

Publication 3

School-based Prevention and Intervention Measures and Alternative Learning Approaches to Reduce Early School Leaving

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About the RESL.eu project

The RESL.eu project aims to provide insights into the processes influencing early leaving of education or training. In addition, RESL.eu intends to identify and analyse prevention, intervention and compensation measures that aim to keep pupils in education or training until they attain at least an upper secondary education qualification. Its ultimate aim lies in the development of generic conceptual models based on research to predict and tackle early school leaving (ESL), and finally, to disclose these insights to various target audiences at local, national and EU levels.

The project's focus is on the development and implementation of education policies, and the transferability of country-specific good practices. RESL.eu also seeks to understand the mechanisms behind, processes leading to and trajectories following ESL through focussing on the actions, perceptions and discourses of all youngsters (ESL and not-ESL), as well as those of their significant others (family, peer group, school staff and principals). The project builds on existing practices to tackle ESL and intends to develop innovative approaches for regular schools as well as for alternative learning arenas.

Key Work Packages

WP1 – Developing a theoretical and methodological framework for studying ESL in nine different EU member states

WP2 – Comparative policy analysis of ESL policies on different policy levels & field descriptions

WP3 – Quantitative data collection and analysis (i.e., longitudinal student survey and staff survey)

WP4 – Qualitative data collection and analysis (i.e., longitudinal approach using bio-interviews and theory-based stakeholder evaluations of prevention, intervention and compensatory measures)

WP5 – Developing a risk assessment tool & conceptual models for the best possible / most promising practices in school-based prevention/intervention and compensatory pathways using triangulation of data and findings

How and where the project operates

In nine EU member states (Belgium, UK, Sweden, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Hungary and Austria), two local urban research areas were involved in a comparative policy analysis of ESL policies on the EU, national/regional and local level.

Quantitative data are collected in two waves among at least 1500 youngsters in each country across two different urban research areas (except in Hungary and Austria). In each country, school staff and school administrators are also surveyed.

Qualitative data is collected across seven member states: at least two bio-interviews are conducted with 24-32 selected youngsters per country. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students and staff have also taken place across 28 schools and 24 alternative learning arenas that were carefully selected based on the first wave of the student survey data and the field descriptions of local educational landscapes.

Introduction

In this third RESL.eu Publication, we present the findings of the cross-case analyses of both **school-based prevention and intervention** measures, as well as measures instituted in **institutions providing compensatory/alternative pathways** for individuals that have left regular secondary education without an upper secondary education qualification in Europe. The main rationale that guides this publication is that there is a pressing need to detect (features of) measures that are promising in the reduction of early school leaving in Europe, both in- and outside mainstream education. In this Publication, we present an extended executive **summary of two project papers** (i.e., Nouwen et al., 2015; Van Praag et al., 2016) that present the findings of the cross-case analyses in a broader and deeper way, and include more information on the specific case studies and their institutional contexts.

During the analyses, we made use of the **theory-based stakeholder evaluation method** to collect information on the official scope and aims of a specific measure. This method starts from a document analysis and confronts this 'programme theory' with an analysis of the discursive congruence of the stakeholders' discourses with respect to the measure's scope and aim, (reasons for) participation, ownership and outcome experience. The interview-based data collection was focussed on **three types of respondents**: the designers, mostly school management; the implementers, mostly teachers and support staff; and the target groups, who were the youngsters involved in these measures; most of them considered at risk of or having experienced ESL.

In the **first part** of this publication, we will provide an overview of the main findings with regard to different types of school-based prevention and intervention measures, including an overview of contextual preconditions. In the **second part**, we discuss the main findings concerning compensatory/alternative learning approaches for youngsters who have left regular education (early). In the **general conclusions**, we will reflect upon what policy makers and education and training providers – both in and outside mainstream education – can learn from the experiences of fellow practitioners and the voices of youngsters. It is important to note here that while we place the measures into categories in order to facilitate their interpretation and analysis, these

specific categories are not exclusive, but permeable. To make the presentation of findings more tangible, we include examples of promising practices throughout this publication to illustrate these categories; we recognize, however, that these examples could fit in more than one category.

Part I: School-based prevention and intervention measures

The first part of this publication addresses school-based prevention and intervention measures directly or indirectly aimed at reducing early school leaving. The chapter on findings from measures designed and implemented in mainstream education will further be divided into two sections. In the first, we will focus upon the findings regarding the concrete types of measures while categorizing them in four broad categories: 1) early warning systems, 2) academic support, 3) emotional and behavioural support and 4) career guidance. In a second section, we will discuss the contextual preconditions that are argued by the staff and students involved to be crucial for measures to be designed and implemented effectively. These contextual preconditions are often considered as an interesting starting point for the design of measures outside mainstream education, and therefore, help to join the first two main parts of this publication together.

Early Warning Systems

Our findings regarding early warning systems showed that the idea of approaching early school leaving as a process that can be altered by timely prevention and intervention measures is broadly supported by school staff. Like many educational policy makers, school staff in general seems to be convinced that the detection and monitoring of early risk indicators is necessary. Because schools often receive government funding for early warning systems, they often subscribe to a broader policy framework designed by local and regional/national governments. Schools, however, often have a certain amount of flexibility with respect to the allocation of funds; they are responsible for applying the funding to issues they see as most relevant in their institutional

context. Most early warning systems focus on the detection of more overt cognitive and behavioural indicators like students' grades, truancy or transgressive behaviour. Only a few early warning systems also systematically aim at detecting and monitoring student's emotional well-being. Staff members (e.g., class teachers and support staff) often try to detect early signals of emotional distress during their one-on-one contact moments with students.

Our findings show that designing and implementing these early warning systems requires schools to have the capacity to interpret risk indicators and design measures that respond to them. We will discuss the importance of the support and professionalisation of teachers as a contextual precondition below. Another risk factor for early warning systems is that they mostly focus on overt indicators of 'reduced' engagement, such as students' grades, truancy or transgressive behaviour, despite these indicators not grasping emotional issues that could influence the process of ESL; nor do they address the contextual social factors influencing such a process. Students who do not display their high-risk status via diminishing achievement or transgressive behaviour could therefore be slipping past the radar unseen. Finally, the efficiency of early warning systems should be evaluated based upon the intervention measures schools can design and implement to respond to low levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural school engagement as symptoms of wider social conditions.

An example: RONI scheme and Support Option in the UK

The 'Risk Of NEET Indicator' (RONI) is a prognosis and monitoring tool to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) early in their secondary school studies, in order to provide them with adequate support to finish their education and gain their diploma.

RONI is a School Information Management System. Through this, data related to NEET risk factors is collected and stored about each student in the school. For instance, in Barnet, one borough in North-West London where we conducted research, the following NEET risk factors have been identified: low academic attainment, high absenteeism, being in care, special educational needs, living in a deprived area, eligibility to pupil premium (connected to low

family income), being involved with the social services, certain ethnic backgrounds, joining the school later, English as an additional language, exclusion from school, gender. Schools and local authorities can amend this list of risk factors based on local knowledge. RONI then awards points based on a weighted scale, which results in a cumulative score that identifies overall vulnerability and risk for each student. Schools are expected to individually assess the young people identified through RONI and provide adequate support for them.

The RONI scheme in Barnet was initiated by the Local Authority to ensure a consistent and uniform approach across schools in the boroughs. The scheme was developed and refined in collaboration with schools, and informed by research on educational inequalities and youth transitions. Locally specific RONI tools are being used in several local authorities in England.

In one of the schools that took part in our research, students identified by RONI are strongly advised to have the 'Support Option' as part of their curriculum. Depending on individual needs, the Support Option can include a combination of academic support, English language support (if appropriate), functional skills in literacy and numeracy, and tailored Vocational and Life Skills courses at an external partner organisation – usually local colleges.

Academic Support

Tutoring support measures

One of the main measures responding to early warning systems' detection of risk indicators at the cognitive level is the provision of academic support through tutoring. Its prominent place in schools' intervention measures can – at least partly – be explained by its close connection to what stakeholders perceive as the core tasks of teaching and education in general. Crucial protective elements for tutoring are the high awareness and commitment of educational actors about their necessity and relevance, the (perceived) effect on students' achievement, and the often school-wide approach.

A major risk factor of tutoring support measures – and additional tutoring support in particular – is that they are mostly limited to students that (voluntarily) show sufficient motivation to participate. School staff repeatedly argued that

students considered most at risk only seldom participate in additional tutoring. Moreover, due to budgetary constraints, teachers often take up these additional tutoring tasks on a voluntary basis, on top of their 'regular' teaching courses. These constraints make tutoring all too often dependent upon the willingness of the stakeholders involved.

An example: Tutorial Action Plan in Spain

The Tutorial Action Plan is a school-wide measure in Spain that includes a personal and academic monitoring as well as an academic and professional orientation. It is developed through individual and group counselling sessions and meetings with families, as well coordination meetings between teaching staff and other professionals. In general, this includes classroom strategies (climate, management and dynamics) and learning strategies (methodological, didactic and assessment). Tutoring is a collective task for the whole teach-



ing-staff, but it especially involves the tutor-teacher of each class in collaboration with the school's orientation department and the local EAP (Educational Psychology Advisory Team). It is offered in all the years of compulsory secondary school (ESO), Baccalaureate and some Vocational tracks (i.e., PFIs).

