

# Transition from School to Employment

Main problems, issues and options faced by students with special educational needs in 16 European countries



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in 16 European countries**

**Summary Report**

**October 2002**



This report is an executive summary of the study "Transition from School to Employment" conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

Extracts from the document are permitted provided a clear reference of the source is given.

A comprehensive Internet-based transition information database with comparative national information from the 16 countries participating in the study, together with European and international information is available at [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

This report is available in fully manipulable electronic formats and in 12 other languages in order to better support access to the information.

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## **European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education**

### *Secretariat:*

Østre Stationsvej 33  
DK-5000 Odense C  
Denmark  
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20  
Fax: +45 64 41 23 03  
[secretariat@european-agency.org](mailto:secretariat@european-agency.org)

### *Brussels Office:*

3, Avenue Palmerston  
B- 1000 Brussels Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 280 33 59  
Fax: +32 2 280 17 88  
[brussels.office@european-agency.org](mailto:brussels.office@european-agency.org)

Web: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

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This report was prepared in close co-operation with:

Ms. Elisabetta BERNARDINI  
Mr. Alexander BÖHM  
Mr. Patrice BLOUGORN  
Ms. Gunvor BOLLINGMO  
Mr. Peter den BOER  
Mr. Harrie van den BRAND  
Ms. Maria Dolores CEBOLLADA  
Ms. Danielle CHOUKART  
Ms. Lesley DEE  
Ms. Eyglo EYJÓLFSDÓTTIR  
Ms. Jorun Buli HOLMBERG  
Mr. Markku JAHNUKAINEN  
Mr. Preben SIERSBAEK LARSEN  
Mr. João de LIMA PINHEIRO  
Ms. Claudia NIEDERMAIR  
Mr. Håkan NORDIN  
Mr. Leif THORSSON

Editor: Victoria SORIANO  
European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education



## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 TRANSITION.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2 RESULTS OF PREVIOUS WORK.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Main Problem Issues.....	14
<b>3 EUROPEAN AGENCY WORK.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4 RELEVANT ASPECTS AND FACTORS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1 Existence and Implementation of Policy and Practical Measures.....	20
4.2 Student Participation. Respect For Students' Personal Choices.....	22
4.3 Development of an Adequate Individual Educational Programme.....	24
4.4 Direct Involvement and Co-operation of All Parties Involved.....	26
4.5 Close Relationships between School and Labour Market.....	28
4.6 Transition to Employment is Part of a Long Process.....	30
<b>5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6 RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>7 REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>WORKING PARTNERS OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCY AND NATIONAL EXPERTS ON TRANSITION.....</b>	<b>44</b>

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## PREFACE

The most sincere gratitude is expressed to European Agency National Working Partners for their support and co-operation and to all the other practitioners involved who organised visits to their schools or training centres and provided documentation, as well as for their time spent contributing to the preparation of this document.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jørgen Greve', written in a cursive style.

Jørgen Greve  
Director



## INTRODUCTION

The topic “Transition from School to Employment” was selected by the European Agency member countries as a result of the perceived importance of this field and the shared interest regarding the problems related to training, qualifications and employment of young people with special educational needs.

One of the main concerns of this document is to highlight the direct involvement of practitioners in this field. Over 60 practitioners from 16 countries have shared their experiences and, thus, contributed with critical reflection upon their daily practice. This delicate exercise aimed at better defining existing problems – the *what* and *why* of the transition process – and identifying ways for improving practice – *how* should transition happen?

At the end of 1999, the European Agency carried out a review and analysis of the existing data and information at the European and International levels concerning training and employment issues for young people with special educational needs. This review provided the basis and framework for an analysis of national information provided by practitioners in the field of transition nominated from the 16 countries involved in this topic. National information was collected relating to existing policies, transition process implementation, problems and results. Practitioners were asked to provide relevant information relating to issues such as:

- Access to educational opportunities for young people with disabilities following compulsory education;
- The existence of transition programmes;
- The employment/unemployment situation for people with disabilities;
- The existence of legislation and policy measures regarding transition or actions in favour of employment;
- Both sensitive and positive elements in the national situations.

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In order to make national information more complete, a significant number of projects/ practices were selected for analysis — at least one or two per country. The projects covered initiatives in secondary schools, vocational training centres or similar types of educational settings dealing with students presenting any type of special need. No specific target group was aimed at, as the purpose was to have the widest possible view of the situation in different countries, respecting the national priorities expressed by the countries. Additionally, no selection was made according to the type of provision – mainstream or special. A short description covering two key areas was provided for each project:

- (a) What the project covered, how it proceeded and why (processes);
- (b) The results (outcomes).

With all this information to draw upon, practitioners participated in several study visits and working meetings involving different countries. The purpose was to identify similarities and differences of practice as well as to produce the first analysis – similarities and contradictions – evident in experiences that made it possible to highlight key aspects to be considered, reinforced or modified in the field of transition. The results of these study visits and working meetings can be found in the online Transition Database: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

The main aim of this document is to provide an overview of apparently effective strategies and processes, to provide a general analysis of relevant characteristics as well as frequently mentioned barriers and, finally, to identify significant factors in the transition process. The final section provides a set of recommendations addressed to policy makers and practitioners with regards to improvement of the transition process.

This overview document presents a summary of the main issues discussed by the participating practitioners during the last two years and aims to provide elements for reflection and future development at the political and professional levels.



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It is impossible to present a complete picture of all the information collected during this project in this document. For those interested in specific information relating to country situations and/or particular areas of interest, details can be found in the online Transition database on the European Agency website: [www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)

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# 1 TRANSITION

The concept of transition from school to employment or working life appears in several international documents with slightly different definitions. However, all definitions include three main ideas:

- 1) *Process* – in the sense of the preparatory work required and period of time necessary for transition;
- 2) *Transfer* - moving from one educational level or life step to the next;
- 3) *Change* – in terms of personal as well as professional situations.

The Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO 1994) states that

*young people with special educational needs should be helped to make an effective transition from school to adult working life. Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life (page 34).*

Transition is described in other documents – for example Pellisé et al. (1996) – as

*an on-going process of adaptation, involving many different variables or factors. It is a process that takes place permanently in one person's life with some critical moments such as entry to kindergarten, end of compulsory education or leaving the education stage (page 4).*

The International Labour Office defines transition as

*a process of social orientation that implies status change and role (e.g. from student to trainee, from trainee to worker and from dependence to independence), and is central to integration into society... Transition requires a change in relationships, routines and self-image. In order to guarantee a smoother transition from school to the workplace, young people with disabilities need to*



*develop goals and identify the role they want to play in society (pages 5 and 6).*

The OECD (2000) suggests that transition to working life is just one of the transitions that young people must make on the way to adulthood. In a lifelong learning context, the transition from initial education, whether upper secondary education or tertiary education, is seen as simply the first of many transitions between work and learning that young people will experience throughout their lives.

The Labour Force Survey (EC, 2000) argues that transition from school to work is not linear, that leaving education is not necessarily followed by the beginning of work. It is gradual and young people experience interspersed periods of studying and working.

Within the framework of the work developed by the European Agency for this topic, it appears that transition to employment is part of a long and complex process, covering all phases in a person's life, which needs to be managed in the most appropriate way. "A good life for all" as well as "a good job for all" are the ultimate goals of a successful overall transition process. The types of provision, or the organisation of schools or other education locations should not interfere with or impede the achievement of such a process. Transition from school to employment should imply the on-going participation of the student, involvement of their families, co-ordination between all the services involved and close co-operation with the employment sector (European Agency, 2001).



## 2 RESULTS OF PREVIOUS WORK

The first review and analysis of existing information at the European and international levels – focussing upon documents published between 1992 and 1999 and involving at least four countries - highlighted quite similar general questions:

- How can people with special needs be prepared for life as adults and as full members of our society? (Pericas et al. 1999)
- How can it be ensured that people with disabilities have access to relevant educational opportunities throughout their lives when they want to maximise their abilities to live independently? (Lauth et al. 1996)
- How can the number of young people leaving initial education and training without a minimum level of qualification be reduced? (Joint Employment Report, 1998).

A careful reading of documentation from the education as well as from the employment sectors shows that some of the main problem issues, highlighted in the majority of documents, are comparable. They may be raised from various perspectives, but can be interpreted as the “two faces” of the same coin. They underline close connections between the education and employment sectors. Problematic areas have an *internal impact* within one sector, but they also have an *external impact* on the other sector.

The following table summarises the problem areas highlighted, per sector, in almost all documents with short explanatory references. Differences concerning terms used by the different authors have been noted and used here.

Education and Training	Employment
1. High percentage of drop outs:	2. High rate of unemployment:
A large number of students start further education but a	People with disabilities are disadvantaged with respect to



<p>large proportion of them will never finish their studies. Even if data is not precise enough, it can be said that a large number of students with special needs do not achieve within the education programmes they are supposed to follow (OECD, 1997).</p>	<p>employment. The unemployment rate among people with disabilities is significantly - two to three times - higher than among the non-disabled: (ILO, 1998).</p>
<p>3. Low level access to education and training:</p> <p>Figures in Europe support the argument that people with disabilities are at a disadvantage on the open labour market, not because of an inherent incapacity associated with their disability, but due to their low level of access to education and training (ILO, 1998).</p>	<p>4. Low level access to employment:</p> <p>People with disabilities generally encounter more difficulties in obtaining employment and are more likely to remain unemployed for a long time (Lauth, 1996).</p> <p>Policies addressing the particular needs of people with disabilities seem to lack sufficient integration with other policy fields, in particular those related to the prevention of long-term unemployment and the adaptation of conditions to facilitate integration into working life (EC, 1998).</p>

<p>5. Lack of or limited qualifications:</p> <p>Low educational attainment and lack of qualifications have been cited as reasons for people with disabilities not being more successful in achieving employment. Current data reveals that many people with disabilities lack the appropriate qualifications for work (ILO, 1998).</p>	<p>6. Difficulties in facing changing working conditions:</p> <p>Working conditions are gradually changing. Employment growth requires an offensive strategy that promotes an increase in demand, rather than a defensive strategy. That requires investments in physical productive capacity, human resources, knowledge and skills (EC, 1996).</p>
<p>7. Underestimation of abilities:</p> <p>Teachers, parents and the public in general frequently underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities to take up competitive paid employment (UNESCO, 1994).</p>	<p>8. Negative attitudes of employers:</p> <p>There are still on-going stereotypes held by employers. Often, they lack a clear understanding of the qualifications and capacities of people with disabilities (ILO, 1998).</p>
<p>9. Vocational training is not always related to job practice:</p> <p>Vocational training needs more information on the skills demanded by employers. (EC, 1992).</p>	<p>10. Limited or missing contact with education</p> <p>Co-operation between education and employment is described by many publications as being very limited or non-existent.</p>



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More complete explanations are provided below with more detailed information about the characteristics of the problems highlighted in the various documents.

## **2.1 Main Problem Issues**

The main issues and difficulties identified through the literature search of documents on the topic of transition, can be grouped by theme into the following eight areas:

### 1. Data

Data in this field is very limited, so any comparison between countries is difficult. Despite differences, terms used by the countries – disabled or special needs students – the average population presenting special educational needs can be identified as 3 to 20% of young people under 20 years of age (European Agency, 1998; Eurybase, 1999).

### 2. Completion rates

In 1995, the percentage of young people from 20 to 29 years old without a final upper secondary school leaving qualification was around 30% (Eurostat). This percentage is even higher for students with special educational needs. It is difficult to estimate the number of pupils, who will leave education immediately after the compulsory phase, but it is possible to state that many will never go beyond compulsory education. Data - even if not precise enough - reveal that a large number of students with special educational needs start further education, but a large proportion will never finish secondary education (OECD, 1997). In some countries, almost 80% of adults with disabilities have either not progressed further than primary education or can be considered functionally illiterate (Lauth, 1996).

