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INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT I: NEW-D RESEARCH STUDY

Summative Report
prepared by
Sarah LAND, Meath Partnership, IE

Project Title: *New Didactical Models for Initial
VET Training of Young Disadvantaged Persons to
Reduce Drop-Out*

Project Number: 2014-1-AT-KA202-000975



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April 2015

PROJECT

New Didactical Models for Initial VET Training of
Young Disadvantaged Persons to Reduce Drop-Out

Acronym: NEW-D

Project Number: 2014-I-AT-KA202-000975

DISCLAIMER

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2 Executive Summary

The NEW-D project aims to develop a new approach to education for disadvantaged youth. The project consortium has identified the deficiencies in the current training opportunities available for youth-at-risk and early school leavers, and the partners believe that by developing and implementing a new didactical approach to this type of education, not only will the quality of VET be improved across Europe, but there will be significant reductions in the numbers of young people dropping out of education, which will lead to improved employment opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged young people.

The recent Eurozone economic crisis has effected an entire generation of young people in Europe, who now need to be re-introduced and re-integrated into the labour market. The loss of European human capital through emigration to other continents, and the absence of professional skills and experience among this generation of young people, is having, and will continue to have, adverse effects on Europe's economy, unless a new approach is found to deliver targeted VET which addresses the needs of the European labour market. Data from the EuroFound website estimates that the "economic cost of not integrating NEETs [young people who are 'Not involved in Education, Employment or Training'] is estimated at over €150 billion, or 1.2% of GDP, in 2011 figures. Some countries, such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia and Poland are paying 2% or more of their GDP" (EuroFound, 2015). Recent research also stresses the need for this type of new approach to targeted VET for this group. A report from EuroFound in 2012 highlights that as well as being economically detrimental to the progress of Europe and the European Union, the high level of education drop-out and unemployment among Europe's youth also has a social implications for the European community;

"...being excluded both from the labour market and the education system heightens the individual's risk of social exclusion and their likelihood of engaging in asocial behaviour; this affects both the individual's well-being and their relationship with society."

(EuroFound, 2012)

Similarly, the Council of the European Union have also acknowledged that there is link between young people leaving formal education, and not pursuing employment opportunities and social disadvantage when they state that NEETs "can face negative social conditions, such as isolation, lack of autonomy, involvement in risky behaviour, and unstable mental and physical health, which expose them to higher risks of unemployment and social exclusion later in life" (Council of European Union, 2013). Further to behavioural and health difficulties, by withdrawing from education pre-maturely and not being able to access employment opportunities, disadvantaged

young people also risk disengagement with social, civic and political processes in Europe, and a withdrawal from the European community. The further these young people get from civic participation, the more difficult it will be to re-integrate them to the European community, education opportunities and the labour market. This research highlights the relevance and pertinence of the NEW-D project to the future sustainability of the European community and economy.

The recent economic downturn in Europe has led to a number of policy challenges both at national and European levels. With the unprecedented levels of youth unemployment and underemployment, and the increasing rate of education drop-outs in this age group, the NEW-D project has the potential to react to these current trends and to address the identified policy deficits. This will be achieved through community consultations with the target group, extensive empirical and desk-based research and adherence to quality assurance measures which will guarantee the relevance and applicability of resources developed. Project partners are committed to improving the economic and social outlooks for disadvantaged youth in Europe and have identified vocational education and training as the key medium through which to enact change within this target group.

Research conducted in 2012 estimates that 48% of young people leaving education had no previous experience of paid employment, which highlights the pivotal issue; young people are not being supported in their transition from formal education to employment (Sissons and Jones, 2012). Where formal education has failed, and young people drop-out and become unemployed, the problems facing the European formal education system are further exacerbated. As a bridge between formal education and the labour market, a new approach to VET can augment the retention of disadvantaged young people in these educational programmes, and subsequently improve their employment prospects in the European labour market. The value of VET in this context has also been highlighted in a recent publication by the Solidar Foundation. In this report, the Foundation asserts that finding new, sustainable approaches to VET for disadvantaged youth is seen as “an essential part of building learning societies where young people are empowered and their skills and competences are both shared and developed” (Reuter, 2014). The NEW-D project team aims to fully exploit the potential of VET in this regard, and to design and develop a new approach to vocational education and training for disadvantaged youth across Europe.

3 Introduction

The purpose of the NEW-D research study is two-fold. Firstly, project partners aimed to identify the real learning needs of the project's target group; disadvantaged young learners and NEETs, a young person who is currently 'Not involved in Education, Employment or Training'. Also as part of this aim, project partners sought to understand the background, and previous learning experiences of this target group so as to ascertain what didactical approaches have worked well in the past, and which models were unsuccessful. Secondly, partners undertook this research to understand, document and present the latest cutting edge knowledge regarding the learning process of young learners. To achieve these research aims, partners completed a two-stage research process, comprising desk-based research into best practices in second-chance education and VET for disadvantaged youth, and empirical research facilitated through online questionnaires, focus groups and face-to-face interviews.

With the scarcity of current stock, flow and empirical data available which determines the reasons why education drop-out occurs with this target group, this study essentially aimed to gather this data from each partner country and to gain insights into the experiences, opinions and sensitivities of young people towards formal education opportunities. When designing this research framework, Meath Partnership considered the specific aims of the research phase, and of the NEW-D project as a whole. In order to successfully develop a new didactical model for VET for youth-at-risk and early school leavers (ESL), it was important to complete the desk-based research under three distinct themes. These themes were then summarised into the following research questions, with partners sharing the research tasks under each question:

1. What is current research telling us about new didactical approaches for working with drop-outs & NEETs in the education, training and employment spheres; what examples of good practice exist and what recommendations can be made to assist in the formulation of the NEW-D guidelines?
2. What can learning and development psychology offer NEW-D in terms of approach and content; what recommendations can be made to support the didactical model NEW-D is formulating?
3. Neurophysiology – how do young people learn and how different is it from how adult's learn – what do we need to adjust from our "normal" approach, what factors do we need to consider in terms of the NEW-D model and what recommendations are to be made from this short analysis?

The overall aim of this study was to explore young people's perspectives on learning styles and education systems in the partner countries of Austria, Germany, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia and Turkey. The study was carried out against the backdrop of changing trends in EU society, most notably, growing level of NEETs and rising unemployment rates of young Europeans.

Little is known in the EU context about young peoples' views of different teaching styles and, in particular, about the views of young people in respect of didactics used by formal teachers and VET trainers. In line with the ethos of the NEW-D project, the research involved consulting directly with young people at risk of school leaving or those already out of education, training and or employment. This report provides a summative overview of the research undertaken and the data collated in each partner country.

4 Research Methodology

Given the paucity of previous research into young peoples' perspectives on this issue, the study is essentially an exploratory investigation that seeks to uncover insights, experience and perceptions. Focus groups were chosen as the most appropriate method for the study, as they represent an effective research method by which various issues can be explored with young people within a peer group setting. Moreover, the use of focus groups with young people acknowledges young people as experts and important informants on their perspectives.

Partners decided that they would conduct preliminary research through the distribution and completion of an agreed questionnaire template. These questionnaires were to be completed by at least 20 young people, aged between 16 and 25 years in each partner country. The project team agreed that these questionnaires could be completed either online or face-to-face as part of the focus groups. Following this, partners decided that they would interview at least 5 young people from this research sample, to gather their feedback and opinions on the research findings, and to ask them further questions in relation to their preferred educational setting, methods of teaching and subjects and to make some recommendations to the NEW-D project team to inform the project development work.

Further topics discussed in the focus groups included young people's views on education and training, teacher's style and skills, reasons for school drop-out, supports currently available and creating an ideal learning environment.

Questionnaires were completed with 147 young people, aged between 16 and 25. The gender composition of the sample was 74 boys, 72 girls and 1 transgender. Further to this, 11 focus groups and personal interviews were conducted with 43 young people, aged 16-25. The perspectives of young people were explored in order to identify core recommendations for the development of the NEW-D didactical framework.

Prior to this empirical research, partners undertook a phase of desk-based research. This research phase was broken into 3 core themes, mentioned above, in line with objectives of the project proposal. Partners worked in pairs and peer-review each other's work in relation to this first project Intellectual Output.

5 Desk-Based Research

5.1 Introduction

As part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, Member States have committed to reducing the number of Early School Leavers (ESLs) across Europe to less than 10% by 2020. Early School Leaving is a complex issue, and a common one. There is not one single reason why young people drop out of formal education, and as a result there is no quick fix to the problem. Young people leave education for a range of personal and financial reasons such as family problems, the lure of making money when in employment, negative education experiences, learning difficulties, cultural issues, discrimination and exclusion from school activities, bullying, etc. At present, statistics show that one in seven young European leave the formal education system without achieving the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to enter the labour market. These young people are without the skills which the labour market currently demands, and they currently number 6.4 million people across Europe (European Parliament, 2011). Of this total, 14 million young people were classed as NEETs; in that they are currently unemployed, and not involved in any education or training programme.

The scale of this problem is compounded when we consider the links which Early School Leaving has to unemployment, lower incomes which can be linked to poor health and living conditions, social exclusion and poverty. While the rate of ESL has been in decline across Europe in the last 15 years, the progress towards the 2020 targets are slower than anticipated, and despite the targeted policies which were developed and implemented to tackle this persistent issue, in several Member States including Portugal, Spain, Italy and Malta, as many as one in 3 young people drop out of formal education early. There is such disparity in the rates of ESL across Europe, that they range from the high of nearly 37 % in Malta to just 4.3 % in Slovakia (European Commission, 2015).

Due to the fact that so many initiatives have been piloted with this target group, and have been less successful than anticipated, the NEW-D project team agreed to undertake a comprehensive desk-based research exercise to ascertain the current stock data in relation to current programmes in employment and education for NEETs; current research on learning and development psychology in developing a new approach to second-chance education; and a study on neurophysiology to better understand how young people learn and which methods suit their needs best.

The following section of this report outlines the main findings from this desk-based research process, and details some best practices where they were found to be appropriate and beneficial to the development work of the NEW-D project.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

What is current research telling us about new didactical approaches for working with drop-outs & NEETs in the education, training and employment spheres; what examples of good practice exist and what recommendations can be made to assist in the formulation of the NEW-D guidelines?

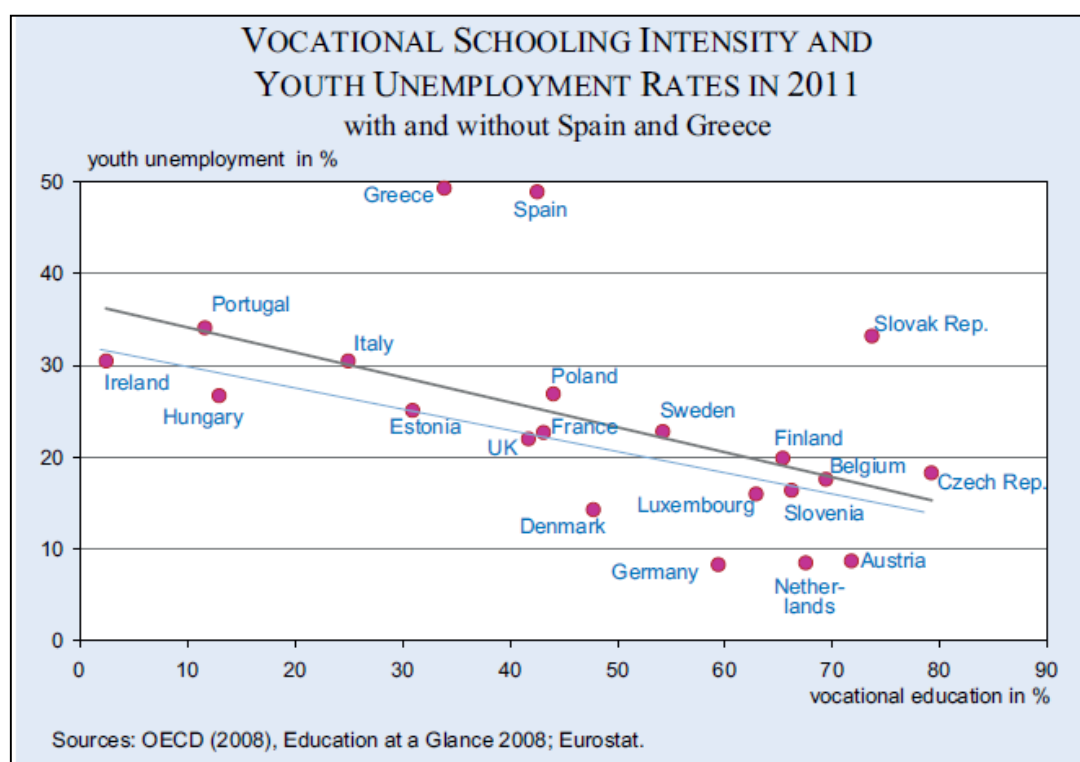
With high levels of youth unemployment across the EU in the aftermath of the 2008 Eurozone Crisis, issues with high level school drop-out across EU Member States brings with it a new set of policy concerns for the EU. These concerns are linked to the social, economic and civic exclusion which ESLs and NEETs typically experience by not being fully involved in European economic and social life; and are also linked to the reported costs of education drop-out to the European economy. Data from the EuroFound website estimates that the “economic cost of not integrating NEETs is estimated at over €150 billion, or 1.2% of GDP, in 2011 figures. In response to these European policy challenges, programmes at local, regional, national and international levels across Europe are being developed to offer a new approach to tackling this persistent problem, and to find a new model to re-introduce these individuals to the education, training and/or employment spheres.

Research conducted has shown that new approaches for working with ESLs and NEETs are mostly focused on sectoral initiatives to encourage ESL and NEET participation in education and training for employment; for example offering informal classes in music production and ICT-based courses to inspire ESLs and NEETs to access education programmes delivered using less formal, alternative methods such as work placement, practical workshops, etc. (Alvaro, 2010). Where these initiative usually fail is they do not appreciate the importance of teacher-learner relationship to young adult learners. Adult learners are adept to undertaking autonomous learning, using a variety of ICT-based platforms and distance learning resources; however as will be discussed later in this report, young learners need constant support, reassurance and contact with a teacher when learning new skills and acquiring new knowledge. As a result, many of these ‘new didactics’ to second-chance education for NEETs usually enjoy short-term success.

In Ireland and the UK, Further Education and VET institutions have become vital to the provision of targeted pre-Leaving Certificate level courses which aim to enhance employment-based skills of ESLs and NEETs. As well as basic training in areas such as business studies and ICT skills, these institutions also offer basic literacy and numeracy training for NEETs and ESLs, who left school at a very early stage. In Ireland, second-chance education has a formal, targeted education programme known as Youthreach. These are comparable to dedicated ‘Second Chance Schools’ in France and Greece where targeted training is offered to young adults from 18-25 years. In France this

training is classroom-based and offered over 12 months, or one academic year (9 months), whereas in Greece the training is more flexible and classes are held outside of traditional school opening times. Youthreach teaches ESLs and NEETs, aged between 15 and 20 years, a range of employment-focused skills in the areas of communications, childcare, personal effectiveness, business studies, art, craft and woodwork; as well as periods spent on work placements in companies where they would like to work. These programmes are classroom-based and follow the same format as formal education programmes, and so their effectiveness in re-introducing students, who the formal education system had previously failed, is questionable.

In other European countries, there are a variety of second-chance education opportunities. For example, there are evening schools and training opportunities in Latvia, Romania and Cyprus; there is a distance education programme for ESLs in Hungary and a mobile learning facility for Traveller populations and communities in Portugal. In other countries, such as in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, formal education is offered in schools through a dual system of vocational training, which combines classroom-based vocational education with workplace-based training. These are also similar to apprenticeships and other work placement schemes, and research has shown that in countries where these systems of formal education are prevalent, there is significantly lower levels of youth unemployment. This is demonstrated in the graph below:



In

this

graph, we see the highest percentage of VET programmes in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, and they have the lowest percentages of youth unemployment; compared to education in Ireland, Portugal and Hungary which is largely academic and neglects the potential of work-based vocational training, and we see the highest percentages of youth unemployment. This analysis advocates the benefits of VET as a medium of offering alternative education to NEETs, ESLs and disadvantaged youth at risk of dropping out of school.

The reason why VET and apprenticeships are more effective than academically-oriented formal education is that VET offers students the opportunity to undertake a smoother transition from education to employment, as they leave education with professional work experience. The problem with relying so heavily on academically-oriented second-level education, as is the case in Ireland, is that for students who are not academically-minded, the education system offers little else for them; there are few other avenues for them to pursue without first completing their Leaving Certificate State Exam. For this reason, if a student is not academic, there is little else on offer for them from the formal education system to encourage them to stay and complete their studies; whereas in Germany, for example, the student may choose either the academic stream and progress to university, or they can complete a VET programme or apprenticeship and progress directly to employment following the completion of the course. In countries which do not integrate initial VET programmes at second-level, often place a lower value on VET over academia, and this can de-value VET in the eyes of the student, meaning that they are less likely to progress to Further Education having dropped out of school. One study states that the dual system of second-level education is the most effective means of reducing the number of NEETs and the prevalence of school drop-out across Europe as it “strengthens the integration of young people into the education and training system, smoothes their transition from school to work and stabilises their early labour market careers” (Hanushek, 2012). From this analysis, it is clear that there is a need to improve the employment-focused skills and experience of disadvantaged youth, to ease and support their transition from formal education and VET to the workplace.

5.1.1.1 Best Practices in the Field of New Didactical Approaches for working with NEETs: *PLYA*

Title: PLYA - Project Learning for Young Adults

Introduction: Participants are 15-25 years olds’ who have not completed primary or secondary education. There is up to 24 participants in the group. The programme is for the participants completely on a voluntary basis and they can enter or exit the programme any time during the school year. They come to the programme every

morning during the week. The programme is designed in such a way that is interesting for youngsters.

Purpose of the Best Practice: The main goal of the programme is to motivate disadvantaged youth to continue in education, or to go back to education if they have left, and to finish a course and achieve a formal qualification and from this to try to find employment. This process will give them valuable experience of job searching, and will teach them responsibility and competences related to completing their education. Because of the highly personalized choices which people make in this regard, the PLYA initiative can be said to be ‘tailor-made’ to each learner involved in the programme. As such it achieves good results, because it responds directly to the needs and wishes of the individual learner.

Methodology used in the Best Practice: Advisors who facilitate the PLYA programme help the young people to make an individual learning plan where they define their personal, educational and professional goals, and then build strategies to achieve them. Advisors and mentors work with young people on an individual basis to build a relationship of trust and to support the young people to become fully independent. Individual work is crucial for their success as it enhances their professional competences. The advisors ensure the development of these competences by first ascertaining where the young person’s interest lies, and then helping them to research training programmes they would like to complete, for example, cooking workshops, computer lessons, making music, creative workshops, etc. The responsibility they undertake to find their training, and attend training in an area which interests them is of great benefit to the young person. These activities also allow participants the opportunity to find out what their interest in is, to gain working habits and to acquire new skills. Their motivation for learning also grows, because they are studying something they like and they are seeing the value of what they are learning. Most of them are attending night school or they are doing exams in different school from which they dropped out.

There are 4 basic rules that every participants must accept:

1. Participants have to come every day in the morning and have to stay until the end of the session.
2. Participants cannot be under the influence of any substance during the programme.
3. During the programme participants are to attend the premises where the programme is hosted each day.
4. Participants show respect to each other; advisors and teachers have zero tolerance towards violence.

Recommendations for NEW-D: The PLYA Programme is quite well recognized in Slovenia, and is a collaboration project between unemployment services, centres for social work, residential groups, crisis centres for children, different organizations that are working with substance mis-users, non-governmental organizations such as associations combatting violent communication, Amnesty International, as well as different schools from which the young people drop out. This programme is a success because it combines individual and group work, and it encourages young people to use the knowledge they acquire from project work, their life experience and their social and cultural background to build their competences and enhance their employment prospects. As this programme is such a success, it is important that the programmes fundamental principles are considered when the NEW-D didactic model is being designed. These principles are as follows:

- Every person is a good human being;
- Every person has the need and ability to grow and develop;
- Every person has the ability to accept their situation and decisions they have made and to take responsibility for them.

When designing the NEW-D model, the project team can also learn the following lessons from this best practice example:

- **Mentors:** Mentors have to be appropriate for this work and properly educated. They have to be able to do individual work (counselling, guidance), group work (prevention workshops, product work), organizing everyday programmes, as well as undertaking administration tasks.
- **TA (transactional analysis) principles:** Mentors must maintain equal relationships towards the participant. This means that mentors treat them as adults; they respect them and accept them as good human beings. This is the grounding they need in order to start solving the problems the young person has. Mentors use numerous tools to encourage participants to recognize their problems, to identify different possibilities and from these activities, they start to believe in their own abilities. Every human being is able to grow, to develop and taking responsibility for their decisions and actions.

5.1.1.2 Best Practices in the Field of New Didactical Approaches for working with NEETs: META

Title: META project (MEtodologie per il Tutor dell'Alternanza) Methodologies for the Dual System Tutors

Introduction: The META project involves 5 vocational upper secondary schools and 3 training agencies, as well as various companies, schools, chambers of commerce and trade associations as associated partners. The project is funded by Tuscany Region through ESF funding. The aim of the project is to train VET teachers, coaches and network tutors who act as the liaison between schools and state agencies, to utilise the dual education system and to ensure that students complete their education by using the VET structures, if they have failed and dropped out of traditional secondary education. The dual system allows students to complete their VET studies alternating periods at school and undertaking in-company training. The training courses created during the lifetime of the META project aim to provide new approaches, resources and best practices to disadvantaged youth, ESLs and NEETs.

Purpose of the Best Practice: The main purpose of the META project is to strengthen the network among the different actors involved in the dual education system and to improve their competences, to be able to take into account individual characteristics of the students and to let them acquire adequate know-how on how to work in a multidisciplinary team (of schools, companies, training agencies). Therefore, VET teachers and trainers need to acquire competences to enable their students to acquire skills needed for working life and lifelong learning, to “counsel” their pupils, but they also need to be able to develop and maintain cooperation between VET and labour market actors. Similarly career coaches need to learn how to approach students at risk of dropping out and to cooperate with the other actors in the field.

Methodology used in the Best Practice: The META project developed 3 training courses which address the needs of the 3 target groups in the dual education system, as follows:

- I. Training of VET school tutors and teachers: 12 courses were carried out in total for a duration of 50 hours each and they took place at the schools participating in the project. Each course had 6 participants. The main topics covered by the course were:
 - a. the role of VET teacher;
 - b. the relationship between school and company;
 - c. planning and evaluating the work placement period;

- d. multimedia materials;
 - e. effective communication (especially with youth);
 - f. psycho-pedagogy;
 - g. empowerment;
 - h. professional needs of a company;
 - i. principles of project management;
 - j. legislative aspects of the dual education system.
- 2. Training of company coaches: 3 courses were carried out in total for a duration of 6 hours each and they took place in the companies outside working hours. Each course had 6 participants. The main topics covered were:
 - a. collaboration with the school in terms of defining the learning pathway of the pupil;
 - b. role of the company coach;
 - c. monitoring and evaluation of the work placement period;
 - d. legislative aspects of the dual education system.
- 3. Training of network tutors: 1 course was carried out for a duration of 20 hours and it took place at the training agencies participating in the project. The course had 10 participants. The main training content delivered during the course included:
 - a. role of the network tutor;
 - b. legislative aspects of the dual education system;
 - c. effective communication techniques;
 - d. relationship between schools and companies;
 - e. evaluation of the work placement period.

Training methodologies included PPT presentations, simulations and role-play, case studies, practical exercises and monitoring tools used in the dual system.

Recommendations for NEW-D: This best practice offers a holistic training to all the actors involved in the dual education system and this should be the approach also to the NEW-D training curricula. META offers not only an effective approach to training all target groups involved in the dual education system, but the programme has also created some very useful resources and has developed good methodologies for a future training. The META didactic materials could be used during the NEW-D training programme.

When designing the NEW-D model, the project team can also learn the following lessons from this best practice example:

- **Involvement of Target Groups:** Involve all target group members when designing a new model for second-chance education, and school retention programmes. These groups include VET teachers and tutors, ESLs, NEETs and disadvantaged youth at-risk of dropping out of school; career advisors and representatives from the labour market, to ascertain what skills the young people should be learning in order to secure employment.

- **Learning Resources:** Develop learning resources which are practical in nature and can be used by participants in everyday situations, for example, practical workshops, role-play and simulations, case studies, etc.

5.1.2 Research Question 2

What can learning and development psychology offer NEW-D in terms of approach and content; what recommendations can be made to support the didactical model NEW-D is formulating?

Research and experience indicates that there are four categories of education dropouts.¹

1. **Life events:** Students who dropout because of something that happens outside of school - they become pregnant, get arrested or have to go to work to support members of their family.
2. **Fade Outs:** Students who have generally been progressing well through the education system, and may even have above grade level skills but at some point become frustrated or bored and stop seeing the reason for coming to school. Once they reach the legal dropout age they leave, convinced that they can find their way without a high school diploma.
3. **Push Outs:** Students who are, or are perceived to be, difficult, dangerous or detrimental to the success of the school and are encouraged to withdraw from the school, transfer to another school or are simply dropped from the student register if they fail too many courses or miss too many days of school, once they have passed the legal dropout age.
4. **Failing to Succeed:** Students who fail to succeed in school and attend schools that fail to provide them with the environment and support they need to succeed. For some, initial failure is the result of poor academic preparation, for others it is rooted in un-met social and/or emotional needs. Few students drop out after their initial experience with school failure. In fact, most persist for years, only dropping out after they fall so far behind that success seems impossible or they are worn down by repeated failure.

Research suggests that schools, school administrators and local communities need an accurate estimate of how much of their dropout crisis is driven by each type of dropout, as each requires substantially different prevention, intervention and recovery actions.

It is also important to look at teacher and administrator turnover rates and absences, and attempt to understand their cause. Schools with high drop-out rates, and the initial education schools which feed students into them, are often marked by high rates of teacher and administrator turnover and absences; this has multiple negative consequences. It is impossible to have meaningful and lasting reform if the teachers and administrators who need to carry it out are constantly

¹ http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/images/Final_dropout_Balfanz.pdf

shifting. High staff turnover also means that students are taught by a high percentage of inexperienced teachers, provisionally certified teachers and long-term substitute teachers. When many teachers are frequently absent it leads to the other adults in the building having to cover their classes, and in so doing, takes away the time and energy they have to do their own jobs.

An extensive literature base has been developed describing the students who are most at-risk for dropping out. Poor academic performance; employment during education; lack of motivation; grade repetition, and high-risk behaviour are all issues which have been correlated with early school leaving. However, these identified barriers to a student's prolonged participation in education have not proved to be useful in creating effective interventions to counter high drop-out rates and to ensure higher levels of student retention. Student demographic factors such as ethnicity, low socio-economic status and early parenthood have also consistently been associated with school dropout, yet these wide-ranging variables leave significant discrepancies unaccounted for and so are not sufficiently informative when trying to determine the reasons for school withdrawal (Knesting-Lund, 2013).

Current theories of high school dropout describe a complex, interactive process, influenced by both alterable and unalterable factors, that influences students' decision to leave school prior to graduation. Families' socio-economic status, parental involvement in their child's education, and family stability (including both family structure and mobility) are linked to students' dropping out of school. Alterable factors for schools include disciplinary practices, resources, school size and the ratio of students to teachers; these factors can all influence students' educational decisions. Similarly, unalterable and external circumstances can also influence a students' decision; these can include the location of a school, the make-up of the student body, etc. Additionally, caring teachers who have high expectations for all students' success are associated with lower dropout rates. Student engagement theory suggests that students who perceive themselves to be connected to their school, or have a sense of belonging, are more likely to stay in education than students who are disengaged. Teachers have the potential to positively influence students not only to graduate, but to thrive in the school environment. Yet it is unclear from the current research literature whether or not teachers themselves are aware of the significant influence they have, potentially limiting the effectiveness of their participation in dropout interventions (Knesting-Lund, 2013).

When we look at available resources pertaining to educational psychology which can be used to formulate the NEW-D didactical model, the following conclusions can be made:

In a survey of almost 1,000 students ages 13 to 17, having a good sense of humour, making the class interesting and having in-depth knowledge of the subject matter were the three characteristics listed as being the most important for teachers to have (Online Learning Centre).

- **Professional Knowledge and Skills:** Effective teachers have a good command of their subject matter and a solid core of teaching skills. They have excellent instructional strategies supported by methods of goal setting, instructional planning, and classroom management. They know how to motivate, communicate, and work effectively with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. They also understand how to use appropriate levels of technology in the classroom.
- **Subject-Matter Competence:** In the last decade, in their wish lists of teacher characteristics, secondary-school students have increasingly mentioned “teacher knowledge of their subjects”. Having a thoughtful, flexible, conceptual understanding of subject matter is indispensable for being an effective teacher. Of course, knowledge of subject matter includes a lot more than just facts, terms, and general concepts; it also includes knowledge about instructional strategies, goal setting and planning, classroom management, motivation, communication and working with diverse students and technologies.
- **Commitment:** Effective teachers also show care and concern for their students. They really want to see the student achievement and are dedicated to helping them learn. Effective teachers do what they have to do to engage students in learning, even if it means spending extra time or resources preparing for their class. Although effective teachers are caring, they keep their role as a teacher distinct from student roles.
- **Professional Growth:** Effective teachers develop a positive identity, seek advice from experienced teachers, maintain their own learning and build up good resources and supports.

Research lists the characteristics of effective teachers as follows:

- a. Have a sense of humour
- b. Make the class interesting
- c. Have knowledge of their subjects
- d. Explain things clearly
- e. Spend time to help students
- f. Are fair to their students
- g. Treat students like adults
- h. Relate well to students
- i. Are considerate of students' feelings
- j. Don't show favouritism toward students

(Online Learning Centre)

The Europe 2020 education goals are to reduce the drop-out rate² below 10 % and increase the proportion of young people with tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40 % by 2020 (European Commission, 2011).

In view of their main objectives the “Lisbon Strategy” has often been judged to have failed (Caritas, 2015): In 2010, the average rate of drop-outs across the EU was 14.1 % and has only slightly improved compared to 14.4 % in 2009. However, there are big disparities across different Member States. In 2010 countries recorded the following rates:

- Malta (36.9 % drop-out rate)
- Portugal (28.7 %), and
- Spain (28.4 %) had the worst rates.

However, other countries such as Estonia (11.6 % drop-out rate), Hungary (10.5 %) and Ireland (10.5 %) are working towards achieving the target of a rate of 10 %. Slovakia (4.7 %), the Czech Republic (4.9 %) and Slovenia (5 %) have already fallen below the target level. In Germany, the drop-out rate increased slightly from 11.1 % in 2009 to 11.9 % in 2010.

In order to achieve this target in other Member States, there needs to be increased activity at national level for young people at-risk of leaving education early. In order to determine what these activities should be, it is important to look at two different studies and to analyse their recommendations.

Firstly, we will summarize ten recommendations which the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides for their partner countries. There is one recommendation (No. 9) which we feel is of particular relevance to this study, however it is noted that all ten recommendations can be used and adapted to influence the design of the framework for the NEW-D approach. Following this, the “Hattie study” will be examined, as will the effects different influences have on learning and students’ achievements (Hattie, 2008).

A recent report from 2012 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2012) has found a strong correlation between school failure and unfavourable socio-economic background. To prevent school drop-out and school failure, and to produce a fairer education system with equal opportunities for all, the following actions at the level of school systems (1-5) and policy recommendations (6-10) are identified (OECD, 2012):

1. Eliminate Grade Repetition

² “drop-outs” are defined as young adults aged between 18 and 24 years who have only completed primary education and do not apply in upper secondary education or vocational training.

Grade repetition is costly and ineffective in raising educational outcomes. Alternative strategies to reduce this practice include:

- preventing repetition by addressing learning gaps during the school year;
- automatic promotion or limiting repetition to subject or modules failed with targeted support; and
- raising awareness to change the cultural support to repetition.

To support these strategies, complementary policies need to reinforce schools and teachers' capacities to respond appropriately to students' learning needs, and to provide early, regular and timely support. Decreasing grade repetition rates also requires raising awareness across schools and society about the costs of repetition and the negative impact it can have on a student's development and perception of education. Further steps should be made to set objectives to counter the practice of grade repetition in schools and to increase awareness of the incentives for schools in stopping this practice.

2. Avoid Early Tracking and Early Selection

Early student selection has a negative impact on students assigned to lower tracks and exacerbates inequities, without raising average performance. Early student selection should be deferred to upper secondary education, while reinforcing comprehensive schooling. In contexts where there is reluctance to delay early tracking, suppressing lower-level tracks or groups can mitigate its negative effects. Limiting the number of subjects, increasing opportunities to change tracks or classrooms and providing high curricular standards for students in the different tracks can lessen the negative effects of early tracking, streaming and grouping students by ability.

3. Controlled School Choice

Providing full parental school choice can result in the segregation of students by ability and/or socio-economic background, and can generate greater inequities across education systems. Choice programmes can be designed and managed to balance choice while limiting its negative impact on equity. There are different strategies to achieve this change:

- introducing controlled choice schemes can combine parental choice and ensure a more diverse distribution of students;
- incentives to make disadvantaged students attractive to high quality schools, school selection mechanisms and vouchers or tax credits can be alternative options;

- policies are also required to improve disadvantaged families' access to information about schools and to support them in making informed choices.

4. Adapt financing strategies to the needs of students and schools

Available resources and the way they are spent influence students' learning opportunities. To ensure equity and quality across education systems, funding strategies should guarantee access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), especially for disadvantaged families; and use funding strategies, such as weighted funding formula, which take into consideration that the instructional costs of disadvantaged students may be higher. In addition, it is important to balance decentralization and local autonomy with resource accountability to ensure support to the most disadvantaged students and schools.

5. Design equivalents pathways in upper secondary education

While upper secondary education is a strategic level of education for individuals and societies, between 10 and 30 percent of young people starting do not complete this level. Policies to improve the quality and design of upper secondary education can make it more relevant for students and ensure completion. To this end there are different policy options:

- making academic and vocational tracks more comparable by improving the quality of vocational education and training, better facilitating transitions from academic to vocational studies;
- reinforcing guidance and counselling for students and designing targeted measures to prevent dropout, such as implementing additional pathways to obtain an upper secondary qualification or incentives to stay in school until completion.

Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are at greater risk of challenges that can result in low performance, affecting the education system as a whole. Low-performing disadvantaged schools often lack the internal capacity or support to improve, as school leaders and teachers, and the environments of schools including classrooms and neighbourhoods, frequently fail to offer a quality learning experience for the most disadvantaged. Five policy recommendations have shown to be effective in supporting the improvement of low-performance disadvantaged schools:

6. Strengthen and support school leadership

School leadership is the starting point for the transformation of poorly-performing disadvantaged schools but often, school leaders are not well-selected, -prepared or -supported to fully undertake their roles in these schools. To strengthen their capacity, school leadership preparation programmes should provide both general expertise and specialized knowledge to handle the challenges of these schools. Coaching, mentoring and networking can be developed to further support leaders to achieve on-going and persistent change. In addition, to attract and retain competent leaders in these schools, policies need to provide good working conditions, systemic support and incentives for better performance. Support for restructuring schools should be considered whenever necessary. Splitting poorly-performing disadvantaged schools, merging smaller ones and closing schools which frequently show very poor performance and school failure can become policy directives in certain contexts.

7. Stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning

Poorly-performing disadvantaged schools are at risk of creating difficult environments for learning. Policies which are specific to these schools need to focus more than other schools in the following areas:

- prioritize the development of positive teacher-student and peer relationships;
- promote the use of data information systems for school diagnosis to identify struggling students and factors of learning disruptions;
- ensure there is adequate student counselling and mentoring to support students and to provide them with support for their transition to continue in education.

In addition, these schools may benefit from alternative learning times, including the duration of the school week or year, and in terms of the size of schools. In some cases, creating smaller classrooms and schools can be a policy to reinforce student-student and student-teacher interactions, as well as better learning strategies.

8. Attract, support and retain high quality teachers

Despite the influence which teachers can have on student performance, disadvantaged schools are not always staffed with the highest quality teachers. Policies must augment teacher quality for disadvantaged schools and students by providing targeted teacher education to ensure that teachers receive the skills and knowledge they need for working

in schools with disadvantaged students; by providing mentoring programmes for novice teachers; developing supportive working conditions to improve teacher effectiveness and increase teacher retention; and developing adequate financial and career incentives to attract and retain high quality teachers in disadvantaged schools.

9. Ensure effective classroom learning strategies

Often, there are lower academic expectations for disadvantaged schools and students, while there is evidence that certain pedagogical practices can make a difference for poorly performing students. To improve learning in classrooms, policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools promote the use of a balanced combination of student-centred instruction with aligned curricular and assessment practices. Schools and teachers should use diagnostic tools and formative and summative assessments to monitor students' progress and ensure they are acquiring a good understanding of the coursework. Ensuring that schools follow a curriculum promoting a culture of high expectations and success is highly relevant.

10. Prioritise linking schools with parents and communities

Disadvantaged parents tend to be less involved in their children's schooling, for a range of economic and social reasons. Policies need to ensure that disadvantaged schools prioritise their links with parents and communities and improve their communication strategies to align school and parental efforts. The more effective strategies target parents who are typically more difficult to reach and identify and encourage individuals from the same communities to mentor students. Building links with the communities around schools, including both business and social stakeholders, can also strengthen schools and their students.

In our NEW-D-approach, we have the capacity to influence the ninth recommendation on the list which pertains to ensuring effective learning strategies in the classroom. To see how NEW-D can achieve this, the following steps should be followed by project partners:

Method: The authors suggest a learner-centred environment, clear structure, a personalized approach to every student, even the weakest learner ("inclusive") and finally, effective group

settings (“social”). They do not prioritise one learning method over another, as direct and student-oriented instructions can be useful, but arranging students in heterogeneous group structures will help both low and average achievers as well as high achievers gaining different skills.

Assessment: The report recommends both summative and formative approaches to assessment, meaning assessing students’ achievement at a particular moment and evaluating student progress compared to their learning goals.

Curriculum: The curriculum should be connected to the next educational level and deal with “real world problems”. The teachers should not be concerned with covering all the topics as they should avoid “disconnected and isolated six-week units”.

The authors link this to the highly acclaimed “Hattie study” (Hattie, 2008) which compares 136 different teaching methods and learning conditions for their success in how effective they are in conferring learning (“effect size”). John Hattie extracts similar recommendations as those of the OECD report, but he goes into more detail and gives more practical information to practitioners and policy-makers. He describes the role of a teacher as an “activator” not a “facilitator”, meaning that teachers should work as a “change agent” for students. The teachers’ role should be more about managing, controlling or “steering” students rather than arranging, giving advice or looking after them. This includes, for example, good classroom management, clarification of the teachers’ roles and ensuring that challenging goals are set and periodic individual feedback is gathered. This report also highlights the importance of “self-report grades” and “Piagetian programmes” (Hattie, 2008) in revolutionizing the structure of failing schools:

- “Self-reported grades”: this term pertains to self-evaluation by students of their own ability, for example, teachers should ask their class before an exam to write down what mark the student expects to achieve. After correcting the exam the teacher should use this information to engage the student to try to perform even better and to identify steps they should take to achieve their predicted grade. This exercise will make students more aware of their own expectations and will allow them to gain confidence in their learning ability.
- “Piagetian programmes” are teaching methods based on Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and his theories pertaining to children’s stages of learning. Hattie summarizes the different methods which relate to this theory, for example, focus on the thinking process rather than the outcomes, or not to impose the adult thinking process on to children.

The Hattie study also gives recommendations which relate to how a teacher stands and presents themselves in front of their class, for example to “reduce [the] distance between teachers and students by moving or moving away from barriers (desk, podiums)” (Hattie, 2008).

5.1.3 Research Question 3

Neurophysiology – how do young people learn and how different is it from how adult’s learn – what do we need to adjust from our “normal” approach, what factors do we need to consider in terms of the NEW-D model and what recommendations are to be made from this short analysis?

How do young people learn? The good news is that brain research is becoming so established that it is now full of information to help teachers learn about the ways in which adolescents learn. There are reasons as to why teenagers act the way they do and because we can better understand their brains, there are strategies that we can use to help our teenage learners learn better.

According to Brownlee, Hotinski, Pailthorp, Ragan, and Wong (1999), the authors of *Inside the Teen Brain*, the adolescent brain is still creating “the connections between neurons that affect not only emotional skills but also physical and mental abilities.” Kelly Graham and Elsbeth Prigmore (2009), authors of *Order in the Classroom*, elaborated on that idea by saying; “adolescents are supposed to test limits as an age-appropriate response to their environment. Conflict is an essential part of growing up.” These statements are reassuring and help teachers to understand that young people aren’t choosing to be difficult; it’s natural for their brains to work on finding the limits of their environments.

Graham and Prigmore (2009) makes the connection that giving students expectations on the first day of school and then expecting them to remember and follow those rules throughout the entire year is like teaching them the operation of long division once and expecting them to remember it forever without ever re-teaching it or covering it again. This is unfair to the students, and makes the whole year a little harder for them. By frequently addressing classroom rules and confronting those that break them on the first offence, students will know the boundaries of their classroom environment and will behave more appropriately.

Adolescents are very capable of learning and behaving, as long as we keep our expectations clear and enforce them consistently. This steady and regular re-enforcement of the rules will teach their brains what they can and cannot get away with. Consequently, if we choose to ignore their behaviour, thinking that they will stop if they don’t receive attention their brains take this information in and realize that in this environment, they can continue with this behaviour without being ‘punished’. One example which occurs in classrooms is when young people talk when they should be working independently. Teachers will usually let it go at least once or twice before saying something; however, by doing this, the teacher is showing those students that it is okay for them to chat a little bit, even when the teacher says that it is ‘silent time’. By confronting the

problem immediately students will learn that going against the rules will not be tolerated and they will behave in a more appropriate manner as a result.

Adolescent brains are still growing and maturing at an incredible rate, and have not yet developed enough to always allow teens to function and act like the young adults we expect them to. Brownlee et al. (1999) explain the adolescent brain by first approaching the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that controls other parts of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain which has “the ability to handle ambiguous information and make decisions. [An individual’s] prefrontal cortex is practically asleep at the wheel [during adolescence]. At the same time, his limbic system, where raw emotions such as anger are generated, is entering a stage of development in which it goes into hyper drive.”

They continue to explain that while adult brains can use many different parts of their brain efficiently to tackle a problem, adolescents struggle with using just one part of their brain in a much more inefficient way to tackle that same problem. This means that many decisions, which as adult would perceive to be simple decisions, turn out to be quite complex for adolescents. When many teenagers get home after a long day, they have homework, dinner, possibly chores, friends to call or text, and their favourite show to watch. While adults realize the order that those tasks should be done in, teenagers’ brains can’t seem to do so as effectively. However, if we help students to learn how to organize their priorities; we are helping them to “exercise their brains” (Brownlee et. al, 1999). By helping students to exercise their brains, Brownlee et al. (1999) say, “many higher mental skills will become automatic, just the way playing tennis and driving do.” Brownlee et al. (1999) continue by saying, “An unfinished prefrontal cortex also means that young teenagers may also have trouble organizing several tasks; deciding, for example, which to do first: call a friend, wash the dishes, or read the book for a report that’s due in the morning.” Most teens struggle with this problem and we just continue to push and expect them to find a way to get their work done. So while we’re trying to cram their brains full of new information, their brains are still working on growing and developing, and many cannot handle and organize the plethora of information that they receive each day. Because of all of this information, it is very important to work with adolescent brains, instead of continually expecting them to succeed with worksheets, vocabulary lists and long-term assignments with no short-term goals, which can tend to work against their brains, overwhelming them and causing them to struggle with prioritizing.

One strategy could be to use a daily schedule written on the board. The teacher tells students each little step that they will need to participate in before getting to the end of the hour-long lesson. Instead of giving them a long-term assignment with no deadlines or smaller steps, it is most helpful to give students more short-term expectations during instruction, so that they see what needs to be done at the time and what does not have to be done before the next class.

Leslie Sabbagh (2007), Robert Epstein, a psychologist and founder of the Cambridge Center for Behavioural Studies, believes that the idea of a “teen brain” is a hoax. From his research, he has found that many cultures “do not even have a word for adolescence and that most teens spend much of their time with adults, not segregated with only their peers.” Though Epstein argues that there is no such thing as a teen brain, he believes that the environment we put teens in –with one adult and up to 25 other adolescents – creates “a recipe for trouble,” because they have few adults to learn from, and are instead learning behaviours from each other.

So if we give students the information they need during instruction, then also help them organize it and make connections, they will be able to behave appropriately and work and behave in way that adults expect them to. By simply giving enough time to accomplish tasks, providing a visual of the schedule, and giving them a chance to document any upcoming due dates or homework assignments, their brains will be better able to process what is required of them and will be better able to accomplish our expectations.

It is important to remember that young people learn very differently from adult learners. Old experiences and new knowledge must be brought into balance with each other in order for adults to acquire learning. This is because the spectrum of the learning fields and subject matters is smaller than in the early stage. Learning needs are connected with the personal interests, or previous experiences, and so an adult learner will reflect on their own experiences and interests and will recognize that they would like to be qualified or certified in this subject area.

Malcolm Knowles is often referred to as the ‘father of adult education’. He first introduced the term *andragogy*. Andragogy refers to the science of how adults learn, and in his early theories, Knowles tried to prove that the adult approach was very different to pedagogy, which is how children learn; however his work now shows that these learning methods and cycles are all part of one continuum, as our learning develops.

Knowles’ research pivots on the following five “Assumptions of Adult Learners”:

1. **Self-concept:** As a person matures into adulthood, they become more aware of themselves and become more self-directed in their own lives, and less dependent on the wishes of others.
2. **Adult Learner Experience:** Adult learners confront new education opportunities from the perspective of their life experience. The more experience they have, the more this becomes an increasingly important resource to them, against which they measure the value of the current education programme.
3. **Readiness to Learn:** As an adult matures they become more willing to learn, as they will see the true value in completing an education programme which they have chosen for

themselves.

4. Orientation to Learning: Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they see the value in the learning, because they understand that there is a practical application to this learning, and this will help them to better perform tasks in the future.
5. Motivation to Learn: As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal and not external as is the case with teachers and parents exerting pressure on adolescents to complete their school work and to do well in education.

From these *assumptions* it is clear to see that adults and children have different needs when undertaking education, they have different factors which motivate their learning, which can have an impact on their commitment to the learning and they also bring different perspectives to learning.

However, in contrast, when a child or a young person is learning, the aim and quality of their learning can depend on the cultural world they are brought up in. While there are variances, in general, it is agreed that an adult will decide the subject area and the learning resources which the child will use. Children and young people learn by mimicry. They are shown new skills and knowledge by their teacher and/or parent, and through repetition of these tasks, they learn. This practice forms the basis of the majority of our school curricula, where it is established what should be learnt.

Due to the nature of how children and young people learn, we can deduce that the learning style of youth is very people-oriented. It is a labour and resource-intensive method of teaching and learning as adolescents and children will rely mostly on their teachers, parents, grandparents, family members and family friends to teach them everything they know, until they mature and can undertake autonomous learning. In this approach, traditional education of young people is very teacher-centred, meaning that the teacher has all of the knowledge and they structure their lesson plans to impart this knowledge on the young learners. It is therefore important to keep this in mind when designing and developing the NEW-D approach to VET for disadvantaged youth.

5.1.3.1 Best Practices in the Field of Youth Education: *Perspective Check for Teenagers*

Title: Perspective Check project for Teenagers in Graz

Introduction: Every year in Austria, approximately 8,000 young people drop-out of the formal education system before they have achieved the minimum qualification they need in order to secure employment. As part of the “Perspective Check” project in Graz, 60 % of these 8,000 young people are currently being assisted with searching for job opportunities. This project works with young persons aged between 15 and 25, across a

range of socially disadvantaged groups. For example, this project has targeted strategies for integrating young migrants and young people with physical, psychological and/or intellectual disabilities into the labour market, or re-introducing them to formal education. When working with these specific disadvantaged groups, it is important to also be aware that negative school experiences could have led to the drop-out of these students, due to language and learning difficulties. Where targeted programmes currently exist, and have existed, to address second-chance education and initial VET for disadvantaged youth, often these initiatives can fail, giving rise to a new generation of NEETs across Europe. NEETs are typically young people who are currently 'Not in Employment, Education or Training'. The problem with this target group, typically aged from 15 to 21 years, is that without formal qualifications or a school diploma they cannot get a foothold in the labour market, and due to their negative past experiences, they do not wish to re-enter education. As a result, these young people resort to finding whatever work they can to make money, and studies show that this group are often marred by an association with substance mis-use, anti-social and/or criminal activity, social exclusion and withdrawal from civil society.

Purpose of the Best Practice: The primary aim of this project is to help to re-integrate members of this disadvantaged target group back into the labour market, by means of:

- CV and interview preparation; and preparation for undertaking an apprenticeship, work placement or commencing a job;
- Identification of training needs and of suitable training programmes available;
- Career planning and assisting youth in building their own career roadmap;
- Actively seeking employment and apprenticeship opportunities.

Methodology used in the Best Practice: This programme uses a competence-based didactic approach to introduce or re-introduce these disadvantaged young people into the labour market. The reason for using this approach is due to the lack of formal qualifications of the target group, so advisors work to establish their key competences acquired external to formal education. In this way, advisors work with young people to build on their existing competences and re-market their skills for their job searches. Advisors work to develop five competence areas with young people, promoting knowledge acquisition and the intelligent use of acquired knowledge. The development of five competence areas allows and promotes the knowledge acquisition and the intelligent use of the acquired knowledge. These competence areas include the following:

- Material competence which creates the condition to use the qualification in a sensible way; to manage and effectively use acquired knowledge.

- Method competence which improves the ability of the young person to source relevant training opportunities for themselves, and to gain some independence in this regard. It also helps young people to procure information; to evaluate training opportunities; to use their knowledge and impart this knowledge to others and to practice problem-solving.
- Self-competence which is the ability and readiness of the person to arrange and structure their lives, which includes improving their judgement, learning appropriate behaviour to talking to different people, to make a concise life and career plan and to be able to self-evaluate one's own talents and competences.
- Social competence, which improves the young person's ability to mix in a social group setting, while also being aware and respectful of who they are. This also builds on their abilities in the areas of cooperation, teamwork and communication.
- Self-study competence, which is the ability to recognize and to reflect on one's own strengths and weaknesses. It includes cognitive abilities such as thinking, processing information and knowledge, understanding self-motivation and determination; as well as the development of skills in problem solving.

Recommendations for NEW-D: By assessing how the adolescent brain works and by studying the outcomes of the given best practice examples from “Perspective Check”, the NEW-D project team should be able to find answers for following questions:

- How can teachers teach best?
- How do young people learn best?
- How much can teachers teach at one time?
- What is the teachers' attitude towards students and how does this impact of the young person's perception of education?

Following on from answering these short questions, the following recommendations can be made, and these will be included in the design of the NEW-D didactic model:

- Accept young people with their good points and their bad; with their needs, expectations, hopes of success and fears of failing;
- Teachers should reflect on their attitude towards their students and if necessary change it to make the learning experience more positive for young people;
- Allow young people the opportunity to develop strategies to counter education drop-out; involve young people and ask them what works best for them – it may just discourage them from dropping out;
- Provide coaching for teachers and students alike;
- Introduce ‘Motivational Interviewing’ (MI) in schools: With Motivational interviewing students' motivation can be strengthened as it is a person-centred approach to career counselling.

5.2 Recommendations

NEW-D project partners undertook a comprehensive desk-based research process, so as to determine effective strategies for developing a new didactic model for initial VET of disadvantaged youth. Part of this analysis also pertained to suggesting improvements to the current system of secondary education across Europe. These recommendations range from how we view adolescent learners and the importance of the attitude and knowledge of the teacher; to some suggestions pertaining to issues of schooling policy such as the practice of grade repetition and early selection; and are as follows:

- Teachers, school administrators and parents should accept young people with their good points and their bad; with their needs, expectations, hopes of success and fears of failing;
- Teachers should reflect on their attitude towards their students and if necessary change it to make the learning experience more positive for young people;
- Policy-makers and administrators should allow young people the opportunity to develop strategies to counter education drop-out; involve young people and ask them what works best for them – it may just discourage them from dropping out;
- Schools should provide coaching for teachers and students alike;
- Career counsellors in schools should introduce ‘Motivational Interviewing’ (MI) in schools: With Motivational interviewing students’ motivation can be strengthened as it is a person-centred approach to career counselling.
- Schools should eliminate Grade Repetition; alternative strategies to reduce this practice include:
 - preventing repetition by addressing learning gaps during the school year;
 - automatic promotion or limiting repetition to subject or modules failed with targeted support; and
 - raising awareness to change the cultural support to repetition.
- Schools should avoid Early Tracking and Early Selection, where students choose to study a reduced number of subjects at a higher or lower track for their entire secondary education. These practices should be referred to upper secondary education.
- Providing full parental school choice can result in the segregation of students by ability and/or socio-economic background, and can generate greater inequities across education systems, therefore there should be a practice of controlled school choice.
- Adapt financing strategies to the needs of students and schools
- Design equivalents pathways in upper secondary education; while upper secondary education is a strategic level of education for individuals and societies, 10-30% of young

people starting do not complete this level. Policies to improve the quality and design of upper secondary education can make it more relevant for students and ensure completion.

- Strengthen and support school leadership
- Stimulate a supportive school climate and environment for learning
- Attract, support and retain high quality teachers
- Ensure effective classroom learning strategies
- Prioritise linking schools with parents and communities

In relation to the design and development of the NEW-D bespoke didactic model for delivery initial VET to disadvantaged youth, the following recommendations have been put forward by project partners as useful considerations for the project team:

- **Involvement of Target Groups:** Involve all target group members when designing a new model for second-chance education, and school retention programmes. These groups include VET teachers and tutors, ESLs, NEETs and disadvantaged youth at-risk of dropping out of school; career advisors and representatives from the labour market, to ascertain what skills the young people should be learning in order to secure employment.
- **Learning Resources:** Develop learning resources which are practical in nature and can be used by participants in everyday situations, for example, practical workshops, role-play and simulations, case studies, etc.
- **Mentors:** Include a mentoring service in the curriculum design, to provide the one-to-one support which adolescent learners need. Mentors have to be appropriate for this work and properly educated. They have to be able to do individual work (counselling, guidance), group work (prevention workshops, product work), organizing everyday programmes, as well as undertaking administration tasks.
- **TA (transactional analysis) principles:** Mentors must maintain equal relationships towards the participant. This means that mentors treat them as adults; they respect them and accept them as good human beings. This is the grounding they need in order to start solving the problems the young person has.

Principles for the NEW-D project team to remember when developing, delivery and implementing the NEW-D model are as follows:

- Every person is a good human being;
- Every person has the need and ability to grow and develop;

- Every person has the ability to accept their situation and decisions they have made and to take responsibility for them.

The countries with the highest levels of school completion and the lowest rates of youth unemployment, are those which have a dual system of education, where students learn both in school and on work placements which gives them practical work experience. Where the dual system is not in place, but there is an alternative to traditional secondary education, such as well-planned apprenticeship programmes, similar results are also seen. Therefore, it is clear to see that if national secondary education curricula are being revised in countries with the highest rates of youth unemployment; Ireland, Portugal, Hungary, Greece and Spain, the school programmes of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands should be consulted as examples of best practice, similarly practical workshops and/or in-company work-placements should be integrated into the NEW-D curriculum, where possible.

6 Empirical Research

Partners undertook this phase of field research by designing and distributing an agreed questionnaire to 20 young people who had previously dropped out of education, or who were at risk of dropping out in the future. Following the completion of these questionnaires, focus groups or personal interviews were held with between two and five young people from this group, so as to validate and gain their perspective on some of the findings extrapolated from the questionnaire data. These research tools were used by partners to gather feedback in relation to the following topics:

- Preferred educational setting
- Methods of teaching
- Favourite subjects
- Young people's perception of education and training
- What they would change about a teacher's style and skills
- To identify the reasons for school drop-out
- To list supports that are currently available and to identify additional supports which would help school retention
- How would they create an ideal learning environment and what would they change about school

6.1 Findings From Empirical Research

The following is a short summary of the responses gathered from the questionnaires, and from the focus groups and interviews conducted with a smaller number of the target group. These questionnaires were completed by current students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, and by young people who have already left formal education and are currently planning their careers, seeking educational opportunities and employment from a range of different support services, details of which can be found below. Questionnaires were completed with 147 young people, aged between 16 and 25. The gender composition of the sample was 74 boys, 72 girls and 1 transgender. Further to this, 11 focus groups and personal interviews were conducted with 43 young people, aged 16 - 25.

When asked about their highest level of education attainment, respondents from Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Slovenia stated that in total 40 had completed further education in VET or as part of an apprenticeship; 24 had completed upper secondary education; 19 had completed lower secondary education; 19 completed primary education and 3 respondents stated that they had 'no education'. No data was supplied for the Turkish and Austrian research samples to this question.

Research participants were then asked to think of their favourite teacher, and to describe their best attributes, qualities and teaching style. The answers received to this question were very varied and included; being approachable, professional, patient with learners, good and active listener and open-minded. The most popular qualities, however, were that the teacher was friendly, supportive, and motivating. Respondents praised teachers who were socially and professionally competent; had passion and love for their work; were highly knowledgeable about the subject they teach, respectful of students and experienced enough in their professional to be fun and entertaining in class and to use a variety of different teaching methods. What was surprising about this question was that teachers were not praised for being flexible, or for not assigning any homework or being lackadaisical with discipline, but rather their answers related to having an interesting, passionate and dedicated teacher who showed respect towards them and was supportive of their personal circumstances.

Next, participants were asked to reflect on their preferred learning method, whether it is classroom-based, theoretical, practical, workshop-based, etc. Answers to this question were similarly varied, however the most popular answers were practical project and group work exercises, engaging in debates and group discussion, experiential learning ('learning by doing'), experimenting and trying new things, individual learning and researching autonomously were more popular than expected with this target group and finally the majority of respondents stated that they prefer working in small groups with lots of discussion, where the work is undertaken at a slower pace and the learning they acquire is more thorough. The majority of respondents preferred practical training, where they can be active and learn with their hands. Many of them also stated that they enjoy working with ICT and digital media resources such as video, film and music; and some said that study visits and field trips were their favourite way to learn. From this analysis, we can deduce that students enjoy practical tasks, experiential learning, and the opportunity to work in small groups to motivate each other to work and to learn.

When asked to describe a good classroom environment, respondents were quite unanimous that they would like a bright, clean and comfortable classroom with fresh air; and access to technology. Some also requested comfortable chairs, and that the chairs be arranged in a relaxed semi-circle of similar formation to facilitate a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom. Respondents from Austria also stated that they would like some plants to brighten up the room; while respondents from Slovenia and Italy focused more on the ambiance they wished to achieve in the classroom environment; with smaller working groups, a sense of cooperation and respect between teachers and students and practicing active listening.

Participants were then asked to specify the reason(s) why they dropped out of school, or why they were considering doing so. As was expected, given the complicated issues of early school

leaving, there were a wide variety of personal, school-related and psychological reasons given. Students also suffered with anxiety, depression and stress over the fear of failing in school, and so they left out of desperation. However, when we consider this question in the context of Question 5, which relates to supports that could have made them stay in school, it is clearer that the teacher played a very important role in the student's decision to leave education. The large majority of respondents stated that they left school because they felt that the teachers did not care about them, they felt a lack of support from them and they did not get the attention they needed in the class because of over-crowding. Some respondents found their teachers to be uninteresting and uninspiring, and they felt that they were not being motivated to learn. Furthermore, these students emphasised that they did not receive enough positive feedback from teaching staff during their education, and respondents from Austria said they did not feel supported or appreciated by their teachers or their families. When we consider how adolescents' learn, and the support, encouragement and guidance they require in order to learn effectively, it is disappointing that so many of the research sample agreed on this point. Some also listed that they felt school to be boring and uninteresting in general; they felt that their personality and their sense of freedom was quashed in school and so they decided to leave school, get a job and earn money. Others also stated that the school curricula is too intensive, and the workload is too much for some learners; as a result some fell behind in their grades and they were not given enough support at this time to be able to improve. Others had issues with their mental health, and other health issues which prevented them attending school and some had disciplinary issues or personal issues which similarly prevented them from regularly attending school, and so they were suspended and then expelled. When asked what would have encouraged them to stay in school, an overwhelming majority of respondents answered that if the teachers had have been more patient, and offered help by explaining lessons more clearly, in a friendly and approach able manner, if they had had offered additional assistance with learning to students who needed it, and if they had have been more pro-active in combatting bullying then they would have stayed in education. Participants from Ireland similarly blamed their exit from education on unsupportive, difficult and controlling teachers, who did not give them the extra support they needed. Some respondents from Slovenia, however, said nothing could have been done for them because at the time they had simply given up on school and they did not agree with the education system; students in Austria would only have stayed if there had been a change in educational system, and Italian respondents would have stayed if the learning was more flexible and if they were able to find employment as part of their coursework.

Questionnaire respondents were then asked to list any personal aspirations they had in relation to their education and/or their careers. Many listed the types of jobs they would like to have in the future, and they ranged from vocations such as being a nurse or mechanic, to being a diplomat or a

teacher. Other popular careers were fire- and police-men, chef and welder. Some wanted professional careers in the IT industry, or as lawyers and accountants. Some had already progressed to higher education to help to achieve these aims, and some had already secured apprenticeships for the same end. A small percentage of respondents had not considered their career plan, and were vague in answering this question as a result. A very small percentage answered that they would consider starting their own business as a pathway out of unemployment; however, this was confined to owning their own shop, rather than launching a new product or working in innovation, for example.

Interestingly, when we consider all answers across the consortium, it is clear that respondents were not so concerned with the salary they would receive for employment, but they wanted a job that is 'meaningful', 'inspiring' and 'interesting'. Some wanted to attend university as their future goal, and would so proud with their achievement of attending any university that they said they did not mind which university they attended or which course they did; they just wanted to go to university. A smaller percentage were more motivated by income and said they had no personal career goals, that they just wanted a job which paid them money.

When asked how they would prepare for these career plans, given any lack of skills, qualifications and experience which they may have, respondents answered that they have planned to, or are currently, completing studies in further and higher education. Others listed that they would undertake mobility stays abroad for experience; train to acquire the administrative and language skills they need; apply for internships so that they could gain relevant work experience in this industry and some said that they would need to source financial assistance before completing any of these actions.

The answer which received the highest number of answers on the survey was Question 8; which asked respondents to list 5 things they would include in their 'perfect school', that if they had a magic wand to wave what would their school look like? The list was very long, and answers ranged from practical solutions such as dedicated teachers and interactive whiteboards in every classroom, to less realistic wishes such as a smoking room in every school, no homework or assignments and no classes early in the morning. A full list of all of their suggestions are included below, as this is the pivotal question on the questionnaire which gives the students the opportunity to tell us exactly what they want from education, so it is important to give their suggestions due consideration.

- Equality and fairness in the classroom
- Supportive atmosphere with specific support available if you need it
- Less strict environment with fewer rules
- No exams, but courses based on continuous assessment

- Fair teachers who offer students encouragement
 - Free course fees, books and stationary or financial assistance for these things
 - An appropriate and welcoming environment
 - Good management structures
 - Expert teachers
 - Schools should be linked with employers and jobs at the end of school so that students see the value in their education
 - At least 1 month exchange programme with schools abroad
 - Modern facilities including technology and computer labs
 - Orientation/ Guidance service to help students to transition to higher education and/or employment, so as to ensure a smooth transition
 - Differentiate language course offerings to include Chinese
 - Flexible timing and scheduling of learning
 - More focus on science subjects and link to employment in this field
 - More apprenticeships for unemployed youth
 - More work in groups to encourage collaboration
 - International staff and teachers to promote intercultural and multi-lingual learning
 - Hours of practical work experience in your chosen career
 - Smaller class sizes
 - Mutual respect between teachers and students
 - Shorter school lessons, maximum of 30 minutes
 - Wi-Fi in all classrooms
 - Interactive smart boards instead of chalk blackboards
 - Better food in the cafeteria
 - More patience for students who are slower to learn than others
 - Minimal use of books, more interactive learning
 - Better field trips
 - More engaged teachers
- Less feasible suggestions included:*
- No homework
 - Longer break times
 - Smoking room in school
 - Non-compulsory school attendance
 - School party once a week
 - No morning classes

When asked to create their perfect, ‘magic-wand’ school, students generated a list of very creative, innovative and practical solutions to what would constitute a perfect school. They did not ask for a chocolate fountain or vending machine in every classroom, but instead they understood the serious value of the question, and they thought about the importance of education and how this would be enhanced in a nurturing, supportive and more flexible environment. The German and Italian research teams split the suggestions from their research sample into five different categories, so as to better define and discuss the suggestions, as follows:

➤ *Environment*

Several participants mentioned that an appropriate environment would be necessary with free access to computer labs and a friendly atmosphere. Participants seem to prefer smaller groups where there is familiarity, solidarity, collaboration and comprehension (active listening) between all the members (both students and teachers). One of the respondents mentioned that the layout of the classroom should be a circle, it's more informal and everyone can see each other better and engage better together as a result. Students from Ireland also suggested that they would like equality of opportunity and fairness to be core principles in their ideal school, so that students would not be discriminated against based on their socio-economic situation or their appearance for example. Finally, these answers reflect that timing is also important: more students mentioned that they would prefer a more flexible schedule; some stipulated longer breaks, shorter class times of a maximum of 30 minutes, and classes in the afternoon instead of too early in the morning. Some respondents wanted to break free from this environment altogether and go on mobility abroad for at least a month of their schooling. Others wanted more freedom with flexible classes and daily schedules, more field trips to interesting locations and classes outdoors in pleasant weather.

➤ *Teaching methodologies and subjects*

Participants agreed across the consortium that they would like to see the link strengthened between education and the world of work, so that they could be better suited to find employment once they have finished their education. It was suggested that this could be achieved through work placements, apprenticeships and the incorporation of experiential learning and practical, thematic workshops into the school curriculum. Others wanted additional, extra-curricular VET training opportunities offered through the school; and a move away from using textbooks in the classroom. With regard to possible teaching methodologies, students agreed that their preferred delivery methods would include debates, group discussions and smaller working groups as these would allow students to communicate any learning difficulties, seek support from peers and teachers, exchange ideas, learn by challenging each other intellectually and improve their communication and team work skills by completing tasks through group work. Furthermore, some of the participants would prefer more group work in order to collaborate better and establish closer relationships with the other students, as well as to learn one from another (also from a more experienced person). Regarding subjects some respondents mentioned that they would like more of a focus on languages and science in the curriculum, as these are identified as areas for future growth in the labour market, and a particularly mention was given to learning Chinese in school.

➤ *Teacher qualities, skills and attitude*

Several participants commented that teachers should be competent, professional, qualified and experts in their field with relevant experience. They should manage well the classroom and teach in an accurate, precise and fair manner, while always maintaining a level of mutual respect with the students. As personal qualities they should be motivated and passionate, while also being able to motivate and encourage students.

➤ *Supports for students and workers*

Financial support should be provided to student and young professionals to help in the following areas: resources to train students and employees through free training courses in a variety of labour market sectors, and with specific skills which respond to the needs of the labour market; assistance to buy books, stationary and to pay fees for education – or ideally to provide all of these resources free of charge; more apprenticeships for young unemployed persons or school drop-outs, and more apprenticeships for current students so that they can continue to study while also earning some money to support themselves. Finally, students suggested that additional supports be given to students in the form of orientation and guidance services. These services would be aimed at integrating students into the labour market or supporting their progress to tertiary education, once their secondary education is complete, by providing them with practical, useful information and tools. These guidance services should inform students about current education and employment opportunities in their chosen area.

➤ *International and Intercultural Awareness*

Across the consortium, an interest was shown in supporting intercultural awareness and appreciation. To this end, students suggested offering international exchanges to other schools, undertaking mobility stays abroad and recruiting international and highly qualified teachers from abroad to increase the diversity of the school.

Following on from this question, research participants were asked to list some advice that they would give their ‘younger’ selves if they had the opportunity. In some countries, there was little response or reaction to this question, and there were questions raised by partners as to whether their students actually fully understood the question. Despite this, those who did answer the question emphasised that they would tell their ‘younger’ counterparts to stay in school and to implore to them the importance of education for future employment opportunities and progression to higher education. Once Irish respondent made this point emphatically by emphasising that had he have stayed in school he would have been graduating from university at the age of 21 instead of only embarking on his university education at this age. Other advice

included not being afraid to ask for help when it is needed, and to ask for help sooner. Many of these respondents had fallen behind in their grades and were unaware or afraid to seek help, and so many have stated that they would not make the same mistake again. Others said they would advise to be punctual; work hard and study for exams; really try to learn and stop being so lazy; make a real effort to be friendly to teachers; go to a school with a good reputation for teachers and do not start friendships with a 'bad crowd'. Approximately one-third of all respondents across the consortium said that they would not do anything differently if they had the chance to go to school again; they said they were happy that they dropped out and so they have no advice for their 'younger' selves.

Finally, respondents were asked to identify where they go to get advice about their education or potential employment opportunities. The most common answers to this question included family and friends; youth centres; employment agencies; career counsellors and advisors; internet searches; second-chance education teachers and state services such as the Citizens' Information Service in Ireland. While it is natural for friends and family to be the main point of contact for this target group, it is important to note that teachers were not near the top of the list of resources, but rather state agencies and supports were. This means that front-line staff should be trained to identify the needs of disadvantaged youth, NEETs and ESLs, and that teachers should increase their capacity to offer meaningful advice to disadvantaged youth regarding their opportunities for future employment and education opportunities.

Although these questionnaire results were conclusive, there were certain issues and points that were raised that partners wanted to investigate further with this target group. For this reason, partners agreed to organise and host either face-to-face interviews or focus group sessions with members of this target group, to present and address some of the findings from the research questionnaire results. These focus groups and interviews were held in all partner countries, and in the most part the feedback gathered from partners at these meetings was concurrent with the questionnaire results. The recommendations made by young people at these face-to-face meetings are detailed in the following section.

6.2 Recommendations & Conclusions

Young people who attended the face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions first agreed that a comfortable, bright and friendly environment is needed in order to make school and education more welcoming and appealing for young people. Their specific requirements included having alternative seating plans for classrooms, comfortable chairs, brightly painted walls, open windows for fresh air, adjustable air conditioning, heating and lighting, clean classrooms and with IT

infrastructure including strong Wi-Fi connections, interactive smart boards and the use of tablets and smart devices.

In the focus group sessions, participants also highlighted the need to create supportive learning environments for students, where they are not intimidated or fearful of asking for help from teachers when they need it. It was stated small class sizes, or smaller working groups within the class structure, is also the most preferred method of teaching delivery. While respondents from Denmark preferred individual work, the majority of participants stated that they would prefer group work activities. They see group work as providing a stimulating working environment for young people to study in, as it allows the students to complete tasks in an interactive, fun and active way, with their friends. Concerns about group work were raised in Denmark however, where students listed low self-esteem, psychological issues and poor discipline and control by the teachers as the main reasons why they preferred to work alone. These young people emphasised that in a group work setting, one student always tries to dominate the work of the group, and this can be intimidating for other students who feel they cannot express their vision for the group's tasks. Poor management of group interaction by teachers was blamed for this, and students also recommended that if using group work techniques, an induction session should first be held, to teach students how to work as part of a group in a friendly, welcoming and respectful manner. This focus group also emphasised, however, that group work and project work are very enjoyable formats for learning, when the group dynamic is managed and is appropriate and inclusive. Focus group participants in Ireland also prioritised group work as their preferred style. These young people placed a high value on experiential and authentic learning, which adds instant practical value to their acquired theoretical knowledge. In this way, young people also prioritised activity in the delivery of this type of training. They want to be active, learn in practical workshops or on field trips, and undertake work placements and apprenticeships which give them real-life professional experience before they leave school.

With regard to teaching methodologies, students were also very enthusiastic about ICT-based learning. The level of expected IT infrastructure varies widely across the consortium, where students in Ireland want computers and Wi-Fi in every classroom, which is currently not a staple in Ireland, and students in Turkey, Denmark and Germany who want smart classrooms with interactive whiteboards as well as the use of smart devices by the teacher to work with students on an individual basis. Respondents from Austria emphasised the need for teachers to challenge their students intellectually by encouraging their critical thinking and communication skills by asking thoughtful and open-ended questions, and seeking to challenge previous conceptions the students may have held by asking them to elaborate on points they have raised. To address this learning need, it was recommended that group discussions and debates are the most effective teaching methodologies.

At this point, it is also worth mentioning the value which these young people placed on their teacher. Successful or failure in formal education, based on the outcomes of this study, can be largely dependent on the type of teacher you have. Respondents to questionnaires and focus group participants equally emphasised the role of the teacher as being crucial to obtaining a good education. All respondents agreed that a supportive, friendly, approachable, well-educated and resourceful teacher would make a big difference to young people at-risk of dropping out of formal education. If a teacher is well-educated, they have a passion for their subject which comes through in their teaching style; if they are resourceful, they can use a variety of teaching styles to communicate a message to their group of students, thus making the learning experience interesting and unique for the students; if a teacher is friendly, supportive and approachable, a student will feel that they can go to speak to that teacher if they are struggling with school work or personal problems. Students will not approach a teacher for help if they do not trust them, and so it is important for teachers to cultivate this trust with their students by showing them patience and respect. Young people who were interviewed felt that teachers should be interested in their students' lives and have their best interests at heart; they should prioritise the personal development of their students, as well as exam results and achieving the curriculum's learning outcomes. This point was highlighted in the Italian focus groups in particular, where young people expressed that teachers typically follow the school curriculum strictly, and do not show any interest in their students' development; and this can be very de-motivating for students. Focus group respondents highlighted the need for a change in this respect when they explained that they went to friends and family for education and employment advice because they could not approach their teachers with these queries. This point was particularly emphasised in Denmark and Ireland; with Turkish respondents highlighting the need to train teachers to better help disadvantaged young people so that numbers of absenteeism and school drop-out falls.

The next issue raised in the focus group sessions pertained to the supports students would need in order to complete their school education. Focus group participants highlighted a range of supports in this category, and these ranged from a room where students can relax or do work in between classes to more pragmatic supports such as having a student liaison officer who will provide personal, as well as academic and professional, support to students. There was an emphasis, in the majority of focus groups, on the need to have expert advisors for students. Participants in the Irish focus group recommended that recruiters from specific industries present the skills, qualifications and experiences needed to obtain jobs in a given sector, leading to students placing a higher value on their potential qualifications, and seeing the benefit of staying in school to secure a better job in the future. Interviews conducted in Austria also highlighted additional supports such as having a 'role model' or a past student come to talk to the current group of students, recounting their story of how they completed their education and progressed to find employment. Austrian respondents also highlighted the need for more excursions and

outdoor activities as potential supports for disadvantaged young people, acting as a motivating factor to staying in school. One suggestion from Turkey was also particularly interesting. Here focus group participants highlighted that students often fail in their first year of secondary education, because they find it difficult to adjust to the new school system and the step-up in academic level. Young people recommended that schools implement an induction year for incoming first year students to make the transition from primary education more seamless. These young people also highlighted the need to include parents in the education system, as students will rarely drop-out if their families are against the decision and are supportive of their education.

While these suggestions are many and varied, the recommendations which have a direct correlation to the development work of the NEW-D Didactical Model are summarised in the section below.

6.3 Implications for Didactical Models

As part of this research process, disadvantaged young people who had previously dropped out of education, or who were at risk of dropping out, were asked to comment on a range of topics all pertaining to why they were dropping out or had dropped out, what they didn't like about school, what would make them stay in school and what they would do differently if they had the opportunity to repeat their school education. The reason why these questions were put to this target group was to gather insight and feedback which would inform the NEW-D new didactic model for providing initial VET to this target group, so that even though they have left formal education, they can still pursue a high quality vocational qualification. Project partners wanted to gain this insight to understand the reasons why people drop-out of school and to understand what supports will need to be made available in order to ensure school drop-out rates fall in the future. These recommendations have been summarised in the previous section, and below, they have been converted into practical tips for project partners to bear in mind when designing the NEW-D didactic model.

1. Training should be delivered to this target group in the form of practical workshops, excursions, field trips and group-work activity. Practical workshops should be designed to actively involve each students, and to allow for collaboration between learners;
2. If using group work techniques, endeavour to work with smaller groups to allow all participants to have their say and feel involved in the group. Before starting a group work session, ensure that there are some ground rules to ensure effective communication and respect by all group members – this can be a short induction into working as part of a group, or it can be something simpler such as writing a group contract;
3. Teachers should be adaptable, flexible, friendly and approachable in order to relate to the students' needs and to provide interesting and interactive learning experiences for them;

4. Where training in classroom-based, the classroom should be bright, airy and comfortable, and teacher's should feel comfortable setting the room up in an alternative layout, such as chairs in a circle, etc.;
5. Teachers should be comfortable using a range of modern technologies. New technologies are interesting to young people, and so to ensure their interest in the learning content computers, laptops, smart devices and interactive whiteboards should be used, where available, to deliver the training;
6. Labour market-oriented and industry-savvy career advice should be on offer to young people, to emphasise the importance of education in securing a good job later in life, and to make recommendations on future career paths following secondary education. In the NEW-D curriculum, this could take the form of a career road-map or career planning tool for some of the larger industries in the European economy;
7. All teachers and trainers involved in providing VET opportunities for this target group should show these young people respect and consideration; this point was made repeatedly in the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, and it is of paramount importance that these young people are viewed and regarded as adults by their teachers, and not spoken-down to, disrespected or their wishes ignored. This is pivotal to the success of the NEW-D didactical model.

7 Summary & Conclusion

All members of the NEW-D project team undertook a comprehensive research process, the outcomes of which will now act as the evidence-base for the development of the NEW-D innovative didactical model for providing initial VET opportunities for disadvantaged youth. Throughout the research process, partners have been committed to involving members of this youth target group at every stage. Following on from desk and field research activities, partners now have a clear understanding of the current models of second-chance education being utilised across Europe, and of the actual needs, apprehensions and aspirations of Europe's disadvantaged young school drop-outs. Current successful education models identified by project partners almost exclusively involve some form of practical, labour-market-oriented training. Where school drop-out rates in Europe are at their lowest, Member States operate a dual education system, where non-academic students can undertake apprenticeships to gain their school diplomas and qualifications. Where second-chance education or school completion initiatives are concerned, a similar practical approach needs to be adopted. Students need to see the value in education and for many the only way this is achievable in by understanding the link between completing education and obtaining a job with a competitive salary or in an industry which interests them. Therefore VET models for disadvantaged youth need to emphasise the correlation between education and employment.

It is also worth noting that where project partners interviewed students at risk of dropping out of school and disadvantaged youth who had already dropped out, these young people, though some were aged at young as 15, viewed themselves as adults. It is therefore important that teachers and tutors who offer education programmes to this target group similarly see and treat these young people as adults. It is important that students trust their teachers, so that they approach them when they need help or advice, and so it is important that teachers show their students respect and understanding, as a means of cultivating this trust. If teachers respect their students and show a genuine interest in their personal circumstances and professional ambitions, students will respond to this by showing interest in their education and mutual respect will grow between teacher and student as a result. By showing students respect, and being approachable and friendly to them, teachers are fostering positive attitudes among these young people towards school and education. A bespoke teacher induction programme, or in-service training programme, could be designed and implemented with secondary teachers to ensure they are adequately trained to offer this type of support to their students, thus ensuring a higher level of school completion. Furthermore, this research highlighted that young people respond best to fun and interactive teaching methodologies; therefore teachers should be well-educated in didactic models which allow them to provide a variety of teaching styles to students. Our research has highlighted that the most stimulating teachers for students are the ones who have a genuine interest and enthusiasm for their subject, are friendly, open-minded and capable of delivering training in a dynamic way, where there may be group work, practical assignments, outdoor activities and excursions or individual working tasks on any given day.

Project partners will consider all of these research findings when making recommendations to second-chance education providers and when designing the project's innovative didactical model in initial VET for disadvantaged young people.

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