



# **Piloting Youth Guarantee partnerships on the ground**

Case study: Helping at-risk youth to prepare and guide them into positive post-school outcomes

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*Employment,  
Social Affairs  
and Inclusion*



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## **Introduction**

Helping at-risk young people to prepare and guide them into positive post-school outcomes, such as next level of education or training or employment, is important to contribute to lowering the NEET rate.

At-risk youth often face multiple barriers to participation. For example, they may be young mothers, carers, those with difficult family backgrounds, those who are experiencing behavioural difficulties or other such illnesses. Often these young people may have already started to disengage from education at an earlier age, or at least show such early signals.

Targeting this group at an early stage can help to prevent them to further disengage from school and society and prevent them from becoming NEET. Importantly, prevention work can reduce the potential cost of NEETs. The annual loss across Europe due to NEETs in 2012 was estimated as €153 billion a year<sup>1</sup>. This is also accompanied with the social cost of NEETs as it tends to lead to long periods of unemployment and inactivity and poverty.

Guiding at-risk youth should contribute towards the European Commission's Europe 2020 headline target for reducing early school leaving to less than 10% by 2020<sup>2</sup>. Early school leaving significantly impacts on an individual's skill development and career choices and the overall skill set of a local area, region or country.

This case study will explore approaches introduced by a selection of pilot projects to address this issue. It will look at practical examples from two projects – Hartlepool (UK) and Legnago (IT). Examples will also be used from other pilot projects to demonstrate the variety of approaches. We will firstly explain the innovative practices for each chosen projects and then discuss the emerging key messages.

## **Overview of transition practices of pilot projects**

Youth Guarantee projects have developed activities to prepare at-risk young people to make positive post-school transitions. We will look at two selected projects.

### **Practice 1: Transition focussed mentoring and support, Hartlepool (UK)**

The Hartlepool project worked with six schools to identify and help at-risk students make a positive transition from compulsory education to the next level of education. The project supported 245 students who were aged between 15 and 16 year olds and in their final year of compulsory education and deemed 'at risk' of disengagement, according to the 'Risk of NEET indicator' used by all secondary schools in the region.

The support model developed by the project included a foundation of 30 hours of one-to-one mentoring support for all participants and add-on support tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of the individual young person. This additional support included the opportunities to attend employers' fairs, 'Choices' careers events and taster sessions at local Further Education colleges. This also included 'wrap-up' support over the summer holiday so as to keep them engaged before starting the new school at the next level of education or training.

The project sat within the wider local context of the Hartlepool Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which is a town-specific plan and working group looking relevant issues to youth unemployment and NEETs.

On a smaller scale, we can look at the support and activities undertaken by one of the participating schools. Thirty-five young people from English Martyrs School and Sixth

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2012) Staff Working Document: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Establishing a Youth Guarantee, page 9

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29\\_early\\_school\\_leaving.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29_early_school_leaving.pdf)

Form College participated in the project. These young people were identified from the 'Risk of NEET indicator' tool and from internal databases. All of the beneficiaries had started to show signs of disengaging from education.

Each young person was provided with a team of specialist support staff. This included academic, non-academic staff and employers. The team was organised around the needs, aspirations and situation of the young person. A key worker from the non-academic support staff oversaw the mentoring teams to ensure that the learners' needs were met. This was different to the support they may have received previously as previous support mechanisms purely focused on their educational needs and did not take a holistic approach.

Each mentoring team talked the young person through the different post-16 choices and options available, along with their parents (if deemed necessary). The teams broke the information down into a simple message that the young person would understand. The mentoring was flexible to their needs. For example, on a day when a mentoring session was planned (perhaps to take place at their house) and the young person is uncooperative the mentor may suggest re-arranging the session to another day. In between the mentoring sessions the support team contacted the young person to 'check-in' with them, particularly those who were less engaged.

The beneficiaries also had the opportunity to be in contact with employers through some of the mentoring (where possible) and by attending employers' fairs. In future the school would like to build in more placements and work experience taster days as those who are most at-risk often require a slower integration into the work place. In addition, employers expect young people to have self-drive and the ability to work unsupervised however this cohort need much more support therefore the school would like to provide employers with a greater level of support in the future to cope with such young people.

Nine out of ten participants to this activity successfully moved to the next level of education at the end of the pilot.

### **Practice 2: Motivational support workshops, Legnago (Italy)**

The project in Legnago (Italy) created a new network between the project coordinator, public organisations, such as social services and schools to help at-risk students and prepare them for positive post-school outcomes. The aim was to provide young people with extra motivational support in school (aged 14 – 16) and provide older young people (aged 17 – 20) with extra training and support to seek alternatives to school / work.

The project created new strategies to help young people into positive post-school outcomes. Below is a detailed description of the two strands.

