. Around 60-70 % of this time is spent within the school on preparatory activities and 30-40 % is spent within the enterprise doing practical tasks;
- working experience path: this is for the pupils from 16 to 18 years old. It is a module of 150 to 180 hours, with 10-20 % of the time spent within the school in preparatory activities and 80-90 % spent within the enterprise on practical tasks.

The Chamber also helps schools with a number of crucial tasks: analysing the local economic structure and business skills needs; developing the pre-work experience preparatory activities which take place within the school; training teachers to become school tutors and liaise with businesses; presenting the school and work alternation to local businesses and identifying enterprises willing to participate in the project; and helping schools and businesses to plan and manage together school and work alternation.

A full evaluation of the Italian system has not yet been conducted but the Chamber of Commerce has collected views from some of the pupils participating, as well as those of schools and enterprises (Casagrande et al., 2006). Schools and pupils have identified the following as key strengths of the approach:

- (a) increasing pupil motivation and engagement in learning activities, especially of those with a low level of interests in pure theoretical approaches;
- (b) developing cross-cutting skills such as team working, problem-solving and communication, and providing an opportunity to demonstrate skills that do not always receive recognition in the classroom;
- (c) integrating theoretical knowledge with a more practical approach;
- (d) providing pupils with a taste of a real working environment and requirements of the workplace.

Enterprises have praised the project because it equips pupils with practical and cross-cutting skills that are essential in the workplace but are generally not addressed by formal education.

### ***Berufsvorbereitungsjahr, Germany***

The *Berufsvorbereitungsjahr* (BVJ) is a one-year training course, generally offered on a full-time basis. It is targeted at young people who do not have a training contract, either because of the economic situation or because they do not have the required competences. Provision varies across the federal states and during the academic year 2006-07 the majority of participants came from Baden-Württemberg (12 300), Sachsen (7200), and Niedersachsen (7000).

The programme aims to provide young people with vocational guidance and to enable them to acquire vocational skills and capabilities. It also allows participants to become familiar with vocational demands, to identify their own individual preferences, and to assess and improve their personal achievement potential.

Vocational training is provided through full-time instruction, designed to give an introduction to one or two occupational fields. Alongside this, practical training takes place through internships and industrial placements in companies, at inter-company training centres, or in vocational training workshops for the disabled. As a result, young people can gain practical experience by working one or two days a week, as well as having theoretical lessons in general education and being taught by a teacher.

The majority of participants have no secondary school qualification (Hauptschulabschluss), which puts them at a considerable disadvantage in the labour market or if they wish to pursue further education. The BVJ gives participants the opportunity to catch up and work towards acquiring a secondary schools qualification.

From 1992 to 2002 the number of pupils taking part in the BVJ steadily increased. However, over the last two years school enrolment has declined by 7.4 % in relation to the previous academic year. During the academic year 2006-07 approximately 71 900 adolescents and young adults took part in the BVJ. Just under two-thirds were male (43 800 or 60.9 %); and 12 600 were foreigners (17.6 %).

Information for this example was compiled from two sources: The Eurydice 2006-07 Report on the education system in Germany and the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2008 Berufsbildungsbericht.

In Germany, the *Berufsvorbereitungsjahr* (BVJ) aims to prepare young people for in-company vocational training and helps them to choose a career. It

comprises both theoretical and practical training and gives participants the chance to work towards a secondary school qualification.

Alternance training initiatives highlight the importance of providing young people with a chance to access the working world. They show that young people, who may have had negative experiences of traditional theoretical learning, can be supported to develop relevant skills and competences, to gain increased confidence and motivation and to make informed decisions about their careers, through collaborative measures between education and training providers and employers.

In Italy, a number of success factors have been identified which can help to make alternation programmes work more smoothly. Schools stress the importance of working closely with employers when planning such activities; to enlist employers in the first instance, it is important to engage credible partners from the business community. In Italy both schools and business have identified the crucial role played by the Chamber of Commerce: without its mediation, schools would find it extremely difficult to engage the business community. Similarly, for the enterprises the engagement of the Chamber of Commerce gives more credibility to the project and it is seen as a guarantee that pupils are going to take the work experience seriously.

Finally, work experience placements need to be of a suitable length. Italian businesses have recommended longer work experience placements (from four to eight weeks), as this is considered to be the necessary timeframe to become familiar with the working environment and to acquire and consolidate practical skills.

#### 6.4. Supported transition: what works?

The measures explored in this chapter have highlighted a number of factors, which can help to ensure that the maximum benefits are achieved for the partners and young people involved in initiatives.

##### 6.4.1. Challenges in developing career management skills approach

The chapter showed that practice and theory concerning career management skills are still in their infancy and that many aspects remain open to debate and improvement. Some countries have expressed concern that the current understanding of career management skills could create an image of young people as lacking life-skills (Sultana, 2009a). CMS should acknowledge that young people learn a series of career management skills throughout their daily



activities, in both formal and informal settings. Additionally, there is the danger of proposing a separate CMS curriculum in the education sector; this could suggest that schools are otherwise ill-equipped to prepare students for life. Moreover, there is a need to strike a balance between the work and life-focused facets of the CMS concept. A 'life-wide approach' might dilute the CMS concept, placing it mainly under the school personal and social development curriculum, which traditionally has over-emphasised the personal psychological dimension of one's development to the detriment of the work-related dimension.

