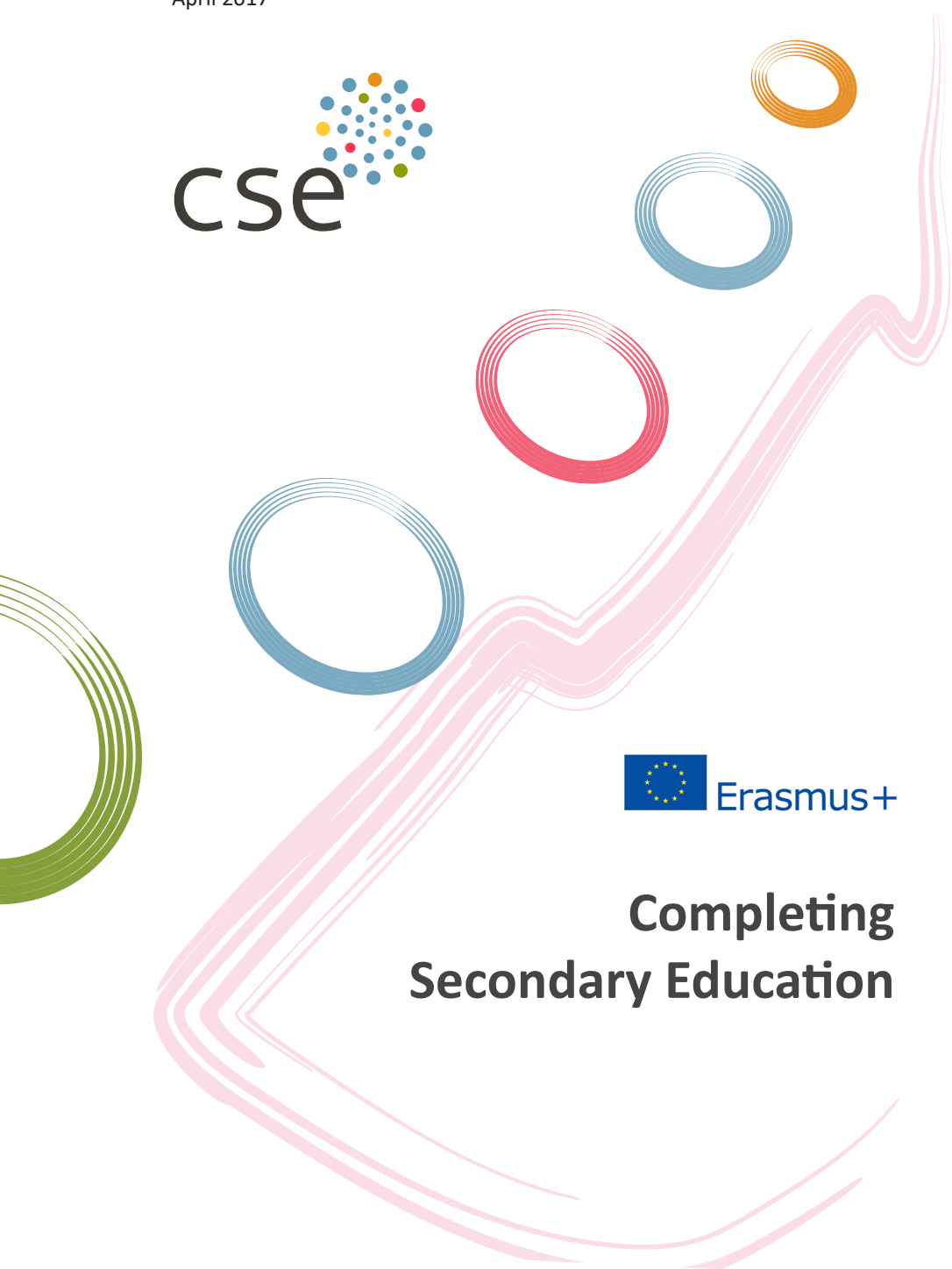
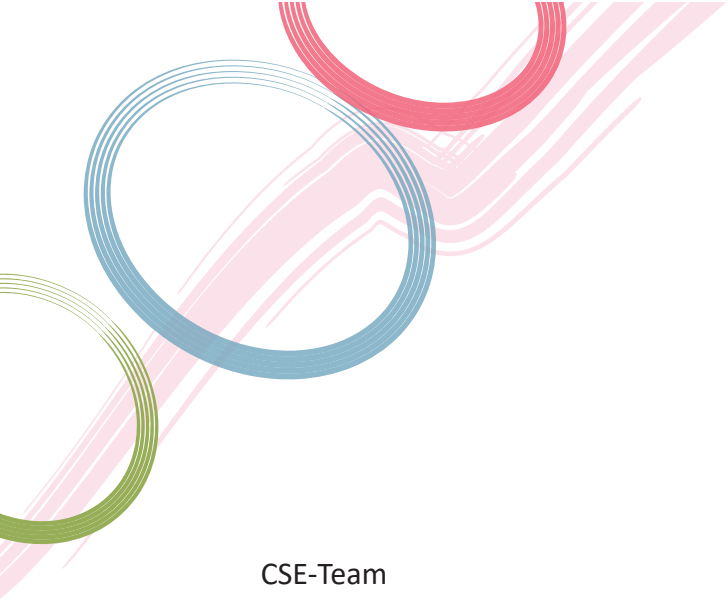


