

## CHAPTER 5.

# Policy impact: evaluating VET measures

Combating early leaving from education and training (ELET) has been relatively high on the EU and national policy agendas for over a decade. This attention to the need to bring young people to at least the level of upper secondary leaving qualifications led to the design and implementation of a multitude of measures, at local, regional, national and European level. This study identified 337 initiatives in 15 countries that had the objective of reducing early leaving through vocational education and training (VET). These measures were not all mainstreamed and some had the reduction of early leaving as one of several objectives. Nevertheless, the number can be considered as an indication that the attention paid to this issue is relatively high and there are many activities in this area. Despite the high number of measures being put in place, early leaver rates, while decreasing, remain high in some countries. The issue seems to be not so much the absence of policy efforts to tackle early leaving but the lack of effectiveness of at least some of these initiatives. In a context of multiplicity of measures, availability of evidence about what works is very important to make decisions about which initiatives should be funded, sustained and mainstreamed.

Several EU-level initiatives emphasise the need to evaluate policies in this area. The 2011 Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving stresses the importance of evaluations to underpin decisions (Council of the EU, 2011). The 2013 conclusions of the thematic working group on early school leaving also underline this necessity (European Commission, 2013a). More recently, the conditionalities of the European Social Fund (ESF) require countries that decide to use ESF money to fund measures to tackle early leaving to have in place an evidence-based strategic framework and a monitoring framework for ELET.

Despite these guidelines to invest in evidence-based policies, many measures initially identified by this study have not been evaluated. Of the 337 initiatives identified only few were backed by evaluations. Cedefop selected for in-depth review 44 measures which were evaluated or for which, at least, monitoring data were available <sup>(23)</sup>. The aim of this review was to assess whether

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<sup>(23)</sup> Of the 44 measures analysed, 38 have been evaluated. For only three, monitoring data were available. In one case, an evaluation was planned but was not carried out, though the measure was accompanied by research. Two of the measures were portrayed as good practices in national publications. Not all of the evaluations were

the indicators used to evaluate policies to tackle early leaving provide the right information to support policy decisions. By identifying good practices and existing gaps, the study aims to support policy-makers and evaluators in their decisions on:

- (a) what indicators should be monitored and against which indicators a measure/policy should be evaluated;
- (b) which approaches and methods to choose to be able to reach conclusions about the resulting change and how this is related to the measure or policy implementation;
- (c) how to judge programme performance.

Examples of indicators that can be useful for evaluating policies or programmes to tackle early leaving and examples of robust evaluations in this field are presented in the following sections, accompanied by discussion of methodologies.

### 5.1. Theoretical framework: what should be evaluated

The focus of this study is on policies and measures that have a common objective, to reduce ELET. Considering the European definition of what is early leaving, this means that all the interventions aim at increasing the share of young people who achieve upper secondary qualifications. The actions expect to do so by reducing the number of young people who quit education and training before being qualified at upper secondary level and/or by reintegrating early leavers into education and training and leading them to a qualification at this level.

The ultimate result expected is quite clear: increased number of young people with upper secondary qualifications. The means through which the measures aim to reach this objective vary greatly.

The prevalent evaluation practice is to assess programmes/policies based on a (programme) theory (e.g. Donaldson and Lipsey, 2006). Theory-led evaluations develop a model which explains logically how the different elements of an intervention should lead to the expected outputs, results and impacts. The programme theory explains in a narrative how putting in place a certain service/activities should change the attitudes and behaviours of people, and ultimately bring about the desired social change. A programme theory is frequently shown schematically in form of an intervention logic that illustrates

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publicly available or made available to the research team. This was the case for 31 measures.

graphically the sequence of inputs, outputs and results (European Commission, 2013b).

In the case of measures to combat early leaving, the desired change is better education attainment of young people and improved employability, as well as equity. This defines the overall objective of all the interventions analysed. The expected results correspond to this objective and should therefore be measured through an increase in the number of young people who achieve upper secondary qualifications.

The result that should ideally be assessed by evaluations of measures to tackle ELET is the change in the rate of early leavers. To observe the change, it is necessary to compare data on early leaving before the measure started (baseline) with data after the measure has been introduced.

However, there is a time lag between the point when the measures analysed intervene and when the beneficiaries are expected to complete the training programme. The prevention interventions analysed concern young people who are often still several years away from the hypothetical year of graduation. The remedial interventions reintegrate young people into education and training but it then takes time for them to complete the programmes. Evaluators often do not have the practical possibility to measure effects which occur several years after the intervention. Evaluations are frequently commissioned in a time frame which does not enable such longitudinal follow-up of young people. Therefore, it would be expected that evaluations capture intermediate outcomes, in particular:

- (a) in the case of prevention and intervention measures, the change in retention rate of young people;
- (b) in case of compensation measures, the change in the number of people who reintegrate education and training as a result of the measure.

Ideally, these changes would be measured sometime after the young person benefitted from the intervention (such as three or six months), seeking impacts of measures to address early leaving.

The programme theory should demonstrate the logic of how the inputs (the intervention itself) will lead to the desired results. This is typically done by making explicit the link between inputs, activities, outputs and results.

The European Commission guide for evaluation of socioeconomic interventions defines (European Commission, 2013b):

- (a) input as financial, human, material, organisational and regulatory means mobilised for the implementation of an intervention. Some prefer to limit this use to financial or budgetary resources. In this case, the word 'activity' can be applied to the implementation of human and organisational resources;

- (b) outputs as an indicator describing the 'physical' product of spending resources through policy interventions;
- (c) result as the specific dimension of the well-being of people that motivates policy action: what is expected to be modified by the interventions designed and implemented by a policy;
- (d) impact as the change [of result] that can be credibly attributed to an intervention. Same as 'effect' of intervention or 'contribution to change'.

The data on inputs to measures is important to understand:

- (a) the level of investment, be it financial or human resources. This is crucial information when judging the success of a given intervention. Some interventions can achieve modest results but if the inputs were also modest then the overall result can be considered a success. However, if resources invested are substantial, the results achieved should be proportionate;
- (b) information on outputs is also important to explain the results observed. If the number of persons reached through the measure is low, the results, even if positive, are also likely to be modest. On the other hand, if the measure reached a large audience but only small change in retention is observed (or only a small change in other positive results), then this can raise questions about the effectiveness of a given intervention;
- (c) the data on impact concern the change observed which would not have happened in absence of a given intervention. This can be particularly challenging to measure in the case of interventions focused on addressing early leaving because:
  - (i) there is a time difference between the moment when a person takes part in a prevention/compensation activity and his/her final graduation. In this time, many other things can happen which influence his/her decision to stay or leave education and training;
  - (ii) in many countries, there are various parallel measures to address early leaving. Therefore, it cannot be considered that those who do not take part in a given intervention have not received any support. Similarly, those who take part in a certain intervention may have received other support in the past or even in parallel. Therefore, it is possible that not all the change observed is linked to the intervention analysed. However, assessing the exact contribution would require sophisticated evaluation models which are not necessarily needed: it may be sufficient for the evaluators to recognise qualitatively the other elements of context that could be influencing the change observed.

In complex interventions, there can be several layers of results. This is the case when the activities do not directly link to the desired change but

intermediary steps need to be made first. Intermediary results are more directly linked to the outputs and lead to the ultimate results. This is the case with interventions addressing ELET.

The policies to tackle ELET and persons in charge of their implementation have little or no control over whether a young person ultimately drops out of education and training or not. This is a personal decision/reaction which is the result of complex combination of factors as discussed in Volume I. While the policies cannot directly influence the decision of the young person, they can try to influence the factors that support an individual's chances of leaving education and training prematurely. Activities aim to change factors such as attitude to education and training, learning goals, skills and competences (and education outcomes). These in turn should result in better retention in education and training that would ultimately lead to lower rates of early leaving.

The expected results of policies to address early leaving can therefore be divided between:

- (a) intermediary results: these are linked to the factors affecting early leaving and are expected to be directly influenced by the policy/intervention;
- (b) ultimate results: these are less directly influenced by the policies put in place but reflect the social change that is aimed at, that is improved education attainment.

As discussed in Volume I (Cedefop, 2016), the factors affecting early leaving are complex and interrelated. They are complex because what leads one person to leave education and training may have no effect on the decision of another person in the same or similar circumstances. There is no simple relationship between the presence or absence of a certain factor and the decision of a person to stay or to leave an education programme. Further, the factors are strongly interrelated with the environment the person is in.

Therefore, the programme theory that should underpin an evaluation of a policy to tackle early leaving is unlikely to be a simple one. Programme theories can be more or less simple depending on the problem that is to be tackled (how dependent is it on various issues) and the level of influence that a policy can have over the result. Simple programme theories can be presented as a causal relationship between the intervention and the result. For example, the introduction of, and access to, a new drug can have direct causal influence over the reduction of a certain pathology or illness. The relationship between the intervention (introduction of a new drug) and the result (decrease of pathology) can be evaluated relatively easily by measuring the results and analysing their relationship with the intervention. It is rarely the case in education policy that the relationship between the policies introduced and the expected results would be

direct and simple. Therefore, the programme theory for most education interventions, including policies to tackle ELET, does not imply simple causal relationships between a few variables (inputs and results but describes complex relationships between a fairly large number of variables. As discussed in Chapter 4, the inputs in case of interventions to tackle ELET can be coaching activities, traineeships, teacher training activities, remedial training, and many others.

The intermediate results can reflect one or several factors associated with early leaving as identified and discussed in detail in Volume I, Chapter 5 (Cedefop, 2016): more clearly defined learning goals; improved attitude and perception of education and training; and improved well-being.

Most measures analysed will combine several inputs (activities) and aim at several intermediary results.

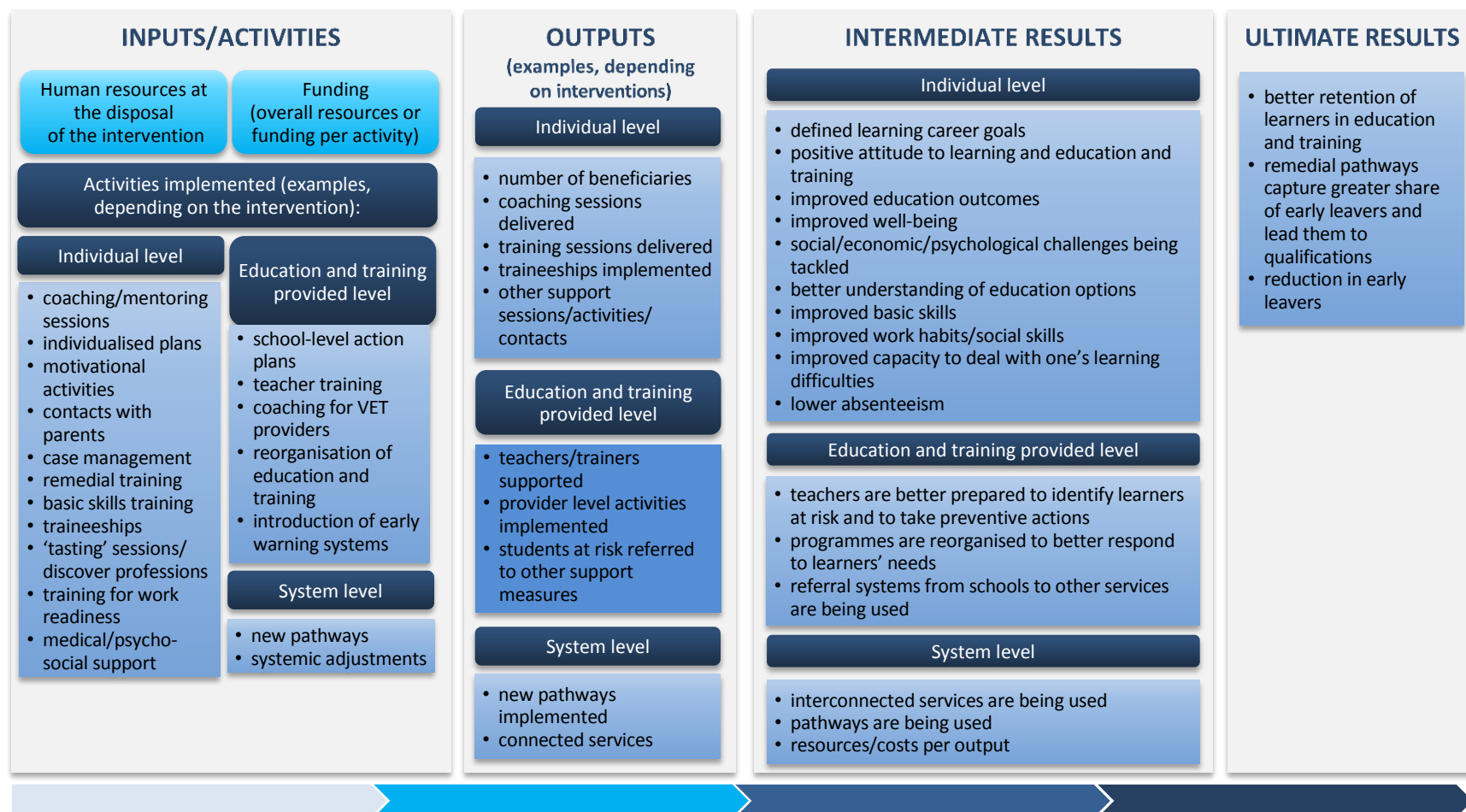
Figure 3 lists types of inputs (activities), outputs and intermediary results that can be the building blocks of intervention logics of measures to tackle early leaving. The ultimate results are common, except that prevention measures aim at retaining a greater share of young people and compensation measures aim at reintegrating a greater share of those who left before being qualified.

The figure also shows that outputs and results can be expected at different levels, depending on the nature of the intervention:

- (a) the level of individual learners, where ultimate results are also expected;
- (b) the level of teachers/trainers and education and training providers, which is crucial to ensure sustainable change and long-term positive evolution;
- (c) the system level, where measures analysed aimed to change conditions and the context to improve the situation of individual learners.

In addition to specifying expected outputs and results, a complex intervention typically has several assumptions about the conditions in which the activities are likely to lead to these results. For example, coaching and mentoring activities alone are not a guarantee of a positive result but will depend on the quality of the service provided and the quality of the staff delivering it. Further, they will not be effective for everyone as the result will depend on the profile of the beneficiary. Such assumptions are not always explicit and they are often not paid sufficient attention in evaluations. Pawson and other authors of the realist evaluation approach emphasise the importance of making these assumptions, which they call programme mechanisms, explicit. Programme mechanisms in their approach are clarifications of what it is about the programme that makes a difference and supports change (Pawson and Tilley, 2004). Clarifying and analysing not only which interventions work but also under what circumstances and for whom is crucial to enable policy learning and continuous improvement.

Figure 3. Theoretical intervention logic for a combination of measures to tackle ELET



Source: Cedefop.

This discussion provides indications of a general framework for evaluation of interventions to address early leaving. It shows that evaluations should focus on indicators covering:

- (a) ultimate results: change in rate of early leaving and more specifically:
  - (i) change in retention rates in education and training;
  - (ii) change in the share of early leavers who participate in compensation measures and complete a qualification through these measures;
- (b) intermediate results: these should capture change at individual level in relation to the factors affecting early leaving, such as:
  - (i) attitudes to education and training and personal education goals;
  - (ii) education and training outcomes: levels of skills and competences;
  - (iii) health and well-being, as well as social, economic or psychological challenges;
  - (iv) work-readiness.

It should also capture change at provider level.

#### **5.1.1. Examples of intervention logics**

The text below shows three examples of how elements of the above framework could be combined into an intervention logic for a selected type of activity. The examples use concrete cases of measures analysed in this study. They discuss which indicators were used in the evaluations carried out and also which other indicators could have been used. Many aspects of an intervention can be evaluated but the focus will vary depending on the way the evaluation will be used by the organisation which commissions the evaluation report. Some evaluations are more concerned with improving the implementation process and therefore focus more strongly on the activities put in place and how these could be improved (formative evaluations). Others are more focused on the results achieved (summative evaluations).