As well as the conceptual tensions around the CMS philosophy, EU members are faced with practical challenges. First, the CMS philosophy represents a multi-dimension approach to career guidance, requiring integration of information resources, learning providers, expertise, systems and tools (Sultana, 2009a). Further, although training is not always required to teach CMS, there is growing recognition of the importance of relevant teacher training. Matching the scarce supply with the high demand for CMS and providing young people at risk with access to CMS services are significant challenges. Due attention also needs to be paid to the difficulties of inserting CMS courses or themes in a crowded curriculum and of making sure students are intrinsically motivated to acquire career management competences.

There is still a lack of continuity between the CMS programmes in the two settings. In the labour market, the public employment service has mainly focused on helping the unemployed with immediate job decisions. Therefore, their CMS programmes often tend to have a short-term horizon, customised to target groups (in particular, those at risk), and not necessarily linked to the CMS learned at school (Sultana, 2009a). This approach reflects the 'curative' perspective on CMS, while schools tend to take a more 'preventive' approach to CMS.

Another differentiating element is the amount of time allocated to CMS activities across the EU countries, varying from four hours per year to two hours per week in school settings and from four to two hundred hours in PES settings.

#### **6.4.2. Access to career information centres**

Career information centres have the potential to help young people overcome a range of education and employment-related challenges and produce a range of personal benefits. Their potential advantages also include the possibility of their services having closer links to the labour market, the likelihood that career guidance will have a clear identity, and the increased possibility that guidance will be independent of the interests of the education institution (OECD, 2004a). Nevertheless, establishing a multi-agency service partnership does not happen



overnight and they have to be sufficiently resourced to provide a cohesive service to young people.

Further, without appropriate investments to ensure access for all, some of the most vulnerable young people will not benefit from the services of career information centres. To tackle physical access barriers, the Polish authorities have introduced mobile career information units that visit remote areas of the country. The services of career information centres can also be promoted through various other channels including outreach work (community based partner organisations can play a particularly important role), information sessions in schools and colleges, and advertising campaigns. However, it must be acknowledged that publicity campaigns will not reach all young people and therefore campaigns should always be complemented with more personal approaches).

Ensuring access can also mean overcoming financial barriers. For example, in the case of Connexions all calls from a landline to the personal advisers are free and an adviser can ring the young person back on his/her mobile, to ensure the cost of calls do not prevent access to the services. The helplines attached to the Connexions service is also open outside typical office hours.

Personal advisers play a critical role in the success of many career information centres. Young people form a strong relationship with the adviser and may have more confidence to discuss wider issues aside from those linked to education and employment. It is, however, essential that they provide advice that is accurate, comprehensive, timely, realistic and readily understood by young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Where they do not have specialist knowledge, they must be able to refer young people to someone who can help them.

#### **6.4.3. Extending the benefits of validation initiatives to at-risk groups**

Validation of non-formal and informal learning can be used to support young people to achieve a range of goals. Formative validation methods, developed either by the public sector or third sector organisations or even private companies, represent both a cost-effective and flexible approach to identifying and recording skills and competences gained outside a formal learning sphere. Young users can also record the types of activities they have been engaged in and use them to consider future career options, so developing career management skills. Validation can be used to support a range of different target groups, including young people from vulnerable backgrounds, if the process is supported and guided by trained professionals. It offers an opportunity to assist

the social and economic integration of disadvantaged groups by demonstrating to them and the outside world their abilities and achievements.

In practice, however, formative validation methods are currently being used by 'engaged' young people, those who are already very active and involved in a range of extra-curricular activities: non-formal training courses, volunteering, coaching or even employment. This is partly because they are aware of such methods through their involvement in youth associations, sport clubs, church groups and other bodies working with young people. They are also likely to have parents supporting participation on such initiatives.

Consequently, any initiative for young people considered to be at risk would need to be tailored to this specific target group. Professional guidance to support the individual beneficiary is essential and the development of validation initiatives should try to identify and address any barriers to access. Obstacles to validation are manifold for vulnerable young people who frequently lack information about it. Authorities in some countries, like Germany through the ProfilPASS initiative, fund initiatives to reach young people. In the Netherlands a project has been set up to reach the parents of disengaged young people and persuade them to support re-engagement through validation. The following are other ways in which validation methods could be supported to reach at-risk groups (modified by using the findings of a report prepared by Keogh, 2009):

- (a) putting in place over-arching national/regional/local policies, targets and funding directed at attracting young at-risk individuals into validation processes;
- (b) identifying sub-groups within what is a very heterogeneous group of disengaged young people: each group will need push/pull factors to encourage engagement;
- (c) encouraging trade unions to act as brokers for young people who are in employment;
- (d) reaching unemployed young people through labour/welfare offices as soon as possible after they have become unemployed;
- (e) enabling third sector organisations with strong community links to play a key role in reaching disengaged individuals;
- (f) establishing specific projects to reach vulnerable young people in collaboration with agencies and community groups working with disaffected young people;
- (g) funding information campaigns but recognising that they will not work for all;
- (h) using financial incentives;
- (i) putting in place information and guidance services to support young people to engage with validation;

- (j) establishing a user-friendly system of validation for young people with user-friendly language/tools/processes.

#### **6.4.4. Extending access to Internet-based guidance**

Internet-based career guidance helps young people in their career choices and the necessary steps towards achieving them. The review has shown that most services are orientated towards universal provision, accessible to all young people and – in some cases – adults. However, some sites provide services targeting young people at risk of dropping out and those who have dropped out already (for example, the Lithuanian Internet portal AIKOS).