- The first strand, the motivational workshops, involved an external expert delivery of five meetings in three schools. This is the first time that external experts from other educational and social organisations have been able to deliver workshops inside schools. Each meeting lasted around three hours. They looked at options available to young people after compulsory education and looked at what the young person wanted to do and how they could achieve it. Teachers were also trained to deliver the workshops in the future. .
- The second strand, the alternative school and work workshops, was delivered over four to five meetings with an external expert. The sessions covered things like how to write a CV, expected behaviour in a workplace and where a young person may prefer to work. The sessions also included a visit to a work place. Ultimately, these sessions helped young people to choose career options right for them.

In addition, the project also established an 'observatory.' This brought together different organisations – such as authorities, social partners and project partners – to look at the issue of young people. The first meeting was held in October 2013 where the results of a piece of research on the number of young people at high risk of drop out was published. The observatory aims to explore different aspects such as differences in attitude, labelling, personal behaviour and problems, social context and any difficulties that exist in school between young people and their peers and teachers. This holistic approach is innovative within the region.

Employers have been positive about the project. This project has allowed them to recruit and meet young people and learn more about at-risk young people. It is important that they can find motivated young people who have the right training and information – or who are malleable, who employers can mould their attitudes and provide them with relevant training. Positively, it has helped them to address any negative perceptions they may have held about this group – such perceptions may hold other employers back from becoming involved.

## **Benefits of providing support and guidance to at-risk young people to make positive post-school outcomes**

The cases of Legnano and Hartlepool indicate that there are a number of benefits in providing at-risk young people with tailored support and guidance to make positive post-school outcomes.

Firstly, these pilot projects have been able to offer young people with ongoing support about making the transition from compulsory education to the next step in their careers. This has either been through a series of one-to-one mentoring sessions (Hartlepool) or a series of group workshops (Legnano). In both situations, information was delivered in an interactive way so that the young person could engage and digest the information in a way to suit them.

Secondly, they have utilised partnerships to deliver holistic support packages to young people. This has built upon existing networks (in the case of Hartlepool) or established new partnership ways of working (Legnano) that encompass a wide variety of partners and expertise. This has included regional or local authorities, social services, schools, further education representatives, social partners, employers and chambers of commerce. The views and inputs of partners has allowed projects to adjust to local needs and to build on the knowledge of specific partners to provide appropriate support to young people. In particular, the partnership working in Legnago has enabled regional authorities to identify at-risk young people, gain an understanding of their issues and to develop tailored packages to respond to their needs.

Lastly, the two projects have been able to build upon networks to create opportunities for employers and young people to connect for the first time. Visits to the workplace (Legnago and Hartlepool) have been useful to both employers and young people to understand each other. In terms of young people, they are extremely useful for young people to understand the expectations of employers and the work place and thus prepare them for working life. This 'taster' approach has also been used in the Hartlepool project for young people who are interested in pursuing further education options. Slow, step-by-step integration into new settings allows young people to gradually prepare for their next step.

## **Lessons from practice**

### **Lesson 1: Intensive one to one support is important to understand, guide and support each young person**

Leaving the security of compulsory education and making the next step to further education, training or employment can be confusing and a difficult transition for young people. A wide range of pathways are available and it can be confusing for a young person to understand, particularly if they have already started to disengage from the education system. Providing intensive individual one to one support provides young people with support to understand the possible next steps and talk through their options.

Face-to-face support is vital to understand the young person and to engage with them. In both the Legnago and Hartlepool projects, face-to-face support was tailed to the needs of the young person. This helped the front-line staff to understand the young person's background, experiences, barriers and career aspirations in more detail. In the Hartlepool

project they used this information to deliver add-on support relevant to the young person's needs.

This type of support was often delivered through mentoring. Providing young people with an adult who they can talk to, outside of the school and home environments, can give them an independent adult view point and guidance on which steps to take to achieve their career aspirations. It is often the first time that a young person has been really listened to, their career aspirations have been taken seriously and they have received support to achieve their aspirations.

Mentoring was sometimes delivered to create a 'bridge' of support between different activities. For example, the Hartlepool project offered each participant 30 hours of mentoring across the project lifetime, taking place within school hours and it was built into the timetable for those the concerned students. How often the mentoring took place was agreed on an individual basis between the mentor and the beneficiary. The Croydon (UK) project also had a large mentoring component. Mentors were trained employer volunteers and met with their two matched mentees individually on a monthly basis. Towards the end of the project some mentors increased how often they met with their mentee, school requirements permitting, and some even maintained contact with their mentees via email. Each session was designed around the wishes of the mentee and often involve confidence-building and exploring career options that the young person hadn't previously considered.

