

The background of the entire cover is a stylized, orange-toned illustration. It features several faces, some looking forward and others in profile, with expressive, somewhat abstract features. Interspersed among the faces are architectural elements like windows and building outlines. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century social realist art.

**DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMME ON
EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE AND EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVING

Discussion papers by
Scott Boldt and Brendan Devine
Delma Mac Devitt
Mark Morgan

Combat Poverty Agency
*working against poverty and
inequality in Ireland*



DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMME ON EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

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Discussion papers by

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INTRODUCTION

In Irish society, failure in the education system can have life-long implications. It can increase the risk of experiencing unemployment or employment in low-paying and insecure jobs; it can also curtail personal development, the development of independence and self-confidence. These problems can become more pronounced over time, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and inequality that is passed on from generation to generation. Educational success is now recognised as an important key to unlocking better life chances.

A major cause of educational failure is leaving school early (i.e., by age 15) or without recognised qualifications. In recent years, a number of government sponsored programmes have been developed in Ireland to address the general problem of educational disadvantage, and particularly early school-leaving. These programmes have had some success. However, there is general agreement that the problem of early school-leaving has not been solved.

Furthermore, it is also recognised that, as the number of early school-leavers reduces, the relative position of those who continue to leave school with few or no qualifications will inevitably worsen in the jobs market. In this context, the Combat Poverty Agency felt that this was an opportune time to examine innovative initiatives in Ireland and other countries aimed at addressing the problem of early school-leaving and to see how Irish programmes could benefit from their experiences.

It is hoped that this collection of papers by experts in their respective fields will contribute to the current debate about the most effective measures to reduce the number of young people leaving school early or without adequate qualifications. In an era when the 'points race' for third-level places is receiving considerable public interest, it is particularly important that due consideration be given to those who, because of their experience of educational disadvantage, drop out of the educational system before they can benefit from it fully.

Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage

This research has also provided useful background information to the Agency at the early stages of the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. The programme is based on a partnership approach to educational disadvantage at a local or district level and follows on from the 14 pilot

projects funded under the Once-off Grants Scheme for Work with Disadvantaged Young People established in 1994. The programme, which was initiated in 1996 and which will run for three years, has two overall objectives:

- the establishment and support of locally-based networks whose role will be to develop an integrated response to the problem of educational disadvantage within their areas and to thereby provide disadvantaged children/young people with opportunities to progress and transfer between the formal and informal education systems according to their needs, and to maximise their participation in and benefit from these systems; and
- the development of structures which have the capacity to influence policy at national level drawing from the local experience.

Four networks are supported under the programme: Drogheda (Co. Louth), Killinarden (west Tallaght, Co. Dublin), Tralee (Co. Kerry) and Tuam (Co. Galway). The networks include representatives of the key education/youth interests in the areas, including schools, parents and training centres, the Area-Based Partnerships, youth groups, community groups and other statutory organisations.

Over the course of the programme, the networks will focus on the development of a process to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the programme, that is, a more integrated and imaginative response to the problem of educational disadvantage, and to influence policy at national level.

Each network has devised its own action plan to this end. However, common themes are: mapping the nature and extent of educational disadvantage in the areas and identifying gaps in current provision; assisting network structures and processes; the development of thematic working groups (e.g. on literacy); awareness raising programmes on educational disadvantage; structured intra-agency training programmes; and support of network partners. The programme has a strong policy and research focus.

Pilot Programme for 8-15 year olds

Since the completion of these papers, the Department of Education and Science has started a new pilot

programme for 8-15 year olds. The programme, which has similar aims to the Agency's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage, will test models for the development of integrated area based co-ordination of services for young people at risk of early school-leaving. The programme, which is currently running in 14 sites around the country, is planned to continue for two years. The three papers should be of interest to both the projects involved in the programme and support staff in the Department of Education and Science.

Education and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy

The completion of this study is also timely in light of the Government's commitment to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Under the NAPS, all government departments and state agencies will be expected to include the reduction and prevention of poverty as key objectives in the development and

implementation of their policies and programmes. Tackling educational disadvantage has been identified as a key issue in the NAPS. In this context, this study may prove of particular interest to those concerned with the development and implementation of an anti-poverty education strategy.

The Agency would like to acknowledge the work of Scott Boldt, Brendan Devine, Mark Morgan and Delma MacDevitt and to thank those who commented on early drafts of the three papers. The Agency would also like to thank the four networks for their continued work in tackling educational disadvantage.

*Combat Poverty Agency
November 1998*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Combat Poverty Agency commissioned the Marino Institute of Education to undertake a literature review on educational disadvantage in Ireland and to draft a summary report of actions taken to address educational disadvantage over the last 10 years. The literature review and summary report are intended to provide information for the four locally-based networks funded under the Combat Poverty Agency's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. The report will also inform the evaluation and research framework for the Demonstration Programme. A secondary function of the report will be to make information available to the Agency for policy-making in the area of educational disadvantage.

The main body of the report presents an extensive literature review on educational disadvantage which covers the following areas:

- Historical Background
- Definitions of Educational Disadvantage
- National Policy Context
- Educational Disadvantage and Poverty
- Incidence of Educational Disadvantage
- Factors and Indicators of Educational Disadvantage
- Consequences of Educational Disadvantage
- General Approaches to Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Formal Sector
- General Approaches to Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Non-Formal Sector
- Conclusions and Recommendations.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Historical Background

"During the 17th and 18th centuries, largely as a consequence of the Penal Laws, Catholic participation in organised educational structures in Ireland was so limited as to be practically non-existent" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 5). Dependent upon how one understands educational disadvantage, it could be argued that educational disadvantage has been a characteristic of the history of Irish education.

Throughout Irish history the vast majority of the population had little involvement in formal schooling. From the fifth century, Irish monastic settlements were restricted centres of learning. During penal times, 'hedge schools' provided a limited level of 'schooling'. Religious congregations with an education mission

emerged in the late 18th century to address educational disadvantage by founding schools and institutions. Only in the late 20th century has there been in existence a network of schools and a system of formalised education sufficient to cater for a large proportion of the population.

The type of educational disadvantage referred to above is more fundamental than that experienced during the 20th century, particularly in recent times; 1992 figures indicated that, "... nearly one-third of the population, or 968,457 people, were engaged in full-time education ... one can reasonably conclude that education is a central institution in Irish society" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, ix). Nevertheless, it is useful to assume an historical perspective in understanding and appreciating the relative nature of educational disadvantage as well as the evolution and change in educational provision in Ireland.

"It is commonly agreed that from the birth of independence up to 1960 the (education) system was both static and gravely under-resourced. In the compulsory sector many of the classes were much too large and the curriculum was much too narrow: it is recorded that, in 1957-58, 22% of teachers were untrained. The upper secondary sector was small, fee-paying, and catered largely for the children of better-off parents. Higher education was elitist." (OECD, 1991, 25)

In the 1960s, educational reform became a priority and there was a rapid expansion of educational provision. In the post-primary sector, priority was given to the expansion of vocational and technical education. In 1967, 'the free education scheme' was introduced into most post-primary schools. Meeting the needs of a 'developing economy' and attempting 'equality of opportunity in educational attainment' were two main objectives in the Minister for Education's *Investment in Education* report of 1965. "The necessity to correct the obvious imbalance between the conventional output of schools and the needs of the rapidly developing economy were very clearly emphasised (in *Investment in Education*). But of almost equal significance were equality of opportunity values, which were being clearly emphasised internationally and were obviously being breached by the glaring social class and regional inequalities in educational provision in Ireland" (Hannan, 1991, 17-18).

Between 1960 and 1980, "... the number of pupils in each type of (post-primary) school almost trebled over the period," and "New building programmes were undertaken in all third-level institutions to cater for the greatly expanded student numbers which increased by about 60%...." (Coolahan, 1991, 134: 136). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, curricular changes were introduced in primary and post-primary schools. "However, the lack of co-ordination and the failure to plan an educational programme in sequential stages appropriate to age and intellectual capacities from the early primary level upwards was to cause considerable problems for pupils and teachers" (ibid., 135). Moreover, "The extent and range of curricular change in post-primary schools was hampered by the lack of fundamental change in the public examination structure" (ibid.).

Only after 1960 did provision for the 'mentally handicapped' and students with hearing and visual impairments develop significantly outside of religious communities. Religious communities had provided a level of assistance and care for such students since the early 19th century. "Up to the middle of the 19th century, the only provision for orphaned and neglected children was in the workhouses" (ibid., 191). Industrial and reformatory schools were established from the 1850s to cater for orphaned and 'neglected' children as well as young offenders. By 1970, only three reformatory schools still existed, and residential homes and special schools would replace industrial schools by 1980 (Gilligan, 1991).

"Travellers are a relatively small, but significant, minority group in Ireland. It is clear that their participation rates at all levels of the educational system are unacceptably low for a democratic society" (Coolahan ed., 1994, 127). Travellers have become recognised as a distinct group, although they remain marginalised to a large extent in Irish society. Educational provision for Travellers is limited but has expanded since the 1970s, particularly at pre-school and primary school levels.

Coolahan points out that, during the 1970s, remedial education expanded considerably to meet the needs of students who were 'backward' as a result of poor attendance, adverse home conditions or specific learning difficulties. In 1980, he stated that, "Recent years have also seen a greater awareness of the educational problems and needs of children who suffer educational disadvantage because they are socially and economically deprived" (Coolahan, 1991, 190). Such educational disadvantage is the focus of the present review, and it differs substantially

in its nature and understanding from that experienced and researched prior to the 1960s; issues of equality/equity, access and opportunity appear to determine to a large extent the 'modern' notion of educational disadvantage.

1.2.2 Definitions of Educational Disadvantage

In the Republic of Ireland, most research on educational disadvantage has not been concerned with defining the term and finding explanations for the problem. Instead, it has focused on identifying the extent of educational disadvantage, identifying factors which relate strongly to it, and proposing measures to address the perceived problem.

Research has tended to work from assumptions based on American and British theories which seem to suggest that 'disadvantaged' children lack a suitable environment for fostering literacy abilities and positive school attitudes. Many researchers maintain that effective interventions can be made to address these problems in order to enable greater benefit to be derived from schooling. In general, the aim of research in this area has been to identify the problem and its related difficulties, so that programmes may be targeted towards those who are or are likely to become 'educationally disadvantaged'.

In practice, Ireland has to some extent benefited from this approach, since the measures used and programmes adopted have been tested in other contexts, and their results and limitations have been identified. Irish research, however, has failed to produce precise explanations of educational disadvantage, its nature and characteristics.

Defining clearly what is meant by educational disadvantage and establishing measurement and evaluation criteria for a whole population, or even a particular group within it, is problematic. What precisely makes one person educationally disadvantaged, another at an acceptable level and someone else advantaged? What is the cut-off point below which an individual or group is considered educationally disadvantaged? Should different criteria be used for different groups? At what point can one say that educational disadvantage has been reduced or eliminated? These and many other considerations are involved in defining and determining criteria for educational disadvantage. To a large extent, what is most important is to specify the term and set criteria which are agreed upon, which are measurable and which serve the purposes for determining the extent of educational disadvantage.

The relative nature of educational disadvantage and the complex conditions and interrelated factors which it usually represents make it a difficult concept to define in a way which is neither so broad as to have little meaningful application nor so narrow as to exclude people or conditions that the term is meant to cover. Nevertheless, it is necessary for theorists and researchers in this area to clarify their understanding of the concept, so that the nature of the term and the issues and factors to which it refers are understood. Imprecision in terminology results in inexact measurements and diminishes effective evaluations of interventions designed to address educational disadvantage. Unfortunately, such imprecision in defining educational disadvantage and the consequent difficulties with measurement and evaluation are aspects of the Irish research literature.

Reviewing the Irish literature related to educational disadvantage does not result in a clear understanding of the concept. This is due somewhat to the relative nature of the concept and largely to the fact that most of the literature on educational disadvantage makes no attempt to define it. Kellaghan et al. observe that "Although the term educational disadvantage is widely used, there have been remarkably few efforts to define it" (Kellaghan et al., 1995, 2).

After making that statement, Kellaghan et al. themselves do not specify a definition of educational disadvantage; they state that the term represents a complex phenomenon, describe how socio-economic, home and school factors may give rise to it and suggest how problems associated with educational disadvantage manifest themselves. But they do not state a clear definition. Further, they mention that, "...terms such as 'inequality', 'marginalised', 'underprivileged' and 'at risk' are often assumed to be equivalent in meaning (to educational disadvantage)" (ibid.); however, they do not comment on whether such assumptions are valid nor how educational disadvantage could be understood to be equivalent in meaning.