The main aim is to monitor and support the educational trajectories of students. In the first years of secondary education, it is expected to motivate students to become involved in the teaching and learning process, and to get to know the students to implement personalized comprehensive strategies (performance and wellbeing). In the last years, the emphasis is placed on the guidance for further academic or training itineraries.

Each school has the capacity to plan, develop and assess the PAT and organise the resources received by the Department of Education. One of the schools analysed in Spain has a tutor and a co-tutor in each class. The advantage of this system is that each tutor has a maximum of ten students and can work more intensively with the family *and* the student; additionally, they get the rest of the teachers involved in a weekly meeting for each level in order

to carry out an intense monitoring. This monitoring can be regarded as a successful measure to prevent school dropout and to promote continuity to post-compulsory education.

“For the entrance exam, she let us study in class, I don’t know, she really kept an eye on us, ‘remember you have to enrol’... She helped us and we stayed to take them, so we knew how to do them. She really helped us a lot [...] Yes and she was on top of us, because of course since there were a lot of people doing it on their own and other people who were letting it slip, they weren’t preparing, then she would support them saying ‘come on, get going’ and they did it.” (Student).

Special Needs Education (SEN) support

School responses to special educational needs (SEN) discussed in this publication are restricted to accommodating SEN students within a regular school context. In this section, we will focus on the cognitive dimension, as measures responding to emotional and behavioural needs are discussed below. Across the different country reports, different SEN measures included in schools providing specialised SEN staff and support as a basic provision, having an explicit inclusive whole-school policy approach with both integrated classes and separate classes to accommodate students with learning disabilities. Based upon the data from the different case studies, special educational needs measures are often implemented by use of multidisciplinary teams, smaller teacher-student ratios and adapted curricula.

Schools that pay attention to students with special educational needs, often do so as part of a ‘caring and supportive nature’ of a specific school and/ or institutionalised in the educational system, and as such can also depend heavily on government investments. It is often part of a more comprehensive support policy where there is a deeper awareness and commitment to support students with learning difficulties.

Providing children with special educational needs with appropriate support raises important questions with which several schools struggle. A major setback is that the lack of funding or cutbacks in governmental investments causes problems for the feasibility of inclusive education. The amount of funding is mainly reflected in schools’ ability to provide smaller class groups and

specialised staff. Furthermore, for schools providing SEN support in separate groups, the risk of stigmatisation of SEN students became apparent from the discourses of both students and staff.

Flexible learning pathways and (ability/remedial) grouping

Flexible learning pathways are primarily created for students who struggle with a more rigid course and educational track structure, which was directly linked to reducing ESL by some stakeholders. Another type of academic support measure – although in practice often linked to flexible pathways – is the development of ability/remedial groupings. This ability/remedial grouping needs to be distinguished from curriculum tracking in non-comprehensive systems for secondary education. A central success factor for both measures lies in the flexibility of the programmes to adapt teaching styles and individualize the curriculum to the specific learning needs and ability levels of students. According to our data, an important aim of such structural adaptations of study pathways and groupings is to avoid grade retention and having to move between study tracks and/or levels.

While the opportunities for schools to provide flexible learning pathways – and to a lesser extent ability/remedial grouping – are constrained by educational legislation and structures, many schools can decide on the specific scope and practicalities of such alternatives. Usually it is the staff that decides whether students (and their families) are eligible to participate, in some cases even making participation obligatory instead of voluntary. Programmes allowing students' voices to be heard in this decision-making process often see the inclusion of students' voices to be reflected positively in students' participation and outcome experience. Where the selection of participants takes into account the readiness and commitment of students, our analyses showed that flexible pathways and grouping can overlook those at high risk of ESL, particularly when government cut-backs make these measures more selective. Furthermore, in the case of homogenous ability grouping, the stigmatisation of students in lower ability groups is a risk factor. In one specific case, this consideration among stakeholders has led to a successful reshuffling of the grouping to promote peer tutoring in a more heterogeneous learning environment.

An example: Continuous Assessment and Feedback in Flanders (BE)

The system of continuous assessment and feedback in the vocational track of one of the Belgian focus schools was designed by the school management but follows a wider trend in Flemish secondary education in which (predominantly VET) schools introduce continuous assessment to replace traditional examinations. The continuous assessment replaces trimestral examination by more frequent tests that are smaller in scope. One of the main motives to introduce continuous assessment was to generate extra teaching time for basic mathematic and language skills by eliminating examination periods. The students are also evaluated more on the basis of their day-to-day performances in class, which allows a more comprehensive evaluation of students' competences. The continuous evaluation allows staff to keep tighter control on students' learning curves and to give more regular feedback.

“Two years ago we started implementing a system of continuous assessment, which allows you to have a more permanent view on the performances, and you win time, because you lose less time organizing the examinations. [...] Keeping close control on students' progress enables you to keep students on board, to increase the level of qualifications... For instance, only five percent of our students are 'C-certificates' [Students who are retained a grade], while – looking at our target population – this is on average much higher.” (school principal)

To further strengthen the continuous performance feedback, the school management introduced regular one-on-one student-teacher feedback meetings. These meetings happen regularly and are prepared by the students based on a list of guiding questions in order to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their study goals and performance before discussing it all with a teacher. The school's design of the continuous assessment and feedback was explicitly informed by John Hattie's scientific review on performance feedback, and the implementation is followed up by specific course-related staff units in order to meet the course-related targets set by the Flemish Government.

“For a few years now, we have also been organising 'reflection moments' [...] so students themselves have to reflect [on their school performances] three times per year. We have arranged a whole system where the students have to meet with this or that teacher to reflect and get feedback. Actually, that is something from the research of Hattie: the international review showed that feedback scores very high as a measure to achieve learning gains, while for instance, grade retention is very harmful for possible early school leaving.” (school principal)

A potential risk factor addressed by teaching staff was the idea that eliminating exams might lower students' ability to study larger amounts of course content, a useful skill in higher education. However, for pupils that struggle to meet the course-related targets, the alternative evaluation system provided more opportunities to pass the course-related targets, to avoid grade retention, and thus lower the risk of early school leaving.

Socio-emotional and Behavioural Support

Counselling, coaching and mentoring

Our analysis shows that while a proactive approach towards one-on-one emotional and behavioural support is to be preferred – because it aims to prevent motivational/behavioural problems and is often less punitive and stigmatising in nature – most schools predominantly react to the more visible symptoms like absenteeism, disruptive behaviour and diminishing study behaviour. Individual emotional and behavioural support often comes too late and the schools' responses are (therefore) conceived by the target individuals as punitive rather than supportive. Furthermore, such a reactive approach is also mostly non-voluntary, allows little room for students' voices and hampers the development of a caring and trusting relationship between the student and a potential adult trustee.

The involvement of staff in providing individualised care mostly tends to be tiered with a primary school-wide signalling role for teachers and the involvement of specialized staff for students showing high support needs. The timing, coordination and task differentiation, however, shows strong variation. The structure of the individualised support ranges between highly structured weekly care team meetings including cross-sectorial partnerships, to ad hoc reactions to students' needs that are noticed by chance rather than through systematic early warning systems. Also, the level of professionalization of support staff varies from regular teaching staff without specific training, to care professionals like student counsellors, social workers and school psychologists. Again, the access to and availability of funding for professional support is considered essential by the designers and implementers. Nonetheless,

while specialised support staff are usually trained in providing this support – when provided only symptomatically – students often prefer more proactive support provided by someone they recognise as a person they trust.

An example: Educational Class Advisor in Portugal

The Educational Class Advisor is a warning system to prevent school failure and dropout. It consists of a scheduled meeting moment called 'Assemblies' in which teachers and students discuss important matters, such as absenteeism, truancy, learning disabilities and disorders; curriculum management, including the class' curriculum project, conception, monitoring and supporting activities to ensure labour market insertion, educational/pedagogical support, solving class and individual problems of underachievement, coordination and conception of "recovery plans", such as the replacement of hours of training. The advisors have a weekly time slot on the schedule to be with pupils but they are also available to meet at any other time if needed.

The advantages of Educational Class Advisor are that it allows the early identification of problems as well as the early implementation of measures to tackle those problems. Furthermore, this 'democratic' way to prevent early school leaving both invites suggestions and ideas from students and at the same time serves an important outlet for students' opinions. This allows school staff to take their opinions into account. These advisory periods lead to the creation of partnerships, cooperation, and compromises, helping both students and teachers to find possible solutions. As the Educational Class Advisor is responsible for establishing the connections among pupils, teachers, school and parents, he/she contributes to bringing parents to the school, in this way also increasing families' engagement, as mentioned by the principal of this school:

"The *Educational Class Advisor* always had a fundamental role in our school... the class educational advisor is the leader of the entire team and is responsible for liaising among the pupils, the rest of the team members, the teachers, school and parents. The *Educational Class Advisor* is much more active... The status of an advisor is a dignified one. The role of the *Educational Class Advisor* is fundamental because she/he can resolve day to day issues which can help prevent failure and dropping out of school".