There is also evidence to suggest that improvements are being made in relation to the fact that the education and training web portals have traditionally had poor links to labour market data (Cedefop, Sultana, 2004). This has been a concern, given that career guidance should develop individuals' understanding and realistic knowledge of the work of world and assist them to make suitable choices. The brief review of services in four countries implies that the situation is changing quite radically in a number of Member States and it is increasingly easy for users of web-based career services to access information on employment opportunities and prospects in different fields. Many web-based career services offer information on job opportunities on completion of different qualifications, including typical employers; typical work activities; general salary expectations and working conditions in different fields; entry requirements; continuing training opportunities and requirements; and career development.

Such information is available, for example, for the users of Finnish education portal *Opintoluotsi* ([www.opintoluotsi.fi](http://www.opintoluotsi.fi)). In Ireland, it is accompanied by photo slideshows of typical days in selected professions ([www.careerdirections.ie](http://www.careerdirections.ie)) and the Finnish website offers short films to illustrate work in different professions.

A major concern in many EU countries has been that Internet-based career information has been fragmented and unconnected, with different providers collecting different information. This has made it difficult for most users – hardtoreach groups in particular – to navigate through the information sources and make sense of different education and training options and associated career choices. The review of web-based services has shown that authorities in many EU countries are taking steps to harmonise web-based information and make the navigation process clearer and easier. One example is the AIKOS portal in Lithuania, a joint effort that includes all of the key actors in education, training and employment. A second example is *Opintoluotsi*, a Finnish online information service that brings together information on educational opportunities in Finland. This also links automatically to other key web-services, including the

portal through which applications to formal courses (from initial vocational education and training to higher education) are made, and the website which compares employment opportunities and prospects in all key occupations and fields.

It is obvious that many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds experience access problems with Internet-based tools, though this information is more widely and easily available than before. It is still important to bear in mind that Internet-based tools should be seen as one of many available support provisions for young people and all efforts should be made to widen access to Internet-based guidance tools at least in schools and other premises where young people spend time. Also, Internet portals cannot replace what personal advisers and guidance counsellors can do to help young people in their career and life decisions.

#### **6.4.5. Well-planned and organised work placements**

It has long been acknowledged by students, academics and employers alike that gaining work experience can improve employability for young people. Experiences that connect career education programmes more directly and experientially to the world of work can, for example, help young people understand the occupation implications of their education choices, improve their career management skills and act as bridge-builders into further education. Providing work placements also brings numerous benefits for employers.

However, work experience programmes must be well planned, organised, followed up and resourced to deliver benefits. Guidance, for both the young person and the employer, is essential for the success of a work experience scheme. To begin, effective brokerage arrangements between enterprises and schools are vital to ensure there are sufficient placements. Further, a clear set of learning outcomes should be identified by the school and discussed with the pupils and with the employer beforehand.

In Finland for example, a website (<http://www.peda.net/veraja/tori/>) has been created to support the compulsory school work experience programme, addressing students, parents, career guidance counsellors and employers. Adolescents can find practical advice about placement periods but the site is also useful for local employers who can advertise placements and learn how the work experience should be arranged in practice. The website also aids the work of teachers and study advisors, as all the necessary forms can be found there.

Students must be motivated to learn from their experience and must be willing to take responsibility for this learning (Pohjonen, 2002). They may need information on the opportunities available and help in making the choice about

which job placement to apply for. Further, by making a young person aware of what will be expected of them in the workplace, they are more likely to be able to form a positive relationship with the employer and other employees during the placement. In the case of the Swedish PRAO initiative, career guidance counsellors give lessons to inform pupils about the purpose of the work experience, the selection criteria and other practical details, prior to their placement.

Employers too should be aware of the purpose of the work placement and the expectations in terms of learning outcomes, to ensure that the young person is able to gain the maximum benefit from their time in the company and is exposed to as many learning opportunities as possible. The employer should ensure that the young person is overseen during the placement (Pohjonen, 2002) and, in most instances, the employer will nominate a mentor to support the learning.

The limitations of short-term work placements also need to be recognised. It is unlikely they would be able to assist the young person in developing specific vocational skills. It is also essential to ensure the placements are available to disaffected young people who have the potential of benefitting most from the experience.

The impact of the economic downturn on employment opportunities for young jobseekers can mean fewer work placement opportunities. This means that the advantages to be gained from work experience may be increased for those students who are able to find a dedicated employer willing to offer them a learning opportunity. A long-term view is important to maintain a good supply of skilled school leavers for the future.

#### **6.4.6. Combining practical and theoretical learning**

A key strength of vocational education and training is the link to the workplace and future employment. Where this can be assisted by work-based learning, young people are able to understand how the theory they learn in the classroom is relevant to a job. Work-based learning, such as apprenticeships and alternation measures, offer learners the chance to benefit from practice-based learning. For some learners this may be more appropriate to their learning style and may represent an opportunity to develop or demonstrate skills which may not receive recognition or encouragement through classroombased learning.