For the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) Education Commission, "The term educational disadvantage refers to a concept which, over the last 30 years, has been used to explain why children from poor backgrounds do not derive the same benefit from their schooling as children from more comfortable backgrounds. Underlying the concept of (educational) disadvantage is the idea that there is a discontinuity between the school and non-school experiences of

children who are poor" (CMRS, 1992, xvii). According to the CMRS, educational disadvantage results from a 'discontinuity' between home and school; "... as well as considering the child's inability to cope with the school, we also focus on the school's inability to cope with the needs of the disadvantaged child" (ibid., 11).

The inability of the child to cope with school is seen to result from "... the environment which a poor child encounters, in the four or five years before coming to school, (which) strongly influences the development of characteristics which make it difficult for them to take on the work of the school" (ibid., 8). The inability of schools to cope with certain children is identified as the result of at least three factors: school ethos, teachers' attitudes and expectations, and curriculum.

While the CMRS sheds some light on the concept, it does not clarify precisely what it means nor what is meant by the term. The CMRS points out correctly that the term has been used to explain why some children do not benefit from schooling as much as others, and that a discontinuity between home and school may result in disadvantage. Nonetheless, it is still unclear exactly what educational disadvantage is.

In *Disadvantage, Learning and Young People*, a number of contributors offer definitions of the term educational disadvantage. Hannan suggests that educational disadvantage is leaving school, "...early without any qualifications or ... having failed the junior cycle examinations," or "... with disabling educational problems and minimal chances of employment" (Crooks and Stokes eds., 1987, 47-48). Corcoran defines it as "... leaving the education system with few or no qualifications" (ibid., 54). Crooks states that, "Disadvantage can be seen as inability to take advantage of opportunities and services" and "In an educational sense young people are considered disadvantaged who leave school at or near minimum school-leaving age (15) with no 'effective' formal qualifications" (ibid., 66).

The definitions of educational disadvantage in Crooks and Stokes suggest that the term refers to a lack of school credentials which reduce employment prospects. Such an understanding of educational disadvantage would seem to differ from more recent usage of the term. However, this is speculative, since most recent reports do not offer a definition. Nonetheless, defining educational disadvantage as the absence of qualifications does not seem to account

for the complexity of the problem nor for the discontinuity of experience between home and school. Until recently, the understanding and discussion of educational disadvantage did not seem to include Travellers, students with physical or mental disabilities, or those experiencing inequalities on the basis of gender. Although physical and mental disabilities appear to be disadvantages, such students had been treated separately and were not normally referred to in discussions of educational disadvantage. Likewise, Travellers were usually considered separately in the literature. Even though the experience of Travellers would seem to place them easily into the category of educational disadvantage, they were often referred to specifically, because of their distinctive identity (see *National Education Convention Report*, 1994, or the *White Paper on Education*, 1995). Similarly, inequality on the basis of gender tended to be treated separately from educational disadvantage.

The Working Group on Educational Disadvantage for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, October, 1996, and the National Economic and Social Forum Report, Early School-leavers and Youth Unemployment, January, 1997, include the above mentioned groups in their discussions, yet do not contribute anything new towards a definition of educational disadvantage. The Working Group on Educational Disadvantage understands educational disadvantage in the same way as Kellaghan et al. and the CMRS did; as a complex phenomenon resulting from deep-seated economic, social and educational factors and as the result of discontinuities between school and non-school experiences of students. The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) seems to understand the term narrowly (as did the contributors to Crooks and Stokes eds., 1987) and does not offer any clear definition of educational disadvantage. It says "(educational disadvantage) ... must be defined in terms of the generally adverse outcomes for young people without formal education and qualifications" (NESF, 1997, 39).

In the light of this review, it appears that educational disadvantage is concerned with the circumstances of those from 'poor' socio-economic backgrounds who experience difficulties within formal schooling or who have left the educational system with few or no educational qualifications. Viewed competitively, those from 'poor' socio-economic backgrounds are at a disadvantage in succeeding at school as a result of their limited financial means and their non-school experiences which do not correspond adequately to school demands and expectations. Thus, it appears

that such students are at a disadvantage in deriving the same benefit from the school programme as do their better-off peers.

Furthermore, such disadvantages are seen to be associated with early school-leaving which results in the educational disadvantage of having few or no educational qualifications when competing with others for employment. Moreover, even if employment is found, educational disadvantage can be a factor in relation to restricted opportunities for advancement, job insecurity and greater difficulty in finding other employment if one becomes unemployed. No recent writing on educational disadvantage associates it with disadvantages in deriving benefit from leisure time or from participating meaningfully in decision-making processes.

This report advances the following as definitions of educational disadvantage.

- In relation to a student in the formal education system, educational disadvantage may be considered to be a limited ability to derive an equitable benefit from schooling compared to one's peers by age as a result of school demands, approaches, assessments and expectations which do not correspond to the student's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours into which (s)he been socialised (as opposed to those to which (s)he is naturally endowed).
- In relation to people who have left formal schooling, educational disadvantage may be considered to be the condition of possessing minimal or no formal educational qualifications and/or being inadequately trained or without knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours associated with the demands of available employment, so that one's likelihood of securing stable employment is disproportionately limited as compared to one's peers by age.

1.2.3 National Policy Context

The present national policy in relation to addressing educational disadvantage seems to cover three areas:

- Developing partnerships and co-ordinating government services.
- Targeting and re-structuring resources and provision within the formal school system.
- Addressing the problem of early school-leaving and the needs of early school-leavers.

These policies should be seen within wider policy concerns to increase the competitiveness of the Irish economy, in part by raising national educational standards. It should be noted that there is no policy initiative to clarify the precise meaning of educational disadvantage nor to explain its prevalence. Educational disadvantage is accepted as a problem and policies are aimed at tackling it. Policies have "... placed high priority on effectively tackling the high levels of socio-economic inequalities in educational achievement, particularly correcting for educational failure, which is so highly associated with socio-economic disadvantage". (Coolahan, ed. 1994, 106).

● Developing partnerships and co-ordinating government services

There seems to be recognition of the complexity of the problem referred to as educational disadvantage and a belief, "... that the principles of partnership should guide integrated planning and policy development which are needed to respond to the problem of educational disadvantage" (CMRS, 1992, 100). The education system acting alone to tackle educational disadvantage is not perceived to be sufficient to address the wide range of factors which is associated with the problem. "Given the depth and increased level of economic and social inequality in our society, due mainly to the increased levels of unemployment (Callan, Nolan et al. 1989), it is essential that the burden of tackling the increasing inequality problem be not left to education alone, but shared more widely over the whole spectrum of government policy" (Coolahan ed., 1994, 106).

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) has educational disadvantage as one of its five key themes and has set out to put institutional mechanisms in place "... to ensure that the issue of reducing poverty and social exclusion is firmly on the agenda of all government departments and agencies, and that there is appropriate co-ordination across and between departments on policy in this area" (NAPS, 1995c, 1). The NAPS Working Group on Educational Disadvantage identified the promotion of partnerships, widespread collaboration and consultation, and the development and expansion of networks in communities among parents, schools, employers' agencies and training services as strategies to combat the problem.

To eliminate early school-leaving within the next five years and to deal with young people who are unemployed, the NESF recommends, among other

strategies, "... the development of partnership between parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, schools, youth organisations and other education and training agencies..." and "... the establishment of a new, high-level interdepartmental working group with representatives from the Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Enterprise and Employment and from FÁS ... to tackle the broad range of issues arising in educational disadvantage in a co-ordinated and ongoing manner ..." (NESF, 1997, 91: 92).

● Targeting and re-structuring resources and provision within the formal school system

The White Paper on Education 1995 outlined policies on targeting interventions and resources to address educational disadvantage. "A major focus of policy in tackling disadvantage will be to ensure continuity and consistency of interventions in support of educationally disadvantaged students throughout their educational lives" (Department of Education, 1995, 55). The need for early educational interventions has been emphasised by many researchers and the introduction of the Early Start Programme, a pre-school intervention programme, reflects the Department of Education's recognition of this need as expressed in the following:

- early childhood experiences are important for the child's development
- entry to formal schooling is a major transition for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- early disadvantages affect the child's enduring experience within formal schooling, because such disadvantages tend to be both persistent and cumulative. (Department of Education, 1995, 16)

The National Education Convention, 1994, highlighted the need for targeting resources and interventions to undermine educational disadvantage. The report of the Convention stated that a wide range of provision was required including, "... a number of specific programmes of targeted interventions, as well as additional remedial teacher and other resources at both the school and school-family-community levels, to attempt to correct ... under-achievement at primary level" (Coolahan ed., 1994, 107). Similar needs were identified at post-primary level requiring a "... commitment to a wide range of interventions and

additional resources, as well as substantial changes in curriculum and examinations, in an attempt to enrich and widen the range of educational opportunities for students who are not well served by the current curriculum and examination system" (ibid.).

The report by Kellaghan et. al., 1995, made specific recommendations on the Department of Education Schemes of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage to improve the effectiveness of targeted resources. *Breaking the Cycle*, 1996, was a new scheme developed from the recommendations which established revised criteria for identifying schools as 'disadvantaged'. It was announced by the Minister for Education in May, 1996, and "... is based on targeting resources, using revised criteria, to identify schools in the most disadvantaged urban and rural areas, with the provision of additional supports for these schools and the requirement that each school included in the scheme should prepare and submit a five-year development plan" (NESF, 1997, 11).

In general, *Breaking the Cycle* has been received favourably. McCormack and Archer said that it, "... represents the first attempt by the Department of Education to deal with disadvantage in rural areas (and) ... The new initiatives will facilitate a more intensified and varied type of intervention than has been tried before. ... The schemes will result in genuine positive discrimination" (McCormack and Archer, 1997, 13).

While it seems that *Breaking the Cycle* represents a renewed commitment to deal with educational disadvantage, there are some limitations which need to be mentioned. "Anecdotal evidence suggests that some disadvantaged schools have not been included in the new initiatives and that there are no great differences between the schools that have been included and some that have not" (ibid.). Furthermore, the NAPS questions the focus of the new initiatives on schools rather than on students, on the following grounds:

- only schools with a sufficiently high proportion of disadvantaged pupils receive extra support;
- schools with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils, but where the overall proportion is not sufficiently high to rank in the score system, receive no extra support - this factor impacts particularly on rural disadvantage;

- certain schools are identified as disadvantaged while the neighbouring school attended by brothers and sisters from the same family is not. (NAPS, 1996b, 27)

- **Addressing the problem of early school-leaving and the needs of early school-leavers**

As previously described, educational disadvantage is often associated with leaving school early with few or no formal educational qualifications. Policies have been focused on the needs of early school-leavers. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has early school-leaving as a priority issue within its strategic framework for tackling educational disadvantage. As well as recommending that resources be targeted at those at risk of educational disadvantage and that interventions aimed at addressing the problem be implemented at the earliest age possible, the NAPS recommends that "... a range of actions to prevent early school-leaving and ensure optimum participation in and benefit from education of young people at risk (be part of any overall strategy to address educational disadvantage)" (NAPS, 1996b, 24).

The Department of Education has as one of its main objectives the retention of, "... as many students as possible to continue in full-time education after the end of the junior cycle. A major objective will be that the percentage of the 16- to 18-year-old age group completing senior cycle will increase to at least 90% by the year 2000" (Department of Education, 1995, 44). It should be noted that, if the Department is successful in retaining at least 90% of students, then, as the numbers of early school-leavers are reduced, those who do leave school early may become more marginalised with fewer prospects open to them.

The NESF consists of politicians, social partners (employers, unions and farmers) and special interest groups whose role is to recommend policy to government. Its most recent report, *Early School-leaving and Youth Unemployment*, 1997, identifies these problems as central issues for national policy. "Early school-leaving and youth unemployment are, in the Forum's opinion, among the most serious social and economic problems which this state must address" (NESF, 1997, 3). This is reflected clearly in one of the NESF's key recommendations. "In the Forum's opinion, there is one key target which must be set to deal with the problem of early school-leaving; that is the total elimination of early school-leaving within the next five years" (ibid., 91). Aiming to eliminate early school-

leaving seems to be impractical, and such a policy presumes that the formal education system is the best system for everyone.