### 3. Access to education and training

In theory, students with special educational needs are presented with the same educational choices as other students,

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but in practice it is only programmes oriented towards social welfare or low paid work that are mainly offered to them (OECD, 1997). They are not necessarily interested in the choices proposed and education, as well as training programmes, is not always suited to their interests and needs. This places them in a disadvantageous position on the open labour market (ILO, 1998). Making educational programmes more relevant and adapted to students could be one solution for a number of different problems including those encountered in the transition phase (European Agency, 1999).

#### 4. Vocational preparation

Vocational training is often not related to real employment practices; it often takes place in segregated provision and it is not usually oriented towards complex professions. People with disabilities do not receive the appropriate qualifications required for employment; training initiatives need to be more tailored to the current demands of the labour market (ILO, 1998).

#### 5. Unemployment rates

The unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities is two to three times higher than among the non-disabled (ILO, 1998). National data from countries only includes registered unemployed people, but a high percentage of people with special needs are not registered - they don't have even a chance to obtain a first job (Lauth, 1996). Unemployment maintenance for people with disabilities has become the third highest item of social protection expenditure, after old age pensions and health expenditure (EC Employment, 1997). Employment growth requires an offensive strategy – an active policy - that promotes an increase in demand, rather than a defensive strategy – or passive policy. This requires investments in physical productive capacity, human resources, knowledge and skills. In this sense, young people with disabilities should have a proactive role in planning their own future (EC, 1998).

#### 6. Expectations and attitudes



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All documents agree on this issue. Teachers, parents, employers as well as the public in general underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities. Co-operation is very important to develop a realistic view of a student's skills in all sectors of education (European Agency, 1999), including during transition to work.

### 7. Work place accessibility

There are still problems related to physical accessibility to work places, as well as access to personal and technical support. Information and support to employers is also a key issue referred to in many documents.

### 8. Implementation of existing legislation

Legal frameworks regarding transition to employment in some countries are absent, or they may lead to an inflexible system. Setting employment quotas as a support measure in favour of the employment of people with disabilities seems to present some failure regarding application and enforcement. Most countries have a combination of measures in place that are perceived to be effective to differing degrees. There are no examples where quota systems achieve their targets. However, supporters of this system point out that resources released by levies or fines permit other employment development measures.

Anti-discrimination legislation also presents problems. At times there is the impression that such legislation is more about communicating messages to people with disabilities and to employers than about providing effective remedies for individuals (ECOTEC, 2000).

All documents and information referred to above provided a solid basis for the discussions conducted by the practitioners during the study visits and working meetings. The next section provides an overview of the results of those discussions.

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### 3 EUROPEAN AGENCY WORK

The analysis within the European Agency Transition project has been limited to the education sector – the aim being to try to go deeper and better understand previously identified issues. Difficulties highlighted by the employment sector and their impact on education have always been kept in mind, as has the effect of education measures upon further employment possibilities for students with special needs. However, it should be noted that the aim of this document is not to provide an in-depth reflection on employment policies and measures. In this sense, analysis of transition in the different countries has mainly focussed on concrete aspects related to education situations. Employment measures or tendencies are only referred to in a widest sense whenever necessary.

Key issues outlined in the first review were used as a starting point for collecting and updating national information on transition, which is now available in the European Agency database. The practitioners from the 16 countries involved in the discussions on transition considered that the eight areas presented in the previous chapter are still problematic. That said, representatives of all countries suggested that some developments have been made concerning improved employment situations and qualification rates and opportunities for students with special needs. These developments mainly relate to local situations in which local projects are established in order to overcome existing difficulties.

Within the European Agency project, a number of exchanges of transition practitioners from various countries were organised, during which the practitioners discussed their daily practice. As a result of those exchanges, it appeared that six areas required a more in-depth analysis. Those areas are listed and briefly explained below.

- Student involvement in the transition process: how should this process be organised in order to place the student at the centre of it? This included issues related to:
  - a) Guidance and assessment,



- b) Development of Individual Educational Programmes,
  - c) Families' involvement.
- Models of transition: types of models used in different countries for implementation of transition from school to employment. The key issues included:
    - a) Strategies developed and implemented for training students in real job situations,
    - b) Strategies implemented for establishing contact with employers and companies,
    - c) Special focus being placed upon the “dual system”: theoretical education combined with practical training in work places.
  - Accreditation: types of qualifications and certificates awarded to students. The main issues related to:
    - a) Content and value of qualifications and certificates; the type of response to academic and employment requirements,
    - b) The role of “intermediary” qualifications,
    - c) Recognition of certificates, (this particularly concerned students with moderate and severe learning difficulties).
  - Support: types of support measures provided in the transition from school to work. Discussions dealt with:
    - a) Objectives and roles of the different support measure,
    - b) Identification of existing overlaps and duplication amongst them.
  - Networking: kinds of services involved in addition to education; the types of relationships they have and the effectiveness of co-operation between them.
  - Policy and practical measures: existing types of “facilitating” measures, if any, present in the countries

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and the degree of their implementation. Discussions dealt with:

- a) Impact of measures such as quota systems in the employment of people with disabilities,
- b) The reasons for limited impact of these measures in some countries,
- c) The extent to which some social measures may actually reinforce discrimination.

These issues formed the basis of the group's discussions from which general aspects and key factors were highlighted. These are reported in next section and illustrated by examples of different practice provided by the countries.



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## 4 RELEVANT ASPECTS AND FACTORS

This chapter describes the key aspects for consideration in the field of transition emerging from the results of the work developed by the different practitioners participating in this project. Discussions were based on the six areas described in the previous chapter: 1) student involvement in the transition process; 2) transition models; 3) accreditation; 4) support measures; 5) networking; 6) policy and practical measures.

The results highlighted that transition to employment is a complex process and special attention should be paid to a number of particular aspects of this process:

- a) The existence and implementation of policy and practical measures;
- b) The participation of students and respect for their personal choices;
- c) The development of an adequate individual educational programme;
- d) The direct involvement and co-operation of all actors involved: family, practitioners and services;
- e) The need for a close working relationship between education and employment services.

