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National report: Key findings of desk research and interviews with educators and stakeholders in United Kingdom

IO1 – Capacity Building Seminars for Educators

Abstract

Early school leavers or school drop-outs are common around the world and especially in the UK. Research into this field in the UK is not common although schools and youth workers are working extremely hard to minimise this risk to all youth.

This report will provide information gathered from experts in this field, those working with youth in schools along with research gathered through various means,

Most importantly we will discover what the reality is and what is needed to prevent more youth leaving school education early and in turn assist with improving their future life.

Contents

1 Introduction

In the United Kingdom, a dropout is classed as anyone who leaves school, college or university without either completing their course of study or transferring to another educational institution. Dropping out of school is not allowed. Attendance at a school is mandatory until age 16 (GCSE exams) and students must be in some form of education or training (either full-time or part-time) until age 18.

Dropout rate benchmarks are set only for each higher education institution and monitored by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Dropout rates are often one of the factors assessed when ranking UK universities in league tables. In November 2014, a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that students from poorer home backgrounds were 8.4 percentage points more likely to drop out of university in the first two years of an undergraduate course than those from the richest homes; they were also 22.9 percentage points less likely to obtain a 2:1 or first degree. For students studying on the same course and who arrived at university with similar grades, the differences fell but remained significant. The report concluded that more should be done both to raise the attainment levels of poorer students prior to their arrival at university and to provide additional support to them at university.

More current studies either have not been carried out or are not accessible at present. Many secondary schools are not so forthcoming with information regarding school drop outs as it is deemed as a failure. The majority of research carried out is with youth aged 18-24 and most is carried out in Universities as it is compulsory for youth under the age of 18 to continue studies in some form. Parents can be fined and even incarcerated if their child does not attend school (until the age of 16). The number of penalty notices have increased by 28% in the year 2018/2019. In extreme cases of persistent absences and those at risk of leaving school early Attendance case Management is put into place. This involves early intervention and a pupil specific approach to tackle absence problems.

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These can include:

► Regular monitoring and follow-up of absence
► Identification of underlying causes of absence or mitigating circumstances
► Engagement with parents to prompt them to focus on their responsibilities to ensure their child`s regular attendance at school and aapplication of sanctions, for example prosecution, if improvements are not made within an agreed timeframe.

Alongside this parenting order and parenting contracts can be issued by courts following prosecution for unauthorised absences. These include a requirement for parents to attend counselling or guidance sessions and to comply with specified requirements. All secondary schools in the UK have policies on "early school leaving prevention" and work closely with Youth workers and other outside agencies to ensure that the number of youths "dropping out" is kept to an absolute minimum. Across the world studies have been carried out to research why youth are dropping out of education early. In the UK, this research is not available, although Britain has some of the worst dropout rates from schools and colleges in the developed world. Figures and statistics from the Department for Education show that the overall persistent absence rate has decreased for the period 2017 -2019 from 11.6% to 10.5%. Absence rates vary by school type, however overall absence rates in secondary schools have decreased. Studies have shown that those who persistently abscond from school are at a greater risk of dropping out totally. Studies carried out by DofE have shown that the main reason for persistent absence is illness, which covers 8.1% for the period 2018/2019. These statistics however are only what has been told to the school and in reality, is not the real reason. By gender, boys have slightly higher overall persistent absence rates than girls (10.8 % compared to 10.2%) Overall persistent absence rates are also higher for pupils whose first language is English (10.8% compared to 9.2%) Pupils in year groups 10 and 11 (age 14-16) had the highest rates of all age groups within the study. The highest overall persistent absence rates were seen for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils (58.2%) whilst lowest were pupils of a Chinese and Black/African ethnicity (3.5%). This project will assist those working directly with young adults in order to understand and prevent early school leaving.

2 Methodology

Various methods have been used in order to carry out research for this project. Questionnaires sent to educators and those working directly with the target group alongside telephone calls and skype calls also. The professionals assisting with this research are: Secondary school teachers. Youth workers, Speech and Language therapist (working within secondary schools) and representatives of academia (PhD candidate). Research carried out online also has uncovered a lack of information available within the UK on this subject, although a great deal of research has been carried out in the United States and across the world.

3 Existing practices and tools for the prevention of early school leaving

There were an estimated 763,000 young people (aged 16 to 24 years) in the UK who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in October to December 2019; this was a decrease of 26,000 compared with October to December 2018 and was down 38,000 compared with July to September 2019. (UK Gov, 2020)

Why Do Young People Leave School Early?