1.2.4 Educational Disadvantage and Poverty

The literature suggests a link between educational disadvantage and poverty. "Poverty is the condition that is most frequently associated in people's minds with disadvantage. ... When economic limitations leave families with no resources beyond those needed for survival, it is obvious that children will not be in a position to benefit fully from educational provision" (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 30). This position is supported by the NAPS and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). A 1994 INTO report suggested a number of 'poverty-related factors' which were seen by teachers to contribute to difficulties students experienced at school. Low levels of income viewed against costs of educational participation in terms of books, school supplies, uniform and school trips were seen to lead to exclusion and feelings of humiliation. Hunger, poor diet and tiredness were seen as factors contributing to low levels of concentration and motivation in school. Inadequate clothing resulting in children not being sufficiently warm in winter, contributing to ill health and absenteeism, was cited as another factor. Similarly, health and hygiene problems and the 'bleak' environments from which 'poor' children came were thought to expose them to social problems which led to behaviour problems in school (INTO, 1994).

O'Brien, 1990, examined the relationship between social disadvantage and education from the perspectives of people from 'disadvantaged areas' and teachers who work in 'disadvantaged' schools. O'Brien states that it is obvious that not all children from working class backgrounds are disadvantaged at school; however, there are many children whose families suffer from severe financial hardship. From her sample of 70 households, O'Brien found that many of the families had a persistent problem paying rent and often had to borrow from friends or moneylenders. Over half of the sample she interviewed experienced unemployment as a consistent problem and, consequently, had to rely on welfare agencies.

The concepts 'poverty' and 'educational disadvantage' have a special relationship in that poverty is often identified as a factor which contributes to educational disadvantage, and educational

disadvantage is often seen as a factor which perpetuates poverty. It is suggested that one of the consequences of being poor is that one will be educationally disadvantaged, and one of the consequences of educational disadvantage can be poverty. The NESF "... has previously referred to the link between the cyclical nature of educational disadvantage causing poverty, and of poverty causing educational disadvantage and this must be clearly acknowledged" (NESF, 1997, 10).

The relationship between poverty and educational disadvantage, however, is not necessarily a causal one. Every person who experiences poverty will not necessarily be educationally disadvantaged and vice versa. This is an important point, because it indicates that other factors impinge on these circumstances and that any programme aimed at addressing the problems of poverty or educational disadvantage must bear this relationship in mind. These observations will be illuminated below in the discussions on the factors, indicators and consequences of educational disadvantage.

1.2.5 Incidence of Educational Disadvantage

"The level of educational failure in Ireland is not noticeably higher than in other European countries. ... 93% of 16-year-olds are still at school/college, 75% of 17-year-olds and 50% of 18-year-olds" (Rourke, 1994, 7). Surveys by the Department of Labour and the Economic and Social Research Institute throughout the 1980s and 1990s indicated that more students were remaining in school and that the rate of participation in full-time education had been steadily improving. "The proportion leaving school at, or prior to, the end of the junior cycle stage has gradually declined, with a corresponding rise in the proportion leaving at the senior cycle. To exemplify, the proportion leaving school at the junior cycle declined from 32% in 1980 to less than 15% in 1995" (McCoy and Whelan, 1996, 5).

Nonetheless, nearly 15%, or 13,000 students, leave school each year immediately after junior cycle. While the percentage of early school-leavers (those who leave with no or minimal qualifications) has decreased significantly over the last 15 years, the problem persists. In addition, the consequences for school-leavers with no educational qualifications have become more severe. The consequences of educational failure have become more serious over time, those without qualifications - drawn mostly from lower working-class backgrounds - being more and

more limited to unskilled manual occupations at high risk of unemployment. "... A priority of policy must be to address the needs of this particularly disadvantaged group" (Nolan and Callan eds., 1994, 318).

An evaluation report of provision for early school-leavers published in 1996 presented the following statistics on the extent of 'educational disadvantage' in Ireland:

- Approximately 4,500 young people per annum between 1992 and 1994 achieved five passes only in the Leaving Certificate examination.
- Approximately 5,500 young people per annum between 1992 and 1994 did not achieve five passes in the Leaving Certificate.
- An annual average of 2,700 young people between 1992 and 1994 left school having completed the Junior Certificate and a Vocational Preparation Training (VPT) course only.
- An annual average of 8,000 young people between 1992 and 1994 left school having completed the Junior Certificate only.
- An annual average of 4,000 young people left second-level school between 1992 and 1994 with no qualifications whatsoever.

In addition, an annual average of approximately 900 to 1,000 young people did not progress to second-level school at all. Therefore, over the period 1992-1994, approximately 25,700 young people left school each year, all of whom could be said to be educationally disadvantaged. This represents an annual average of approximately 40% of the school-leaving population" (European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit, 1996, v-vi).

The NESF report, 1997, presents new figures from 1993 to 1995 based on McCoy and Whelan, 1996, and Department of Education data. These data are an interesting comparison with the 1992 to 1994 data. "The extent of educational disadvantage in Ireland is clear from the following details for the period 1993-1995 (annual averages):

- up to 1,000 did not progress to second-level school at all;
- 3,000 left second-level school with no qualification whatsoever (of which 1,970 were boys and 1,030 were girls)

- 7,600 left school having completed the Junior Certificate only (4,900 boys and 2,700 girls); of which 2,400 failed to achieve five passes in the Junior Certificate;
- 2,600 young people left school having completed the Junior Certificate and a VPT course only (1,400 boys and 1,200 girls) and;
- around 7,000 did not achieve five passes in the Leaving Certificate examination (around 4,000 boys and 3,000 girls)." (NESF, 1997, 39)

Comparing the annual averages of 1992-1994 with those of 1993-1995, the following figures emerge:

- 1,000 less students left school with no educational qualifications;
- 400 less students left school having completed the Junior Certificate only;
- 100 less students left having completed a Junior Certificate and a VPT course;
- 1,500 more students did not achieve five passes in the Leaving Certificate.

This comparison indicates that more students are staying in school up to their Leaving Certificate; however, a similar number of students are not passing the examination. The introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme may address this problem.

Since 1990, the Department of Education has designated certain areas and schools in Ireland as disadvantaged for the purpose of providing additional resources and personnel. Kellaghan et. al., 1995, adopted different measures for identifying disadvantaged areas and schools and suggested that the Department's designations did not adequately serve disadvantaged students from town and rural areas. Their work provided the basis for the *Breaking the Cycle* initiative and gives a good indication of the incidence and the distribution of educational disadvantage in Ireland.

"Our attempts to estimate the incidence and distribution of educational disadvantage lead to a number of conclusions. First, ... 16% of the population may reasonably be regarded as

educationally disadvantaged. Second, the majority (60.7%) of disadvantaged pupils in the country live in rural areas (with populations of less than 10,000), followed by Dublin (25.5%), towns with populations between 10,000 and 40,000 (9.5%) and other urban areas (4.3%). Third, Dublin has the greatest concentration of disadvantage (18.1% ...), followed by rural areas (16.6% ...), towns (14.2% ...) and other urban areas (10.6% ...). Fourth, Dublin is the area that is best served under the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage, followed by other urban areas, towns, and rural areas." (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 47-48)

1.2.6 Factors Relating to and Indicators of Educational Disadvantage

As stated earlier in this report, most of the research in Ireland on educational disadvantage is concerned with understanding significant factors relating to it, identifying variables associated with it and measuring its incidence. Such work is problematic, since researchers often work from unclear conceptions of educational disadvantage and because of the complexity of the phenomenon. In the literature, factors and indicators of educational disadvantage often parallel one another, so they will be treated together in the discussion below.

"In many ways, pupils' school performance may be regarded as the most significant indicator of educational disadvantage as far as the educational system is concerned" (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 39). The Department of Education uses literacy problems and the percentage of students who leave school without any formal qualifications to evaluate school performance. The Irish literature on these areas has grown since the 1970s and has contributed a great deal to the understanding and awareness of the problems associated with educational disadvantage.

Literacy Problems

Fontes and Kellaghan's study, *Incidence and Correlates of Illiteracy in Irish Primary Schools*, 1977, focused on the reading and writing abilities of children in their last year of primary school. They examined the incidence of literacy problems among primary school-leavers in two ways: by administering tests in English and verbal ability and by eliciting the perceptions of teachers on how well their students could cope with everyday and post-primary school demands in reading and writing. They also compared how children classified as having literacy problems rated

on a survey of their personal characteristics in order to see if any correlations existed between literacy problems and particular personal and social characteristics. Their study covered nearly 100 primary schools in Ireland and approximately 4,000 students.

The indication from their findings was that about six percent of students in any randomly selected primary school in the country could be expected to be unable to cope with the everyday demands of reading. Further analysis indicated that higher percentages of students would have difficulty coping with post-primary school.

"If we assume that pupils who are unable to cope with everyday demands would also be unable to cope with the demands of post-primary school and if all pupils in sixth classes transfer to such schools, then we would expect that teachers in the typical school consider 13.2% of pupils going to post-primary school as unable to cope with the reading demands of school and 11.8% as unable to cope with the writing demands of the school." Fontes and Kellaghan, 1977, 19)

In regard to students' personal and social characteristics as possible correlates of literacy problems, there were some interesting findings. Children with literacy problems were older than their classmates; up to six months in the case of severe difficulties for everyday reading and writing. As was expected, students who were observed to have literacy problems had markedly low standardised test scores (ibid., 16).

Students considered to have literacy problems also scored lower on average than their peers on school-related and personal-social ratings. Furthermore, "The most startling incidence of handicap was reported for children of fathers who were unemployed, invalided or dead ... far higher percentages of these pupils had severe and moderate handicaps in reading and writing than their membership in the total group would have led one to expect" (ibid., 17).

In 1983, Archer and O'Flaherty began a longitudinal study on the extent of literacy problems in Dublin's inner-city, beginning with students in their final year of primary school. The original sample contained over 1,400 students from 36 primary schools in the inner-city. The reason for conducting a study which focused on young adolescents was due to the high rates of adult illiteracy in the inner-city which had been found

in previous studies (O'Flaherty, 1984, and Vaughan and Murphy, 1984). Archer and O'Flaherty wanted to determine the level of potential literacy problems among this group. It was assumed that a high level of adult illiteracy in an area will result in a high incidence of literacy problems for the children of these adults.

Archer and O'Flaherty wanted to detect the scale of the problem in the inner-city among adolescents in order to estimate future adult literacy needs and to ensure that suitable provision would be made for dealing with this problem. Their study was "... the first longitudinal study to systematically investigate and analyse the extent and validity of these features (low literacy level, poor educational achievement and early school-leaving in the inner-city) using a variety of student input and output variables" (Archer and O'Flaherty, 1986, 15).

Their findings indicated consistently low levels of performance among inner-city primary school-leavers. An interesting correlation was found between school performance and place of residence. "In the case of both teachers' judgements and test scores the relative inferiority of the present cohort of students was found to be most pronounced among those students who not only attend primary school in the catchment area but who live there as well" (ibid., v). A similar relationship was observed by MacGreil, 1974. He analysed adult participation and achievement in education in the greater Dublin area and found that, "... place of residence had been one of the most significant negative variables in that it has shown an imbalance of educational achievement between the various districts (in Dublin)" (MacGreil, 1974, 37).

Archer and O'Flaherty's study used the same criterion as Fontes and Kellaghan for measuring literacy problems: a qualitative measure ascertained by eliciting teachers' perceptions of students' reading and writing abilities, and Drumcondra standardised tests. In the opinion of teachers, many of the children at the end of primary school in the inner city did not have rudimentary abilities in reading and writing. It is also clear that those students who attend school and live in the inner city exhibit a higher incidence of literacy

problems than their classmates who live outside the inner city.

Comparing their results to those of Fontes and Kellaghan, Archer and O'Flaherty found severe literacy problems to be between three to four times higher among inner city primary school students (Table 1).

The inner-city group scored lower than the national sample, and inner-city residents performed at a lower level than the entire group. Archer and O'Flaherty state that, "The evidence to date points to the fact that the performance on standardised tests of students in Dublin's inner-city is consistently below the norm" (ibid., 40). By further analysis, the authors discovered that, "In very simplistic terms we may say that the present sample is performing at a level between three and five school terms behind what one would expect on the basis of published norms" (ibid., 41).

Like Fontes and Kellaghan, Archer and O'Flaherty were concerned primarily with identifying the degree of the problem rather than explaining it. Their study is valuable in that it identified factors related to literacy problems and analysed their extent. Fontes and Kellaghan concluded that their study illustrated the complexity of the problem and that even though their data did not uncover any causes, their work showed that the problem lies in a complex interaction of social and personal factors.