Working-life familiarisation measures may, however, simply demonstrate to young people how theoretical learning can be applied in the workplace. Going to work 'cannot be a completed course in itself' (Pohjonen, 2002) and should form only part of a course designed to support the young person to make the transition

to the labour market. Theoretical training should be in place to support work-based learning. For instance, key skills such as literacy and numeracy should still be acquired: it has been found that, for apprenticeships, teaching these at the start of the programme, while emphasising how they relate to the job role, can be more effective (Jones and Simister, 2007). Other factors that make work-based learning opportunities successful include:

- (a) providing an 'authentic' experience. Working-life familiarisation measures should support young people to understand the reality of the working world and what it is like to work in a certain job or field. It is important that the measure provides a realistic picture or experience to the young person. Young people undertaking work experience, for example, should be provided with a range of tasks (suited to their level of ability) which can be supplemented by work shadowing, to support their understanding of how different work tasks play a part in the running of the company (Trident, 2008);
- (b) creating strong relationships/partnerships. The interaction between education establishments, employers and students, as well as other relevant stakeholders, is considered essential to ensuring maximum success from work-based learning (Pohjonen, 2002). Close collaboration and regular communication can ensure that the placement or training meets the needs of all those involved and that expectations are appropriately managed. In the Italian alternance training scheme, for example, schools stress the importance of working closely with employers when planning activities. This means that the programme can be tailored to the needs of the enterprise as well as those of the individual;
- (c) providing guidance. This is central to working-life familiarisation initiatives. The role of guidance extends beyond the advice and information for the young person, to liaison with the employer. In the first instance, young people need to know what opportunities are available and may need help in deciding which is best for them. They should be supported to make choices (e.g. of work experience placements, of training opportunities) which are in line with their interests, abilities and learning styles and capacity. By finding the most appropriate opportunity for the young person, the host employer also benefits by hosting the most appropriate trainee. Parents may also wish to access guidance, as in the Austrian Career catching counsellors project, to support their child in making the right decisions about their future;
- (d) identified learning outcomes and methods of recording and assessing these. It is important that any working-life familiarisation measure has a clear aim in terms of the young person's learning. Both the learner and the employer

should understand the intended learning outcomes of the initiative and be committed to these. It is also important to require the preparation of reports or assignments to support work-based learning (Pohjonen, 2002) and the employer should provide feedback to the education/training provider after a work experience placement ends (Trident, 2008);

- (e) valuing work-based learning. For vocational training opportunities which represent an alternative to academic routes, it is important to ensure that these are not seen as a 'second best' option for weaker learners, since this can be demotivating and can lead to higher levels of drop-out. Where vocational training is given greater status and is based on strong collaboration between providers and employers, there is a greater chance that it will be successful.

## 7. Conclusions

Research has shown that reforms have taken, and are taking, place across Europe to transform education and training, in order to meet better the needs of young people who have already dropped out or are at risk of doing so. Such reforms have included creating alternative learning options, developing more comprehensive and tailored delivery methods, widening choices, providing better and more targeted support, addressing barriers to participation, and making practical changes such as tracking young people more effectively. These reforms appear to be making a difference as official statistics indicate that the number of early school leavers in Europe is declining, albeit at a much slower pace than anticipated.

That said, in many European countries young people appear remarkably resistant to the wide range of interventions established and, in certain areas and contexts, the number of people failing to make successful transition to employment is increasing. This is particularly relevant in the context of the current economic crisis as youth unemployment is likely to remain high over the coming months. Even when the recovery begins, competition for jobs is likely to be intense. Low-skilled individuals, including early school leavers, can find themselves 'trapped' as higher qualified and skilled peers secure the few jobs available.

While successful practice in aiding the learning-to-work transition has been identified, more needs to be done. This study has identified a number of principles underpinning the effective delivery of guidance to prevent early school leaving or to support the transition, regardless of the context in which the guidance is delivered. Some of these factors are pertinent to both preventive as well as remedial measures.

The analysis presented in this report suggests that coordination, a strategic overview, long-term/sustainable funding are often missing and are too focused on project-based approaches. There is growing recognition that effective practice in efforts to prevent early school leaving comprises a professional approach, joined-up structures, personalised guidance, and thinking 'outside the box' when considering ways of supporting young people in their transition from education to the world of work.

One of the key conclusions from the study is that coordinated approaches must be combined with outreach work in order to identify and reach those individuals who are in most urgent need of support (hardest-to-help groups).



Community groups, mentors and organisations representing minority and disadvantaged groups can play an important role here by providing informal and non-formal guidance. It is vital that all young people, including the most hard to reach and disadvantaged, are able to access appropriate and good quality guidance. If guidance is to have a significant impact across all young people, it must have the necessary strategies and resources in place to reach those who are often ignored by mainstream measures because they are not easy to reach.

It is not enough simply to support young people: front-line support staff need to be appropriately selected, trained, coordinated and then continuously supported. This includes professionals as well as volunteers from a range of different agencies, organisations and schools working with young people. Support staff should also be provided with opportunities to exchange experiences with their peers. Further, the study has found that initial and continuing teacher training should become an important part of the overall policy approach to encouraging school completion, as dissatisfaction and difficulties with school-level processes are some of the main reasons young people drop out early. Access to good quality, initial and continuing teacher-training is made all the more important by the fact that, in many countries, teachers are responsible for delivering career guidance and play a central role in identifying young people experiencing difficulties in school. This is also highlighted by the new Strategic framework for education and training in the EU (Education and training 2020).

A difficult challenge for guidance professionals and other teaching staff involved in providing guidance services to at-risk young people is learning how to establish a good working relationship with the young people in question. The partnership between parties needs to be based on mutual trust and respect but also needs to place the interests of the young people first.