In order to prevent early school leaving it is necessary to identify why young people do not remain in education. One of the UK`s priorities are to reduce early school leading to less than 10% by 2020. It set up a working group on early school leaving who reported that: ''The complexity and multi-faceted dimension of early leaving from education and training is widely acknowledged and requires an equally multi-dimensional approach to adequately address its diverse causes." It found that many problems result from wider social factors outside the educational system and most often results from a combination of personal social economic educational and family related factors. Often it results from progressive disengagement from education that links to underachievement and is often rooted in the early years. It states that research shows that the socio-economic status and the educational attainment of parents are among the strongest causes of early school leaving (UK Gov, 2020)

It also says that research shows that systems characterised by grade retention, early tracking, insufficient support for learners, lack of quality vocational education and training (VET) and limited provision of early childhood education and care are faced with stronger social inequalities in educational achievement and attainment. School and classroom practices, teachers' attitudes and teaching styles also affect children and young people's motivation and commitment towards education: an unfavourable school climate, a lack of learner centredness, inadequate awareness of educational disadvantage, violence and bullying, poor teachers-pupils relationships, and teaching methods and curricula which are perceived as irrelevant are some of the factors that can contribute to the decision to leave education prematurely (EC, 2019)

The European School Heads Association (EHSA) says that the phenomenon of early school leaving in all EU countries follows the same pattern and since there are no single reasons for leaving education there are no easy answers. Early school leavers are more likely to have a lower socio-economic status, belong to a vulnerable social group or be from migrant backgrounds. Male students are more likely to drop out of school education. There is also an impact by the setup of the educational system and the environment in individual schools. The RESL.eu project (Reducing Early School Leaving project in Europe) looked at the rate of ESL in 2016 in nine EU countries which participated in the RESL.eu project – Austria, Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. This project found that, there is no single way to tackle ESL as there is no single reason that causes it. What puts a youngster at risk of early school leaving is not a single factor but the accumulation of various risk factors. It found that having one at-risk characteristic or even many risk factors does not indicate that a young person will definitely leave school early, but only increases this probability and that ESL is often preceded by a longer process of gradual distancing from the school which might be accompanied by truancy, periods of worse academic performance, and/or low school involvement. However, sometimes leaving school early is associated with a previously unanticipated event, a sudden crisis such as an accident, pregnancy, etc. (ESHA, 2019)

VET School Kit

The Europe-wide VET toolkit for tackling early leaving was developed by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) in 2017. It provides practical guidance, tips, good practices and tools to help:

- Young people at risk of becoming early leavers to attain at least an upper secondary qualification;

- Early leavers to reintegrate into education or training and the labour market.

The toolkit can help to:

- Identify early the signs of disengagement and prevent early leaving;

- Support learners at risk of dropping out;

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- Improve attendance or reduce dropout;

- Monitor early leavers systematically to reach out to them in time;

- Motivate and re-engage early leavers, bringing them back to education and training;

- Advance knowledge on what makes tackling leaving education early so successful.

There is a range of tools drawn from successful VET (Vocational Education and Training) practices, including instruments developed as part of projects funded by the European lifelong learning and Erasmus+ programmes.

Tools include:

- Good practices: measures to tackle ESL found to be successful in   different EU countries

- Quick wins: relatively activities that can contribute to prevent ESL

- Self-reflection tool for policy-makers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of policies put in place.

- Evaluation plans for policy-makers or VET providers to design an appropriate monitoring and evaluation approach.

 Interested parties can register and download templates

School Engagement Risk Assessment Toolkit (SERAT)

Researchers at the University of Sheffield which also includes the University of Nottingham, have recently completed a five-year research project Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) and from the findings of that research, designed the School Engagement Risk Assessment Toolkit (SERAT) to help schools to put more effective and targeted measures in place to prevent students from leaving education prematurely. The toolkit to tackle the prevalence of NEETs (Not in Education and Training) can be used at school and class-level to identify individual students who report low engagement, and to identify where school resources might best be focused.

The toolkit has been developed using extensive research data collected as part of the RESL.eu project and the Department for Education outcome data (KS4 / KS5 results) for over 3,000 young people in England. The SERAT toolkit comprises a student questionnaire

with up to 25 questions and a spreadsheet to help interpret the results (Cedefop.europa.eu)

England

There is no standalone strategy for the prevention of early leaving of education and training in England. Local authorities have a duty to identify young people not participating and are expected to help them find an alternative place in education, training or employment with training that will lead to a relevant qualification. (Participation Statutory Guidance). The Post-16 Skills Plan published July 2016 gives the vision for technical education. This plan gives 15 routes into schools employment such as health and science construction social care engineering and manufacturing either through to your college-based program or through an apprenticeship and is suitable for 16 to 18-year-olds (EC, ELET)

Funding

There is a16 to19 Bursary Fund for those who meet residency requirements It is provided by the government to local authorities of schools and colleges etc to enable students 16 - 18years inclusive who meet certain criteria to study at a public funded school or college or attend a training course - including unpaid work experience. There are two types of bursary - vulnerable student bursary and discretional bursary.