In the following section, each aspect is presented with: a short definition, an identification of the main factors acting as barriers and those facilitating a successful transition process. Factors will be illustrated with examples provided by different descriptions of practice or discussion between practitioners. Examples (in italics) are only mentioned here: for more detailed information readers should refer to the European Agency Online Transition Database ([www.european-agency.org](http://www.european-agency.org)), the Practices, Official Publications and Country Overviews sections.

### 4.1 Existence and Implementation of Policy and Practical Measures

Legislation, leading to policy and practical measures, is necessary for supporting the implementation of a successful

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transition process, as well as protecting young people's rights to being full members of the society. Governments provide and offer different possibilities, but implementation of legislation is often difficult.

*Barriers:*

- Lack of co-ordination: different sectors may try to implement measures that could be positive individually, but conflict with existing policies or practical measures from other sectors.
- Passive policies: some social measures (such as early social security or benefit schemes) can restrict initiatives in favour of autonomy and employment. It is necessary to use every possible means in order to find a job before benefits are offered as an easy solution.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Implementation of flexible policies coming from legislation: in some countries policy is flexible and provides various possibilities for the field of transition. However, legislation needs to be implemented through concrete actions and measures (see the Transition Planning in the United Kingdom practice, UK1 *East of England Region*).
- Flexible measures: there is a need for flexibility in measures relating to benefits that are relevant to the real situation – possibilities and requirements - of each person. Equal rights and opportunities cannot be distorted in favour of or against people with disabilities (see Official Publication section, *Active Employment Policies and Labour Integration of Disabled People: Estimation of the Net Benefit*).
- National regulations: there is a need for mandatory regulations governing the preparation of transition plans for all young people, rather than a reliance on individual schools and local initiatives (see Country Overview section, *France*)



- Local projects: support for local projects seems to achieve better results than national initiatives directed by National level policy, as local projects are less constrained by policy dictating services and closer to the practical realities of individual situations (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section)
- Employers' information: employers need to be informed about existing legislation and policy measures - and the possible benefits for them - in order to extend and improve their own involvement (see Country Overview section, *Sweden*).
- Voluntary organisations: an important role is played by voluntary organisations that work with and for people with disabilities, to promote their interests with policy makers. The possibility that some groups of young people run the risk of exclusion as nobody is lobbying for them must be avoided (see Practices Section, Italy, IT2, *La Lega Del Filo D'Oro*).

#### **4.2 Student Participation. Respect For Students' Personal Choices**

Participation implies that the student, their family and practitioners work together to formulate an individual educational plan. This will involve, as part of the process, negotiating a plan that respects students' personal choices and opens up rather than closes down possibilities for them. The student, as well as their family, needs to feel they are a full part of the transition planning process.

##### *Barriers:*

- Over-protection: this is one of the main negative elements. It concerns all people with special needs, but more specifically, people with learning disabilities. Over-protection here is referred to in relation to practitioners and students' families. As a result of over-protection,

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student's personal choice becomes more limited.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Young people's aspirations and wishes: the starting point for planning transition programmes should be the young person's own aspirations and perceived needs. These should form the basis of subsequent individual transition plans which may include renegotiating and re-thinking goals which were unrealistic (see Practices Section, Norway, NO2, *Erik*).
- Students and parents' involvement: formal meetings with practitioners should be conducted in ways that ensure that students' and families' contributions are listened to and respected. Young people and their families can also be supported to develop a plan for the future through circles of support. These are community-based groups made up of close family members and friends and also key practitioners, led by a trained, skilled facilitator. The group may meet on a regular basis in the young person's own house. Once a plan has been developed the young person and the parents can present it at formal meetings at school or elsewhere. Sometimes these circles can help young people to find jobs (see Practices section, Austria, AT8, *Spagat*).
- Clear educational strategies: should be developed by the school to ensure students' participation. The educational plan needs to be designed, its content to be provided and a follow up needs to be planned in such a way as to make students actively involved, stimulating them to make decisions concerning further developments as well as evaluation (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section).
- Profile of competences: the student's abilities need to be well documented and this involves the students themselves in identifying their skills and necessary competences, which should be closely related to their abilities. Students should have as many opportunities as



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possible to have practical experiences of different professional fields in order to better understand their abilities and capacities. Objective tools for assessment will help to address this issue (see Practices section, Spain, ES1, *Perez Urruti*).

- Open options and clear information: students are directly concerned about important issues other than those associated with school or education and training: housing, leisure and social opportunities; employment; financial benefits and sources of support and continuous education also need to be provided. Information has to be provided in a clear and co-ordinated way in order for the students, as well as their families, to make choices concerning their future life and any other issue they are concerned about (see Practices section, Denmark, DK1, *Via*).

### **4.3 Development of an Adequate Individual Educational Programme**

It is necessary to develop an individual education programme in collaboration with the student and their parents focussed not only on the student's progress, but also on any changes to be made in their school experience. Countries highlighted a distinction between an *individual educational programme*, which is more broad and educational oriented and a *transition plan* – more centred on transition matters and related to adult life and employment. Both need to be closely inter-related.

#### *Barriers:*

- Content: Individual educational programmes are mainly academic in orientation. If mentioned, personal and social aspects seem not to play a significant role.
- Accreditation: in some cases official certificates are not awarded to students, presenting them with inequality in opportunities. There are contradictions evident between qualifications obtained and certificates awarded, which is

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still an obstacle for securing a job with equal salary in comparison to other employees. Qualifications are mainly based on an evaluation of practical, general and social skills and attitudes, which does not always correspond to what is expected in terms of achievement after obtaining a formal certificate.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Individual transition plan: this needs to be included in the individual educational programme and be based upon a student's motivation and wishes. It should also include:
  - Competences – general, specific or individual - to be acquired,
  - Qualifications to be obtained,
  - Work possibilities and perspectives to be considered.

The transition plan needs to be constantly reviewed.

The transition plan has to ensure the involvement of everyone concerned, as well as clarify their responsibilities. It should provide:

- A clear analysis of the student's possibilities and a consequent career plan,
- Preparation for real job situation experience and
- A follow up at the work place.