April 2017



# Completing Secondary Education



## CSE-Team

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## Intro

*Overall, the CSE-project has shown that it is very important that students are given the right guidance and opportunities when they are in risk of dropping out. The project also raised some questions and issues to look at for the future.*

The fundamental challenge is to clarify and define the role played by the participating organizations in achieving the goals of the project. In this brochure we want to highlight the main approaches and ideas to solving the issue of early school leaving to make those accessible to other stakeholders in this field of education.

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First of all, it is important to look at personalized learning pathways. How to enable these personalized pathways? Every student has different talents, needs and risks, and therefore needs a personal approach, that offers the right guidance. The school needs to help building this personalized pathway and adjusting the offered programs of the school to these needs. A personalized learning pathway will help improve the number of students that complete secondary (vocational) education.

Second, it is important to get parents and peer groups involved in the educational pathway. Every student has a social network around him, that influences him and can guide him. For the school to offer the best guidance during school, it is important to also connect with the social environment of the student. This connection with parents and peer groups helps to build a personalized learning pathway.

It is important to use the right language in the right way, so it will support the learning process. Teachers have an important role here. Professional language needs to be used when teaching students, but also the language that adjusts to the students own environment. Students are then better able to connect theory and practice.

And finally, also teachers should be prevented from dropping out. A high work pressure among other stress factors can cause teachers to look elsewhere for a job. Students also experience negative results when teachers drop out, or are under a lot of pressure. The quality and continuity of the education could diminish. Teachers should therefore also receive the right support in their work. Also when guiding the students and preventing them from dropping out, teachers should receive support as how to provide the best guidance within this situation.



Issues as described  
above will be challenges  
for all of us for the  
future!





## Statistics

*One of the aims in Completing Secondary Education is to use quantitative measures to assess the development and the success of the project.*

All the schools involved use different statistical tools to monitor completion of education and this means that it is challenging to compare the countries involved. The tools have been used as they are. Good indicators of school completion may be:

- Percentage of students having completed school on time (ordinary progression)
- Percentage of students completing their secondary education within a given timespan

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This given time span is different measured for the partners involved (In Norway 5 years after the they start upper secondary education, in Holland from start until the year they turn 23 years and in Denmark until the age of 25). To develop comparable statistics on this field is far above the competence and mandate for our project. But it may be a useful tool to measure completion in the future.

In the application of the CSE-project it is written that the partners will measure changes in statistics from the beginning of the project period to the end of the project, even it is unlikely that this project will improve the statistics on all involved school within the project period.

We also have to take into consideration different national decisions with the aim to increase completion during the project period (for example the 10% absence rule in Norway from 1/8-16). The monitoring of results has therefore to be continued even after the project is finished in order to monitor effects of the performed actions.


We have found two national statistics which in an informal manner says something about school completion in secondary education, from Norway and Holland:

Norwegian statistics

Dutch statistics

At the end of the project we will say something about the results of comparing the statistical tools. We will make some suggestions how they can be improved to be more exact about the different reasons for students dropping out.





## Cooperation with working life

*Vocational education and training (VET) is about linking theory and practice in any vocational field of study.*

It is widely recognised that early contact and integration with working life is an important source of motivation for students, which may counteract early school leaving. Although the partnering vocational institutions within this project exist in very different VET-Systems – from full-time school-based programs to dual-system programs (company- and school-based learning) – this link between theory (school) and practice (local working life) is essential to create meaning within any given VET-program improve learning and to reduce drop-outs. “Why do I have to learn this?” “What is the relevance of this for me and my future life?” “How does this subject connect to that subject?”

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One of the main drop-out factors in VET is that students have chosen vocational program that does not meet their expectations, interests or skills. German statistics indicate, that about 30 % of the VET drop-outs are caused by this mismatch. Therefore, the collaboration between schools (compulsory and for VET education) and working-life is key to provide students with proper orientation to reduce the number of students leaving prematurely. Within this orientation phase / company internships youngsters are to “get the flavour” of a profession. These youngsters can then develop a personal relation to a profession – hopefully leading to starting a suitable and meaningful VET. Within these internships companies can also get an idea about a student and may find interest in training this student later in VET. CSE-Partner schools use various orientation programs – from guided company internships in pre-vocational classes to basic-course systems at TechCollege that each student entering VET needs to take part in find the right choice of profession.