Further, the study has found that parental involvement plays a key role in motivating and supporting young people in education and training. Evidence from literature and the case studies shows clearly that not only can parental involvement have a significantly positive impact on the young person's education and development, it can also benefit the parents themselves, the school and the wider community. Young people who are supported and encouraged to succeed in their education and training by their parents are less likely to disengage from school. In many cases, it can also build a solid foundation for learning throughout life. Parental and community involvement is particularly beneficial for young people at risk of disaffection with the education and training system and can provide an effective framework of support to facilitate (re)integration. Regarding career guidance, involving parents in the process can ensure that they have a

wellinformed, and supportive rather than controlling influence on their children's career choices.

This study has identified a number of effective ways of promoting parental involvement: keeping parents and local communities informed of school news and events, providing parents with regular information on how their child is doing at school, and informing parents of what the school expects of them (such as attendance at parents' evenings). However, while good practice exists, there is evidence to suggest that the influence of national and European policies promoting parental involvement has not always filtered down to the school level.

Another important component underpinning many of the successful case studies is a multi-agency approach to delivering career guidance and personal, social and academic support for young people. Such an approach reduces over-reliance on single guidance providers and offers an opportunity to provide a more holistic guidance service. It also prevents the chances of young people 'slipping through the net', or missing out on support appropriate to their needs due to lack of coordination across the range of support services offered. Adequate funding is particularly important for such an approach to work, as the creation of a true partnership between a range of different actors, agencies and professionals takes time and resources. The potential long-term benefits can, however, be significant, as an integrated, strategic approach can maximise synergies between guidance initiatives and external partners.

Another key ingredient of successful guidance for at-risk groups is involving young people in the design of the policies and approaches. Relatively few examples were found of policies taking this approach to design or delivery of activities, although their involvement has the potential to bring some of the greatest benefits. This was illustrated by the Notschool.net case study, which fundamentally changed its system of guidance delivery following feedback from young people.

Successful guidance policies take into consideration the specific situation of each individual, rather than adopting a 'blanket' or 'one size fits all' approach. Consequently, the policies recognise that early school leavers are a heterogeneous group, from diverse backgrounds and with varied needs and aspirations. While guidance is a universal right, tailored approaches ensure that each individual receives support appropriate to their level of ability and additional needs, and can help to maintain the sustained participation of the young person.

Finally, it is evident from this study that guidance is an indispensable ingredient in any policy that seeks to speed up education-to-work transition and reduce the economic and social costs associated with early school leaving. Guidance provided through informal and non-formal means can prove vital in the

absence of professional guidance, but access to formal guidance should be available to all, especially those at-risk. Smooth and rapid education-to-work transitions are likely to become increasingly important as the EU faces a decline in its working-age population from 2020 (as indicated in the European Commission's Communication on New skills for new jobs).

The conclusions concern the three specific themes of this study; preventive approaches, reintegration measures and working-life familiarisation.

## 7.1. Preventive approaches

Successful preventive approaches take a long-term view, are systematic and comprehensive, and are adequately targeted, funded and resourced. Early interventions, as soon as signs of difficulties are detected, are critical to avoid the cumulative development of problems that increase the chances of the young person dropping out. It is increasingly argued that prevention begins with providing high quality pre-school education, accessible for all.

Early interventions in the school context work through careful monitoring of young people's attendance, behaviour and achievement patterns. Where underachievement or poor behaviour and attendance patterns are identified, these should first be addressed using the resources available at the school. If unsuccessful, bespoke support can be accessed through support networks such as counsellors, mediation services, careers information centres, outreach workers, mentors and peer support systems. The decisive feature that underpins this work is the fact that the support should not be forced on the young person and the guidance provided is high quality, multi-dimensional, impartial and person-centred.

As the case study and literature evidence demonstrates, effective preventive approaches focus on guiding young people through key transition points, such as supporting transition from one level of education to another, and into employment. A relationship with a trusted support worker, such as a mentor or a personal adviser, is one of the most effective ways of helping a young person through a transition point. Such support, however, is not available to many young people due to the high delivery costs.

Area-based approaches have the potential for reducing the level of early school leaving, although the criticism levied at them is that the funding tends to be spread too thinly to make a real impact. The Dutch area-based approach, which offers secondary schools financial incentives to introduce activities supporting school completion, seems effective. The activity is centred around

flexibility, as local solutions are sought and decided on by each municipality with a network of relevant partners, and they centre on guidance, early identification of at-risk groups and providing alternative learning opportunities.

Collecting and sharing quality data is essential. It was evident from the analysis of good practice examples that many preventive approaches lack formal evaluation evidence to demonstrate their success. Much of the evidence is anecdotal. High-quality monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to show whether a project is working well or whether improvements could be made and to ensure that provision is continually evolving in line with changing contexts. Further, only some of the guidance-oriented developments reviewed result from an in-depth, systematic assessment of the needs of their users, although they often require huge investments of public funds.

Many project promoters also face a dilemma concerning the difficulties associated with targeting particular groups. For example a number of mentoring projects reviewed as part of this study (e.g. the Rise and follow your dreams project in Denmark and scholarship and mentoring projects in Hungary) have expanded their targets from minority groups to all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. While these projects now have the potential of benefitting a greater range of young people, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some of the new projects are not necessarily then able to reach all of those in need of most acute support. However, given the nature of the client group for such projects, time is required to develop appropriate links and develop trust based relationships.