Early School-Leaving

A second indicator of school performance used by the Department of Education is the percentage of students who leave the system without any formal qualifications. A number of studies have analysed data on early school-leaving and identified factors strongly associated with the problem. The Early School-Leavers Project (Granville, 1982), for example, suggested that there were five significant indicators of early school-leaving: poor school attendance, poor school achievement, age variance (students who are older than their classmates), poor self-image and low motivation, and limited family support.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Archer & O'Flaherty data on literacy problems with those of Fontes & Kellaghan

	Reading Severe	Reading Moderate	Writing Severe	Writing Moderate
Archer & O'Flaherty				
Entire Group	15.25	5.3	22.05	3.44
Inner City Residents	17.09	5.7	24.47	4.02
Fontes & Kellaghan	6.2	7.0	6.6	5.2
(Archer and O'Flaherty, 1986, 32)				

Breen, 1984, analysed three previous studies carried out in Ireland on factors related to children who left formal schooling at primary level. A high proportion of these children came from homes in which the father did not have a steady job. "In all three surveys the lower the educational level the lower the percentage of school-leavers with a father at work" (Breen, 1984, 102). In Breen's study of post-primary early school-leavers, he identified father's occupational status as a significant correlation to school failure. "... the relationship between father's employment status and educational level is most evident in a comparison of school drop-outs with the rest. Controlling for occupational group, fathers who are unemployed ... are chiefly associated with those who leave school having sat for no exam" (ibid., 104).

Breen used 10 predictor variables (sex, age, father's occupational group, type of school, location of school, type of job aspired to, post-Group Certificate intentions, size of family, parents' educational levels, and students' attitudes) to identify which of these were most commonly shared among school-leavers. He found that the "... group which does not continue to the Inter. Cert. contains higher proportions of males, of pupils with fathers in manual work, of vocational and community/comprehensive pupils, of pupils in urban schools and of pupils aspiring to manual jobs than does the group of Inter. Cert. takers. In addition, the former are, on average, older, and a higher proportion of them expressed the intention of leaving school after the Group Certificate" (Breen, 1984, 112). By use of multivariate and discriminant analyses of data, Breen was able to identify 85% of school drop-outs. According to Breen, the most important discriminating variables for predicting early school-leaving are the father's occupational group, the school type, and the father's occupational status.

Breen, like Fontes and Kellaghan, was concerned with identifying factors and indicators associated with educational disadvantage. Breen's findings were intended to be used to identify 'at-risk' students, so some sort of intervention could be made to retain them in school. "Ideally the equation provided should then be useful in identifying which pupils, among the age cohort, have the highest likelihood of leaving school at some particular point. ... (It) would clearly be an important aid to policy and educational practice in so far as it would ... permit specific programmes to be directed at such pupils." (Breen, 1984, 110).

Hannan, 1986, discovered that the incidence of early school-leaving was most frequent in large cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford) and in the

Ulster counties and Co. Louth. Like Breen, Hannan also found early school-leaving to be most prevalent in particular schools. "Early school-leaving is quite concentrated in certain kinds of schools - those that cater mainly for working class children, or children from small farms or from families of unemployed manual workers, vocational schools and schools in which the poorly educable are selectively concentrated" (Hannan, 85, 1986). In a survey published in 1988, it was found that, "No less than 46% of (unskilled manual workers') children leave school without having attained any qualifications whatsoever" (Sexton et. al., 1988, 20).

Nevertheless, as Rourke points out, the problem of early school-leaving in Ireland is in no way restricted rigidly to particular areas, schools or students: "... early school-leaving is not an urban phenomenon. Indeed, it has been argued that the problems faced by disadvantaged young people in rural areas are often more extreme than those of their urban counterparts" (Rourke, 1994, 8).

In general, the research in Ireland has highlighted significant correlations between characteristics of students and incidents of early school-leaving, and these conform broadly to those identified in the international literature. Some researchers argue that school-related factors and wider social inequalities contribute significantly to educational disadvantage.

Boldt, 1994, stated that most literature on the problem of early school-leaving relied on statistical measures and focused almost exclusively on students' personal and social background characteristics and pointed out that the perceptions and experiences of early school-leavers themselves had been largely ignored by research. He interviewed early school-leavers with no educational qualifications from the inner-city of Dublin, their parents, classmates, teachers, principals and workers from their communities. The research suggested that early school-leaving was a complicated process affected by many variables, the precise influence of which was indeterminate. Boldt found that the perceptions of the sample differed on the reasons why students leave school early and that these differences seemed to depend upon a person's experience with and relationship to early school-leavers.

"One of the more significant findings from this research is the extent to which school-related factors, particularly the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship, are seen by early school-leavers to contribute to their decision to drop out

of school. They express strong views about their experiences ... and maintain that it was these experiences that contributed most to their decision to leave school. (On the other hand) ... any school factors that teachers and principals believe to be of importance are perceived to be outside of their control as they involve finances and resources" (i.e. the responsibility of the Department of Education). (Boldt, 1994, vii)

School Factors

Hannan, 1987, examined the social organisation and curricula of schooling, and he monitored their effects on student attainments and rates of early school-leaving. The main focus of his study was on the differentiation of students by the practice of 'streaming'. Hannan believes that rigid streaming discriminates against students with low abilities and low achievement levels. The process of differentiation is seen to reinforce and perpetuate the relationship between socio-economic background and educational achievement. Furthermore, he thinks that the objectives a school promotes and maintains can implicitly undermine and downgrade students who have difficulties in literacy and at school.

"I would argue, therefore, that the objectives and organisational arrangements of post-primary schools - both within schools and between schools - have important effects on educational achievement or under-achievement ... recent evidence is clear that individual schools and different schooling arrangements do have important effects on educational achievement, either in reducing or exacerbating social inequalities". (Hannan in Crooks and Stokes, eds., 1987, 28)

Other work by Hannan indicates that streaming has a negative effect on levels of early school-leavers in the first three years of post-primary school. "Whatever the underlying reasons - whether the negative 'labelling' effect, or the differential effectiveness of the schooling process on high and low streams, pupils in streamed schools - controlling for all relevant factors - are then somewhat less likely to remain in school than in mixed ability or less rigidly hierarchically arranged systems" (Hannan, 1987, 138).

Hannan found no evidence to support the practice of streaming. He stated that there were no consistent or independent positive effects related to the practice of streaming whether one looked at its effect on students performing at a high level and continuing on to

university or whether one observed its effect on minimising early school-leaving rates. "This strong conclusion supports a lot of more recent research work on the effects of streaming and tracking which show that, although these practices have no 'main effect' on student achievement, they have significant polarisation effects - tending to create greater inequalities between students at the ends of the ability and social class continuum" (ibid., 149).

Hannan also discusses the implications which schools' objectives and goals have for children with different abilities and lower achievement levels. "These poorer outcomes were predictable side-effects of giving priority to schooling goals which implicitly, but visibly, downgraded the position of lower ability/performing pupils" (ibid., 41). In Hannan's opinion, there are no schools which strive to meet the needs of all their students. An earlier study intended to identify the needs of adults with literacy problems supports Hannan's views. "Studies have shown that much of the responsibility for adult illiteracy in our society rests on the failure of formal schooling to cater adequately for a minority of the pupils" (Vaughan and Murphy, 1984, 82). In a school system such as Ireland's, where there is competition and selective processes at work in accepting and organising students, those students with abilities that are non-academic are catered for inadequately.

O'Brien, 1990, reported that within her sample of 70 'disadvantaged' households, there seemed to be strong bonds in the community and within a person's group, and it was not socially acceptable to deviate from the community even in minor ways. Any type of deviation would be seen as a threat to the group and would be met with some type of sanctions against the offender.

"Schools, however, foster individual competition and success, especially as the child progresses through the system. Thus, the values of the school and those of the working/unemployed class groups come into conflict. This helps explain why it is almost necessary for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds to opt out of schools. It is also necessary, then, not to show academic strengths which set you apart from your mates; this threatens the group." (O'Brien in Mulholland and Keogh, 1990, 30)

O'Brien states that teachers and schools must be aware of the support, both emotional and educational, which is necessary for children and parents who have literacy problems and difficulties with school.

Following from this, she suggests that schools have to be aware of and be sensitive to parents from these backgrounds and that they should understand the positive and negative contributions they make towards their children's education and learning.

O'Brien states that teachers have to be aware of the cultural and value differences which children bring into the classroom. They need to understand the importance of the community in children's lives and be attentive to the conflicts which can arise between the school and this group. These social and cultural differences also mean that pedagogy and curricula should be reconsidered. "Firstly, we must respect the child's own culture and use this as our starting point. This respect implies taking account of the special needs of individual children" (ibid., 32). Making schools relevant to children's needs means that teachers have to understand the values and culture of the families and community from which their students come.

"In summary, then, social disadvantage involves ongoing experiences of financial, social and environmental difficulties. These constraining factors create a lifestyle and world view which may not concur with the predominantly middle class world view upheld and maintained by the school. It appears to spell a cultural conflict between school and socially disadvantaged groups". (ibid., 31)

Hannan, 1987, states that, "The consequence of (Ireland's) disorganised and competitive (education) system is that the selective and competitive schools can effectively ignore local lower ability or educationally disadvantaged pupils" (Hannan, 1987, 28). Indeed, the schools which do not impose selection procedures receive and must cope with a disproportionate number of 'socially and educationally disadvantaged' students. Typically, this is the situation of vocational schools, as Breen, 1984, confirmed in his study of the relationship between education and the labour market.

Vocational schools record the highest drop-out rates and lowest level of exam performance (Table 2) which is attributable to the fact, "that vocational schools have a disproportionately high intake of working class pupils and low ability pupils" (Breen 1984, 63), as compared to secondary and community/comprehensive schools. "And it is these intake differences among schools that mainly account for differences in drop-out rates" (Hannan, 1987, 136). A survey published in 1988 of over 100,000 young people of which 27% had left school without any formal qualifications, "... indicates a very high drop-out rate from the vocational stream of the lower cycle of second-level education" (Sexton et. al., 1988, 18). Fontes and Kellaghan, 1977, found that teachers who identified their students as having literacy problems were likely to recommend these students for vocational schools instead of secondary schools.

Inequality

Raftery 1987, examined the relationship between inequality and disadvantage, and sought to understand their underlying causes. Raftery said that, "An examination of the performance of the Irish educational system suggests that only a very limited form of equality is practised in education" (Raftery in Crooks and Stokes, eds., 1987, 4).

Raftery states that a commitment to equality is not taken seriously in Irish education. His view is strongly supported by Lynch, 1987, in which she indicated that neither equality nor egalitarianism were policies that were ever favoured by the Department of Education.

Breen, 1990, states that the Department of Education has supported a policy of equality of educational opportunity, but he thinks that this goal is misguided and serves merely to maintain inequalities. "Equality of opportunity, as an educational ideal, is inadequate because it proposes equality of treatment ... irrespective of differences in pupils' backgrounds. Yet we know that pupils' home circumstances are of crucial importance..." (Breen in Mulholland and Keogh, 1990, 44).

Level of Education:	All	Leaving	Intermediate	Group	
School Type:	Levels	Certificate	Certificate	Certificate	None
Secondary	56.9	71.7	44.9	11.0	26.2
Vocational	32.9	19.6	41.6	78.2	62.2
Community	10.2	8.7	13.6	10.9	11.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.0
N		4779	1631	670	666

(Breen, 1984, 101)

Peter MacMenamin, 1990, supports a policy of positive discrimination for disadvantaged schools and sees it as the only way to begin to tackle the problems of disadvantage and school failure. He believes that equality of treatment irrespective of children's backgrounds only serves to perpetuate the problems. "Money must be disproportionately diverted to the weaker and less privileged sections of society and to the schools which continue to provide for these students ... in a situation of inequality, equality of treatment reinforces the inequality" (MacMenamin in Mulholland and Keogh eds., 1990, 109).

Raftery holds the view that fundamental changes would be required if the educational system in Ireland were to pursue a thorough commitment to equality. "If education was to take seriously the goal of equalisation of basic attainments, major changes would be required, not only in the curriculum but also in the organisation and ethos of schools" (Raftery in Crooks and Stokes, eds., 1987, 7).

According to Raftery, these changes are unlikely to occur in Irish schools for a number of reasons. Firstly, schools typically are not clearly organised to achieve well-defined goals. Secondly, schools tend to have poor management structures in which teachers often play conflicting and unclear roles. Thirdly, according to Raftery, many of the schools owned and managed by religious orders tend to recruit more able students, maintain a system of fee paying for secondary schooling, and leave the problems of 'disadvantage' to vocational and community/comprehensive schools. Fourthly, since individual schools have considerable autonomy and share control with the Department of Education, there is little room for local educational planning in which schools could be monitored, and equality objectives supported.

Breaking the Cycle, 1996, has directed resources to particular schools through a policy of positive discrimination. The White Paper on Education, 1995, recommended that post-primary schools be required to draft school development plans. Furthermore, regional education boards will be established which may allow more room for local educational planning. Nonetheless, the recommendations described above on changes required in the education system to demonstrate a commitment to 'equality' remain relevant.