The Careers and Enterprise Company

This manages the careers and enterprise fund which aims to increase the contact with employees through careers and enterprise activities. Part of this funding is aimed at geographic opportunity areas identified by the government

Job Centre Support for Schools.

This aims to help students at risk of becoming NEET. Young people, after 6 months on universal credit, will be expected to apply for an apprenticeship or traineeship or mandatory work experience placement to give them the skills they need to move into sustainable employment

Incentives for providers: From April 2017 the government pays in full training costs of: employers with fewer than 15 employees who take on apprentices aged 16 to 18 years, employers of any size and training providers who take on 16 to 18-year-olds who are in care or have an EHC plan, providers to 16 to 18-year-olds on apprenticeship

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Local Authorities

Statutory guidance is issued to local authorities to help those at risk of dropping out of learning. The extent and the way in which this is done is down to local priorities and decision-making. Local authorities can coordinate with institutions to implement the 16 to 19 bursary funds. The Department for education monitors the performance of the local authorities specifically regarding the tracking and supporting of 16 and 17-year-olds using data collected by local authorities and submitted to the national client caseload information system (NCCIS). NCCIS includes data showing the numbers of young people who are NEET (Preventing early leaving from education and training (ELET) UK-England, 2020)

Wales

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) is the Welsh Government's approach to tackling the problem of young people who are NEET. The Welsh Government continues to support local authorities, who have the strategic lead for the implementation and embedding of the framework,
The framework has six key elements:

- Identifying young people most at risk of disengagement

- Better brokerage and coordination of support

- Stronger tracking and transitions of young people through the system

- Ensuring provision meets the needs of young people

- Strengthening employability skills and opportunities for employment

- Greater accountability for better outcomes for young people

An Engagement and Progression Coordinator and early identification systems have been established. They help to identify at the earliest stage the young people who need support. As part of this, the right partner organisation (e.g. Careers Wales, further education or work-based learning providers, youth justice, health, housing, third sector etc.) is identified to provide the support the young person needs to progress (EC, ELET)

Financial support mechanisms

The Welsh Government targets financial support at certain disadvantaged groups to make it easier for them to remain in education. The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is available for young people aged 16 to 18years. This support is removed if certain criteria are not met.

A Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) supports students over 16 years who face financial difficulties that would prevent continuation of their education.

The Welsh Government makes money available to individual further education institutions to administer to their students on the basis that the college is best cable to match support to the need of the student. The FCF can provide help to eligible students with childcare, books, equipment, lunch and transport costs.

Disadvantaged children and young people aged 16 -19 studying in school Sixth forms, but not in a further education college are eligible for free school meals. Further education institutions are able to provide support for eligible students to cover the costs of meals via the FCF.

Local authorities will also provide free home to school transport for pupils above compulsory school age (16).

The Welsh Government has a youth discount travel scheme. This provides discounted travel on buses for those aged between 16 and 18 who live in Wales and may be used for school or college transport.

Careers and the World of Work (CWW) forms part of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils aged 11 to 16 at maintained schools. CWW is also part of the 'Learning Core' of Learning Pathways for 14–19-year olds

The Welsh Government's Careers and the World of Work: A Framework for 11 - 19-year olds in Wales and related guidance and educational materials are the key documents setting out the careers education provision required for pupils in secondary school.

Careers Wales receives an annual remit letter from the Welsh Government outlining what its priorities should be. The remit letter for 2017-18 identifies target groups.

'Have A Go' events in schools and colleges involve young people trying out new skills through a range of interactive activities to help to open up vocational pathways, including apprenticeships.

The Youth Guarantee comprises the offer, acceptance and commencement of a suitable place in education or training to 16-year-olds who are making the transition from compulsory education for the first time.

In February 2017, the Minister for Skills and Science launched the Welsh Government's new apprenticeship policy

A Traineeship programme enables young people to gain the skills needed to get a job or progress to further learning at a higher level,

Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work such as support by youth workers assigned the role of 'lead worker' under the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.

The Youth Work Strategy 2019 addresses NEET through informal and non-formal learning. However, this strategy does not include an implementation plan. This was due in October 2019.

The Prince's Trust, a UK-wide charity, runs an 'Achieve' programme, free to participants, aimed at 13- to 19-year-olds who are experiencing personal barriers that may prevent them from engaging in education (EC, ELET)

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government is ultimately responsible for increasing the proportion of young people in learning, training or work under the National Performance Framework (see 'Main trends in young people's participation in education and training') (EC, ELET)

Opportunities for All. Opportunities for All (OfA)

This programme brings together a range of existing national and local policies and strategies as a single focus to improve young people's participation in post 16 learning or training, and ultimately employment. Apart from the Scottish Government, there are many partners essential to implementing strategies in support of this. OfA and related guidance documents mention Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, schools, colleges, universities, Community Learning and Development providers, local authority multi-agency partnerships and the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions, among others. The role of schools is key.

