

PUBLICATION 2

# Attitudes of school personnel to Early School Leaving

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# About the RESL.eu project

**The Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe (RESL.eu) project aims to** provide insights into the processes and mechanisms influencing students' decisions to leave education or training early. In addition, RESL.eu intends to identify and analyse prevention, intervention and compensation measures that aim to keep pupils in education or training until they attain at least an upper secondary educational qualification – equivalent to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3.

Its aim lies in the development of insightful conceptual models based on research to predict and tackle early school leaving (ESL) and, finally, to disclose these insights to various target audiences at local, national and EU levels.

The project's focus is on the development and implementation of education policies and the transferability of country-specific good practices. RESL.eu also seeks to understand the mechanisms behind, processes leading to and trajectories following ESL through focussing on the actions, perceptions and discourses of all youngsters (ESL and not-ESL), as well as those of their family, friends and teachers. The project builds upon existing practices to tackle ESL and intends to develop innovative approaches for regular schools as well as for alternative learning arenas.

The EU-funded project operates over five years (2013-18) in nine EU member states (Belgium, the UK, Sweden, Portugal, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Hungary and Austria), with research being undertaken in two local urban areas per country, identified by the country teams on the basis of specific economic and socio-demographic indicators. (NB primary research does not take place in Austria or Hungary)

Quantitative data were collected in two waves (Wave 1 in Spring/Summer 2014; Wave 2 in Spring/Summer 2016) among at least 1,500 youngsters in each country across two different urban research areas. Additionally, in each country, school staff and school administrators are also surveyed in relation to their views and experiences of ESL and policies aimed at reducing the rate at which this occurs. This survey of school personnel forms the focus of the present RESL.eu Publication.

Qualitative data were collected across seven member states between October 2014 and October 2016: at least two bio-interviews are conducted with between 24 and 32 selected young people per country. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students and staff have also taken place across 28 schools and 24 alternative learning arenas that were carefully selected based on the first wave of the student survey data and the field descriptions of local educational landscapes.

A more comprehensive break-down of the project's objectives, methodology and outputs is available on the RESL.eu website: <http://www.resl-eu.org>

## Introduction

**The first RESL.eu Publication (Ryan et al., 2014) provided a comparative overview of the various EU- and national-level policies aimed at reducing early school leaving (ESL) across the nine partner countries.**

**In this second RESL.eu Publication, we explore the views and opinions of school personnel by presenting the findings of an online survey of which ran from March to December 2015. A total of 1,977 responses were collected across seven RESL.eu partner countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK). The main objective for the staff survey was to elicit insights into schools' policies to reduce ESL. It also provided an opportunity to give voice to staff members' opinions on which factors are most associated with risk of ESL and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of interventions, strategies and policies aimed at reducing it.**

The analysis of the data collected as part of this stage of research is presented in two analytical sections. The first of these (Part I) comprises a cross-national descriptive analysis of the responses elicited across the seven RESL.eu partner countries in which the survey ran. We present an overview of the main differences and similarities that can be seen between respondents on a cross-national level with regards to both their profiles and their attitudes towards ESL and ESL-focussed policies and practice.

The second analytical section of the publication (Part II) comprises a series of school-level case studies. The 17 case study schools (between two and four per country) are each examined in relation to their local context, institutional characteristics and staff composition. Data from the staff survey is supplemented by the national research team's own insights garnered through their qualitative fieldwork undertaken in these schools as part of a separate data collection stage of the RESL.eu project (see [Project Paper 4](#)<sup>1</sup>). This section of the publication allows for a context-specific examination of the ways in which ESL and policies and practice aimed at reducing ESL are perceived by school personnel in a particular institutional setting, whilst also allowing for a wider discussion about how certain practices or interventions may or may not be successfully transferred across schools and/or educational systems with similar attributes.

Finally, by way of conclusion, some broad commonalities of emergent themes are drawn together, highlighting the principal challenges that school staff face in implementing effective policies and interventions to reduce early school leaving.

## Part I: Cross-national perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> Clycq *et al.*, 2014

**Whilst the data collected varied significantly from country to country in terms of number of respondents and the number of institutions in which staff members worked, it is nevertheless possible to highlight some emerging findings arising from an analysis at the cross-national level.**

However, the variability seen within and between participants from the different countries – together with very difference national and local contexts – precludes any findings that can be generalised to the wider school staff force. The themes arising from the data analysis represent only the views of a small subset of teaching and non-teaching personnel in a number of ‘focus’ schools where a range of research has taken place for the RESL.eu project.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note where significant similarities or differences exist in respondents’ opinions and attitudes in relation to early school leaving (ESL), its contributing factors and the relative effectiveness of various interventions, strategies and policies aimed at its reduction. Where responses are consistent across respondents from all countries it can be seen as an indication that such factors are recognised – and acted upon – cross-nationally and that such interventions *may* be successfully applied across different educational systems. Conversely, significant differences in the ways in which survey respondents from different countries answered may serve to highlight the context-specific nature of national systems and/or particularities inherent within a particular area, school or student population.

**Socio-demographic characteristics of participants**

Table 1, below outlines the socio-demographic composition of respondents to the staff survey administered in each of the participating RESL.eu partner countries. In most countries, education is a highly feminised sector and this is borne out in the proportion of women answering the staff survey. Overall 63.1% of respondents were female and in most countries women made up between 60 and 80% of the total sample. Conversely, in Sweden a majority of respondents were male (57.4%), indicative of the relatively large proportion of male teaching assistant, school psychologists, etc., who took part in the survey. Furthermore, at least one of the participating schools in Sweden was pursuing an active gender-balanced recruitment policy for its staff.

The age composition of the survey respondents was similar across each of the countries, with the younger staff member comprising the smallest group (9% of the overall responses). Staff members aged 50 or over comprised the largest group overall (35.4%), as was the case in each of the countries except Belgium and the UK, where respondents aged between 30 and 39 were more prevalent.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of countries had only a very small proportion of staff members who considered themselves a member of a minority ethnic group. This is indicative both of the overall composition of the populations where the survey was administered and of the make-up of the personnel within the education sector there. Only in the UK were there a significant proportion of minority ethnic respondents (31%). Education in the UK does represent a diverse sector of employment, although, this still represents an over-representation of BME staff members for

the UK overall and may reflect the greater number of respondents working in schools in London (one of the two UK research areas), which has much higher levels of ethnic diversity than seen in the rest of the country.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the schools' staff survey respondents, by country of survey**

%	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	All
<b>Sex</b>								
Male	35.2	34.4	23.2	25.6	40.3	38.4	57.4	36.7
Female	64.8	65.6	76.8	74.4	59.7	61.6	40.3	63.1
<b>Age</b>								
under 30	14.9	14.0	8.1	3.0	2.9	10.3	7.0	9.0
30-39	31.9	22.6	31.5	29.6	21.1	36.8	14.8	27.0
40-49	24.1	23.7	24.2	31.4	34.3	25.3	33.4	28.5
50+	29.1	39.8	36.3	36.1	41.8	27.5	43.4	35.4
<b>Ethnicity</b>								
Minority grp	3.3	5.6	0.0	3.0	8.3	31.0	*	6.1
Non-minority grp	96.7	94.4	100	97.0	91.7	69.0	*	93.9
<b>Level of education</b>								
Below degree	17.4	4.5	1.6	1.2	4.3	3.6	14.4	9.6
Bachelor's degree	50.2	59.1	4.1	3.1	75.8	47.6	35.2	49.4
Master's degree or above	32.4	36.4	94.3	95.7	19.9	48.8	50.4	41.0
<b>Teaching status</b>								
Teaching staff	83.2	57.3	89.6	97.6	97.0	80.2	82.2	87.5
Non-teaching staff	16.8	42.7	10.4	2.4	3.0	19.8	17.1	12.4

Respondents' level of education is highly variable across survey participants from the different countries. Whereas almost 17.4% of respondents in Belgium and almost 15% of respondents in Sweden report being educated to below degree level, this figure is below

5% in all other countries – and as low as 1.4% in the Portuguese case. Conversely, amongst respondents in Poland and Portugal over 94% had at least a master's degree. The variability seen here can be explained by two main country-specific factors: firstly, the minimum qualification requirements to teach may be different in different education systems, e.g. in Belgium (Flanders) there are a number of professional qualifications that one can attain that, although below-degree level, nevertheless provides the training necessary to work as a teacher. The second explanation for this variability is the make-up of the staff members who responded to the survey – participation was sought from educational support staff as well as teachers and these may comprise a greater number of respondents in some countries than in others, and the educational requirements for some support roles may be lower than for teaching positions.

Overall, the vast majority (87.5%) of respondents were staff members who at least had some teaching responsibilities. Non-teaching personnel typically comprised between 2% and 20% of the total respondents. In the Netherlands, however, almost half of the survey respondents were non-teaching members of staff. It is possible that in the Netherlands respondents placed a greater emphasis on their non-teaching administrative role (e.g. school leadership or management), despite the fact that they were also involved in teaching lessons, which they chose not to disclose.

### **Attitudes to ESL and policies for RESL**

One of the primary aims of the staff survey was to reveal education professionals' attitudes towards early school leaving (ESL), its contributing factors and the relative effectiveness of various interventions, strategies and policies aimed at its reduction.

### **Factors contributing to ESL**

To this end, the schools' staff survey asked respondents to rank the extent to which each of a series of factors were important contributors to students' leaving education early. Table 2, below, groups certain similar factors together and provides an overview of the relative importance attached by staff members participating in the survey in each country. As can be seen, family factors, such as problems at home, a lack of parental engagement with the school and socio-economic background score the highest in almost all of the country samples (except for Poland). Negative influence of peers groups in which young people find themselves is also highlighted as a major contributing factor, as are 'engagement' factors, such as academic aspiration and participation in extra-curricular activities. At the other end of the spectrum, school factors are seen as less important – unsurprisingly participants working in schools are reluctant to attach responsibility for ESL to factors within the purview of the institution in which they work. Thus, the school staff survey appears to reinforce the perception that the main causes of ESL exist primarily outside of the school environment, whilst teachers and school personnel are hesitant to discuss the school's contributing role despite its central place in the lives of their students.

**Table 2: Importance of factors contributing to ESL (mean scores out of 5)**

<i>mean</i>	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	<b>All</b>
<b>Family factors (3 items)*</b>	3.91	3.91	3.83	4.19	4.17	4.11	3.65	<b>3.99</b>
<b>Negative influence of peers</b>	3.68	3.44	3.86	3.75	3.67	3.83	3.33	<b>3.67</b>
<b>Engagement factors (3 items)*</b>	3.21	3.20	3.18	3.44	3.36	3.87	2.94	<b>3.28</b>
<b>Systemic factors (3 items)*</b>	3.05	3.03	3.13	3.77	3.63	3.42	2.28	<b>3.25</b>
<b>Teacher-student relations</b>	3.09	3.27	3.57	3.14	2.90	3.83	2.86	<b>3.10</b>
<b>Individual factors (3 items)*</b>	3.07	2.85	2.31	2.79	2.69	2.84	2.45	<b>2.81</b>
<b>School factors (3 items)*</b>	2.82	3.07	2.57	3.15	3.40	3.34	2.88	<b>2.45</b>

\* Items included as 'family factors' are: family problems, lack of parental engagement with the school and family socio-economic background; items included as 'systemic factors' are: lack of coherent government policy, non-availability of financial assistance to continue studying and plentiful labour market opportunities for school leavers; items included as 'engagement factors' are: low individual aspiration, low individual academic ability and non-participation in extra-curricular activities; items included as 'school factors' are: inadequate school policies or interventions, insufficient school resources and inadequate school curriculum; items included as 'individual factors' are: lack of <main language> proficiency, minority ethnic background and gender

Whilst establishing parental engagement, other family factors, peer influences and engagement factors as primary contributory factors for ESL, survey respondents were asked about the extent to which a number of selected policies at school level might be effective at reducing ESL.

**Effective policies for reducing ESL – commonalities**

Consistent across countries, table 3 highlights that more than 70% of respondents believe that involving parents in the school, monitoring student attendance, early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour, psychological support or counselling and

increased opportunities for work experience are effective ways that schools can reduce the level of ESL. The degree to which respondents in all countries agree that these policies can be beneficial supports the idea that these are policies that can work across different educational systems and school environments.

**Table 3: Selected policies believed to be effective for reducing ESL (a: commonalities) (percentage believe are 'quite effective' or 'very effective')**

<b>%</b>	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	<b>All</b>
<b>Involving parents in the school</b>	80.4	90.9	77.4	87.6	82.0	82.0	72.7	<b>81.3</b>
<b>Monitoring attendance</b>	84.4	97.0	79.1	70.1	76.4	94.0	90.6	<b>79.9</b>
<b>Early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour</b>	77.0	80.3	71.3	73.7	81.6	86.0	77.3	<b>78.6</b>
<b>Psychological support/ counselling</b>	73.6	87.9	86.1	72.3	80.9	80.0	75.2	<b>77.2</b>
<b>Work experience opportunities</b>	77.2	69.7	70.4	83.9	69.1	76.0	76.7	<b>74.9</b>

**Effective policies for reducing ESL – differences**

Conversely, responses as to the effectiveness of other school-level policies show a much greater level of variability between respondents in the different countries (table 4). For example, whilst

guidance for pupils during periods of transition was seen as an effective policy by more than 71% of respondents in most countries, in Poland, little more than half of the survey participants thought this would be at least 'quite effective' at reducing ESL. Similarly, whilst as many as nine-in-ten respondents in the Netherlands and Sweden advocated specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of ESL, the proportion believing this to be an effective policy in Belgium (57.2%) and Poland (50.4%) was significantly lower. In Poland, Belgium, the UK and Portugal, less than half of survey respondents thought outreach programmes for vulnerable families would be effective at reducing ESL, whilst in Sweden 84.9% of staff members thought this to be a good policy. The provision of extra-curricular activities by the school was also seen to be effective at reducing ESL by respondents in most countries, although the proportion supporting this in Belgium (36.3%) and the Netherlands (43.9%) was again significantly lower.

**Table 4: Selected policies believed to be effective for reducing ESL (b: differences) (percentage believe are 'quite effective' or 'very effective')**

%	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	All
<b>Guidance for pupils during periods of transition</b>	71.9	80.3	52.2	73.7	78.9	86.0	78.2	<b>75.0</b>
<b>Specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of ESL</b>	57.2	90.9	50.4	67.9	75.2	70.0	91.9	<b>68.4</b>
<b>Additional classes for low-performing students</b>	68.0	74.2	62.6	51.8	70.9	86.0	75.8	<b>67.8</b>
<b>Outreach programme for vulnerable families</b>	45.3	60.6	33.0	48.2	50.5	46.0	84.9	<b>50.7</b>
<b>Extra-curricular and out-of-school activities provided by the school</b>	36.3	43.9	62.6	63.5	51.6	68.0	62.8	<b>50.0</b>

### Policy proposals to reduce ESL

Beyond school-level strategies, school staff members' attitudes to reducing ESL were sought in relation to wider system-level (meso- and macro-level) policies. Table 5 shows that the vast majority of respondents in all countries were in favour of better monitoring of ESL at school level (83.5% overall), greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies (82.3% overall) and better co-ordination between schools (75.1% overall) to help to reduce ESL in the future.

**Table 5: Policy proposals believed would help to reduce ESL in the future (a: commonalities) (percentage believe are 'quite important or 'very important')**

%	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	All
<b>Better monitoring of ESL at: school level</b>	79.2	80.0	75.9	84.0	86.8	87.5	91.9	<b>83.5</b>
<b>Greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies</b>	79.7	75.0	83.0	87.0	85.0	83.3	*	<b>82.3</b>
<b>Better co-ordination between schools</b>	78.3	88.3	71.4	80.2	75.2	77.1	60.5	<b>75.1</b>

*\* item response rate less than 5*

It is interesting to note that all of these policies are meso-level proposals that may be implemented across educational institutions themselves, rather than at the macro-level which may be seen as involving local or central government actors. In this regard, the survey respondents' opinions are more mixed (table 6). Better monitoring of ESL at national level, whilst still seen as important by a majority of respondents (66.2% overall), was ranked as the least important when compared to the other listed policy proposals. This may be due to the active involvement of some central authority that would be necessary to implement such a strategy. Similarly, whilst promoting the role of vocational education and training (VET) was seen as important by the vast majority of respondents in the UK, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain, this policy

proposal was advocated by less than half of the respondents in Sweden, and less than 60% of those in Poland. In the case of Poland, this may be due to the association of VET with 'basic vocational schools', within which the problem of ESL is most acute (Tomaszewska et al. 2015: 85). The effectiveness of VET, therefore, might be viewed by some as somewhat limited. For Sweden, a change of policy in 2011 has meant that vocational upper secondary programmes no longer automatically provide students with the courses required to apply for higher education later on, which has negatively impacted upon the perceived usefulness of these programmes.

As is to be expected, almost all of the respondents cited more (77.6% overall) and better targeted (90.5% overall) economic resources as a key policy to assist schools in reducing ESL. However, a significantly smaller proportion of respondents in Belgium and the Netherlands saw more economic resources as an important policy as compared to survey participants in the other countries; and whilst in most countries more than 80% of staff members advocated better targeted resources, in the Netherlands only two-thirds saw this as an important policy proposal.

**Table 6: Policy proposals believed would help to reducing ESL in the future (b: differences) (percentage believe are 'quite important' or 'very important')**

%	BE	NL	PL	PT	ES	UK	SE	All
<b>Better targeted resources</b>	90.5	66.7	82.1	93.1	95.6	89.6	*	<b>90.5</b>
<b>A greater role for vocational education and training (VET) and alternative learning environments</b>	81.6	81.7	58.9	89.3	91.9	93.8	45.5	<b>80.3</b>
<b>More economic resources</b>	66.7	73.3	82.1	86.3	89.5	83.3	80.8	<b>77.6</b>
<b>Better monitoring of ESL at: national level</b>	62.8	63.3	75.9	84.7	63.2	75.0	87.7	<b>66.2</b>

\* item response rate less than 5

Cross-national analysis of the schools' staff survey data shows that similarities do exist across staff respondents from different countries with regards their attitudes towards ESL and the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at combatting it. In general, consistent with the academic literature in this area, respondents believe risk of ESL to be associated with family factors (e.g. Jimerson *et al.*, 2000), individual engagement with school (e.g. Finn, 1989; Ferguson *et al.*, 2005) and the existence of negative peer group influences (e.g. Lee and Ip, 2003; Thomas and Webber, 2009; McGrath, 2009). There appears also to be some level of agreement as to which policies are the most effective in attempting to reduce ESL: attendance monitoring, parental engagement, early

warning systems and psychological support are all highlighted as constructive strategies that schools can put in place. On the other hand, opinions on some policies (e.g. additional classes for low-performing students; outreach programmes for vulnerable families or a greater role for VET) are divided and the extent to which some, more specific interventions can be useful in the can differ greatly between and within countries.

## Part II: Analysis at country level

This section of the publication comprises a series of school-level case studies. The case study schools (between two and four per country) are each examined in relation to their local context, institutional characteristics and staff composition. Data from the staff survey is supplemented by the national research team's own insights garnered through their qualitative fieldwork undertaken as part of a separate data collection stage of the RESL.eu project (see Project Paper 4). This section of the publication allows for a context-specific examination of the ways in which ESL and policies aimed at reducing ESL are perceived by school personnel in a particular institutional setting, whilst also allowing for a wider discussion about how certain practices or interventions may or may not be successfully transferred across schools and/or educational systems with similar attributes.

