



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



Cedefop Validation Workshop:

**Evaluating impact and success for VET policies to tackle
early leaving from education and training**

Brussels, 21 October 2015

Conclusions

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Official opening by Cedefop

Irene Psifidou, Cedefop expert who organised the event, welcomed the participants at the workshop on behalf of Cedefop. She then gave an introductory speech explaining the background to this event and Cedefop's project on the role of VET to reducing early leaving from education and training. She presented the agenda of the day (see Annex 2) and pointed out the main objectives of the workshop:

- Discuss and validate the findings of the Cedefop-related study and in particular:
 - Factors and indicators contributing to the effectiveness of measures involving VET to tackle early leaving from education and training;
 - Factors needed to learn from and transfer an effective measure to another context within the country and cross-country.
- Draw relevant and useful possible recommendations to national and local policy-makers as well as to EU-level policy-makers to support the European Commission, Member States, social partners and other stakeholders to implement EU policies to reduce early leaving from education and training and to achieve the EU target by 2020.

A *tour de table* followed the opening speech and provided an overview of the experts participating in the workshop (see Annex 1.).

1 Session 1: Features of effective VET measures

Following a presentation on the methodology and scope of Cedefop project, Daniela Ulicna and Patricia Vale from the ICF research team presented the key features of effective VET measures in relation to the profile of learners and the factors affecting early leaving from VET.

Following the presentation, the participants took part in the first group work that had a focus on discussing the effective approaches being put in place to prevent or remedy early leaving.

The first discussion was facilitated by Bianca Faragau-Tavares and asked the participants to reflect on the question below and report back on their reflections to the entire group.

The question asked was: **Focusing on the content of measures, what are the key features of successful measures to tackle early leaving from education and training?**

Based on the first exercise prepared as part of their homework, participants were asked to discuss in pairs the key features of the measure that they had thought about and to then rank the common features they identify by filling in the Table (see Homework) jointly.

Afterwards, participants were divided into three groups. Each group was asked to consider a different learner profile: a) at risk of dropping out, b) has just dropped out, and c) has been outside education and training for a year. Each group discussed and listed on their flipchart: i) 'typical' challenges the learner faces which make them disengage from education, and ii) the key features that a measure should combine to help this learner.

Bianca collected the feedback from each group and prompted them to clarify views.

The first group reported the following challenges that a learner at risk of dropping out faces:

- negative attitudes of teachers and trainers;
- negative self-perception;
- negative perception of education due to accumulated failure;
- lack of basic skills;
- bullying and violence at school;
- lack of supportive home environment.

The key features of measures identified by the first group were:

- teacher training on positive attitudes towards all learners and promoting a positive and safe learning environment;
- capacity-building for teachers;
- psychological support available to all learners;
- adopting a whole-school approach involving multi-agency and cross-sectorial support for learners at risk of dropping out;
- setting up an early warning system in schools at primary level;
- bringing positive role models in the classroom;
- raising the image of VET ('re-branding');
- individualised and flexible educational support tailored to the learner's difficulties.

The second group reported on the typical challenges encountered by a young person that has just dropped out of school:

- low self-esteem;
- need for an income;
- health issues;
- family problems;
- lack of knowledge about alternative ways to get into learning and / or the job market;
- risk of getting involved in 'shadow' activities;
- developing risk behaviours;
- unemployment leading to long-term unemployment;
- housing problems;
- family responsibility to support the young person;
- problems with law enforcement;
- lack of basic skills.

Measures to help the learner would need the following key features, according to the group:

- establish quick contact with the individual who just drop-out from school;
- provide guidance and coaching by a career-councillor;
- set up early re-starting programmes;
- provide a social worker to help deal with income, health, family-related issues etc.;
- develop personalised learning programmes in function of 'learning styles';
- develop a holistic view on the individual's situation;
- focus on staff training (within school as well as outside-school staff dealing with dropouts);
- coordinate the professionals around the young person;
- set up flexible learning programmes accepted by school management;
- provide basic skills training.

The third group reported the following typical challenges faced by a learner that has been outside education and training for a year:

- disorganised or no routine at all;
- loss of social relations (friends);
- marginalisation leading to engaging in criminal activities;
- lack of self-confidence and self-esteem;
- lack of basic skills;
- difficulty to find a job;
- involving in 'black market' jobs;
- lack of vision / plans for the future.

The group also discussed the following key features of measures that could help the learner:

- get in contact with the learner;
- try to understand why he/she left school;
- engage non-profit sector or associations to serve as a link between the person who dropped out and the school;
- involve social workers that can help young people re-establish a routine;

- set up multi-professional team (case-management) to propose an individualised solution which covers the person’s global situation (health care, social security, education, etc.);
- propose attractive activities (‘something to do’) to re-integrate the learner;
- provide the young person with a mentor / guide / counsellor.

2 Session 2: Tools for implementation

The session chaired by Irene Psifidou started with a presentation of two projects that focused on developing concrete tools to tackle ELET at the level of schools:

- Learning from the **Crocoos project** – presented by Krisztina Mihalyi from the Tempus Public Foundation, and
- Learning from the **Recognise, Remedy, Reengage project** – presented by Beatrix Charlier, from the private school Marie-Consolatrice.

A group work exercise followed the presentation and engaged the participants in discussions on the processes through which successful measures are designed and implemented.

The group exercise was facilitated by Patricia Vale and asked each of the three sub-groups of participants to reflect on one of the following questions:

- **How are successful measures designed and funded?**
- **How do successful measures identify and reach out to potential target learners?**
- **How successful measures change attitudes of teachers / school leaders?**

The group work started with an individual reflection on the specific challenges related to the given question. Each participant wrote down the challenges they themselves identified. Based on the results of the individual reflection, each group then discussed the common challenges they identified in relation to the design and/or implementation of measures. Once the challenges were agreed upon in the group, then each group discussed possible solutions to address those challenges. The exercise was concluded with the three groups sharing and discussing the results of their group work in plenary.

The first group shared their reflections on how to design measures to tackle early leaving, including aspects related to funding and involvement of key stakeholders.

Challenges	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Involvement of stakeholders -> cooperation is the key ■ Involvement of local stakeholders ■ Good contact with employers to secure apprenticeship / training placements ■ Include practitioners (who have experience from the field) from bottom-up ■ Resistance to change among educators (and their trade unions) ■ ‘Convince not force’: i) incentivise experimentation; ii) show results; iii) promote diffusion. ■ Taking into consideration regional / local specificities ■ Lack of voice from young people in the design of the measures (especially regarding problem definition) ■ Clear understanding of the reasons for dropping out (‘what is the problem?’) so that measures can be targeted to the real needs of learners ■ Sustainable funding beyond pilot projects ■ Difficult bureaucratic and financial requirements ■ Performance-based funding is useful but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cooperation and involvement of stakeholders” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensive consultation at multi-level (from local level for a bottom-up approach) - cross-sectorial approach and awareness - involve stakeholders not only as experts but also as actors to have share responsibility - flexibility for implementation at local level but linked with minimal guidelines / indicators / benchmarks / targets ■ Defining the needs involving learners as well as accounting for regional / local specificities ■ Adapt bureaucratic and financial requirements to innovative projects based on evidence ■ Put evaluation in the design, including both quantitative and qualitative assessment ■ Define well the objective of the evaluated policy (i.e. indicators)

<p>must not be a dogma given its distortive effects; there is a need to leave space for costly and risky experimentations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design measures based on scientific evidence, or else, use evidence to design measures ■ Introduce assessment in the design, such as measuring the effectiveness of policies 	
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The second group reported the following challenges and solutions to identify and reach to potential early leavers:

Challenges	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design measures adapted to the needs of the target learners ■ Lack of early warning monitoring systems both at school level and at national level ■ Timing of identification of those at risk of dropping out ■ Identifying risk without stigmatising learning (i.e. labelling) ■ Challenge of motivating youth to participate ■ Prioritising the measures ■ Challenge of identifying who is responsible within and between institutions for reaching to those at risk of dropping out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop and implement a methodology based on evidence to identify and reach out to potential target learners ■ Know the rates of absenteeism of different learners ■ Set up a European system and standard for collecting data ■ Identify early leavers through local devices for diagnostics ■ Visibility of school practices ■ School flexibility and accountability within the national framework ■ Offer re-engagement (compensatory) measures inside and outside of education and training systems (i.e. second chance schools) ■ ICT training for staff (teachers and assistants) ■ Data-sharing bring together different sources of knowledge ■ Effective systems to track / identify learners with difficulties in primary / lower secondary schools ■ National policies as well as regional / local policies to coordinate measures (i.e. within national strategies)

The third group shared their thoughts on the challenges and solutions on how to change attitudes of teachers and school leaders:

Challenges	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fear of / resistance to change ■ Lack of motivation ■ School leadership-level barriers ■ Avoiding frustration from the possible risks involve in experimentations ■ New experience ('how to do things differently') ■ Changing mind-sets is difficult ■ Agenda-setting issues ■ 'Pleasure as a result' ■ The schools are closed / far from the working life ■ School statistics / targets are focused too much on students who are performing well ■ Lack of empathy towards the learners who are struggling ■ High pressure on exam results and not on quality of teaching ■ Often change of curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Training for teachers and school leaders ■ Recruiting teachers / school leaders from a range of backgrounds (i.e. different industries), having work experience outside of school environment ■ Practical guidance for teachers ■ Provide examples of success stories ■ Improve funding for supporting teachers' training ■ Include teachers' attitudes within the inspection framework ■ Open the school to working life by inviting people from different industries / backgrounds at school ■ Mentoring for teachers ■ Cooperation of teachers / school leaders with measure supporters and providers ■ Improving the initial teacher training ■ Empower teacher to change school through supporting their continuous training / professional development ■ Support teachers to take leadership at school ■ Make teachers accountable for their own students who drop out

3 Session 3: Monitoring and evaluation

The third session started with a presentation by a research project **RESL.eu** on cross-case evaluation of school-based prevention and intervention measures that focus on tackling early leaving within the school environment.

The presentation was followed by a group work exercise facilitated by Sarah Fleury. The exercise started with a reflection on the second exercise which participants had prepared as part of their 'homework'. Firstly, participants shared in plenary new indicators that they had identified, which were added to the given list of indicators:

- Change in attendance
- Past experience of learners with regards to number of dropout events
- Quality of support (e.g. qualifications of counsellors)
- Intensity of guidance
- Change in teachers' mind-sets / awareness
- Change in teachers' attitudes
- Cost per outcome
- Long-term outcomes (unemployment rates, social inclusion)
- Change in well-being
- Improvement of soft skills

Participants were then asked to tick the indicators (listed on the flipchart on the wall) which, to their knowledge, are currently measured in their country. They then had to select 5 indicators which they thought that should be measured as part of monitoring and evaluation of measures to address early leaving. The ICF research team did a quick count for each indicator and drew some conclusions on: i) which indicators are currently being measured, and ii) which indicators should be measured, according to participants' views. The count is featured in the Table below.

Caveat

It was clarified during the discussion after this exercise that the participants understood the first column (indicators currently being used) differently from how the research team intended it to be understood.

The workshop participants understood that they should identify those indicators for which data is being collected at national level. The research team on the other hand wanted to know whether policies and measures are being evaluated using these indicators. In other words whether change in these indicators is monitored in relation to measures/ policies to address early leaving.

That is why there is an important mismatch between the results of this exercise and the study findings. For example: why the study found that for most policy measures the effect of the measure on numbers of young people who achieve a qualification is not being measured the participants noted that in most countries the number of people who achieve a qualification is being measured at the level of the education system. These are however two different observations.

Table 3.1 'Votes' of participants on which indicators are currently being measured and which should be measured to monitor and evaluate measures to address early leaving

	Indicator	Currently measured in how many countries?	Should it be measured as part of monitoring/ evaluations?
1	Number of young people at risk of ELET (typically defined by the rate of absenteeism)	10	11
2	Number of young people who have left education and training without completing a programme	11	0

3	The number of persons who benefitted from the measure (beneficiaries/ participants)	11	1
4	<i>Breakdown by number of past dropout events</i>	5	
5	The share of participants who stayed in education and training (for example 6 months after intervention)	9	0
6	The share of participants who achieved a qualification	13	8
7	The share of participants who were in employment (for example 6 months after graduation)	7	4
8	Participants' satisfaction with support received	10	8
9	Change in participants' education performance	8	5
10	<i>Change in attendance</i>	4	2
11	Change in participants' attitude/ engagement in education and training	6	9
12	Change in the number of young people at risk of ELET	6	1
13	Change in the number of young people who have left education and training without completing a programme	9	3
14	The number of education and training institutions/ training companies participating	9	2
15	<i>Intensity of support (i.e. guidance)</i>	1	1
16	The number of teachers/ trainers participating	10	1
17	Number of action plans implemented	8	1
18	<i>Quality of support</i>	2	5
19	Change in education and training providers/ training companies practices	2	1
20	<i>Change in mind-sets / awareness</i>	0	1
21	Change in teachers' practices	3	10
22	<i>Change in teachers' attitudes</i>	0	3
23	<i>Cost / outcome</i>	3	7
24	<i>Long-term outcomes (social inclusion, employment)</i>	4	3
25	<i>Change in well-being</i>	6	3
26	<i>Improvement of soft skills</i>	9	0

4 Session 4: Transferability and sustainability

The research team presented examples of measures where support was provided for potential transferability in the country: the ExPairs project of the French-speaking community of Belgium, the Retention Caravan in Denmark and the introduction of a new monitoring system of early leavers in France were briefly presented.

Participants then had the chance to discuss and exchange ideas on what processes and/or tools are and/or should be put in place to support transfer from successful examples and which stakeholders are or should be targeted. They were divided into three groups and asked to reflect on the following two questions:

- **What is being done to support transfer of successful measures in your country or across countries?**

■ **What should be done to support transfer of successful measures in your country or across countries?**

The group exercise started with an individual reflection on the key elements available in participants' countries to ensure transferability as well as the key needs in terms of support needed to ensure transfer of measures. Participants then put their suggestions on the table and discussed them in the three small groups. Each group identified the most important needs in terms of support to ensure transferability of measures. Finally, the groups shared and discussed the results of their group work in plenary, which are presented in the Table below.

Table 4.1 The reflections shared by the three groups on transferring successful measures

Group #	What is being done to support transfer of successful measures	What should be done to support transfer of successful measures
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A publicly available database of all interventions ■ Portal of materials / toolkits ■ Workshops and training courses in VET ■ 'School' peer-learning and peer-reviews to evaluate one another's measures ■ 'Ambassadors / champions' of successful measures / programmes that can provide support to schools new to the measure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make information on different aspects of interventions available in public databases ■ Disseminate materials / information ■ Provide training / support on how to use these materials ■ Have experts that can help upscaling the measure ■ Have a dedicated Agency to provide support in implementing and evaluating of measures ■ Meta-evaluations of good practices to identify key factors ■ Provide time for evaluating the measure ■ Multi-agency training across education sectors (general education, VET, etc.) ■ Incorporate teachers' knowledge into policy-level evaluations ■ Establish a community of practice at international level
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conferences ■ Projects ■ Regional networks ■ Local consultation platforms ■ Cooperation between schools ■ Impact on internal development and upscaling first within the same school ■ Calls for transferring and replicating good practices ■ Erasmus+ dissemination of successful measures ■ Good practice: www.emu.dk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build capacity for management of change ■ Implement the effective methods as part of initial teacher training ■ Increase visibility of good practices ■ Promote peer-learning ■ Promote sharing between organisations ■ Set up national strategies ■ Establish a European web-platform to keep information on effective projects ■ Increase funding opportunities for second-chance and compensatory measures ■ Secure commitment from Government to upscale successful measures
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Existence of political support ■ FR: evaluation of measures, involving workshops for diagnostic and action plan ■ Barriers: 'European projects are not national projects' – effective EU-funded projects have difficulty finding national support for upscaling or transferring lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make good practices visible through 'Awards' ■ Promote study visits, info days etc. such as the annual 'week for the prevention of early school leaving' (good practice in FR) ■ Training of teachers and school leaders ■ Accountability of regional authorities ■ Get support of headmasters to upscale within the school and across schools ■ Evaluation to provide evidence of success ■ Transfer between countries is also important ■ Having one person responsible for feeding interest and keeping contacts within the project to be able to disseminate good

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practice Establish networks / associations for a 'community of practice'
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5 Session 5: Key policy messages

The session chaired by Irene Psifidou started with a panel discussion with representatives from OECD: Ms Anna Rubin, European Commission (DG EMPL): Ms Ann Vanden Bulcke and the EACEA: Ms Simona Abbatangelo. The panel discussion focused on:

- European policy initiatives and funding supporting national measures to tackle early leaving from education and training (especially the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Alliance for Apprenticeship)
- The implementation of the employment initiatives and the Youth Guarantee and factors affecting their success, mainly drawing from a recent OECD publication;
- Erasmus+ and its contribution to evidence-based policy-making in VET.

Participants were then given the chance to select three most important key policy messages out of the nine messages that so far resulted from the study and which were listed on flipcharts on the wall. The result of the 'voting' was the following:

Table 5.1 Key policy messages in order of 'votes' given by participants

#	Key policy message	Number of 'votes'
1	Vocational education and training is both: a major 'supplier' of early leavers and a major 'safety net' for those at risk of ELET. The problem is often not to be found in the VET system but in the way the specific VET providers face this problem or ignore it locally. Change of mind-sets and attitudes is needed in VET schools, training centres and training companies. Capacity building measures need to be put in place.	12
2	A lot is known about why young people leave education and training prematurely. Less is known about what works to prevent such departures or bring them back. Even less is known about whether the measures put in place are making a real difference to the young people taking part. Systematic evaluation of measures is still rare.	11
3	When measures are monitored and evaluated, most of the data collected focuses on outputs, more rarely on results and hardly ever on impacts. Information on outputs does not give sufficient insight into whether the measure / policy is making a difference and how. Evaluations should focus on analysing results. Impact evaluations need a longer term perspective but nevertheless should be made regularly.	8
4	A portfolio of complementary measures adapted to different target groups is necessary at national and local level. Early leavers are a varied group.	8
5	Systematic efforts to learn from 'what works' to tackle ELET are rare. Use of pilots and experimentations is far from being systematic and when they are funded they are not systematically evaluated and mainstreamed if successful.	6
6	The more complex the situation of the young person, the greater the need for a complex support. Comprehensive measures should focus on those in greatest need.	4
7	A lot of prevention can be done through activities that are relatively simple to put in place but are likely to be seen as 'extra work' or 'not core businesses' by VET providers. Unless there are some incentives in place these small changes will not happen alone.	2
8	European funds are being used to fund measures to tackle ELET. They could be used better to finance also monitoring and evaluation as well as capacity building of practitioners.	2

9	There is a multiplicity of VET policies and measures expected to tackle ELET but only a fraction of them are evaluated.	0
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Participants were asked to reflect on three key messages from the workshop and share them after the event. Here are the key messages shared by some of the participants:

- Provide learners with coaching and mentoring for development of career-plans including development of a positive vision of one's pathway;
- Provide work-based learning as a means to valorise VET pathways;
- Transition from remedial measures to VET programmes or apprenticeships is important;
- Every project should adopt a strong evaluation method from the beginning;
- More focus is needed on developing teachers' practices / attitudes / approaches towards vulnerable learners;
- Holistic approach to youth is important (rationale: there are multiple reasons why some learners drop out from school);
- Strict demands as far as attendance or job insertion are concerned, independently of the characteristics of the participant population and the labour market have the clear effect of a greater selection of participants and entail a penalisation of the entities that work with populations with the greatest vulnerability;
- Measures to tackle ELET should be part of the core of the VET systems and not only peripheral measures;
- All the measures to tackle ELET should be based on evidence;
- Need to invest in a personalised approaches, with a holistic view, followed by case-management, that should include reaching out to and coaching at-risk learners;
- (Medical) absenteeism can be a good signal of risk of dropping out. Extensive absence is one of the main risk factors of dropout and thus is a good 'marker' for this risk. And when going into dialogue with learners and parents about the absence, this should be done out of concern, not by control or punishment / regressive measures;
- Help is needed to upgrade and disseminate good practices at national and international level. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. Therefore, a national or even international institution can help to evaluate the interventions and to support implementation, including training of professionals. Nowadays, most interventions/good practices are not evaluated thoroughly and the tools of an intervention are, at best, diffused.

6 Closing and follow-up activities

Irene Psifidou from Cedefop gave concluding remarks. She also explained that the workshop findings would be used to validate the final report of the study and that all workshop outcomes would be shortly published on the Cedefop project website¹.

She thanked all participants for their active participation and enthusiastic exchange for which they will be acknowledged in the forthcoming Cedefop publications.

¹ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/early-leaving-education-and-training>

Annex 1. Workshop participants

Cedefop:

- Irene Psifidou, Expert at the Department for Learning and Employability
- Vlasios Korovilos, Assistant at the Department for Learning and Employability

National experts:

- Ward Nouwen – PhD Researcher at the Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Rut van Caudenberg – PhD Student at the Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium;
- Ramanan Balasubramaniam – Special Advisor at the Ministry of Education and the Retention Taskforce in Copenhagen, Denmark;
- Meeli Murasov – Chief Expert at the Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia;
- Ulrich Schunder – Inspector, Federal Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Germany;
- Krisztina Mihalyi – Project Coordinator at Tempus Public Foundation (CroCooS Project), Hungary;
- Naderi Zsuzsanna – Head of VET Department, Association of Hungarian Independent Schools, Hungary;
- France de Langenhagen – Responsible on tackling school disadvantage, DGESCO / DRDIE, France;
- Gerard Griffin – National Coordinator at Youthreach at the Department of Education and Skills, Ireland;
- Elena Ragazzi – Researcher at the National Research Council CERIS, Italy;
- Yvonne Vanneste – PhD student and youth health care physician at the Regional Public Health Service, the Netherlands;
- Erik Sandvik – Senior Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Research, Norway;
- Anna Borkowska – Head of the Department of Education and Prevention at the Ministry of Education, Poland;
- Beatrix Charlier – Education attaché and coach at the private school Marie-Consolatrice, Luxembourg;
- Antonio-Luis Mesquita da Silva – President of AE2O Association for second chance education, Portugal;
- Francesca Salva Mut – Associated Professor at the University of the Balearic Islands, Spain;
- Charlotte Blant – CEO of Youthforce, the UK.

Experts from international organisations:

- Ann Vanden Bulcke – Policy Assistant, DG Employment & Social Affairs, European Commission;
- Simona Abbatangelo – Project Officer, EACEA;
- Anna Rubin – Policy Analyst, OECD LEED.

ICF International

- Daniela Ulicna (Consulting Director / Principal)
- Patricia Vale (Consultant)
- Sarah Fleury (Junior Consultant)
- Bianca Faragau-Tavares (Junior Consultant)

Annex 2. Agenda outline of the day

09.30 - 10.00	Introductory speech Presentation on the factors affecting early leaving from VET
10.00 - 11.00	Session 1: Features of effective VET measures
11.00 - 11.15	Coffee break
11.15 - 12.30	Session 2: Tools for implementation
12.30 - 13:30	Lunch
13.30 - 14.30	Session 3: Monitoring and evaluation
14.30 - 15.30	Session 4: Transferability and sustainability
15.30 - 15.45	Coffee break
15.45 - 16.45	Session 5: Key policy messages
16.45 - 17.00	Closing and follow up activities