The examples begin with a description of the aims of the initiative as this is the basis for development of evaluative indicators.

##### **5.1.1.1. Example 1: capacity building of schools, including teacher training**

This example shows the intervention logic of a policy/measure that focuses on building-up school-level capacity to tackle early leaving, as with the Danish example of the *Retention caravan* analysed as part of this study. The evaluation did not explicitly follow a theory-based approach to evaluation, however elements of an intervention logic are apparent from the way the indicators used were defined (Danish Ministry of Education, 2012). The text below shows which



indicators were used in the evaluation carried out as well as those that could have been used to improve understanding of ultimate impact.

### **Description of the intervention**

The *Retention caravan* aims to support the retention of VET students from ethnic minorities, particularly boys. More specifically, the objectives, as formulated in the documentation about this programme, are:

- (a) 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;
- (b) to increase the retention of young people who have started VET. The quantitative target at the participating schools was to improve the retention rate by 20% by the end of the project period;
- (c) to support the governmental target that 85% of a youth cohort should complete upper secondary education by 2010, and 95% of a youth cohort should complete upper secondary education by 2015;
- (d) to support the labour market needs for an educated workforce.

The initiatives targeted individual schools and their problems, with a view to:

- (a) support the VET institutions and the teachers in developing ways to tackle ELVET among ethnic minorities, such as through training of the teachers;
- (b) engage parents in their children's education, such as through teachers visiting the VET students' homes;
- (c) develop tools that could motivate VET students from ethnic minorities and make them feel welcome and wanted at the schools and in the future labour market, such as through specific mentor programmes and intensive guidance programmes (Danish Ministry of Education, 2012).

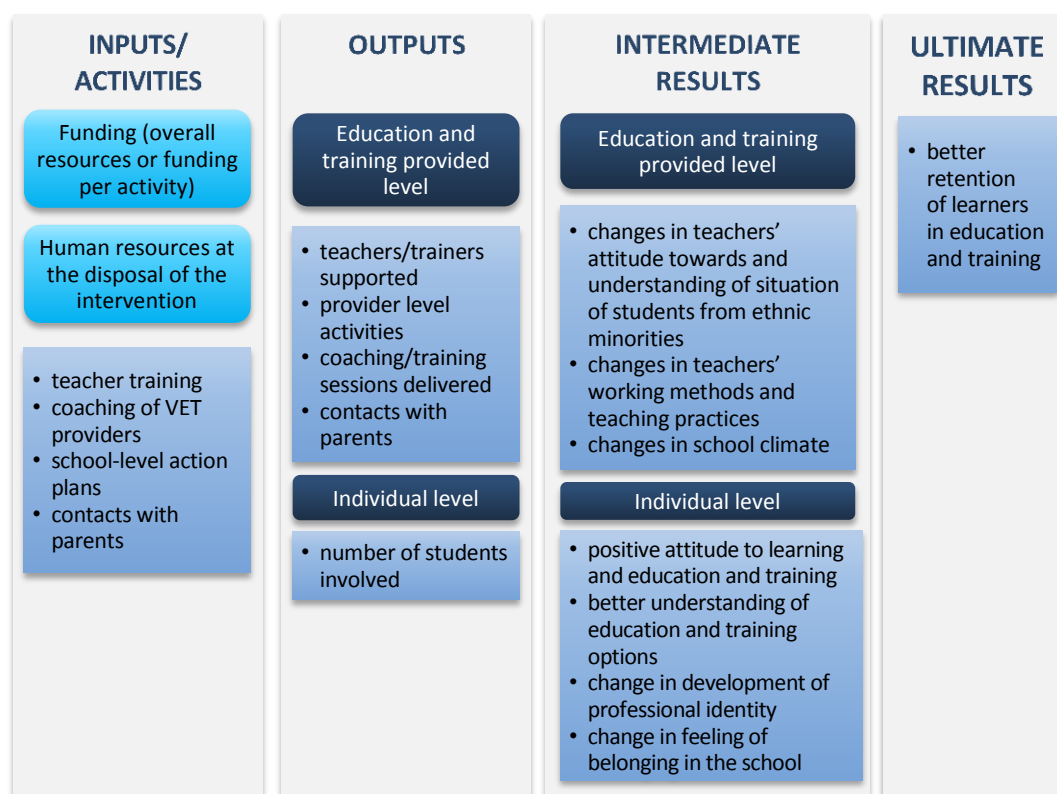
The activities implemented include:

- (a) setting up a 'retention coordinator' function at VET institutions;
- (b) skills development of VET teachers aimed at developing teaching methods based on the individual students' strengths, skills and possibilities;
- (c) developing more contact with parents;
- (d) use of educational counsellors to support dialogue and contact with parents;
- (e) setting up local groups of role models;
- (f) developing study environments such as homework cafes, a form of out-of-school support to help young people to complete their homework;
- (g) developing networks to support implementation of best practices (Danish Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 5).

The *Retention caravan* put in place a team of experts who accompanied schools in the design and implementation of school-level activities.

An overview of the intervention logic for this programme is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. **Intervention logic: *Retention caravan***



Source: Cedefop.

### Indicators on inputs

The 2012 evaluation of this initiative did not analyse the inputs. The following indicators could have been used to understand the scale of resources needed to achieve the reported results:

- overall financial resources mobilised as well as resources per school supported or per type of activity implemented;
- the human resources put in place: number of persons/experts engaged in supporting schools and the extent to which they were mobilised full-time or part-time;
- number of activities carried out by the experts advising the schools, numbers of contacts between the experts and the schools, number of contacts with families.

### **Indicators on outputs**

The 2012 evaluation monitored the following outputs:

- (a) number of schools taking part in the intervention;
- (b) number of students involved;
- (c) number of teachers involved;
- (d) number of parents involved;
- (e) number of courses/sessions delivered in schools.

The following additional output indicators could have been used:

- (a) number of counsellors involved;
- (b) the number of sessions delivered could have been broken down by type of session;
- (c) number and type of materials developed.

### **Indicators on intermediate results**

The 2012 evaluation monitored the following intermediate results:

- (a) change in teachers' understanding of how to work with young people at risk of early leaving (qualitative feedback);
- (b) change in teachers' teaching practice/methods (qualitative feedback);
- (c) change in teachers' capacity to interact with students from various backgrounds (qualitative feedback);
- (d) the nature of the relationship between teachers and mentors (qualitative feedback);
- (e) young persons' development of professional identity (qualitative feedback);
- (f) change in young persons' self-confidence;

The following additional indicators could have been used in light of the activities put in place and the objectives of the intervention:

- (a) change in parents' attitude to and understanding of their children's' education pathways;
- (b) change in young persons' feeling of belonging;
- (c) change in school climate;
- (d) change in young persons' aspirations.

### **Indicators on ultimate results**

The 2012 evaluation analysed the change in retention rate, comparing the retention of students of Danish and non-Danish origin. It compared the results with a control group of schools that did not take part in the *Retention caravan*.

The indicator on retention captures well the expected ultimate results of the programme. The collection of data on students of Danish and non-Danish origin

is a proxy that helps assess whether the main aim was attained: supporting the retention of VET students from ethnic minorities.

#### 5.1.1.2. *Example 2: coaching and mentoring young people*

This example discusses the possible elements of an intervention logic focused on the young person by providing a combination of remedial training and vocational guidance. This was the case in the activities of the French association AFEV (*Association de la fondation étudiante pour la ville*). The AFEV activities to prevent early leaving from VET received funding for social experimentation which had to be accompanied by rigorous evaluation; the latter was carried out in 2012 (Bavoux and Pugin, 2012).

#### **Description of the intervention**

AFEV is specialised in providing individualised support to children and teenagers living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and potentially at risk of dropping out. About two hours of individualised support per week are provided by volunteers (around 7 000 university students per year) in 43 areas in France across different cities. Their input is often broader than just school support. They act within the family and try to support parents – often disorientated with school matters/school language – to follow their childrens' education and to legitimise their role alongside the school.