This section presents an analysis at country level of individual schools, using a case study approach. Data from the staff survey are supplemented by the national research team's own insights garnered through their qualitative fieldwork undertaken as part of a separate data collection stage of the RESL.eu project.

Firstly, a summary of data for each of the case study schools (between two and four per country) is presented, providing an overview of the number of respondents in each of the institutions, their job roles and their average level of experience.

Following this, the analysis is subdivided by country and proceeds by providing brief contextual information relating to the education system within which the case schools operate, followed by, for each of the selected case schools, a brief statistical information summary combining some key official data on the schools as a whole and concludes with a more in-depth description of the case schools under study. This serves to build a picture of the schools based on available official data, the staff responses to the RESL.eu survey and researchers' insights elicited from their own fieldwork undertaken in the school as part of the qualitative element of the project. Conclusions seek to draw on this wealth of information to summarise the extent to which school personnel in each case are able to address the issues surrounding ESL.

## Case schools: a statistical overview

School staff working across the seventeen case study schools comprise more than 400 individuals, with an average of 25 per institution. Table 7 gives a breakdown of the number of respondents to the staff survey by school, dividing them between teaching personnel and non-teaching staff. As can be seen, the vast majority – over 90% - of the respondents had at least some teaching role in the school, although this varied substantially between schools. In the Netherlands, non-teaching support or administrative staff comprised over 25% of respondents in each of the case schools, whilst in Belgium and Poland the proportion was between 10 and 12 per cent. In Portugal and Spain almost all respondents were staff members with responsibility for teaching students and numbers of non-teaching respondents were also small in Sweden and the UK.

**Table 7: Schools' staff survey respondents by case school and job role**

	Teaching staff		Non-teaching staff		Total
	#	%	#	%	#
<b>Case school BE1</b>	69	88.5%	9	11.5%	78
<b>Case school BE2</b>	22	88.0%	3	12.0%	25
<b>Case school BE3</b>	22	88.0%	3	12.0%	25
<b>Case school NL1</b>	15	75.0%	5	25.0%	20
<b>Case school NL2</b>	8	61.5%	5	38.5%	13
<b>Case school PL1</b>	15	88.2%	2	11.8%	17

Case school PL2	17	89.5%	2	10.5%	19
Case school PT1	24	100.0%	0	0.0%	24
Case school PT2	11	100.0%	0	0.0%	11
Case school ES1	24	100.0%	0	0.0%	24
Case school ES2	26	96.3%	1	3.7%	27
Case school ES3	55	100.0%	0	0.0%	55
Case school ES4	18	100.0%	0	0.0%	18
Case school UK1	8	80.0%	2	20.0%	10
Case school UK2	13	92.9%	1	7.1%	14
Case school SE1	13	86.7%	2	13.3%	15
Case school SE2	13	92.9%	1	7.1%	14
<b>All case schools</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>91.1%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>417</b>

In terms of level of experience, respondents in some of the case schools were much more experienced on average than in others. Amongst teaching personnel, the average level of experience was 16.8 years in total, of with 11.4 were spent at their current school. However, in several of the schools (SE1, SE2, PT1, PL1, PL2 and ES2) the overall experience level of the teachers was significantly higher than average. Conversely, staff members in UK2 and BE2 responding to the staff survey had less than half the average number of years' experience than the overall average.

The few members of non-teaching staff who responded to the schools' staff survey ( $n=37$ ) did appear to have relatively high levels of work experience on average. In Sweden, for example, non-teaching personnel at both case schools had over 30 years' experience on average and in most schools where responses from

the administrative or support staff force were collected, the average level work experience in their role exceed 10 years.

**Table 8: Average level of work experience (no. of years) by case school and job role**

	Teaching staff				Non-teaching staff			
	Work experience (this school)		Work experience (total)		Work experience (this school)		Work experience (total)	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Case school BE1	65	11.1	63	13.4	9	19.8	9	18.9
Case school BE2	22	7.0	22	8.3	3	2.5	2	9.0
Case school BE3	22	18.2	21	19.0	3	12.7	3	14.7
Case school NL1	14	8.5	12	19.9	5	7.4	4	11.3
Case school NL2	8	10.3	8	11.7	5	9.6	4	16.0
Case school PL1	15	13.1	14	20.6	1	6.0	1	10.0
Case school PL2	17	14.4	16	21.3	2	13.0	2	23.0
Case school PT1	23	9.7	23	20.8	0	-	0	-
Case school PT2	10	8.9	10	12.8	0	-	0	-
Case school ES1	20	5.2	24	12.5	0	-	0	-
Case school ES2	26	12.3	25	20.5	1	22.0	1	24.0
Case school ES3	53	10.5	53	19.1	0	-	0	-
Case school ES4	18	13.1	18	17.6	0	-	0	-
Case school UK1	7	8.1	7	11.0	2	3.0	2	10.0
Case school UK2	13	5.1	12	8.3	1	1.0	1	3.0
Case school SE1	13	22.2	13	26.5	2	30.5	2	37.0
Case school SE2	13	19.1	13	22.2	1	25.0	1	30.0
<b>All case schools</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>15.7</b>

# Belgium

## Outline of the education system

Due to a series of federalization processes during the past decades, education in Belgium has become almost entirely the responsibility of the different communities. This means that for Flanders, the Flemish Community - and more specifically the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training - has all major competencies with respect to this domain. However, the Belgian constitution stipulates compulsory learning between the age of 6 and 18 years old, and guarantees the freedom of education which entails, amongst other aspects, the right to establish schools autonomously and the right to enrol in a school of your choice. Consequently, the three educational networks that make up the Flemish compulsory educational landscape – education organised by the municipalities (and provinces), Flemish-government organised official education and publicly-funded private education - have a lot of freedom and autonomy to construct their own educational policy. Schools and educational networks however are required to adhere to a broader framework for curriculum and learning objectives to benefit from governmental funding and to be able to provide officially-recognised educational qualifications to their graduates.

According to official data from the Ministry of Education and Training, 183,393 people<sup>2</sup> (157,788 FTE) were employed in the

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<sup>2</sup> This number does not only include teachers but also non-teaching support and administrative staff

educational sector (excluding university) in the school year 2014-2015. Approximately 73.5% of staff are women, whilst a little over 40% of all educational personnel are employed in secondary education. The majority (66,020 persons) of secondary education staff work in regular full-time secondary education; while part-time vocational education employs 1,399 persons and special secondary education 9,020 persons. In secondary education almost 64% of the workforce are women. Overall, around 75% of the secondary education staff has a permanent position, while 25% has a temporary position. The majority (70.6% of permanent staff and 63.9% of temporary staff) are employed in the publicly-funded private schools, followed by government-organised official education (19.8% of permanent and 26.3% of temporary staff). 9.6% of permanent and 9% of temporary staff, work in schools organised by the municipality education network (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

In line with the former EU Lisbon Strategy (2000) and current EU2020 Strategy, Flanders has developed long-term plans named respectively the Pact of Vilvoorde (2001), the Flanders in Action Plan or VIA (2006) and the Pact2020 (2010). The current Flemish Reform Program presented to the EU is built on both the VIA plan and the Pact2020. Flanders is well aware of the relatively high amount of high-performing pupils in compulsory education, in many cases leading to higher education degrees. Nonetheless, Flemish future objectives and strategies also recognise the fact that many pupils, especially those with low socio-economic status (SES) and/or ethnic minority background, experience problems of grade retention and streaming down the hierarchically-organized tracking system and

finally leave education unqualified. It is within this context of growing awareness that the Flemish Minister of Education has prepared a specific 'Early School Leaving Action Plan' (2014). This Action Plan defines and classifies fifty concrete actions according to the main headings and concepts described in the report of the EU Commission's Thematic Working Group on Tackling ESL, e.g. identification and monitoring, coordination of policies, prevention, intervention and compensation. With an overall ESL rate of 7.5% (according to the most recent European data), the ESL rate in Flanders is already below the European target of 10%. However, large discrepancies still exist with much higher ESL rates in urban areas (e.g. 24% in Antwerp and 19% in Ghent) and amongst people from lower SES and ethnic minority families (e.g. research amongst a group of 17-22 years old in 2010 showed an ESL rate of 40.6% amongst boys and 29.4% amongst girls with non-Dutch speaking, low-educated mothers, compared to respectively 8% and 4.5% of boys and girls with Dutch-speaking highly-educated mothers (Van Landeghem *et al.*, 2013).

## Case schools analysis

**Table 9: Information about Case School BE1**

<b>School ID:</b>	BE1
<b>Number of students:</b>	Approximately 600 students
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12-19 (in case of normal progression; year 1 to 6 of SE and 7 <sup>th</sup> diploma year for VET students)
<b>Type of school:</b>	Secondary school providing both general, technical and vocational tracks (service sector)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	No official data available
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	<i>Mothers without ISCED 3 degree: 85%; Non-Dutch home language: 67% Educationally disadvantaged neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>:94%</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	At least 70 full time equivalents <sup>4</sup> (Total of estimated teaching, support and administrative staff)
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	78
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	123
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.92 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.74 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	62.1% (BE sample average: 62.3%)

<sup>3</sup> Based on high percentage of 15 year olds with at least two years of grade retention.

<sup>4</sup> Estimation of full time equivalents based on official pupil data in combination with OECD TALIS 2009 Student-Teacher Ratios in Belgian upper secondary education (10 to 1), TALIS 2013 ratios of teaching/pedagogical support (31 to 1) and teaching/ administration and management staff (10 to 1) ratios for lower secondary education in Flanders.

### CASE SCHOOL BE1

This school is a publicly-funded but privately operated Catholic secondary school with around 600 pupils. The school provides courses in the vocational, technical and – since recently – in the general track. It furthermore provides reception classes (OKAN) for recently-arrived migrants, which primarily serve to teach pupils Dutch in order to facilitate their integration into regular classes. The school has one building that predominantly teaches business oriented courses on all three track levels (economy, business and office/retail) and another building where the focus is on vocational courses directed towards the care and fashion sector.

The school is located in a densely-populated urban neighbourhood, known for having a large group of working class inhabitants of Moroccan origin. The school mainly attracts pupils who live in the area and, therefore, it has a pupil population which – according to the principal – is made up of more than 80% is of pupils of Moroccan descent.

As stated above, the school mainly attracts pupils who live in the area. Owing to the specific profile of the neighbourhood, the school has a strong concentration of socially disadvantaged ethnic minority pupils. Data from the students' survey show that less than 50% of the pupils' fathers and only 16% of the pupils' mothers are in paid work, and that 65% of the fathers and 81% of the mothers do not have a secondary education diploma. According to the students' survey, the pupils in this school have the lowest average

family socio-economic status based on the parental occupational groups of all schools ( $n=41$ ) in the Flemish sample. A little more than half of the student body changed schools at least once in secondary education and 30% changed more than once. According to official statistics of the Flemish Ministry of Education, 75% of pupils experienced one or more years of grade retention (2012). At the same time, the school scores exceptionally well compared to other RESL.eu schools of the Flemish sample when it comes to the pupils' self-esteem, academic self-concept and perceived social and school support from parents. Furthermore, the pupils show an overall high level of (emotional, cognitive and behavioural) school engagement and reported a high level of teacher support compared to other RESL.eu schools in the Flemish sample. The level of emotional belonging, on the other hand, is lower than expected from the level to which the school staff reported to be invested in socio-emotional support and investments in the well-being of the pupils.

Due to the high proportion of socially disadvantaged pupils, the school receives a significant level of equal educational opportunities (EEO) funding. The school uses these extra funds to employ extra teachers and to limit its class sizes. The school also uses the extra teaching hours these funds create for non-teaching activities and to strengthen teamwork amongst the teachers by forming teams based on the courses they teach. Each of these teams has a co-ordinator who works as an intermediary between the teachers and the school management and communicates concerns, suggestions and other matters to the school management, thereby introducing a 'middle management' in the

school. This is also shown in the relatively high score for distributed leadership in the school reported in the schools' staff survey.

The school also uses the EEO funds to organise extra-curricular activities (e.g. school trips, school plays, school fashion show, indoor soccer tournament), which are considered important to create a positive atmosphere in the class group and to stimulate the overall well-being of the pupils in the school (the provision of extra-curricular activities what highlighted as an important tool towards reducing ESL in the staff survey).

In general, the school also invests a lot in career guidance (staff in the survey indicated wrong study choices as a major reason for ESL), which is mainly aimed at reorienting pupils that have motivational problems or problems to keep up with classes. Typical career guidance consists of giving advice regarding changing study tracks or courses, mostly oriented within the school's provision of tracks and courses. These track changes mostly concern 'streaming down' (e.g. from general to technical) tracks but 'streaming up' (e.g. from vocational to technical) does occasionally happen too. Some pupils receive extra guidance and support to change tracks.

Because the school receives a high amount of EEO funds, it also has a relatively high ratio of teachers per pupil, as well as a significant number of non-teaching staff. In the Flemish data of the staff survey, the school also has one of the highest scores with regard to the availability of staff and other resources. The staff's age composition however shows a relative over-representation of teachers in the most junior and senior categories and, therefore,

also lacks teachers in the prime of their teaching career. These teachers are often considered to have sufficient experience and are still in the most active phases of their career. Also, the teachers score relatively well with regard to participation in continuing professional development. According to the results of the schools' staff survey, the staff of the school report student-related factors, such as wrongly motivated study choices of pupils (72.5%), socio-economic background of the family (70.0%), and family problems (61.4%) as the most important causes of ESL. In that sense the school staff does not differ substantially from the staff of other RESL.eu schools with a similar profile. On the other hand, the staff of this school can be considered particular in that they attribute much more importance to school-related causes of ESL - schools that are too eager to retain pupils, pupils that change secondary schools too easily, schools that expel pupils too easily, and to a lesser extent also a lack of motivated teachers – than reported in the other case study schools.

When asked about school-level policies to reduce ESL, the staff of the school believed the following policies to be most effective: early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (85%), work experience opportunities (83.3%), monitoring attendance (78.3%), and provision of ongoing professional development for staff working with at-risk students (78%). The majority of the school staff believed that the school was implementing such policies 'quite well or very well'. During the qualitative fieldwork, staff members who participated in the focus group discussion recognised that the school was making efforts to keep students in the school, not only by focusing on the behaviour of the student and imposing strict

rules on them, but also by looking at the surrounding factors and trying to gain insights into individual problems:

*R2: "Nowadays, schools are trying to pay more attention to the surrounding factors influencing bad behaviour in the class rooms."*

*R4: "This school is truly progressive in this. (...) On the one hand, when they [student counsellors] have interactions with students, they try to be very clear about the legal regulations that are used in the school in case of truancy and being late and the results of this behaviour on the long term. On the other hand they try to find out the individual problem(s). The reasons for not being at school are such diverse, that it is very important to have insight in this."*

## Conclusions

When it comes to ESL, this school can be considered to have a theoretically high 'at risk' population. Fieldwork in the school furthermore has shown that the school staff and the school management see their pupils as coming mainly from socially disadvantaged background and that they are therefore in need of additional support from the school. The teaching staff play a leading role in providing this support, which mainly targets the socio-emotional well-being of the pupils. Nonetheless, the average level of school belonging, as an indicator of emotional school engagement, is lower than what could be expected based on the prominent role of socio-emotional support that is purported to be provided by the school. However, this average score for school belonging is still ranked in the top quartile of the international RESL.eu dataset and the school scores exceptionally well when it

comes to the pupils' self-esteem, academic self-concept and perceived social and school support from parents, as well as in the overall level of (emotional, cognitive and behavioural) school engagement.

**Table 10: Information about Case School BE2**

<b>School ID:</b>	BE2
<b>Number of students:</b>	Approximately 800 students <sup>5</sup>
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12 – 19 (in case of normal progression; year 1 to 6 of SE and 7th diploma year for VET students)
<b>Type of school:</b>	Secondary school providing both technical and vocational tracks (industry sector)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	No official data available
<b>Student characteristics:</b> (e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)	<i>Mothers without ISCED 3 degree: 75%; Non-Dutch home language: 55% Educationally disadvantaged neighbourhood<sup>6</sup>:85%</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	At least 90 full time equivalents <sup>7</sup> (Total of estimated teaching, support and administrative staff)
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	25
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	128
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.83 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.56 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	34.4% (BE sample average: 62.3%)

<sup>5</sup> Based on official pupil count of February 1st 2014. More specific official data are available but we reported an approximate number to safeguard the schools' anonymity.

<sup>6</sup> Based on high percentage of 15 year olds with at least two years of grade retention.

<sup>7</sup> Estimation of full time equivalents based on official pupil data in combination with OECD TALIS 2009 Student-Teacher Ratios in Belgian upper secondary education (10 to 1), TALIS 2013 ratios of teaching/pedagogical support (31 to 1) and teaching/ administration and management staff (10 to 1) ratios for lower secondary education in Flanders.

## CASE SCHOOL BE2

This school is a public secondary education school with over 800 pupils that is operated by the governing body of the Flemish Government. The school has two campuses in different areas of the city. The campus where fieldwork was carried out provides full-time secondary education, predominantly in industry-oriented courses in the vocational and technical track. It furthermore provides a 7<sup>th</sup> specialization year to allow pupils on the vocational track to obtain a secondary education diploma. On this campus the school also provides part-time vocational courses consisting of two days of school-based and three days of work-based learning per week. Within the school building there is also an adult education centre that provides industry oriented courses for adults.

The school campus where fieldwork was carried out is located in a suburban area outside of the inner city of Antwerp. The neighbourhood is characterized by having a predominantly socially-disadvantaged and ethnically-mixed population. The school tends to have a wide catchment area that goes beyond the city of Antwerp. This is particularly the case for some specific courses they provide, such as sports education at the technical track level, and for the wide range of part-time work-based VET study courses.

A large majority of the student body of the school have a socially disadvantaged background: 78% of the pupils are 'equal educational opportunities (EEO) indicator' pupils. Furthermore, almost 90% of the pupils have been held back for one year or more throughout their school career and more than 40% of the pupils have a non-Dutch home language. The school has a predominantly

male student body: 99% of the pupils that participated in the RESL.eu students' survey are male. Data from the RESL.eu survey also show that 90% of the pupils are of non-EU origin and only 5% are of native origin. Sixty-three per cent of the pupils' fathers and 28% of the mothers are working in a paid job; whilst almost half of the fathers and two-thirds of the mothers do not have a degree of upper secondary education. According to these data, the pupils in this school have the fifth lowest average family socio-economic status based on the parental occupational groups of all schools ( $n=41$ ) in the Flemish sample. According to the RESL.eu survey, the pupils of this school perceive very low teacher support: the school is in the lowest quartile according to our composite measure of perceived teacher support. Based on the RESL.eu survey data we can say that the pupils in general have a positive self-image, report to be cognitively involved in their education but show low behavioural compliance (which is also reflected in the staff survey results) and low emotional school engagement. Furthermore, the pupils in general report low levels of perceived social support from their peers and parents.