Truancy and disciplinary policies

Our findings show that truancy and disciplinary interventions predominantly punish students for not being compliant with school regulations about attendance, punctuality and class behaviour, rather than rewarding them for compliance or positive behaviour and making changes in school subjects and structure in order to captivate and stimulate the students more. These truancy and disciplinary policies are often formally stipulated in procedures that apply a stepwise approach, starting with notifying the parents and moving on to drafting behavioural contracts with sanctions such as detention, suspension and ultimately (temporary or permanent) exclusion from regular class or even the school. While being mainly punitive in nature, many of the disciplinary actions are often combined with more supportive actions provided by multi-disciplinary teams involving youth care and mental health professionals. In some cases, the disciplinary actions are also enforced in cooperation with local/national authorities and can have legal consequences for students and parents.

The participation of students in disciplinary measures is mostly mandatory as they are often the result of deviant behaviour. The non-voluntary participation and the fact that disciplinary measures are mainly unilaterally designed and implemented by school staff are often reflected in the low sense of ownership among the students. Nevertheless, the low sense of ownership towards school regulations and sanctions does not mean students overall do not value the importance of truancy and disciplinary policies. Similar to school staff, students recognize the value of regulations for the school's reputation and climate. Nevertheless, more distributed leadership that recognizes the voice of the target group in the disciplinary actions can increase students' ownership.

Regarding the (direct) relation to reducing ESL, designers and implementers primarily evaluate the outcome of truancy and disciplinary measures based on short-term indicators, such as truancy and expulsion rates, rather than ESL rates. Furthermore, disciplinary policies are often a school's response at a point where truancy and student misconduct have reached an advanced stage wherein neither staff nor the youngsters are motivated to restore their relationship and invest in staying in school. Moreover, sanctioning students for non-attendance or showing disruptive behaviour, especially by excluding them from the school, can further increase the risk of early school leaving for those students considered most at risk.

Social skills training & extra-curricular activities

In our study, there were not many schools that explicitly focused on developing social skills. In fact, most measures that did include elements of social skill training were not offered on a schoolwide level, but rather tended to segregate students showing high levels of emotional and behavioural risks. While a more intensified student-focused approach can be beneficial for students at risk, segregating them in special teaching groups put them at risk for stigmatisation, which was confirmed by both participating students and staff. Furthermore, because providing social skills training is often not considered to be the core business of schools, the (human) resources and knowhow for providing social skills training often lies with youth care and mental health professionals. Herein lies a major risk factor because school staff often reported a difficult relationship with outside agencies and the lack of continued government funding. Although most schools claimed to be open to cross-sectorial cooperation, cooperation was often described as demanding and (therefore) lacking timely responses to students' needs.

When considering the provision of extra-curricular activities, we found that while all schools provided some level of extra-curricular activities, they varied widely in scope. Some schools only provide very limited access to activities outside of the school curriculum, while other schools offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities: from sports, arts, crafts, to voluntary work or specific skills training. Most of the aims involve social skills development and increasing students' school belonging. Different from most measures that provide emotional and behavioural support, participation in extra-curricular activities is almost exclusively voluntary and some schools also allow students to help steer the school's provision of these activities, thereby increasing their feelings of ownership.

An example: The Open Classroom in Spain

The Open Classroom is a specific device of some secondary schools in Spain designed to cope with school failure, within the framework of Curricula Diversification Programmes. It is a curricular adaptation group especially designed to prevent drop-out before graduation. The students develop some activities with their regular class-group but the basic objectives and skills are attained through a special arrangement of curriculum contents and subjects as well as

adapted teaching methods in temporary arrangements. It can also include the 'Knowledge of Trades' project, a project promoting direct experience with different types of jobs, as well as internship periods in local firms and organizations. Fewer teachers intervene in these groups and they carry out a more individualized approach to students.

The general objective is to promote graduation from compulsory education and additionally, to increase self-esteem, motivation and expectations for students at risk of leaving school without a certificate. Furthermore, it pursues the continuation of education in official or alternative tracks, trying to raise the students' motivation and providing academic and professional orientation.



The advantage of this measure is that it allows students at risk of school failure to continue their education in non-formal education programmes, usually in Basic Vocational Training; a large portion of them subsequently return to the formal education system. It is important to remark that the flexibility of this measure should be implemented in ways that avoid the unintended stigmatization or segregation of students.

“In a regular class things are taken more seriously, OK? Cause they assign more homework, they put their thinking hats on. In the Aula Oberta, they help you understand step by step, right?” (Student school B).

Career guidance support

In general, most stakeholders argue that the provision of quality career guidance support with respect to students' educational and further professional trajectory is crucial. While school staff mostly acknowledged that career guidance support needs to go further than general information about the supply of educational pathways – integrated in the curriculum or provided as a separate course – more individualised career guidance that speaks to students in a direct and relevant manner was rather scarce. Various schools do engage with

this issue and invite role models, try to give students a high degree of ownership of career guidance activities, or try to find meaningful internships for their students. A longitudinal and integrated school approach towards career guidance support can prevent it from becoming too dependent upon the willingness and commitment of specific staff members.

With regard to workplace learning – mostly provided as short-term internships and as a career guidance tool in mainstream education – stakeholders reported a struggle to balance educational aims, i.e., supporting students to attain an upper secondary education qualification while catering to labour market aspirations by providing opportunities for workplace learning as part of the school programme. Some educational actors fear that employers can attract students with (short-term) labour contracts before they attain a diploma. In other cases, however, cooperation between schools, students and labour market organizations appeared to be very fruitful for students' engagement in education.

An example: The thread of Study and Career Guidance – making future occupations an informed choice over time in Sweden

The *Thread of Study and Career Guidance* is a measure that seeks to help students make an informed and conscious choice for their future by integrating study and career guidance throughout their schooling. The thread is a strategy

plan where the student's choice of future occupation is seen as a process starting already in early childhood. By giving students more information about a wide range of professions and also encouraging them to

Preschool:	Self-portrait
Year 1:	What occupations are there?
Year 2:	Play-with-occupations
Year 3:	Interview a relative about their job
Year 4:	When I grow up, I want to be..
Year 5:	A visit from different professionals
Year 6:	A day's work
Year 7:	Where am I heading?
Year 8:	"Prao" and entrepreneurship
Year 9:	How to get a job!

think about their own interests and strengths related to that information, the school hopes to have made a firm ground for the students to stand on when

the time comes to leave secondary school. With different activities for each school year, adapted to the age group and in close relation to developmental psychology theories, the ambition is to integrate career guidance into all regular subjects and lessons.

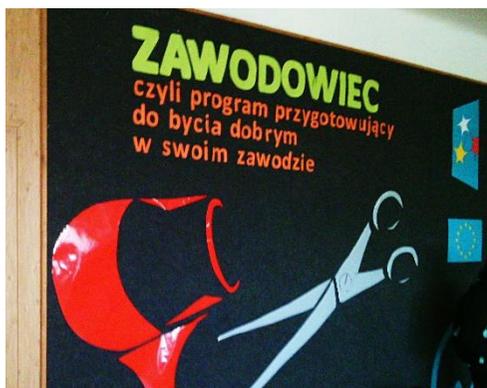
The *Thread of Study and Career Guidance* combines theoretical and practical guidance inside and outside the school building. For the younger students, the guidance is turned into playful events such as the “play-with-occupations” in 3rd grade. In a playful manner the kids are encouraged to question stereotypes of gender, class and ethnicity in relation to different professions and jobs. Can a woman become a police officer and what does a psychologist look like? For the older students, the school provides shorter internships – 1 day, 1 week or 2 weeks – as well as meet-ups with different professionals. Graduating from secondary school, the students thus have a range of experiences that can aid them in their future educational and occupational choices.

An example: A Programme for Professionals in Poland

A school in Poland, designed the ‘Professional’ programme as a response to the high unemployment rate of the immediate social environment of the school and to find a way to deal with the poor educational results of the students in this school. The general aim of the programme is to raise the vocational qualifications of the students via the acquisition of professional skills and work experience.

The programme was created by the school staff to help the students of both the basic vocational and the technical upper secondary tracks find their way on the labour market. Students gain key competencies and professional skills that are necessary for future work opportunities. The programme involves many additional activities which aim at developing soft skills, vocational skills, skills in core curriculum subjects, such as Polish language proficiency and mathematics. Students have extra-curricular classes in English in the workplace, raise funds for their own business, learn how to present themselves and write their curriculum vitae, and learn the latest trends in hairstyling (hair-dressing track) or a two-step course in AutoCAD (construction and installation fitting track). Moreover, students are offered psychological and pedagogical support and they can get advice from a career counsellor. This helps students to determine their own interests and match them to specific fields of education

and professions. Finally, students receive support in their decision-making processes that guides their further professional and personal development.



Through the monthly (paid) apprenticeship the students participating in the programme gain work experience and have the opportunity to earn some money for their work. For instance, for a one-month apprenticeship [150 hours], each student receives 1,5 thousand PLN, approx. 360 Euro. The funds enable the school to create a new hairdressing

classroom in the school, where the students of the hairdressing track may gain additional experience with real clients from the neighbourhood and other parts of town.