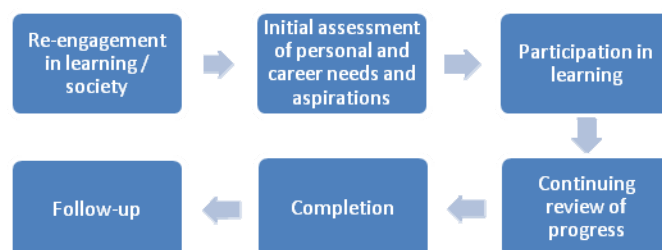
Evidence also implies that local and 'target-group specific NGOs' can play a very important role in identifying, reaching and supporting those in greatest need of guidance and support. This has been apparent, for example, from the Roma mentoring projects in Hungary and other eastern European and Balkan countries.

## 7.2. Reintegration measures

Research shows that disengagement results from a range of factors, all of which need to be addressed before it is possible for young people either to return to learning or integrate into the labour market. This study has found that the reintegration of a young, disengaged person into mainstream education, training or employment begins with an assessment of their needs and aspirations. The process then continues with their participation in learning and continuous review of their progress through to employment. It is important that the journey does not end when the young person enters employment but that support is received

through to their first steps into the mainstream. This progression pathway is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. **Supported reintegration journey**



Source: GHK Consulting, 2009.

Outreach workers, mentors, role models, guidance professionals and others who work with young people can encourage and impact upon re-engagement, though re-engagement itself comes when the young person takes personal responsibility for learning and career development objectives. Professionals and others can support young people, but cannot force participation. Targeted support at an early stage can often prove most effective. Role models and mentors can help to raise aspirations, revive an interest and enthusiasm for learning and widen the horizons of the young person through highlighting the benefits associated with participation. Those young people who are in need of support can be identified at an early stage through tracking, linked to soft contact and re-engagement before young people become completely disengaged.

Young people's appetite for learning can be stimulated through holistic, tailored approaches, specific to their needs. Support systems such as the relay classes (France) and holistic interventions such as youth schools (Lithuania) and Youthreach (Ireland) can be delivered over different timescales, depending on the nature of support required. Such projects aim to stimulate interest through the offer of alternative learning opportunities and/or environments which do not necessarily resemble formal schooling, at least in the early stages. This might include providing young people the freedom to choose the subjects they want to study from a wide variety of topics, or using alternative methods of learning.

The initial assessment of the young person's needs, aspirations and motivations is crucial. It is essential to ensure that the support delivered is appropriate to the young person's needs and that it is provided by appropriate, experienced and knowledgeable professionals. It should also act as the first stage in what should be a continuous review of progress and examination of learning goals. For example, in the UK Notschool.net project, the review of progress (academic, social and personal) takes place on constantly to ensure the

support measures and learning opportunities provided are suitable. Young people should be integrated into the review process as it provides opportunity to highlight their successes and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Strengthening a young person's ability to deal with problems and barriers is important to strengthen their ability to understand that they are likely to face setbacks. This is particularly important for those young people who are unsuccessful in their chosen activities, since they can often find that their expectations have been raised but not fulfilled. In addition, the costs associated with continued disengagement are high.

While assisting a young person to become re-engaged is a key output of guidance, it is only part of the process. Ensuring that they remain engaged is vital. Despite the importance of after-care, the research has shown that it is not always available. This is often the case where guidance providers have been contracted to provide a service that has a clear end point. Should this occur, community outreach workers and personal advisors from career information centres who provide a holistic service to young people can provide after-care. It is important that any support measures provide young people with the details of where they can get further help, or equip them with the skills they need to find out where support can be accessed.

The reintegration journey highlights that guidance is a continuum which provides support for the passage from disengagement to re-engagement. It is through appropriate support measures, tailored to the needs of the individual and delivered by a range of actors, that young people can be re-engaged and subsequently make the transition into the labour market.

### 7.3. Education-to-work transitions

The demographic time-bomb is also important in terms of the time taken to make education-to-work transitions. In the future, this process may need to speed up as the retiring baby boomers leave the labour market in greater numbers. Transition comprises two interrelated elements that help young people take career decisions: the development of career management skills and the opportunity to familiarise oneself with the world of work.

Helping young people to develop the skills to manage their careers and take decisions that allow them to access and operate in the labour market throughout their working lives, at a level commensurate with their skills and abilities, is critical to shortening the time taken to make the transition from education to work.

Equipping young people with the capacity to appreciate their skills and competences and allow them to understand how they need to continue to develop throughout their working lives is a means through which lifelong learning is embedded.

While career management is relatively new as a visible or defined concept, it is based on sound and well-established principles: young people need to be able to understand themselves, their skills, competences and aspirations and match these to available opportunities. Developed in a soft learning environment, the validation approaches identified in Section 6.2.4 demonstrate how career management skills can be embedded in other activities which make their acquisition palatable to disengaged youth and so lead to a recognised output. The importance of such skills is necessary given the proliferation of information sources available: young people require the critical analysis skills to identify what information is relevant to them and when to seek additional support from guidance professionals.

There has been a transformation and expansion of guidance delivery mechanisms and options. These now range from multi-agency service centres, addressing the guidance needs of young people in a holistic manner, to sophisticated, integrated online information and communication tools. The study showed that, while barriers to accessing Internet-based systems remain, they are used extensively and increasingly to deliver information, advice and guidance. Efforts to harmonise and integrate web-based information services and link them to labour market information are improving the quality of information and making navigation easier and career information more easily available to a wider audience. Use of innovative online tools such as blogs, chat facilities, podcasts and videocasts offer new and alternative methods of communicating information about jobs and careers to existing and new target groups. While careers advice information is sufficient for many, this is not the case for most disaffected young people, who need to be supported in a more holistic manner and often a one-to-one basis or in some cases through group guidance.