In an article entitled, 'Education and Democracy,' Michael D. Higgins TD (former Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht) supports Raftery's thesis,

saying that the educational system in Ireland is neither equal nor democratic in terms of access, control, curricula, attainments, social impact or organisational structure. Higgins states that the purposes of the educational system in Ireland are not challenged, and equality is not taken seriously.

The needs of the society in general and the economy in particular are left unquestioned ... Education is perceived as determined by these needs. The consequences for uncritically placing education at the behest of the given economic structures and social forms are only too obvious. The worst features of the society are fed into the educational experience as 'natural'." (Higgins in Mulholland and Keogh eds., 1990, 52-53)

According to Higgins, education in Ireland is hierarchical, competitive and authoritarian. He thinks it should be democratic and participatory. Like Raftery, Higgins believes that changes have to come from outside the educational system and that the process of change has to begin in the government institutions. "All these changes have yet to be campaigned for at the political level. There are powerful interests who will oppose any change. Politicians to date have not taken the curriculum argument with sufficient seriousness" (ibid., 57).

1.2.7 Consequences of Educational Disadvantage

It is difficult to state with confidence the consequences of educational disadvantage, because of the problems associated with the definition of educational disadvantage, and also because there are no easily measurable causal links between educational disadvantage and outcomes referred to as consequences. These consequences could be the result of personal or socio-economic factors, economic changes or other variables. Nevertheless, there are statistics which relate to the circumstances of early school-leavers which may be considered consequences. These 'consequences' will be examined in relation to unemployment and participation in the labour market.

Hannan, 1986, estimates that half of those who leave with no qualifications or with poor Junior Certificate results remain unemployed for up to five years. Furthermore, he states that one-third of those will never find stable employment. The advantages of obtaining a Leaving Certificate were emphasised further in a survey published in 1992. "While overall employment fell among early school-leavers, there was no decline in the percentage of those at Leaving

Certificate level who found employment. In contrast, there was a fall in employment of 8% to 47% among Intermediate/Group Certificate leavers and over 9% to 31.1% of those with no qualifications" (School-leavers Survey, 1992, 47).

Examining figures from a Labour Force Survey in 1992, Rourke points out that rates of unemployment vary widely among those with no educational qualifications (46%); those with Junior Certificates (27%) and those with Leaving Certificates (11%). He states that, "in 1994, 74.6% of the unemployed have either no educational qualification or just the Intermediate/Group Certificate" (ibid., 6). Drudy and Lynch state that, "... the most vulnerable group within the labour market and those most prone to unemployment are those who leave school with no qualifications" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, 145).

These earlier figures are supported in the most recent statistics; "... those leaving with senior cycle qualifications experienced an unemployment rate ranging from 9% to 14% in 1995, compared to a figure of 53% for school-leavers with no qualifications" (McCoy and Whelan, 1996, 6).

Hannan's prediction in 1986 appears to be borne out in NESF data.

"In a five-year follow-up study, the unqualified started out in 1987 with an unemployment rate of around 61%, but they ended up five years later with almost the same rate (58%). However, for those with a Leaving Certificate, the unemployment rate both started in a relatively better position at around 32% (half the rate of the unqualified group), and had declined five years later to a rate of 10%. There also appears to be a much higher rate of job turnover among the least qualified, with much lower probabilities of getting a secure long-term job." (NESF, 1997, 25)

Increased participation in the formal education system has led to a so-called 'qualifications explosion' with a much higher proportion of the population holding educational credentials. Persistent high rates of unemployment in Ireland have led to greater competition for jobs and greater emphasis on the use of educational qualifications as a means of selection by employers. This situation has further undermined the circumstances of the 'educationally disadvantaged'. Moreover, the NESF, 1997, indicates

that the lower one's educational level by qualification, the lower one's earnings and opportunities to progress to a 'better' job; this view is corroborated by McCoy and Whelan, 1996.

1.2.8 General Approaches to Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Formal Sector

Since the 1960s, in line with approaches developed internationally, the Irish education system has approached the problem of educational disadvantage through policies aimed at compensating for 'disadvantages' associated with students who are identified as 'at risk' of educational failure. Most of the measures adopted to tackle educational disadvantage are undertaken at primary and post-primary level. Provision at pre-school level has been very limited, but, as with post-school provision, it has expanded gradually in recent years.

According to Kellaghan et. al., 1995, most approaches adopted to tackle educational disadvantage operate from the following set of assumptions: that everyone is entitled to equal opportunities in regard to education, training and employment; that extra resources for disadvantaged students are equitable; "... that it is necessary to motivate individuals to acquire skills ... (and that) success in education and training is defined in terms of fairly limited forms of achievement which the educational system, training agencies, and those responsible for recruitment to employment seem to be generally agreed on" (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 28).

Pre-School

Six years is the compulsory school age for children. It is estimated that 65% of four-year-old children and almost all five-year-olds are enrolled in primary schools; hence, much early formal education occurs within a school setting. Nonetheless, pre-school provision in the formal sector is quite limited and not very well developed and resourced in Ireland.

Irish research related to educational disadvantage has for many years recommended 'early intervention' to address the problem. The Department of Education has developed and supported few approaches at pre-school level. These include the pre-school *Early Start Programme* for selected primary schools, pre-schools for children of Travellers and for children with special educational needs, and the Rutland Street Project.

The *Early Start Programme* is a pre-school programme based in primary schools intended to address

'educational disadvantage'. "The overall aim of the Department of Education's pre-school programmes is to compensate for background deprivation" (Department of Education, 1995, 17). Pre-school programmes for Travellers and children with special needs seek mainly to compensate for home experiences and personal abilities respectively, which are perceived as limiting opportunities to participate meaningfully in formal schooling. Pre-schooling for Travellers has expanded steadily since 1984 from 18 programmes to 56 in 1996 (NESF, 1997). In 1969, a pre-school was set up in Rutland Street, located in an area of Dublin with high rates of unemployment, limited facilities and a record of low educational achievement (Holland, 1979). The Rutland Street Project, "... basically sought to provide children in a pre-school setting with experiences which would facilitate the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to later school success and to involve parents as closely as possible in the education of their children" (CMRS, 1992, 24). The project is still in existence and was used as a model for the *Early Start Programme* which is being implemented on a pilot basis in approximately 30 pre-school units.

Primary

Initiatives and approaches at primary level are broader, though quite limited, and involve the following: provision of books and school meals, remedial teaching, special measures for schools in disadvantaged areas, and parental involvement. Grants for books are provided to primary schools based on the number of 'needy' students, using criteria from the Department of Education. School meals are available to students in designated schools in urban and Gaeltacht areas. Kellaghan et. al., 1995, highlighted problems with both these schemes in their administration and in terms of the type of students who benefit from them. Their report recommended changes in the criteria which have been implemented through the *Breaking the Cycle* initiatives.

Remedial teachers provide a service mainly for students who have literacy problems. "At the time of the Special Education Review Committee's (1993) report, there were 1,032 officially recognised remedial teachers providing a service to 1,700 schools in which 77% of all pupils in the country were enrolled" (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 15). The relationship between the work of remedial teachers and the effect on disadvantaged students is not clear; however, 96% of designated disadvantaged schools have remedial services.

A Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage was established in 1990 by the Department of Education (reformed in 1996 in *Breaking the Cycle*) which provides a concessionary teaching post and additional grants for general management, books and home-school-community liaison. In the same year, the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme was put into place in 55 schools. By 1996, it had expanded into nearly 200 primary schools.

"The thrust of the (Home-School-Community Liaison) scheme is to promote active participation between home, school and relevant community agencies in developing the educational interests of children. In an effort to bring parents to the level of working in partnership with the school, the scheme aims to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational process and assist them in developing skills."

(Ryan in Boldt ed., 1996, 72)

Evaluations of the operation and outcomes of the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme have been very favourable, particularly in regard to addressing educational disadvantage (CMRS, 1992, and Ryan, 1994). In regard to parents, the scheme has enjoyed considerable success. However, the participation of community agencies has been less extensive and has not been a consistent feature throughout the scheme. Nevertheless, the philosophy and objectives of the scheme seem to take account of the complexity of the problem of 'educational disadvantage', and its approach appears to have generated partnerships with parents in the educational process.

Overall, provision and resources at primary level may be enhanced by what many commentators refer to as a 'demographic dividend', that is, the same or an increased amount of personnel and resources applied to a smaller school-going population. The NAPS and groups such as the NESF and CORI see the demographic changes as an opportunity to improve educational services and address 'educational disadvantage'.

The School Attendance Service serves primary and post-primary schools. The service provides information on non-attendance at school and governs young people between the ages of six and 15 years. The information which school attendance officers record is important in that it can be used to assist in the

identification of young people who are at risk of educational failure and 'educational disadvantage'. School attendance is a factor strongly associated with educational performance and retention within the system. The following procedures are used by officers to enforce school attendance: home visits, if absent for 10 days or more; legal warnings for continued absences, serving statutory notices, if the above measures are not effective, remand for assessment, case conferences, issuing of summonses, and court cases.

Post-Primary

Measures at post-primary level aimed at tackling educational disadvantage are similar to those at primary: remedial teaching, additional resources, parental involvement, and curricular initiatives. Most remedial teachers at second level are ex-quota (there were 277 in 1993), but some in-quota teachers are given remedial teaching duties. Students in need of intensive remedial help at second level are likely to be at a serious disadvantage in the light of the literacy demands of post-primary schooling.

As in primary schools, a Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage was set up for post-primary schools in 1990. The scheme provides an additional teaching post and an extra capitation grant. "By the year 1994-95, 22.5% of post-primary schools had been designated under the scheme. These schools were attended by 24% of the post-primary school population" (Kellaghan et. al., 1995, 23).

Not surprisingly, vocational schools have the highest representation under the scheme. By 1996, approximately 100 post-primary schools were involved in the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme. Activities under the scheme at second level are similar to those in primary schools with an emphasis on partnerships with parents and local communities in order to support the educational process of children.

Distinct from primary level, a wide variety of initiatives and experimentation has taken place in the post-primary curriculum. Curriculum changes at post-primary level have been occurring in the junior cycle with the Junior Certificate examination (1989) and a National Foundation Certificate programme which is in the process of being implemented. At senior cycle, the Leaving Certificate Applied (introduced on a phased basis in September 1995) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (fully implemented

in September 1996) are aimed at serving a wider range of ability than the established Leaving Certificate programme.

In the past 20 years, there have been considerable changes and developments in the post-primary curriculum (McNamara et. al., 1990, Department of Education, 1995). Some of these curricular changes could be seen as measures to address educational disadvantage; however, it is not clear precisely how such changes relate to the problem. Nonetheless, many of the curricular initiatives described in McNamara et. al., 1990, were school responses made in the context of "... the unemployment of young people and, in particular, of early school-leavers without qualifications" (Herron in McNamara et. al., 1990, ix).

Post-School/Second Chance

There are a number of programmes for school-leavers up to the age of 18, some of which may be considered as strategies to tackle educational disadvantage. Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FÁS programmes and the new European Social Fund YouthStart programme (20 pilot projects) provide a level of education and training. Unfortunately, due to a lack of sufficient places, many who leave school without qualifications are not served.

"The education sector now provides approximately 2,000 Youthreach places in Youthreach Centres and FÁS provides approximately 1,700 Youthreach and non-Youthreach places per annum through the Community Training Workshops. Together with places in the Travellers Training Workshops (600) and places on other community-based provisions (approximately 1,200) this adds up to approximately 5,500 places which still represents gross under-provision in the face of an early school-leaving population numbering 14,500 per annum."

(European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit, 1996, xiv)

The NESF, 1997, estimates that, annually, there are approximately 3,000 unqualified school-leavers (those with primary education only, those who left prior to the Junior Certificate and those who obtained less than five Ds in Junior Certificate). There is a 'stock' of 2,400 unqualified young people aged 15 to 17; and a 'stock' of 2,800 18- to 20-year-olds with no qualifications. Apart from under-provision for these groups, "The Forum is concerned that not enough is

being done to promote second chance education, particularly in terms of reaching the most educationally disadvantaged" (NESF, 1997, 85). Moreover, the Forum pointed out that there is a lack of provision for 18- to 21-year-old early school-leavers with no qualifications. It recommended that a pilot programme be established between the Community Employment Scheme of FÁS and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), described below.

In 1989, the VTOS, operated by Vocational Education Committees, was introduced. Courses in literacy, catering, tourism and general education, including preparation for the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations, have been offered to people over the age of 21. The Adult Literacy and Community Education scheme was set up in 1983 and is also operated by Vocational Education Committees. The scheme provides literacy courses and community education in disadvantaged areas. In 1991, nearly 20,000 people participated in the scheme (Kellaghan et al., 1995).