An example: 'Investing in our Future' event in the United Kingdom

In one of the UK focus schools, the Investing in our Future event was introduced by the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) team as an opportunity for students to meet relevant professionals, employers and university representatives in a semi-official setting in order to get a more realistic picture of the jobs they aspire to and the ways to obtain them. It works like a speed-dating event: the representatives sit around tables, while students move around and spend 20 minutes at each table they are interested in. Tables have a student captain trained to lead the conversation if necessary. The event is targeted at Year 12 students (age 16-17); however, younger students can also be invited.

The event is organised by a group of student volunteers with the help of the IAG team. They find out about their peers' career aspirations and their parents' jobs through a survey. After receiving training in how to communicate effectively with businesses on the phone and through emails, students start inviting companies and universities. The invitation email is carefully written and contains a photo of the participating young people. Feedback from companies

demonstrated that showing that image of the young people behind the numbers heavily influenced their decision to take part. Parents that were seeking jobs are also invited. This method seems very successful since parents are more likely to accept the invitation. In this way, the school managed to secure contacts in hard-to-reach areas, such as hospitals.

Based on feedback, the guests were very impressed by the students' skills and enthusiasm and they offered work opportunities, mentoring, skills training and other opportunities. The school makes sure to invite companies with work experience offers, to encourage other employers to follow suit. The initiative proved so successful that the students and staff were invited to present it in the House of Commons.

About half of the participating students so far were offered work opportunities as a direct result of the event. The students who organise the event learn valuable transferable skills, such as communication, presentation, organisation and leadership skills, event management, questionnaire design, budgeting, networking, etc.

'Although in the beginning they said they couldn't offer anything, one boy charmed them so much that they offered him eight weeks of work experience, and then gave him a good reference so he could get a job; now he is doing retail, just as he wanted. He probably wouldn't have got it without the confidence he gained and that work experience on his CV.' (Assistant Head-teacher)

'Another student wanted to go on gap year, but with the confidence she gained through this initiative she ended up taking a pharmaceutical course at [name] University. Also, she met a lady from [a pharmaceutical multinational] who talked to her about a job, and then she ended up getting work experience there. If she hadn't sat at that table she wouldn't have had that chance -- she might not have gone to study pharmaceutical science.' (Independent Learning Manager)

Contextual preconditions

Next to the more concrete measures that were discussed and evaluated above, our cross-case analysis of school-based prevention and interventions shows that stakeholders often refer to some underlying processes that can have great influence on the success of a measure and the broader contextual preconditions that need to be in place and/or addressed for specific measures to be considered successful by its designers, implementers and target group. It is exactly in these contextual preconditions that policy makers could find

inspiration to improve these school-based measures, or that – as will be shown in part II – were already used by measures in compensatory/alternative pathways as a starting point to cope with young people at risk of early school leaving.

Addressing Basic Needs of Students

Perhaps the most elementary contextual precondition for schools to keep students on track for attaining an educational qualification is to ensure basic human needs like nourishment and shelter are provided for. Although the stakeholders did not often discuss addressing these basic needs explicitly, for some schools the poor living conditions of students made this issue an important precondition for successfully supporting student's educational attainment. In several of the studied research areas, national and local education authorities provide schools and students with resources to support basic needs like free meals in schools and study allowances. Some schools that pick up on living conditions that do not enable students to actively engage in education worked out school-based actions and cross-sectorial partnerships to provide these students with after-school study facilities, allowances for study materials, free meals and clothing.

Promoting Parental Involvement

Parents are seen as playing a crucial role in the educational trajectory of their children and are perceived as crucial actors in the tackling of ESL. School staff in particular (management, teachers and support staff) stressed the central role of parents. The schools show a wide variation of actions and practices that aim to raise parents' engagement in their children's education, such as organizing parent-teacher meetings, home visits, providing interpreters, drafting commitment agreements, parent satisfaction surveys, workshops on parenting skills, and local community outreach programmes. All these actions have different scopes and aims but are often based on the problem orientation that parents need to be more involved in the child's educational career. A major risk factor found in various (but not all) school actors' discourses is the negative representation of parents with socially disadvantaged and/or ethnic minority backgrounds. Based on these deficiency-based ideas about students' living conditions and family support, school staff is often not optimistic about

involving parents more in the school and often directly link this to the problem of ESL. Yet, a more positive and less stigmatizing approach in some schools has been able to engage parents more successfully.

Promoting Professional Development and Support of Staff

Another recurring thread is the focus on the need for further professionalisation of staff. School staff in particular mentioned that tackling ESL necessitates staff that is able to detect and monitor early signals of risk and to address these issues, sometimes by being able to refer students to specialised staff. This is crucial especially for those students that do not show any overt and explicit signs of distress. Furthermore, staff may need to increase their pedagogic competencies to engage students in education, both in their initial and continuing training.

While our findings show that most schools employ some kind of support staff responding to students' emotional and behavioural needs, the professionalization levels widely differ both among schools and designated staff members. Moreover, where some schools motivate and support (class) teachers to build caring one-on-one relationships through mentoring and individual meetings, some staff expressed that they did not feel equipped to take up this role. Therefore, it is not surprising that several staff members explicitly expressed the need for further professionalization and in-service training. These staff members sometimes indicated that the initiative for in-service training lay with the staff itself and that management – often restricted due to financial cutbacks – needs to be convinced to allocate resources for additional training. Another difficult issue is that some staff felt that in-service training did not always provide them with the tools they felt were necessary for addressing the needs of students at risk.

Promoting Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships

As became apparent throughout the interviews and focus group discussions with students, the most important actor in a student's educational trajectory is the teacher. This person can take up the role of trustee and can become a reference person for students when discussing educational – but sometimes also more personal – issues. Many designers and implementers of school-

based interventions in our study acknowledge the strong role a single staff member – and especially teachers – can play with respect to a student’s risk for ESL. In some schools, personnel is therefore made aware of their decisive role and are motivated to connect with students in order to pick up on and respond to potential risk indicators. Typically, schools who are investing in teacher-student relationships tend to introduce regular one-on-one talks between students and specific teachers or support staff members in the form of regular feedback, interviews with (class) teachers, and talks with mentors, youth coaches and student counsellors.

Promoting Student Voice and Ownership

Although it is important to understand if students share a similar view on the scope and aims of the measures, the problem orientation behind the measures and on their feasibility, our findings show that students are often absent in the design and implementation of measures. Measures are usually considered less effective when students do not feel motivated to participate. The fieldwork in the focus schools also showed that school personnel are not always interested in students’ voices or do not have the time and/or competencies to acknowledge them. Students are also, however, sometimes simply not interested in expressing their voices to school staff, often due to negative past experiences. Nonetheless, several focus schools show interesting examples of how students are invited to express their voices and feel recognized for it. One important way to facilitate the expression of student voice is to provide specific avenues of expression, such as student councils or boards, through which ideas, complaints and issues can be conveyed. Other schools implement one-on-one feedback moments for students to express their voice in a more intimate context, while others use a questionnaire to probe students’ perceptions about the school’s policies and actions.

Taking on a Holistic Multi-professional Approach

There seems to be consensus about the need for a holistic and multi-professional approach to tackle ESL efficiently. A comprehensive approach can be instituted by not only responding to cognitive and behavioural risk factors, but also targeting potential emotional disengagement from school. In practice, prevention and intervention measures focus mostly on one or two dimensions

separately. Separating students by, for instance, the use of ability grouping can have stigmatising effects on students with lower ability and therefore on their personal well-being and school belonging.

At the same time, holistic policies also do not approach ESL as a (rational) decision made by an individual, but as a process leading up to a potential ESL decision that is always embedded in a broader and complex context. Our findings showed that it is important not to lose sight of the influence of other dimensions on the institutional and structural level. A holistic approach thus implies that the micro-level of the individual student is studied taking into account the opportunities and limitations provided at the meso- and macro-level. While many stakeholders are in fact convinced that ESL is a complex process that needs to be addressed in a holistic and multidimensional way, a lack of strong relationships with students' parents and partnerships with other relevant actors outside of the school limits a school's opportunities for a more holistic approach. Nevertheless, our findings show that various schools do succeed in building these relationships.

Sufficient and Stable Funding for Reducing ESL

Another contextual precondition that is a recurring issue throughout the discourses of school staff is the availability of sufficient and stable funds. Many schools have argued that they are in favour of taking on a more holistic approach, encourage continuous professionalisation of their staff and want to provide a broad range of extra-curricular activities or provide for the basic needs of their students. However, on numerous occasions throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, school staff reported that they feel hampered by insufficient and unstable funding. The consequences of the economic crisis and the cut-backs are discussed regularly and as a consequence some hard choices needed to be made. Promising (pilot) measures and policies had to be terminated and some management feel there is not even enough funding available to employ sufficient teachers and support staff to engage with students at risk of ESL. We will later see in the second part of this publication, that sufficient and stable funding is also a major issue for compensatory/alternative learning approaches outside mainstream secondary education.

Part II: Alternative learning pathways

In the second part of this publication, we will provide a summary of the cross-case analyses of measures designed and implemented in institutions providing compensatory/alternative learning pathways for individuals that have left regular secondary education without an upper secondary level qualification. Despite the large variety that characterises these alternative learning pathways, we will discuss four distinct aspects or features of these measures separately: 1) work-based learning approaches, 2) innovative pedagogical approaches, 3) holistic student care approach, and 4) educational reintegration strategies, and illustrate these with some examples. As mentioned in the introduction, these are not exclusive 'categories'; rather, these sections group together the most predominant issues of each measure. This discussion of different aspects of these measures allowed us to focus and elaborate further on similar features of these measures altogether and discuss their strengths, weaknesses, contradictions, risk and protective factors.

Work-based learning approaches

Dual learning pathways (i.e., part-time school- and part-time work-based learning) have gained policy attention at the EU level and have been presented as both a preventive as well as compensatory tool for combatting early leaving from education and training at the EU policy level. Although many EU member states have a large proportion of students in a dual learning track (e.g., Germany, Austria, Denmark), in the countries involved in our study, dual learning pathways – mostly through apprenticeships – are rather marginal in comparison to the mainstream education sector.

The actors involved in work-based learning approaches acknowledged to a large extent the dual scope and aims of these learning pathways. With regard to the scope, virtually all case studies involved both school-based/training centre-based and work-based learning. The extent to which the work-based learning was actually performed in regular economy contexts differed across the case studies. Some students were (temporarily) trained in pre-apprenticeship courses or close-to-real simulations in workshops and social economy contexts. Most stakeholders agreed that besides the dual scope of the training

pathways, the study path in which they were involved also had a dual aim, namely to provide opportunities for gaining (certified) professional skills, and to work towards an educational qualification. Especially the acquisition of professional skills seemed to be a more prominent and direct objective of the measures under study. This priority to focus more on professional skills was also acknowledged in students' discourses about their reasons for participation.

Often, extrinsic motivation of the future labour market outcomes was mentioned by students as the most important reason to enrol. Attaining an upper secondary education degree was in some trainings formally not directly achievable (e.g., pre-apprenticeship programs, basic vocational trainings preparing youngsters for actual upper secondary VET), or was de facto perceived to be outside the reach of some youngsters. The idea that some youngsters will never be competent or able to achieve an ISCED 3 level qualification was addressed in both students and staff's discourses and was ascribed to low achievement levels, behavioural issues, as well as social and financial problems that forced youngsters to prioritize finding employment over continuing education.

Due to the fact that many of the learning pathways involving work-based learning are perceived as alternative pathways outside of mainstream education, many of the stakeholders involved in these tracks also mentioned that these study pathways are often (but not always) seen as 'second best' or 'last resort' options, frequently chosen after negative experiences and a trajectory of academic disengagement in regular secondary education. Many of the actors, however, ascribed students' academic disengagement to the exclusionary character of mainstream education. This contrasts with mainstream education, which mainly looks at factors situated outside school. Students enrolled in work-based learning were often perceived to be unfit for more academically oriented school-based education.

Some stakeholders, however, indicated that the new work-based learning environment could compensate for the lack of practical learning and individualised support in mainstream education. For many students, work-based learning can thus provide an alternative learning route that is perceived to be more relevant because of the practical and often more mature learning context. Nonetheless, most of the youngsters were only reoriented towards work-

based learning after a range of negative school experiences and a history of academic disengagement. In many cases, a strong critique among both students and staff involved in these study tracks was that staff – even specialised career guidance staff – did not have good knowledge about the work-based learning options and, therefore, did not provide sufficient and correct information about the dual learning option throughout students' school career. Furthermore, the stakeholders' discourses indicated that both staff and students in mainstream education – and public opinion – did not value the work-based learning as much as the more school-based and academically oriented tracks.

Although most work-based learning pathways are frequently perceived to be a 'second best' option after regular secondary education in the countries involved in this study, many of them introduce some level of selection with regard to the inflow of participants in work-based learning. The level of selectiveness did, however, vary widely. Some case studies only had a few formal restrictions (e.g., age restrictions), while others were more selective, such as apprenticeship tracks that require students to have an apprenticeship contract before being able to enrol. Enrolment in pathways that sometimes require regular economy apprenticeships is therefore also dependent on the supply of labour market opportunities. Hence, apprenticeship opportunities may be subject to discrimination on the labour market.

Virtually all dual learning pathways apply a system of intake and screening at enrolment. During the intake and screening, one of the major issues relates to students' maturity for entering work-based learning programmes. This labour market maturity primarily entails work ethic and basic skill levels. Many types of work-based learning provide perspectives for gradual labour market insertion through individualised study programs, pre-apprenticeship courses and high levels of socio-emotional support. Furthermore, some of the institutions providing work-based learning employed specific guidance counsellors that try to mediate between the training centres, employers and students to bridge differences in the expectations between the different actors that are involved.

In sum, the cross-case analyses showed some contradiction between the finding that often the most vulnerable students end up in work-based learning after a process of gradual academic disengagement – partly due to the exclusionary character of mainstream education – and the finding that regular labour market apprenticeships can also be selective in nature.

An example: Apprenticeships with labour insertion guarantee in Portugal

In Portugal, the one specific initiative of apprenticeship with labour insertion guarantee is set up to guarantee the labour insertion of the young graduates by means of close collaboration with the wood and furniture companies in the region and by engaging young people in more practical and technological learning processes

that are more interesting to them while simultaneously providing useful skills directly related to the labour market. The apprenticeship measure with labour insertion guarantee first of all starts with



a diagnosis which is carried out by the school of the labour needs of furniture and wood companies. The yearly launch of specific courses for young adults in the training centre responds to these needs on the labour market. Trainees are sent to these companies to do their apprenticeships with the expectation to stay there afterwards as regular employees. As a consequence, trainees become well-qualified experts in very specific fields of the wood and furniture industry. The centre provides the workforce for the industry in the region and helps students to get both an upper secondary and professional certification. This is, however, not a general practice throughout the country.

The advantage of this process is that it enhances the possibility for trainees to have work experience and to make contact with job contexts and employers. As a result of this contact with the labour market during students' training, the trainees are better prepared to face the difficulties of working and frequently

have the possibility to stay on in the companies where they do their internships. Furthermore, these apprenticeships are designed to provide a workplace learning context that is more 'real', practical and dynamic compared to the classroom. Moreover, the concern of the training centre to meet the needs and the industrial tradition of the region has a positive impact on the broader community and students themselves who feel part of that community and have a real prospect of finding a job. Many stay in the company as the most qualified workers because many of the other workers that have worked in the companies for several years only attained lower secondary education or below:

Student 1: 'We go to an internship company and 98% of the time we stay working in the company, with three years' [of] work background.'

Student 2: 'And we leave with a work certificate. Because we are studying to perform a certain function. In regular schools we are studying, but it isn't for any function. We are studying to go to university and that's where we get to work to have a function. It isn't like that [in this apprenticeship].'

Student 3: 'We finish 12th grade here and we can have a job right after graduating. Those that successfully finish 12th grade in regular education and do not go to university, do not find a job as easily as we do.'

An example: Apprenticeship in Poland

In Poland, we found an example of an apprenticeship-based, on-the-job training with employers. This apprenticeship training is an alternative pathway to full-time, school-based basic vocational education and prepares young people to work as qualified employees. The apprenticeship training is offered by the Voluntary Labour Corps, whose primary objective is to counteract marginalization and social exclusion of young people and to create adequate conditions for their social and vocational development. Since education in Poland is obligatory until 18 years of age, the target group of this measure are all students below the age of 18 with lower secondary education degree who want to obtain vocational qualifications but for some reason (e.g., learning difficulties) cannot or do not want to participate in full-time school education leading to obtaining a basic vocational school certificate.

The on-the-job vocational training leads to qualification as an apprentice or a skilled worker. This comprises practical vocational and theoretical training at

the employer's organisation. The training lasts 36 months and ends with the vocational exam organised by the chamber of crafts. Each participant is employed on a basis of an individual employment contract with an employer, under the terms and conditions applicable to juvenile employees. Most of the apprenticeships take place in small and medium-sized companies. Employers are usually members of a guild or a chamber of crafts and the training is supervised by the chamber of crafts.

The whole process of vocational training at the employer's location is supervised by the VLC units. Apart from assistance in job placements, the adolescents participating in this measure are provided with additional support such as counselling, psychological-pedagogical support, training (e.g. entrepreneurship courses, language courses, computer courses), professional qualification courses, and job search courses. However, it should be noted that there is no formal obligation for pupils to attend the activities offered at the VLC unit. Rather, according to the law, youngsters are obliged to be enrolled in the VLC if they want to participate in the vocational training, but there is no legal obligation for them to take part in other activities at the VLC units.

An example: Apprenticeship Ambassadors Programme in the UK

The Apprenticeship Ambassadors Programme is run by a Further Education College from South London in partnership with the local council. The scheme encourages young people completing an apprenticeship to become Apprenticeship Ambassadors and use their experience to promote this pathway in the borough to their peers, parents, teachers and employers.

Apprentices were recruited from a variety of sectors including IT, sports, accounting and marketing. They took part in a five-week personal and professional self-development course led by well-known professionals. The aim of this course was to equip selected apprentices with the belief, confidence and skills to excel in the workplace. The training also provided them with the knowledge, flexibility and technique to adapt to new environments, network, create goals, develop the ability to engage and interact with audiences through powerful presentation techniques. At the end of the course, the Ambassadors attended a conference in the Houses of Parliament as part of the

National Apprenticeship Week, where they addressed an audience of local school and college students, employers, training providers and policy makers on the benefits of apprenticeships and going into employment.

The Ambassadors also took part in an apprenticeship roadshow from April to June 2016 in schools and post-16/ adult education centres. Their final duties were in July during a recruitment event supported by the programme partners to help the borough's young residents gain employment through the apprenticeship route. It is hoped that the programme will work as a pilot, to be rolled out all over London. It will also help with the target of the Government to create 3 million apprenticeship places.

“It is really important that we help young people, their parents, carers and all levels of staff in schools and colleges to understand the benefits that apprenticeships can bring. It is important that they understand what constitutes a quality apprenticeship, what they are expected to achieve from their qualifications so that they can progress in learning whilst earning and what is expected of young people to manage the transition from education to the world of work.” (Education Professional from the Council)



Example 1: A mentor with the Apprentice Ambassadors in the background at the launch of the programme

Innovative pedagogical approaches

Many alternative learning pathways make use of innovative pedagogical approaches, in order to engage students that previously left mainstream education and to keep students at high risk of ESL enrolled in education or training. These initiatives frequently start from the idea that the pedagogical approach used in the regular secondary education cannot successfully be applied to

their target group. Consequently, the use of an innovative pedagogical approach seems for many stakeholders essential to be able to keep young people in education. These innovations are carried out at distinct organisational levels with different aims and are designed for a particular target group. School staff has also shown some creativity in devising ways to realize these objectives. For instance, in Portugal, the cooperative vocational training wants to co-create 'simulated cooperative' and 'real cooperatives' for all types of students (with/without access to higher education or the traditional job market), to introduce labour market dynamics from the beginning of students' educational careers. Other examples are a vocational training with the arts in Portugal, the modular learning system in Flanders, a vocational boarding school in Poland, employability modules and workplace immersion in the United Kingdom and Spain (see overview Van Praag, et al., 2016).

Despite this variation across countries, some striking similarities are found. Most of these measures mentioned being successful just because of the high organisational, curricular and personal flexibility they have and the strong investment in affective bonds. This enabled them to respond to students' individual needs and changing student intake and local realities, as well as protect students against other challenges that complicate their educational career considerably. However, when analysing the interviews and focus group discussions with the stakeholders, we found that most seemed to agree that the added value of these measures does not merely limit itself to the pedagogical value of the measure. Rather, the measures under study are innovative as they use alternative pedagogical approaches to introduce more flexibility in the learning pathways, focus explicitly on experiences of success and provide more practical learning methods and better access to transferable skills. We will discuss these assumed protective factors for early school leaving separately.

Flexibility is in many measures introduced to respond to the necessities of students at risk of early leaving school and as a reaction against the more rigid structure of regular secondary education and practices herein. Regular secondary schools are often not designed for those who are less successful in schools, that have failed at some point in their school career or that have difficulties in meeting the set criteria by regular secondary education. For example, some students experience difficulties catching up with the speed and

timely structures that are part of regular secondary education. Overall, alternative, innovative pedagogical approaches frequently introduce some kind of flexibility in order to avoid some of these consequences that in the end could lead to early school leaving. However, across countries, there are different ways in which this flexibility is introduced. While in some alternative learning arenas, flexibility is structurally anchored, for other measures, implementers receive more space to use an individualised and flexible approach towards each student.

When evaluating measures or pathways that use innovative pedagogical approaches, one should take into account that it always takes effort and motivation to apply an alternative approach that moves away from the more traditional habits of dealing with students in educational institutions. Participants sometimes indicated being happy with the increased attention for particular subjects, however, did not necessarily feel a major difference with traditional methodologies. This was for instance the case in the cooperative training in Portugal, where students valued the more interactive lessons, the increased contact with some tutors and the use of interactive methodologies, but did not identify the methodologies used as distinct.

The way these measures want to increase students' motivational levels through participation is crucial. Many of the alternative learning arenas have focused on experiences of 'success' for people that have already had 'problematic' school careers. These measures aim to move away from failure and give rise to a 'cycle of success'. The rationale behind this is that successful experiences in education will serve as a motivation to engage in school and to continue the educational career. Most actors acknowledged the large inflow into alternative learning arenas of students that have lost their motivation to study in regular secondary education. According to some of the people interviewed, regular secondary education tends to hinder students' natural curiosity to learn about the world and about themselves. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid the experience of failing because it could start an entire cycle of other factors that could result in early school leaving. This is for instance the case in Flanders (Belgium), where students that fail one or more courses have to repeat the entire year, which means repeating all the courses, not just the one they failed. This kind of repetition invariably leads to boredom and increased

disengagement from school. Hence, many alternative learning arenas respond to the particular needs of this target group by giving more room to their voices and including them as active 'partners' or 'participants' in their learning experiences. By proposing these alternative pedagogical approaches, new realities are created that question the educational institutions that constitute mainstream education and/or try to respond to some of its deficits. XOXO

In some cases, the incorporation of innovative pedagogical approaches has led to the introduction of more practical learning methods. While mainstream education starts in the classroom, possibly to learn about other living spheres such as the labour market, the measures outside mainstream education often turn this relationship upside down. Instead of starting from teaching theoretical knowledge, they use practical skills and experiences as a point of departure to build up the training. Additionally, most measures that try out new, innovative pedagogical approaches to reduce the risk of early school leaving or want to re-orient students to re-enrol in education or training increasingly focus on teaching transferable skills to their students. These transferrable skills are perceived as necessary to be able to continue education or 'survive' on the labour market. Some measures explicitly focused on the teaching of such skills.

As many of these methodologies aim to stimulate students' self-awareness, motivation and self-esteem, these measures could have positive long-term consequences in their future occupational, educational and personal lives. While these innovative pedagogical approaches are often mentioned to increase the motivation of students and provide them experiences of success, at the same time, they are frequently (but not always) associated with negative stereotypes and receive a lower status in broader society than other educational programmes or institutions. When evaluating these innovative pedagogical approaches, it is important to take these negative appraisals into account as they may hinder student enrolment or later success on the labour market. In general, these measures/pathways have already been quite successful in reaching a vulnerable group of students that are prone to opting out of education. However, many of these measures aim to appeal to a very diverse audience, reaching out to all kinds of people with different (often troubled) educational pathways, diverse national and ethnic origins, and coming from different social classes.

An example: Cooperative Vocational Training in a cooperative vocational school of social economy in Portugal

The cooperative vocational training works as a parallel system to mainstream secondary education and allows dual certification: the conclusion of upper secondary education and the attainment of certified professional skills. The methodologies of cooperative quality are part of the vocational cooperative training. This work is supported by tutors. It can be inserted in one of the disciplines and assessed or developed in an extracurricular and/or autonomous way. This is a form of curricular innovation aimed at adapting to new social needs.

The purpose behind this innovative pedagogical approach is assuring young adults' future labour market entry in a non-dependent form. It builds on the assumption that there is a need to move from the transmission towards the construction of knowledge. The measure is enacted by means of the creation of 'simulated cooperatives' throughout the training and may also include creating 'real cooperatives' by the trainees if they show interest and are willing to do it in their 'free' time. The 'simulated cooperatives' prepare those trainees who do not have access to higher education or to the traditional job market to organise themselves cooperatively and create their own jobs.

The primary advantages of this compensatory pathway are that it is more practical than mainstream school and promotes employability. This is a significant pull factor for students who are former early school leavers or have previously failed in school. The possibility of being financially autonomous and independent of an employer is a motivation. Moreover, the fact it brings young people with diverse educational pathways together in the same group allows them to gain from each other's experience. Therefore, the measure has potential not only to adjust to the social reality, but also to create a new sustained reality. The use of cooperative methodologies is an open strategy of voluntary participation. As a quality measure, it presupposes co-construction and non-normativity. The 'simulated cooperatives' and 'real cooperatives' help young adults to engage in other ways of managing situations (discipline planning; organisation of modules etc.) and improving relationships in the class. At a time when young adults' integration in the labour market is very precarious, this

methodology enables them to position themselves as proactive agents of their learning and of their future job, in the modality of the social economy.

The Principal: “Cooperative methodologies enhance the development of curriculum implementation, but how are young people prepared for the labour market? There may be the need and possibility that young people actively participate in the establishment of real cooperatives, because they may be interested in having an income from that activity. That is where strategy comes... ‘COOP work’...”

An example: Modular learning system in Second Chance Education provided in Adult Education Centres in Flanders (Belgium)

The modular system is a fundamental feature of second chance education in Belgium. The modular system offers the curriculum in separate modules that each can result in the obtaining of a particular ‘partial certificate’. When all ‘partial certificates’ of a specific track within second chance education are obtained, a secondary education diploma is awarded.

The purpose behind this modular learning system is that it enhances the possibility for students to approach their curricula in a flexible way and organise their school trajectories – to a certain extent – themselves. This flexibility involves the option to be enrolled in modules that are given during the daytime and/or in the evening or via distance learning, the choice to decide on the number of modules to enrol in at the same time, and the option to follow different modules in different Centres for Adult Education. This flexibility requires that all Centres for Adult Education providing second chance education work with a more or less similar structure and organization, and with the same (partial) certificates.

The advantages of this modular system are that students who had to repeat their year and who changed their curricula often in regular secondary education have to repeat too many courses when they re-enrol. Furthermore, succeeding in one of the modules and receiving partial certificates focuses on feelings of success. These positive successful experiences may help students to get back on track and become motivated to get an educational qualification.

Finally, this system makes it easier for people to combine work, family and school and learn at their own pace.

“It’s much better. Because than you can decide on your own trajectory. For example if you work then you can say ‘I can only take two courses now’ instead of 4 or 8 at the same time. You’re being judged by a module, and not everything together. If you do one thing wrong you can repeat it. Then you don’t have to repeat everything.” (Student in Second Chance Education)

Holistic student care approach

While some school-based prevention and intervention measures could profit from a more holistic student care approach (see contextual preconditions in Part I), in this section, we want to address the measures in compensatory/alternative pathways that have taken into account the particular vulnerabilities of students that enrol in such programmes by applying a holistic student care approach. These measures started from the assumption that, in order to re-engage students in education and training, one should approach students – especially a particular group of vulnerable students – in a more holistic way and not only focus on their role as ‘student’. Measures fall into this category when they explicitly focus on the specialised support (practical, emotional or psychological, advice) needed by their participants, which is seen as a precondition to succeed in education. This could be interpreted in terms of special care arrangements, but could also apply to the supply of transferable skills and the empowerment of participants enrolled in the measures under study.

Across countries, we found several ways in which programmes and institutions wanted to take up a more holistic approach, especially when compared to regular secondary education. This includes for instance measures such as the instalment of a (voluntary) Care framework in second chance education in Flanders (Belgium), a caring programme in the Netherlands, the employability module in the United Kingdom, or a general programme with a human rights profile in Sweden. While most alternative learning arenas aiming to re-engage students in education and training apply a more holistic, individualised ap-

proach compared with measures in regular secondary education, in this section, we will focus on measures that are particularly designed to approach students' lives in a holistic way and provide them additional care.

Applying a holistic student care approach could reduce the risk of early school leaving, as many young people at risk of ESL or actual early school leavers struggle with various kinds of socio-emotional issues and/or lack access to the kinds of cultural and social capital necessary to succeed at school. While these factors may have contributed to them leaving mainstream education early, these issues are perceived to be a prerequisite before other training or schooling options are possible. Most measures that aim to approach students in a more caring, holistic way stress the importance of being flexible to be able to use a more individualised approach with participants. The highly individualised approach towards learning, the small class groups and the high number of staff are mentioned to be some of the protective factors that stop/prevent students from opting out of the measure. Such a holistic student care approach is desirable, as it is thought to increase participants' self-esteem and motivation and therefore can be seen as a protective factor that prevents them from leaving school early. This is all the more so the case when participants feel they have the opportunity to influence the measure's design and implementation, that the staff members listen to them and take their opinions and ideas into account, and above all that they are treated as citizens actively participating in society.

Compared to school-based measures, the holistic care approaches in alternative learning arenas were often more explicitly oriented towards vulnerable groups (see part I). As a consequence, these measures were organised in such a way that they tackled any factors that seemed to hinder students' continuation of their school career. Furthermore, they were often really flexible, trying to make it structurally possible for educational institutions or programmes to adapt to the local contexts in which these programmes and young people find themselves. Nevertheless, the focus on vulnerable groups entails some risks as well. As participants rely more often on the approaches of the individual implementers of the program, the level of support, participation and ownership may not reach far enough for many participants. Consequently, many participants still drop out early from the programmes. Furthermore,

measures focus on the vulnerable groups that tend to drop out of regular secondary education, but also note changes in the student compositions that may change the nature of their institution, possibly neglecting some other vulnerable groups. However diverse the target group of these alternative pathways are, their focus upon one particular target group may cause an imbalance and may require a renegotiation of the objectives of the programme when the student intake changes. Therefore, some flexibility in the design of these institutions or programmes allows the implementers and designers to adapt to changing student compositions over the years and factors that could complicate students' school careers.

There are also some downsides related to the use of holistic student care approaches in education. Due to its individualized approach, it is often more difficult to make potential participants clearly aware of the existence of a particular programme or institution. Measures might not be able to reach all young people needing this service. Additionally, the limited awareness of the measures for potential students hinders these measures from realising their full potential. Furthermore, the individualized approach and the provision of extensive care which characterise the nature of holistic student care approaches is often very costly and time-consuming. This is particularly problematic, as financial cuts impact the vulnerable young people who rely on these services the most. Finally, due to these measures' reliance on the personal approach and on trust relationships, turnover in staff may jeopardize the further existence and/or determine the success of the measure.

In sum, designers and implementers of many alternative learning arenas feel like they need to tackle specific, deep-rooted problems (see the contextual preconditions that were identified as crucial factors for school-based intervention and prevention measures), while at the same time take up a more holistic student care approach to their participants. In many cases, this results in some kind of caring framework in which young adults are assisted to deal with the challenges they face in their daily lives (e.g., housing problems, risk-taking behaviour, low self-esteem). Some measures even take this further and focus not only on the actual issues and difficulties many young people are facing, but also attempt to empower these young adults and provide them with the tools to take care of themselves.

An example: The General Programme with a Human Rights-Profile: an inclusive, democratic and individual-oriented approach in Sweden

The folk high school programme General Programme with a Human Rights-Profile is a measure that offers young people who lack a complete upper secondary qualification the opportunity to attain such a qualification. The programme is arranged within the folk high school at upper secondary school level and has a clear ideological profile focusing on human rights, a perspective and approach that permeate all of the activity in the measure.

A number of measures have been implemented within the framework of the programme, measures that aim to facilitate learning and increase the students' chances of attaining a complete qualification. For one thing, the manner of teaching is clearly adjusted to the needs of individual students, insofar as study groups are small, students hardly have any homework or tests and are given more time to complete their school work than in upper secondary schools. Students also get the opportunity to choose between different kinds of learning methods. All of this implies that the measure is characterized by high degrees of flexibility. Moreover, staff at the school also try to create a kind of free zone for the students, a place where they feel welcome and where they feel they are actively participating. Consequently, one of the basic principles at the school is community and cooperation. Students are not only seen as students but are also treated as citizens taking part in and contributing to the development of a democratic society. The wider goal, thus, is to make students part of a democratic process and get them involved in society. The program's specific focus on human rights contributes to the strengthening and deepening of these inclusive and democratic basic guiding principles.

After completing the measure, the students attain a complete upper secondary qualification. Many students themselves state that participating in the measure also helps to strengthen and empower them as individuals as well as provide them with the tools necessary to achieve their future educational or occupational aspirations.

An example: Talent for Rotterdam in the Netherlands

Challenging home situations of young people are often one of the main risk factors for dropping out of school in the Netherlands. For that reason, Talent for Rotterdam invests in the prevention of early school leaving and youth unemployment by assisting young people with education, employment and coaching, and affordable housing. In close collaboration with employers, senior VET and adult education, local housing associations and youth coaches, Talent for Rotterdam aims to have more youngsters graduating with the minimum of a basic qualification, and that they enter the labour market as qualified and independent members of society.

The Talent for Rotterdam initiative focuses on 18- to 24-year-old youngsters with disrupted home environments combined with debt or psychosocial problems, but who still have the motivation to continue with school. This group



can be divided in two groups: the first group being those who have already dropped out of school, education, training or work and are therefore already far from entering into the labour market. The second group are young people at risk of dropping out of school, education, training or work. All of them are potentially talented students, who want to study, but due to personal circumstances were not able to continue with school. The aim is to give all these talented youngsters the assistance they need in order to at least obtain a basic qualification by providing them with a combined programme of school-based or work-based education, in addition to a residence and two hours of individual coaching per week. On average, youngsters participate in this project for 16-18 months. Around ninety per cent finishes this programme and receive a basic qualification. In addition, around seventy per cent of the participants who obtain a basic qualification continue to higher levels.

Educational reintegration strategies

In this final section, we will explicitly focus on strategies that aim to reintegrate young people into education, and by extension, into society. Again, these strategies are implemented in various ways across the different countries involved in the RESL.eu project. We will discuss courses, guidance or projects that both prepare young adults for educational reintegration and increase their chances of a successful educational reintegration. In general, when preparing young adults to participate and to take part in all aspects of the broader society, measures often apply a holistic student care approach, train students to become active citizens (e.g., Swedish folk schools) or provide young people with ‘soft skills’ – communication, interpersonal, etc. Nevertheless, it is not always so clear to many school personnel what exactly they have to do to prepare young people to reintegrate into education. Strategies could range from the provision of social and transferrable skills to much more specialised knowledge.

Another strategy that helps participants to engage in society and develop themselves, found in some of the measures under study, is the introduction of labour market dynamics, which seem to be something like the apprenticeship courses developed outside school – to which we already referred. When relating training more to the labour market, many young people were often better able to understand the importance of education. Thus, the focus on the labour market was often a way to become more engaged and to stay enrolled in education.

Frequently recurring risk factors of these educational reintegration measures are the initial stigma associated with the measures in general, the fact that these approaches are not offered in regular secondary education, the lack of financial resources and the change of personnel in the measures under study (e.g., due to temporary contracts).