In the most recent Public Inspection Report, the school was described as suffering from a negative image due to the concentration of socially-disadvantaged and ethnic minority pupils. To try to counter this negative image, the management team of the school is investing strongly in rebranding the school and in strengthening the connection with their sister school (e.g. development of a new logo and templates well as a shared website for the school campuses and giving more visibility to socio-cultural events the school organises).

The management team has also created a more individualised system for promoting certification at the end of each school year in order to allow teachers to speak with the pupils about their achievements and to look into possibilities to avoid grade retention or reorientation. The school is furthermore progressing towards a system of permanent evaluation in the vocational track and for the minor courses in the technical track with the aim of closer monitoring of the pupils.

Fieldwork in the school has shown that a recent change in the management team of the school (see below) is considered as one of the driving forces behind the recent changes that have resulted – according to the school staff – in improvements within the school and a more positive image of the school. These changes include a decision making structure that changed from a rather top-down to a more bottom-up approach with management, teachers and support staff working more closely together, more attention on socio-emotional support and career guidance, and a stricter disciplinary policy.

The school has a relatively new and young school management team that consists of a new general principal – who is responsible for all campuses – and a new assistant principal for the particular campus where the fieldwork was carried out. Like the management team, the teaching and support staff are also relatively young. Recently, the school had recruited new staff members to replace older staff, who have retired. During the qualitative fieldwork, the new management team reported to be placing a strong emphasis on the recruitment of teachers who not only have the necessary

subject-related knowledge and experience but who also have strong social skills and are considered a good match with the school team and pupil population.

The support staff includes student counsellors and a youth coach (some of which have an ethnic minority background) who are responsible for counselling the pupils and implementing the school's disciplinary policy. Furthermore, the new management team has appointed a full-time career guidance counsellor as a main contact person for the pupils when they have questions regarding career guidance. The qualitative fieldwork, however, has also shown that the new role of the career guidance counsellor was not yet widely known amongst the pupils involved in the focus group discussion.

The school also participates in a new local policy measure to support schools in the career guidance of students and organises orientation activities to promote better motivated and more positive study choices at different stages of the students' school career (e.g. taster courses, surveys on interests and talents, active reorientation programmes).

Regarding early school leaving, the results from the schools' staff survey show that the staff of the school consider the main factors contributing to ESL to be: family problems (72%), low individual aspirations (68%) and family socio-economic background (64%).

On the other hand, the qualitative fieldwork also revealed that the school staff as well as the principal are convinced that the labour

market has a big influence on the educational trajectories of the youngsters, and that in the case of early school leaving, the student has often already received a job offer. When it comes to tackling ESL, 90.9% of the respondents from the schools' staff survey from this school found monitoring attendance to be the most effective school-level policy, followed by work experience opportunities (77.3%) and guidance for pupils during periods of transition (72.7%). While almost all respondents believed that the school is monitoring attendance and implementing work experience opportunities 'quite well' or 'very well', only around half of them believed that the guidance for pupils in times of transition was being provided to the same standard.

## Conclusions

Case school BE2 is trying to counter a negative image of being a male-dominated and ethnically segregated school where a lot of the pupils are presumed to have behavioural problems. By 'rebranding' the school as well as implementing several other measures, the school is trying to create a more positive image for itself and its student body (see Annex to Project Paper 6 [Belgian Country Report]). These changes are acknowledged by the school staff who have already perceived recent improvements in the school as well as a more positive image of the school. The new school management furthermore puts a lot of emphasis on recruiting teachers with strong social skills and who are a good match with the school team and the pupil population. Another central policy concern is the right orientation of students into the most appropriate VET courses. The staff survey results

acknowledged the strong role the staff give to providing work experience opportunities to the VET students as part of their strategy to combat ESL. Despite the efforts made by the new management team, pupils – at the time of the student survey – however still perceived low teacher support and low emotional and behavioural engagement (2013). Some of the more recently-implemented measures – e.g. with regard to career guidance – may need more time to develop further and to be adequately communicated to the students and staff.

**Table 11: Information about Case School BE3**

<b>School ID:</b>	BE3
<b>Number of students:</b>	Approximately 600 students <sup>8</sup>
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12 – 19 (in case of normal progression; year 1 to 6 of SE and 7th diploma year for VET students)
<b>Type of school:</b>	Secondary school providing general, technical and vocational tracks (service sector)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	No official data available
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	<i>Mothers without ISCED 3 degree: 69%; Non-Dutch home language: 51% Educationally disadvantaged neighbourhood<sup>9</sup>:71%</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	At least 70 full time equivalents <sup>10</sup> (Total of estimated teaching, support and administrative staff)
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	25
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	113
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.66 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.53 (BE sample average: 3.68)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	74.6% (BE sample average: 62.3%)

### CASE SCHOOL BE3

Case school BE3 is a publically funded but privately operated Catholic secondary education school with around 600 pupils. The

<sup>8</sup> Based on official pupil count of February 1st 2014. More specific official data are available but we reported an approximate number to safeguard the schools' anonymity.

<sup>9</sup> Based on high percentage of 15 year olds with at least two years of grade retention.

<sup>10</sup> Estimation of full time equivalents based on official pupil data in combination with OECD TALIS 2009 Student-Teacher Ratios in Belgian upper secondary education (10 to 1), TALIS 2013 ratios of teaching/pedagogical support (31 to 1) and teaching/ administration and management staff (10 to 1) ratios for lower secondary education in Flanders.

school offers full-time regular secondary education in the general, technical and vocational tracks and the courses they provide are mainly situated in the service and trade sector. The school has three different campuses, two of which are located next to each other while the third one is at a different location within the neighbourhood. Generally speaking, each campus provides education for a different grade, so students have to change locations according to the grade they are in.

Fieldwork was carried out at two different campuses (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) that are situated in the same northern part of an urban neighbourhood outside of the inner city of Antwerp (the same neighbourhood as case school BE2). According to official statistics, the neighbourhood has a mixed ethnic population of mainly socially disadvantaged inhabitants. Most people with an immigration background are of North-African (mainly Moroccan) origin.

This previously relatively 'white' school with a strong reputation for trade-related study courses has experienced a large inflow of pupils with a migration background in the last decades. This evolution, according to the staff, has negatively affected the school's reputation and its attractiveness to native middle class students. Data from the RESL.eu students' survey show that 92% of the pupils who participated in the survey have a migration background. The majority (72%) of the pupils' fathers have a paid job, compared to just 45% of the pupils' mothers. More than half of the pupils that participated in the survey have already experienced one or more years of grade retention during their school career.

The pupils of the school show one of the lowest levels of emotional school engagement out of the Flemish RESL.eu sample, while, on the other hand, the pupils in the vocational track show the highest perceived socio-emotional support from their parents. However, perceived teacher support is a lower than the average for the entire Flemish sample. Pupils of the vocational track reported a somewhat higher level of teacher support than pupils of the technical track.

This school puts a lot of emphasis on the behaviour of the student (student behaviour is discussed regularly in meetings amongst the staff) and it has a very strict policy when it comes to lateness, absenteeism and misbehaviour (which is also reflected in the schools' staff survey results by relatively low levels school and class misconduct). According to the school principal the school has the image of being "a very strict school" compared to others in the neighbourhood. This image is something they are actively seeking and want to uphold. The recent change in the pupil population is considered somewhat problematic by the school management because they see a large gap between the school and home environment of these pupils. The school attempts to close this gap by focussing on the Dutch language skills of the pupils (e.g. Dutch language posters are hung up around the school, there is co-operation with Dutch language schools, and extra language tutoring offered after regular school hours). The strong emphasis the staff gives to Dutch language proficiency – as contrasted to proficiency in their mother tongue – was also reflected in the low scores in the measurement for potential benefits of promoting multilingualism included in the Flemish staff survey.

The additional equal educational opportunities (EEO) funding the school receives is – amongst other things – used to create an EEO-team that is responsible for organising parents’ evenings and home visits to enhance parent involvement, which is considered very low by the school staff and management. To answer to the complaints of the teaching staff about motivational and behavioural problems amongst the students, the school has created the function of a student counsellor (one for each campus). Fieldwork in the school however has shown that the pupils perceive these student counsellors primarily as implementers of disciplinary measures who punish students after showing misbehaviour and truancy, and less as providers of socio-emotional support.

The relatively older school staff and school management (28% of the respondents were over 55 years of age) report the recent inflow of pupils with a migration background as one of the school’s major challenges. They primarily report cultural differences between the home environment of these pupils and the school environment, something they did not experience as much before the transformation seen in the student body. According to the school staff there is little parental involvement and knowledge of the Flemish educational system in the home environment. Compared to case schools BE1 and BE2, the school staff working at case school BE3 who participated in the schools’ staff survey, relate ESL to a higher extent to student and family-related factors (such as family problems (80%), family socio-economic background (80%), as well as a lack of parental engagement with the school). During the qualitative fieldwork the school staff often explicitly related this to

the pupils’ ethnic-minority background and lack of Dutch-language proficiency.

Regarding school-level policies to tackle ESL, the data from the schools’ staff survey show that the staff of this school mainly believe the most effective school-level policies to be early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (90.5%) and monitoring attendance (87%), followed by involving parents in the school (81%) and guidance for pupils during periods of transition (81%). The qualitative fieldwork in this school furthermore has shown that the teaching staff generally approves of the strict school policy and sees it as beneficial for the students’ school success. The schools’ staff survey data also shows that the teaching and support staff indicate strong needs for further professional development and – in comparison to other Flemish school staff – score significantly lower with regard to having followed continuing professional development courses. The latter is the case for staff in all ten types of courses who took part in the survey. Finally, the school staff also reported amongst the lowest levels of job satisfaction in the Flemish sample.

## **Conclusions**

In this school, the school management and school staff perceive a language and cultural gap between the home environment of the students and the values and norms in the school. The school considers this as an important risk factor for ESL. Although the school staff reported in the survey that their efforts to involve parents in the school are mostly successful, at the same time the

least successful measure reported by the teachers was the involvement of disadvantaged families in the school. The fieldwork has shown low levels of critical or self-reflexive tendencies with regard to the school and staff practices. This was also reported in the results of the teacher survey that indicated that school-related factors are considered the least important for explaining ESL. The discourse of the staff also showed a typical reaction of a school that has recently experienced a transition from a more middle-class to a more socially-disadvantaged student population in which many students have an ethnic minority background. The latter is therefore also most prominent in the data collected amongst staff in this school with regard to the factors they attribute to risk of ESL, despite the fact that this school has the lowest concentration of socially-disadvantaged and ethnic minority students of the three Belgian case schools.

## Netherlands

### Outline of the education system

In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is largely responsible for the funding of education; it develops education policy and sets the admission requirements, structure and purpose of education. In addition, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ) are substantively involved in higher education.

The education system in the Netherlands is diverse, including public schools, special schools (religious or with alternative learning methods, e.g. Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, etc.) and a few private school institutions. Public and special schools are government-financed and therefore fall under the jurisdiction of the OCW, receiving financial support from the government so long as certain criteria are met. Although they are officially free of charge, these schools may still ask for a parental contribution (*ouderbijdrage*). Private schools rely on their own funds, but are relatively rare in the Netherlands. Public schools are monitored and overseen by local authorities; special schools are controlled by a school board. The differentiation between school types is seen across all educational levels.

In the Netherlands compulsory education (*leerplicht*) begins at the age of five, although in practice, most children begin school at the age of four. There is partially-compulsory education (*partiële leerplicht*) from the age of sixteen, which means a pupil is obliged to

attend some form of education for at least two days a week. Compulsory education ends when pupils are eighteen and up or when they acquire a minimum diploma (*startkwalificatie*).

The Netherlands has a stratified education system where students are tracked into different educational streams at the end of primary education based on their teacher's advice and a test score (called the "CITO" test). Based on the test results and the teachers' advice students are directed to either pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO), general secondary education (HAVO) or pre-university secondary education (VWO). Pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) prepares students for secondary vocational education (MBO); general secondary education (HAVO) is followed by university of applied sciences (HBO); and pre-university secondary education diploma (VWO) gives access to research university education (WO).

In 1993, a basic qualification was introduced in the Netherlands relating to the completion of training at the level of a 'young professional' (*startend beroepsbeoefenaar*). This can refer to a pre-university (VWO) diploma, a general secondary (HAVO) diploma, or completion of two years at a senior secondary vocational education (MBO – level 2). The basic qualification is considered the minimum level required to be successful in the labour market, and a prerequisite to participate in the Dutch labour market. The Netherlands has a relatively lower rate of ESL compared to other EU countries (8.7% in 2014), yet reducing ESL remains high on the political agenda. Various policies have been initiated: Firstly, the government has introduced an obligation to complete a minimum-

level qualification, which requires students to stay in school until the age of 18 or until they have obtained a basic qualification. Moreover, student monitoring mechanisms have been enhanced whereby each student is assigned a student number to enable their tracing in the education system. On the school level, almost every secondary school in the Netherlands have a youth care work team, comprised of staff members such as care coordinator (90% of schools), remedial teachers (69%) and a care advisory team (70%). The care team may include in-house and external experts such as social worker, nurse, psychologist, counsellor, police officer and school attendance officer (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2006).

Teaching in the Netherlands is a gendered occupation: according to a government report in 2014/2015, 64% of the teaching force in primary education, secondary, vocational and adult education was female (Stamos, 2016). Teachers with a minority ethnic background, however, are still very much under-represented in secondary education, with only 4.7% belonging to a BME group according to a 2011 government report (van der Zee *et al.*, 2011). The average pupil to teacher ratio in the secondary schools is 1:15.6 (CBS/DUO/OCW, 2016).

Teachers in secondary education are required to have either a 'grade one' or 'grade two' teaching qualification. A grade two teaching qualification is attained at higher education institutes and provides access to teaching in the first three years of general academic (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO) education, as well as all in pre-vocational (VMBO) and secondary vocational education

(MBO). A grade one teaching qualification requires a university degree in a general subject coupled with a master's degree in teacher training, and allows teaching in all levels of general academic (HAVO) and pre-university secondary (VWO) education as well as in all pre-vocational (VMBO) and secondary vocational education (MBO). All teachers are expected to follow internships of a minimum of six months in length, which is integrated with their teacher training studies.

### Case schools analysis

**Table 12: Information about Case School NL1**

<b>School ID:</b>	NL1
<b>Number of students:</b>	Around 2,000 students
<b>Age range of students:</b>	Between 12 and 18 years old
<b>Type of school:</b>	Secondary education covers pre-vocational programmes (18%), general (50%) and pre-university (34%) lower and upper secondary programmes
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	Unknown
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	<i>unknown</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	138,9 FTE and 11,3 students per fulltime teacher
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	20
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	98
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.37 (NL sample average: 3.51)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.62 (NL sample average: 3.63)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	38.7% (NL sample average: 46.4%)

### CASE SCHOOL NL1

Case school NL1 is a public secondary school without any particular religious or other ideological status. There are around 2,000 students across its three buildings. As a secondary school it offers all three levels of secondary education; pre-vocational secondary programmes (18%), general secondary programmes (50%) and pre-university (34%) secondary programmes.

Case school NL1 is located in Rotterdam, the second largest urban centre in the Netherlands. The school stands in a middle-class neighbourhood, predominately inhabited by white and older residents within an attractive residential setting, where government social policy interventions have been seen as less necessary. However, the school's wide catchment area is both ethnically and socially diverse, attracting students from all over Rotterdam.

Data on the characteristics of students at NL1 – particularly with regards to the ethnic and socio-economic representation – is sparsely available from the school itself. Data from the RESL.eu students' survey show that, amongst the participants of the survey in case school NL1, 21.2% of the students were first-generation migrants, 51.5% were second-generation, with one or both parents born outside the Netherlands, and 27.3% had parents born in the Netherlands. These percentages are very similar to the students' survey data for the Netherlands as a whole, where 16.3% were first generation migrants, 54.4% are second generation and 29.3% had

native-born parents. Student respondents from case school NL1 reported that 7.3% of the fathers were unemployed compared to 5.9% of the students' survey respondents for all Netherlands respondents to the survey. Hence the survey respondents in school case NL1 display similar trends with respect to ethnic background and father's activity compared to the rest of the respondents.

On the basis of the ethnographic research within the school, we can observe that student characteristics differ across the different educational streams. While pre-vocational tracks comprised students predominantly from minority ethnic backgrounds, general secondary and pre-university programs were much more mixed, with students from both native and minority ethnic backgrounds. Of the minority ethnic respondents in the students' survey, almost all (98%) attended a pre-vocational track, which is corroborated by our ethnographic findings in pre-vocational tracks.

Case school NL1, provides its students with various facilities; each class has their own mentor, the school monitors students' attendance, offer additional classes for low-performing students and they have welfare and care arrangements for students with social problems (either within the school, such as problematic behaviour, or outside, such as parental divorce, etc.

Case school NL1 employs 210 staff members of whom 155 are teachers. Respondents to the schools' staff survey included staff with more than 20 years of experience as well as a number of ethnic minority staff members. Moreover, during our field visits, we observed that in comparison to other schools in the Netherlands,

the staff force is relatively ethnically diverse. Amongst the 20 respondents who participated in the survey, 13 of them (65%) stated that they teach at the vocational level while the rest did not specify the level. Therefore, we can attempt to see whether the findings from the survey relate in any way to the qualitative focus groups conducted with the teachers in the vocational track at this school. The respondents to the survey scored parental involvement at case school NL1 as relatively poor, compared to other schools, and attributed this as a cause of early school leaving. Additionally NL1 respondents also reported relatively lower levels of parent-community interaction, in comparison with the other schools represented in the schools' staff survey.

In terms of early school leaving, the main contributing factors listed by the teachers from case school NL1 participating in the survey were;

- lack of parental engagement in school (85%)
- family problems (80%)
- low individual aspirations (70%)

During our fieldwork visits, staff members mentioned that one of the most challenging issues was that many of their students needed forms of support that teachers were sometimes not able to provide.

Most of factors highlighted in the survey as leading to ESL were identified as being on the individual level. When asked the most

effective measures to combat ESL all of the respondents participating in the staff survey emphasised the importance of:

- Monitoring attendance
- Additional classes for low-performing students
- Involving parents in school
- School procedures for dealing with problematic behaviour

It is important to note that not all respondents were aware of the additional class offered by the school for low-performing students yet all respondents were informed about the measures of monitoring attendance and involving parents and they believed that the school was doing well in respect to these policies.

Beyond the school level, respondents from case school NL1 believed that there ought to be a greater role for vocational education and training (VET) and alternative learning environments, whilst more effective regional policies on ESL and better monitoring in national and regional level could also help to reduce ESL. Only a small minority of the respondents (14.3%) believed EU had an overall positive impact on policies reducing ESL.

## **Conclusions**

Case school NL1 is an established secondary school with a renowned name and reputation. It offers three different levels of secondary education and attracts students from Rotterdam and its suburbs. The reputation of the school has transformed over the years across different locations and levels of education. A majority

of the teachers participating in our survey teaches at this vocational level. They associate the problem of early school leaving primarily with family problems, a lack of parental involvement and low individual aspirations, which were additionally all mentioned during the focus group discussions with the school staff in the pre-vocational track. As the school provides secondary-level education and young people are in compulsory schooling, the teachers expect a higher level of parental involvement. Yet fieldwork with parents has also shown that they believe that the school does not provide enough opportunity for parental involvement. In highlighting these findings, however, it is important to underline that the survey had only 20 teacher respondents, and a wider participation rate would have allowed for a more extensive and robust analysis of the findings.