1.2.9 General Approaches to Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Non-Formal Sector

It is difficult to identify initiatives undertaken by the non-formal sector because many of them are established on a local level and operate independently and/or on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, many of these programmes are not described in print. Nonetheless, it is assumed that the non-formal sector has made important contributions in addressing 'educational disadvantage' at all levels. The non-formal sector has compensated for gaps in formal sector provision. Religious organisations, community groups and youth groups account for most of the approaches in the non-formal sector.

At pre-school level, the non-formal sector has been quite active. Nurseries, day-care centres, crèches, Montessori groups and play groups are made available by voluntary groups and individuals, providing many services for children under the age of six and their parents. The extent of such services was observable in the strong reaction to the introduction of the *Early Start Programme* by many community-based child care workers. *Early Start* was seen to undermine and displace some of the community-based services when it was introduced free of charge in local primary schools without sufficient consultation or involvement with local groups. "This resulted in the disempowerment of some of the more active women from disadvantaged communities" (NESF, 1997, 53).

It is difficult to locate information on non-formal services for primary and post-primary school students. Community centres and youth groups offer a variety of programmes, some of which are specifically designed to assist primary school students in school (e.g. homework clubs). At post-primary level, similar provision is available, and increasingly local community groups are linking up with schools to address particular issues. There is also a range of information awareness programmes which are offered to schools through youth services and community groups.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) provides literacy instruction and examination courses which are devised to suit individual needs. These courses are available to early school-leavers. Centres for the unemployed, community action groups and centres providing social services are available in many areas, some of which offer special assistance for early school-leavers and/or people with literacy problems. There has been little published research into these areas, and many of these services are known only on a local basis.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 1.2 presented a review of literature on educational disadvantage in Ireland. It was shown that there have been insufficient attempts in the Irish literature to define educational disadvantage precisely. This situation has meant that it is not always clear to whom or to what the term educational disadvantage applies. Thus, research on its incidence, on factors related to it and on measures recommended to address it is not based on a clear understanding of the concept. This has led to certain inconsistencies resulting in difficulties in understanding the problem and in making comparisons to the research.

It was found that most of the Irish research on educational disadvantage has been concerned with identifying factors and indicators of educational disadvantage, so that interventions could be developed to address the needs of students associated with the problem. The problem of educational disadvantage was shown to be complex and the result of a wide range of interrelated variables.

The incidence of educational disadvantage was shown to be significant and widely dispersed according to particular variables. The consequences of educational disadvantage in relation to unemployment and participation in the labour market were shown to be serious.

General approaches aimed at tackling educational disadvantage were quite limited in the formal sector and were insufficient to meet the needs of all those who were considered educationally disadvantaged. Provision in the non-formal sector was difficult to ascertain but was seen to contribute to formal efforts designed to address educational disadvantage.

The above conclusions are based on what is available in the literature on educational disadvantage in Ireland. It was shown that the term educational disadvantage has been used to identify people who resisted the formal education process or who 'underachieved' after completing a formal education, so that they could be assisted in some manner. It could be argued that these individuals are, in fact, the logical outcome of a system that is itself disadvantaged through having no clear philosophy or objectives to adapt to their needs. A system, such as the Irish education system, that is intrinsically competitive and individually goal-oriented will alienate and disadvantage those whose social values and norms are family and community-based.

By their application, state examinations create 'winners and losers'. In general, public examinations in the Irish system are designed to test narrow academic aptitudes. Students who lack such academic abilities are immediately disadvantaged, if not alienated, from the whole formal education process. Reading and writing are the cornerstones of the educational programme; however, one must question whether reading and writing are the only legitimate ways of coming to knowledge and awareness, and if they are the only ways of assessing human capacity. The Irish education system seems to be founded on these assumptions.

Many of the research reports emphasise the need for schools and teachers to be more community orientated in order to address the problem of educational disadvantage. This recommendation and the assumption on which it is based may in itself be counter-productive. This view strengthens the 'missionary' or paternalistic nature of the philosophy behind educational policy. People from within 'disadvantaged' communities should be recruited and involved in schools, rather than school personnel with heavy workloads, severe time constraints and expanding duties being requested to become involved in communities of which they are not a part.

Students are being strongly encouraged to remain within formal education until they attain a Leaving

Certificate. For those for whom the post-primary system is not suitable, encouragement to stay in school can lead to frustration, alienation and a sense of 'failure'. For those who are suitable to the system, pressure will increase on them as the points system continues to spiral upwards. The points system in operation at present creates disadvantage in higher education and the job market, as people tend to be selected on the basis of their number of points without consideration being given to personal qualities, life experiences or non-qualified skills. The points system also serves to narrow what is accepted as education. Clarity of vision must be encouraged at government level. Policy decisions that are taken ostensibly to tackle 'disadvantage' must be closely examined and justified. What is the reason for encouraging students to remain at school longer?

Recommendations:

In the light of the conclusions, the following recommendations are offered.

- The 'educational disadvantage' concept needs to be clarified and specified as it is experienced in Ireland, so that numbers can be accurately measured, programmes can be focused on those in need, improvements can be monitored, research findings can be compared and interventions can be evaluated.
- To address a phenomenon as dispersed and widespread as educational disadvantage there needs to be considerable changes made in the thinking, approaches and objectives of formal education. Furthermore, interventions aimed at tackling educational disadvantage have to be expanded significantly and funded sufficiently in order to reach people considered 'educationally disadvantaged' and to meet their needs.
- A policy aimed at the encouragement, support and recruitment of educational personnel and auxiliaries from 'disadvantaged communities' to be employed and involved in formal schooling should be advanced and supported in the education system.
- Monitoring and evaluation of approaches aimed at tackling educational disadvantage are required. Effective approaches which have been developed to tackle educational disadvantage need to be identified and 'mainstreamed', where possible. Moreover, detailed descriptions and information on effective approaches and interventions should be widely disseminated.

1.4 SUMMARY REPORT ON INTERVENTIONS

1.4.1 Introduction

Section 1.4 analyses and evaluates interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland which have been implemented in the last 10 years. This summary report includes details of interventions at the following levels: at system level, community level, school level and family/individual level. In many cases the interventions overlap the levels and do not fit into them neatly. The report pays attention to interventions which involve collaboration and also to the issue of how successful interventions might be mainstreamed. Section 1.4 covers the following areas:

- Pre-School Interventions
- Primary School Interventions
- Post-Primary School Interventions
- Post-School and Third-Level Interventions
- Conclusions and Recommendations

1.4.2 Pre-School Interventions

Pre-school services in Ireland are provided mainly by private groups and individuals (non-formal) and on a very limited basis through the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education (formal). These services are not standardised or regulated, and provision is on an ad hoc basis. Irish research on pre-school provision and programmes is extremely limited (see Hayes, 1992, and Kellaghan and Greaney, 1993). Furthermore, in regard to pre-schooling and its relationship to educational disadvantage, there are few sources of information and, as of 1994, "... no research has been conducted in Ireland regarding the social variation in the use of pre-school services" (O'Flaherty et. al., 1994, 4).

The gaps in the research and the low level of provision are probably attributable to the scant attention which has been paid to pre-schooling in terms of policy and funding. Even though there has been strong evidence to support the value of early interventions on later school and labour market experiences, the Department of Education has only recently introduced the *Early Start Programme*. The need for early intervention to address educational disadvantage was highlighted by the NESF.

"With regard to second-level education there is a continuing requirement to adapt to the needs of potential early school-leavers since many students are already suffering from the effects of educational disadvantage and are clearly identifiable as likely to leave early. This means

that the focus must also involve pre-school and primary level."
(NESF, 1997, 51)

The *Early Start Programme* is intended to address educational disadvantage. "The overall aim for the Department of Education's pre-school programmes is to compensate for background deprivation" (Department of Education, 1995, 17). *Early Start* has a curriculum based on guided discovery through structured activities. A prominent feature of the programme is the involvement of parents; "... parents belong to an advisory group in each centre, parents participate in the everyday running and organisation of the centre and parents join their children in many of the centre's activities" (ibid., 18).

Criticisms about the introduction of *Early Start* in terms of displacing pre-existing community-based services and 'disempowering' local people involved in them have been made. Insufficient attention was paid to its introduction; key community people were not involved in consultations and some community-based play groups were discontinued. "Unfortunately, due to lack of consultation at the local level, the result of the *Early Start Programme* is that existing and established community pre-school groups ... have seen their numbers decimated and in a number of cases had to close their community play groups" (McGennis in NESF, 1996, 13). The NESF "... is in favour of the extension of the programme and intensification but stresses that this must be in co-operation with community and voluntary service providers" (NESF, 1997, 54).

A 1994 evaluation of a pre-school project in a 'disadvantaged area' of Dublin was carried out and indicated some of the features of non-formal pre-school interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage. The role and involvement of parents is a key component of many of these types of interventions. The pre-school project which was evaluated had as its objectives, "... providing a pre-school service for disadvantaged children ... providing the parents with the opportunity to mix with each other on a regular basis ... (and) providing the opportunity for parental involvement in the actual pre-school" (O'Flaherty et. al., 1994, 14).

The evaluation showed that there was collaboration on the project between parents and staff of the pre-school, between pre-school staff and staff of the local primary school, and with professionals, such as the speech therapist and public health nurse. This network of communication and partnership is another key

aspect of the intervention and highlights the importance of establishing links in setting up and developing such provision.

The evaluation was generally positive; "... the children ... who would have been expected to encounter a myriad of difficulties throughout their school careers, as a consequence of their disadvantaged home circumstances, were performing on a par with their more advantaged peers" (ibid., 48). Furthermore, analysis from interviews with parents and staff indicated a high level of satisfaction. Much of this satisfaction would seem to derive from the partnerships which were forged and the involvement and 'ownership' which was afforded to the 'partners'.

The *Community Mothers Programme* was piloted in Dublin in 1988 by the Eastern Health Board. Experienced volunteer mothers in 'disadvantaged areas' provide support and encouragement to first-time parents in child rearing. The focus of the programme is on health care, nutrition and overall development. "The community mother works under the guidance of a family development nurse (trained public nurses who are seconded from their normal duties). ... The criteria for area selection include housing type, social class, education and unemployment as derived from census and other data" (Johnson and Molloy, 1995, 73).

The programme demonstrates the integral role of mothers in children's development and indicates the impact this can have on their education. In the evaluation of the programme, intervention mothers scored significantly better than a control group on a number of child-rearing variables and, "Of the 78% of mothers who said that they read to their child, significantly more did so in the intervention group ... Scores for stimulating the child using cognitive games and nursery rhymes were significantly better in the intervention group..." (ibid., 79).

1.4.3 Primary School Interventions

The Home-School-Community Liaison scheme seems to have developed a successful approach to intervention at both primary and second level. "The extension, development and 'mainstreaming' of the Home-School-Community Liaison project to disadvantaged schools was universally welcomed; although it was also pointed out that it needed more adequate resourcing, and more adequate in-service training, particularly at 'whole-school' level" (Coolahan ed., 1994, 109).

"(The Home-School-Community Liaison scheme) is unified and integrated at both primary and post-primary levels. (It) is based on preventative measures, and it focuses on adults whose attitudes and behaviours impinge on the lives of the children, namely teachers and parents. Partnership is central to the scheme with collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers. Activities and courses within the scheme are structured on the basis of the expressed needs of parents and teachers, and with a view to fostering self-help and independence."

(O'Brien in Boldt, ed., 1996, 69-70)

The Home-School-Community Liaison scheme is a good example of the process of mainstreaming an intervention programme. After being initiated and developed 'on the ground', the approach received recognition from the Department of Education. It was then introduced on a pilot basis. Having proved itself pragmatically and having been supported by training, the scheme was expanded. Co-ordinators received further in-service training, and networks were established which facilitate support, development and information sharing. The scheme has been evaluated and has continued to develop and expand.

Boldt, ed., 1996, identified Irish school-based interventions at primary level which were aimed at enhancing students' experience of school and addressing various factors associated with educational disadvantage. It was the first report to present intervention programmes aimed at addressing specific needs and problems which had been established within individual schools. Boldt found a wide range of initiatives serving diverse needs with limited sources of funding and support. Five of the interventions are described in detail below. The following points indicate the prominent characteristics of the interventions studied.

- There appears to be much greater emphasis placed on the process of learning and establishing relationships with pupils than with producing specific educational outputs.
- The focus of most of the initiatives is on building pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
- Almost all the interventions were designed within schools and emerged from within a specific situation and context in order to meet identified needs of pupils, parents and/or the local community.