Attainment Scotland Fund

 The £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund is a targeted initiative focused on supporting pupils in the local authorities of Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation. Part of this fund is the Pupil Equity funding which targets poverty related attainment gaps including funding for free school meals. The Further Education Discretionary Fund (FEDF) is primarily for emergency use and instances of financial to be used by colleges for travel and study support. Careers information, advice and guidance is available and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) u information, advice and guidance in secondary schools. SDS has developed a 'Partner Zone' on its My World of Work website, providing additional support for teachers delivering Curriculum for Excellence

Scottish Funding Council

The Scottish Funding Council has supported the charity Become to expand its Propel Scotland website in 2017. This is aimed at inspiring more young care leavers to stay on in education after the age of 16. Transition to the labour market:
The 'Youth Obligation' , means that young people (NEET) who claim Universal Credit after six months will be expected to apply for an apprenticeship or traineeship, gain work-based skills, or go on a mandatory work placement to give them the skills they need to move into sustainable employment. Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

'My Skills, My Future' is a suite of resources from the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership aimed at supporting individuals in identifying the skills they have gained from experiences other than formal qualifications.

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions
Delivery of the Opportunities for All commitment to offer a place in learning or training to all 16-19-year olds not already engaged in education, employment or training relies on a system of information sharing being in place.

The Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 made provision for sharing of information on young people's involvement in further and higher education and training a legal requirement for local authorities and other public bodies. The Young People's Involvement in Education and Training (Provisions of Information) (Scotland) Order 2014 made under the 2013 Act specified all relevant bodies and the information sharing requirements between them and Skills Development Scotland, the national skills agency. The bodies who are mandated to share information on the provision being accessed by individuals post-16 The UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions, which exercises functions in relation to welfare benefits across the UK, also has a mandate to share information. Skills Development Scotland maintains a '16+ Data Hub' which holds information on 16- to 24-year-olds that can be shared securely between partners (EC, ELET)

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pathways to Success is the Northern Ireland Executive's overarching strategy to prevent exclusion and promote participation amongst young people that are not in education, employment or training (NEET), or at risk of becoming so. It was endorsed by the Executive on 31 May 2012 and is intended to cover the period until 2020.The main aspiration of the strategy is that: by 2020, every young person will not only have an opportunity to access education, training or other preparation for employment but, to the extent that they are able, also avail of that opportunity the main measures in the strategy include:

- Delivering the Entitlement Framework to ensure that every young person has the opportunity through the education and training system and the provision of high-quality careers advice, information advice and guidance

- Re-engaging 16-18-year olds to resume learning and progress into work

- Increasing flexibility and permeability of educational pathways

- Developing a tracking system which supports early identification,

- Re-engaging unemployed 18-24-year olds the primary responsibility for implementation of the strategy is held by the Department for the Economy (DfE), the successor department to the Department for Employment and Learning (Pathways to Success, Dept of Economy UK)

Financial support mechanisms

The Northern Ireland Executive targets financial support at certain disadvantaged groups. Part of this fund is the Pupil Equity funding which is invested in the current parliamentary term up to 2021. Its focus is on targeting poverty related attainment gaps. This includes funding for free school meals.

An Education maintenance allowance (to those aged 16 to 19 years from low-income households helps cover the day-to-day costs of staying on at school or college, such as travel costs, books and equipment and up to age 22 for those with a disability and up to age 24 for those from an in-care background students with certain disabilities.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance

The Northern Ireland Curriculum's statutory area of learning 'Learning for Life and Work' incorporates 'employability. Preparing for Success 2015-2020 contains five key commitments to help young people improve their employability.

Schools continue to share responsibility for careers guidance with the Department for the Economy (DfE)'s all-age Careers Service. The Department for the Economy sets annual targets for further education colleges for enrolment, achievement and success, achievement of which is directly linked to their funding arrangements. Under the Care to Learn (NI) Scheme, parents aged between 16 and 20 and studying at a further education college, or those expecting to become a parent during the course, can apply for help towards childcare costs. The Training for Success programme offers training up to 104 weeks (156 weeks for those with a disability) to help young people

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Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work

Youth work can be particularly relevant to those at risk of disengaging from society, those who become disaffected at school. It also identifies 'Young people not in, or who are at risk of disengaging from education, employment or training' as being suitable for targeted provision. The Big Lottery Fund makes grants available under its 'Empowering young people' programme. To be eligible, projects must be aimed at achieving at least one of the following outcomes:

- more young people are ready for education, work and training

- young people have better relationships with their support networks and communities

- young people have improved health and well-being.