**Table 13: Information about Case School NL2**

<b>School ID:</b>	NL2
<b>Number of students:</b>	Around 25,000
<b>Age range of students:</b>	16 and above [50% 16-18; 18-22 19%; 23-30 11%; 31-40 6% and 40+ 10%].
<b>Type of school:</b>	vocational education and adult education vocational education and adult education
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	On average 69,1% receive their degree
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	unknown
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	Around 2,400
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	13
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	623
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.56 (NL sample average: 3.51)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.67 (NL sample average: 3.63)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	33.6% (NL sample average: 46.4%)

### CASE SCHOOL NL2

School Case NL2 is one of the two largest regional training centres for senior vocational education and adult education in Rotterdam. Some 25,000 participants follow an educational programme, supported by approximately 2,400 staff members at 50 different locations in the metropolitan area of Rotterdam. They provide work-based programmes which are similar to apprenticeships (in Dutch: BBL) with one day at school and four days' paid work experience; and also school-based training, which require full-time education with extended periods of internships (in Dutch: BOL). Courses typically last between two and four years. Levels 2-4 lead

to a basic qualification or above, with level 2 being required for a minimum qualification. The centre offers some 300 sector-oriented courses in health care, wellbeing, services, food, technology and economics.

Case school NL2 is a regional training centre with 50 different locations. Therefore, the catchment area of the centre comprises the entire metropolitan area of Rotterdam and its fifteen suburbs. However, our study has only been able to include four of these locations.

Data from the students' survey show that amongst the respondents from this school 15.3% were first generation migrants (average for all respondents in the Netherlands: 16.3%), 45% were second-generation migrants (NL average: 54.4%) and 39.6% of the respondents had native born parents (NL average: 29.3%). Based on the students' survey, it can be seen that case school NL2 has a smaller proportion of participants of migrant origin than seen in other schools in the Dutch sample.

Respondents from case school NL2 reported that 6.6% of their fathers were unemployed, which is slightly higher than rest of the respondents in the students' survey (5.9%). Compared to all respondents to the survey in the Netherlands, the respondents from case school NL2 reported slightly less perceived teacher support and less parental involvement. This may well be due to the status of the school as a post-secondary educational institute, for young people aged 16 and over.

As most ESL occurs at such vocational education and training (VET) schools in the Netherlands, case school NL2 has several student-based intervention measures targeted at those students identified as being more at-risk of ESL. These include additional support staff, such as mentors, career coaches, school social workers, attendance officers and remedial teachers. Case school NL2 has around 2,400 staff, although data regarding their socio-demographic composition or other characteristics is not readily available.

### Conclusions

From a total of 2,400 staff at case school NL2 only 13 staff members participated in the schools' staff survey, which makes interpretation of the results somewhat difficult. Nevertheless compared to case school NL1 we can highlight certain differences: case school NL2 provides post-secondary vocational training, where parental involvement is not expected or required by the school. Indeed teachers sought to attribute risk of ESL not to lack of parental involvement but mostly to family problems, lack of finances and again low inspirations of the students. However, our field work in the school also found that many students have serious problems with finding internships which in turn may jeopardise their studies. This was further underlined by responses to the schools' staff survey prominently highlighting that greater collaboration with employers and external agencies was a key methods for combatting ESL. This may be indicative of the issue of access to internships being experienced by the students. Most teachers were aware of the existing policies in the institution yet a lack of sufficient funding and more assistance to students were mentioned as important policies towards combatting ESL.

## Poland

### Outline of the education system

Educational policy in Poland is framed primarily by the Ministry of National Education, which also monitors schools together with regional pedagogical superintendents (*kurator*). The administration and management of publicly-funded schools lies with individual local authorities.

Public schooling is much more common in Poland than the non-public schools sector – public schools are attended by some 95% of all students. Non-public schools are obliged to follow the same core curriculum as public schools, but it is only in public schools that teachers' working conditions (employment, salaries, promotion and other) are regulated by a specific law – the Teacher's Charter.

The vast majority of public schools are managed and administered by the local authorities. Municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary education, while upper secondary schools are administered at a higher level by the county administrations.

Compulsory education in Poland begins at age 7 and continues until the age of 18; between the ages of 16 and 18 students may combine part-time in-school education with out-of-school training, usually with on-the-job experience.

So far as it is addressed in Poland, the issues of ESL (the national rate has oscillated around 5% for the last 10 years) and NEET

(15.8% in 2015<sup>11</sup>) are mostly targeted by the social sector. The main state organisation responsible for implementing policies in this area is the Voluntary Labour Corps (VLC), as well as a number of 'second chance' schools. The VLC combines second chance education (primary, lower secondary and basic vocational) with providing working opportunities for its pupils through job placements and partially incentivising employers to take on young people. Second-chance schools teach a mainstream curriculum, but offer a more flexible timetable, with classes taking place on only a few days a week.

There are over 490,000 teachers in Poland (GUS, 2015), 24% of whom work in upper secondary schools:- 11% in technical upper secondary schools, 11% in general upper secondary schools, 3% in basic vocational schools (Eurydice, 2015: 14). Recent studies (IBE, 2014: 60-62) estimate that 26% of teachers are employed part-time, 12% are employed in more than one school/school complex. The average number of students per teacher (FTE) ranges from 16 in basic vocational schools to 12 in technical upper secondary schools. The average age of a teacher in Poland is 42 years. A highly feminised sector in Poland, women constitute 80% of teachers teaching general (non-vocational) subjects (IBE, 2014: 83).

Due to a demographic decline, the number of available positions for teachers is also in decline, especially in general upper secondary schools, where the employment rate fell by 19% between 2007/08 and 2012/13. In technical schools, however, the employment level has remained stable (IBE 2014: 64).

By law, all teachers are required to have obtained a higher education degree. Moreover, for secondary schools, at least a second-cycle degree diploma (MA or MSc) is necessary. Before taking a job at school teachers are also obliged to complete initial teacher training courses, including subject-related training, training in psychology, and pedagogical training (Eurydice, 2015: 14).

The Teacher's Charter distinguishes four categories of professional promotion in a teacher's career: trainee teacher, contract teacher, appointed teacher and chartered teacher. Trainee teachers are employed on the basis of one year contract, beyond this unlimited term contracts are the standard. Appointed and chartered teachers have equivalent status to civil servants (Eurydice, 2015: 14). The basic teacher's salary is set yearly by Parliament in the Budgetary Act and adjusted to each category of professional promotion according to the fixed algorithm.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Eurostat [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_ifse\\_20&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_ifse_20&lang=en)

## Case schools analysis

**Table 14: Information about Case School PL1**

<b>School ID:</b>	PL1
<b>Number of students:</b>	125
<b>Age range of students:</b>	16-19
<b>Type of school:</b>	General upper secondary
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	No data available
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	54% females, 5% living in rural areas <sup>12</sup>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	38 persons on 28 full-time positions <sup>13</sup>
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	17
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	71
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.43 (PL sample average: 3.57)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.46 (PL sample average: 3.31)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	66.1% (PL sample average: 61.9%)

### CASE SCHOOL PL1

Case school PL1 is a public, general upper secondary school belonging to a school complex which also includes a primary school. It has 125 students in six classes, which makes it relatively small, compared to the average for upper secondary schools in Warsaw (251 students, 10 classes), or for public schools in Poland (345 students and 12 classes on average)<sup>14</sup>. Case school PL1 offers students the following educational tracks: psychological (preparing to the university studies in social sciences) or cultural-recreational

(focused on humanities as well as tourism and recreation). The school has so-called integration classes for pupils with or without special educational needs. Each integration class may consist of not more than 20 students, including five students with special educational needs and/or other disabilities, or disorders. These students are subject to intensive support.

Case school PL1 is located in a typically residential area and its catchment area is relatively limited: students come primarily from the districts closest to the school, although some live in other districts of Warsaw. The results of the students' survey confirm that for the majority of students (65%) the journey from home to school takes less than 30 minutes. For respondents attending other schools in Warsaw only 46% of respondents from other schools reported a journey to school as short as this.

Findings from our field work in the school indicate that teachers perceive the pupils as very much attached to the neighbourhood (indeed perhaps limited to it). The district has an industrial heritage, near the school there were many factories, which were mostly closed down during the transformation period, contributing to the social problems of these once-working-class area. The area is one experiencing significant levels of poverty, unemployment, disability, care needs and educational problems, as well as high levels of crime.

Owing to the school's profile, it has the over-representation of students with special educational needs. According to the Deputy Principal the most common disorders are: physical disability,

<sup>12</sup> Estimations on the basis of the Educational Information System data.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Estimations on the basis of the Educational Information System data.

Asperger syndrome, autism and conjugate disorders. The students' survey also indicates a higher occurrence of learning difficulties, physical and mental illness in case school PL1, compared to the whole sample in Poland. However, the differences are relatively small and students with particular difficulties do not form a majority within the school population. The increased frequency of learning difficulties is reflected in the percentage of students who reported having repeated a grade at some point within their education – 31% in case school PL1, compared to just 12% for Warsaw schools in the survey. The additional measures applied in case school PL1 correlate with relatively high levels of perceived staff support amongst the students.

To manage the increased need for student support, case school PL1 employs more educators and learning support specialists than average. Inclusive classes have two permanent support pedagogical counsellors and students are guaranteed revalidation activities – 10 hours a week per class. Integration classes currently comprise at least five hours a week. There are also five teaching assistants employed by the school, which is again higher than usual in upper secondary schools. The school cooperates with other providers of social services (psychological-pedagogical counselling centre, Social Welfare Centre, the police, pedagogical superintendents, the courts, Integrated Prevention Institute) in a bid to improve teaching methods.

The outcomes of the external evaluation of the school, conducted by the regional pedagogical superintendent, underline the involvement of teachers and their individual approach to students,

in a friendly and inclusive atmosphere. The school's infrastructure was assessed as 'excellent'. However, the educational added value for the school is low<sup>15</sup>, as are the exam results, with only 74% student passing the Matura exam in 2013.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the results in most subjects are significantly below the average for Warsaw and for Poland overall.

Case school PL1 forms part of a school complex and, as such, teachers work in all affiliated schools within the complex.. The complex to which case school PL1 belongs employs 38 teachers (only 13 in full-time employment), but according to the Deputy Principal only 21 of them work in case school PL1. Therefore the results of the schools' staff survey, which covered 17 individuals from the school represents the vast majority of its overall staff force.

Respondents in case school PL1 do not differ significantly from the majority of the teachers in Poland in terms of gender and origin – 75% are female and all are of native Polish origin. However, the structure of age of the teaching staff is younger than seen in Poland as a whole – 25% of teachers are less than 30 years old, and a majority of them are below 40. The presence of such a large group of staff members aged below 30 is primarily due to the fact that the school employs a high proportion of teaching assistants, who are usually earlier in their careers.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://ewd.edu.pl/wskazniki/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://docplayer.pl/3848621-Warszawie-biuro-edukacji-urzedu-m-st-warszawy-18-20-listopada-2013-r-1-licea-ogolnoksztalcece-wg-dzielnic-stan-na-dzien-30-09-2013-r.html>

According to the schools' staff survey, teachers working in case school PL1 report:

- a slightly less attentive classroom environment, which can partially be explained by the increased number of students with various disorders in the integration classes.
- a perception of lower availability of school resources, which seems quite surprising, given the school profile and evaluation outcomes. One possible explanation is that the additional support is still not sufficient to compensate for the significant challenges facing the staff at this school.
- slightly lower staff satisfaction. That may reflect a variety of factors, amongst them low pupil performance, difficult social environment in the district, etc.

Respondents from case school PL1 attribute potential risk of ESL primarily to factors connected with: family problems (82.4%), low individual aspirations (76.5%) and a lack of parental engagement at school (70.6%). These are similar views to those presented in the interviews conducted as at the school and seem to be typical for the school staff perception in Poland. In case school PL1 the rare occurrence of ESL cases at school (at least according to declarations of the staff) and the specificity of its students may further encourage teachers to attribute the phenomenon to the family and individual factors. Moreover, during the interviews the staff complained about the weak response from many parents to efforts to engage them in cooperation with the school.

In the opinion of the teachers the most effective school-level policies to reduce ESL are already being implemented in case school PL1: early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (93.8%), cooperation with social and youth services, health services and/or other service providers (82.4%) and extracurricular and out-of-school activities provided by the school (76.5%). Most of the respondents positively evaluated the efficiency of those policies in case school PL1, which is also confirmed by the qualitative research in the school. The presence of an increased number of specialists contributes to the early detection of problematic behaviour and may explain the high rating of school's early warning systems. Cooperation with other service providers was confirmed by both teachers and students, and qualitative fieldwork also highlights a wide range of extracurricular specialist activities in the school offer, such as speech therapy, social therapy and correctional education.

Similarly, almost all (94.1%) respondents in case school PL1 believe better monitoring of ESL at school level and greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies are policies that would help most to reduce ESL. The vast majority (88.2%) also highlight the need for more economic resources and better targeting of resources, which is in line with their perception of low availability of school resources.

Teachers from case school PL1 taking part in the schools' staff survey attribute the most positive impact on policies reducing ESL to the agents working within the school environment: teachers or other staff members (76.5%) and Headteacher/School

Management Team (70.6%). At the same time, less than a quarter of respondents believe that the local authority, central government or the European Union had an overall positive impact on policies reducing ESL. Such attitudes were confirmed by the qualitative interviews – the teachers stress the importance of cooperation between all staff members and the existence of mutual support: *“We arrange some things, we keep a united front, and this is already a lot, because no one has yet won the war single-handedly” (Teacher)*. However, they do not feel sufficiently supported in their job, neither by the parents, nor from the authorities whose impact on ESL policies they do not perceive as significant.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, staff members’ responses to the schools’ staff survey indicate that their opinions on risk of ESL and its prevention are connected mainly with school-level policies – the school reports low rates of ESL and hence the measures used by the school to enhance students’ outcomes and participation are evaluated as useful for preventing ESL as well. One area of improvement highlighted by the survey, however, is increased cooperation with employers, which although considered useful in preventing ESL is difficult to arrange for the general upper secondary school. In addition, although there is a relative abundance of resources in case school PL1 – at least compared to other upper secondary schools in the research area – and active cooperation with some parents, respondents to the schools’ staff survey continue to stress the lack of resources and parental engagement needed to assist with the high number of special needs students at the school.

**Table 15: Information about Case School PL2**

<b>School ID:</b>	PL2
<b>Number of students:</b>	470 <sup>17</sup>
<b>Age range of students:</b>	16-20 <sup>18</sup>
<b>Type of school:</b>	complex of vocational schools (among them: technical upper secondary and basic vocational)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	students from basic vocational track who do not finish the school on time – 50% the school dropout rate – approximately 15%
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	49% female, 7% living in rural areas <sup>19</sup>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	32 persons on 26 full-time positions <sup>20</sup>
<b>Number of respondents to Schools’ Staff Survey:</b>	19
<b>Students’ Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	40
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.45 (PL sample average: 3.57)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.54 (PL sample average: 3.31)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	20.5% (PL sample average: 61.9%)

### CASE SCHOOL PL2

Case school PL2 is a complex of vocational schools. The school provides two types of educational tracks for young people: basic vocational and technical upper secondary. Contrary to the usual, the basic vocational track is larger, involving over 200 students in eight classes (one of the largest in Warsaw), while the technical

<sup>17</sup> Not including post-secondary school.

<sup>18</sup> Data for the schools for youth. There are also schools for adults in the complex with no maximum age limit.

<sup>19</sup> Estimations on the basis of the Educational Information System data.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

upper secondary school is relatively small – just 88 students across four classes (the average for Warsaw being 300 students and 13 classes). However, following a growing popularity of technical education in Poland, the school has seen an increasing trend in its technical provision over the last four years, while the number of students in basic vocational track has been decreasing.

The courses offered by the technical track include hairdressing technician and construction technician. In the basic vocational school there are multi-vocational classes, and students of this school may get a vocational qualification in the following professions: automotive mechanic, automotive electrician, cook, salesman, car tinsmith, confectioner, electrician, car painter, sanitation and sanitary installations fitter, photographer, baker or carpenter.

Case school PL 2 is located in a formerly industrial area, whose heritage still influences the spatial order of the surrounding neighbourhood (public infrastructure facilities and warehouses). The school was originally connected to one of the many factories in the area, which provided the students with practical training and offered work placement to the graduates. The part of the district in which case school PL2 is located is cut off from the rest of the district by a busy street, a railway line and an area of garden plots. It is one of the most degraded areas of the city and has long been faced with socio-economic problems, characterised by a low level of economic activity of inhabitants and various developmental barriers. Other problems include significant levels of poverty, high

unemployment rate, alcohol problems and a perceived lack of future prospects.

However, the school's catchment area is much wider than the borough, albeit the share of the students coming from surrounding suburban towns and villages (9%) is below the average for the upper secondary schools in Warsaw as a whole (20%).

According to the findings of the students' survey, the case school PL2 student population is close to average in terms of gender and other demographic characteristics. However, about 30% of students have repeated a grade at school at least once and about 40% of students report some learning difficulties, whilst the average for the Warsaw sample was only 27%. Such a large frequency of grade retention is connected with the profile of the school – basic vocational school is the last choice available for the majority of the students, and this trend is even more visible in Warsaw, where this type of school is attended by less than 4% of all students in upper secondary education (the figure is closer to 12% in the country as a whole). Therefore, the basic vocational track usually attracts the least able lower-secondary graduates. Moreover, it has been identified that vocational school students tend to come from low socio-economic status families.

Qualitative field work conducted as part of the project has highlighted several advantageous features of case school PL2, amongst them innovative programs of vocational training, extensive local history education, good cooperation with employers, effective detection and intervention strategy in case of

individual problems. Case school PL2 additionally provides various extracurricular activities which are aimed at developing soft skills, vocational skills and skills in core curriculum subjects: Polish and maths. The project funded from EU funds help students to enter the labour market and gain vocational experience, thanks to paid summer apprenticeships. The school has the ability to provide practical vocational education in the centre for continuing and vocational training, part of the same school complex. Case school PL2 employs a career counsellor, additional pedagogical counsellor and additional practical training manager. The staff assess students' abilities 'at entry' and systematically analyse the outcomes throughout the school cycle.

The results are mixed – on the one hand 80% of graduates of basic vocational track continue education at a secondary school for adults; on the other, the principal estimates that 50% of students from basic vocational track do not finish the school on time for a variety of reasons. The school dropout rate is approximately 15%.

Case school PL2 is not included in the list of the best 29 technical schools in Warsaw<sup>21</sup>, which means it is ranked below the median (there are 55 technical upper secondary schools in Warsaw).

According to Educational Information System (EIS), there are 29 teachers and other pedagogical staff, as well as 3 non-pedagogical workers employed in the complex to which case school PL2 belongs. Not all of them are employed full-time to work with young

people – in total, there are 19.5 full-time equivalent posts attached to the basic vocational and technical tracks. According to the schools' staff survey results the staff in case school PL2 has a higher-than-average proportion of men, a much greater proportion of staff aged between 40 and 49 and a slightly more experienced teaching staff force. All these features may be attributed to the school's profile. The vocational courses offered by case school PL2 are mostly connected with heavily masculinised professions and that may explain the high proportion of male teachers. In addition, owing to the relatively low starting salaries in vocational education, it is difficult to attract new teachers into this sector in Poland. For this reason the average age of school staff in case school PL2 is relatively high.

Respondents to the schools' staff survey from case school PL2 had a perception of slightly greater availability of school resources, which may be explained by the additional funding from the EU-financed projects. The collaborative school decision-making system and positive teacher-student relations reported in the schools' staff survey are also confirmed by both ethnographic research in the school and qualitative interviews. In interviews the staff emphasized the mutual support and problem-oriented attitude in the team:

*One of the head teachers from the technical school had problems with her class, so everyone got involved. It's November now and the class are as good as gold. Like clockwork. (Deputy Principal)*

*Besides, we also know who is good at what, I mean*

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.perspektywy.pl/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2735:ranking-technikow-warszawskich-2016&catid=195&Itemid=367](http://www.perspektywy.pl/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2735:ranking-technikow-warszawskich-2016&catid=195&Itemid=367)

*teachers. And if I have a problem with something, I can more or less suspect who can help me resolve this problem. (Pedagogical Counsellor)*

The main factors contributing to ESL highlighted by respondents from case school PL2 reflect the general tendency of staff in the Polish sample to look for the reasons of the school failure in the social background of the student: most prominently they emphasise family problems (88.9%), negative influence of peers (78.9%), lack of parental engagement at school (68.4%).

The most effective school-level policies to reduce ESL according to the respondents from case school PL2 are:

- monitoring attendance (89.5%)
- psychological support/counselling (78.9%)
- specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk ESL (73.7%)
- involving parents in the school (73.7%)
- work experience opportunities (73.7%)

The majority of respondents report that case school PL2 is implementing these policies, although with varying results. Only 28.6% believe the school was involving parents in the school 'quite well' or 'very well', which is in-line with the findings of qualitative research – during the interviews the staff were also complaining about low parental engagement at the school. Conversely, the additional vocational training project and additional practical training manager employed by the school help to provide work experience opportunities for the students and 92.8% of

respondents to the schools' staff survey believe that the school perform 'quite well' or 'very well' in this respect.

Moreover, greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies and a greater role for vocational education and training, together with more economic resources are identified as the policies that would most help to reduce ESL by, respectively 94.5% and 77.8% of respondents from case school PL2.

Respondents from case school PL2 do not differ from the rest of the sample in their perception of the impact that various institutions can have on policies reducing ESL. 89.5% of them believe the positive impact have teachers or other staff members, as well as Headteacher/School Management Team, whilst less than 20% have similar view on the role of central government. Despite the appreciation for the EU funds assigned for extra courses and classes, only a small minority (26.5%) also believed that European Union had an overall positive impact on the policies combatting ESL.

## Conclusions

To sum up, the assessment of school policies increasing students' involvement and educational outcomes (and hence reducing ESL) presented by the case school PL2 staff in the schools' staff survey, coincides with the evaluation of researchers undertaking field work there and with the outcomes of the other RESL.eu research conducted at the school. That suggests that the staff's assessment of the situation is quite frank and reliable. Attractive educational tracks, active involvement in extracurricular vocational training

programs, effective detection and intervention strategies in the case of individual problems and needs of students, positive school climate can all be considered protective factors implemented by case school PL2 to prevent or reduce ESL.

## Portugal

### Outline of the education system

In Portugal, educational provision is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and/or the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training, depending on the nature of the provision and its target audience.

The remarkable reduction of the rate of early leavers from education and training from 43.6 % in 2000 to 20.8% in 2012 has come about through the implementation of a significant number of measures to tackle ESL. These include the diversification of educational provision at upper secondary level and projects directed at improving students' basic skills in maths, Portuguese and other subjects that are subject to national examinations. Other measures are targeted towards preventing low school achievement and dropout and primarily address the re-organisation of the schools network. Compensatory measures to encourage returns to education and training comprise part of a suite of lifelong learning initiatives. Between 2011 and 2015, most of these measures continued, although due to the economic crisis changes were implemented under the Memorandum of Understanding on Specific Economic Policy Conditionality (Magalhães *et al.* 2015).

After 2015, national tests were abolished in the 4th and 6th year (the final years of the 1st and 2nd cycle of basic education) and replaced by an evidence-gathering exercise in intermediate years to allow compensatory measures to be implemented, if necessary,

before the end of these cycles. In addition the government has effected policies aimed at implementing universal early childhood implementation, free textbooks in the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of basic education and the creation of the new position of ‘teacher-tutor’. It is also signals the political intent to support and encourage registration in vocational education and to reduce the stigma associated with these courses, making them more appealing to students.

Compulsory education continues up until grade 12, or till 18 years of age, and is run in state publicly-funded schools and in private schools (independent private and government-dependent private). As of 2012, it comprises basic education (1st-9th grade), with three sequential cycles (1st cycle - grades 1-4; 2nd cycle – grades 5-6; 3rd cycle - grades 7-9) and upper secondary education (10th-12th grade, equivalent to ISCED 3).

Upper secondary education is characterised by subject specialisation. It provides permeable educational pathways leading to further studies or vocational qualifications, within the National Qualification Framework (QNQ), in line with the EQF (European Qualification Framework). Scientific courses provide a diploma of upper secondary educational. Technological, specialised art courses, VET and Apprenticeship courses provide dual certification of upper secondary education and professional certification of level 3, allowing students to enter the labour market by providing work experience and/or to continue studies/ training by upgrading their educational attainment.

In 2013/2014, 205,318 students (55.5% women) enrolled in upper secondary mainstream education, of which 86.81% were in public

provision; 117,699 (42.31% women) were in vocational education of which 59.24% were in public schools.

In the same year, there were 72,509 teachers (71.15% women) in lower and upper secondary mainstream education and 7,952 in vocational education. Around 12% had a doctorate or master. There are also 87,933 members of non-teaching staff. The educational sector in Portugal is highly feminised, as indicated by the fact that 71.15% of teaching staff and 86.16% of non-teaching staff are women.

### Case schools analysis

**Table 16: Information about Case School PT1**

<b>School ID:</b>	PT1
<b>Number of students:</b>	924
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12 to 14 (lower secondary) and 14 to 18 (upper secondary)
<b>Type of school:</b>	Lower and upper secondary school
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	No data provided
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	8.3% have learning difficulties. In 2013/14, 53% of the students in upper secondary school and 67.97% in lower secondary school financially supported by SASE (school social support) (IGEC,2013/14)
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	The School staff is constituted of 155 teachers, 26 technical staff, 10 technical assistants and 38 operational assistants.
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	24
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	131
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.57 (PT sample average: 3.67)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.76 (PT sample average: 3.64)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	55.4% (PT sample average: 62.6%)

## CASE SCHOOL PT1

Case school PT1 is a lower and upper secondary school, the headquarters of a complex of neighbourhood schools from pre-school level to grade 12. The school is part of an educational territory of priority Intervention (TEIP). Combatting truancy and early school leaving are central to the objectives of school-level policies.

The school provides scientific courses in science and technology and in languages and humanities; and technical professional courses in electronics, robotics and computing; electrical engineering; tourism; catering (kitchen/pastry); hospitality (restaurant/bar); sports management support; child support; and an education and training course (2 years - waiter) (2013-2014).

Most students at the school are local residents from the surrounding neighbourhood. Although it comprises both lower secondary students and students in upper secondary school, case school PT1 is smaller than average (with 344 upper secondary students, compared to an average size of 400 students).

The school is situated in a suburban area of Porto, in the middle of a social housing project. The area is home to a large number of residents with low SES, precarious jobs and/or dependence on social security. The area's population also contain a proportionately high number of residents with low levels of education: the percentage of parents with higher education is just 2%. There are a

number of Roma people living in the area, which has sometimes caused ethnic tensions with the white population.

99% of the students from the aggregation of schools had Portuguese nationality. Most of them were white, although there are also a significant number of students of Roma origin. In 2013-2014, 53% of the students in upper secondary school were financially supported by SASE (school social support action) (IGEC, 2013/2014).

The school has good facilities: a wide and well-furnished library, computer rooms, teachers and staff lounge, covered and uncovered playground, several pavilions, a canteen and a cafe. Networks between teachers, class directors, tutors, technical and pedagogical services and parents are promoted through the school blog, newspaper and webpage. The principal and teachers offer a lot of their personal time for the benefit of students and of the school, although this has led to a certain level of fatigue, especially amongst the older teachers. The personnel are mainly from the neighbourhood and have an outside-of-school relationship with many of the students.

The school monitors ESL and defines targets for its reduction: the class directors identify risk cases that are kept under observation by the tutorial group, social intervention office, school psychologist, etc. There is a strategy to support school achievement and improve the school-family-community relationship to prevent early school leaving, truancy and poor discipline and learning is promoted by increasing teaching support and preventive measures, such as

preparation for exams; students' ombudsmen; tutorials and supervised self-learning; sports and artistic projects. In general, ESL occurs primarily from vocational courses (20.19%), whilst in scientific courses the rate of ESL is only 1.79% (School Assessment report, 2014-2015).

On the basis of respondents to the schools' staff survey, teachers at case school PT1 are almost exclusively white and middle class and show high level of experience. According to the teachers, the merger of schools to reduce costs and to ease the transitions between school cycles has brought about new difficulties relating to the more centralised management of schools. This may explain why the majority of teachers highlight in the survey that better co-ordination between schools is needed as a means to combat ESL.

With regards to school decision making, there appears to be a tendency for top-down implementation from the school principal, rather than by consultation with the teachers. Respondents to the schools' staff survey report the most effective school-level policies to reduce ESL to be:

- Work experience opportunities (78.9%)
- Monitoring attendance (68.4%)
- Specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of Early School Leaving (63.2%)
- Early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (63.2%)

Whilst these policies were being implemented by the school, only 18.2% believed that early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour was being implemented 'quite well' or 'very well'; only a minority of respondents also believed that the school's attendance monitoring (28.6%) and specific support measures for at-risk students (36.5%) policies were being implemented 'quite well' or 'very well'. Conversely, more than three-quarters of respondents (81.8%) believed that the school performed 'quite well' or 'very well' in their provision of work experience opportunities.

Despite the complex nature of the school's context, respondents to the staff survey from case school PT1 appear to lack reflection on the role of pedagogy in promoting students' attendance and school success. However, monitoring attendance is highlighted as a particularly useful policy to tackle ESL, together with the early identification of problematic behaviour. Almost all (94.7%) of the teachers believed that the most effective way to reduce ESL is the provision of work experience and the greater collaboration with employers so that young people feel more motivated by schoolwork as a tool for their labour market entry. The consequences of the global economic crisis: increased levels of poverty, job scarcity and precariousness may be at the roots of this focus. Better target resources (100%) and better co-ordination between schools (94.7%) were also emphasised. However, respondents were also dubious of the positive impact that is made by the central government (15.8%) and the European Union (21.1%) on policies reducing ESL.

## Conclusions

In institutional terms, ESL often occurs when the school's educational provision does not meet students' expectations. In line with the central ministerial guidelines, case school PT1 takes a strategic view to support school achievement and reduce truancy, poor discipline and ESL, including attempting to improve the school-family-community relationship, focusing on giving more teaching support and developing processes for self-learning.

With the exception of good relationships with entrepreneurs, considered essential in dealing with ESL, respondents to the schools' staff survey do not consider that case school PT1 are implementing school policies for the reduction of ESL to a sufficient level of efficacy. Despite this, they consider that teaching personnel and the director/management team are the key actors in the fight against ESL with the Ministry of Education or the EU playing only a peripheral role.

According to most respondents from case school PT1, risk of ESL is primarily due to factors on the individual/family level and on the particularly challenging social contextual conditions in that area of the city. A lack of students' motivation, behavioural issues and poor discipline and the lack of parental engagement with the school are also major factors relating to potential ESL.

Despite the fact that a high proportion of the school teaching staff is quite experienced, the school's early identification of at risk students and the development of prevention strategies seems still to be inadequate. However, it has implemented other effective

intervention measures, such as requiring students to study in school, enrolling more teachers in study support and decreasing the number of students per class.

**Table 17: Information about Case School PT2**

<b>School ID:</b>	PT2
<b>Number of students:</b>	237
<b>Age range of students:</b>	14-21
<b>Type of school:</b>	One delegation of a broad national cooperative vocational secondary education
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	94%
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	The school population is composed of young women and men, mainly white, of low or quasi low social economic status. 41.7% of students are supported by the national social security system; around 10% have learning difficulties.
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	24 teachers; 3 administrative support staff; 1 psychologist; 1 cleaner
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	11
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	99
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.53 (PT sample average: 3.67)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.56 (PT sample average: 3.64)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	36.8% (PT sample average: 62.6%)

## CASE SCHOOL PT2

Case school PT2 is a vocational upper secondary school (comprising grades 10, 11 and 12). It is one delegation of a national state-funded privately-managed consortium of six schools, which has a contract of classroom-pedagogic, administrative and financial

autonomy with the state. This implies a degree of financial support and respect of the national curriculum.

In 2014-2015, this school increased the number of classes to nine, enrolling a total of 242 students. Although it is smaller than average for upper secondary schools, this delegation is similar in size to the other vocational schools in the area.

The school is well equipped (labs and computers), although the space seems too narrow to shelter the number of students attending the school and there is no outdoor space. The canteen is small (more akin to a school coffee shop) and is placed in a multi-purpose room. No meals are provided but students may purchase snacks.

The school provides practical pre-professional training that allows access to higher education or other post-compulsory courses. It has a focus on coordinating with the labour market and enterprises to provide for student internships. It offers four technical vocational courses (Communications, Marketing, Public Relations and Advertising; Computer Equipment Management; Information and Technology Systems Management and Programming; and Banking and Insurance).

This school is negatively affected by the requirement of the consortium to manage six schools that are spread in the northern and central area of the country and which all have different realities to deal with as a result.

The school is sited in a heavily urban area of the city centre. It is surrounded by old buildings in a narrow street. The school occupies a building of three floors next to one of the main metro stations. There are no green areas around.

Students are in general from lower-middle and 'working class' families; most live in the Greater Porto area and some in the neighbouring counties. A significant number of families are unemployed, have low educational achievement and/or receives social security support. The average age of new students is 16: about 32% previously attended a mainstream secondary school, 32.2% have never failed a year at school and 39% have previously failed one year. In 2013/2014 the school had a total of 135 male students and 84 female students of whom 11 males and 6 females dropped out. The lower levels of parent and community interaction and engagement in school may result of the fact that some students are from the surrounding cities and have low socio economic status. The low levels of schooling may also be at the heart of their lack of investment in the school life of their children. There is also a clear relation between low individual aspiration and family problems.

Case school PT2 provides permanent services of psychological and vocational guidance, as well as social integration programmes. The dropout rate is 3.8% (many students just change to other schools and do not leave the educational system). Teachers undertake periods of reflexive communication and learning with their colleagues and every year they work around a school project chosen by the management team. The school has also invested in

implementing a Council of Class Delegates and a Students' Union. Together with a strong link between family and school, the pedagogical model is based on pedagogic differentiation and cooperative work as the main strategies to tackle early school leaving. According to responses to the schools' staff survey, these institutions can have the most positive impact on policies reducing ESL – in particular, the majority of respondents highlighted the effectiveness of teachers or other staff members (88.9%) and the headteacher/school management team (77.8%).

According to the schools' staff survey, respondents believe that the most effective school-level policies to reduce ESL are psychological support/counselling, involving parents in the school, guidance for pupils in periods of transition and provision of work experience opportunities. At a structural level, policies upon which all respondents were agreed would reduce ESL included: better co-ordination between schools, better monitoring of ESL at national level, greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies and a more effective national or regional ESL policy.

Only a minority of survey respondents believe the European Union (22.2%) has had an overall positive impact on policies reducing ESL, whilst none of the respondents believes that the local authority has had an overall positive impact.

Of the 24 teachers in the school 13 are female. According to responses from the schools' staff survey, staff are mainly younger than 55 years old and seem to not have very high levels of experience.

The workforce have a combination of self-employed (10) and permanent (14) work contracts, whilst all of them are educated to at least degree level. The technical trainers undertake both teaching and non-teaching activities. According to the schools' staff survey, it appears that non-teaching staff are more supportive towards the students than teaching personnel and it is these members of staff who students call upon in case of trouble.

Teachers responding to the survey highlight the following main factors contributing to ESL:

- Non-availability of financial assistance to continue studying (90% of respondents)
- Low individual aspiration (80%)
- Family problems (80%)
- A lack of coherent government policy (80%)

The latter has been particularly apparent since the change in national government in 2011, moving from central to right wing policies, which has brought instability to the education sector. This is reflected by a very large percentage of the respondents who have had to deal with unpredictable changes in education policy, including swingeing reductions of funds for education.

## **Conclusions**

According to the teachers in the survey the main reasons for ESL - financial and family problems - are external to the control of the school itself. Additionally, the reduction of government's funds for

education was also discussed during the qualitative research stage as an important feature with negative impact on ESL.

Therefore, the school's strategy for tackling ESL is mostly focused towards giving support (both psychological and educational) to students and on improving the school-family relationship. Being a vocational school the provision of work experience and the relationship between education and the labour market are given as solutions for ESL, in line with the Portuguese and European guidelines for education. However, more effective policies on monitoring ESL are also sought and highlighted for improvement. Most teachers are eager to accept the role of the school in supporting students but do not think of themselves as responsible for students' failure nor their pedagogical practices. However, respondents' belief that it is the teachers and other staff members who can have the greatest positive impact to reduce ESL appears to contradict their prevailing view with regards their own professional action.

It is worth noting that the low level of school dropout in this institution may be indicative of a certain degree of satisfaction on the part of the students with the educational settings and conditions they are being provided. However, the fact that the school is part of a nationwide consortium does not seem to benefit students as respondents from the Porto school find it difficult to adapt the curriculum to local and student-specific needs.

A small percentage of teachers believe that the European Union has a much more positive impact overall than the local authority.

This seems to mirror a certain sense of disappointment and disaffection that has affected a significant number of the population in relation to the international economic crisis and 'interference' from traditional political structures.

# Spain

## Outline of the education system

All research for the RESL.eu project in Spain was undertaken in Catalonia. Therefore, the Spanish case schools all fall under the purview of the Catalan Department of Education. Whilst the Department of Education has responsibility for compulsory and post-compulsory education, certain vocational training schemes are managed under the Catalan Department of Work, Social Affairs and Families, and higher education is regulated by the Catalan Department of Business and Knowledge. There are three different types of secondary schools in Spain: state-owned and funded schools; privately-owned, state-funded schools (both of which offer compulsory and post-compulsory education tracks and programmes); and privately-owned, privately-funded elite schools. Compulsory education is state funded but, in general, post-compulsory education is not. Selection of students at state-funded, i.e. compulsory, stages is based on residence in the neighbourhood and different socio-economic factors. For post-compulsory studies, however, there are usually a lack of vacancies in the more prestigious private schools. The privately owned, privately funded elite schools, which can be either religious or lay, are usually located out-of-town or in high income neighbourhoods. Compulsory education in Spain starts from 6 and last to 16 years of age. The schools selected for intensive fieldwork belong to the two different categories of state-owned, state-funded schools (ES1, ES2 and ES3) and privately-owned, state-funded schools (ES4).

