

**CLUSTER "ACCESS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN LIFELONG
LEARNING"**

**Summary report of the Peer Learning in Dublin, 31
January-2 February 2007**

**Preventative and compensatory measures to reduce
early school leaving**

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Executive Summary

The second Peer Learning Activity of the Cluster on Access and Social Inclusion was organised in Dublin on 31 January-2 February 2007 by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science.

It was a highly inspiring experience, thanks to the excellent conception of the programme and its organisation, and to the active contribution given by participants.

It focused on a series of preventative and compensatory initiatives against early school leaving, some of which were brought together under a recent policy plan against educational disadvantage (DEIS):

- The **Home School Community Liaison**, aimed at establishing collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning, targeting in particular families and/or neighbourhoods identified as being "at risk" – the principle being that parents are the main actors of the education process, and that it is necessary to develop recover trust on their side and to establish a comfortable relation between them and the school.

- The **School Completion programme** is a positive discrimination measure, targeting those in danger of dropping out of the education system. Schools are grouped into clusters of one or more second-level schools and their main feeder primary schools. The clusters of schools receive extra-funding to organise activities with the aim of retaining disadvantaged students in school, with a large focus on extra-curricular activities.

- **Youthreach** provides second-chance education for unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20, with a holistic approach on the needs of the pupils

- The **Area Partnerships** were established in the early 90's to tackle problems of unemployment and disadvantage on the ground. They also have a specific focus on education, and they ensure the connection of different services so that people do not fall out of the net.

The visits and presentations inspired rich and multiple reflections. First of all, *education is not in a vacuum –it is part of a much more complex picture.* An education system is the product of a given society – and, to be effective, policies aimed at restoring equality in education must first of all look at overall equality issues in society.

Difficulties at school often have their roots out of school. It is therefore necessary to

develop a comprehensive approach based on listening to pupils about their actual needs.

Trust and respect are fundamental. It was highlighted several times that **emotional values and expectations** in relation to what the school represents and may offer are key elements in disadvantage.

It would probably be high time to reflect on how **well being** at school may be fostered. The approach to well-being should be holistic – that is, it should not only concern the pupils but also the teachers and the parents. The experiences that we saw that proved successful were in fact those working toward this aim.

Parents have a central role in the educational project - a synergy between families and school is indispensable, and in the case of disadvantaged families a bond of trust must be established between families and the school .

As exclusion and ESL are multifaceted problems, it is necessary to tackle them through ***comprehensive strategies bridging different actors/"agencies"***.

It is important to develop statistics and indicators, and to collect data. How to ***measure disadvantage*** is something which we should analyse in depth through the Cluster.

1. The issue of Early school leaving in the context of the work of the Cluster

At the first Cluster meeting in May 2006, it was decided that, given the wide scope of the Cluster, it was necessary to identify some priority issues for discussion. Early school leaving was identified by the vast majority of Cluster members as an issue of utmost relevance.

In the framework of the Education and Training 2010 workprogramme, MS committed themselves to reducing early school leaving¹ to 10% by 2010. However, even though there was some improvement in the period 2000-2005, the current EU average seems stabilised at around 14.9%, which means that significant additional efforts to meet the benchmark are required. The issue is particularly complex, and for this very reason the exchange of practices and sharing of reflections may be particularly beneficial.

2. The Peer Learning Activity

2.1. Organisation

The PLA was organised by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science. It was a three-day event. The first day was at the premises of the Department, and it consisted of presentations of the Irish policies to tackle educational disadvantage as well as of specific initiatives. The second day consisted of on-site visits in Coolock, North Dublin, so as to see how the initiatives that were presented work in practice.

In the third day, another initiative (Local Partnerships) was presented. The final session consisted of workshops where participants discussed about each of the four main initiatives under analysis

For the sake of clarity, the present report presents each initiative in a block, without distinguishing between the presentations and the visits. The feedback coming from the last day's workshops is summarized in 2.7.

2.2. Background on the Irish education system and policies to tackle educational

¹ Measured as number of people aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and not in education nor employment.

disadvantage

First of all, there was a presentation of the Irish **education system**. Schooling is compulsory for all children from ages 6 to 16. Over 85% of students go on to complete upper second level education or equivalent and over 55% of students progress directly to third level education.

Most children start school between 4.5 and 6 years. It was underlined that an issue is that underprivileged children would start school earlier (at 4 instead of at 6), without accessing pre-primary education (which is mainly managed by the private sector). This induces a disadvantage in relation to children starting school at a more mature age and with an experience of pre-primary education.

Second-level education generally starts at age twelve and consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by an optional *transition year* and a two-year senior. There are two examinations – one at the end of the junior cycle and a leaving exam at the end of the senior cycle. The *transition year*, between the two cycles, provides an opportunity for students to explore a wide range of subjects and have a taste of work experience at a remove from the examination focus.

The second-level education sector in Ireland comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. The types of schools mainly differ on the basis of administration and sources of funding.

- Secondary Schools, which comprise the majority of second-level schools in Ireland, are privately owned and managed, many by religious orders or organisations
- Vocational Schools are administered by Vocational Education Committees
- Community and Comprehensive Schools are administered by the state and owned by partnership boards of trustees.

A large part of education is therefore administered in schools linked to the Church. It appears that privately managed Secondary schools would tend to be often regarded as more prestigious than comprehensive schools.

The higher education system encompasses the university sector, the institutes of technology, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. Entry to third level education for Irish students is highly competitive and based upon performance in the final secondary school examination, the Leaving Certificate. The Department of Education and Science provides financial assistance to students from disadvantaged background to access higher education

and in addition, under-graduate students benefit from free tuition.

Concerning **legislation**, it was underlined that the approach to change in the Irish education system is evolutionary and not revolutionary. A great deal of re-appraisal and analysis of the Irish education system took place in the 1990s. This led to a number of education acts, including the Education Act (1998), the Irish Universities Act (1997), the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2003) form the legislative framework for this change agenda.

Of particular relevance is the establishment in 2003 of a national framework of qualifications, encompassing all levels and types of education and training and thus providing recognition for all learning achievements.

Concerning data on **school retention and early school leaving**, the national retention rate to completion of the Junior Certificate examination is 94.6%, the national adjusted retention rate to completion of the Leaving Certificate examination is 81.3%

Data are based on the Post-Primary Pupils database. The Department is currently planning the development of a Primary Pupils Database, which will facilitate the collation of much more accurate and comprehensive data on transfer rates in the future, and will be of key importance in identifying early school leaving in very disadvantaged communities.

A rather radical new approach to ESL was the establishment in 2000 of a single body responsible for school attendance, the **National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB)**. The general functions of the Board are to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. The Board deploys Educational Welfare Officers throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance.

Concerning **social inclusion policy**, in 1997 the government launched a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), which eventually merged with the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social exclusion, in the framework of the European Open method of coordination on social inclusion. The strategy focused on five key areas – unemployment, income adequacy, educational disadvantage, urban disadvantage and rural poverty - each with its own subsidiary targets and timeframes.

The strategy has been a key element of the social partnership agreements between

Government and the social partners: employers, trade unions, farming bodies and the community and voluntary sector.

There has thus been an increasing focus on a cross-Departmental approach to tackling disadvantage. There was also an increasing focus on social inclusion within each governmental department -which led to the creation of the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science.

Coming to specific policies to address educational disadvantage and early school leaving, a key recent step has been the adoption of **DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)**, the new action plan for educational inclusion. It focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years).

The action plan provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme, bringing together a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage.

The main principles of the new action plan are, on the one hand, the better targeting of resources on communities which are most in need (as opposed to a previous more widespread approach), and a more integrated approach aiming at overcoming the fragmentation of initiatives.

Concerning the identification of disadvantage, the socio-economic variables that collectively best predict achievement were singled out. These variables include unemployment, accommodation and lone parenthood and, in the case of second-level schools, data on retention and attainment from the Post-Primary Pupils and State Examinations Commission databases. The variables determine the eligibility for the School Support Programme under the DEIS action plan. A review process was also put in place for primary and second-level schools that did not qualify for participation in the School Support Programme, but that regarded themselves as having a level of disadvantage which was of a scale sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the programme.

Overarching principles in the plan are a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools, an increased emphasis on planning at school and school cluster level, and target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes. The DEIS action plan includes a number of the initiatives and relates to the others that were analysed in detail in the PLA and which are described in the next paragraphs.

2.3. The Home School Community Liaison

The HSL aims at establishing collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning, targeting in particular families and/or neighbourhoods identified as being "at risk" (poverty, unemployment, high ESL rates). On the first day Dr Concepta Conaty, director of the programme, gave a presentation on the way it works. On the second day we saw it working in practice. The principle of the programme is that parents are one of the main actors of the education process. In the case of underprivileged families, the existing problems leading to school disadvantage (lack of books in the house, poor linguistic skills, poor nutrition, family-related problems) are amplified by the fact that parents would often have had a negative experience with school and would therefore hesitate in linking with school. The philosophy is therefore to recover trust on the side of parents and to establish a comfortable relation between them and the school.

The key feature of the programme is the presence in each targeted school of a home-school coordinator, who acts as a mediator and contact person. The coordinator would regularly visit homes and would intervene in particular in crisis situations, after absences from school or in cases of disruptive behaviour.

Besides, parents are involved in the educational project also through a recognition of their belonging to the school (many schools have a room for parents with kitchen facilities) and they are also offered adult education courses. A rather revolutionary idea is the organisation of classes held by parents: once a week during a period of six weeks, parents would come to school and give classes (mathematics and reading) to primary school children, divided into small groups. Besides, parents of children with special needs would come to help their own child with reading. This has a lot of benefits, as parents are trained to help children and it will become easier for them to do it at home. Besides, parents acquire an understanding of the work of teachers and build a better relationship of trust and knowledge with the school. We saw these classes taking place, and the enthusiasm and pride on the side of parents was tangible.

2.4. The School Completion programme.

The programme was presented on the first day by its national coordinator, Mr Aidan Savage. Then, a visit a secondary school allowed to see it applied in practice and to discuss with the

teachers and coordinators who are responsible for its concrete implementation.

The programme is a positive discrimination measure, directly targeting those in danger of dropping out of the education system. It favours cross-community and cross-sectoral approach based on the development of local strategies to ensure maximum participation levels in the education process.

Schools are grouped into clusters of one or more second-level schools and their main feeder primary schools. Each cluster has established a local management committee composed of principals, voluntary and statutory agencies including County Development Boards, Local Drug Task Forces, Area Partnerships, the local programme coordinator, parents, community interests etc. This committee is responsible for developing and overseeing implementation of a fully costed, integrated plan to tackle early school leaving in the area, including specific retention targets.

The clusters of schools receive extra-funding to organise activities which may have a positive affect on retaining disadvantaged students in schools. The programme provides both academic and non-academic supports and includes in-school, after-school, out-of-school and holiday time supports in recognition of the fact that continuous support must be given to young people at risk of early school leaving. Therefore, the programme organises breakfast and lunch clubs, week-end excursions, drama and yoga, holidays abroad etc – the idea being at the same time to compensate for that support that fortunate children would receive through their families, and to make the school a more attractive place to be at such a key time of personal development.

In principle, the programme is based on the identification of disadvantaged pupils and on providing them with specific support. Nevertheless, singling out individual pupils for support activities may have an undesirable stigmatisation effect. Therefore, in most cases, activities target the whole class or school.

2.5. YOUTHREACH

Youthreach is a second –chance programme. On the first day, the programme was presented by its national coordinator, Dr Dermot Stokes. On the second day, we had the chance of visiting a centre and speaking with its principal, some teachers and some pupils.

Youthreach provides second-chance education for unemployed early school leavers aged 15-20. It is a joint programme between the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and of Employment. It is administered in out-of-school centres, operating full time on a year-round basis. Centres are small in size, with about 50 pupils each. Overall, there are currently about 5000 places in Youthreach Centres nationally, and the intention is to increase their number. The visit to the Centre was a very intense experience. To give us an idea of the issues their students are confronted with, the centre's director outlined a "typical" case of a student in the Centre (a successful case, as she's now in University). She was 15, lone mother after having being raped by her cousin, she lived with her mother and seven brothers and sisters (all of them out of education and employment), she had scabies, lice, other health problems derived from poor nutrition, she had difficulties in speaking and panic attacks. And, of course, she had left school. Clearly, in all this, the educational issues – the ones which the Centre is supposed to focus upon – are rather collateral. Therefore, the intervention of the Centre is holistic – they would first of all carry out a check up of all problems facing the child, including health problems and family problems. Then they would bring in all relevant actors to solve each problem – they would contact the health services, bring the child to the dentist etc, they would find a suitable psychological treatment, they would contact social services to alert them about her family problems, they would provide her with orthopedic services and with acupuncture to relieve stress. They would give her (and all other students) nutrition lessons and cooking classes. They would find a place for her baby in a nearby childcare service in order to allow her to attend school. Only once all these problems are solved can the real education work start. Education focuses at the same time on classic curriculum subject – English, maths etc –to prepare pupils for the leaving certificate, and on personal development –handling emotions and frustration, assertiveness, nutrition. Food plays a key role in the project, also because of a general problem of poor or unhealthy nutrition. Children start the day with a breakfast together and in turn prepare lunch for the whole centre. Another key part of the initiative is the focus on sports and leisure – children would go out for weekends and journeys together. The Centre takes part in Youth exchanges and in Comenius projects and they are very enthusiastic about it. A major initiative is a journey to Florida which the Centre organised last summer and will repeat this year. We spoke with two pupils and a teacher who had been formerly enrolled in the same centre. They were immensely enthusiastic about it, to the point of being upset when the centre closed for a day. They emphasized the importance of feeling respected and listened to. "Respect" and "encouragement" are actually the key features of the educational policy of the Centre. The assessment system is also based on this philosophy: We saw a board where marks were shown. The worst mark was "Come on, you can make it!". The principal actually said that she had never met a pupil who did not *want* to learn – they just did not know *how* to do it. Another striking point was the motivation of teachers. Most teachers have been in the Centre

for fifteen years, since its opening. They are committed to the point that they would go to supermarkets to fill bags, in their evenings, to collect money for the Florida trip. When asked about that, they would say that the main reason for their passion is the team spirit within the staff, and the possibility of giving a visible contribution to improving perspectives for the children. A large majority of kids obtain a leaving certificate, and many progress to University.

2.6. Area Partnerships

The Northside Partnership programme was presented on the third day by its education co-ordinator, Mr Noel Kelly. Eleven partnerships were established by Government in 1991 as a response to the problems of long-term unemployment and disadvantage. These were located in unemployment blackspots. The model was so successful that Government subsequently funded the establishment of a further 27 Partnerships bringing the current total to 38 nationally. The partnerships have a specific focus on social inclusion and work with priority target groups including the unemployed, lone parents, early school leavers, ex-prisoners etc. Within its catchment area each partnership further identifies the streets and districts most in need and directs services to these areas. Over the years partnerships have become more focused on education as this is seen as the key to unlocking each individuals potential, and they ensure the connection of different services so that people do not fall through the education net. Some examples of Northside Partnership education support programmes include scholarship programmes for higher education students from disadvantaged groups, a support programme to help teen parents to stay in education, an out of school programme to support disadvantaged pupils to complete post-primary schooling, adult guidance and counselling and a schools network that plans and delivers innovative practice and disseminates best practice. The Partnership also acts as an advocate for learners who have encountered difficulties or who wish to re-engage in education or training.

The real strength of partnerships lies in their ability to innovate and their links with a wide range of partners whom they can mobilise to respond to needs in their areas.

2.7. Final debate

The final debate provided the opportunity to participants to draw some overall impressions on the initiatives. The group was divided in four workshops, each focusing on an initiative. Participants were asked to answer three questions:

- What has struck us most?
- What are the similarities and differences with our own countries?
- Do we have any ideas on how to improve these programmes?

Here is a short summary of results of workshops (some points are further elaborated in section 3)

On Home-school Liaison

What struck us most?

- The presence of parents and their cooperation on crucial matters
- Their volunteering
- The fact that the school environment was perceived as a safe one for parents
- The difference of working class parents with the middle class
- The government funding of the programme
- Finding mothers and fathers who probably had low skills themselves helping their own child
- Comparisons
 - Language/Cultural barriers
 - In Hungary, for instance, there are Roma assistants
 - Re-distribution of funding towards primary and pre-primary
- Suggestions for improvements
 - Mixture of statistical data and development of persons
 - Social competences are not enough: numeracy, literacy, communication... are also important, so do not separate
 - Parent should not be just 'clients', but they should participate in the governance of the school in real partnerships

On School Completion Programme

- What struck the participants?
 - The existence of a national programme for school completion
 - The holistic view adopted by this programme
 - The wide range of non-strictly academic activities that it included
 - How different actions were put together to achieve the targeted goals
 - The management structure of this programme
 - The focus on early prevention
- Similarities/differences
 - In many countries, there is a lack of a national strategy
 - There is a similar awareness of the problem in most countries, but the approach

tends to be strictly academic, as opposed to the holistic approach in Ireland

- In other countries, school completion is regarded as the problem of mainly some minorities (eg. The Roma)
- Ideas to improve the situation/problems
 - Better targeting of teenager integration (as a risk group)
 - More focus on vocational training as an alternative to comprehensive schools
 - Continuous, long-term teacher training
 - Working more with teachers within this programme

On Youthreach:

- Struck us more:
 - Networking
 - Engagement
 - Personal commitment
 - Responsibility of teachers
 - The different attitude of teachers
 - Reduced class size
 - 'Social' pedagogues
 - Not teaching the subject but the child
 - Evaluation, quality framework
- Comparisons:
 - In France: the general mission for vocational education
 - In Italy: structural funds-supported measures
 - Austria: Polytechnikum
 - Belgium: SAS only, D+
 - Hungary: Some, but not parallel
- Suggestions:
 - Mainstreaming/to have an inclusive school system
 - Irish system, church
 - Teachers
 - Long term commitment by the State

On Area Partnerships:

- Struck us more:
 - Challenger programme: Prevention (ideally) – Intervention (actually)
 - Charitable approach
 - Early intervention for prevention, but long-term process + results
 - Competition + cooperation

- Funding to disadvantage schools
- Regional authorities of Department of Education
- Fear of failure in the formal system; people to be able to tell what their competences and strengths are.
- Programmes make people work better together
- Revise regular schools; influence their policies; make them more innovative
- Aspirations and motivation play a role in selection
- Role models in the area
- Comparisons:
 - Germany: school partnerships / Community schools

3. Lessons learned and questions left open

After the presentations, during the visits and in the final debate, several issues were discussed. The present chapter tries to make the point on the most often highlighted one.

3.1. Lessons learnt

Education is not in a vacuum –it is part of a much more complex picture

As Prof. Kathleen Lynch, who presented on the first day, put it, each education system is the product of a specific society. To be effective, policies aimed at restoring equality in education must first of all look at overall equality issues in society.

Developing a concept of well-being at school

Prof. Lynch also underlined that the fact itself that education is compulsory, and not a voluntary activity, makes it necessary to reason on how school may become a place for a positive self-development instead of a place of frustration and tension. She underlined that the main mission of education is to “nurture”, while the reality of things is that often contact with education translates into a first and forever traumatic experience of failure.

It would probably be high time to reflect on how well being at school may be fostered. The approach to well-being should be holistic and involve all participants in the education project – that is, not only the pupils but also the teachers and the parents.

The experiences that we saw that proved successful were in fact those working toward this aim.

Listening to real needs/the importance of emotions

Once again, we saw that **difficulties at school often have their roots outside of school**. It is extremely difficult to learn while being sick, hungry or having huge family or personal problems. It was actually incredible to see what part food and poor or unhealthy nutrition may have in school disadvantage. There is therefore the need for a comprehensive approach based on listening to pupils about their actual needs. Being listened to is indispensable – many pupils leave school in frustration because their needs and problems are neither understood or taken into account. **Trust and respect are fundamental**. It was highlighted several times that **emotional values and expectations** in relation to what the school represents and may offer are key elements in disadvantage. There is probably the need to reflect in a global way on well-being at school (well-being for pupils, teachers and families). In Youthreach, to praise good results, pupils would receive stars – and the director said that it was incredible to see 18 ys olds, with all sorts of tough experiences behind, in anxious hope of a star on the board. One of their conclusions was that encouragement works just as well, or much better, than sanctions.

Building bridges/partnerships

As exclusion and ESL are multifaceted problems, it is necessary to tackle them through **comprehensive strategies bridging different actors/"agencies"**. Partnerships at the local level seem to be highly effective ways to do that. It was said that policies should be conceived nationally but engineered locally.

Involvement of parents

Parents have a central role in the educational project. The largest part of learning actually takes place within the home. Therefore, a synergy between families and school is indispensable. The problem is that often disadvantaged parents are reluctant to get closer to the school, as they have themselves experiences of failure at school . Hence the importance of rebuilding trust between parents and schools.

Teachers

It was said that it is key that teachers are ambitious for students, and that they provide a structure. Like in almost all other MS, schools with a disadvantaged population suffer from a very high turnover of teachers (up to 50% per year in certain schools). However, in Youthreach, where the most difficult students are concentrated, there is no turnover at all. We analysed this a bit, but more analysis is needed. Reasons for staying in Youthreach vs normal schools might be the better pupils/teacher ratio (only 10 pupils per teacher), the feeling of belonging to a specific project (almost a mission), the team spirit. It was underlined that while in Youthreach the focus is on overcoming disadvantage, in normal schools teachers must work with "difficult" pupils but also ensure that highly performing pupils are not penalised – this can be a hard task.

There is now the intention of developing a closer co-operation between mainstream school and Youthreach, in order to allow for an exchange of views and methodologies.

Importance of leisure activities

All initiatives placed a great emphasis on extra-curricular activities: personal development, nutrition, sport, creativity (drama, music, art), excursions. There seemed to be a consensus on their importance in facilitating good relations and well-being within the school.

How to identify disadvantage?

In order to develop policies and to evaluate their efficiency, it is important to develop statistics and indicators, and to collect data. How to do this is something which we should analyse in depth through the Cluster. Concerning data, the Department of Education and Science is currently planning the development of a Primary Pupils Database, which will complement the already existing Post-Primary Pupil Database.

3.2. Some challenges/doubts

Participants also saw some challenges.

- Transferability of the Irish model? Participants were struck by the consensual approach of the actors and authorities involved. This enviable attitude seems to characterise Irish society, possibly facilitated by the small dimension of the country. It is not clear whether partnership mechanisms might work as well in other contexts.

- Involvement of parents. Some participants wondered whether activities such as home visits

would be acceptable in a different context. In particular, some found that engaging parents in a common project may be more difficult in the case of families of immigrant origin.

- Multiplicity of parallel interventions and the need for partnership: there are several programmes running in parallel to address problems of disadvantaged youth. This implies a multiplication of costs for staffing, managing the programme and co-ordination with other programmes so as to avoid overlapping. It may also be burdensome for disadvantaged families, who have to see a "long queue of people wanting to solve their problems". DEIS as an integrated framework actually aims to coordinate the interventions. On a positive note, the multiplicity of interventions has the advantage of inducing co-operation and co-ordination among actors.

- "Mainstreaming" Youthreach. Youthreach might be seen as a viable alternative to normal school. While all participants were enthusiastic about the programme itself, the perspective of enlarging it seemed rather controversial. They saw a big risk that schools would tend to push difficult children toward Youthreach in order to get rid of them. Thus, it might shift from a rather extraordinary alternative – where stigmatisation is somehow counterbalanced by the really extreme need – to a "mainstream" special school with lots of stigmatisation issues. On the other hand, the Youthreach coordinator actually thought that by having it more associated to the school, and by looking at it as a normal option rather than as an extreme remedy, stigmatisation should actually decrease rather than increase. Some participants thought that the change should instead take place within the school, so that the school becomes more similar to Youthreach. To be further discussed.

4. Comparison with experiences in other Member States

4.1. Comparison of two similar initiatives: Youthreach vs Sas (French Community of Belgium, visited during first PLA)

Youthreach and Sas are very similar and apparently equally successful initiatives. Both are second chance programmes for teenagers. Both mark their difference in respect to the school environment by being physically located out of school buildings, in more homely and reassuring settings. Both have a communal kitchen always accessible to pupils, just like in a house. Both focus on well being and on listening to the personal needs of young people. In both, staff has features that distinguish it from mainstream teaching staff: they seem to focus more on psychological and artistic competences than on academic ones.

There are however some substantial differences between the two, namely concerning the scope of the activity and the relation with mainstream school.

First of all, duration of stay and perspective. The basic principle of Sas (which means a space of transition) is to offer a sort of sabbatical period so as to allow pupils to explore other fields of activities (based on a project outlined in a contract between the Centre and the pupil). This is however a period that needs to be limited in time (no more than an academic year, that is max 9 months). The main objective is to reaccompany the pupil to mainstream school. Even though the pupils in Sas are not registered as school leavers, the period spent in Sas is not recognised as a year of education – when pupils go back to school, they would restart at the same point where they had left. The consideration behind this approach is the need to avoid stigmatisation linked to the attendance of a “different” sort of school.

Youthreach, instead, would provide formal education beside self-development activities, with the main objective of supporting pupils to pass the Leaving certificate. Duration of stay in Youthreach is longer (an average of 18 months). Besides, Youthreach is open longer than normal schools, and provides services also during summer months (pupils would be accompanied in holidays). Bringing pupils back to mainstream school happens but does not seem to be the main aim of the project.

The relation with mainstream school is thus a main difference between the two. The Sas philosophy is that academic education should take place within the school, and that the role of sas is to provide a complementary experience which may reinforce self esteem and therefore may equip pupils to eventually face more easily the challenges of school. The Youthreach perspective is that sometimes the traditional school model is just not appropriate, and that an alternative must be offered.

It is of course impossible to judge what the more efficient approach is.

Of course, stigmatisation is a very critical issue to be kept in consideration in relation to second-chance schools. A diploma awarded by a second-chance school risks being less worthy than one by a good mainstream school. In Ireland, however, the fact that the Leaving Certificate exams are managed at the national level eliminates much of this problem.

Sas is a recent initiative which still needs to be evaluated. A follow up of pupils when they go back to school could perhaps help to understand if the approach is successful in achieving school completion.

3.2 Other comparable experiences in Member States

On identification of disadvantage and collection of data on ESL:

Italy has established a registration system for young people who have dropped out of the education system so as to provide them guidance and tutoring .The services are locally managed by *the Employment Centres*. Now the aim is to integrate local databases so as to jave a national register of all young people aged 6 to 18. There are already some integrated databases at the regional level (Emilia Romagna).

Policy plans against ESL and educational disadvantage

In Hungary, the “*Out of the Last Bench*” project aims to reduce the number of students (often Roma) who are unreasonably labelled as disabled and to return them to classes with general curricula. For instance, in 2004, there were 2.100 children re-examined by independent specialists and 222 of them returned to mainstream classes. The non-culture -biased tests that are essential for the programme were standardized in 2005. As one of its main activities, the Public Employment Service organises trainings taking into account the special needs of target groups, supplemented by consultancy and career orientation.

Besides, in Hungary in June 2003 a modified Act on Vocational training has been passed by Parliament, focusing on the provision of vocational training and guidance with a specific focus on disadvantaged pupils.

In Turkey , the Ministry of Social and the Ministry of Education have launched a programme on *Reducing Social Risk*. The aim is to develop a social aid web in order to support poor children to access basic education services. A financial aid is given to underprivileged families at condition that they bring their children to school and to health services. Additional support is given to girls.

In Germany, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz) and the Conference of Ministers of Youth have developed a policy plan on "*Strengthening and further development of the overall context of education, instruction and care*", and they are strengthening their cooperation in the main fields of the transition from kindergarten to primary school, the development and enhancement of all-day support and supervision at schools, and support for children and adolescents with learning difficulties and social disadvantages. Schools and the youth work and youth welfare services

will intensify and further develop their cooperation in supporting children and adolescents with learning difficulties and social disadvantages. This applies in particular to the transition from schools to vocational training.

In Italy, the new Education Act (2003) prolonged compulsory education (defined as "right/duty") till the age of 18, with the aim to tackle educational disadvantage, social exclusion and early school leaving. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour have therefore defined with the Regions a pilot scheme of 3 years long education and training pathways, ensuring a diploma or a qualification (recognised at national level) for young people at risk of exclusion. Besides, Law 328/2000 focuses on the safeguard of minors and the prevention of exclusion through actions directly involving the school.

Developing partnerships on ESL:

In Spain, cooperation between all agents is one of the principles of the new Education Act (**LOE**). This includes cooperation through the *Conferencia Sectorial*, formed by representatives of the Ministry and each of the Autonomous Regions (C.C.A.A.), in order to achieve a common strategic framework detailing specific initiatives. The LOE envisages a systematic involvement of all key actors through developing partnerships at national, regional and local levels, as well as cooperation between local entities and private associations at different levels.

In Hungary, in January, 2003 a **national integration network** was created to support the integration of Roma children. After a one-year-long pilot program (with 45 schools) now more than 250 schools participate.

A project is being carried out by the German Youth Institute (DJI) on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Education and is co-financed by the European Social Fund, in which examples of practice in the field of preventing school fatigue and school refusal are being systematically recorded. On this basis, the DJI is organizing and moderating a network of projects from as many German *Länder* as possible with different approaches to collaboration between youth social work and schools. Tested approaches are being documented, disseminated and developed further within the framework of this network.

In France, the *general mission for vocational integration* aims at preventing dropping out after 16 years and providing a qualification. Young students at risk of dropping out are identified and meetings are systematically organised between students, the headmaster and the

teachers. It focuses on creating a more positive atmosphere around pupils and on supporting individual needs through personalised training.

Positive discrimination:

Belgium: we analysed the application of positive discrimination in the French community of Belgium during the first PLA (see PLA reports for details). Additional funding and staff resources are given to schools with a disadvantaged population, based on a specific project presented by the school. The differences between the Irish and the Belgian model seem to be primarily the allocation of funding to single schools (Belgium) or to clusters of schools (Ireland), and the focus on academic support (Belgium) or rather on extra-curricular activities (Ireland).

In France, affirmative action is a main instrument in favour of equal opportunities. It has been revisited since February 2006 (but it had been initially implemented in 1981). It is implemented through 249 networks « *ambition réussite* » ("aim: success"). Such networks propose projects, for instance focused on a different organisation of timetable, on bridging actions in transition years, on innovative pedagogies etc. In support of affirmative actions, schools receive additional teaching staff and a nurse per school. Pupils targeted by the action have a personal skills (abilities) book. Evening classes are organised after courses with an assistant and teacher. Vocational guidance is provided, in particular, to increase «ambition». Pupils received additional grants. Indicators of performance are inscribed in the financial law for affirmative action and take account of the differences between these networks of schools and the other schools for the acquired skills in French language and maths and the % of pupils who reach in the first class in the lower secondary class in time (without repetition).

In Spain, the second part of the new Education act is dedicated to **Equity in education**. The Act provides for measures for students with specific need of educational support. The Act also provides for compensatory measures for social inequalities in education through specific schooling measures establishing a series of priority criteria assuring that in the schooling process there will be no discrimination for birth, gender, religion, opinion or any other social or personal circumstance; equal opportunities in the rural areas (free school bus, lunch and boarding if needed); grants for those students with less favourable socio-economic conditions. In the post compulsory education levels these grants depend on students achievement. Compensatory education is a concept, not a programme as such. Therefore, it must be applied through all the educational system and in all the teaching and learning processes .

In Hungary, Children of disadvantaged social background may participate in a **capability development training** backed by a normative subsidy of 17 thousand, later 20 thousand HUF. Since September, 2003 an “**Integration normative**” – a per capita financial normative support aiming introduction of integrated education can be utilized in the classes 1, 5 and 9 of primary schools in an ascending system. Besides, the “**Tanoda**” programme (**Act on Public Education 95.§**) is a method facilitating the school success of disadvantaged children through afternoon activities outside the school.

In Turkey, **Supporting the Families with Low Income Project** is being carried out with the aim of providing development of the children who live in bad conditions, forming an atmosphere that they can increase their mental skills, creativeness, competencies and knowledge and developing the educational potential of their parents.

Collaboration between school and parents:

In Italy, a National Forum of Parents associations is being implemented and it contemplates the inclusion of immigrants parents in the Forum.

In Hungary, since 2003 Roma family coordinators have been working in primary schools as youth helpers and assistant teachers. Besides work they also participate in adult education and vocational training.

In France a system for early identification of possible disadvantage in educational achievements - in primary and early secondary school - has been implemented in 2005, aiming at preventing failure and tackling difficulties as soon as they arise. The programme is based on a formal commitment (registered in a document) between the pupil, his family and the pedagogical team.

In Spain, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Educational Administrations of the Regions continue to develop the P.R.O.A **Plan for Reinforcement, Guidance and Support**, which includes actions consisting of programmes of school support and reinforcement in primary and secondary schools. The main working aspects are attention to students and centre organisation, and intervention with families and relation with the environment (school absenteeism, extra-school activities, etc).

Second chance schools:

France has a long tradition of second chance education. At the moment there are two measures for different publics. On the one hand, there are temporary programs to cope with drop out and violent kids, who cannot be kept in class nor thrown out. These programs called « classes relais » or « ateliers relais » are organised jointly by the ministry for education with voluntary teachers and by the educational associations with experience of coping with disturbing people. They are generally implemented out of school in apartments welcoming a group of 6 to 8 with open and active methods to learning and to have social skills. The aim is to join again normal schools as soon as possible. On the other hand, there are second chance schools. The initiative was started in 1995 by Mrs Cresson. It caters to young ESL 18 – 25 years, volunteer and motivate, with the aim to let them acquire a qualification, as well as social skills. They are based on three principles : coaching; partnership with enterprises; active pedagogic methods.

In Germany, the Federal Government has launched the pilot programme "School Refusal – The 2nd Chance" which is funded under the European Social Fund as well as by the Federal Government.

Funding has been provided to local projects at 74 locations across Germany since 1 September 2006. These projects help school refusers to attend classes regularly and to thus considerably increase their opportunities for obtaining a school-leaving qualification and thus also a training place. These on-the-spot coordination offices provide young people with so-called Case Managers to support them. A total of initially 1,450 young people throughout Germany are to be given support in finding their way back into everyday life at school.

In Turkey, returning to school has been provided to the 10-14 aged children that are out of the education system in the frame of "Compensation Education". The students who become successful in this education system have the chance of continuing to their education by settling them to the classes according to their ages. 640.000 students have taken advantage of this education till the end of 2006.

In Hungary, there is a development of the network of vocational training institutions catering for the disadvantaged. The objective is to close the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged young people by creating a second chance institutional framework for dropouts.

In Spain, **social guarantee programmes** have provided a safety-net for low achievers by means a combination of basic education and vocational training. Students who leave school without obtaining the Certificate on **Secondary** Education receive intensive teaching support

through reduced class size and a high allocation of teachers(applicable until 2008/09). One step forward with the LOE is the implementation of the **PCPI** (Professional Initial Qualification Programmes) which will allow this group of students (ages 16 to 21) to get a vocational **certificate included in the Sistema Nacional de Cualificaciones** and give them the opportunity to obtain the Graduate on secondary education conditional upon the completion of a voluntary module within these programmes .