Validating non-formal and informal learning can enable young people to record the types of activities they have been engaged in and help them to consider future career options, building foundations for developing career management skills. Validation methods can be used to support young people from vulnerable backgrounds when they are guided by trained professionals.

Programmes, such as *Ammattistartti* allow young people to try different career options and routes, visit work and training places and access professional career guidance and other support options to explore different career and job opportunities before selecting their study or employment route. These have the

potential to aid smooth transition from one education level to another and from education to employment.

Familiarisation with the world of work is important for all young people, particularly for those who have become disengaged from education and training. It enables young people to learn by doing, and offers a kinaesthetic learning style, which may suit those who have become disenchanted with traditional schooling.

Work experience allows young people to get a real taste of the working world. It can help them to identify what they are really interested in and to eliminate career options which do not suit them. For those young people who have become disengaged from education and/or society, work experience can allow them to start afresh and gives them the opportunity to learn, use and gain recognition for skills and competences, which may not be taught or sufficiently recognised in traditional academic routes. Perhaps most important, work experience is a valuable addition to a young person's portfolio of skills and experience and can enhance employability. In the current economic climate, this is a particular asset.

Equally important is practical support for companies to take on young trainees, as previous crises have shown that employer investment in initial training, mainly through the provision of apprenticeship places, reduces at times of crises.



## 8. Recommendations

These points are structured around generic recommendations from the study and the four key priority areas set out by the 2008 Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (*Resolution of the Council ...*, 2008) to help support the lifelong career transitions of European citizens.

### 8.1. General recommendations from the study

Guidance should not be seen as one of many approaches to supporting transition: it should be seen as an integral part of any approach to tackling this problem and be embedded in preventive, corrective and transitional management. Therefore, it is important that guidance moves from an implicit to an explicit policy response.

Guidance should also be seen as a continuum: it is not about supporting a young person at a specific point in their life only, but is something that extends over time and out into the community and the workplace. This stems from the complex nature of the world of work today, in which career preparation is no longer limited to a career for life but is characterised by shorter-term career cycles. Individuals, therefore, need to be equipped with transferable skills and the ability to manage their own career path.

Underpinning the delivery of guidance services, young people need to be empowered through a relationship which sees them as resourceful individuals with a lot of untapped potential, rather than as trouble-makers or underachievers. Practitioners have an important role to play in promoting high expectations, as educational and career aspirations developed during teenage-years can have lifelong significance, influencing future occupational and socioeconomic outcomes. It is important to recruit and support the continuing development of talented and committed individuals for such roles.

In the context of early school leaving, the job of guidance counsellors, teachers and others is to influence individual behaviour positively by helping to raise young people's aspirations, support them with their education and career efforts and identify problems before they escalate too far. To influence their lives more broadly they need time, flexibility and training – both initial training as well

as opportunities for continuing training – to develop the skills necessary for working with disaffected young people.

There is a need to invest in transition support and after-care. This is an area where there is underinvestment at present. Such an approach supports the view that guidance is a continuum.

As has been seen with the Education and training 2010 targets, there is a need to take a long-term view and commit adequate resources to prevent early school leaving. Bespoke guidance solutions are normally, although not necessarily, more expensive than mainstream provisions, hence both time and resources are required to put in place and deliver such services. However, there is merit in seeing expenditure on such policies as an investment rather than as a cost, given the high costs associated with disengagement.

Person-centred approaches are important, though in the initial stages guidance may be led by professionals working with young people. At some point during the continuum, responsibility for re-engagement needs to be taken on by the young person concerned: such an approach gives young people the skills to take responsibility for their own progress and cope with setbacks. It also gives them a sense of independence and having control over their own destiny.

## 8.2. **Priority area 1: encourage lifelong acquisition of career management skills**

It is important that teachers and trainers have the necessary skills to help young people to develop career management skills and apply them in both the transition into work and throughout their working lives. An understanding of career management needs to be integrated into mainstream education and training, with the acquisition of appropriate skills as a key output. CMS also need to be part of IVET and any alternative curricula for young people at risk.

Concerns have been raised that the guidance offer that accompanies IVET is not at an equivalent standard to that in mainstream education. There is a need to ensure that the same quality service offer is available to young people pursuing a vocational route.

Consideration needs to be given to how CMS contributes to employability. Theoretically, CMS helps reduce the transition (though this needs to be proven), hence providing such skills to the at-risk/excluded should improve employability and promote equity and inclusion.

There is merit in considering whether national frameworks for CMS are appropriate and required.

While there is evidence of good practice in developing career management skills, this should be transferred across Europe. Peer learning activity(ies) could provide an opportunity for this transfer: the peer learning activities have so far concentrated on the role of CMS in the school curricula and in the services provided by the public employment services.

While various studies demonstrate that work experience is a positive experience, it would be worth discovering what difference such experience makes in the education-to-work transition. For example, does work experience shorten the process? Does it contribute to career development and/or salary progression?

In the context of demographic change, working life familiarisation should be promoted as a two-way process: an opportunity for young people to acquaint themselves with the world of work as well as an opportunity for employers to familiarise themselves with the local talent pool.