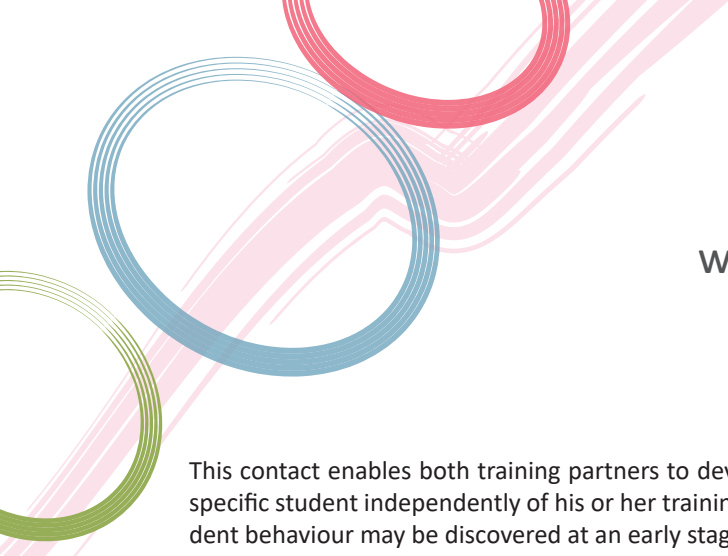
Within VET collaboration between schools and working life is very important to link theory and practice within any given VET. Due to the different and specific VET-systems in each of the CSE-partner countries, the actual means



and needs of cooperation between school and local working life may vary considerably from system to system. Within a fulltime school based program students will gain valuable insights into real working life through internships. A student within a dual-system VET-program will have this insight every day when she or he is in the company-based learning periods. Hence the focus of collaboration might shift more towards coordination and management of the different learning phases at school and at the company. Nevertheless, both systems need strong ties between each other to reduce the number of drop-out students.

German statistics about drop-outs within the dual-system of VET indicate that school related issues are not significant drop-out factors. Therefore, vocational colleges have only a very limited effect on premature leaving in the dual-system of VET. There are – however – several very specific actions that have potential to reduce the drop-out rate. First, vocational colleges can develop key-competencies within students to cope with conflict situations at work in a better and more professional way. This refers to aspects of the “Basic-Course concept” of TechCollege – to develop key-competencies that help students to find their way into any given profession (e.g. working-life culture, conflict management etc.).

Another aspect to support and guide students during their dual-system VET is to keep close contact between school and training company. RRBK has made good experiences with maintaining intensive contact to training companies.



## Cooperation with working life

This contact enables both training partners to develop a clear picture of any specific student independently of his or her training place. Hence deviant student behaviour may be discovered at an early stage and supportive measures can be developed and discussed among training partners and installed where necessary.

Looking at full-time school-based VET, vocational colleges have very different responsibilities in regard of drop-out prevention. However, measures taken here are often also beneficial within the dual-system of VET. Looking at all project partners bridging theory and practice within any vocational training program seems to be a big issue. “In what way is this subject matter relevant to my VET?”

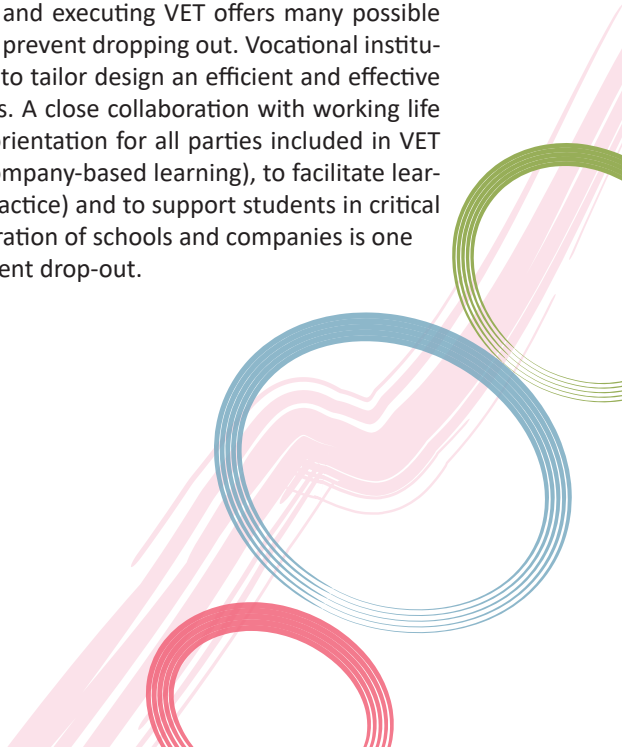
Partners have developed several different approaches to this issue. Some institutions like Axxell and CVS require their teachers to do in-service training in relevant companies to give teachers a clear picture of working professionally in each profession. Hence this training enables teachers to relate much better to materials, work-processes and working-life of a specific trade. Of course, this approach is also very transferrable to dual-system VET. The more teachers know about working-life reality the more authentic learning arrangements can be designed at school.

Another approach to bridging the gap between theory and practice project base learning. RRBK has acquired a lot of experience in this field, keeping learning at school very close to the work processes in real working-life. Within problem based learning scenarios projects various subject matters should be combined to find multi-dimensional solutions to a specific problem (e.g. technology, design, math, work safety etc.). Therefore, theory is directly linked

with specific aspects of work practice. Main objective is to create relevance for the learner “Why do I need to learn this?” However, a profound knowledge of real-life working processes is needed to design those learning projects AND subject teachers need to work in teams to develop the various aspects of their subjects within the projects.