In Catalonia 106,274 teachers are employed in 'general' education (2013/14), including pre-school (3 to 5 years), compulsory primary and secondary education (6 to 16 years), as well as post-compulsory general and vocational training. In Catalonia, 66% of secondary school teachers work in public schools. Teaching in Catalonia tends to be highly feminized: 76% of the total staff force is made up of women. As for teachers' age, 37% of them are under 40, and 67% under 50. The private schools tend to employ younger staff: 45% under 40, as opposed to 34% in the public schools.

The evolution of ESL since 2006 has followed two trends: up to 2008 the rate increased before it steadily started to decrease until it reached current levels (falling below 20% in 2016). Overall, the graduation rate from compulsory secondary education in 2011-12 in Barcelona (province) was 78.6%, with differences between the public sector and private sector as high as 13.6 percentage points (74.7% and 88.3% respectively).

Whilst ESL in post-compulsory tracks is very high (around one-in-three students), the main concern of teachers, administrators and policy makers is focused on the risk of dropping out from the compulsory (lower secondary) education (ISCED 2), that is not obtaining the 'GESO' credential that is required to go on to study at higher stages of education.

Many of the efforts made in Spain to retain students in post-compulsory education are addressed to those between 16 and 18, who can follow one of two official post-compulsory tracks if they graduate from ESO at 16: one academic (*Bachillerato*), and one

professional (initial VET, or 'CFGM'), which comprise upper secondary education (ISCED 3) and enable them to continue on to higher education (University or CFGS/University).

In terms of youth employment, Spain has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Europe (43.6%, or some 900,000 young people under the age of 25), a rate more than twice the EU averages (21%) and more than three times the estimated world average (13%).

There are four types of situation identified in relation to ESL and the programmes and measures available to deal with it: For students **at risk of not graduating** from compulsory schooling there are school-oriented and work-oriented measures; while for those **likely to graduate** from compulsory schooling and wishing to go **on to upper secondary education**, information and counselling about available options are provided. However, for those with **no desire to continue in education or training** there is still no real strategy being implemented.

## Case schools analysis

**Table 18: Information about Case School ES1**

<b>School ID:</b>	ES1
<b>Number of students:</b>	approx. 800-900 students
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12-16; 16+
<b>Type of school:</b>	Public school that offers: compulsory ESO & post compulsory: Baccalaureate, PFI, CFGM, CFGS, CAS
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Graduation rate: ESO (ISCED-2): 68%</li> <li>- Graduation rate in VET programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- second chance VET (ISCED-2): 39.6%</li> <li>- initial prof. training: 57.1%</li> <li>- advanced VET: 71%</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Baccalaureate: 68%</li> </ul> Drop-out rates are relatively low in ESO (ISCED-2), while dropping out is moderate in post-compulsory stages: 13% in Baccalaureate, and 17% in intermediate VET.
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 47.5% of students have immigrant backgrounds</li> <li>- 3% are Spanish Roma students</li> </ul>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	64
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	24
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	81
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.67 (ES sample average: 3.75)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.86 (ES sample average: 3.66)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	62.0% (ES sample average: 81.1%)

### CASE SCHOOL ES1

Case school ES1 is a public secondary school, officially classified as a “school with maximum complexity” based on family SES factors. It is composed of approximately 800-900 students and 64 teachers, which corresponds to an average size secondary school of the area. The compulsory ISCED 2 is composed of 2 tracks, split into 3 smaller groups in order to offer a better teacher/student ratio. Beyond regular comprehensive groups, one group in years 9 and 10 is VET oriented and another one offers an Initial Vocational Training (PFI) for students who do not aspire to graduate from compulsory education. Baccalaureate courses include one branch in Humanities / Social Sciences and another branch in Experimental Sciences-Technology. The school also offers post-compulsory VET programmes. The initial VET (ISCED 3) includes two of the twenty-four standard branches or ‘professional families’ of VET in Spain. The School prepares students for the access course to advanced VET programmes as well as having two specialisms at ISCED 5, in the same professional branches as in initial VET programmes.

The school is located in a (stigmatized) working class neighbourhood severely affected by the economic crisis and the cutbacks in public services. Students also come from the surrounding working class neighbourhoods. At the post-compulsory level the school also attracts students from further afield to a limited degree. Its catchment area includes seven public primary schools and three large public secondary schools.

Student characteristics

Half of the students are in ISCED 2 or in the post-compulsory academic track. The other half are in initial and upper VET tracks (CFGM and CFGS). Most of the students are from families with very low income and very low educational level. In compulsory education, 47.5% of students have foreign immigrant backgrounds, mostly from poor countries, and 3% are Spanish Roma students. 65% students in ISCED 2 speak Spanish at home, 14% of them speak Arabic and only 3% of students speak Catalan at home (despite this latter being the vehicular language of school). The school principal claims that most of the students starting ESO have not learnt the primary education curriculum contents to an acceptable level.

According to all stakeholders interviewed and the documents analysed, ESL related behaviours are frequent in this school. Graduation rates in ESO are relatively low (68% of students enrolled complete ISCED 2), but in VET programmes are even lower: initial professional training 57.1%; 'second chance' VET track: 39.6%. Drop-out rates are, therefore, very high, especially in initial professional training programmes (23.5%).

Case school ES1 has a negative reputation, especially at lower secondary (ISCED2) level. Better-off families tend to avoid enrolling their children into this school. Though, this does not apply to post-compulsory courses. Due to its "high complexity" status, it has developed a wide range of specific or crosscutting measures, services, and activities to increase both school engagement and academic performance, combatting absenteeism, dropout, etc. School documents emphasize linguistic communicational

competencies. The school is predominantly seen by all stakeholders as a trustworthy and committed school, with excellent social relations. Nevertheless, families and teachers who have no direct link with it do not share this vision. There are no specific measures regarding ESL in this school, nonetheless the staff implement diversified strategies to retain students and offer them different paths and programmes to take them to the completion of compulsory education. Some of the strategies aiming to improve school engagement are composed of the elements of the **Tutorial Action Plan**. Mentoring, improved family-school communication, split-groups, personalised attention and academic guidance/orientation are important element of the action plan. Teachers also underline Open Classroom (reduced groups with adapted curriculum) and their linguistic project as fundamental elements to prevent disengagement and ESL, highlighting social cohesion as a principal aim.

A significant part of the teacher staff is strongly committed to the school's project and particularly with students' progress. However a number of teachers do not believe in it and feel unmotivated by students' low academic/cultural capital.

Students and families highlight the teachers' positive attitude towards them and acknowledge their pedagogical efforts as well as the school's good climate. Some students declare their perception that teachers actually care for them, and families have also confirmed this, this having an impact on attendance. The headteacher and the teachers also refer to their students in very positive ways, emphasizing their potentials and qualities. In

contrast, they are extremely critical of the educational authorities and the continuous scarcity of resources and arbitrary decisions they have to face. The majority of teachers in School B has decided to voluntarily extend their working hours for free to be able to keep reduced numbers of students per class-group. For these reasons, they are only reluctantly taking part in the RESL.eu project.

The schools' staff survey shows that compared to other schools, in this school teachers do not tend to identify problems only in socio-economic situation of the families: they also focus on policies and lack of financial resources.

The fact that teachers perceive a slightly higher than average level of delinquent behaviour in the schools' staff survey, must be contrasted with the qualitative data collected in the school, according to which: school management has put an extra effort into creating a good school climate, on good relations amongst teachers and amongst teachers and pupils. They say, and pupils' interviews also confirm that misbehaviour and antisocial acts have significantly reduced.

A very high level of agreement on the effective 'solutions' can be observed amongst the teachers, that implies teachers' active involvement in the discussion and solution finding. As opposed to other schools: here, emphasis is not based on control. Monitoring or controlling measures are not amongst the most effective policies mentioned.

Parents' involvement seems to be the most difficult task for the school, according to the schools' staff survey. Though they believe it would be the most effective solution, teachers are not fully satisfied with the progress they are currently making. They have not managed to launch a Parents' Association and similarly there is no parental representation in the School Council. Less than half of the families turn up to parents' evenings in ESO and intermediate VET, although turnout is much higher (83%) in the second chance programme.

Teachers show a high level of satisfaction with the extracurricular activities they are offering, under the framework of "Catalan Sports Plan" (sports activities, leisure activities, year-end party), as part of their aims to improve social cohesion.

ESL Monitoring/Control at school level and at national level seems to be a common concern amongst teachers in all four case schools. A proactive proposal, made by teachers in this school, of widening VET and ALA provision is based on the fact that this school is more successful at VET levels, than in ESO. Moreover the main claim of the school is that educational administration should provide them with more economic resources to improve the situation.

As for the other Spanish case schools teachers in ES1 believe that teachers can do more than the school management (with a difference of about 10%) for the reduction of ESL.

## Conclusions

Case school ES1 is the most sceptical of the four Spanish cases in terms of any positive impact authorities (provincial authorities, Catalan government, national government or European Union) may have on reducing ESL. This scepticism can be linked to the fact that teachers expressed a very critical view of a public administration that does not support their efforts for social cohesion and against disengagement, absenteeism, dropout and low performance. Teachers here, also perceive lower than average parental involvement at the school. They identify as the main causes of ESL: families' socio-economic background (87%), non-availability of financial assistance to continue studying (86.4%) and lack of coherent government policies. Unlike other case schools, teachers here do not only see families as the main cause of ESL (86.4%) - they also believe that family involvement in the main solution (94.7%), in addition to further extra-curricular and out-of-school activities (94.7%) and pupils' guidance (90%). Most of them tend to be satisfied with the school's present performance in these aspects. This case school is the less trustful (9.5%) about the possible impacts of the central government or the EU on policies reducing ESL, as compared to the other Spanish case schools.

**Table 19: Information about Case School ES2**

<b>School ID:</b>	ES2
<b>Number of students:</b>	Approx. 1,080
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12-16 + 16+
<b>Type of school:</b>	Public secondary school
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	In-year admission (enrolment) rate in case school 2 is a lower than average, and it is due to foreign students' late arrival in ESO. According to head teacher: there is an overrepresentation of students of light mental retardation. Others mention a wide range of sensorial diversity: dumb, Asperger, degenerative syndromes, ADHD, amongst others. General graduation rate: approx 70% (ISCED 2&3) General repetition rate: 20% (ISCED 2 & 3) General dropout rate: 10% (ISCED 2 & 3) General truancy rate: Intermediate approx. 7% (predominantly belong to the Roma students) High in-year admission in ISCED 2
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	24% Foreign-born students (ISCED 2) 16% Spanish Roma (Gitano) students (ISCED 2) 15% of students are of special education need (registered by EAP) Overrepresentation of students diagnosed with light mental retardation (ISCED 2)
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	93
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	30
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	223
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.75 (ES sample average: 3.75)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.74 (ES sample average: 3.66)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	70.2% (ES sample average: 81.1%)

## CASE SCHOOL ES2

Case school ES2 is a public secondary school, officially classified as a "school with maximum complexity" by Catalan Educational authorities. There are 1,080 students enrolled in this school, in different courses. It hosts 14 groups of ISCED 2, 4 groups of Baccalaureate; while it offers second chance vocational secondary training courses for 2 groups, initial VET courses in 9 groups and upper level VET courses in 8 groups.

All the students are in "ordinary groups", except for some newcomers who attend "Welcome Class" (Aula d'Acollida) and another small group that undertakes a project on "school gardening".

Case school 2 is of average size, similar to other public secondary schools in the municipality. In the same "zone" there are two other public secondary schools, with similar size and training profile. It is located in the northern end of the city. The population has been recently fed by a significant number of immigrant families, especially from Latin America and Morocco. While the indigenous population is of a low-to-intermediate economic level, newcomers tend to be poor and strongly affected by recent economic crisis. Both Spanish and immigrant families tend to have low level of post-compulsory and tertiary studies. A significant part of the students are precedent of a nearby segregated (and stigmatized) neighbourhood. The school is situated within the widest

catchment area of the city, which includes 12 public primary schools and 3 public secondary schools.

Approximately 24% of the students are foreign born, which is double the Catalan average. The most frequent nationalities are those from Latin America (17%) and Morocco (8%). There are 35 different nationalities present in the school besides Spanish. 16% of students are of "Spanish Roma" ethnic origin: a high enough proportion for non-Roma parents to consider this school to be avoided. Almost 15% of the students are registered by Psycho-pedagogic Consultancy and Guidance Team under different categories that require special attention or measures. This is also a significant issue in post-compulsory stages, especially as teachers have no knowledge about students' special needs. The in-year admission (enrolment) rate in this school is higher than average, mainly due to foreign students' late arrival in ESO. According to the headteacher, there is an overrepresentation of students with learning difficulties. Others mention a wide range of sensorial diversity, such as deafness, Asperger's, degenerative syndromes and ADHD, amongst others. The overall graduation rate in this school shows an average of 70%, together with a general repetition rate of 20%. The dropout rate is close to 10%, and the General truancy rate is estimated to be around 7% (predominantly amongst the Roma students).

The general reputation of the centre is poor, especially in the compulsory ESO studies. The main reason why parents enrol their children in case school ES2 is proximity rather than quality. Teachers are aware of the bad reputation and they recognise that

it is partly due to the families who attend this school being from one of the most stigmatized and marginalized neighbourhoods of the city. The only exceptions from this rule are students of “VET course on Design”, which is highly esteemed, as it is offered in very few schools in Catalonia. By contrast, its VET course in Administration is only attractive to students living in the surrounding area.

Despite its poor reputation and school performance, mentoring activity depends on each teacher's consideration both in ESO and in VET levels. A positive point though is that the school offers mediation (conflict resolution and social cohesion) with the active inclusion of students. Beyond “intramuros” measures, this school participates in a ten-day university campus visit during the summer holidays at UAB, a project organised by the university and financed by a bank. This programme (“Campus Ítaca”) reports a significant impact on students who participate in it, in terms of academic continuity towards university studies. The Argó Programme, also organized and offered by UAB, is a programme that provides joint supervision of students' final projects of Baccalaureate and high vocational education tracks (CFGs) in their transition to university and offers professional development for the schools' teachers. Beyond these projects, the school runs a Welcome Class for newcomer students: currently it hosts 23 students with an extra provision of a half-time teacher, a Social integration specialist (provided by the city council) and an Educator (external specialist).

There are 93 teachers working in the school. The staff is made up of many older teachers approaching retirement age, while some others are younger. The teaching methods that the majority follows are more traditional and conservative. Project based work is only implemented in the most popular VET course: designed by a small group of teachers. It is generally recognized by the teachers that they do not coordinate well enough as a staff force.

It must be mentioned that case school ES2 is one of the few secondary schools in Catalonia that did not originally pass the quality examination of the Catalan Department of Education. The main reason was that despite the low level of students' performance, most students were not made to repeat the academic year.

## **Conclusions**

The schools' staff survey shows that there is a general tend to identify school problems in families, rather than in structural and institutional causes. Respondents do not mention government policy, local policy, and even less the schools' insufficiencies as major factors.

Responses, compared to other schools' staff, reflect a lower-than-average agreement amongst the teachers on the most effective school-level policies with respect to ESL. Whist the teachers agree in identifying family-related factors as the ones that most contribute to ESL, correspondingly, they believe that most effective

solutions should target parents, such as involving parents at school more (77%). Despite this, less than half believed the school was currently involving parents 'quite well' or 'very well' and teachers seem to believe that they could do more with this respect. This is confirmed in the interviews as well. Providing work experience and monitoring attendance seems for the majority of the staff to be a school-service best acknowledged amongst teachers. ESL monitoring and control at school level and national level is a common concern amongst teachers in all four case schools. In all four case schools teachers believe that teachers can do more than management staff for the reduction of ESL. ES2 case school teachers highlight “better targeted resources” (94.7%) as the best way policies could achieve the reduction of ESL. Similar to case school ES1, only one-in-ten of the respondents believe that EU and state-level policies on ESL had a positive impact.

**Table 20: Information about Case School ES3**

<b>School ID:</b>	ES3
<b>Number of students:</b>	724
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12-16; 16+
<b>Type of school:</b>	Public secondary school
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	<b>Graduation rate:</b> ESO: 85.5% Baccalaureate: 89.3%
	<b>Repetition rate:</b> ESO: 7.9% Baccalaureate: 8.1%
	<b>Dropping out rate:</b> ESO: 1.03% Baccalaureate: 2.1%
	<b>Truancy rate:</b> ESO: low-level 1.2%; grave 1,7% Baccalaureate: 2.7%;
	1,6%
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	15,8% of students are of foreign origin 3,23% of students are of special schooling needs School mobility rate: 2,83% Only 45% of the students are Spanish speaker. High % of Catalan speakers.
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	62
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	57
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	152
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.78 (ES sample average: 3.75)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.48 (ES sample average: 3.66)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	78.6% (ES sample average: 81.1%)

### CASE SCHOOL ES3

Case school ES3 is a public secondary school that hosts a total of 724 students and 62 teachers. It is a larger than average size public secondary school in the zone offering 4 parallel groups of ESO. The

school offers 4 tracks of Compulsory Secondary Education (ISCED 2) and two of the four standard branches or fields in Baccalaureate education: Humanities-Social Sciences and Experimental Sciences-Technology. Case school ES3 does not offer VET programmes. In 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades of ISCED 2 it runs one support group in each level. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> it applies “flexible groups” that fosters easy transition amongst groups. It has a “Welcome class”, presently with 5 students (in year 10).

The school is situated close to an industrial zone, with detached houses, housing estates and also factories nearby. Nevertheless, the school does not serve a specific neighbourhood, but recruits students from different areas of the town. Furthermore, there have been a growing number of students from other nearby municipalities. The demand has been increasing, exceeding the number of school places offered.

It has around 724 students, 45% of whom declare to speak only Spanish at home. Only a tiny proportion of the students speak Catalan at home, which is the official vernacular language in Catalan schools. Unemployment and downward social mobility due to economic crisis is notable amongst the families.

Over 15% of students have a foreign immigrant background, which is slightly higher than the Catalan average. Approximately half of foreign-background students are of Latin-American origin, while the highest nationality group is that of Moroccans (19%) and Chinese (13%). The school management highlights that an increasing proportion of students face economic and family

problems for which they do not have suitable and sufficient resources. More than 3% of the students have been diagnosed to have a special education need. Students’ school mobility rate (that is changing school) is around 3% (mostly in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of ISCED 2 and in 1<sup>st</sup> grade of post-compulsory academic track, ISCED 3)

Case school ES3 is known as a prestigious school in comparison to the rest of public schools in the industrial town where it is located. Since 2010, it has an over-demand. Its prestige is reflected in the statistics. It has a graduation rate of 85.5% in ISCED 2, and a 89.3% in ISCED 3 (general). Repetition rate in this school is lower than in other public school of the town: 7.9% in ISCED 2 and 8.1% in ISCED 3 (general), coupled with low dropping out rates: 1% in ISCED 2 and 2.1% in ISCED 3 (general), while truancy rate also remains close to 1% in ISCED 2 and around 2% in ISCED 3 (general).

ESL related behaviours are less frequent and there are no measures specifically targeting early school leavers. However, efforts to prevent ESL (mostly understood by teachers as dropping out before completion of compulsory schooling or without completing post-compulsory tracks) are planned within the monitoring and guidance of the students through the activities of the **Tutorial Action Plan**, according to which a specific teacher is in charge of every class-group, monitoring students’ performance and any problems or difficulties; holds conferences with parents; and coordinates actions addressed to the whole group or individual students along the school year. This task includes **academic orientation**, and the participation in outreach activities organized by a nearby university: amongst them the ‘Argó programme’ which

offers professional development both for Bacallaureate students the teachers through the development of the final research work.

Other efforts are implemented through **student-focused measures** such as temporary or permanent students' groupings (to reinforce, accelerate or compensate students' learning), assessments by the school's Diversity Committee (CAD), **first term Bacallaureate** intervention (to assess real possibilities to complete it successfully and, eventually, re-orientate students), mediation (conflict resolution) and emotional support activities. The **Ítaca Program** [Programa Campus Itaca] is an outreach activity offered by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and addressed to a limited number of ESO year 3 students in every school participating in the programme. There is also the **maths joint strategy with UAB** [Croma secundària FAS-UAB]: strategic after-school study groups aimed at raising the maths standards amongst ESO students, as well as other recently implemented outreach activity offered by UAB. Additionally the school provides a **Special Education Support Unit** [Unitat de Suport a l'Educació Especial, USEE] for students with mental & behavioural disorders and **Social Support Specialists** [Tècnics d'Integració Social] in internships.

Educational projects include participation in a **European Comenius** project, a detailed mediation (conflict resolution) project, environmental care project, participation in the Catalan Plan for Sports, Accompanied Study Workshop, and the use of digital books through computer-focused learning.

Beyond "intra-muros" measures, this school participates in a ten-day university campus visit during the summer holidays at UAB, a project organised by the university and financed by a major bank. The programme is called Campus Ítaca, and it reports significant impact on students who participate in it, in terms of academic continuity towards university studies.

Teacher characteristics

The staff force comprises 62 teachers. Students with academic aspirations and those from middle class families have proved to be more critical in their appreciation of their teachers' availability and readiness to guide them in their further choices. The growing instability of the teaching staff was highlighted by the management team as a threat to long-established good practices. This instability affects the internal coherence of the school plan which targets the students' wellbeing and academic achievement.

## Conclusions

Currently, case school ES3 makes considerable efforts to engage their students with continued studying as well as successful labour market incorporation. Nevertheless, it has had growing difficulties due to general decline of living standards of the families, and the absence of feedback from the education administration related to the positive or negative impact of their continued efforts and educational interventions on their students' later careers.

The schools' staff survey suggests that, similarly to most case schools, these teachers also identify the root of the problem of ESL

in families, rather than at a structural or institutional level: family problems (83%); lack of paternal engagement at school (83%); family's socio-economic background (81%). They do not mention government policy, local policy or school-related insufficiencies. In spite of that, in the schools' staff survey, there is less relative importance given to families' involvement amongst the most effective measures to fight ESL. This is the only Spanish case school that puts emphasis on local level cooperation with main public services (youth, health and social and other), 92% of the staff highlighting it. Compared to the other Spanish case schools, in case school 3, the gap between the extent to which teachers believe they can help reduce ESL and how much the onus should be on management staff is much narrower (2%), suggesting a high level of trust in management, or a higher awareness of management's efforts. We can observe, just like in other Spanish case schools a very limited (10%-20%) belief in any positive impact of authorities (county authorities, Catalan government, national government or European Union) on reducing ESL. Generally, teachers share a critical view about it.

**Table 21: Information about Case School ES4**

<b>School ID:</b>	ES4
<b>Number of students:</b>	870
<b>Age range of students:</b>	12-16; 16+
<b>Type of school:</b>	State funded private school (Colegio concertado)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	0% truancy rate, 0% drop out, and no ESL has been reported
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	No minority (immigrant & Roma) students in ISCED 2 Only few immigrant students in post-compulsory courses. 70% of VET students coming from public secondary schools
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	59
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	19
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	205
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.69 (ES sample average: 3.75)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.61 (ES sample average: 3.66)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	88.6% (ES sample average: 81.1%)

### CASE SCHOOL ES4

Case school ES4 is a state-funded private school, with a progressive left-wing tradition shared by the teaching staff, which has gained great prestige in the city both in compulsory and post-compulsory education. With just one ISCED 2 group it is amongst the smallest compulsory secondary courses in the city, despite the large demand amongst middle class and also working class families. The

vast majority of its students pursue post-compulsory diplomas/degrees. It offers pre-primary, compulsory primary courses in a separate building, as well as compulsory secondary courses and different post-compulsory trainings in another.

It is located in a favourably-regarded, though not rich, suburb. Its catchment area is not amongst the largest ones. It attracts students from all around the town, including the nearby town, just one railway stop away. Secondary school (ISCED 2) groups of the school are filled up with students who had previously attended the primary school course in the same school, and few places remain available for new students.

This secondary school hosts a total of 870 students in different courses: ISCED 2 (128); Baccalaureate ISCED 3 (330); intermediate VET ISCED 3 (194); upper VET ISCED 4 (160), and second chance VET track for those who did not graduated the compulsory secondary training (15). While secondary school students come directly from the school's primary school stages, its Baccalaureate course is 80% filled with students coming from other private schools. Seventy per cent of its VET courses are filled by students coming from public secondary schools. No pupil mobility is reported and similarly, there is no dropout in the compulsory stages, whilst for post-compulsory courses it is also comparatively very low. There are no Roma students in school and students from immigrant families are few.

Case school ES4 is considered to be a very successful school and the statistics demonstrate this. More than 60% of intermediate VET students continue to study or enter employment. They achieve a 98% of success rate at the university access. 100% of their ESO students continue studying in a post-compulsory stage. In the 2014/15 school year, the school had a graduation rate of close to 93% in ISCED 2; and 90% in general ISCED 3. Year repetition (retention) rate is also very low, an average of 3% in ISCED 2 and an average of 14% in the first year and 10% in the second year of general ISCED 3. A zero truancy rate was reported across all the courses.

The school participates in different projects of school/educational innovation, it also participates in several projects launched by universities, and local administration (e.g. Programa Agenda 21). It runs a Comenius project and organizes visits to England for their ESO students. Students are provided with tablets for an affordable price. Classes are organised in a variable and flexible ways, often splitting into smaller groups.

Case school ES4 participates in several innovative projects, such as the project called "Nova Escola 21". The school fosters volunteering amongst their students: such as accompanying primary school pupils from-car-to-school, or job in local NGOs.

The school employs 59 teachers. Overall, teacher staff is very stable. Nevertheless, several teachers are employed on a part-time basis and their involvement in the school's strategic project is less.

## Conclusions

Unlike public schools, this state funded private school has an extremely low truancy, dropout and ESL rate. According to the schools' staff survey, teachers identify main factors of ESL in families, rather than in structural and institutional aspects.

As in case school ES4 there is no dropping out. There are only a few low SES families amongst those in compulsory secondary education. In post-compulsory education, there is an important division between the recruitment of students for Baccaureate and for official VET programmes. Their Baccaureate specialties are filled with students from other state-funded private schools of the town, mostly from middle class families, while their VET specialties are filled with students from public high schools and families with working class (though not poor) and lower middle class backgrounds.

Drawing on data from the schools' staff survey, teachers focus on families while identifying main factors that contribute to ESL. Nevertheless the most effective school level policies do not target families, but psychological support (100%), early warning system (94%) and academic/labour market guidance to students (94%), especially in critical situations. The school, according to respondent teachers, makes the greatest efforts in ensuring that all students stay in education after compulsory schooling in either academic or vocational tracks, for which they have a strong reputation. The staff also believe that teachers have a strong positive impact on policies reducing ESL. Similar to the other Spanish case schools, teachers

have a very limited (10%-20%) belief in any positive impact of authorities (county authorities, Catalan government, national government or European Union) on reducing ESL.

## United Kingdom

### Outline of the education system

In the UK, the Department for Education (DfE), headed by the Secretary of State for Education, has overall responsibility for education. However, further education, skills development and higher education fall within the remit of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

England has a diverse school system ranging from publicly funded state schools to fee charging private schools (independent schools). Private schools do not come under the same regulatory framework as state schools.

Even within the category of state education there is considerable variety: while state schools are under the direct control of local authorities, there is a growing number of educational providers, including Academies, Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools, which report back directly to the DfE rather than to local authorities.

Compulsory education in England begins at age 5 and formal schooling continues for 11 years until the age of 16. Recent policy reforms have raised the participation age to 18, such that for two years following the end of formal schooling (GCSEs) young people are required to be either in full-time education, in a work-based learning initiative or undertaking part-time education whilst working or volunteering.

Other policy initiatives to combat ESL (national rate: 12.3%<sup>22</sup>) – or NEET (national rate, 16-24 year-olds: 13.1%<sup>23</sup>) – include obliging students not achieving a minimum ‘C’ grade at GCSE in English and maths to continue to study these subjects up to the age of 18; incentives to undertake apprenticeships; provision of vocational training focused towards equipping young people with in-demand skills for the labour market; and establishing closer links between the world of work and the schools system.

There are currently over 450,000 teachers (FTE) in England with more than 480,000 teaching assistants and school support staff (FTE). Around 40% of these work in secondary education. The majority of secondary school teachers are female (62%), with around 15% being of a BME background (slightly below the proportion seen in the national population). The average pupil-teacher ratio in secondary schools is 15.8 although average class size (average number of pupils taught in a class by one teacher) is 20.1.<sup>24</sup>

Although the number of teachers is going up in absolute terms, the profession does face considerable challenges in terms of recruitment and retention. Almost 50,000 teachers leave the state sector every year, primarily due to workload pressures or individual school circumstances. Government policy aimed at retaining teachers in the profession surround promoting more flexible working practices, whilst recruitment strategies include offering

bursaries for prospective teachers, fee reductions and alternative pathways into initial teacher training.

### Case schools analysis

**Table 22: Information about Case School UK1**

<b>School ID:</b>	UK1
<b>Number of students:</b>	3303 (students aged 16-18) + 180 apprentice between 16-18; approximately 21,000 altogether
<b>Age range of students:</b>	16+
<b>Type of school:</b>	General Further Education College
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	69% from a Black or Minority Ethnic background, 51.1% of the learners are female; 8% of all students disclosed having a difficulty, disability or health problem.
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	11
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	221
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.78 (UK sample average: 3.73)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.92 (UK sample average: 3.67)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	46.2% (UK sample average: 56.7%)

<sup>22</sup> Source: Eurostat, 2013, edat\_lfse\_14.

<sup>23</sup> Source: DfE/ONS, 2015, SFR 29/2015.

<sup>24</sup> Sources: DfE/ONS, School Workforce Census, 2014; Schools Census, 2014.

## CASE SCHOOL UK1

Case school UK1 is a large college of further education with approximately 21,000 students in total, spread across three main campuses. The school delivers approximately 1,500 full and part time courses, in over 20 subjects, including A levels (academic path) and vocational courses. It offers specialist education for young people with learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues; English-language courses (ESOL); and a number of foundation courses preparing students for further academic or vocational education. In addition, the college offers apprenticeships in a variety of sectors: hairdressing, childcare, health care, business administration, customer services, bricklaying, and hospitality.

The school is located across three campuses in two highly populated suburban boroughs. The wide catchment area includes a diverse range of residents, both ethnically and socially, and, as the only FE college in the area, attracts a considerable number of students leaving secondary school or returning to education.

In the last academic year, more than two-thirds of students at the college (69%) were from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background. Data from the students' survey show that amongst respondents from this school, an even greater proportion (84.4%) reported being from a BME background. The students' survey also show that a greater proportion of respondents in this school lived in one-parent families (37.6%) than for the UK survey respondents

overall (26.0%) or for the UK national average (25.0%); a greater proportion have fathers who are unemployed (7.1% compared to 3.6%) (overall UK unemployment rate for males is 6.7%); and over twice the proportion who have mothers with no formal qualifications (21.6%, as compared to 10.0%)

This having been said, respondents from case school UK1 did report significantly higher-than-average levels of perceived support from the staff at the college. Official data show that 80.6% of 16-18 year olds at the institution go on to complete their studies (close to the UK national average of 81.2%<sup>25</sup>).

Case school UK1 provides students with a wide range of support including: welfare and enrichment advisors, learning and community advisors, safeguarding and equality officers, and careers advisors. The college places emphasis on helping students to enrol on the right course, to ensure that they remain motivated to stay in education. All learners take part in a comprehensive induction programme where they learn about their course and the range of support and enrichment services available to them. They also complete a range of initial and diagnostic assessments to ensure that they are on the right programme. If they change their minds or are struggling on their course, they can transfer to a more suitable one, according to the Director of Learner Experience.

The college employs approximately 770 staff members, of whom 69% are female (UK national average is 71%<sup>26</sup>); 52% are of BME

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<sup>25</sup> SFA, National Success Rate Tables, 2013/14

<sup>26</sup> ONS, School Workforce Census, 2014

background (UK national average is 14%<sup>27</sup>) and 4% have a stated disability (Source: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report: 2013/14).

In line with these official statistics, the staff members responding to the schools' staff survey were 72% female, although a lower proportion of respondents were of BME backgrounds (27.3%).

The relatively high perceived teacher support scores reported by the students in the students' survey seem to be reflected in the schools' staff survey with relatively high average scores for teacher-student relations and teacher-student support. However, data from the staff survey indicate that the school as a whole scores lower than for the UK sample overall in terms of parental involvement and parent and community interaction. This is perhaps owing to the institution's status as a further education college, catering to young people over the age of 16. It is to be expected that students are given more autonomy within an environment more akin to a college or university than to a school. This might also be a reflection of the fact that a proportionately higher number of students attending case school UK1 live in one-parent families, as noted above.

In terms of early school leaving, the main contributing factors highlighted by school staff from case school UK1 are:

- family problems (90.0%)
- low individual aspirations (90.0%)

- not getting on with teachers and school staff (90.0%)
- family's socio-economic background (90.0%)
- insufficient school resources (80.0%)

Although these responses are largely in line with survey participants from other institutions, it is interesting to note that 90% highlighted not getting on with teachers and school staff, compared with 66.3% in the UK sample overall; and whilst 80% cited insufficient school resources, the figure overall from UK respondents was just 45%.

During the fieldwork process, staff members at the college were keen to point out that risk factors affecting students did not occur in isolation and many experienced multiple adverse circumstances that meant some young people needed more support than others:

*Most students are very complex when they're when and I think when you pick up a student who has who is having problems ... there's normally quite a lot of problems and these problems have come from way back so you end up supporting them not just in one area but you're having to signpost them to other areas as well for different kinds of support. (**Learning Centre Supervisor**)*

The majority of the factors identified by survey respondents are at the level of individual students and their immediate families, although the relationship between students and teachers and the level of resourcing available to the school are also highlighted.

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<sup>27</sup> ONS, School Workforce Census, 2014

When asked how effective they believed a variety of school policies can be in general to combat ESL, the most popular responses included:

- Monitoring attendance (87.5%)
- Additional classes for low-performing students (87.5%)
- Early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (87.5%)
- Provision of ongoing professional development for their staff working with at-risk students (87.5%)

These responses emphasise specific strategies that teachers value that institutions can implement to address potential risk of ESL.

Throughout the qualitative fieldwork undertaken at the college, staff members were keen to highlight that the college undertakes a number of strategies to encourage students to remain and succeed in education. This includes “lots of monitoring and recording” of students’ progress, according to the Director of Quality and Learning at the college, but also working with parents and different external stakeholders:

*The other bit of the strategy is the partnership work... parents are an important part of the jigsaw, so there are parents’ evenings. ... But then it’s also working with employers, they might be working with social services, it might be working with the probation service depending on the individual student’s circumstances ... So where we*

*need to work with people, we will. (Director of Quality and Learner Experience)*

Beyond the school level, all respondents (100%) from case school UK1 believed that better monitoring of ESL, a greater role for vocational education and training and better targeted resources would most help to reduce ESL. This again serves to highlight the role of further education and, in particular, a well-funded, well-resourced vocational training sector in reducing ESL.

## Conclusions

The fact that this institution is a college of further education means that it already provides a compensatory pathway for students at-risk of early school leaving. Students leaving secondary school after their GCSEs can enrol at an FE college for a number of reasons, amongst them the desire to follow a vocational course not offered by their school or the belief that they can thrive better in an environment more akin to a university than a school.

The wide catchment area for the college means that the student population includes a diverse range of young people, both ethnically and socially and, compared to other institutions in the UK study, comprise a greater proportion of BME students and those from single-parent families. This, however, is well known to the staff and management at the college and they recognise the need for a wide range of learner support strategies.

The complex issues faced by some students are addressed using monitoring techniques and involvement of parents and other key stakeholders, such as employers. The role of teachers and staff to provide support is hugely important and the positive impact of this can be seen as students report higher-than-average perceived teacher support scores. This is further reinforced by the teachers themselves, who report high average scores for teacher-student relations and teacher-student support.

**Table 23: Information about Case School UK2**

<b>School ID:</b>	UK2
<b>Number of students:</b>	753
<b>Age range of students:</b>	11-18
<b>Type of school:</b>	Academy Converter
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	54.8% of students are boys; 1.3% have SEN statements; 71.3% of pupils with English not as first language
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	14
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	143
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.78 (UK sample average: 3.73)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.69 (UK sample average: 3.67)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	40.0% (UK sample average: 56.7%)

## CASE SCHOOL UK2

Case school UK2 is a comprehensive Academy Converter<sup>28</sup> secondary school with around 750 students from age 11 to 18. Its governing body is comprised of local community representatives, parent and staff governors, including the school principal.

The school has a diverse and personalised curriculum according to students' individual needs, their ability and potential. The timetable is developed based on student choice, instead of setting a fixed structure from which students have to choose. In many subjects, students are taught in groups set according to ability. In Years 7 to 11 (age 11-15), all students study a number of core subjects, whilst from Year 9, they also have 2 elected subjects per year – these are mixed-age groups. Functional skills courses in literacy and numeracy to students are also available for students who arrive into the British education system with little prior formal education.

At Sixth Form level (age 16-18), both academic courses (A-levels) and vocational courses (BTEC) are taught and students are encouraged to choose the subject, course or option most appropriate to them. A few students follow an alternative education path, undertaking a placement at a Further Education college for 1-2 days a week, to study vocational courses currently not provided by the school, such as hairdressing, beauty, construction, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Schools which have voluntarily chosen to convert to academy status in order to take advantage of the greater autonomy this brings

Case school UK2 is located in a residential district of a heavily populated outer London borough. The neighbourhood in which the school is located is ethnically very diverse: in the 2011 Census, 43% of the local population identified as White British at ward level, and 46% at local authority level.

The school's ethnic composition is even more diverse than its surrounding area. In the last academic year, only 10.2% of students at case school UK2 are of White British ethnic origin; whilst for 71.3% of pupils English was not their first language – indeed over 70 different languages are spoken at the school. The student population of the school is also socially diverse, with 37.7% of pupils are eligible for free school meals (FSM), more than double the English national average, which is 16.2% for state-funded secondary schools.