The Prince's Trust, a UK-wide charity, runs the 'Achieve' programme, aimed at 13- to 19-year-olds who are experiencing personal barriers that may prevent them from engaging in education and put them at risk of exclusion or underachievement.

The International Fund for Ireland (IFI) seeks to promote reconciliation between the two main political persuasions in Northern Ireland, unionists and nationalists. It was established as an independent international organisation by the British and Irish Governments in 1986. IFI runs a Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP), which aims to connect young people aged 16-25 to personalised learning

Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions

While the main responsibility for implementation of the strategy to prevent early leaving from education and training is held by the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department of Education (DE) and other departments are also closely involved, due to the cross-cutting nature of the policy. Pathways to Success discusses the voluntary and community sector that also have a key role to play (EC,2019) Across the UK most Secondary Schools have in place co-operative multiagency working practices with youth workers and

other agencies internal within the schools in order to combat this issue. Research suggests that "if schools need to expand their remit from a subject-led curriculum to a more student/learner-led curriculum youth worker are well placed as effective partners". The definition of youth work in schools is broad and not everyone may agree on exactly how it is defined. (EC, 2019)

Why is youth work in schools important? All comprehensive schools have a number of pupils who, for a host of reasons, are unable to cope with the daily requirements of school life. Because of troubled home backgrounds, absence of appropriate role models outside school, substance abuse outside school and a whole range of other problems they can be destined for failure before they even arrive at school. Their anger and frustration often lead to confrontations with teachers leading ultimately to exclusion

A teacher is there to help children learn their subject in the classroom and through the programme of extra-curricular activities. Teachers are experts in a subject area. They can only do their job effectively when the pupils attend regularly, are properly equipped and their lessons are free from disruption. However, the vast majority of teachers view their jobs far more widely than mere delivery of skills and knowledge and care passionately about the broader welfare of their pupils. However, they are not social workers and it is simply not feasible for them to provide formal counselling or support over the many problems young people encounter outside school. The presence of a multi-disciplinary team in school can do a vast amount to support teachers in their work and reduce the risk of exclusion for the most vulnerable pupils (EC, ELET)

4 Key findings of the Empirical Research

4.1 Findings of the interviews with educators

For the purpose of the empirical research, a total of 4 professionals were interviewed. The targeted professionals are educators in lower and upper secondary education with various backgrounds (Professor and Head of the Languages Secondary School, Science Emotional, Mental health & Well-being, SENCO, French & Spanish educator and others). The educators have work experience in Cornwall, a rural region in the Southwest England.

4.1.1 Difficulties faced by the educators

Analysing the question *"Do you face any difficulties in your work with youth at risk of early school leaving? Would you like to give us some examples?"* The majority of the interviewed educators said they don't face any difficulties with regards to youth at risk of early school leaving. If they concern about a young person at risk to drop out, they have channels to follow and other external agencies to discuss the matter with such as youth workers, the head of college/ school, mental health support teams within Cornwall Council. 25% of the participants (1) mention that poor academic performance and other behavioural difficulties are related to the youth at risks to drop out. Another 25% of the participants (1) mentions that the young people at risk to drop out, they are occasionally involved in violent outbreaks while are not attending to class.

4.1.2 Methods used to prevent early school leaving

Analysing the question *"Do you use any methodologies that can/could contribute to the prevention of early school leaving?"* One (1) participant answered that they could deal with students at risk to drop out by reducing timetable for students who aren't coping with full time education, or reducing their GCSE subjects so they sit less exams. All also, stressed out the importance of a chat/mentoring during lesson time within the local council. Another teacher said that the career advisor conducts individualised 1 to 1 interview, organize open career days, visits to universities, and other lessons about options /alternatives after leaving school at the age of 16. It's very important to highlight the fact

that 50% of the participants didn't find any available methodology, practice or tool to apply when dealing with students at risk to drop out.

4.1.3   Existing practices and tools that contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon

Analysing the question *"Are you aware of any existing practices or tools for the prevention of early school leaving?"* The majority of the participants, surprisingly enough, mentioned that there is not an official effort introduced for preventing ESL phenomenon at the upper secondary education. One teacher said that even though she recognises the existence of specific CPD (Continuing Professional Development) seminars with practical in-class ideas, it was never clarified whether or not has been attended. Some interviewed teachers stressed out the good communication and trustful relation between student and school. Moreover, a few teachers recognise the role of social workers in preventing ESL at school, trained educational personnel.

4.1.4   Training needs and necessary skills

Analysing the question *«Do you feel sufficiently trained for working with young people who are at risk of early school leaving?"* 100% of the participants said they have never attended specific training on ESL or any training to enhance their knowledge on how to work with youth who are at risk of dropout out. One teacher elaborates on this by saying that it is not an area of professional expertise and also, she doesn't know anyone in the educational environment being well-prepared to deal with these cases.

Analysing the question *"What skills do you find necessary for an educator to possess in order to identify young people who are at risk of early school leaving?"* During the interviews it was noted that a teachers/educators should possess the following characteristics to identify people at risk of dropping out: poor attendance, lack of motivation, no homework, generally speaking a ''school refuser'' On the side of the educators, special therapy and mental support is needed in each school units to assist the educators to recognise the ''red signs'. One teacher suggested that there will be useful to have more general training around the topic of ESL, not mentioned in ITT (Initial Teacher Training) and in school CPD (continuing professional development) program.

4.1.5   Training recommendations

Analysing the question *"Would you be willing to participate in relevant trainings, in order to acquire new skills on innovate pedagogical methodologies, that could contribute to the prevention of such phenomena? If yes, what would you like this training to include?"* The majority of interviewed teachers/educators stated that they are not interested in participating in trainings to gain additional

skills and knowledge in dealing with the ESL phenomenon. One participant believes that no matter how well-equipped the educators might be in the school unit other members of staff are more responsible to deal with this phenomenon. Another teacher expressed his reluctance to assess how an effective could be a seminar that includes only two modules for instance to deal with such a complexed social topic. Only one interviewed participant suggested the following training topics for Capacity Building Seminars: (a)counselling (b) therapy

4.2 Findings of the interviews with education stakeholders

For the purposes of this part of the analysis, a total of 7 professionals were interviewed. The majority of the participants are experienced stakeholders from academia such as the University of Glasgow, experienced local administrators either in public social services (Cornwall Council) or other private educational institutes and initiatives.

4.2.1 Difficulties faced by the educators

Analysing the question *"Do you work with educators who are in contact with young people who are at risk of early school leaving?* Would you like to give us some examples?" Out of seven (7) professionals, three (3) answered that are not cooperating at the moment with educators who are in direct contact with young people at risk of ESL. Some others replied that they are not directly cooperating with children/teens at risk to drop out, but they work alongside members of teams whose full-time job is working with young ta high risk of early school leaving (such as youth referral centres). Lastly, one (1) participant mentioned that is collaborating with schools who identify young people at risk of permanent exclusion due to a variety of issues, mainly behavioural.

4.2.2 Methods used to prevent early school leaving

Analysing the question "*Are you aware of any existing practices or tools for the prevention of the phenomenon?*"Out of seven (7) participants, one (1) teacher characterises as the best existing tool to deal with the phenomenon at multiple levels the individual focus and communication with each student. In particular, it was mentioned, that teachers are focusing on helping students to reach their educational potential, while about half of the students on average normally develop forms of challenging behaviour. Without the focused support many of the student groups at risk would have been excluded if they attended mainstream schools in the urban environment of Plymouth. Students who

struggle with mental health issues as well as anxiety disorders are unable to come to school without adaptations on the curriculum. Schools choose to promote an alternative schedule including the following measures: adjusted start and finish hours; avoiding busy corridors; access to quiet rooms and spaces for breaks and lunch; available facilities to leave lessons when things get too much for them to cope with. Another experience youth worker said that they use a multiagency approach to look at the needs of the young person and their families in order try and put a robust support package in place to motivate change.

Analysing the question *"Are you aware of any practices used by the educators to prevent and combat early school leaving? "*Out of seven (7) participants only two (2) professionals managed to present few practices, due to the fact that they seem to be unaware of any specific existing practises or tools. They also think that different schools have different policies to tackle school the refusers and truancy. Sometime the Educational Welfare Officers are really effective in getting the students to increase their attendance. Some expressed ideas to combat ESL might be the following:

- 1-1 support;
    - Counselling support;
- Educational Psychological reports;
- EHPlabs
    - Ensuring that the other staff in school understands the needs of the students and consistently apply the appropriate strategies
    - Reducing the number of students in each classroom in secondary school where there are so many students.
    - Schools and professionals need to have positive relationships with parents which are perceived as supportive and non-judgmental, being trustful and tolerant
    - The staff are there to support them, and that positive relationships with their parents / carers are maintained.
    - A high level of differentiation in the classroom is typically required to enable the students to access
- Support from CAMHS and other agencies to families of children at risk to drop out or victims of bullying.

Analysing the question *"Are there any results of the practices used? "*It can be said that only one (1) out of the seven (7) professionals managed to fill the answer of this question by saying that the quality of the institutional initiatives at a regional level will be reflected on the teens' performance in exams and/ or the enrolment/attendance rate in alternative education.

4.2.3   Training needs

According to the interviews of the participants on the question "*Does your organisation provide any training(s) to educators who work with youth at risk of early school leaving? "*the answers of the respondents are negative. Regarding to the question "*Would you be willing to support educators for the prevention and tackling of early school leaving? "*All professionals express their willingness to support teachers/educators in the process of preventing ESL.

4.3 Characteristics of young people at risk of early school leaving

Educators and Stakeholders have filled information on the identified questionnaire with the following interesting results:

STATISTICAL DATA OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

To the question "*What is the average number of school drop-outs in UK?"*Both stakeholders and education staff seemed reluctant to answer this question. The results amongst teachers are non-significant since the four (4) participants believe that the average annual number of schools drop outs in the UK ranges from 1.000 to 30.000 while the same number of students at risk to drop out ranges from 20.000 to 300.000. On the other hand, the stakeholders believed that the average annual number of schools drop outs is estimated from 550 to 40.000 while the same data for young people at risk is considerably higher, estimated from 15.000 to 40.000. All participants seem to have a different understanding or even no understanding on the requested information and data around the topic, but all interviewed participants agreed on the basis that the people at risk to drop out is much higher than the people who finally drop out.

In regard to the question *"What is the average number of young people at risk of early school leaving in UK "*Both stakeholders and teaching staff seemed again reluctant to answer this question and those who finally managed to answer it have used the same data with the average

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number of schools drop-outs in UK. The majority of the respondents from both sides believed that the percentage of school drop outs range from 5% to 1%.

*"What is their average age? "*More than 80% of the participants answered that the average age of students at risk of dropping out school is either 13 or 16.

While to the question *"What is their gender? "*Even though stakeholders as well as educators have mainly answered that males are at higher risk of dropping out of school, there were quite few comments supporting the idea that female young students face particular risk to drop out due to under-aged pregnancy. Finally, there were a few answers in which ''other'' gender is more prone to drop out school for multiple reason.

.*"Based on your knowledge, do you think that certain students belonging in minorities are more prone to drop out of school? "All* respondents agreed that students from minority background are most likely to dropout. In particular, there have been identifying the following groups: young people from low and fragile socio-economic background; children of families with low expectations; ethnic and religious minorities with particular attention to Pakistani and Polish oriented young people. Further to the question *"If yes, please mention three (3) groups that you think might be associated with higher drop-outs? "*The majority of the educators as well as the stakeholders agreed on listing the Roma community, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other minority groups, young migrants and refugees. Furthermore, a few participants from both sides have selected youth with learning disabilities, other learning difficulties and mental health issues.

CHARACTERISTICS AND DRIVERS OF SCHOOL DROP-OUTS

Concerning the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following aspects have an impact on early school leaving? "*100% of the respondents from both backgrounds believe that economic factor, family qualities and cultural/ethnic background affects the early school leaving rates inevitably. Less popular answers were the gender issue and the school qualities. One stakeholder found all available aspects equally important to the discourse of ESL.

To the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to academic qualities, have an impact on early school leaving? "Low* interest of school was selected by 100% of respondents but it was also stated that irregular/low attendance, low academic achievement

and the level of basic numerical skills, were selected by 60-80% of the respondents as decisive factors on the students' drop-out from the educational process. Just a few stakeholders chose to add the option of Lower cognitive abilities as well as other factors that remain unidentified.

To the question "*In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to school qualities, have an impact on early school leaving? "For* both educators and stakeholders the administrative/instructional leadership and standards of conduct have a great impact on the dropout rates amongst students of the secondary education. On the other hand, there were just a few answers targeting the teachers' performance as a main reason fuelling the ESL phenomenon and option of physical facilities was the least popular amongst the participants.

According the question "*In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to personal background, have an impact on early school leaving? "*The answers received by both educators and educational stakeholders appear to present similar statistical data. Ethnic background, cultural background and social class are reported as the most significant factors affecting ESL rates in the UK, while Gender was followed in the survey, attracting only a very few answers.

According to the question *"In your opinion, could one or more of the following factors, related to the family context, have an impact on early school leaving? "*Respondents from both categories agreed on saying that the lack of family encouragement, traumatic experiences, economic background as well as other unidentified reasons seem to be the most impactful factors on ESL by approximately selected by more than 80% of the participants. The second most significant group of factors are distinguished into: the less individual attention towards children and the inter-generational dropout patterns by attracting the preference of around 70% of the participants.

According to the collective respondents' answers to the question *"In your experience, do any of the following groups face higher risk of early school leaving? "According* to the data collected from both educators and stakeholders, groups at-risk to dropout are mostly appeared to be children and youth from Roma communities, young refugees and migrants as well as those of minority background which 90% of respondents have selected. The second most popular answer is the students with disabilities, learning disabilities and emotional/behavioural disorders as well the students from low-income families and deprived rural areas, selected by 80% of the participants.

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5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the research carried out for this project has shown us that there is a lack of research carried out in this field across the UK compared to the rest of the European counter partners. The numbers of youth persistently absent from secondary education are decreasing which is an encouraging sign. As it is a legal requirement for young people to remain in education until 16 and to continue studies in some form until they reach 18, statistics on early school leavers are not readily available. Initial research has shown that early school leaving is linked to unemployment, social exclusion, poverty and poor health. There are many reasons why some young people give up school and education prematurely and they are often complex. There may be:

- Personal or family problems,
- Learning difficulties,
- A fragile socio-economic situation
- The setup of the education system,
- School climate
- Teacher-pupil relationships

However, those experts who were interviewed for this project expressed a real need for more tools to be readily available in order for them to support the young people they work with for preventing persistent absences and in turn early school leavers. A greater need for communication by multi-agency working was seen to be of upmost importance alongside more funding in order to employ specialist within school settings to work on mental health issues.

According to the findings of the educators and stakeholders, the school units and the educators lack an appropriate system for preventing and monitoring of early school leaving. The UK is a country that faces a very high level of youth unemployment that is over 2.5 times greater than the UK overall unemployment rate. For this reason, the European Commission has required UK to improve the quality of vocational training in order to reduce the number of young people who do not attain sufficient skills to enter the labour market and of course to reduce the number of ESL in secondary and upper secondary education. Moreover, in the current period of crisis, and in what concerns national translation of the EU 2020 targets, reducing ESL is not a target in NRP (National Reform Programmes for the UK)

The findings of this analysis confirm the fact that the largest dropout in secondary education happen between the 13 to 16 years of the teens. All participants agreed on saying that the ESL is more common social phenomenon among Roma students, young people from deprived families and/or with minority background, mainly in larger towns and cities where behaviours are strongly influenced by gang cultures but also in rural areas where poverty levels are high and aspirations for future life are low.

Many of the teenagers who the experts work with are becoming increasingly disaffected as they get older due to their awareness and inability to cope in the classroom due to poor mental health and communication skills. Frequently they look for social acceptance and escape though increased engagement in risky behaviour including: truancy, habitual drug/alcohol/substance misuse and are vulnerable to forms of exploitation including sexual and county lines. Unless these behaviours and risks are identified and the young people are supported, inevitably, they fail to complete their education and can fall into the criminal justice system. 60-90% of young offenders have poor mental health in secondary school and persistent absences.

Difficulties across the boards are seen to be ensuring that all staff in the school setting understand the needs of individual students and consistently applying the appropriate strategies. This is seen as challenging as there are so many students in secondary schools / colleges. Alongside this is the parenting styles and social backgrounds of the students. All interviewed for this project described the difficulty to engage with some parents, including those who are involved with social services. It was seen that schools and professionals need to have a positive relationship with parents and be perceived as supportive and non-judgmental.

Although many activities and measures with the form of national and local plans/strategies have been introducing the last years, in reality the educators/teachers during the interviews stressed out their inability to identify any protocol which has been designed to referred to the teachers when dealing with students at risk to drop out. They also, seemed unaware on how to intervene in each family and there is also the sense that the role of the teacher exists only to deliver successfully knowledge-oriented outputs while therapists, social services and the Council are the most appropriate services to deal with the children at risk to drop out as well as their careers. Even those students with the most challenging behaviour have completed their GCSE`s providing that they understand their own needs, understand that staff are there to support them and that

positive relationships with their parents/carers are maintained. A high level of differentiation in the classroom is typically required to enable the students to access the work.

The youth workers, on the other side, were aware of existing practices and tools readily available and used them when working with youth however not always within the school setting. All experts who were interviewed are aware of the need for more training and research to be carried out with regards to early school leaving prevention as it was felt that the UK Government has put pressure on schools to not have any early school leavers it is the schools own responsibility to keep children in education/ training.

In the UK, it is required from a few voices, the significance of developing a heathy relation in the triangle parent – child – school as an inseparable link in the education process. It is also noticeable that there is a lack of systemic trainings for teachers/educators regarding the prevention. The lack of profiling of groups at risk to drop out was detected as one of greatest gaps in the whole educational process.

Equally important with the continuous lifelong learning activities for the educators is the participation of school social workers at all levels of secondary education. They can provide staff with essential information to better understand factors (cultural, societal, economic, familial, health, etc.), affecting a student's performance and behavior, assisting teaching staff with behavior management.

Awareness of guidance around identifying young people who may be involved in gangs or other forms of exploitation and abuse (e.g. physical, neglect, sexual, mental, racial and radicalisation) What to do? Who to refer to help? Specific needs of students including less obvious ones: mental health conditions and eating disorders. Skills and the ability to differentiate and adapt elements of the school curriculum to enable all students to experience as much success as possible.

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