### 8.3. **Priority area 2: access for all to guidance services**

It is important that young people are aware of guidance support on offer and understand what difference it might make. Providing information to individuals and communities to demonstrate the benefits of guidance is essential to increasing support and aiding re-engagement. Given the current demographic change taking place in Europe and the increasing demand for skilled labour in the move towards 2020, empowering individuals, families and indeed communities to request support is paramount, particularly among communities that may be marginalised, e.g. Roma and immigrant communities.

Given the proliferation of information sources, it is important to consider how guidance professionals support young people in accessing information. Signposting to useful sources is important to ensure that young people are not deterred by sifting through a range of irrelevant sources. Accessibility is also crucial, including aspects like the language used, etc.

### 8.4. **Priority area 3: quality assurance in guidance provision**

Consideration needs to be given to developing quality standards in recruitment, training and development of guidance staff.

Further research could be beneficial to demonstrate the costs and benefits of guidance and its role in prevention, reintegration and facilitating transitions. While effective practice illustrates how guidance can be used, cost-effectiveness evidence will help make the case for developing such services. High-quality monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to show whether a project is working well or whether improvements could be made and to ensure that provision is continually evolving in line with changing contexts.

Support should be impartial, multi-dimensional, realistic and specific and provided by experienced and knowledgeable advisers who understand the world of work and the range of different learning opportunities available for young people. These advisers should be able to signpost young people to other, more appropriate organisations when they cannot help.

More evaluation is need of preventive approaches. It is important to develop new initiatives based on knowledge of what works and such evaluation needs to communicate effectively the costs and benefits associated with these approaches.

Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring that teachers providing guidance and guidance practitioners know the local and the wider labour market context and so are to provide wellinformed and targeted guidance services.

#### 8.5. **Priority area 4: encourage stakeholder cooperation**

To cope and thrive in this challenging work, guidance practitioners should seek to establish good working partnerships with other professionals (psychologists, career guidance counsellors, etc.) and agencies working with the young person. Such a network can prove a valuable source of support for both the young person and the practitioner.

While there is evidence of multi-agency approaches identified in the case studies, such approaches are not present in all countries. An aim for the future is to ensure that comprehensive multi-agency approaches or true partnership-working becomes the norm, accessible for all young people.

Preventive strategies need to operate within a strategic and integrated approach to minimising drop-out. Multi-agency, joined-up approaches are required to ensure that young people do not fall through the cracks in service provision. The examples identified in this report need to be communicated to policy makers, to ensure that they learn from practice and do not reinvent the wheel.

The role of young people in policy dialogue needs to be developed and expanded. Too often, guidance partnerships are based on collaboration between different agencies and leave out the service users: young people ideally placed to provide constructive feedback on the effectiveness and operational practices of guidance services. Policy-makers need to ensure that they create the time and provide appropriate space to involve young people in the policy process: getting input from youth organisations on new policies, investing in evaluation, and organising feedback sessions or questionnaires to find out what young people actually think about the guidance services they have used and how they would improve them.

In light of the current economic crisis it is important that employers, especially SMEs, are given the necessary support to be able to offer apprenticeships and traineeships. Financial constraints have led many employers to reduce significantly the number of apprentices and trainees they are able to take on. In some cases, companies have ceased their traineeship programmes altogether. This is where dedicated coordinators from schools, VET establishments and reintegration programmes can offer real added value, for example by coordinating placements and helping young people to adjust to them.

## List of abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BVJ	<i>Berufsvorbereitungsjahr</i>
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CES	Croatian Employment Service
CMS	Career management skills
CREA	Special Centre for Research in Theories and Practices for Overcoming Inequalities
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DOTS	Decision-learning, opportunity awareness, transition learning and self-awareness
EEA	European Economic Area
EENEE	European Expert Network on Economics of education
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
ESF	European Social Fund
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
HEI	Higher education institutes
IAWM	Institution of Vocational Training for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
ISKUR	Public Employment Services (Turkey)
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
MONE	Directorate for Special Education, Guidance and Counselling (Turkey)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Public employment services
PLYA	Project learning for young adults
PPRE	<i>Programme personnalisé de réussite éducative</i>
RAM	Guidance and research centres (Turkey)
RMI	Revenu minimum d'insertion
RVCC	The Portuguese system of recognition, validation and certification of competences
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SNJ	National Youth Service
VET	Vocational education and training
VLC	Voluntary labour corps
WRE	Work-related education
YGC	Youth guidance centre

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ANNEX 1

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## Guiding at-risk youth through learning to work: lessons from across Europe

The global economic crisis has given greater focus to improving guidance services for at-risk youth to support social inclusion, active participation in lifelong learning and smooth integration into working life. This Cedefop report draws attention to guidance measures and initiatives applied across Europe to aid school completion and education-to-work transitions of young people who risk dropping out of mainstream education and training or who already have done so.

The study suggests that coordinated approaches should be combined with outreach work to identify and reach those individuals who are in most urgent need of support. The partnership between different actors needs to be based on mutual trust and respect but also needs to place the interests of the young people first. Guidance professionals and teaching staff providing guidance services should learn how to establish a good working relationship with at-risk youth. Further, parental involvement, together with competent teachers, guidance practitioners, youth and social workers, labour-market actors, and healthcare providers, are considered essential support in the young person's transition.

The findings of this Cedefop study should encourage future action in the Member States on improving guidance service provision to at-risk youth. The overall goal across the European Union is to create good conditions for supporting young people's smooth transition from adolescence into a meaningful adulthood, with career and learning opportunities, partnership and parenthood, financial and residential independence.



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