Especially within fulltime school-based VET internships in real companies provide the link between theory and practice. Those periods are the only work-life experience for the students to figure out, if their competencies acquired at school are transferrable to working-life practice. Therefore, the internship period becomes an integral part of VET-training – practice segment linking school based learning to professional life – and creating relevance to the student. Being an integral part of VET-training including the internship period asks for a formal evaluation and certification.

The entire process of student orientation, student qualification, matching with training programs / companies and executing VET offers many possible measures to support students and to prevent dropping out. Vocational institutions need to pick suitable elements to tailor design an efficient and effective support system that suits their needs. A close collaboration with working life has very good potential to provide orientation for all parties included in VET (especially connecting school- and company-based learning), to facilitate learning processes (linking theory and practice) and to support students in critical situations. Therefore, a close collaboration of schools and companies is one of the key-ingredients to reduce student drop-out.





## Partners

*During the work on the CSE project we have come to understand that there are many common things regarding potential partners to reduce early school leaving.*

**Primary schools (lower secondary schools):** The source of our students - cooperation in order to give orientation and knowledge of what to come and possible career pathways.

**Other secondary schools:** Exchanging experience and students. Building networks between schools. A shared strategy in organising and planning educational fairs.

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**Universities:** cooperation regarding in-service training for teachers (e.g. learning environment, theory of learning, pedagogy etc.), bridge building for students, research projects, out-reach projects.

**Companies and working life:** training committees both on the local and the national level (Guilds), internships, apprenticeship programs, work placement.

**Youth workshops:** They pick up students when they have dropped out from the mainstream education. Most of them need additional help in order to get back to the traditional schooling system.

**Local Employment centers (job centers):** Funding studies, analysis of potentials, giving information on available jobs, applying for jobs.

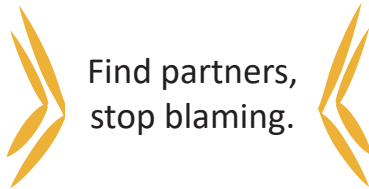
**Information centers:** Information about education, courses, general funding, staying abroad,

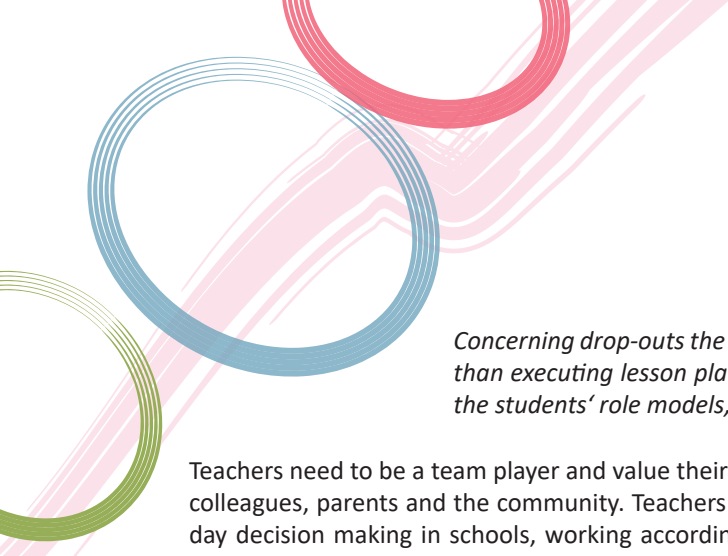
**Social welfare and services:** School Psychological Services (diagnostics and counselling) hospitals and health care centers, rehabilitation centers.

**Financial aid organizations:** private or public, grants, loans local charity...  
Guidance centers both from primary education to secondary and from secondary to higher education

**Local school authorities:** bridge building, orientation, enforces law in case of school absenteeism of school aged minors

**Regional and national authorities:** funding of regional upper secondary schools and access to EU funding, social funds, research projects, pedagogical matter (curricula).





## Teachers' role and teaching

*Concerning drop-outs the teachers' role is much more than executing lesson plans. They are also becoming the students' role models, mentors and counselors.*

Teachers need to be a team player and value their relationship with students, colleagues, parents and the community. Teachers are participating in day-to-day decision making in schools, working according to set priorities, and dealing with organizational problems that affect their students' learning. The education of today is a close relationship between a caring adult and a secure, motivated student.

Axxell Utbildning Ab (Finland) has an "own teacher"-system that supports this kind of thinking. Every student has the same own teacher from day one until he/she graduates. The own teacher's tasks are to support and mentor the student during the studies and to help the student to plan and realize a personal study path. The own teacher will follow up absence, study achievements and if the student is under 18 also have contact with the guardians. One of the own teacher's most important role concerning drop-outs is to get to know each student as an individual in order to comprehend his or her social and cultural background, unique needs, learning style interests and abilities.

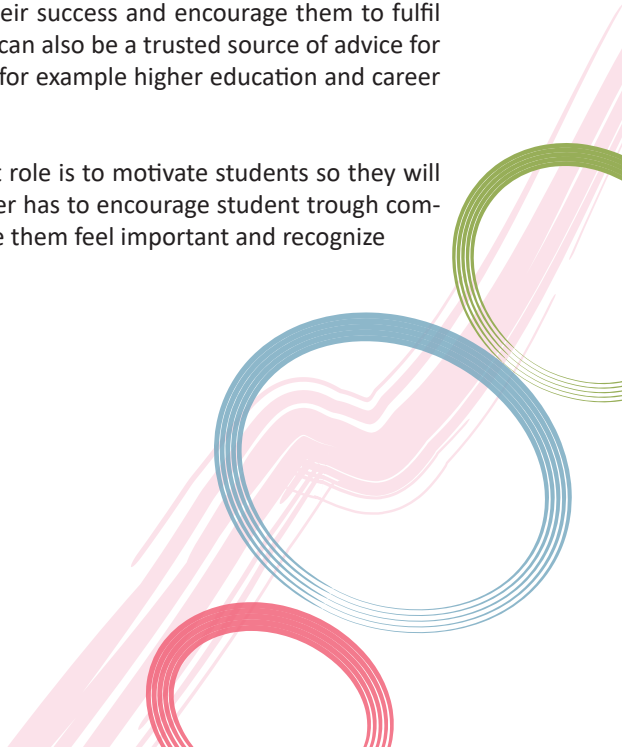
The teacher is spending a lot of time with the student and acting as a constant role model. A role model is a person whose behavior, example, or success is or can be emulated by others, especially by younger people. A trusted role model is a person who inspires and encourages. If a teacher wants to be a great role model, she/he must connect with the students and reach them on multiple levels, because the best teachers are committed to their students' well-being both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers can also be a trusted source of advice for student's important life decisions.

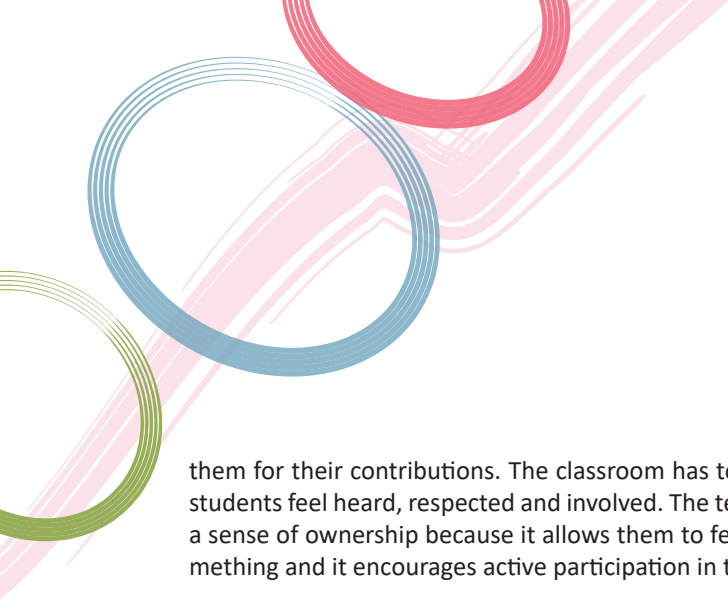
Dropping out is a decision that students will not address the teacher. It is the task of the teacher to notice the indications that a student is struggling and

intervene before it's too late. If the student trusts the teacher and asks for help at an early stage the teacher can assess the problem and figure out an alternative solution for the student. The student's wellbeing improves if they feel that the teacher has a genuine interest in them; they become motivated and confident. A stronger self-assurance can make it easier for the student to stay in school and graduate. It is very important that every student has at least one teacher that they trust and feel that they can talk to about everything. The best solution would be if the teacher could get extra resources for mentoring and guidance, for example Axxell's own teacher system.

A great teacher should put effort in: Education – Inspiration – Guidance. A teacher should make the classroom an exciting environment for learning because it will hold the student's fascination. Students learn best when they are both challenged and interested. It's part of motivating students, which may not be easy, but will benefit students in the long run. Some students who are more prone to drop-out are more dependent on an engaging teacher. Inspiring students is integral to ensure their success and encourage them to fulfil their potential and studies. Teachers can also be a trusted source of advice for student's important life decisions as for example higher education and career opportunities.

One of the teacher's most important role is to motivate students so they will not drop out from school. The teacher has to encourage student trough communication and free thinking to make them feel important and recognize





## Teachers' role and teaching

them for their contributions. The classroom has to be a friendly place where students feel heard, respected and involved. The teacher should give students a sense of ownership because it allows them to feel that they accomplish something and it encourages active participation in the classroom.

Expectations, reasonable demands and rewards from the teacher encourage students to participate and work with a goal in mind. A teacher should be creative and use different teaching methods. It is also important that the teacher draws connections to real life. If a student doesn't believe that what they are learning is important, their willingness to learn will decrease. This makes it important to demonstrate how the subjects relate to them. Good example on this are Workbased learning and a Norwegian project FYR. FYR will ensure that students in the vocational education program receive an education in common mathematics, Norwegian, English and science is perceived as relevant to their school life and vocational towards future employment.

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In CSE the partners have shared best practices and learned a lot from each other when it comes to working with students so they will remain motivated and graduate from school. The partners are aware that because of different education system all project partners can't use the same systems and methods to 100%. During this project every project partners was given the possibility to do job-shadowing with a partner that offers methods/models that could have best effect in their own organization. The job-shadowing was an important and valuable part in this project. For example Finland got the chance to know more about Iceland's Risk detector and Norway got to know more about The Netherlands project; "Playing for success."





A teacher  
takes a hand,  
opens a mind and  
touches a heart.

Author unknown





## Risk detector

*The Risk Detector is a screening test developed for school counsellors to systematically identify upper secondary school students at risk of dropping out.*

The Risk Detector consists of two parts: Student's electronic questionnaire, called *My Study Environment* and a computer program, called *Student Monitor*. The Student Monitor analyzes statistically the strength and weaknesses of the student and his or her environment based on the information from the questionnaire (the students' answers).

The Study Environment: The questionnaire is divided into the following main and sub categories of risk and protective factors that have been found to relate to school failure and dropout. Those are:

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1. Student background: Gender, age, parents education, family structure and language background.
2. Family factors: Parent school involvement, emotional support and supervision, and sibling or siblings who have dropped out of school.
3. Previous school experience: Previous academic achievement and negative school behavior.
4. Students academic engagement, social engagement and educational aspiration.
5. Psychological adjustment: general self-esteem and academic self-esteem.
6. Working while at school and friends' school engagement.

The method is designed to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the student and his or her learning environment. The focus group is first grade students at upper secondary school. It should be administered for the cohort of first grade students in the beginning of the school year, about six weeks after the school has started. At that time the students should have had the opportunity to get to know their new school environment. Still, the administration should have

time for intervention if needed. The questionnaire is a web solution so it is administered in groups. At VMA we take one to two classes of first year students at a time and it takes each student about 20-30 minutes to answer the questions. The data is anonymous so the students are assigned code numbers that only the student counsellor has access to and can match with the students. It is extremely important that students are assured that their answers are strictly confidential and only accessible to the school counsellor.

It should be pointed out that when the questionnaire was designed it was decided not to ask students questions that they might find intrusive, for example on drug use and antisocial behavior.

When the data has been gathered the school counsellor uses the results of the computer program the Student Monitor to identify the students that give answers that could categorize as a possible dropout indicator. The Student Monitor gives information on students scores on each of the risk factors described above. The students are then offered an interview with a counsellor that goes over the results and together they find a possible solution if necessary. What that solution is depends on each student and can vary from one student to another. The aim is always to offer a preventive approach and give the students an opportunity to speak freely about what they see as a possible solution.

The aim is to assess not only the risk of school failure but also what type of supportive intervention is most suitable for different groups of students.



## Risk detector

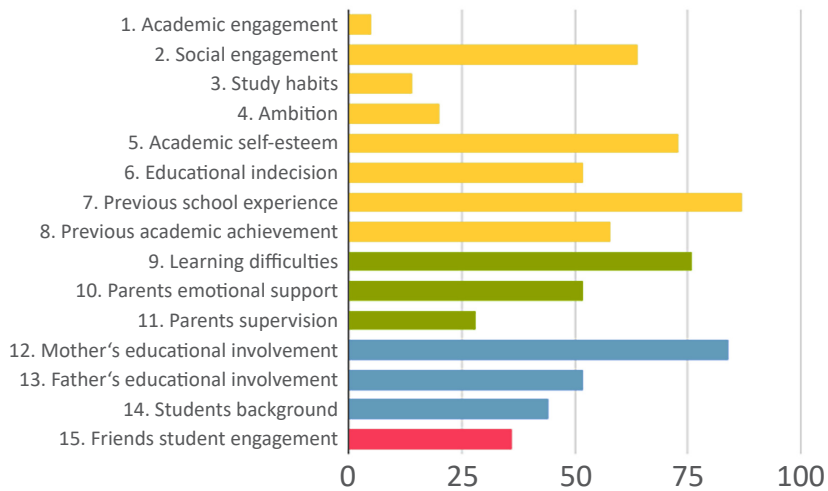
The Risk Detector was originally developed within the pilot projects Spider-web and The Personal Profile and Support for Learners (PPS) supported by the Leonardo da Vinci Community Action Program.

The output of the Risk Detector is four fold and is shown graphically:

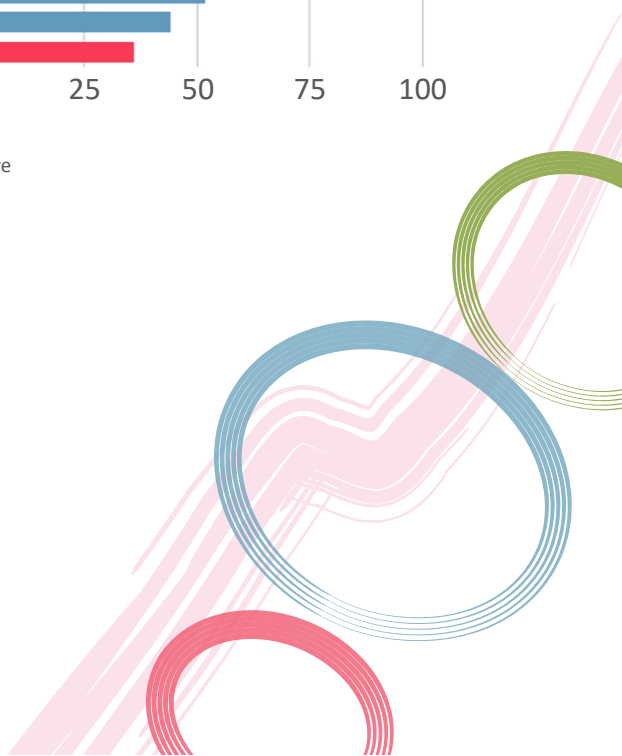
1. Identification of high risk students
2. Student profile (strengths and weaknesses)
3. School profile (strengths and weaknesses)
4. Student report

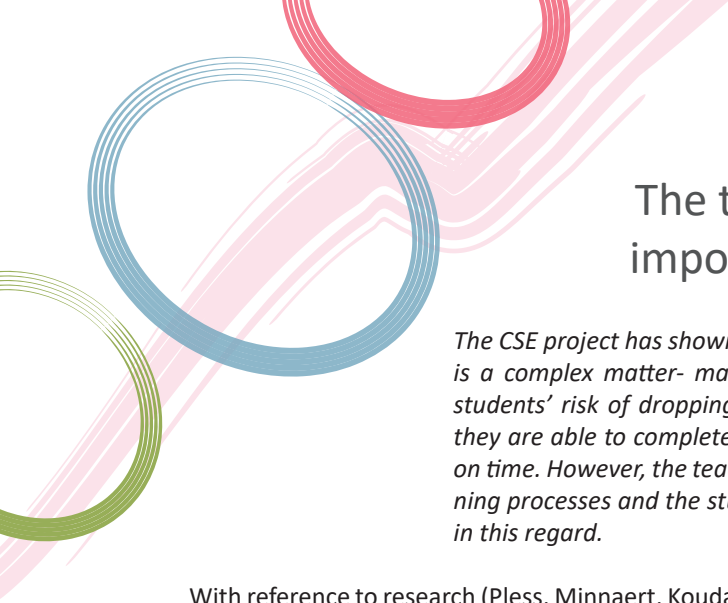
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The following figure shows where the student stands relative to other students on the factor in question. For example, if the percentile rank is 60 it means that the strength of the student or his/her study environment is equal or better than among the 60% of students on given factor. Percentile rank around 50 indicates average performance or outcome. The higher percentile rank the better for all the factors. For example, if the percentile rank is low on learning difficulties it means that the student has more difficulties compared to most students.



The figure shows the percentile rank for each factor, i.e. the percentage of students who have equal or less strength on given factor. The lower the percentile - the higher the risk.





## The teacher is more important than ever

*The CSE project has shown that absence and dropout is a complex matter- many things influence on the students' risk of dropping out and thus on whether they are able to complete their secondary education on time. However, the teacher and his role in the learning processes and the students' life seems to be key in this regard.*

With reference to research (Pless, Minnaert, Koudahl, Blöndal\*), the following 'mindset', initiatives and measures are of great importance when working on preventing students from dropping out of school:

The school is a place to learn, not just a place to be (not a "drop in center"). Therefore, *present* teachers are very important in creating and facilitating a conducive, welcoming, motivating and inclusive learning environment:

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- The day at school is predictable for the students (classroom management and learning leadership).
- A holistic ("the whole person") and practical approach to learning – including relevant theory linked to practice.
- Individual progression and have inherited a feedback-culture – to have the student's experience the development in their individual learning processes.
- Flexibility of learning approaches and opportunities.
- Visible learning and learning goals for the students (one size does not fit everybody) - delivery of learner-centered curricula. Students must be challenged with short term learning goals (realistic, approachable and completable) of which they can see the result – not goals that are several weeks in the future Workshop as a learning arena.

\* References:

Blöndal, Stella Assistant Professor, University of Iceland  
Minnaert, Alexander Professor at University of Groningen  
Koudahl, Peter Docent, Ph.D. at Metropol Copenhagen  
Pless, Mette Associate professor at University of Aalborg/Cefu

## PUSH-OUT RISKS!

The professional language is a completely new language to all students.

The teacher talks A LOT - students are passive.

Focus on performance and results.

Focus on achieving curriculum ... as fast as possible!

Repetition = same procedure as last...

“I still don’t understand”


Unstructured assignments

Lack of overview - “every day is a coincidence to me”

“Relations are not important - we prioritize professionalism!”

“LEARNING is the student’s own responsibility!”

*Projekt uddannelsesløft*



## The teacher is more important than ever

Besides the items that are mainly in the responsibility of the teachers, research highlights the following factors to be relevant to reduce student dropout. Schools have to:

- Facilitate that students feel part of a 'community' that nurtures the sense of relatedness and belonging and learning as co-creation
- Assist students in finding realistic aims for their future: Students want to achieve something
- Support students through guidance, counselling, mentor or peer system and follow-up-programs - academically and socially – including social support aiming at social inclusion
- Provide link to labor market / further education/career
- Monitor and evaluate objectives and goals

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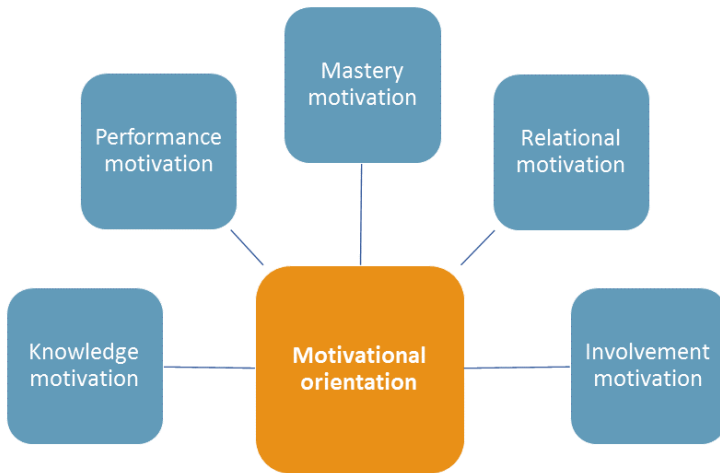
### Students' motivation

According to research, motivation is not only a prior condition for learning; motivation is also the result of school/learning activities (Pless, 2016). Teachers cannot rely on the cooperation of highly motivated students to engage in learning processes. Therefore, we need to direct a new attention on students' orientations and motives for (dis)engagement in learning activities – different kinds of motivation for the students to learn. Teachers have to be aware of these individual motives and take them into account when creating and providing opportunities to learn.

Therefore, one of the key ingredients to prevent student dropout is the teachers and the teaching. Teaching which puts the students' learning and well-being in the center! This approach could be named "quality teaching – motivating pedagogy and didactic". The means are; new methods and tools for



the teaching teams, and that the teachers are being respected, assisted and supported in their work. The objective is to acquire and to implement the best tools to create a learning environment that is motivating and activating the students.



## Outlook

*Within the CSE-project we found out that there are more important items to explore to reduce the risk of students dropping out.*

### **Parental involvement**

The Icelandic scientist Stella Blöndal has documented the parents' influence on their children's engagement in school and motivation for learning and education. Her findings emphasize how important the nature of the parent-child relationship is in enhancing adolescents' engagement with both school and their studies, and that engagement, in turn, reduces the risk of dropping out of school.

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*How to involve the students' parents or family in the best possible way – a way that reach beyond a solely stressing parental involvement around academic issues?*



### **Performing culture vs a learning culture**

In many educational settings, there is a strong focus on performing well in tests and in terms of grades. This can, according to scientist Mette Pless, create a narrow concept of learning (learning = curriculum and exams).




*How can we support students' focus on and engagement in other types of learning processes, that reach beyond this?*




### **Time as a phenomenon among young people**

The mindset of most students/young people is, that time is something that you have at your disposal! They are orientated towards the present; "how am I right now...", and when choosing an education and maybe setting goals for the future, they will sometimes be wrong – their thinking is "I have plenty of time.... for trying ... and also for re- trying" (Koudahl)



*How do we work with the fact, that young people's orientation is based predominantly on 'value-rationality', while they must exist under conditions primarily based on 'goal rationality'?*



### **Teachers' dropout**

To many teachers' it is a daily struggle to win the relation and handle the students' difficult behaviour and lack of motivation (Pless). This along with the feeling of workload, pressure, lack of recognition and too little time for preparation and cooperation makes more and more teachers leave the profession and school (*Minnaert*).




*How to prevent teachers from dropping out?*




### **No student has the professional language as his or her mother's tongue!**

Professional (technical) language is a barrier for many students in VET- educations. The teacher attention to the use of professional language is essential to the students' understanding, achievement and learning: No attention, time and support to learn and acquire the professional language by practicing this in various learning activities, leaves many students behind and puts them in the risk of dropping out (*Projekt uddannelsesløft*).



*How to work with the professional (technical) language in the students' learning process?*



#### References:

Blöndal, Stella Assistant Professor, University of Iceland  
Minnaert, Alexander Professor at University of Groningen  
Koudahl, Peter Docent, Ph.D. at Metropol Copenhagen  
Pless, Mette Associate professor at University of Aalborg/Cefu

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