Transition planning must be reviewed at agreed intervals and changed according to the needs and development of the student (see Practices section, Portugal, PO3, *Escola EB23 de Carteado Mena*).

- Regular evaluation: the individual educational programme needs to be regularly evaluated: self-evaluated by the student, in order to ensure that students are in the centre of the transition process and also evaluated by the practitioners involved. All results from this review should be recorded in a written form (see Practices section, Finland, FI2, *Kurikka*).
- Multidisciplinary approach: the development of the



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individual educational programme is the result of the teamwork of all parties involved (see Practices section, Germany, DE4, *AVJ*).

- Development of a *portfolio*: the individual transition plan needs to function as a portfolio or as an agenda, managed by the student, containing all kinds of proposals, modifications and results. It should also reflect a student's strengths and needs. It needs to be compiled by schools, families and employers or companies (see Practices section, Belgium (French), BF1, *Amay*).
- Certificates: have to reflect students' achievements and qualifications and should have real recognition which would allow students to move to other jobs or placements. Not all jobs need a formalised certificate; modular training systems approved by employers seem to provide a good solution (see Practices section, the Netherlands, NL1, *NPO*).
- Equal opportunities: the individual transition plan needs to ensure equal opportunities concerning any difference of gender, culture or geographical area (see Practices section, Finland, FI3, *Helsinki City College of Culinary, Fashion and Beauty*).

#### **4.4 Direct Involvement and Co-operation of All Parties Involved**

The co-operation between all parties involved – family, schools, employers, trade unions, support services, vocational schools – is of great importance. Their role and involvement will vary according to the phase of the student's life.

##### *Barriers:*

- Lack of training: different actors are not prepared for co-operation and sharing responsibilities

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- Lack of clear rules: even if there are efforts made in some countries, services seem to hesitate in taking initiatives; clear rules are missing and, as a result, networks function inefficiently.
  - Lack of communication: the involvement of parents in some cases can be perceived as problematic as their expectations differ from students' and schools' expectations. It is necessary to establish efficient ways of sharing information and communicating.
  - Lack of shared, common language and definitions: different services use different terms and definitions to define who qualifies for support during the transition process.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Existence of a support network: that ensures co-operation between all individuals, organisations and services involved - wherever they are located – and where one of the services involved accepts a clear co-ordination role (see Practices section, Austria, AT1, *The Social Network*).
- Definition of tasks: a clear definition of tasks of every person or service involved needs to be discussed, provided and guaranteed. However, this needs to be linked to flexibility for initiatives to be established that set up and/or co-ordinate networks. Any shared type of support also needs to be agreed and well established (see Practices section, Belgium (Flemish), BNL1, *Gemeentelijk Buso*).
- Re-enforcing Career Guidance Services: the role and the resources allocated to these services or their equivalents needs to be reinforced. The role of these services should be mainly focussed on the problems of students more than of enterprises. They should also advise families on social benefits or any other matter the families are concerned with (see Practices section, Austria, AT2,



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*Alpha Nova Compass*).

- Further training: the different parties involved need to be prepared for further, future co-operation and sharing of responsibilities (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section).
- Involvement of employers and employment organisations: employers and trade unions need to be more active and present in this co-operation in order to ensure better employment chances for young people (see Practices section, Germany, DE2, *Berufsausbildungswerk Mittelfranken*).

#### **4.5 Close Relationships between School and Labour Market**

Students need to experience real working conditions. The main aim is to promote self-confidence and autonomy, to verify real expectations of students and to ensure in all cases future jobs. Experts highlighted that practical training in companies during school time is the best option to allow students to have real contact with enterprises and with the open labour market. It also helps students to make decisions in relation to existing possibilities within the labour market.

Schools and the labour market have to increase co-operation between each other. As far as schools are concerned, they need to follow developments and changes of conditions occurring in the labour market.

*Barriers:*

- Closed systems: schools and companies belong to different “worlds”, use different language and working methods and have different aims. They both need to get to know each other better by sharing concerns, respecting and understanding the differences they have within pursuit of their shared goal i.e. mutual benefit.

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- Schooling pre-determines post-school possibilities: at times it seems that schooling mainly prepares students for one single course: this often appears to be sheltered employment. Pre-determined options will act as barriers to the personal and professional development of students. In this sense, vocational schools often impede educational access for students with special needs because their programmes are not adapted and individualised.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Building networks: in order to improve links between both sectors, an effective option could be to build networks. These networks could be social or professional, including those such as parents' organisations (see Practices section, France, FR1, *DJINH, Dispositif Jeunes Insertion Handicap*).
- Establishing creative measures: aimed at finding ways and strategies to overcome negative attitudes within the labour market. Schools should develop contacts with enterprises and show them how some schools have proceeded in order to integrate students with disabilities (see Practices section, Portugal, PO1, *Projecto PROACT, escola Basica 2/3 de S. Pedro do Sul*).
- Extending dual systems: the principle of combining theory in school with practice in companies (dual system) appears to be efficient and needs to be implemented for all students (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section).
- Organising flexible training measures: for example setting up preparatory years before proceeding to training during employment; setting up an extra vocational year before looking for a job; extending vocational training as long as needed; providing vocational training in different modules; providing 6 months work-based training for all students as an integral part of their three year vocational education and



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training (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section, specifically, see Germany, DE3, *BO10 - Berufsorientierender Lehrgang in Kooperation mit Betrieben der freien Wirtschaft*).

- Improving cross sector communication: opening up the school to the employment sector by bringing people from the labour market into school to talk about job possibilities with students and practitioners (see Practices section, Norway, NO3, *Hordalandsmodellen*).
- Job databank: a data bank, in which job offers are available seems to help students with making choices (see *Aetat Service* in the Norwegian Practice NO3 *Hordalandsmodellen*).
- Follow up: schools need to follow students, at least for a time, when they enter working life to keep track of how they are doing. Follow-up can be used as a kind of evaluation tool to provide schools as well as the network with the information needed to make adjustments and/or adaptations to their programmes. Assessment of students' achievements and the quality of work done can influence the employer's decision to keep and increase work places within the enterprise (*multiplicator effect*) (see Practices section, the Netherlands, NL1, *NPO – A Job for Every Pupil*).
- Support measures: personal and material, financial and technical resources are needed to support not only employees, but also employers (see Practices section, Greece, EL1, *Margarita*).

#### **4.6 Transition to Employment is Part of a Long Process**

Individuals face different transitions during their lives. Transition from school to employment is one of those critical periods: the preparation and facilitation of young people to enter economic and adult life. It is part of a complex process that needs be organised in a simple, clear and transparent way in order to

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allow students to progress from education to employment by identifying and overcoming barriers or difficulties they encounter.

*Barriers:*

- Rigid structures and/or procedures of the educational system: rigid assessment procedures, poorly co-ordinated transfer between schools and later on to employment impedes a good transition process.
- Structural barriers: different funding and administrative structures within educational systems and competition as well as lack of co-operation between services, often serve as sources of difficulty.
- Legal barriers: different legislative systems in education or contradictory legislation directing different services, also prevents a successful process of transition.

*Facilitating factors:*

- Early process: schools need to start as early as possible to prepare students for transition to adult life, including employment. This process cannot be started at the end of compulsory education (see Practices section, Sweden, SE1, *The Employability Institute*).
- Adequate guidance: an appropriate guidance programme has to be ensured during the transition process (examples can be found in every item listed in the Practices section).
- Flexible support: support for the student needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to individual circumstances and needs and to extend beyond the school-leaving phase (see Practices section, the United Kingdom, UK2, *Oaklands College*).
- “Advocate” or reference person: a specific professional has to be in charge and should act as reference and support during the transition process for as long as



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possible. This person needs to be mainly based in school and has to be a key member of the team that develops the transition plan (see Practices section, Luxembourg, LU2, *LTC - Lycée Technique du Centre*).

- Follow up: in order to guarantee a successful transition process, it is necessary to ensure follow up for students after they leave school (see Practices section, the Netherlands, NL2, *NW-Veluwe*).

Although the different factors highlighted in the report are listed here as separate factors, this is rarely the case in reality. These factors are very much inter-related and sometimes it is difficult to analyse one of them without considering others.

In general, they can be described as *simple* and *complex* factors. *Simple* factors are those that are clearly defined without chance of confusion when used to describe a situation. This is the case with, for example, the term equal opportunities when applied as a circumstance to be ensured within transition.

The majority of factors are *complex*. Within these, two types can be further identified: *reversible* – for example when a positive situation can be changed to a negative one and vice versa – and *combined* factors - when two factors can hardly be disassociated. “Flexible measures” is an example of an reversible factor, as it expresses a positive situation that easily can be changed to negative if, for example, no such flexibility is in place or if the flexibility is misused. The individual transition plan is a good example of a combined factor, as it cannot easily be disassociated from other factors such as, for example, “regular evaluation”.

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## 5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report has tried to address three areas:

- 1) **Main problems** faced by students with special needs, their families and practitioners regarding transition from school to employment. This question was approached through an examination of existing documentation at the European and International levels. Problems, raised by the education and employment sectors are quite consistent and inter-related. The main problem issues identified by both sectors focus upon:
  - How to reduce or prevent high numbers of education dropouts and unemployed young people;
  - How to increase access to quality education and training;
  - How to provide the right qualifications, which would correspond to the young person's abilities and allow them to adequately face adult and working life
  - How to stimulate improved contact and mutual understanding between the education and employment sectors.
  
- 2) **Key aspects** that need to be considered in the field of transition, taking into account existing problems. This area was investigated through discussion and analysis of the documentation provided by different practitioners from the 16 countries involved in the project. Six key aspects emerged with regards to the concept of transition:
  - a) Transition is a process that must be supported by the existence and implementation of legislation and policy measures.
  - b) Transition needs to ensure student participation and respect the personal choice of the student. The student, their family and practitioners must work together to formulate an individual plan.
  - c) Transition needs to include the development of an individual educational plan focussed on the student's



progress and on any change to be made in the school situation.

- d) Transition must be based upon the direct involvement and co-operation of all parties concerned.
  - e) Transition requires close co-operation between schools and labour market, in order for the students to experience real working conditions.
  - f) Transition is part of a long and complex process preparing and facilitating young people to enter into economic and adult life.
- 3) **Main factors** which seem to either facilitate or prevent the implementation of a successful transition process at the practical level. These factors were identified from local practices selected by different practitioners. Genuine transition situations highlighted a range of factors that facilitated a more detailed description of the six aspects outlined above. These factors seem to act either as barriers to, or as facilitators of a successful process of transition. The description of the factors shows that very few of them correspond to factual and simple situations – *simple* factors. The majority correspond to complex and inter-related situations – *complex* factors.

The analysis of the three areas listed above has resulted in the identification of recommendations for the future of transition. These are presented in the next section. They are addressed to policy makers and practitioners and aim to provide guidance on how to improve the development and implementation of the process of transition.

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## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations listed below are addressed to policy makers and practitioners. Recommendations at the policy level are to be considered as guidelines to be implemented by countries at national, regional and local levels.

Recommendations are based on aspects and factors listed in previous sections and try to highlight practical actions that need to be undertaken in order to facilitate transition from school to employment for young people with disabilities.

### **Existence and Implementation of Policy and Practical Measures**

#### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Promote and/or effectively improve co-ordinated policies between different services, avoiding the creation of new legislation that is in contradiction to or overlapping with existing legislation.
- Ensure concrete measures for the effective implementation of adopted legislation, in order to avoid differences and/or discrimination as a result of unequal human or technical resources.
- Systematically consult, taking into consideration and respecting the opinions expressed by voluntary organisations working with and for people with disabilities.
- Search for and promote active policies in order to reinforce employment and personal autonomy.
- Ensure more focussed control and evaluation of any “facilitating” measures in favour of people with disabilities, such as quota systems, tax facilities, etc. and ensure the effective functioning of services at national, regional and local levels.
- Ensure the availability extensive information concerning any legal or policy measure addressed to employers.
- Ensure the creation of local networks, involving all the partners in order to implement national policy.



### ***Recommendations at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Receive all necessary information, strategies and skills in order to implement existing legislation and ensure there is an adequate methodology for applying it.
- Regularly evaluate local innovative projects and disseminate their results in order to achieve a *facilitator* effect.
- Set up a local network in which all partners (employment, social, educational services and families) are represented, in order to discuss, plan and implement the national policy.
- Have convenient methods for communicating their needs to administrators whenever new measures are being implemented.

### **Student Participation. Respect for Students' Personal Choices**

#### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Provide the necessary resources (time and budget) to the schools in order for them to implement work with the student and their families.
- Ensure that resources have been used effectively in order to guarantee this collaborative task is achieved.

#### ***Recommendations at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Have and spend the necessary time with the student and their families in order to better understand their wishes and needs.
- Develop a written transition plan, as early as possible, open to the student, their families and practitioners involved at further stages in and outside school.
- Modify and adapt the transition plan at any time that is needed in co-operation with the student.
- Encourage the student as much as possible to discover

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- his/her own skills and competences.
  - Provide students and their families with as much information as they might need, or direct them to the competent services.
  - Ensure the individual education plan and the individual transition plan is in an accessible format for students with for example, limited reading abilities.

## **Development of an Adequate individual Educational Programme**

### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Provide schools with the necessary resources to ensure that individual educational programmes are developed. In particular, teachers should have sufficient time and receive the necessary guidance for their tasks.
- Ensure that a transition programme is included in the individual educational programme.
- Provide quality standards concerning individual educational programmes.
- Ensure that qualifications achieved by students are reflected in the certificates they obtain and that any discriminatory situation is avoided.

### ***Recommendations at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Ensure that the student is at the centre of the process of developing an individual education plan and an individual transition plan.
- Receive the necessary help in order to develop an individual educational programme as a team based task.
- Ensure the individual educational programme is regularly evaluated by the student, the family as well as by the in and outside school practitioners involved using a written format.
- Develop from the outset a “portfolio” or equivalent tool, in order to keep in one fixed place the individual educational programme and a record of all the changes introduced.

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- The portfolio should include an assessment of attitudes, knowledge, experience and the core (main) skills relevant to the student (e.g. academic, practical, daily living, leisure, self-determination and communication).

## **Direct Involvement and Co-operation of All Parties Involved**

### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Ensure practical measures for co-operation between services, as well as ensure a follow-up of this co-operation.
- Establish clear responsibilities to be allocated amongst services in order to ensure effective co-ordination.
- Ensure an evaluation of co-ordination as well as of distribution of responsibilities in order to introduce any required changes.
- Ensure that all services fulfil their obligations and participate in the co-ordination task.
- Motivate employers and trade unions through specific measures to be directly involved.
- Policy makers should encourage co-operation and co-ordination between all departments involved at the national level.

### ***Recommendations at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Have an efficient support network to which other practitioners can address their demands for support and information.
- Have official recognition (in terms of budget or at least in terms of time) for the co-ordination tasks required by other services.
- Receive further training in order to better define tasks within the framework of co-ordination and to learn how to share responsibilities.

## **Close relationships between the School and the Labour**

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## **Market**

### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Ensure that all young people experience real working conditions.
- Guarantee access to some type of practical training for all students respecting the different needs they might have.
- Organise flexible training measures, for example, setting up preparatory periods before getting trained on the job.
- Promote formal and informal incentives for companies (e.g. tax reductions, social recognition, etc.) to encourage them to provide working-learning places for young people.
- Emphasise and demonstrate the mutual benefits possible through evaluation of good transition examples.
- Involve employers in these types of initiatives, in co-operation with employment services, by means of information campaigns; networks of employers and trade unions.
- Recognise the need for formal co-operation between education and employment services.
- Provide resources available for the on-going professional development of teachers.

### ***Recommendations at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Be open to and better informed about labour market possibilities.
- Have time to visit enterprises, to organise meetings with them as well as with other services from the employment sector, provide the means for in-company training periods for teachers in order to keep them in touch with daily practice.
- Acquire the competences available in the school for making contacts and arrangements with companies.
- Invite practitioners from the employment sector to educational settings in order to meet students as well as educational staff members.



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- Ensure follow-up for students after leaving school.

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## **Transition to Employment is Part of a Long Process**

### ***Recommendations at the policy level***

Policy makers should:

- Put into place all the necessary measures in order to ensure a successful transition process, identifying and solving barriers or difficulties to this process.
- Avoid rigid educational procedures (e.g. regarding assessment).
- Facilitate co-operation between and within services and recognise the time spent by practitioners in co-operation and co-ordination tasks.
- Ensure the development of transition plans early enough in a student's school career, not just at the end of compulsory education.
- Recognise the need for one specific professional to act as an *advocate* or reference person and support for the student in the transition process.

### ***Recommendation at the practical level***

Practitioners should:

- Use efficient means in order to facilitate this process (e.g. adequate guidance, flexible support, good co-ordination etc.); the time spent on these duties needs to be officially formalised and recognised.

Practitioners, policy makers and representatives of employers and trade unions involved in this project came to the conclusion that the implementation of the suggested recommendations would undoubtedly improve the process of transition and minimise problems that students currently face when they leave school and are confronted with issues related to securing employment.

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## **Working Partners of the European Agency and National Experts on Transition**

### **Austria**

Ms. Irene MOSER [irene.moser@aon.at](mailto:irene.moser@aon.at)  
(Working Partner)

Ms. Claudia NIEDERMAIR [claudia.niedermair@magnet.at](mailto:claudia.niedermair@magnet.at)

Ms. Judith PANNOS [judith.pannos@ssr-wien.gv.at](mailto:judith.pannos@ssr-wien.gv.at)

### **Belgium (NL)**

Mr. Theo MARDULIER [theo.mardulier@ond.vlaanderen.be](mailto:theo.mardulier@ond.vlaanderen.be)  
(Working Partner)

Mr. Ludo VLAMINCKX [dbo@vlaanderen.be](mailto:dbo@vlaanderen.be)

Ms. Maria CREVE [dbo@vlaanderen.be](mailto:dbo@vlaanderen.be)

### **Belgium (FR)**

Ms. Thérèse SIMON [therese.simon@skynet.be](mailto:therese.simon@skynet.be)  
(Working Partner)

Ms. Danielle CHOUKART [danielle.choukart@cfwb.be](mailto:danielle.choukart@cfwb.be)

### **Denmark**

Mr. Poul Erik PAGAARD [poul.erik.pagaard@uvm.dk](mailto:poul.erik.pagaard@uvm.dk)  
(Working Partner)

Mr. Preben SIERSBAEK LARSEN [siersbaek@uvm.dk](mailto:siersbaek@uvm.dk)

### **Finland**

Ms. Minna SAULIO [minna.saulio@oph.fi](mailto:minna.saulio@oph.fi)  
(Working Partner)

Mr. Touko HILASVUORI [touko.hilasvuori@minedu.fi](mailto:touko.hilasvuori@minedu.fi)

Ms. Eija EL DAOUK [eija.eldaouk@edu.hel.fi](mailto:eija.eldaouk@edu.hel.fi)

Mr. Markku JAHNUKAINEN [markku.jahnukainen@hamk.fi](mailto:markku.jahnukainen@hamk.fi)

### **France**

Mr. Pierre Henri VINAY [cnefei-diradj@education.gouv.fr](mailto:cnefei-diradj@education.gouv.fr)

Ms. Nel SAUMONT [brex@cnefei.fr](mailto:brex@cnefei.fr)

(Working Partners)

Mr. Patrice BLOUGORN [brex@cnefei.fr](mailto:brex@cnefei.fr)

### **Germany**

---

Ms. Anette HAUSOTTER [a.hausotter@t-online.de](mailto:a.hausotter@t-online.de)  
(Working Partner)  
Mr. Alexander BÖHM [alexboehm@odn.de](mailto:alexboehm@odn.de)  
Mr. Ernst SCHULTE [schulte@rwb-essen.de](mailto:schulte@rwb-essen.de)

### **Greece**

Mr. Konstantinos KARAKOIDAS [t08dea1@ypepth.gr](mailto:t08dea1@ypepth.gr)  
(Working Partner)  
Ms. Venetta LAMPROPOULOU [spedu@pi-schools.gr](mailto:spedu@pi-schools.gr)  
Ms. Stavroula POLYCHRONOPOULOU  
[polychronopoulou@geniki.gr](mailto:polychronopoulou@geniki.gr)  
Ms. Eleni MATHIOTOPOULOU [eurydice@ypeth.gr](mailto:eurydice@ypeth.gr)

### **Iceland**

Ms. Bryndis SIGURJÓNSDOTTÍR [brysi@ismennt.is](mailto:brysi@ismennt.is)  
(Working Partner)  
Ms. Eyglo EYJÓLFSDÓTTIR [eyglo.eyjolfsdottir@mrn.stjr.is](mailto:eyglo.eyjolfsdottir@mrn.stjr.is)

### **Italy**

Ms. Paola TINAGLI [paola.tinagli@istruzione.it](mailto:paola.tinagli@istruzione.it)  
(Acting Working Partner)  
Ms. Lucia DE ANNA [Deanna@iusm.it](mailto:Deanna@iusm.it)  
Ms. Elisabetta BERNARDINI [bettabernardini@libero.it](mailto:bettabernardini@libero.it)

### **Luxembourg**

Ms. Jeanne ZETTINGER [srea@pt.lu](mailto:srea@pt.lu)  
(Working Partner)  
Ms. Pia ENGLARO [srea@pt.lu](mailto:srea@pt.lu)  
Ms. Monique KRIER [srea@pt.lu](mailto:srea@pt.lu)

### **Netherlands**

Mr. Sip Jan PIJL [s.j.pijl@ppsw.rug.nl](mailto:s.j.pijl@ppsw.rug.nl)  
(Working Partner)  
Mr. Peter DEN BOER [pdb@stoas.nl](mailto:pdb@stoas.nl)  
Mr. Harrie van den BRAND [vdbrand@tref.nl](mailto:vdbrand@tref.nl)

### **Norway**

Ms. Gry HAMMER NEANDER [Gry.Hammer.Neander@ls.no](mailto:Gry.Hammer.Neander@ls.no)  
(Working Partner)  
Ms. Jorun Buli HOLMBERG [j.b.holmberg@isp.uio.no](mailto:j.b.holmberg@isp.uio.no)  
Ms. Gunvor BOLLINGMO [gunvor.bollingmo@bfk.no](mailto:gunvor.bollingmo@bfk.no)



## **Portugal**

Mr. Vitor MORGADO      [vitor.morgado@deb.min-edu.pt](mailto:vitor.morgado@deb.min-edu.pt)  
(Working Partner)

Mr. João DE LIMA PINHEIRO      [np99ma@mail.telepac.pt](mailto:np99ma@mail.telepac.pt)

## **Spain**

Ms. Victoria ALONSO GUTIÉRREZ (Working Partner)  
[victoria.alonso@educ.mec.es](mailto:victoria.alonso@educ.mec.es)

Ms. Marisa HORTELANO ORTEGA  
[marisa.hortelano@educ.mec.es](mailto:marisa.hortelano@educ.mec.es)

Ms. Maria Dolores CEBOLLADA      [loguar@teleline.es](mailto:loguar@teleline.es)

## **Sweden**

Ms. Lena THORSSON      [lena.thorsson@sit.se](mailto:lana.thorsson@sit.se)  
(Working Partner)

Mr. Håkan NORDIN      [hdprod@telia.com](mailto:hdprod@telia.com)

Mr. Leif THORSSON      [leif.thorsson@swipnet.se](mailto:leif.thorsson@swipnet.se)

## **United Kingdom**

Ms. Felicity FLETCHER-CAMPBELL      [f.f-campbell@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:f.f-campbell@nfer.ac.uk)  
(Working Partner)

Ms. Lesley DEE      [ld205@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ld205@hermes.cam.ac.uk)