The support has three main aims:

- (a) providing methodological help for studying general courses (such as mathematics, French);
- (b) accompany learner orientation and professional goals;
- (c) accompany learner personal development to increase autonomy and mobility, such as search for adequate support services (social services, health services, sport services, cultural services).

Various activities support the three specified aims:

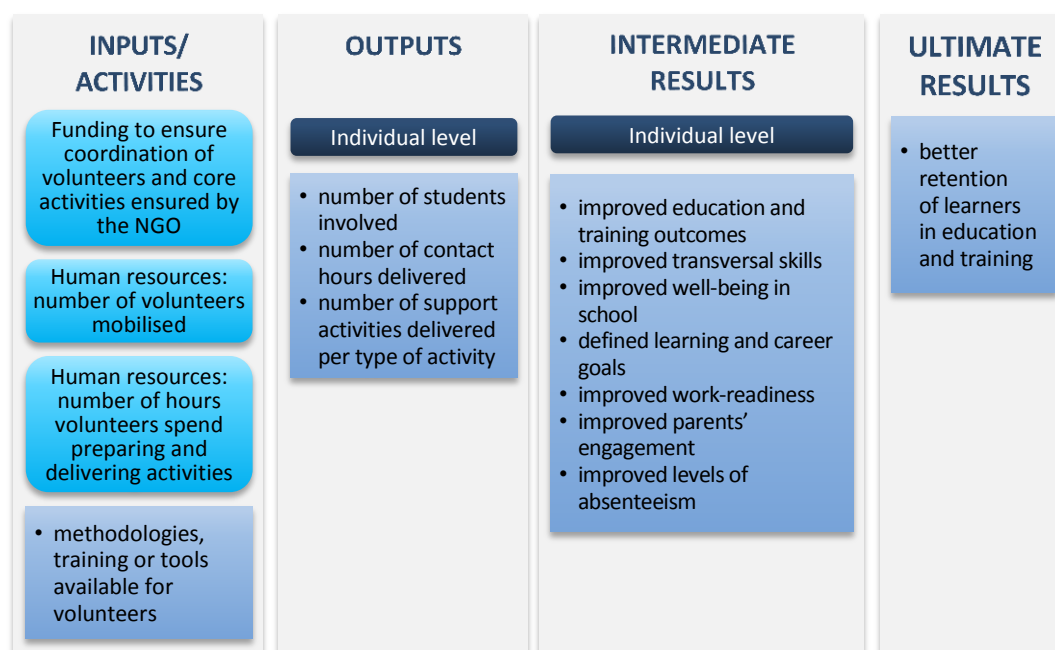
- (a) providing methodological help in studying general courses: updating learners' skills in general courses, helping the learner to do his/her homework, using ICTs for pedagogical purposes and for searching for VET opportunities, improving relationship at schools with teachers and other learners;
- (b) accompany learner orientation and professional goals: improving the image of the VET track chosen, providing the learner with professional guidance, helping him/her to find an traineeship/write a CV, informing the family about VET tracks;

- (c) accompany learner personal development to increase autonomy and mobility: help the search for adequate support services (social services, health services, sport services, cultural services), encouraging learners discover new places/services (such as youth information centres, public libraries) and cultural activities that he/she would not usually attend/do (theatre, reading activities, museums, cinema).

The AFEV also organises activities within the VET school, for example CV writing workshops, cultural and sport activities, organisation of school festivities, and building a 'wall of expression' in which young people can express themselves with regards to their problems at schools. There is a permanent presence in school of a volunteer (under the national volunteer scheme: *service civique*) who helps develop activities with the school/teachers in collaboration with the local AFEV coordinator.

An overview of the intervention logic for this initiative is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. **Intervention logic: activities of the French association AFEV**



Source: Cedefop.

### Indicators on inputs

The evaluation did not discuss input indicators such as the financial or human resources mobilised.

The following indicators could have been used:

- (a) the number of volunteers intervening;
- (b) the number of hours a volunteer invests in the activities;
- (c) the funding AFEV received to organise the activities of volunteers and implement the project.

### **Indicators on outputs**

The evaluation provided data on the numbers of beneficiaries reached by the activities.

Other indicators that could have been used to provide data on outputs are:

- (a) number of hours the volunteer students spent with the beneficiaries;
- (b) the number of activities implemented per type of activity.

### **Indicators on intermediary results**

The evaluation provides data on the following intermediary results:

- (a) change in education outcomes in general education subjects;
- (b) changing in learning to learn capacity;
- (c) change in digital competence;
- (d) change in well-being at school (active participation in courses, boredom, understanding what the professor explains, anxiety, attitude towards going to school);
- (e) change in one's positive vision of his/her future and understanding of professional possibilities;
- (f) change in parents' attitudes on training of their children;
- (g) change in students' capacity to seek traineeships and in their work-readiness;
- (h) change in absenteeism;
- (i) change in use of other places in the town which provide resources for one's development, such as libraries;
- (j) change in civic attitude.

Other indicators could be identified but the above list is comprehensive, already covering all objectives of the intervention.

### **Indicators on ultimate results**

The evaluation did not cover the extent to which the beneficiaries ultimately achieved an upper secondary qualification. The duration of the evaluation did not enable such longitudinal measurement.

#### 5.1.1.3. *Example 3: second chance education and training*

The intervention logic of an initiative that offers second chance education and training to those young people who have already disengaged from education and training can be seen in the *Youthreach* initiative in Ireland. This initiative was evaluated in 2010 and the indicators used in that evaluation are discussed below (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). The 2010 evaluation focused on the process of delivering *Youthreach* programmes and on the management of its centres. It was not a fully fledged evaluation of effectiveness but included an evaluation of some results.

#### **Description of the intervention**

*Youthreach* offers a way in which young people and adults may return to, or complete, their education in a non-threatening learner-centred environment. It targets at 15 to 20 year-olds who are unemployed, who left education and training before completing either lower or upper secondary education. It provides them with opportunities to acquire a qualification.

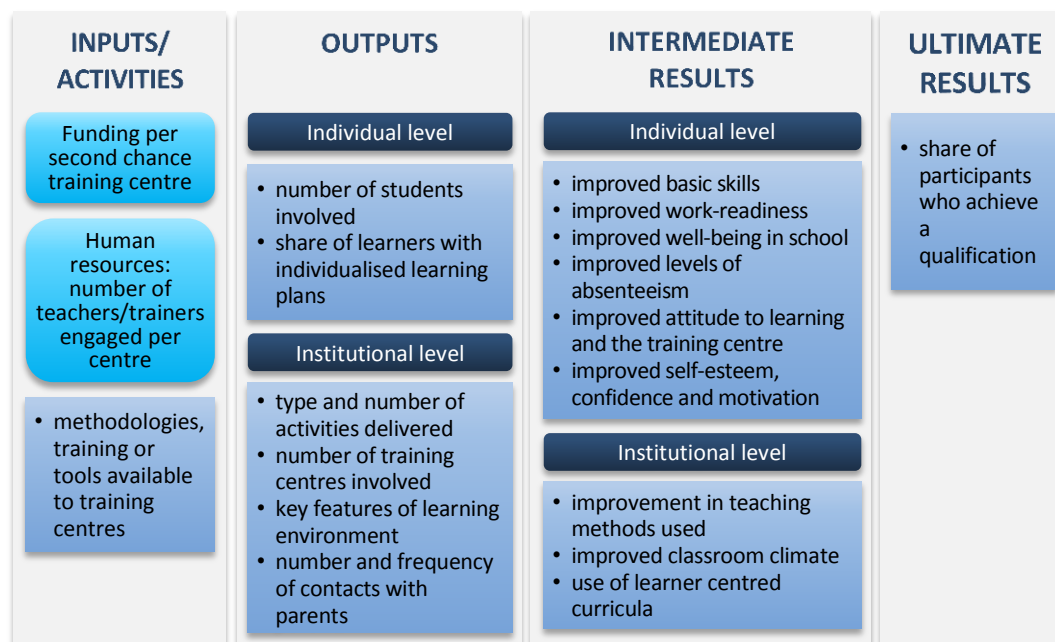
*Youthreach* centres are responsible for developing programmes and courses to meet the needs of their particular learner group, locally. The curriculum includes three main elements: general education, vocational training and work experience. The specific curriculum content varies depending on the qualification for which the learner is being prepared.

The national guidelines drafted in 2010 specify a four-phase plan for learners:

- (a) in the induction phase, student needs are identified and a suitable learner plan is devised;
- (b) in the foundation phase, the emphasis is on developing personal and social skills and on skills development generally via accredited modules;
- (c) the progression phase emphasises employability skills and work experience and leads to a vocational qualification;
- (d) there is also a transition phase to help learners progress onwards from the centres.

Figure 6 gives an overview of the intervention logic and the indicators used.

Figure 6. **Intervention logic: *Youthreach* initiative**



Source: Cedefop.

### Indicators on inputs

The evaluation did not discuss input indicators, such as:

- numbers of teachers/trainers mobilised in *Youthreach* centres;
- financial resources available per *Youthreach* centre;
- other resources available to the training centres such as guidelines, methodologies, and training.

The evaluation looked at many other indicators that relate to the management of *Youthreach* centres, such as, existence of a management board, relationship with the vocational education committee, practices for staff management, and presence of policies or codes of practice. These indicators relate to quality assurance processes rather than to the actual outcomes of the intervention.

### Indicators on outputs

The evaluation collected information on:

- number of training centres that use the national methodology and how is it put in place;
- number of learners benefiting from the intervention and their background;
- share of learners with individualised learning plans;
- key features of the learning environment and of the teaching approach;



(e) level of parental involvement.

Other indicators could have been identified but the above list is comprehensive, already covering all objectives of the intervention.

### **Indicators on intermediate results**

The evaluation reported the following indicators that could be considered as capturing the intermediate results:

- (a) the extent to which the curriculum is learner-centred;
- (b) the extent to which the training centre uses collaborative planning methods for design of and implementation of training;
- (c) nature of teaching methods used and their frequency;
- (d) classroom atmosphere;
- (e) learners' feeling of belonging in the training centre;
- (f) learners' positive attitude to the training centre;
- (g) change in learners' self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation;
- (h) change in rate of absenteeism;
- (i) improvement in basic skills.

### **Indicators on ultimate results**

The evaluation reported findings regarding these ultimate result indicators:

- (a) the share of students who achieve a qualification;
- (b) the share of students who progress to further education and training;
- (c) the share of students in employment.

The first indicator adequately reflects the aim of *Youthreach*: to provide early leavers with opportunities to acquire a qualification. Evaluation also looked into the pathways of students after leaving the measure, helping assess if the attainment of a qualification ultimately led to increased opportunities in terms of employment or education and training. This is particularly relevant to a measure targeting the unemployed.

#### **5.1.2. Developing intervention logics**

The key issues to bear in mind when developing an intervention logic that could be used for evaluation is to <sup>(24)</sup>:

- (a) develop the programme theory and the intervention logic based on a good understanding of what the intervention aims to achieve and how;

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<sup>(24)</sup> For more information see the resources under 'Define what is to be evaluated' in *Better evaluation*: <http://betterevaluation.org/plan/define>

- (b) identify objectives that are clearly formulated; often the objectives of interventions are articulated in a general manner. As interventions are evaluated against their objectives, it is important to ensure that:
  - (i) the objectives can be achieved through a given intervention (for example, a small local project will only have local results and this should be recognised in the way the objectives are phrased);
  - (ii) the objectives are formulated in a way that makes it possible to identify how a given intervention contributes to the outcomes; the chain of effects between the activities implemented and the expected results must not be too long or the possibility that other activities have a strong effect on the result observed increases;
- (c) define objectives that can be the basis for developing indicators, qualitative or quantitative. The results should not be formulated narrowly, focusing only on what should be measured, as this could limit the potential of the evaluation to find unexpected results;
- (d) making explicit the whole chain of inputs, outputs and results (possibly with different layers of results). Having information on results alone does not explain why a change is happening and whether it has anything to do with the intervention.

### **5.1.3. Analysing results and judgements**

An important feature of evaluations is that they judge how a given intervention performed. They should not only report results but they should also enable to judge whether the results are 'good enough'. In particular, they should consider whether:

- (a) the results respond to the objectives and the targets defined;
- (b) they are proportionate to the resources spent;
- (c) the same or better results could have been achieved via a different, less costly activity;
- (d) the results are different from the situation before or without the intervention.

Judging the effectiveness of an intervention requires comparing the results observed with a framework that supports the ultimate judgement about performance. The framework can consider the targets set for the intervention (assessing whether the targets have been achieved); the costs per output or per result compared with other interventions; and comparison of results achieved with other interventions or a situation where there is no intervention (baseline or a control group).

The indicators that support the judgement may capture change or evolution (and this can be positive or negative) but they can also reflect an absolute

statement about a certain feature of the intervention. For example, an evaluation can conclude that students who undertook guidance sessions had a better idea of possible education and training options than those who did not attend such sessions (control group comparison), or before attending such sessions (baseline comparison), or those taking part in a similar process (comparison with another intervention). In such cases the success of a measure is based on comparison. An evaluation can also conclude that the fact that all students are offered guidance is a success. In this case, the judgement is not being made based on the results achieved but rather because of presence of certain systemic features which are expected to yield positive outcomes. In some cases, it is not possible to collect data on results and therefore judgements need to be formulated based on presence or absence of facilitating features.

To carry out a counter-factual evaluation is resource-extensive and requires a more substantial evaluation budget. Depending on how the evaluation findings are expected to be used, it is not always worth the cost of carrying out counter-factual evaluation that would enable a comparison with a control group or a different intervention. Further, baseline data are not always available when the evaluator is asked to carry out the evaluation as it was not collected at the beginning of the intervention. In such cases, evaluators can design judgement criteria based on the objectives of the intervention and decide, from stakeholder discussions, what would be considered as poor, good or excellent performance before the actual data are collected. In any case, it is important to decide how the judgement will be made before the evaluation is actually carried out as, otherwise, there is a risk that judgement criteria will be tweaked to make the intervention appear good.

## 5.2. What is being evaluated?

This section discusses the indicators which were measured as part of these evaluations. It focuses on the quantitative components of evaluations. Most evaluations also gathered qualitative feedback which focused on aspects, such as:

- (a) qualitative illustration of results also monitored quantitatively;
- (b) identification of additional or different results;
- (c) explanation of results captured quantitatively and how the measure led to such results;
- (d) feedback related to the process of implementation.

The use of qualitative information was varied and is not discussed here in greater depth.

#### **5.2.1. Main evaluation focus**

Most evaluations of measures analysed tended to report individual level outcomes. Information about change at the level of education and training providers was rarely reported.

Many of the evaluations analysed focused on the situation of young people when exiting a given intervention: the number who completed the support programme, whether they went into another form of training, and whether they integrated into employment.

This is a positive aspect as it shows that most of the evaluations went beyond simple output data about numbers of beneficiaries and looked at what happened to young people after they received the support. Twenty-seven of the evaluations analysed looked at whether young people stayed in education and training after the intervention. Other evaluations looked at whether they transitioned to 'regular' education and training programmes. For example, in the Luxembourg second chance school, of the 150 students in upper secondary education, 59 continue their further studies in 2012 and another 48 took up mainstream education.

However, only 15 of the evaluations looked at whether young people eventually qualified and therefore whether they escaped the 'fate' of becoming an early leaver. For example:

- (a) in the UK, the percentage of those who achieved a qualification for *Skills for work* doubled from 30% in 2008/9 to 60% in 2013/14;
- (b) in Norway, the pilot project evaluation of the certificate of practice from 2011 showed promising results, with 41 of 51 students completing the certificate of practice (two-year programme) (80%). This is higher than the retention rate of students with similar profiles in standard programmes (67% dropout);
- (c) in France, since the launch of the second chance schools, the average success rate of pupils at the vocational baccalaureate exam has exceeded 90%, with some variations from year to year. This is higher than the success rate in the mainstream programme.

Less commonly, evaluations looked at how the interventions affected the factors leading to early leaving, the intermediary outcomes. When such outcomes were measured, the indicators selected often reflected only few of the factors identified in the general programme theory above.

In some cases, the evaluations looked at the effect of the intervention on young people's education aspirations/goals and their professional orientation. This was the case:

- (a) in the evaluation of the German vocational orientation programme (*Berufsorientierungsprogramm*, BOP) where young people were asked to report on their understanding of professions suitable for them as a result of the orientation process; 80% of students stated that they knew which professions were not suitable for them at all and more than 60% stated that they knew which professions were suitable for them;
- (b) in Austria, data from the *Production school* analysed show that, at the beginning of their participation, only 14% of young adults had a concrete and realistic picture of their career aspirations. At the end of their participation, this increased to 50%. For 50%, career plans became more realistic and more concrete, for 40% they remained the same and for 9% they got worse;
- (c) also in Austria, about 76% of participants in the youth coaching programme said that the coaching helped them to develop a better perception of their future and 71% said that they are more aware of their skills and strengths. 57% of learners say that their perspective on their future profession has improved;
- (d) in Hungary, teachers of students who took part in the *Springboard* programme were asked whether they considered the students' choice of profession appropriate: 78% stated the choice was appropriate.
- (e) participants in the *Production school* programme in Austria improved their work readiness: at the beginning, 20% of students were able to fulfil their working duties while at the end the figure was 35%. The numbers of those who wanted to give up when difficulties occurred decreased from 46% to 42%. Better motivation to fulfil working tasks was seen for 32% of participants, the motivation stayed at the same level for 56%;
- (f) employers who trained learners in the Welsh programme pathways to apprenticeships were asked whether, allowing for their age and experience, their learners had limitations in terms of work readiness and work-related characteristics: 32 out of the 67 employers said they had none.

Some of the evaluations captured the effect on absenteeism and punctuality which are frequently cited as symptoms of disengagement from education and training:

- (a) the introduction of medical advice for students who were often absent for medical purposes in the Netherlands resulted in a reduction in level of absenteeism from 8.5 days in 12 school weeks before the advice was

received to 5.7 days three months after the support, and to 4.9 days 12 months after the support;

- (b) attendance in the second chance school analysed in Portugal was 80%, which is considered as high for a given target group.

One of the evaluations looked at level of absenteeism but saw no difference compared to the control group – this was the case of the French initiative of student association AFEV.

Improved education performance and levels of skills are another aspect measured by some of the evaluations:

- (a) between 6% and 20% of participants in the youth coaching scheme in Austria has seen an improvement in basic skills (numeracy/literacy) and sometimes also soft skills (communication). This is based on data reported by the coaches;
- (b) under the German scheme *VerA* (prevention of training dropout) 80% of participants who had difficulties in education performance stated that the mentoring help them with their results;
- (c) 86% of students who took part in the Hungarian programme *Springboard* considered that the acquired knowledge was useful for their future life.

Some of the evaluations looked at the attitude towards studying and education:

- (a) 90% of respondents from the *VerA* programme in Germany state that the mentoring has increased their inclination to study;
- (b) also in Germany, two thirds of participants in the *Carpo* programme stated that they had almost given up on the idea of an apprenticeship and were only motivated to try once again to start an apprenticeship training because of the offer of assisted apprenticeship through *Carpo*;
- (c) 30% of students who took part in the German vocational orientation programme (BOP) claim to be more motivated at school after participating in the programme.

Some of the evaluations looked at aspects such as motivation and confidence:

- (a) 70% of mentees who took part in the German *VerA* programme state that without their mentor, they would not have made it through this difficult time;
- (b) in the Austrian youth coaching scheme, improvement in overall motivation was reported by 33% of participants and self-confidence by 31% of participants.

An overview of the main results reported per intervention is presented in the annex.

### 5.2.2. The evidence used

The evaluations reviewed uses two sources of data: surveys and administrative data.

The survey data mainly concerned factual statements about one's situation and perceptions of how participation in a programme contributed to change learners' situation (skills, work readiness, etc.).

The perceptions were either self-reported or reported by teachers/trainers/mentors. While self-reported data are usually relatively easy and not very costly to collect, it also has limitations: it relies on respondents' honesty, capacity to introspect, understanding of the question asked. It is also prone to response bias depending on how the question is formulated. However, self-reported data are a common source of evidence in evaluations and is often the only practically feasible way to collect data on certain types of effects.

The administrative data were used as basis to populate indicators about participation, programme completion, absences and participant background.

None of the evaluations reviewed used actual administrative data on education performance of students.

### 5.2.3. Analysing data according to target groups

Breaking down data according to gender or other characteristics of the target group is one way of seeing whether certain groups benefit more from the programme than others. Most evaluations reviewed had data breakdowns per gender (18 evaluations).

Other breakdowns were sometimes, but much less frequently available:

- (a) education pathways or prior education attainment (19);
- (b) migration (seven cases);
- (c) age (nine);
- (d) socioeconomic background (10).
- (e) company size (one).

While participation is often broken down by these categories, the results are rarely discussed or distinguished according to these categories. Exceptions are:

- (a) the evaluation of Austrian supra-company apprenticeships found that those participants with good level of competences have the best chances to complete the supra-company training and find a regular apprenticeship training placement. However, those with learning difficulties, but also those with migrant background or older apprentices, have more difficulties and are more at risk of dropping out from this scheme;
- (b) in Denmark, the final evaluation of the *Retention caravan* concluded that the initiatives had a positive impact on the retention rate of VET students from

ethnic minorities as well as on the retention of disadvantaged Danish VET students;

- (c) evaluation of the Danish youth guidance centres showed that the academically weakest students attach more importance to the development of an educational logbook than the academically stronger students: 56% of the academically weakest students thought that guidance had some or a big impact on their career plans in the transition into upper secondary education, while only 25% of the strongest students responded in this way. Students living in homes with another main language than Danish also attached more importance to the educational logbook than students from homes with Danish as the main language.

#### **5.2.4. Assessing change and impact**

Evaluations make a judgement on the contribution of a given programme or policy. They should also determine that any change observed is not due to something that is independent of the programme (demography, economic changes, another programme).

Few evaluations reviewed made a clear reference to the baseline situation before the programme was introduced. However, the baseline situation of the participants in the measure is often implicit and reflected in the programme design. For example, the persons were either at risk of early leaving or they were already outside education and training. So the measures that looked at change in outcomes at individual level compared with the starting situation of the participant, even though this was not explicit. That, however, does not allow assessment of the regional or school-level evolution of the rate of early leaving.

The second issue is to understand whether the change is due to the intervention. This can be assessed through experimental or quasi-experimental techniques, though such techniques are difficult to put in place in social policy and their use in this context is contested by some. For instance, randomly allocating some learners to a support measure, while not giving support to another group of learners, can be considered ethically questionable.

None of the evaluations reviewed had an experimental design where participants with the same characteristics would be allocated to a control group at random. Several of the measures had a quasi-experimental design using some form of control group (group that did not participate in the programme). A comparison with a control group is made in the evaluation of the Hungarian *Springboard* initiative, the Danish *Retention caravan* and the French experimentation of student association AFEV. Comparing the results of the group of learners who were exposed to the programme with the group that were not



exposed to the programme suggests a causal link between the programme and the results observed.

The contribution of the programme can also be assessed based on statements made by beneficiaries who observed the link. This can be done by asking them how the programme contributed to different types of results. This approach is the one found in most of the evaluations that used participant surveys as main data.

### 5.3. Conditions for policy mainstreaming and learning

The issue of policy and programme evaluations is germane to the question of mainstreaming and policy learning. Once evidence is available about the success of a given intervention, the question arises of whether this intervention could be mainstreamed within the given country and also possibly transferred internationally and under what conditions.

The question of policy transfer across countries is broadly debated (e.g. Stone, 2001) and sometimes criticised for not being culturally sensitive and context-specific (e.g. Bridges, 2014). Nevertheless, countries have been and are looking at other countries' education policies and transfer, after remodelling, practices from abroad. Such transfer can be more or less successful depending on a range of issues discussed below. Some of the examples analysed in this study have been inspired by measures in other countries, as with the production schools in Austria which were based on the Danish model of production schools.

The issue of mainstreaming projects and local initiatives to national programmes and policies is also a challenge. Many small-scale examples demonstrate positive outcomes but are never mainstreamed. In other cases, small-scale examples are mainstreamed with important variations in results. The text below discusses the conditions for mainstreaming and transferability of approaches to tackling ELET within and across countries.

#### 5.3.1. Conditions for mainstreaming measures within the country

Mainstreaming or upscaling a certain approach within a country implies that:

- (a) the approach is successful and there is convincing evidence of its success;
- (b) the transfer will introduce a change in the way education and training is provided or supported.

Several models have been developed to analyse change in education, among the most influential being those of Rogers, Fullan and Ely. These and others have been analysed by Ellsworth (2000). The main characteristics of these three models are briefly described below.

#### 5.3.1.1. *Rogers model of diffusion of innovations*

Rogers analyses innovation in education as a process of communication. The key building blocks of this theory are the:

- (a) 'change agents' who are persons between the change agency (i.e. the organisation that 'commands' the change) and the organisation and persons who are to adopt change;
- (b) 'communication channels' which are used by the change agent to reach to and convince the target group by communicating and diffusing innovation. The channels can be media or interpersonal contacts.

Rogers sees change agents as the key mechanism for change. They are seen almost as 'manipulating' the adopters while the adopters have a somewhat secondary role. He sees the role of change agents in several stages: develop a need for change; establish an information-exchange relationship; diagnose problems; create the intent in the client to change; translate this intent to action; stabilise adoption and prevent discontinuance; and achieve a 'terminal relationship' in which the organisation or people adopting the change develop the ability to be their own change agents <sup>(25)</sup>.

#### 5.3.1.2. *Fullan's model of education change*

Compared to Rogers, Fullan's model is not based on a one-to-one relationship between the change agent and the adopter. He sees change as a process in which multiple persons and organisations act as change agents. His work analysed in greater depth the factors that influence change, with the following key stages in the process of change and the related actors:

- (a) initiation: there several factors that matter at the stage of the initiation, such as the availability of innovations and awareness of these but also the pressure or advocacy from the government or interest groups;
- (b) implementation: some of the factors that matter for implementation are linked to the change itself (how complex is it, how urgent is the need for the change), others to the local context (such as the positions and attitudes of headmasters or the municipality) and also the broader context (particularly government policy);
- (c) continuation: this is the face of institutionalisation; it is dependent on formalisation, take up by key persons, existence of procedures;

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<sup>(25)</sup> Based on Penn State personal web server. Rogers' diffusion of innovations.  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/wxh139/Rogers.htm>

- (d) outcome: the purpose of the change is achieving successful outcomes (the change itself is a means).

Fullan analyses change as a dynamic process which is not a linear and is influenced by a range of aspects. He suggests that those working on stimulating change in education need to pay attention to the trade-offs between issues such as planning and uncertainty or centralisation versus decentralisation <sup>(26)</sup>.

#### 5.3.1.3. *Ely's conditions of change*

Ely looks further into the process of change implementation and adoption by analysing the conditions of change. Successful implementation and adoption of change is not dependent solely on the characteristics of the innovation. He identified the following eight conditions for change:

- (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo (the adopters must feel the need to change);
- (b) sufficient knowledge and skills (this concerns both the knowledge to understand the innovation and also that to put it in practice);
- (c) availability of resources (not just financial but also human);
- (d) availability of time (knowledge is not sufficient people need to gain a deep understanding of the innovation, which takes time);
- (e) reward or incentives (encouragement);
- (f) participation and ownership of the innovation;
- (g) commitment from the leadership;
- (h) leadership offering support as well as inspiration.

Based on these models, the following conditions for transferability have been identified in the measures analysed:

- (a) leadership and commitment over time;
- (b) evidence on success factors;
- (c) the role of change agents;
- (d) the role of the communities of practice;
- (e) autonomy supported by guidelines and other tools <sup>(27)</sup>.

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<sup>(26)</sup> Based on Penn State personal web server. Fullan's educational change.  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/wxh139/Fullan.htm>

<sup>(27)</sup> Based on Penn State personal web server. Ely's conditions of change.  
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/wxh139/Ely.htm>

#### 5.3.1.4. *Leadership and commitment over time*

Some of the measures analysed, though not all, have been successfully scaled up to national or regional level. When upscaling happened, this was often possible because of the high level commitment from policy-makers. Leadership at all levels of an intervention is crucial to introduce sustainable changes, particularly if these are to bring in important change to the previous practice.

Several of the measures analysed built on pilot projects that first tested the approach, its feasibility and the extent to which it yielded positive results. Once evaluation of pilots was positive, the measures were scaled up to the national level: this was the case for nearly half of the measures analysed. Examples include:

- (a) the vocational orientation programme (*Berufsorientierungsprogramm*) in Germany started as a pilot project in 2008 and was mainstreamed following evaluation in 2010. Since then, the programme has reached 815 000 pupils and created partnerships with 3 275 schools. Today, the project is part of the *Educational chains* initiative which accompanies youngsters from school through vocational training to their first job);
- (b) the *Local action for youth* programme was launched by the Luxembourgish Ministry of Education in 1984 as a pilot project and extended to the whole country in 1988. Today, its large network of field offices provides comprehensive guidance, training and personal support to young people to help them enter the labour market;
- (c) in Ireland, the Ballymun youth guarantee pilot was tested in the period 2013-14. It was then subsequently mainstreamed into the national model for youth guarantees;
- (d) in France, the first second chance school (E2C) opened in 1997, as part of an EU pilot project, in the city of Marseille. Other pioneer E2C soon followed (in 2000 in Mulhouse, in 2002 in Champagne-Ardenne and Seine-Saint Denis). Today, E2C operate at 107 sites in 18 regions across France. The number of young people supported increased from 1 000 in 2003 to 15 000 in 2015.

Policy leadership and continuity is not only about mainstreaming pilot experiences. Longer-term commitment to the issue and to the mainstreamed solutions is needed for initiatives to get over the project phase to become programmes and/or core features of a system to support young people in difficulties.




The study also analysed examples of local initiatives that were developed without particular top-up support. While these were successful, in many cases they did not manage to inject a dynamic of scaling up and transfer on their own,

without political support. Securing such commitment in early stages of a project is important for its sustainability and future use of results.

Stability of the measures is also important for the successful transfer and large scale implementation. Several of those analysed have been in place for over a decade: the drive to reduce dropout rates in the Netherlands has existed since 2007; the supra-company apprenticeships in Austria were created in the 1990s; the *Youthreach* programme in Ireland was created in 1989).

The expert workshop organised as part of this study <sup>(28)</sup> concluded that it takes time for local innovative initiatives to be evaluated, scaled up and eventually turned into larger programmes or policies supporting young people at risk. Long-term support secures the commitment of staff working on the ground and allows them to develop their working methods as they gather experience.

Table 25. **Tips for ensuring leadership and commitment over time**

	Integrate elements of successful practice into national strategies
	Secure government commitment to scale up results of experimentations and pilots
	Make regional authorities accountable for delivering activities to address ELET

NB: Icons created by Freepik from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)

Source: Expert workshop results.

#### 5.3.1.5. *Evidence on success factors*

Evidence of what works is essential to enabling learning and transfer within the education system (OECD, 2009). Evidence is crucial to informing policies, putting in place funding arrangements, and helping build necessary capacities. Cedefop has identified some successful measures which relied on comprehensive monitoring and documentation of activities.

In France, one of the challenges in the fight against early leaving was the number of measures coexisting locally with little or no connection between them. The solution was a new monitoring system of early leavers comprising regional platforms responsible for following and supporting young people who left general education or VET without a qualification. These platforms not only allow the authorities to coordinate measures regionally and make sure they complement each other; they also offer an opportunity to exchange experiences. The




<sup>(28)</sup> <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/events/evaluating-impact-and-success-vet-policies-tackle-early-leaving-education>

monitoring activities proved pivotal both in raising awareness of the problems linked to early leaving and in mobilising all actors.

The French monitoring system is not limited to VET but is a comprehensive system requiring interministerial and interinstitutional collaboration and compatible mechanisms to collect data across the country. This broad basis captures data on early leaving from VET and enables policy-makers and practitioners to track learners' trajectories and to understand which type of education they have left.

In the Netherlands, the provision of reliable data from the monitoring system BRON (basic records database of education) helped in the process of getting ELET/ELVET on the agenda at schools and municipalities. Offering reliable data to VET schools and municipalities was essential to enable them to manage ELVET. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has worked closely with BRON to create reliable ELET/ELVET data. The goal, to have reliable figures for ELET/ELVET, was to help schools and municipalities to identify with the figures and understand how these figures were created. The main goal was to serve as a 'management tool' for schools.

Table 26. **Tips for developing evidence on success factors**

	Carry out evaluations to provide evidence of success and meta-evaluations of several good practices to identify key factors in view of mainstreaming
	Provide time for evaluations to ensure that they can capture intermediary and ultimate results, not only short-term outputs
	Reflect the voices of teachers and trainers and take their knowledge and experience into account in policy-level evaluations

NB: Icons created by Freepik from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)

Source: Expert workshop results.

#### 5.3.1.6. *Change agents*

In the examples analysed, change agents have the capacity to introduce change locally in education and training institutions. An equivalent function to change agents can be identified in several of the measures analysed:

- the coaches in the Austrian apprenticeship coaching programme can be seen as change agents: they do not only train and guide young people but also provide support to companies who are struggling to retain apprentices at risk of early leaving, actively engaged in conflict resolution;
- the coordinators in the Danish *Retention caravan*, an initiative set up by the Ministry of Education to attract and retain ethnic minority youth in vocational




training programmes, acted as change agents, both guiding and coaching the young people and supporting VET providers to use motivational pedagogies. The pivotal importance of these coordinators is illustrated by the fact that their function, established as part of the project which finished in 2012, has been continued since;

- (c) in the French context of regional networks to tackle early leaving, the networks themselves can be seen as change agents. The activities of networks create momentum to support learning from good practice locally;
- (d) in the Netherlands, the drive to reduce dropout requires local and regional authorities to develop action plans to reduce early leaving. However, there is also support offered by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science which deploys account five managers <sup>(29)</sup> tasked with closing the gap between the policy frameworks of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the 39 regions in the Netherlands (schools and municipalities). The account managers went to schools and municipalities to discuss their specific ELET issues. The outcome of these conversations served as input for continuously improving policy.

The change agents support education and training providers in their transition to a different approach to teaching, organising education and training or retaining young people.

The expert workshop organised in 2015 as part of this study confirmed that the use of change agents is a good strategy to support transfer of innovative and successful practices (Table 27).

Table 27. **The role of change agents**

	Act as a network of experts who can support capacity building of schools based on good practice
	Provide training to education and training institutions and their leadership
	Get the support of headmasters, leaders of education and training centres, social partners, employers and other actors concerned to support adoption of good practice

NB: Icons created by [Freepik](https://www.flaticon.com) from [www.flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com)

Source: Expert workshop results.

<sup>(29)</sup> Along with a budget for municipalities and (VET) schools.





#### 5.3.1.7. *Communities of practice*

Supporting peer learning and exchange of successful practices among professionals helps a group of actors to reach a common understanding of what works, a prerequisite for mainstreaming any project or measure. Good examples from those analysed are:

- (a) the project *Expairs* in the French Community of Belgium from 2012 to 2014 helped 42 schools to focus their teaching on learners' needs and to design measures to motivate them. The schools were divided into three thematic clusters where best practices were shared, documented and transferred with the help of the project experts;
- (b) QuABB counsellors in Hesse/Germany are encouraged to exchange experiences and to work with a wide range of stakeholders, by participating in regular regional and state meetings and workshops. The project specifically aids exchange between practitioners (guidance counsellors and counselling teachers), who regularly meet at local and state level.

Several ways to support the development of communities of practice were highlighted during the expert workshop (Table 28).

Table 28. **The role of communities of practice**

	Share knowledge about what works via publicly available user-friendly databases Increase visibility of good practices, for example through awards
	Promote peer-learning Promote sharing between organisations
	Promote study visits, info days, conferences, and other events such as an annual 'week for the prevention of ELET'
	Establish networks/associations for a community of practice

NB: Icons created by [Freepik](https://www.flaticon.com/) from [www.flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/)

Source: Expert workshop results.

#### 5.3.1.8. *Autonomy supported by guidelines and other tools*

One of the challenges when transferring good practices is how to contextualise successful activity. This is why policy-makers have been giving increasing leeway to education and training providers and other stakeholders (such as social partners, employment and community services, NGOs) to develop their own approach, based on existing guidelines, methods and advice. In turn, they are expected to comply with specific reporting requirements, ensuring that best practices can be captured and made available to others. In the following



examples, the education and training providers and stakeholders were given quite a lot of autonomy to design specific activities to reduce early leaving:

- (a) the Dutch strategy to reduce dropout rates does not prescribe any specific activities except that all regions, municipalities and education and training providers need to put measures in place to address ELET;
- (b) the French regional networks which coordinate activities to support prevention and compensation measures are also not given specific definition of activities to put in place. They are required to work in a network and coordinate but the exact activities and how they work with those at risk or those who have already dropped out are left to their discretion.

In several activities analysed, the providers of education and training and stakeholders implementing the activity need to comply with certain guidelines or frameworks. These are expected to capture the enabling features of activities to tackle ELET which lead to successful results:

- (a) the Irish *Youthreach* centres need to follow a quality framework developed specifically for this type of provision;
- (b) the Estonian pathfinder centres follow the guidelines, indicators and annual goals set by the Ministry of Education. Within this overall framework, they enjoy a large degree of autonomy;
- (c) in Denmark, youth guidance centres were recently reformed with more emphasis on quality assurance. They work autonomously but are required to publish objectives, methods, planned activities and expected performance on their websites. In support, the Ministry of Education has published a handbook helping them develop a quality assurance system;
- (d) the French E2C need to adopt a charter of fundamental principles governing their work following a relevant audit. This charter defines the key features of E2C (support by local/regional authorities, objective of social inclusion, cooperation with companies, focus on skills). Compliance with the charter is necessary for the award of a quality label.

### **5.3.2. Transferability of measures across countries**

Transnational policy learning happens but there are challenges to overcome. The socioeconomic context is different from one country to another, and so are the roles of employers and employment services, of social partners and guidance and counselling services, of parents, teachers and learners. These differences may be crucial to the success or failure of a measure tackling early leaving.

Governance frameworks also vary. The existence of institutions offering second chance provisions, the sharing of responsibilities between ministries, guidance provision and monitoring, and the degree of autonomy of education and

training providers will influence whether a certain policy or practice can be adopted in a given country.

This study analysed examples inspired by practices from other countries, showing that, despite limitations, policy learning in this area is already happening:

- (a) both the production schools in German-speaking countries and the Matosinhos second chance school in Portugal are inspired by the Danish factory schools. While the Danish factory schools are part of the regular education system, Germany and Austria have not integrated them as such. Nevertheless, the production schools have been operating successfully in both countries and are interlinked with other education options and pathways. The Matosinhos second chance school is an independent school run by an NGO in partnership with a local authority (city council of Matosinhos) and the Ministry of Education. The school is requested by the Ministry to deliver official training programmes;
- (b) the study analysed activities of several second chance schools/models for second chance schools (in France, Luxembourg and Portugal) which are part of a European network. These schools put in place very similar working principles and are influenced through the networking offered via this European platform.

Independent of the above constraints on direct transfer (replication) of practices to tackle early leaving, there is much that can be learned and borrowed transnationally. This study identified several key features of effective practices, most of which are relatively independent of context (Chapter 4). These key features could be used as principles to develop measures and refine practices to tackle early leaving in other countries.