## **Lesson 2: The involvement of non-teaching staff and those outside of schools can result in a higher level of positive engagement from young people**

Often at-risk young people see teaching staff, and sometimes non-academic school staff, as being part of the 'establishment' and are often unresponsive or demonstrate negative behaviour towards such support. Non-teaching staff or specialist outside of schools, such as psychologists and youth workers, are equipped with specialist knowledge and skills to effectively engage with at-risk young people. As a result, some pilot projects have involved external experts or organisations to work closely with the young people. For example, the Legnago project involved external experts to deliver the motivational and alternative school and work workshops as they had specialist skills and knowledge to deliver engaging workshops to the target group.

Non-teaching staff, youth workers and those outside of schools can provoke a better response from young people as they talk with young people at their level, in language that they understand and effectively engage with them in meaningful dialogue. The Pembrokeshire project worked with youth workers to produce a 'Rough Guide to Work', which explains the social norms and expectations in the work place using a language and style familiar to the young people. This enabled at-risk young people who are on the verge of leaving compulsory education to have an understanding of what is expected of them during the job search process and in the work place and they are able to talk through their concerns, experiences or preconceptions with someone who is 'independent' of their school and family life.

## **Lesson 3: Multi-agency partnerships help individual organisations to provide holistic support packages**

Working in partnership with other organisations is hugely beneficial to pilot projects. Drawing on the expertise and networks of social partners, youth organisations, local authorities, schools and employers strengthens the offer of holistic, sustainable support packages to young people.

Using partner knowledge is particularly useful to adapt offers of support to young people's needs when making the next step to positive post-school outcomes. In the case of Hartlepool, at English Martyrs School the initial mentoring sessions between the mentor and young person was used to establish the needs and career aspirations of the young person. During this process, the school was able to build upon the partnership

expertise to provide appropriate solutions to help the young person work towards positive next steps. For example, one student expressed a strong interest for entering the music business, specifically concerning hip-hop music. The school was able to engage with the project partners to explore possible connections and avenues and they were able to source expertise in the area so that the young person could speak to someone about this career path and have a taste of the music industry.

On a strategic level, cross-cutting partnerships have provided sustainable working methods. Establishing such platforms encourages sharing knowledge and may lend itself to more innovative ways of working. As part of the Legnago project, the partners established an 'Observatory'. This new approach brought together the local authority, schools, social services and others to explore the issues that young people face. It aimed to provide a platform for organisations to share knowledge and transfer learning points. The observatory explored the different languages and terms used and established a common lexicon concerning youth issues that all partners and related organisations can use. This was an important basis for future discussions. In addition, it published research on the problems facing young people in the region that has been disseminated to others. Lastly, the observatory shared and promoted the work of the pilot project to wider networks. It is worth noting that the observatory is to continue after the projects have ended.

#### **Lesson 4: A trial and error approach via taster sessions provide insights into future pathways**

Making the leap from school to a new setting can be daunting for at-risk students, whether they are considering further education, training or work. The pilot projects have acknowledged this and have provided useful insights and 'tasters' of new settings to help prepare young people.

One-off visits to the work place have helped young people to make a first connection with employers. Many at-risk young people have limited experience of the work place and are unfamiliar of what is expected in the work place. In particular, this is further impacted in cases where young people come from family backgrounds where their parents do not work. pilot projects have included visits to work places as a first step to either exploring possible career options or meeting employers prior to an arranged work placement. The Legnago project organised visits for a small number of young people who were looking to make the first step towards employment. This allowed the young people to meet employers face to face, ask them any questions and find out about the work place. In other projects, such as the Vilinus project, visits also provided employers with an opportunity to find out more about a young person prior to a placement. For example, employers used the opportunity to explore more about their specific needs and abilities so that they could assign the young person with tasks suited to their abilities and make appropriate support arrangements, if required.

Projects have also used a series of visits to help individuals facing multiple barriers to adjust to possible new settings. The Hartlepool project used bite-sized visits, which slowly increased in duration over a longer period of time, for at-risk young people who were looking to move to further education. For these young people, full and immediate integration into a new setting could have resulted with further disengagement. However, shorter visits help the young person to adjust to new settings gradually and, as a result, the young person may be more likely to engage and stay in the new setting.

## **Conclusions**

The experiences and practices of the Legnago and Hartlepool project demonstrate that a range of support mechanisms and activities must be in place to help prepare at-risk young people to make positive post-school outcomes. Importantly, no 'one-size-fits-all' solution exists for at-risk young people. Each young person may face a unique set of multiple barriers and they may lack support, understanding and motivation at home to

progress with their career. Intensive personalised support, such as mentoring, is an important element to guide young people through the transition period. The project examples have demonstrated that it may be best undertaken by non-teaching staff or those outside of the education system. This can utilise specific expertise and be much more engaging and inspiring for the young person. Importantly, organisations must work in partnership to access such expertise and to create a holistic support package. This can help to ensure that no one young person is left behind. Lastly, a trial and error approach helps young people to discover what they want to do.

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