- All the initiatives would benefit from funding and greater resources; however, most did not emerge from nor rely on sources of funding, rather they developed out of a response to needs regardless of or despite inadequate resources.
- The support and/or participation of parents and local communities in the interventions seemed to be key elements to their success.
- A characteristic of each initiative is a respect for all the people associated with the interventions (i.e. school personnel, pupils, parents, community groups/agencies).
- Where initiatives are centred specifically around learning, they are activity-based, allowing pupils opportunities and choice while engaging them in decision-making.
- Finally, nearly all the interventions described in this report can be implemented in any school without extensive funding or intensive training; they offer ideas which can be adapted to suit particular needs and circumstances. (Boldt, ed., 1995, 79)

In September, 1995, the Department of Education sanctioned approximately 30 teacher-counsellors in the Dublin area. The notion of a teacher-counsellor was developed in Dublin and is aimed at addressing the social and emotional problems of selected pupils. "A decision was made to create a safe place in the school where children could relax, be creative, choose their activity and mix with others in a non-competitive way. The role of the teaching counsellor is to welcome the children, give them attention and good listening, and encourage healthy, co-operative play". (Hegarty in Boldt, ed., 1996, 8).

Children are selected for the programme by the co-ordinator in consultation with, and on the recommendation of, parents, class teachers, school psychologist, the remedial teacher and the principal. As far as possible, communication is maintained with these individuals on the progress of each child. "The greatest difficulty encountered in the programme is time pressure with huge demands for this type of work and a need for continual prioritising" (ibid., 9). This programme was operated on a pilot basis and is being expanded and developed further.

The Educational Support Project (ESP) serves two primary schools in the inner city of Dublin. It grew out of the observations of teachers that a growing number

of children were seriously 'at risk' of 'educational failure' due to social and emotional difficulties and that no category of special support was focused on them. St James's and Scoil Iosagáin developed comprehensive and detailed proposals on the nature of the problem and a strategy for dealing with it. The main aim of the project was to provide a nurturing environment for children so that they experience security and an opportunity to relate in a small group setting. Within this context emphasis is placed on providing opportunities to build self-esteem and confidence. It is intended that, through the identification of and positive intervention with selected students, aged between seven and 12, 'at risk' children will be enabled to integrate and operate more appropriately and fully with their school-going peers and within their communities.

Children are identified for the ESP when they are making little academic progress, when they are persistently and seriously disruptive and involved in gross misbehaviour, when they have been on recurring school suspensions for this behaviour and when there has been considerable effort made to involve their parents and/or where parents are seeking support. The permission and co-operation of the child's family is always sought for referral.

The project teacher facilitates and manages the day-to-day running of the project with support from a trained FÁS worker. The project emphasises flexibility in working with children and building caring relationships within the groups. The project teacher identifies the needs of the children and works in direct response to those needs. Linking the work within the group to the work that occurs in the classroom is vital. A positive approach and teaching the language of praise and appreciation is central to the project.

Locating funding from the Department of Education and evaluating the project were the two main difficulties identified with the project at the time of the research. Funding has been obtained primarily on the basis of the community nature of the project and the involvement of parents and local groups. The Department of Education had been unwilling to sanction the funds necessary to provide a teacher for the project, so the future of the entire programme had been in question. However, in May, 1997, the Department of Education granted a resource teacher post to be shared between the two schools.

According to the project co-ordinators, the difficulty with evaluation is identifying precisely what should be measured and what can be measured over the limited

period of one academic year. For those wishing to establish an intervention programme of this type, the following suggestions were put forward:

- clarify the needs of children and staff;
- ensure the involvement of all personnel;
- visit other projects and agencies;
- involve parents and the community;
- use all available political routes;
- assemble a team responsible for developing and maintaining the project. (O'Brien in Boldt, ed., 1996)

In 1985, Ann Higgins took a career break from teaching and worked with a group of parents with children in St Lelia's primary school in Limerick to see how the parents could become more active in their children's education. Her efforts resulted in the establishment of the *Kileely Community Project* with adult education classes, the *3 O'Clock School* and the *Space Project*. The group of parents began with the identification of their own education needs which resulted in the establishment of a network of morning and evening adult education classes. To assist their children, the group set up the *3 O'Clock School*. This is a club in which parents and children work together after school hours. The *3 O'Clock School* involves social, creative and remedial learning opportunities. More recently, the *Space Project* was devised which is an initiative designed to address the needs of young lone parents in the local area. The *Space Project* has crèche facilities for these parents and offers a series of recreational and educational activities.

The target group for the *Kileely Community Project* are students selected through consultation with their teachers and families and adults from the north side of Limerick, many of whom are past-pupils. Adult education classes are provided by the Vocational Education Committee (VEC), the *3 O'Clock School* is staffed by teachers from St Lelia's with support from parents and local agencies. The *Space Project* is co-ordinated by a member of the community who had been involved in adult education and realised that a separate project was needed to cater for the needs of lone parents.

An evaluation of the project has been conducted on an informal basis through feedback from children and parents. Success is measured by the continued involvement of adults and the recruitment of new members. Close contact is maintained with families and local groups. When the project was initiated,

there were struggles with finances; while this has eased, there are ongoing difficulties obtaining funds in order to subsidise activities and to purchase equipment. The project is managed by the local group, and its only source of funding is through grants and fundraising. Teachers working on the project are paid by the VEC. Such a funding structure makes planning and development difficult if not precarious.

The project addresses social and community needs as well as direct educational needs. The project continues to attract new people and to develop. Higgins believes that, if children are to cope with the pressures facing them and participate meaningfully in school, they need to build self-esteem through positive experiences. She would advise any school wishing to do similar work to start off small and to involve local people in decision-making (Higgins in Boldt ed., 1996).

The *North Clondalkin Homework Project* in Dublin was designed to meet the needs of children aged eight to ten who were identified by their teachers as having difficulty maintaining themselves in school. It was felt that a project which concentrated on specific areas of education (e.g. homework, numeracy, reading and spelling) would help foster in children a more positive attitude to school, helping them to succeed in areas of education and develop confidence in their own abilities.

Initially, the homework project was run by volunteers trained and supported by home-school-community co-ordinators and a teacher employed by Dóchas, a family centre in the North Clondalkin area. South Dublin County Council took on the operation of the project through a co-ordinator under a Community Employment Scheme, in order to facilitate its development and expansion. Children attend the project twice weekly for two years starting when they are in second class. A staff of 16 are employed on the project, working in teams of four. Each team works with a group of eight second class and eight third class children, the ratio being one staff member to two children. Children are selected from four primary schools in the area. They are selected on the basis that they are having difficulties with homework, that they are in need of individual attention, that they have poor concentration and that they are balanced in groups in terms of gender and in terms of withdrawn or disruptive behaviour.

Parents whose children are selected for the project must give written consent and are visited by home-

school-community co-ordinators. Staff on the project meet once a week to discuss their work, highlight successes and consider what aspects need to be changed. Moreover, staff identify areas in which they need further training themselves, and these are addressed by the project co-ordinator.

Successful aspects of the project are the following: keeping the number of children in each club small to provide for individual attention; enabling adults in the community to receive training and staff the clubs; sharing ideas and the workload; acting on feedback from children, teachers and parents; and engaging in ongoing evaluations through discussions and weekly meetings. Some of the problems experienced in the project are the limitation on financial resources, some of the accommodation provided by local community centres for the clubs, the change-over of staff on a yearly basis (a Community Employment Scheme regulation) and a low level of self-esteem among some of the staff.

While FÁS is the main source of funding for the project, grants have been obtained from the Home-School-Community scheme, the Garda Síochána and the local Credit Union. Representatives from South Dublin County Council, the schools, Dóchas, the Eastern Health Board, the Youth Service and the Gardaí provide support to the co-ordinator and make policy decisions. The success of the project is seen to result from the high adult/child ratio, ongoing training of workers and daily support provided by the co-ordinator (Troy in Boldt, ed. 1996).

Since 1991, *Scoil Bhríde* and the *Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP)* in Galway city have established a close working relationship through the organisation of various child and adult support groups and activities held in *Scoil Bhríde* primary school. At the beginning of the 1995 school year, a programme was set up to work with parents and their children who would benefit from an opportunity to enhance their self-esteem and improve their motor skills. Phase one of the programme ran from September to Christmas in which a group of parents learned a variety of art and craft skills while a group of their children learned similar skills. In phase two, from Christmas to Easter, parents worked with their children on a project of their choice using the skills they acquired in the first phase. Phase three, running from Easter to the summer, involved the parents in teaching some of the techniques they had learned to other children and co-operating with teachers and NYP staff on similar projects.

Materials and a community artist employed by the NYP are funded by the VEC, Western Health Board and Arts Council of Ireland. Teachers in the school are involved in the selection of students for the initiative and are encouraged to visit the groups to see how they are doing and to assist in the evaluation of the children's group. Attendance has been very satisfactory in the two groups. Both parents and children reported a high level of enjoyment and satisfaction. At the end of each term parents fill in an evaluation form. In the children's group, peer pressure and group discussions have worked well in regard to behaviour, and the co-ordinators review the work of the group on a weekly basis. The only difficulties experienced have been in relation to space and time which have been resolved easily.

The main benefits of the initiative are seen to be the raising of self-esteem among participants, the acquisitions of useful and creative skills, the strengthening of the parent/child relationship and the opportunity for parents and children to express their concerns and ideas about themselves and their community.

The inter-agency co-operation between the school and the NYP is seen to be one of the main strengths of the programme. Planning is done between the school principal, co-ordinator, project leader and members of the NYP. Resources and facilities are shared, and a variety of other group activities have resulted from this collaboration. Geraldine Mulgannon advises anyone wishing to do similar work to look to their communities for groups and agencies working in the area of family support and community development. She recommends that any initiative should start small, plan well and consult with all people concerned (Mulgannon in Boldt, ed., 1996).

The interventions described above demonstrate some of the possibilities when teachers, other professionals, parents and community members work together in response to children's needs. The interventions could be expanded and developed in other areas and offer interesting opportunities and challenges. They represent some of the work happening in primary schools which is clearly addressing 'educational disadvantage'. Reflecting on the seminar at which the interventions were presented, Dr. Joe Dunne offered the following insights;

"Another, related, feature of the day that deserves to be highlighted was the emancipatory, genuinely humane, thrust of the

projects that were brought together. Animated by a concern for children and for the personal meaning of learning, they were free from the instrumentalist, accountancy-driven tendencies now so evident in education. Nor were they showcase demonstrations, selected from idealised or privileged settings. To the contrary, most of the projects were set in areas of 'disadvantage' and owed their existence to the commitment of teachers and other concerned adults in these areas and not to any favourable financial or academic endowments from outside."

(Dunne in Boldt, ed., 1996, 32)

Barnardos is a voluntary child-care agency which aims to provide services for children and their families experiencing 'disadvantage'. The *Jobstown Youth Action Project* was set up in 1989 and is co-ordinated by Barnardos in partnership with the Eastern Health Board, three local primary schools and families of the children involved in the project. The project, based in Tallaght, Dublin, operates concurrently with the local primary schools in that children aged eight to 13 are selected by teachers from the schools and attend the project as part of their normal school attendance; one day a week (junior programme) or one and a half days a week (senior programme).

The content of the programme involves the following: a breakfast session, literacy and numeracy, art, social and life skills, library, drama and games, lunch, group-based activities (e.g. horse riding, swimming, art workshops and outings); children are also involved in cleaning up and shopping, and there are individual activities and extra individual support. Communication is maintained between project workers and children, parents and school personnel, especially the principals and home-school/community co-ordinators.

An overall evaluation of the project was conducted in 1993 by the Education Department in Maynooth University and was very favourable. "The project is having a positive effect on the personal and social skills of the children ... People associated with the project are very supportive and enthusiastic ... and demand for places is a reflection of this very high level of support. Communication and collaboration between the various agencies involved is considered to be satisfactory with the exception of communication with class teachers" (Martin and Drudy, 1993, 100).

The approach developed by the project seems to offer a good model for interventions of this type. The project

appears to be well-structured, based on collaboration and partnership, and committed to development through processes of monitoring and evaluation. "The work of the project workers should be acknowledged and affirmed and they should be given the opportunity to further develop (sic) their skills in this area so that such projects may be introduced in other disadvantaged areas" (ibid., 101).

Intervention programmes aimed at addressing 'educational disadvantage' at primary level seem to be the most extensive and well-developed within the education system. Difficulties are apparent in relation to funding. Many of the interventions described rely on funding which is not guaranteed in terms of its duration or amount, or they are reliant on multiple sources of funding which can create difficulties in the organisation and development of the programme. If, for example, various individuals in a programme are paid from different sources, conflicts may emerge as a result of changes in funding criteria or objectives, thus jeopardising the nature or development of the intervention. There may be, in fact, many interventions which are forced to discontinue due to these circumstances.

1.4.4 Post-Primary School Interventions

At post-primary level, there are fewer interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage than in primary level; however, compared to primary, there have been considerable developments in the curriculum at both junior and senior cycle. The Curriculum Development Units in Shannon and Dublin have played an important role in curriculum reform, and these units have also set up and monitored pilot projects aimed at students who have difficulties adapting to school.

As in the primary sector, the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme is viewed very positively. Its philosophy and approach are widely accepted and supported; the main issues surrounding the scheme seem to concern its further development and funding. "It needs to be expanded substantially at second level, moving out from the disadvantaged area schools where it is now concentrated, to at least 'disadvantaged schools' (the approximately 300 primary and post-primary schools identified as having high proportions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Coolahan, ed., 1994, 111).

Interventions outside of the post-primary system have developed and expanded in recent years. Youth services have concentrated their attention on

educational and employment needs. "In its role as a key non-formal educator, the youth service is currently responding to the everyday needs of disadvantaged and unemployed young people on the ground" (National Youth Council of Ireland in NESF, 1996, 3). In the past 10 years, organisations such as the National Youth Council, the National Youth Federation, the Catholic Youth Council, Foroige and Comhairle le Leas Oige have begun to direct their work towards educational disadvantage, and they seem to have adequate resources to do so.

"Out-of-school provision, especially through youth work, has been increasingly identified as an effective mechanism for dealing with disadvantaged young people. It is recognised that the non-formal, flexible, person centred approach adopted in much youth work practice might be more appropriate to the needs of young people not pursuing a school-based, academic route. This recognition has been matched by (i) the creation of a distinct section of youth work which deals with disadvantaged young people (as opposed to normal, mainline services) and (ii) a large increase in budgetary support from the Department of Education for this type of work from £612,000 in 1987 to £5,515,665 in 1993." (Rourke, 1994, 9)

Youth work has often been concerned with providing non-formal and informal experiences of learning to assist young people in their social and personal development. Youth workers often reach young people who have been excluded from school or who were unable to cope with its demands. In relation to educational disadvantage, the youth service would have much to offer the formal education system in terms of relating to young people and devising effective methods of communicating with them. Much greater co-operation and communication is needed between schools and the youth service. Partnerships formed between them aimed at addressing educational disadvantage could address the problem in new and innovative ways.

"... attention must be paid to the holistic development of young people, rather than focusing solely on their academic abilities. This is where the Youth Service plays an integral role in the educational system. The Youth Service is committed to empowering and resourcing young people who have not benefited from, or have not

had their needs met, by the formal education system. It is a planned and systematic educational experience which complements the formal school curriculum. ... Most voluntary youth organisations are responding to the needs of disadvantaged young people ... They are developing preventative services aimed particularly at young people at risk...' (National Youth Council of Ireland in NESF, 1996, 13)

Sub-programme 2: Integrated Development of Designated Disadvantaged and Other Areas of the European Community Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development has as one of its main objectives the provision of additional supports to facilitate participation in and benefit from education for those who could be considered educationally disadvantaged. Responsibility for implementing Sub-programme 2 is with Area Development Management. Area-based Partnerships are the main eligible group for funding within the Subprogramme.

Many area-based partnerships have been seeking and developing interventions which support second-level students. This work has been set up in direct response to the needs of students and in the light of the high incidence of early school-leaving in certain areas. A wide range of programmes and activities has emerged. Most of these have been devised to complement the work of the schools and to offer direct support to students with their schooling.

The Finglas/Cabra Partnership in Dublin has developed a programme called *CHOICES* (Practical Supports for Students). The programme aims to 'maximise the achievement potential of young people while at school, reduce early school-leaving and improve educational and training attainment levels'. The complete programme consists of six components described below: Pathways, study skills sessions, supervised study/homework clubs, mentor/tutorial programmes, careers advice/information and summer projects. As the programme is still being developed, not all the components have been implemented fully.

The Pathways programme addresses the transition from primary to second-level, prepares and monitors progression to second-level and provides support for first year students in the post-primary system. Study skills sessions is a programme for enriching students' learning styles and study skills and supporting the

training of teachers and parents. Supervised study/homework clubs are held in centres near schools within the community and are supervised by teachers, parents, volunteers and third-level students.

Mentor/tutorial programmes provide group tutorials in specific subjects and individual tuition for selected students. The careers advice/information programme holds seminars and workshops for students and their parents, and subsidises some students to participate in careers events. Summer projects concentrate on activities designed to develop communication, social, computer and enterprise skills; outdoor and creative arts are also provided in the summer project.

CHOICES targets students who are nominated by their schools or by community/youth groups. Overall responsibility for overseeing the development and progress of *CHOICES* rests with the Education and Training Working Group of the Finglas/Cabra Partnership. An advisory steering committee consists of representatives of the Partnership, parents, schools, community groups, colleges, training bodies, employers and the VEC. The success of the programme is monitored in the following ways: student/parent attitudes, second-level retention rates, third-level participation rates, transfers to further training and career patterns. Regular evaluation takes place through workshops/seminars, questionnaires, interviews and written reports. External evaluations are conducted on specific aspects of the programme. The intervention programmes operating within *CHOICES* seem to have great potential for addressing educational disadvantage in its target communities. Significant support is offered to students and schools, and there appears to be a high level of partnership and co-operation. As a model it seems to offer many opportunities for Partnerships and communities to assist students and support them in deriving greater benefit from their schooling.

The *Stay in School Project* (SIS) is a new intervention programme based in Crumlin Social Services Centre in Dublin. The overall aim of the project is to address the problem of early school-leaving by providing selected students with opportunities and activities designed to increase their self-esteem and to develop their coping skills. Students from five post-primary schools in Crumlin attend the Social Services Centre once per week in order to experience a different environment in which they can consider constructively their behaviour and participation in formal schooling and engage in small group work focused on their personal development. Each school has a link person

responsible for monitoring students, and attention is given to involving parents and youth work agencies in the project. The pilot phase of the project was completed in May, 1997, and the project will be run on a yearly basis from September, 1997.

Another example of an intervention programme designed for students at post-primary level is the *Carline Project*. This innovative project is based in Clondalkin in Dublin and has three main aims: to promote the safe and legal use of motor vehicles, to provide a programme to discourage 'joyriding', and to encourage and support young people aged between 11 and 15 to remain in school. Information available on the project suggests that it offers a new and attractive approach to addressing the needs of students considered to be educationally disadvantaged. The programme seeks to meet its stated aims by providing an exciting programme for young people built around indoor Go-Kart racing. Participants learn skills in Go-Kart driving, team work, mechanics, administration, computers and catering. If effective, such a programme could encourage new models of intervention and engage students in learning who are not deriving much benefit from the formal education system.

1.4.5 Post-School and Third-Level Interventions

Youthreach and Community Training Workshops serve Priority Group One of the Social Guarantee and provide a maximum of two years of education, training and work experience for early school-leavers with no qualifications. Community Training Workshops are supported either by FÁS or by the Department of Justice. Youthreach is two-year programme run jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise and Employment. The first year of the programme (foundation year) is operated by vocational education committees (VECs) and funded primarily by the Department of Education through FÁS. In the second year (progression year), FÁS is responsible for the funding and delivery of the programme. Priority Group Two is served by Youthreach and the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPTP) which is run within post-primary schools on a one- to two-year basis. In addition, many early school-leavers who fall into this category attend Community Training Workshops and FÁS courses which offer a wide range of subjects, skills and work experience.

"These workshops offer training in basic skills and aim to enhance the job prospects of youngsters. There is also strong emphasis on the

personal development of the young person, with attention to life and social skills. Workshop instructors are expected to work closely with the young people and not just be concerned with the technical content of the training." (Gilligan, 1991, 91)

In analysing provision for Priority Group One, Rourke states the following.

"Youthreach has achieved significant results and is a good progression route for young people who leave school early. ... This route does not always operate smoothly. Some young people do a certain course, scheme or programme and then return to unemployment and inactivity - a real need exists to keep the momentum going (for these young people) until such a time as they have accessed employment or are strong enough to develop an independent lifestyle for themselves." (Rourke, 1994, 13)

There is a number of programmes for school-leavers up to the age of 18. Youthreach, Community Training Workshops, FÁS programmes and the new European Social Fund YouthStart programme (20 pilot projects) provide a level of education and training. Unfortunately, due to a lack of sufficient places, many who leave school without qualifications are not served.

"The education sector now provides approximately 2,000 Youthreach places in Youthreach centres and FÁS provides approximately 1,700 Youthreach and non-Youthreach places per annum through the Community Training Workshops. Together with places in the Travellers Training Workshops (600) and places on other community-based provision (approximately 1,200), this adds up to approximately 5,500 places which still represents gross underprovision in the face of an early school-leaving population numbering 14,500 per annum." (European Social Fund Programme Evaluation Unit, 1996, xiv)

There is a wide range of so-called second chance education initiatives, some of which are aimed at providing parents with the confidence and skills necessary to support their children in the education system. Such interventions could be seen as indirect efforts to address educational disadvantage among younger people.

A voluntary group in Dublin called the *Edmund Rice Discernment Group* has established and developed a response to the needs of some early school-leavers in the form of outreach volunteer teams which are operating in the inner city of Dublin and Kilkenny. The group decided that an approach was needed which was geared towards learning about the lives of early school-leavers, identifying their needs and directing them to opportunities which could address those needs. It seemed to the group that the major consideration in addressing the needs of early school-leavers was how to attract them to available services, how to foster their personal and social development and how to ensure that the services were relevant to their needs. The Discernment Group undertook research which was based on in-depth interviews with early school-leavers. This work led them to establish outreach volunteer groups whose aim is to keep in contact with early school-leavers after their decision to leave school. The philosophy behind the initiative is based on the 'empowerment' of early school-leavers at each step of the relationship.

The group set down ways of selecting and training volunteers to work with early school-leavers. Volunteers are provided with literature related to early school-leaving, guidelines for interviewing and a description of the aims and objectives of meeting with early school-leavers. Each volunteer receives instruction on interviewing techniques and respectful intervention, as well as direction on how to write up interviews. Members of the Discernment Group explain their involvement and experiences with early school-leavers, and offer suggestions and advice. Volunteers are given lists of early school-leavers which include a person's name, address, sex, date of birth, date of leaving school, educational qualification and current status. Each volunteer is accompanied by an experienced researcher during his or her initial visits to offer guidance and support. Once volunteers complete a few interviews and feel confident to engage in the work, they either continue the work on their own or go out to certain areas with another volunteer. As all the work is done on a home-visit basis without prior communication, volunteers carry an identity card.

A monthly meeting of the volunteer groups is held to discuss and reflect on experiences, to evaluate the work, to gain encouragement and support, to collect interview transcripts and to issue new names and addresses. The *Edmund Rice Discernment Group* and the volunteers follow a philosophy of respectful intervention, so that any assistance to interviewees is non-directive and aimed at providing them with

information or assistance in relation to employment, training or educational opportunities. No action is taken on behalf of an early school-leaver without their consent and without consultation with the group. Assistance varies according to the needs of the interviewees and has mainly taken the form of informing people of services available in their local areas or, in some cases, making contact with an agency or organisation on their behalf. As a result of this initiative, contact has been established with nearly 200 early school-leavers, and over 30 early school-leavers have obtained employment, joined a training programme or returned to schooling.

Although the report of the National Education Convention, 1994, called for "substantial expansion of the college-school linkage programmes", this does not seem to have become a priority of the Department of Education. Furthermore, it is not at all clear how or if the introduction of free university fees will address the disproportionately low rates in third-level education of those who experience educational disadvantage. Despite this, in certain areas third-level initiatives have been devised to encourage students to remain in school and to assist them in participating in higher education.

"These initiatives are focused on post-primary schools in areas of disadvantage and are associated with Dublin City University, Dublin University, and the University of Limerick. The initiatives comprise a series of interventions designed to counteract early drop-out from post-primary school and to increase the likelihood of remaining in education after the completion of post-primary school" (Kellaghan et al., 1995, 24-25). The National College of Industrial Relations and the Marino Institute of Education are other third-level institutes which have set up programmes to counter educational disadvantage.

As with the area-based partnership interventions mentioned above, interventions from third-level institutions for post-primary students include supervised study, tutorials, summer schools and information sessions on third-level courses and career options. