

CHAPTER 4.

Key features of effective policies

This chapter analyses the key features that made the 44 measures analysed in-depth successful and how these respond to the factors leading to early leaving. It also discusses which activities are particularly important for different profiles of young people at risk of dropping out or who are already early leavers. It presents, key issues around the design and implementation of effective measures.

4.1. Successful measures analysed





The factors that lead young people to disengage from education and training to the point of dropping out are discussed in detail in Volume I (Cedefop, 2016, Chapter 5). These factors feed the rationale that underpins the design of the measures analysed, most being addressed by at least one (but frequently several) measures reviewed. The factors which were not clearly covered by the measures analysed are:





- (a) gender;
- (b) working conditions;
- (c) overall economic context;
- (d) labour market regulation.



The last three are outside the scope of influence of measures to address early leaving. For gender, it is possible to imagine measures focusing specifically on the needs of young men (who are more frequently at risk of early leaving), but this aspect was not clearly addressed in any of the policies analysed.

Table 19 shows the relationships between the factors leading to early leaving, the key features of measures, and examples of measures reviewed.

Table 19. Relating factors leading to ELET and key features of measures analysed

Factors leading to ELET	Key features related to this issue	Examples of measures
<p>Non-supportive family environment</p> 	<p>Parental involvement, giving parents the tools to support the education progression and choices of their children; informing them about the education choices their children face.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the UK scheme <i>Training for success</i> (Northern Ireland), mentors play a key role in supporting the relationship between participant – parent – employer, among other aspects of support; • in the German scheme vocational orientation programme (BOP) parents are invited to the feedback discussions after the analysis of learner’s potential; • the Dutch scheme <i>Medical advice for sick-reported students</i> systematically involves parents in the discussions about youngster’s self-reported sickness, his/her medical condition and how this influences education achievement.
<p>Difficulties related to health, well-being, social issues, poverty</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • case-management. Work in parallel on the full range of challenges the person faces. Young person is in contact with one intermediary; • stabilisation of the personal situation of young person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the apprenticeship coaching scheme in Austria includes case management, during which the coach involves other institutions in the coaching process, to support the apprentice in individual issues; this could be therapists, doctors, debt counselling, youth welfare or the PES. The case management approach ensures that the coach is the main contact person to organise every step together with the apprentice; • youth labour market agencies in Germany are part of the federal plan to improve cooperation of stakeholders involved in federal and regional programmes dealing with career guidance and counselling for disadvantaged youth and their integration in education, training and the labour market. They offer one-stop shops for guidance but also deal with many other issues including personal difficulties.
<p>Students of migrant or ethnic minority origin being more frequently at risk of ELET</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve parents and inform them about the education system of the country; • desegregate the education system; • make certain pathways that can lead to success attractive to young people with minority background. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Denmark, the <i>Retention caravan</i> aimed to increase young people’s motivation for choosing VET or a basic VET course, and to give them an understanding of the value of a VET education, as well as career opportunities, in Danish society; • in Hungary the <i>Integrated pedagogical system</i> aimed to integrate children and young people facing difficulties, in particular those with Roma background, into mainstream education and so destigmatise them.
<p>Education underachievement</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide opportunities for remedial training, tutoring as part of mainstream programmes; • integrate training covering basic skills depending on individual’s needs; • individualised learning plans; • activities aimed at building confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the French Community of Belgium, the following measures were taken to prevent ELET at system level: forbid grade repetition and require teachers to provide remedial training if learners are lagging behind; • in the UK, <i>Training for success</i> targets young people who dropped out of education and training. About 40-45% of the cohort has important gaps in basic skills. For this group the programme delivers ‘essential skills’ curriculum to enable learners to make up for skill deficits and achieve qualification;

Factors leading to ELET	Key features related to this issue	Examples of measures
	and motivation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in Luxembourg, specific courses target pupils aged 15 to 18 years who lack the necessary skills to find a job and do not fulfil the requirements for entry into technical and vocational education and training. These courses also provide sociocultural, sporting or artistic activities to build confidence and motivation.
<p>Absence of positive future vision for oneself and students' inappropriate orientation</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth-centred development of goals through coaching and mentoring; opportunities to try different professional orientations (tasting). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in Austria, the youth coaching scheme provides young people at risk of early leaving with 15 or even up to 30 hours of coaching to accompany them in the development of professional and educational projects and their realisation; in Ireland, the Ballymun youth guarantee pilot project provides holistic guidance services which support the young person over several weeks/months and involve engagement of the person, assessment of youngster's profile, development and implementation of a career plan; in the UK, the youth contract provides young people with the possibility of a pre-engagement activity during which the individual's reading for a given pathway is tested. This allows young people to experiment before deciding on their progression.
<p>Negative self-perception linked to education failure</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> motivational and confidence building activities that include sport or cultural activities; getting students interested and motivated in general and in a specific profession. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in Poland, participants in the Voluntary Labour Corps work towards getting a vocational qualification but also to develop their personal and social skills necessary to be autonomous. Development of their personal and social skills takes place mainly through organising extra-learning and leisure time activities: cultural activities, sports, contests, events, to stimulate development of young people's interests; in France, in the insertion centres (which share certain characteristics with the past military service) young people participate in regular sport activities and sociocultural activities.
<p>Programme content and organisation</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> integrating work-based learning and simulations; organising theoretical and practical learning to enable rapid transfer between the two contexts; individualised programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all the second chance schools analysed (FR, PT, LU) offer a different education approach from mainstream education. Theoretical learning is closely integrated with practice to ensure its relevance to the learners; in France, the innovation pole uses a pedagogical approach based on the theory of productive learning which is activity-based, and individualised.
<p>Lack of readiness to work</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop work-readiness by working on skills such as time-management, communication, working in a team; provide work-based learning and close-to-real simulations as a motivational measure; cooperate with employers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all second chance schools based on the model of factory schools analysed (PT, AT, IT) integrate a school-level company which offers real working context for young people, in particular those who struggle finding a regular apprenticeship position; in Northern Ireland (UK), apprenticeships were strengthened as part of the strategy to improve completion rates at upper secondary level; in France, the second chance schools systematically combine working experience with school-based training modules;

Factors leading to ELET	Key features related to this issue	Examples of measures
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Italy, Turin, the crafts square provides young people in compulsory education, as well as unemployed young people and adults, with an alternative education offer. By combining within one space (the 'square') the school and the work place (a restaurant, a pub, a chocolate factory and a printing press), it offers students of the school the chance to apply immediately what they are learning in school in an environment where there are already real clients and expectations.
<p>Relationships in the workplace and in the classroom</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accountability for all teachers and trainers to tackle the problem of ELET; • school-level action plans to tackle ELET; • support not only the young person but also the apprenticeship company in conflict resolution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in Denmark, the <i>Retention caravan</i> and its successor encourage the establishment of coordinators to prevent ELET in each institution as well as the development of action plans to prevent ELET; • in the French Community of Belgium, in the <i>Expairs</i> project, institutions were supported to develop school-level projects to valorise VET pathways by improving students' motivation, reorganising educational activities to make them more relevant, and by improving students' orientation. The main aim was to support school-level innovation in this area.
<p>Attraction of the labour market</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide young people with a vision of their future beyond the qualification: offer positive role models; • remuneration of apprentices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in France, those who have been early leavers and enrol in the new chance schools (specific model of second chance schools) sign traineeship agreements with the training institutions and receive an allowance to compensate for their work contribution; • in most countries analysed apprentices receive a remuneration; • in the UK, the retention rate for apprenticeships is higher than that for some other forms of work-based learning where students are not paid.


Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews. Icons created by Freepik from www.flaticon.com






4.2. Critical success features

Choosing the right mix of activities for the target group concerned is crucial to the success of any measure. Multiple factors are associated with early leaving from education and training (ELET) (for an in-depth analysis see Volume I; Cedefop, 2016, Chapter 5). The reasons why young people exit education and training before achieving a qualification can be found within the education system itself but in the young person’s environment. Measures to tackle early leaving need to react to the underlying causes of disengagement as well as its negative consequences. Given that the reasons why young people drop out are not uniform, the solutions also need to differ. Those that are effective for the highly disengaged and demotivated target groups tend to be complex and resource extensive. Therefore, these types of measures have to be focused on those who need them most and who would not change their trajectories of disengagement through ‘lighter’ measures. In contrast, some young people at risk of early leaving only need relatively ‘light-touch’ adjustments and advice to remotivate them and to find a track that suits them.

Previous research has identified several profiles of early leavers or those at risk of early leaving. These vary from cases where the young person faces major difficulties (often independent of the education context) to cases where the reasons for dropping out are less severe and the level of disengagement is also less (Section 5.1 of Volume I; Cedefop, 2016). This section presents the key features of effective measures to tackle ELET relating to six profiles identified using the narratives that interviewees provided about what leads young people to disengage (Tables 20 and 21). These profiles have the purpose of illustrating how different risk factors can interact and lead to early leaving.

Table 20. **Six profiles of early leavers and learners at risk of early leaving**

<p>Learners escaping the system</p> 	<p>These young people often show limited interest in education activities which they do not perceive as meaningful for them. In many cases, their parents are also not active in following their education and do not encourage and motivate them to succeed. They are often average or below average performers in academic subjects. Their disengagement is reflected in high levels of absenteeism.</p> <p>They have low education aspirations and often they have no or little career vision for themselves. The education environment is something they endure but they do not positively associate with it. They did not actively choose the programme in which they are enrolled but were advised to follow it.</p> <p>These young people are often in a grey zone: they could drop out but they could also stay in education depending on other contextual developments. They drop out when there is an opportunity of a job, when they face a challenge such as a transition to a new environment and a new learning context, or when the support they need or try to turn to is simply not there or they do not know where to find it.</p>
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<p>Learners confronting the system</p> 	<p>These are young people who have high levels of absenteeism and who, though still formally in education and training, are already strongly disengaged. Over the years, they have accumulated gaps across skills and academic areas. Their education performance is subsequently rather poor. In some cases, this may be linked to non-diagnosed learning difficulties. They have negative attitudes towards education and training which may result in conflictual behaviours. They fail to find education and training meaningful.</p>
<p>Learners disengaging due to difficulties adapting after transition</p> 	<p>These young people are at risk of dropping out during transition from one type of education/training to another. They have high rate of absenteeism. The reality of the training does not match their expectations and they are undecided about their future orientation. Thus, they do not have a positive attitude towards the new programme and they do not mix with the rest of the group. Often, they do not have the right habits and social competence to engage successfully in the training programme. They are frequently enrolled in a programme of which they have only partial understanding. Their choice of programme was passive and is not a reflection of a profound aspiration.</p>
<p>Learners disengaging because they cannot find a placement of their choice</p> 	<p>These are young people who qualify as early leavers because they did not manage to secure a training place. They can be young people who did not find an apprenticeship placement or who did not find a training programme corresponding to their choice. They did not disengage from education/training but ended up being left behind due to mismatch in their expectations and the availability of training places.</p> <p>This category also covers those young people who did not actively drop out of education/training but who failed the final examination and therefore did not qualify.</p> <p>These are often young people who are in a grey zone between early leavers and regular students. They may not be radically different from those who secure a training place or who pass examinations successfully. Usually, they are slightly weaker students, prone to stress or less capable of presenting themselves in a manner which will secure them an apprenticeship position or other form of training.</p>
<p>Learners who had to leave ET because of caring, parenting or working obligations</p> 	<p>These are young people who left education and training because they had obligations which were not compatible with full-time study, such as parenting responsibilities, need to earn an income or need to take care of other family members. Their education performance prior to dropping out used to be average but it is not the main reason why they disengaged. Though they decided to drop out of education under constraints, in many cases, they had rather low aspirations.</p>
<p>Learners combining multiple disadvantages, possibly facing health and psycho-social issues</p> 	<p>These are young people who already left education and training prematurely and who did so after a progressive period of disengagement which resulted in a profound break-up from the education system. They ended up leaving education and training for a variety of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of motivation to continue learning and generally low appreciation of the value of learning. This can be linked to insufficient parental engagement and the importance they attribute to education and training; • previous educational failures, stigmatisation as 'bad student' and related low self-esteem; • marginalisation in the school environment and in the classroom. They may have been victims of bullying, disregarded by their teachers or excluded from school for behavioural issues; • lack of longer-term perspective for themselves, disillusion with what education can offer them and absence of meaning in past schooling activities.

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In many cases, the young people at risk of abandoning education and training also face several non-educational challenges which further worsen their disengagement. These can be issues such as mental health and wellbeing problems, drug or alcohol use, unstable family context, poverty, conflict with the law or parenting responsibilities.

Also, some young people with learning difficulties and disabilities often end up in this group, due to lack of prompt support and accumulation of education failures.

For many of these young people, school is often just one more obstacle to overcome rather than a route to a more promising future.

The borders between these profiles are blurred; they combine several characteristics:

- (a) level of (dis)engagement of the young person;
- (b) non-education challenges the person is facing;
- (c) prior educational achievement;
- (d) experience of education and self-perception as a learner;
- (e) stage of learner education and training pathway.

This last is understood as whether they are still engaged in education/training or have already dropped out. This characteristic is not intrinsic to the individual and his/her context.

Not all learners who combine the characteristics of the marginalised or obliged profile have already dropped out from education or training. However, in most cases, measures targeting specifically these profiles are designed as intervention or compensation measures. Young people who correspond to the profile of escapist or non-conformist may evolve into one of the other categories as their circumstances change and their engagement in education and training worsens. That is why the profiles and the measures targeting these profiles have been grouped under the categories of prevention, intervention and compensation and reflected in the structure of this section. However, such categorisation is never clear cut. Many prevention activities also have aspects of intervention and many compensation measures are also, to a certain extent, intervention measures. The distinction is usually quite clear between prevention and compensation, even though some measures analysed provided both forms of support.

Table 21. Overview of early leavers' profiles and learners at risk of ELET

	Escapist	Non-conformist	Lost in transition	Resigned	Obligated	Marginalised
Summary	Learners escaping the system	Learners confronting the system	Learners disengaging due to difficulties adapting after transition	Learners disengaging because they cannot find a placement	Learners who had to leave ET because of caring, parenting or working obligations	Learners combining multiple disadvantages, possibly facing health and psycho-social issues
Level of dis-engagement	Medium. Frequent absences but still attends education and training. Has some positive linkages with education/school.	Rather high. Frequent absences, rebellious behaviour in school, conflictual relationship with teachers and sometimes peers.	Medium. Chooses a new type of programme but this proves to be ill-adapted to his/her capacities and aspirations and/or competences; he/she progressively disengages.	Medium to high. Is left behind because his/her skills are not suitable to integrate into the type of programme s/he wants to enrol in.	Medium. Makes a decision to leave education/training because of his/her family or economic context.	High. No longer in education and training for a prolonged period of time. Shows no interest in education and training.
Non-education challenges	Low aspirations that can be linked to lack of family support and engagement. Possibly mental health issues such as depression.	Possibly complex personal, social and/or family issues. Possibly mental health issues such as depression.	Often low aspirations and low parental support, but not necessarily other major issues.	Possibly present but not necessarily severe.	Cannot afford to pursue full time education/training for reasons such as: needs an income, needs to take care of a parent, parenting responsibilities, etc.	Complex personal, social and/or family issues; possibly issues of health, mental well-being or antisocial behaviours.
Prior education achievement	Average or below average but not repeated failure.	Poor, often accumulates gaps in basic skills which prevent progress. Possibly having learning difficulties.	Average to poor. Does not have the skills needed to adapt to the new type of programme.	Poor, was not accepted in a programme or his/her choice often due to poor results.	Average	Often poor education results, gaps in basic skills.
Experience of education and self-perception as a learner	Neutral	Negative, often stigmatised as 'bad student', perceives self as not capable of learning.	Negative. The new programme does not suit his/her expectations – creates a negative attitude and low self-esteem.	Neutral or negative	Neutral	Very negative. Felt stigmatised. Low self-esteem and confidence in own learning capacity.
Stage on their pathway	Still in education and training.	Still in education and training.	Still in education and training but on the verge of leaving.	On the verge of leaving education and training.	Already dropped out.	Already dropped out for a longer period of time.

Source: Cedefop.

The study looked at whether and how the 44 measures analysed could be matched to these profiles. While the boundaries between the different profiles are blurred and different measures will apply to them, the study found that:

- (a) the preventative measures often target the escapist and non-conformist. They also try to prevent the profile 'lost in transition';
- (b) the intervention measures typically target the profiles 'lost in transition' and 'resigned';
- (c) the compensation measures focus on those who are 'resigned', 'obligated' or 'marginalised'. The measures that target the 'marginalised' profile are often quite different to those targeting the other profiles, as they offer much more comprehensive support. The measures targeting the 'resigned' and 'obligated' types are often labour-market-related measures.

Section 4.2.1 discusses the key features of prevention, intervention and compensation measures linking the six profiles identified.

4.2.1. Key features of successful prevention measures

The prevention measures to avoid young people leaving education and training prematurely have the following key features:

- (a) engage in a discussion with the young person to show interest in him/her and also to understand his/her challenges;
- (b) review the planning of education and training to ensure that young people can constantly make the link and the transfer between theory and practice, improving the perceived relevance of the more theoretical parts of training;
- (c) provide young-person-driven counselling, mentoring or coaching to help him/her develop a positive vision of his/her future which includes learning;
- (d) raise awareness among teachers about the importance of combating early leaving and their role in this context;
- (e) develop school-level commitment to prevention activities;
- (f) involve parents in discussions about their children's orientation. Make them better informed about the educational choices available and raise awareness of the importance of their commitment to their child's education pathway.

Many preventive measures target learners who correspond to the profiles of 'escapist' and 'non-conformist'. Often, relatively small changes and interventions are sufficient to make a difference for these young people and refocus them. These changes are often done within mainstream education and involve the development of interrelationships within and across schools, with parents, and in conjunction with local agencies and support services. They introduce multidisciplinary teams and measures to ensure that teachers have the resources and support they need (Table 22).

Table 22. **Key features of prevention measures**

Key characteristics/activities implemented	Number of measures with this characteristic
Accompany the young person to develop a career plan/set objectives	12
Parents' engagement	7
Whole-school approach: school-level action plan	5
Make teachers responsible and/or provide training or mentoring to teachers	6

Source: Cedefop.

Boxes 20 and 21 show the pathways of learners in these situations as reported in interviews during case study visits.

Box 20. Learner pathway vignette: escapist

Participant profile: 17-year-old male, living in a disadvantaged suburban area

He was a low performer in lower secondary education and had already repeated a grade twice due to absenteeism. The school psychologist recommended him to try a pre-vocational programme at lower secondary level. These programmes had just been introduced and he applied for the only course available in the municipality. It involved trying out three different vocational areas. Initially, he did not have a particular interest in any of them; he simply did not see himself in the mainstream programme.

During the one-year pre-vocational course, he gained interest in one of the vocational areas he tried out. His performance at school improved, although he still struggled to pass mathematics, and showed some absenteeism. After completing the programme, he decided to enrol in a two-year upper secondary VET programme in the same school in the vocational area he had been most interested in.

He has completed the first year of the upper secondary VET programme. During that year, his absenteeism was lower than in the previous year. The student's aspirations grew. He now plans to enrol in the second year of the programme and is even considering continuing to a higher VET programme after that.

When asked about what made the difference in this programme, the student insisted on the strong relationship with the group tutor, who is also the teacher of the vocational area, and with the other students in the group. He explained that the teacher helped connecting theory and practice. The teacher also supported him throughout the school years. Despite initial disagreements, they ended up by adapting to each other, and building up a relationship based on trust. The support of his parents and the sharing of experiences with other students in the group were also important. Finding a vocational area that he liked was a clear motivating factor.

Source: Interview during case study visit.

Box 21. Learner pathway vignette: non-conformist

Participant profile: 15-year-old male, living in a relatively deprived area of a large city

When completing the lower secondary cycle, he was in one of the lower streamed classes. He had not been getting on very well at school and found some of the lessons challenging, especially when there was a lot of reading to do; as a result, his behaviour and attendance was in decline. His school was located in a relatively deprived area of a large city and a high proportion of students leave the school without an upper secondary leaving certificate.

One of the teachers at the school approached him and suggested that he might be suited to the pre-vocational programme for the upper secondary rather than the mainstream programme, which is more academic. The teacher explained that the programme involved a mix of academic and vocational curriculum and was intended to prepare students for the transition from school to adult and working life.

At first, he was not sure about this option because the programme had a reputation as being for students that were not as bright as others. He was worried that employers would not hire him if his school certificate was attained through this programme. But the teacher persuaded him that this was the best option because otherwise he might not succeed at all in the more academic programme. He was also attracted by the modular system of assessment and the chance to have work experience in an engineering company, as this was what he hoped to do for work afterwards.

Eventually, he enjoyed his studies on the pre-vocational programme, especially the different style of teaching, group work and opportunity to do more practical work. This built on his preference for learning by doing rather than learning by listening. He also got on well with others in his class. He felt much more positive about learning and his self-esteem increased when he saw the results of his modules over the two years and could work at his own pace.

Following his graduation from the programme, he decided to do further study. While he could not go into university from his programme, he did a complementary course which gives access to higher VET. He also has a job offer from a local engineering company who are looking for someone with practical know-how and some work experience. He is really pleased that he took the option for the pre-vocational programme when he was 15 years old; he has friends that were in his class and who took the mainstream programme but dropped out because they could not keep up with the work.

Source: Interview during case study visit.

Three types of activity frequently found in effective prevention measures are discussed below.

4.2.1.1. *Counselling, coaching or mentoring: objectives and plans*

Developing a positive future outlook which embraces further learning is a key first step for demotivated young people. The counselling methodology itself is a motivational tool ⁽¹⁴⁾. It proceeds by questioning the young person about his/her future, encouraging him/her to take responsibility for his/her development and act upon the aspirations formulated.

The one-to-one contact that the young person gets is also seen as beneficial. The fact that s/he develops a trusted relationship is in itself motivating. The lack of personal relationship between the learner and the teacher in a previous educational experience is often one of the issues that led to disengagement.

Further, the counsellor is a neutral person who can intervene in case of misunderstandings or conflicts between the learner and the education and training institution, or the employer in case of apprenticeships. That is why in many cases the counsellors are not the teachers or trainers directly.

For these measures to succeed, it is crucial that:

- (a) counsellors are trained to work with young people facing difficulties; often they are youth workers;
- (b) there is a medium-term perspective and the young people keep in touch with one single counsellor. The continuity enables development of a personal relationship. However, it is not uncommon that the counsellors work on temporary contracts and are themselves in a relatively precarious situation, which results in high turnover.

The German *VerA* (prevention of training dropout) connects apprentices at risk of dropping out (mentees) with senior experts (mentors) on a one-to-one basis. These senior experts are senior citizens, retirees who volunteer to pass on their experience and help young people in trouble. The structure can help to focus on the specific problems of the mentee. The problems worked on by the pair may include professional questions linked to the apprenticeship or the school work, studying for exams, or working on personal issues such as motivation, self-assurance, or family-related or financial problems. The pairings last between a few months up to many years throughout the apprenticeship, depending on the demand and motivation of the mentor and the mentee. As a rule, mentors take part in two-day introductory courses organised by the regional coordinators. Biannual meetings with other mentors are also organised, where experiences and challenges are elaborated on and ideas are exchanged.

⁽¹⁴⁾ For example Wells et al., 2014; Cryer and Atkinson, 2015.

The youth coaching scheme in Austria adopts a case management approach, where one coach is responsible for the entire coaching process of a given learner. This includes vocational orientation, transfer to other measures, organisation of internships, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, cooperation with other initiatives and institutions (such as the PES, youth welfare), and inclusion of the family and social environment. Coaching providers are companies, NGOs and social enterprises, selected by the federal agency for social matters, and people with disabilities through a regional call for proposals.

4.2.1.2. *Parental involvement: encouraging and raising aspirations*

Several studies showed that parental involvement in children's and adolescents' education is correlated with the probability of staying in education (e.g. De Witte and Rogge, 2013; Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir, 2009). There are several theories explaining why parental involvement matters for child and adolescent educational success (for an overview see Tekin, 2011). Measures to prevent ELET have learned from these theories and actions developed. Parents can be more or less involved in their children's education depending on whether they know that their engagement makes a difference to the child's future, and this is influenced by their experiences with school in the past (Avvisati et al., 2010). Outreach activities to bridge the gap between school and parents involve parents so they are better informed about the school system and the pathway of the young person, to encourage them to show interest in their child's progress and challenges, and to emphasise the need to avoid absenteeism (e.g. Paris School of Economics, 2010).

Measures that encourage parental involvement in school governance, teacher/parent relationships, and parents as resource to the school and to each other are effective with learners at risk of dropping out, provided that the young person is not in a conflict with his/her family. Parental involvement works in those situations where the relationship within the family remains good.

The initiative *Medical advice for sick-reported students* in the Netherlands systematically involves parents. The aim of this initiative is to reduce absenteeism for medical reasons by identifying biological, psychological and social factors by youth health care physicians and defining an action plan. Absenteeism for medical reasons is an important signal of psycho-social difficulties. Evaluation of the initiative showed that absenteeism reduced significantly, three months and also one year after the intervention (from 8.5 days to 5.7 and then 4.9) ⁽¹⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Results provided by an interviewee [unpublished].

In the youth coaching scheme in Austria, parents receive information through leaflets and information events and can participate in a first meeting with the coach. Also, in the case of young adults who are not in education or training, parents are invited to contact the coaching provider or the regional coordination office. However, learners participate voluntarily and do not need an approval by their parents.

4.2.1.3. *Whole-school approach and initiatives increasing teacher responsibility*

Early leaving is too often considered as a problem of the learner, with research into individual causes of disengagement. But the individual responsibility is only one part of the story. Grade repetition and exclusion of students from schools are sometimes mechanisms through which education and training institutions remove the challenge of non-motivated students. There are other factors linked to education institutions which influence early leaving (class climate, stigmatisation by teachers) (e.g. Blaya, 2010).

This has driven the European Union's ET 2020 working group on schools policy to call for a whole-school approach to tackling early school leaving (European Commission, 2015b). As explained by this group, this 'means that the objective of eliminating dropout and encouraging school success for all should be promoted consistently and systematically across all those dimensions of school life which may have an impact on educational achievement. In a 'whole-school approach', all members of the school community (school leaders, middle management, teaching and non-teaching staff, learners, parents and families) feel responsible and play an active role in tackling educational disadvantage and preventing dropout' (European Commission, 2015b, p. 8).

Several initiatives reviewed focused on putting in place school-level action plans or raising teachers' awareness of the problem of early leaving. The action plans can cover a variety of activities such as:

- (a) centrally monitoring absenteeism and identifying students at risk;
- (b) offering support to those at risk through counselling, change of track, individualised planning;
- (c) being accountable for activities carried out;
- (d) teacher training and continuous support to teachers.

The challenges for measures which require schools to put in place such action plans are:

- (a) deep understanding and acceptance of the role of the action plan to avoid it becoming a purely formal exercise;
- (b) frequent over-reliance on the enthusiasm of one individual who leads the initiative;

- (c) relationship between those in charge of the action plan and teachers who are associated with high levels of dropping out. Even within VET institutions, the rates of early leaving often differ between types of programme, professions and sometimes classes. This can depend on the type of population the programme attracts or the teacher's relationship with the group. In the latter case, mobilising underperforming teachers is often a major challenge.

In the French Community of Belgium, schools were invited to develop action plans focusing on one or more of three key issues: student motivation, student orientation and school-organisation (such as changing routines). This approach was initially introduced under the project *Expairs* but it was subsequently mainstreamed via a ministry circular (*Direction générale de l'enseignement obligatoire*, 2014). This whole-school approach is also present in the reform of the VET systems focused on certification per units (CPU)⁽¹⁶⁾. Training is structured by units which are acquired progressively. If a student fails an assessment for a unit, the school has to put in place remedial measures to bring him or her to the required level of competence.

School-level responsibility is also emphasised in the plan to fight ELET in France (French Ministry of Education, 2014). The VET schools visited during this assignment have all clearly identified a person (head of school or his/her deputy) who is in charge of coordinating actions to prevent early leaving.

4.2.2. Key features of successful intervention measures

The identified intervention measures put in place for young people at risk of early leaving include:

- (a) organisation of early remedial support to avoid them accumulating wide competence gaps compared to the curriculum;
- (b) possibilities for young people to try several professions to have a more concrete idea of the fit between personal profile and the work;
- (c) clarify aspirations and develop a positive learning project for oneself;
- (d) acquire the basic routines needed to integrate into a programme and succeed, including work-readiness to enrol in apprenticeships;
- (e) provide psycho-pedagogical support to help develop effective strategies to deal with learning difficulties and adjust the training programme and assessment requirements accordingly;

⁽¹⁶⁾ Certification per units, <http://www.cpu.cfwb.be/>

- (f) motivation and engagement measures to develop positive attitude to education and training; work-based learning and other forms of practice-based training can be included;
- (g) identify health and well-being challenges and support the young person in overcoming these, including, if needed, by adjusting the education programme.

Measures in this category mostly focus on young people who correspond to the profiles of learners ‘lost in transition’ and ‘resigned’ (Boxes 22 and 23). The sections below discuss the activities most frequently mentioned in measures focusing on young people in these situations.

Table 23. **Key features of intervention measures**

Key characteristics/activities implemented	Number of measures with this characteristic
Developing work readiness	10
Individualised development and learning plan	11
Help the young person to develop a career plan/set objectives	17
Flexible programme and educational arrangements	8
Work-based learning or close-to-real simulation	9
Social and communication skills; everyday routines and social contact	8
Remediation support to learners in difficulty	7

Source: Cedefop.

Box 22. Learner pathway vignette: lost in transition

Participant profile: 21-year-old female, living in a disadvantaged suburban area

She was a low performer and was struggling to finish lower secondary school. Her family had financial problems and she wanted to get a qualification as soon as possible. She then tried several lower secondary pre-vocational tracks offered by her school, but she did not like them.

The school psychologist suggested that she could try a new type of pre-vocational track (at lower secondary level) offered in a nearby school, offering trial of three different types of profession. She followed this track and found an area she was interested in.

After she finished lower secondary, she pursued a VET track in upper secondary in her chosen area. Her absenteeism decreased from lower secondary to upper secondary. She believed that the last year was the most interesting since the subjects were more closely related with the profession.

She has now completed the two-year programme and has been offered her first job: a six-month contract in the enterprise where she did her last internship.

She attributes the positive results partially to being more mature and to the strong support provided by the teacher in charge of the vocational area. However, finding an area of her interest was critical for completion. She remarked that her colleagues, who dropped out or had worse results were not interested in the field.

She appreciated the opportunity of developing work-based learning in different companies since this helped her understand the options in terms of working conditions in the sector. It was also motivating for her to participate in a local initiative where she developed activities in her training field with primary school children.

Source: Interview during case study visit.

4.2.2.1. *Remedial training: addressing gaps before they translate into failure*

One of the key factors leading to early leaving is accumulation of academic failure. If young people miss certain key competences, this hinders them from further learning as they do not have the basis to understand and assimilate new material. Such competence gaps have the tendency to become broader unless they are tackled early. Another negative consequence of academic failure is the related stigmatisation. Young people who frequently fail in education and training, put themselves in a position where they are no longer receptive to learning. They embody the idea that they are not efficient learners, which then prevents learning.

The measures analysed put in place remedial training to address gaps. It is important to ensure that these are not perceived by the young person as further stigmatisation but as support. Such measures also require teachers/trainers to have a good, regular understanding of the young person's progress, as well as of how do they see themselves, and how they feel they are perceived.

In certain cities of France, a volunteering association (AFEV) provides long-term individualised support to disadvantaged VET students to reduce absenteeism and risk of dropping out due to low academic achievement. This support has three main aims or axes:

- (a) providing methodological help for studying general courses (such as mathematics and French);
- (b) accompanying the learner in his/her orientation and professional project;
- (c) accompanying the learner in his/her personal development to increase his/her autonomy and mobility in the city and search for adequate support services.

The volunteers are usually university students. The beneficiaries are referred to receive such remedial support directly by the VET school.

In the French Community of Belgium, reform introduced a new approach to organisation of learning and assessment. The curriculum and the assessment are based on competence-based units, with each unit assessed and certified. The

units are developed to build on each other throughout the duration of the training. The reform also brought the restriction of class-repetition. Students can no longer be required to repeat a grade. If a student fails the assessment of a unit (which is done after a few months, not only at the end of the academic year), the school and, more specifically, the teacher and/or trainer are required to put remedial measures in place.

Box 23. Learner pathway vignette: resigned

Participant profile: 16-year-old male, not in employment, education or training

He was a low performer in lower secondary school and failed the exams at the end of the cycle.

His school referred him into the remedial programme, but he did not want more studying, which he first thought the programme focused on.

He tried to get a job, but without success, because he was told that he lacks both qualification and basic skills required. His unemployment benefits were cut after several months and his family was pushing him to obtain a qualification to be able to get a job.

He finally decided to apply for the remedial programme and, given his low levels of qualifications, was accepted immediately.

According to his particular needs assessed when entering the programme, he was advised to follow personalised courses for numeracy and literacy, with the main objective to achieve the lower secondary examination. Because the courses were far from where he lived, he received support in the form of a monthly transport pass.

Every week, he spends one day in the classroom to get individualised learning support for the examination. He trains three days and a half in a company to get on-the-job skills and work experience. Half a day per week consists of guided personal learning, which means one-to-one support with learning difficulties (such as learning techniques and, concentration span). He appreciates the practical learning as well as the individualised support on examination subjects (basic literacy and numeracy).

He also likes the trips that the programme organises to visit industries, and the recent youth camp.

He meets his mentor (keyworker) every week to discuss any problems and his progress towards his objectives from the personal action plan. He trusts his mentor and appreciates his help and advice; he particularly likes that his mentor is encouraging him to continue in the programme and believes that he can succeed in the examination. This boosts his self-confidence.

He stayed in the programme for six months before taking and successfully completing the examination. With the help of a career advisor, he then enrolled in a pre-apprentice scheme for six weeks to become eligible and ready for apprenticeships.

As a next step, he hopes to get an apprenticeship (which is well remunerated in the country).

Source: Interview during case study visit.

4.2.2.2. *Tasting measures: creating interest and aiding orientation*

Transition from lower secondary to upper secondary implies a choice of programme orientation. This choice is often not well-informed and may be seen as second or third best option by the young person himself/herself.

The role of tasting measures in this context is to give young people the opportunity to try various orientations based on their interest and their abilities.

In Luxembourg, as part of the measures organised by *Local action for youth*, short 'orientation' traineeships are organised in cooperation with secondary schools. Each of the 2 000 pupils in the final preparatory year of lower secondary education carries out two company-based traineeships of two weeks: this means approximately 3 600 to 4 000 traineeships each year. The organisation helps pupils with the administrative procedures of securing a taster traineeship, while teachers use informal networks built with local employers to support this programme ⁽¹⁷⁾.

As part of the assisted VET programme (*Carpo*) in Germany students have to carry out internship arrangements, which last from two to four weeks. This programme aims to integrate young people who face difficulties entering apprenticeships because of their migration background or parenthood. As part of the measure, participants are supposed to do one or two internships at companies in fields where they are interested to start an apprenticeship. The (unpaid) internships work as a trial phase for both the apprentice and the company, who can test the apprentice and often agree to accept them as an apprentice after the internship.

4.2.2.3. *Building work-readiness: habits and behaviours that enable participation*

One of the challenges young people face is that they do not manage to find an apprenticeship or internship placement. Several measures analysed integrated a component focusing on developing work-readiness. This includes building basic behaviours that enable participation in company life, such as punctuality, social skills or working in a team.

The training in production schools in Austria includes modules focusing on work readiness. These aim to organise training activities tailored to the individual situation and targets. Three types of training module are covered:

⁽¹⁷⁾ The prevention strand of *Local action for youth* (*Action local pour jeunes*, ALJ) activity which covers one-day information courses (OSNA) and 'orientation' traineeships made available to 2 000 pupils in the preparatory period of lower secondary education, was evaluated between November 2014 and October 2015 by the Agency for the Development of School Quality (*Agence pour le développement de la qualité scolaire*, *Agence-qualité*).

- (a) modules with a focus on getting involved in working processes provide support for beginners. They aim to (re-)adjust young adults to everyday routine, such as going to work regularly or having social contacts;
- (b) training modules with a focus on training working habits and values (such as being punctual, calling when not coming to work) and gaining and using practical competences;
- (c) training modules with a focus on preparing for specific vocational training, aiming to enable transfer to an apprenticeship.

In Hungary, the *Springboard* initiative includes, among other things, training to develop basic labour and career-building competences to support student career choices. A special 'bridge to employment' module was developed. At least six occupational fields were taught at each *Dobbantó* class in accordance with the interests of the students and the possibilities of the participating VET. The module put particular emphasis on workplace visits and job-shadowing, providing the students an opportunity to learn and gain experience in the specific vocations.

4.2.3. Key features of successful compensation measures

Compensation measures target young people who are already disengaged from education and training. They often target, at the same time, young people who are outside work (so not in education, employment or training). The measures in this category can be differentiated between those that have a strong labour market integration focus and those that also place strong emphasis on the education, personal development and social inclusion aspects.

Measures in this category often combined the same or similar activities as the intervention measures but they also emphasised:

- (a) training that gives access to a qualification but which is sufficiently flexible to enable the target group to attend to existing obligations or which provides an alternative source of revenue;
- (b) tailor-made training to improve basic skills;
- (c) motivational activities to help build confidence and self-efficacy;
- (d) support with non-education challenges such as health, housing, social benefits;
- (e) developing social competences to enable young people integrate into a group of students or a group of employees;
- (f) acquiring basic habits which are needed for (re-)integration into education and training and/or employment, such as punctuality, planning, learning-to-learn.

Acquiring a vocational qualification is a next step for some of the measures analysed and the immediate objective is to reengage the young person in a learning process. Therefore, some of the programmes did not directly give access to qualifications but were bridging programmes that help reengage young people and then lead them on to a qualifying training programme.

Such measures typically target young people who correspond to the ‘obligated’ or the ‘marginalised’ profile (Boxes 24 and 25).

The key features of the measures are presented in Table 24 and discussed below.

Table 24. **Key features of compensation measures**

Key characteristics/activities implemented	Number of measures with this characteristic
Accompany the young person to develop a career plan/set objectives	18
Developing work readiness	14
Work-based learning or close-to-real simulation	12
Individualised development and learning plan	15
Social and communication skills: everyday routines and social contact	9
Training to upgrade basic skills	8
Flexible programme and educational arrangements	10
Activities aimed at developing self-confidence, motivation, engagement	7
Opportunities to transit to training/apprenticeship	7
Case management/comprehensive support provided by multidisciplinary staff	6

Source: Cedefop.

4.2.3.1. *Case management and multifaceted support*

These young people face multiple challenges, education being only one of them. They are disengaged and demotivated but they may also have psychosocial difficulties, housing, mental health or other difficulties. Resurrecting their interest in education and training is only one of several types of support they need and measures targeting such young people offer complex support which attempts to tackle multiple issues. A key principle of this support is case management, meaning that the professional working with the young person coordinates the different services enlisted to meet his/her individual needs. Rather than sending the young person from one type of social services to another, the case manager liaises with the services, and coordinates the requests and responses to deliver tailor-made multifaceted support.

Box 24. Learner pathway vignette: obligated

Participant profile: 20-year-old female, leaving in a disadvantaged urban area

She was a medium performer in lower secondary school and was oriented into the vocational track (school-based training) at age 16. However, she frequently missed classes and had difficulties focusing on her studies, as she had started to work part-time during evenings and week-ends to support her parents and siblings. Towards the end of the school year, she took up a full-time job, and dropped out of school.

During the next couple of years, she worked under different precarious contracts. She then realised how her lack of qualification was a major obstacle to finding a stable job, but was unsure if and how she could resume her studies due to her family's financial situation.

During a period of unemployment, she registered at the local employment service for young people. Her adviser, based on her profile and interests, suggested that she could apply to a second chance programme in a local VET school to prepare a vocational qualification in sales in two years.

What convinced her to apply to the second chance programme was the opportunity to receive a monthly grant during her studies and the good prospects for obtaining a qualification (high rates of success at final exams). She took the test and passed an interview with the school.

Her selection at the school motivated her to look for a company that could take her on as a trainee for the duration of her training. She also signed a contract with the school to formalise her commitment to attend classes and on-the-job training.

Every week, she spends two days at the company and three days at the second chance school. Compared to her previous experience in school-based VET, the combination of on-the-job experience with classes encourages her to learn and her attendance is rewarded by a monthly grant.

She also appreciates the close contact with her tutor in the company as well as the fact that the second chance school staff is very open to discussing students' personal matters.

She is still in contact with her advisor at the public employment services, who receives her quarterly school reports.

She hopes to be recruited by the company where she undertakes her traineeship when she graduates.

Source: Interview during case study visit.

Box 25. Learner pathway vignette: marginalised

Participant profile: 18-year-old male, living in a rural town

Like many participants on the programme, he struggled in lower secondary school. He mostly disliked the way he felt: the teachers looked down on him and spoke down to him, like they were 'better' than he was. The more he felt they did it, the more he wanted to rebel. He felt angry with the system and was frequently absent from school.

Ultimately, his studies suffered; as a result, he did not do very well in his lower secondary education exams and left school.

He came from a socially and economically disadvantaged background with a difficult home life. His family had originally moved from a deprived area in the city to this rural town.

He knew about the second chance education centre in his area because he had friends locally who had preceded him there. He knew that this option offered him a chance to continue his education while offering him some independence by providing him with a weekly allowance. His mother was also aware of the programme and interested in exploring this option with him; she attended the centre initially with him to meet the staff and learn more about the measure.

Initially, he had considered registering with the second chance education programme just to have 'something to do'. At the same time, he had been worried that he might continue to struggle in a hierarchical, institutionalised setting.

However, he immediately found the staff in the centre interested, friendly and encouraging – they talked to him like he was 'an equal', 'like a normal person' – which cemented his decision to register for the programme. He found that this mutually respectful approach of staff and students, along with activities based around the social development of participants (such as cooking lunch together with staff daily) and the opportunity to discuss personal issues with staff helped him to build his confidence socially. He believes this aspect of the programme helped to make him less angry, more confident and more respectful of others around him.

Also, he felt that the two-week work experience component completed during each year of the programme enabled him to get a feel for what it was like to work 'for real' and the importance of getting on with other people in the job.

He found the career guidance service offered by the centre staff very helpful, first, in showing him the range of education and training options that were available to him, and, second, in nurturing within him a desire to think about and discover the career that he would genuinely like to progress towards.

He found the way in which he was assessed on modules suited him more than exam-based qualifications. There was less pressure and less anxiety. He found he had performed much better in subjects that he had failed in his lower secondary school exam.

He found his attendance improved drastically in comparison with his attendance at school; motivated initially by the threat of losing a portion of his allowance for each day missed, he found that this source of motivation was soon replaced by the genuine desire to participate in the programme. He looked forward to going to classes because it was a welcoming place to be, and wanted to complete the modules successfully and attain the qualifications.

While the programme was billed as a two-year course, he was now registering for a third year. This flexibility was enabling him to complete the qualifications he wanted at his own pace and together with the centre's ethos of patient, but steady encouragement and belief in his abilities, he felt much more hopeful than previously about his future.

Source: Interview during case study visit.

The Portuguese second chance school of Matosinhos provides all young people with psychosocial support as well as counselling and help in aspects such as health, justice, legalisation of situation for migrants or economic resources. These activities are a core element of the support, in parallel to the education and vocation training aspects and motivational activities (arts in this case). It is the only second chance school which offers this form of comprehensive support. The school focuses on young people in difficult situations. Demand for support is higher than the number of places and so the school prioritises more complex cases, based on interviews and information provided by the referring institution. Considering the target group, the school reports high rates of attendance (between 75% and 80% during 2008-11) as well as high rates of reengagement: of 65 students in 2014-15 only three dropped out, while all the others were pursuing education and training at the end of the academic year (Day et al., 2013; Second chance school of Matosinhos, 2015).

4.2.3.2. *'Joyful activities': motivation and confidence building*

Many young people in this category have 'scars' when it comes to their self-perception, in particular the idea they have of themselves as learners. After years of having been labelled as 'bad students' they have interiorised this vision of themselves. Such low self-esteem is a barrier to continuing in education and training.

Measures aimed at young people who are deeply disengaged tend to combine education or training activities with others that are not directly linked to a training programme or a qualification. Such activities have a core objective of ensuring that the individual can participate and enjoy an activity in a group and feel ownership and feel valued for his/her contribution. These activities can be artistic or sportive depending on the choice of the measure.

The *Produktionsschule* in Austria integrates regular sport activities as part of this measure, aiming to strengthen self-confidence, character formation, discipline and reduction of aggression. Sports activities are developed in cooperation with regional clubs based on diversity principles (BundesKOST, 2015). The measure is successful as it leads most young people into mainstream

education and training programme. Among the positive effects reported, the measure succeeds in strengthening the motivation of young people and improving their persistence in tackling difficulties.

The second chance school in Matosinhos in Portugal uses artistic activities for social effect on young people taking part in the measure. Art is also used as a technique to enable young people understand various life situations and to solve problems they may be facing. They are invited to act out the difficulties they face, to change roles with their peers and to arrive at solutions. The learners interviewed all emphasised the positive effect of these artistic activities on their motivation and enjoyment of school activities.

4.2.3.3. *Low entry barriers and provision flexibility*

Bringing back these young people into education and training is a challenge. Many are unlikely to be willing to commit to a long programme on regular basis and some may not be capable of it. It is important that entry barriers to the measure are low; this means that they do not immediately have to sign up for a full programme but they can start piecemeal.

Young people in the *Produktionsschule* in Austria can also participate in one-day activities (workshops). It is hoped that through these short interventions young people will progressively reengage and become available and willing to take on longer training. This low barrier entry is in parallel with active outreach activities to recruit young people (open street work).

In the second chance school in Matosinhos in Portugal an open-door policy is a key principle. This means, for example, that when a learner is absent from classes s/he is not considered negatively. Instead, the learner is shown understanding and encouraged to go further. As explained by a learner interviewed for this study, in the previous school she used to be sent away from the school; here she was invited to come in and staff tried to understand why she was acting rebellious, and tried to be friends.

4.3. **Other critical success factors**

There are other success factors that can be seen as transversal in the sense that they often go beyond a specific measure or entity applying it. These are described in the following sections.

4.3.1. Identification and recruitment of learners

A comprehensive approach to early leaving starts with efficient identification of early leavers and those at risk of becoming so, the capacity to reach out to them,

and analysis of their needs to decide which of the existing measures are most suitable.

This process is relevant to institutional level (mostly concerning those at risk but also with early leavers who dropped out from the institution) and at local, regional and national level, where structures are often created to coordinate different actors playing a role in the field.

Identification and recruitment of an early leaver or a young person at risk of early leaving can happen in different ways:

- (a) the training provider identifies the person and offers support in-house;
- (b) the training provider identifies the person and refers him to another measure;
- (c) public employment services refer people to the measure;
- (d) social services refer people to the measure;
- (e) other entities refer people to the measure (as with juvenile courts);
- (f) centralised monitoring systems are used to identify people;
- (g) outreach activities by professionals, such as youth workers, who look for at-risk young people through street work;
- (h) the young person comes on his/her own.

The training provider is best positioned to identify a young person at risk or one who has recently dropped out. The provider is in the front line when it comes to detection of risk symptoms such as absenteeism, poor academic performance, or personal, social and/or family issues. It is also the first entity to detect if a student has dropped out of a programme. Teachers and trainers are aware of these situations and inform the institution leadership through different channels, which can be more or less systematised: from attendance registers to complex systems for the monitoring of students at risk. A more comprehensive (covering not only absenteeism but also other relevant indicators), and easy-to-use monitoring system at provider level aids identification of at-risk students.

When an at-risk learner is identified, the provider typically puts in place measures to understand better what the problem is and to address it. In the first instance, the learner is approached by a reference teacher/trainer, a counsellor or a school psychologist, and other measures can follow (including academic support). The training provider can also refer the student to another institution, for instance another provider offering different types of programme, an external guidance centre, or a social worker.

VET providers, however, are less well placed to identify and reach out to early leavers, especially those who drop out outside regular training periods. For instance, if a student completes the first year of a programme and does not enrol in the second year, it is often difficult for providers to know whether it is a case of

early leaving or whether the student might have changed to another school or training scheme.

Centralised monitoring systems with individualised information allow identification of early leavers, most significantly long-term early leavers with whom the training providers have lost contact. Such systems usually have annual information on the trajectories of the young persons through different providers and programmes, allowing identification of young people away from education and training for a year or more. Once these are identified, measures can be taken in coordination with other entities.

Box 26. Centralised monitoring systems: examples from Luxembourg and the UK-England

The *Youth contract* was introduced in England to support the participation in education, training and work of 16 to 24 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET). Implementation of this measure highlighted the need for a coordinated local response to identify, support and meet the needs of young NEETs or at risk of disengagement. Local authorities record information about the current activity of young people and their characteristics on a client caseload information system (CCIS). Therefore, local authorities know better than any other organisation what is going on in their geographic area and can help providers in developing their programme, in recruiting disengaged young people and referring them into the *Youth contract*.

In Luxembourg, regional offices of the local *Action for youth (action locale pour jeunes, ALJ)* systematically contact young people identified as early school leavers, based on the listings (*fichiers élèves*) provided monthly by the Ministry of National Education, Children and Youth. Pupils who left school without any qualification are contacted individually by the staff of the ALJ regional offices. In addition to surveying them on their current status (for monitoring purposes), ALJ staff helps early school leavers (who are willing and interested) to define a realistic and concrete professional plan and guide them in their transition back to school or into work.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

Public employment services and social services also have a relevant role in identifying early leavers, mostly long-term ones. Employment services have information on unemployed people with a low level of qualifications, not in education, employment or training (NEETs), and often refer them to upskilling measures. Social services and, less frequently, other entities such as juvenile courts, the police or orphanages, are most relevant when it comes to marginalised young people, with complex personal, social and/or family issues; they liaise with other institutions for more comprehensive support, not just on education and training, but also financial issues, housing problems, prevention of violence, and health issues).

Box 27. Referral from other entities: examples from Luxembourg, Poland and Portugal

In Luxembourg, the local *Action for youth* (ALJ) and the public employment service can refer early school leavers to 'guidance and professional initiation courses' and to 'professional initiation courses to diverse professions'.

In Poland, young people are directed to the voluntary labour corps (VLC) by the probation officers, education and psychological counsellors, local social-care services, emergency care, juvenile courts, police or orphanages.

In Portugal, social security services, the Commissions for the Protection of Children and Youth at risk, and the multidisciplinary teams of advisement to courts identify youth at risk and liaise with the second chance school to analyse the possibility of sending the young person to this school.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

There are also outreach activities, often run by non-government organisations that aim at identifying early leavers highly disengaged from education and training. Compared to the intervention of the social services, these activities would have a wider target group, for instance, in terms of background (not only the most marginalised) and age (not only those within the compulsory education age limits). The measures proposed would be tailored to each youth and typically involve street work: for example, a youth educator could visit the young person at his/her house or during outdoor activities with other young people. This study did not find many examples of this type of approach, allegedly due to the high level of resources that such an individualised approach requires⁽¹⁸⁾.

Young persons can also ask directly for support; this can happen from the moment they are at risk of early leaving to long after they have left education and training. However, they are often not aware of the available measures and receive this information from professionals at the VET provider or other entities, such as employment or social services. Several interviewees also mentioned that learners often arrive at the measure following the recommendation of friends or relatives who have participated⁽¹⁹⁾.

It is generally more common for learners come to the measure on their own initiative having been obliged to leave their studies in the past (perhaps due to

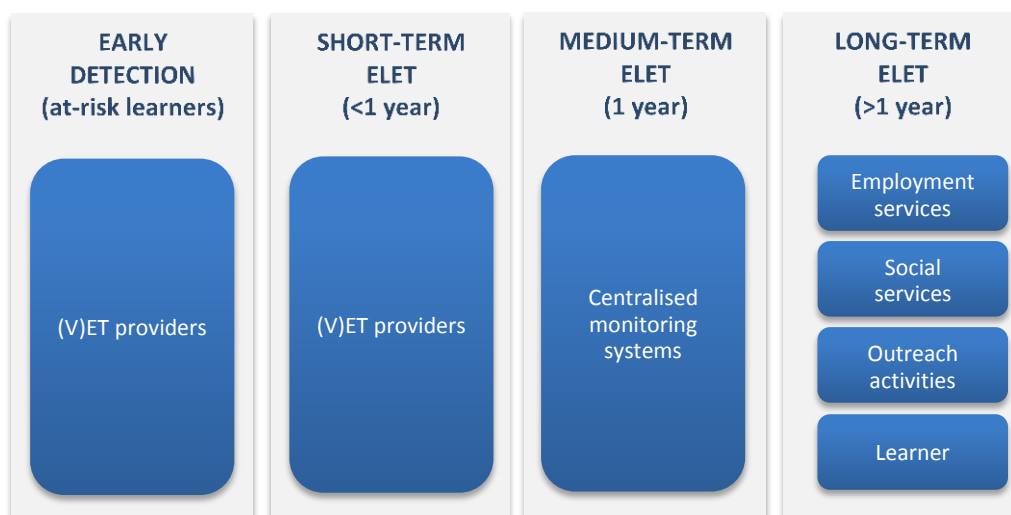
⁽¹⁸⁾ An example of this type of measure would be the programme *Zero dropout* (2010-12), promoted by the Portuguese organisation Entrepreneurs for Social Inclusion. This has not been analysed in the present study.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Such measures include production schools (AT), the youth coaching scheme (AT), the second chance school of Matosinhos (PT).

economic or family reasons) and want to come back to training. Young people with a strong negative perception of school are unlikely to look for support from training providers, and marginalised young people tend to distrust any support coming from public authorities. As mentioned by the interviewees on the Austrian *Coaching and counselling for apprentices and training companies*; ‘troubled apprentices rarely contact their apprenticeship office directly and file a formal application for a coaching. They lack the motivation, courage or capacity to do so. In most cases, a third person has to take the initiative and launch the process, for example teachers, trainers, guidance teachers, parents, psychological support services located at vocational schools or another confidant. Apprenticeship coaching must try to reach out to and inform this group of “third” persons, to make the measure known’ (interviewees).

Figure 2 shows the different approaches to identifying and recruiting early leavers or learners at risk of early leaving.

Figure 2. **Identify and recruit early leavers or learners at risk of ELET**



Source: Cedefop.

This overview reflects the fact that the medium-term is probably not effectively addressed in many countries due to the absence of centralised monitoring systems. Once an early leaver is identified, it is important to determine which institution or professional is best positioned to bring that person back to education and training; a training provider may be the first to detect a short-term ELET but may not have the capacity to redress the situation. Measures should aim at ensuring the provider has the right skill set to recognise early warning and act positively on it. One important aspect is knowledge of other measures and coordination with the entities providing them (Section 4.3.3).

4.3.2. Developing trustful and long-term relationships with learners

A young person with a strong negative perception of school (and teachers) is not easily brought back to education and training. Counselling, coaching or mentoring are essential and at their core is the development of a relationship based on trust between the learner and the person providing support. The development of such a relationship requires time and frequent contact with the learner. A one-off intervention is not enough, although the need for frequent exchanges can be more or less acute depending on the needs of the learner. There could also be benefits from extending the contact to after the learner has completed training.

Several measures reviewed provide frequent support to learners and are open to adapting the length of the interventions depending on their needs.

Box 28. Frequent and flexible contacts with the learner: example from Austria

Coaching and counselling for apprentices and training companies in Austria, in its pilot phase encompassed a coaching process for apprentices of maximum 41 hours. However, in the developed programme, the flexibility has increased: first, there is no limit on the number of coaching hours: the coaching process can last as long as is considered helpful by the coach and the apprentice. Second, there is active after-care following the completion of coaching: the coach contacts the young adult two to three months after completion of the coaching, to monitor the development of the apprentice and enable additional coaching if necessary. Last, the coaching process can also be started up to six months after the apprentice left the apprenticeship.

The intervention under the youth coaching scheme in Austria starts with an initial meeting with a coach, which may last up to five hours. The second step is in-depth counselling, which may last up to six months and includes up to 15 hours of coaching. There is a third step for young adults who need more intensive coaching, of up to one year and 30 hours of coaching.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

Learner follow-up can also be supported by monitoring systems. Coaching and counselling for apprentices and training companies (Austria) has developed an electronic monitoring system where coaches must document their observations, but also the apprentice and the apprenticeship company can (voluntarily) provide feedback on the coaching process. This is considered a positive development, as it will allow daily analysis of data and will observe outstanding developments or trends, so allowing fast counteraction, if needed.

4.3.3. Coordination with other measures and resource pooling

The entity in charge of identifying early leavers may not be sufficiently resourced to provide an adequate response. Further, the concurrence of ELET with complex

personal, social and/or family issues, asks for coordinated interventions from different professionals and institutions. This is why some of the measures reviewed involve measure coordination and resource pooling.

The clearest benefit of cooperation is that it supports learner engagement in the available measure most adjusted to his/her needs. It can also improve acceptance of the measure among the target group. For instance, if a professional who has established a good relationship with a young person (such as within a mentoring programme), refers him/her to another measure (perhaps a type of training scheme), it is more probable that the young person will feel inclined to enrol in the latter, than if recommended by someone who has sporadic contact with the learner.

Box 29. Coordination between measures: examples from Germany and Estonia

In Hamburg (Germany), the Youth Labour Employment Agency (*Jugendberufsagentur*, JBA) was designed as part of a project on cooperation between different service providers in youth counselling initiated by the German Public Employment Service. The JBA agency unites federal and regional public institutions dealing with vocational guidance, counselling and labour market and vocational training services for youth under one roof: public employment agency, job centres, district youth agencies and the government Agency for School and Vocational Education (*Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung*), and its member organisation Hamburg Institute of Vocational Education and Training (*Hamburger Institut für Berufliche Bildung*).

Cooperation is promoted at different levels. JBA organises case conferences to deal with young people who have multiple difficulties and need the services of more than one actor. Participants include the young learner, in some cases his/her parents, and representatives of all relevant JBA actors. If necessary, external actors, such as representatives of health or youth organisations, may also be invited.

In Estonia, pathfinder centres have struggled to reach the early leavers target group. Young adults aged 18 to 26, who have discontinued their studies and might be unemployed, are difficult to contact with. To address this, pathfinder centres are planning to increase cooperation with youth workers.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

4.3.4. Relationships between education/training providers and companies

For education providers, building networks with companies is a basic condition to raise young people's awareness and experience of the world of work, their understanding of job demands and employer expectations. Most measures reviewed stress strong collaboration with employers as a success factor. This aims at ensuring work-based learning experiences for learners and also at

improving provider and company mutual understanding, their respective challenges and constraints in terms of time and resources.

Box 30. Cooperation with companies: examples from France and the UK-Northern Ireland

In France, learners in second chance schools (E2C) typically do several internships, at different companies, spending close to half of their time at companies. To make sure their learners find placements for internships, E2C pay special attention to developing and maintaining strong links with enterprises. They try to sign local or national charters or conventions; EdF and La Poste are well known partners. The *Réseau E2C France* showcases on its website some of the companies which are partners of the E2C schools ⁽²⁰⁾. Some enterprises sponsor specific actions, while others earmark the money raised through the apprenticeship tax to the E2Cs ⁽²¹⁾.

One critical success factor is that enterprises have a clear contact point with whom to address any potential problem concerning the learner, day-to-day within the school. , Depending on the school this can be either a person dedicated to links with enterprises or the referral person for the learner in question.

Under *Training for success* (Northern Ireland), further education colleges usually work with a wide range of business and industry sectors, community and statutory agencies, resulting in high levels of economic engagement across the provision. When training suppliers engage with employers, these employers then become training partners and agree on a training plan between the training provider, employer and learner. Support officers and mentors within *Training for success* work closely with employers to understand what their needs are and match those needs with the knowledge and skills of the trainees.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

4.3.5. Changing mindset of education and training professionals

Several interviewees mentioned the stigmatisation of learners participating in the measures as one of the challenges to implementation. Participants in compensation measures may not easily find their way back into regular education and training, being seen as less capable than other learners, and possibly problematic as a result of marginalised backgrounds.

⁽²⁰⁾ Network of second chance schools France. <http://www.reseau-e2c.fr/ecole-de-la-deuxieme-chance/entreprises>

⁽²¹⁾ In France, firms pay an apprenticeship tax which is set at 0.68% of the salaries paid by the firm in the year N-1. The amounts collected from this tax are used to finance apprenticeship and E2C. Some education and training providers are allowed to receive part of the money collected through this tax directly from firms who can earmark the funds to them.

This negative image of learners participating in ELET measures is often found among professionals, families, companies and learners themselves. Since professionals have a key role in identifying learners and referring them to suitable measures, the change of mindset must start with the professionals. Some of the measures reviewed include relevant actions: they provide support to professionals in mainstream schools on how to deal with learners at risk of early leaving, including those facing personal, social or family issues, through training activities or guidance.

Promoting a culture of peer learning among teachers and other staff, but also among pupils, can be a powerful way of changing mindsets. It aids transference of pedagogical practices from measures addressing early leavers or learners at risk of dropping out, extending their benefits.

Box 31. Changing the professional mindset: examples from the Netherlands and Portugal

In the Netherlands, the professionals working with *Medical advice for sick-reported students* (MASS) observed that teachers were not at ease when addressing the topic of absenteeism with their learners, as it is not seen as one of their regular tasks. As a response, MASS wrote a manual for teachers to support them in having absenteeism conversations with youngsters. MASS also provides courses on absenteeism conversations for teachers.

Within the Dutch programme *Getting started*, often used for youth at risk who are in the transition from a youth detention centre back into society, the counsellor also provides teachers with guidance on how to work with these youngsters.

The staff from the second chance school of Matosinhos (Portugal) often provide training on how to work with at-risk youth to teachers from mainstream schools.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

4.3.6. Political commitment and sustainable funding

Many interviewees referred to political commitment as a key factors for success and this is linked to ensuring sustainable funding. While some measures were initiated thanks to specific funding programmes (pathways to apprenticeship in Wales and pathfinder centres in Estonia have been supported by the European Social Fund), their extension in time (and geographic expansion) depends on guaranteeing a more permanent source of funding.

This is also a requisite for continuing development and improvement of measures to tackle ELET: measures that last can be more systematically evaluated and improved based on the evaluation results.

Box 32. Political commitment and sustainable funding: examples from Ireland and France

Factors which contribute to the *Youthreach* programme's effectiveness include the continuing political focus on early school leaving and ways to address it, and the Irish government's continuing commitment to funding the *Youthreach* and community training centres on a nationwide scale over 30 years to provide second chance education and training opportunities for those who fail to complete secondary school and become unemployed.

The length of time the programme has been in existence has led to a stock of physical infrastructure, and growth in the social and knowledge capital over the period to create a substantial and effective system of addressing early leaving which includes approaches to teaching, administration and management of the programme.

The added value of second chance schools has been recognised by the French government (see Act 2007-297 of 5 March 2007 and its implementing Decree 2007-1756 of 13 December 2007) ⁽²²⁾. This political endorsement contributed to the dissemination of the E2C across France. It also opened doors for financial support, including via apprenticeship tax.

Source: Cedefop desk research and interviews.

⁽²²⁾ Network of second chance schools France, <http://www.reseau-e2c.fr/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Textes-de-lois-1.pdf>