Data from the RESL.eu students' survey show that a much higher proportion of students in case school UK2 were born outside of the UK (71.4%) than for the UK survey respondents overall (20.2%). Respondents from this school were also more likely to be of a black or ethnic minority origin than for other London schools (87.4% compared to 79.6%). The proportion of participants in the students survey from UK2 who said that they lived in a one-parent family (45.0%) was almost double the figure for the UK survey overall (26.0%), whilst the proportion of students with mothers without any formal qualifications was also significantly higher than seen in the survey for the UK overall (20.5% compared to 10.0%). Nevertheless average score for students in terms of school engagement (3.78 out of 5) and perceived teacher support (3.69)

were almost identical to the overall averages seen in the UK survey as a whole. This having been said, however, the proportion of respondents from UK2 with aspirations to go to university (40.0%) was significantly below the average for the UK survey overall (56.7%).

In case school UK2, comprehensive data are collected on students' academic achievement, attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Through the Raising Attainment Planning (RAP) system under-achievement, non-attendance or decline in any of these measures is promptly flagged up, so it can be addressed by referring the students to the relevant support measures.

The school offers revision classes and focused study support, help with English language and academic mentoring and they work closely with external agencies that provide relevant services such as speech and language therapy, educational psychology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nurses and social workers.

All students have one-to-one sessions with a career-advisor that parents can attend, as part of the careers programme. Indeed, parent involvement features highly on the school's agenda: they invest in strategies to increase participation in parents' evenings; parents are regularly surveyed about their views; there are workshops and courses for parents on relevant topics such as computing skills, parenting, learning English. Parents have access to their child's timetable, teachers contact details, attainment, attendance and behaviour data through the school's online information management system.

The school employs approximately 90 staff members, of whom 57.5% are female (UK national average is 71%<sup>29</sup>); 56.6% are of BME background (UK national average is 14%<sup>30</sup>) and 12.4% are aged 50 or over (Source: School Workforce Census). In line with these official statistics, the staff members responding to the schools' staff survey were 50% female, those with BME backgrounds also comprised 50%, whilst those aged over 50 were over-represented (21.4%).

Data from the staff survey indicate that the school as a whole scores lower than for the UK sample overall in terms of parental involvement at school with the school, whilst respondents to the survey also reported slightly more disruptive classroom environments than seen in the UK survey overall.

A relatively low reported level of parental involvement may be surprising considering the emphasis the school places on engagement with families, although this may be an area that the school as a whole has identified as requiring greater attention. Low parental involvement may also be a reflection of the fact that a proportionately higher number of students attending case school UK2 live in one-parent families, as previously stated.

Respondents to the staff survey from case school UK2 highlight the following contributing factors as the most important in terms of risk of early school leaving:

- low individual aspirations (100.0%)
- low individual academic ability (91.7%)
- family problems (83.3%)

These responses are largely in line with survey participants from other institutions in the UK and a focus on family and individual factors is again emphasised. This seems to suggest that, according to school personnel, risk of ESL is something that lies beyond the immediate remit of the school and primarily rests with individual motivation, ability and family circumstances.

Staff members from case school UK2 believed that the most effective school-level policies for reducing ESL were: monitoring attendance (100% of respondents believe this to be a 'quite effective' or 'very effective' policy); guidance for pupils during periods of transition (100%); specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of Early School Leaving (83.3%); involving parents in the school (83.3%); early warning systems to identify problematic behaviour (83.3%); co-operation with other service providers (83.3%) and provision of ongoing professional development for their staff working with at-risk students (83.3%).

The vast majority of respondents were aware that case school UK2 were already implementing these policies, although only around 60% of respondents stated that the school provided specific measures for at-risk students or had policies for the ongoing professional development of staff members working with at-risk students.

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<sup>29</sup> ONS, School Workforce Census, 2014

<sup>30</sup> ONS, School Workforce Census, 2014

These responses emphasise specific strategies that teachers value that institutions can implement to address potential risk of ESL. Beyond the school-level, respondents also highlighted that better monitoring of ESL in schools (by some higher authority) and greater collaboration with employers and other external agencies were important policy proposals that could help to reduce ESL in the future. Whilst all respondents from case school UK2 agreed that the most positive impact on policy initiatives remain the school's staff force and leadership team, very few believed that the EU or central government could positively influence policies to reduce ESL.

## **Conclusions**

In summary, case school UK2 comprises students and teachers from a diverse range of backgrounds with a substantial proportion of BME and socially-disadvantaged pupils. Despite this, it has a large number of measures in place to assist students and to provide both academic and pastoral support. The levels of perceived teacher support recorded in the students' survey are comparable to those seen for students at other schools in the UK sample and school engagement does not appear to be any lower on average than for the UK students' survey overall. ESL is seen primarily through the lens of poor individual ability, aspiration or adverse family circumstances and staff members appear to believe that the measures implemented by the school are sufficient to assist at-risk students in the majority of cases.

## Sweden

### Outline of the education system

In Sweden, both the nine-year compulsory school and the voluntary upper secondary school are co-educational, comprehensive and have a nationwide curriculum. All public education is completely or partially financed by the public budget and tuition is free of charge in public institutions. Different financial assistance schemes are offered to students in upper secondary, adult and higher education (Le Grand, Szulkin, & Tåhlin, 2005).

Whilst the municipalities are responsible for compulsory and upper secondary education for all residents who start studying before the age of 20 years, schools can be either publicly or privately run. Approximately 17% of all compulsory schools and 33% of all upper secondary schools are '*friskolor*' – privately owned charter schools with public funding. In 2015, Swedish compulsory schools had an average of 12.2 students per teacher and employed approximately 94,000 teachers. Although 9 out of 10 teachers has an pedagogical university degree, reports show that only 67% are qualified for the specific school form, grade and/or subject they teach (Skolverket, 2014).

Amongst the students leaving compulsory education in 2015, 23% did so without complete grades. The highest rates of failed grades could be found in two of the three core subjects – 10.4% in mathematics and 35.9% in Swedish as a second language (Skolverket, 2016). Having failed to pass one or more of the core subjects, students are not eligible for upper secondary education. Alternative pathways, such as preparatory programmes (for those

who are not qualified) or language introduction programmes (for children of newcomer immigrants), are available for students who want to continue to upper secondary education later on. To tackle early school leaving Swedish policy documents stress the importance of focusing on the young person's needs and to provide for flexible solutions (Skolverket, 2010). One way of meeting students' individual needs is to individualize the teaching content and working methods, for example by making use of individual study plans and development dialogues (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2007). Cooperation between school workgroups and labour market (SKL, 2013), special support for students with special needs (Skolinspektionen, 2009; Skolverket, 2010), well-functioning study and careers guidance (SKL, 2013; Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 2013) and competence development for educational staff (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2007) are amongst measures implemented towards tackling the problem of early school leaving.

## Case schools analysis

**Table 24: Information about Case School SE1**

<b>School ID:</b>	SE1
<b>Number of students:</b>	473
<b>Age range of students:</b>	6-16
<b>Type of school:</b>	Municipal compulsory school (preschool – 9 <sup>th</sup> grade)
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	<i>unavailable</i>
<b>Student characteristics:</b> (e.g.% of minority students;% with learning difficulties, etc.)	<i>unavailable</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	47
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	17

### CASE SCHOOL SE1

Case school SE1 is a municipal compulsory school located in a suburban area in a small municipality outside of Stockholm. In 2015, the school had approximately 500 pupils studying in grades from pre-school class up to the last year of secondary school (9<sup>th</sup> grade). The size of the school is comparable to other institutions in the surrounding area. The school also provides preparatory language classes for newly-arrived immigrants and has an after-hours leisure-time centre for pupils up to the age of 12.

The suburb was built in the mid-1970s and consists of a mix of high-rise buildings, terrace houses and three-storey buildings. The majority of the children enrolled at the school live within walking distance; some, however, travel from nearby neighbourhoods.

People in this area, according to Statistics Sweden (SCB), have a very low rate of employment (approximately 45%) compared with the average in the country as a whole. Furthermore, the educational level amongst the residents is very low compared to other areas in the municipality: whilst 35% have an educational level below upper secondary school, only 15 to 20% has studied at the university level. The majority of inhabitants have a background of migration, primarily from areas of the Middle East.

The municipality where the school is situated has a high percentage of inhabitants with an immigrant background – around 50% of the population is either foreign- born or have two parents born abroad (SCB, 2014). While the majority of the pupils in 9<sup>th</sup> grade are born in Sweden, 95% of the students are taught ‘Swedish as a second language’ (SvA), instead of regular Swedish courses. For young people who are newly arrived, the school provides preparatory classes before integrating the children into the regular education. Due to the categorisation of pupils into grades according to age group, the prior educational level amongst the newly arrived pupils in one class can vary to a great extent.

According to the school's student advice counsellor, approximately 1/3 of the pupils in 9<sup>th</sup> grade continue onto a language introductory programme at upper secondary school.

Although students' merit qualifications are low – 187.1 points for the school year of 2015 in comparison with national average of 224.7 – results has been increasing slowly. Since 2011, when a new national curriculum was introduced, the number of pupils eligible

for upper secondary education has increased from 39.3% to 67.7% in 2015. That is, however, only for vocational programs. For the natural science and social science programmes, 56.9% and 64.6% respectively of the students qualified. Of those who finished 9<sup>th</sup> grade during 2015, only half (50.8%) were able to pass all subjects.

The school building was previously situated close to the suburb's centre but burnt down some years ago. The current school building has been in use for four years and the architectural design is based on a model of open spaces and glass walls. This model has been both praised for its innovative character and highly criticised for creating an environment where it's hard for the students to concentrate.

The school's poor reputation is something of which both students and staff are highly aware. The difficulties of employing suitable personnel and qualified teachers often relate to its reputation as well as to the fact that the school is perceived to be badly geographically situated in terms of public transportation and accessibility. Since there is a lack of qualified teachers on a national level, case school SE1 has difficulty in competing with other schools when it comes to attracting the few available qualified teachers.

The school has received pedagogical and economical support from the state to be able to combat the issues affecting it (such as low merit qualifications and low rate of eligibility for upper secondary education). As a result, in October 2015, the school had a lower ratio of pupils to teachers than the national average – 10:1 in this school in comparison to 12:1 on average. The number of full-time

staff has increased, higher wages have been introduced to attract teachers with good qualifications and the school invests in continuing professional education for the present staff force.

Case school SE1 employs 47 teachers, out of whom 35 have a teaching qualification. In comparison to the other schools in the survey, the teachers at this school have less experience of teaching, both in their current position as well as overall; slightly lower levels of job satisfaction; slightly lower access to school resources and are more likely to have a migration background.

Many of the newly-employed teachers stay only for a short period of time, sometimes even before their contract has ended. Consequently the school leaders have a difficult task to recruit and retain teachers.

Discussing the challenges for the staff, school leaders emphasise the low educational levels of the pupils' parents as a major factor for which the school has to compensate. However, the respondents of the schools' staff survey do not regard the socio-economic background of the children as one of the most contributing factors of early school leaving. Instead, the main factors contributing to early school leaving are perceived to be:

- A lack of parental engagement with the school (68.8%)
- Low individual aspiration (68.8%)
- Family problems (64.7%)
- Inadequate school policies or interventions (52.9%)

The difficulty in being able to contact parents and in poor levels of school-home co-operation can be illustrated by the lack of participants in the 'school-parent' meetings in which only a small number of the parents participate. The lack of Swedish language proficiency amongst both parents and pupils is also an issue about which the teachers raise concerns.

When asked about the most effective school level policies to reduce early school leaving, 'psychological support' and 'counselling' (92.9%) as well as specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of dropping out (86.7%) are highlighted by the school staff. While all of the personnel are aware of the existing policies concerning these issues at the school, only 40% perceived them to be implemented 'quite well' or 'very well'.

## Conclusions

Case school SE1 has one of the municipality's highest rates of students leaving their secondary school education without sufficient grades to be eligible for upper secondary school. Early school leaving is thus a prominent issue at this school and many efforts have been made to break the trend. Due to the national lack of qualified teachers, competition between schools to secure their personnel has increased and schools like SE1 have an even harder time attracting much-needed staff members. Many of the teachers stay only for a short amount of time, which leaves the students with several new teachers every semester. The levels of Swedish language proficiency amongst the students in one class can vary to a great extent, hindering the ability to teach to a high level for all

students. Both students and teachers are aware of the efforts the school has made to come to terms with low school results but none of the groups consider these to be sufficiently effective or well implemented.

**Table 25: Information about Case School SE2**

<b>School ID:</b>	SE2
<b>Number of students:</b>	1,076
<b>Age range of students:</b>	16-20
<b>Type of school:</b>	Municipal upper secondary school
<b>Student attainment at ISCED 3 (%):</b>	<i>unavailable</i>
<b>Student characteristics:</b> <i>(e.g. % of minority students; % with learning difficulties, etc.)</i>	<i>unavailable</i>
<b>Number of staff members:</b>	97
<b>Number of respondents to Schools' Staff Survey:</b>	14
<b>Students' Survey</b>	
<i>Number of respondents:</i>	39
<i>Average School Engagement score (out of 5):</i>	3.67 (SE sample average: 3.63)
<i>Average Teacher Support score (out of 5):</i>	3.96 (SE sample average: 3.69)
<i>% Aspirations ISCED 4+:</i>	23.7% (SE sample average: 59.9%)

### CASE SCHOOL SE2

Case school SE2 is a municipal upper secondary school that is located in a small municipality in Sweden. With its 1,076 students, case school SE2 is the largest upper secondary school in the area. The school provides the following education tracks and programmes:

- Construction
- Automotive and transport
- Electricity and energy
- Health and social care
- Engineering programme
- Trade and administration
- Economy
- Natural science
- Social science
- Upper secondary special school

The majority of the students in case school SE2 come from a working class background, are Swedish born and have no history of migration in the family. Depending on the programme, the number of students who complete their studies and achieve an upper secondary school qualification varies:

- Construction programme: 50%
- Automotive and transport programme: 77%
- Economy programme: 76%
- Social science programme: 71%

Case school SE2 provides students various kinds of support, such as measures to increase parental involvement, measures to identify and support students at risk of early school leaving, extra tuition, study and career guidance and guidance for students during periods of transition. Another crucial support measure, the introductory programmes are implemented to reduce the risk of students leaving school early. The teachers in these programmes are highly experienced and offer the students individualized learning. Flexible and innovative teaching methods are used and students' individualized needs are taken into account. Student groups are also very small, something that gives teachers the opportunity to provide extensive help to each student.

The teachers at case school SE2 are slightly older than the average age amongst teachers participating in the survey and the majority of them are of native origin. They have worked for a longer period of time at the same school and have a greater level of teaching experience in general. The majority of the teachers are satisfied with their working conditions and are aware of the different measures the school directs towards preventing early school leaving. The respondents at case school SE2 believe the main factors contributing to early school leaving are:

- A lack of parental engagement with the school (69.2%)
- Low individual aspiration (64.3%)
- A lack of Swedish language proficiency (64.3%)
- Inadequate school policies or interventions (61.5%)

In terms of effective school policies, all the teachers highlight the involvement of parents in school as having crucial importance. Other policies considered the most effective are specific measures to identify and support pupils at risk of early school leaving, outreach programmes for vulnerable families and guidance for pupils during periods of transition. While a large proportion of the teachers believe that the school is involving parents and implementing guidance for pupils during periods of transition 'quite well' or 'very well', less than a third (30.8%) believe that the school is implementing outreach programmes for vulnerable families 'quite well' or 'very well'. These perceived limitations in the implementation of outreach programmes may, in turn, be related to another aspect that the majority of the teachers (78.6%) are concerned about: i.e. the lack of economic resources. The lack of

sufficient resources is perceived to be a problem especially amongst the teachers in working in the preparatory programmes.

The teachers participating in the survey believe that the school management team and other staff members can have an equally positive impact on the policies aimed at reducing early school leaving. This approach is also notable in the cooperation between the school management team and the teachers. For instance, teachers and school management team members are equally involved and co-operate with each other in the design and the implementation of the Individual Alternative introductory programme. This programme is in itself a measure introduced to reduce the risk of early school leaving, a measure in which students receive individualized teaching by highly experienced teachers and student groups are very small. Likewise, school management and teachers also cooperate in other support measures and policies implemented at the school level.

## **Conclusions**

Case school SE2 faces a number of challenges in its efforts to reduce the risk of students leaving school early. Since the majority of the students have a lower socio-economic background they generally lack high levels of study motivation and quite a high proportion of the students do not completed their studies. In order to increase the number of students achieving a qualification the school has implemented several support measures, of which some are considered by the teachers to work effectively while others are regarded as inadequate. For example, while a large proportion of

the teachers think that the schools' efforts to involve parents and implement guidance for students during periods of transition are well-functioning or quite well-functioning, only a small number think that outreach programmes for vulnerable families are effectively implemented. Moreover, a majority of the teachers are worried about the lack of financial resources, something that might explain the limited effectiveness of some of the existing support measures – there simply is not enough money. However, one aspect that might to some extent counteract these financial limitations is the successful co-operation between the school management team and teachers in the design and implementation of the various support measures and policies at the school.

## Overall conclusions

**The analysis of the case study schools presented in this report can only scratch the surface of the extremely diverse range of contexts, approaches and experiences of secondary education within and between European countries. This study is not meant to be 'representative', but rather to provide a number of insights and discussion points to be explored further in future research and among practitioners. Nonetheless, some major themes and issues emerge quite strongly from the data collected across the 17 schools in Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Sweden.**

Firstly, a large number of these schools are endeavouring to challenge negative **perceptions** about themselves and the communities they serve. This issue goes well beyond local public relations and superficial 'rebranding', and is connected instead to the way in which perceptions or prejudices about a school can generate 'vicious' or 'virtuous' circles among students, parents, staff and local stakeholders. There is also a direct impact on staff morale and the ability to convey specific sets of **values and norms** as the guiding principles of a school's activities. This second element emerges as another challenge shared by many schools. In particular, many of the school staff surveyed referred to a mismatch between the values of the school and the values, expectations and aspirations of students as a major obstacle in pursuing their educational objectives. This mismatch is perceived as rooted in the socio-economic and cultural background of the students and their families, particularly with regard to class and

culture (including, but not limited to, ethnic minority and migrant populations). Indeed, it is interesting to note how the **family background** is very often identified by school staff as one of the major risk factors for ESL and low school engagement and a lack of **parental involvement** is listed among the main problems faced by schools. In very few cases teachers seem to have found effective mechanisms to address this.

More generally, the results of our school staff survey and the fieldwork undertaken in some of the schools indicate that most teachers tend to identify the **root causes of ESL** outside the school's arena and remit, and more specifically to do with the socio-economic and cultural environment of the students. In some cases, this may be connected to a need of increasing critical and **reflective approaches** among teachers with regard to their pedagogical practice and the measures implemented within the school. On the other hand, the role of **local and national policies** – though the object of strong scepticism in some countries – appears much less prominently in the views and concerns of education practitioners; whilst **European policies** and interventions are moreover almost entirely off their radar.

Another recurrent theme emerging in most school is the need to liaise more effectively with **employers** and to be able to provide adequate work opportunities to students. The inability of students to secure relevant and appropriate extra-curricular and employability-focused activities, in some cases to lack of resources or underdeveloped networks, is often seen as another key

challenge to support young people **transitions from schools to the labour market**.

Finally, it is important to observe that many schools operate within a **constantly changing environment**: change in their student population (and hence in their students' needs), change in the socio-economic composition of their local areas, changes in policies and guidelines and, in some cases, changes in school management and high levels of staff turnover. This requires continual adjustments to the practice of individual teachers and makes it difficult to implement and consolidate good practice and effective measures in schools.

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