Three specific risk factors of educational reintegration strategies were noted as well. First, most measures that are specifically oriented towards educational reintegration strategies are also confronted with relatively high proportions of drop-outs and/or high truancy rates. Although in most cases statistical analysis supporting this statement is missing, it is frequently remarked upon by many stakeholders that see a reduction of the number of participants over

time, or by participants themselves that have frequently changed programmes and/or re-enrolled several times.

Second, as all early school leavers have dropped out of school at a range of different educational levels or distinct stages, it is difficult to determine precisely in which programme these youngsters are able to enrol – or at which level. Furthermore, considering that the main focus in regular secondary education is to keep students enrolled as long as possible within their proper educational institution, there seems to be a lack of collaboration and referrals to 'alternatives'; remarkably many young adults are not aware of the existence of alternative programs.

Third, it is often difficult to define appropriate selection criteria for enrolment. As educational reintegration strategies often demand places available in internships, or utilise extensive support from implementers and resources, many of the measures or pathways developed selection criteria trying to ensure the success of their measure/pathway. It is remarkable that while recruiting participants that have previous negative experiences in education, generally lower performance levels etc., the main additional criterion that is used during the selection processes is the motivation of students. This could have important consequences, especially as the strength and the power of many measures lie mainly in their motivating role for youngsters living in demotivating contexts. These selection criteria are important to consider when evaluating the distinct measures and comparing them with each other. For instance, when looking at stakeholders' evaluation of these measures, the main outcome experience was mostly defined in terms of the actual learning profits and increases in students' study motivation over the course of the measure.

An example: School to work transition plan in Spain

Programmes of Training and Labour Insertion (PFI) are a set of voluntary educational programmes that offer early school leavers and students at risk of ESL alternative paths to both re-incorporate and/or re-engage themselves into the educational system, especially in order to continue VET studies. These Programmes of Training and Labour are organized by Catalan Department of Education and are offered in three different categories according to their specific management and to the type of institution where they are implemented:



- School to Work Transition Plan organized in collaboration between the Department of Education and the local authorities. Run in local council facilities.
- Initial Vocational Plan, which is conducted either in public schools owned by the Department of Education or in private schools and authorized training centres.
- Training programmes and professional learning, offered and conducted only in public secondary schools owned by the Department of Education.

The main purpose behind these programmes is to offer 16-21-year-old unemployed early school leavers – and secondary students who are leaving compulsory education without a lower secondary diploma – an alternative educational path that allows them to re-enter the educational system. All programmes have a duration of a single academic year and entail about 1000 hours of basic VET compulsory training modules which are especially aimed at engaging participants in further formal medium VET (upper secondary education equivalent). Medium VET formal studies can be accessed by passing a specific entry exam. Furthermore, this programme also provide participants with essential skills that facilitate their access to the labour market with better chances of obtaining a skilled job.

One of the main advantages of these programmes lies in the fact that they offer a friendly, adult-like educational environment where students get individual guidance and support by the educators, aimed at restoring their confidence and commitment to learning processes.

Student 1: “In secondary schools they should treat you a bit more like an adult than like a child. Here you are treated like an adult, which is what you are, I say.”

Student 2: “This is very different than secondary school, because they treat you differently... it’s very one-on-one. They’re not on your back supervising everything (...) they help us without us having to ask for it, they come by themselves and they explain it to us.”

Furthermore, the Programmes of Training and Labour also enable students to obtain the Secondary Education Certificate (lower secondary education). Students who complete the PFI’s compulsory training modules and then decide by themselves to continue beyond the basic accreditations with an extra general education module may obtain the Secondary Education Certificate by attending an Adult Education Centre or via IOC (an on-line platform). Note that while these programmes allow access to regular VET upper secondary education equivalent studies, the GESO (lower secondary education) certificate is not obtained without taking this extra voluntary module specifically run to obtain it.

General conclusion

In this publication, we collected the main findings from the cross-case analyses of prevention, intervention and compensatory measures for reducing early school leaving designed and implemented across 52 schools and alternative learning arenas in seven EU member states. This publication summarises two RESL.eu project papers (i.e., Nouwen et al., 2015; Van Praag et al., 2016) that each contain more in-depth findings and contextual information about the total of 76 case studies and corresponding cross-case analysis, performed between autumn 2014 and spring 2016. In this concluding section, we will bring together some of the more general findings and concluding remarks

that – alongside the more concrete findings presented in Part I and II – will inform the development of conceptual models for promising measures in- and outside regular education, as well as the policy recommendations in the next phase of the RESL.eu project. It is important to mention here that both mainstream education and alternative learning arenas each find interesting and creative ways to reduce early school leaving, ways that inspire each other and are often set up with the best intentions. In this conclusion, we will focus more in-depth on the ways both groups of measures could be improved.

A main general conclusion when comparing the findings from both (regular) school-based prevention and intervention with findings from compensatory/alternative learning approaches is that the measures' risk and protective factors are closely intertwined. Starting from school-based prevention and intervention measures, we found that several contextual preconditions that were formulated as crucial determinants of the 'success' of the measure (e.g., addressing the basic needs, investing in caring teacher-student relationships and the recognition and appreciation of students' voices) are often reflected in the core features of compensatory/alternative learning pathways. Stakeholders who designed and implement the alternative learning approaches addressed in this publication – e.g. measures with more flexible and individualised learning pathways, holistic student care approaches – often indicated these features as the *raison d'être* of the measures. They did so while at the same time explicitly referring to the shortcomings of mainstream education in meeting these conditions for successfully retaining students and successfully enabling learning with more complex needs to enable learning. When looking at the everyday realities with which supervisors and implementers of alternative learning pathways are confronted, there seems to be a tendency to consider this particular student composition in the very design of the measures. Applying a holistic student care approach and using work-based learning and other innovative pedagogical approaches seems to make them more successful in motivating students (again) to engage in schooling.

At the same time, many of the main challenges alternative learning pathways face are constraints that can be linked to the lack of inclusiveness in regular secondary education. Mainstream education's shortcomings in retaining students until graduation, for instance by providing alternative learning methods, more flexible learning pathways or caring learning contexts, often determines

the inflow of students to compensatory/alternative learning pathways. The latter often have to deal with a very particular student intake. First, many of them live in more complex living circumstances, in which they, for instance, have to provide a living for their family or that are characterised by instable family arrangements. Second, there is a higher proportion of students with learning disabilities or background variables that make learning more complex. For instance, when students' first language is different from the language of education, they can encounter difficulties speaking the language of instruction fluently. Third, compensatory measures attract a large group of young people that have already undergone negative experiences in secondary education, and the resulting distrust against educational systems and actors needs to be countered first, before any other level of engagement can be expected. The fact that these characteristics are often overrepresented in the student bodies of alternative learning pathways does not necessarily mean that the students are not eligible for obtaining educational qualifications.

Besides funding issues related to the particular student inflow of alternative/compensatory pathways, one also needs to address processes of stigmatisation related to the student inflow in alternative pathways. This is not only necessary for students' academic self-concept and study motivation but also for the evaluation of the qualifications received in these institutions on the labour market. Furthermore, a frequently mentioned problem was the lack of correct and timely information about these compensatory measures provided in mainstream education, even by career guidance counsellors. If these measures were truly seen as valid alternatives, students could be more easily redirected to these measures to find more suitable learning approaches that facilitate their educational trajectory towards a qualification. It is crucial to do this before students have endured a trajectory of negative educational experiences and academic disengagement that could hamper their future ambitions and expectations.

As for regular secondary education, the scarcity of and competition for funding can limit alternative learning arenas on the level of inclusiveness. Even though many of the students that (re-)enrol in education or training in compensatory learning pathways do so because of being/feeling excluded from regular secondary education, many of the measures in compensatory learning pathways

have built in some level of selectivity themselves. The motive for these selection criteria is often to increase the effectiveness of the alternative learning approach for those who can start. Although introducing intake screening might be seen as crucial for measures to present successful outcomes, it may yield some risks as well, considering it may introduce new forms of social and educational exclusion. If these selection criteria are based upon previous achievement results or even the initial level of motivation, these measures may actually rule out exactly the most vulnerable groups of participants.

The risk of being excluded from alternative learning pathways is often particularly pertinent for students in apprenticeship-based learning pathways. Participation in many of these pathways depends on the supply of placements and the goodwill of employers to provide quality workplace learning opportunities. Moreover, due to the stigma of studying in a 'second-best' educational pathway in many EU member states, the work-based learning pathways are, in many but not all cases, chosen more based on a process of elimination rather than positive choice. This rather negative public image that is often connected to work-based learning pathways can therefore also have negative effects on the opportunities of these students to find quality apprenticeships. Better developed orientation procedures to work-based learning pathways can help to prevent academic disengagement in mainstream education and provide more positively – and intrinsically – motivated enrolments before negative experiences in mainstream education have occurred.

Overall, the paper showed that innovative pedagogical methods, holistic student care approaches and the introduction of work-place learning can serve as inspiration for mainstream education and training to increase its level of inclusiveness for students at risk of early school leaving. However, without a more equal distribution of students with complex learning needs, (further) polarisation between regular secondary education and compensatory/alternative learning arenas is likely to occur, which can ultimately impair the feasibility of compensatory/alternative learning approaches.

Final Reports – RESL.eu Project

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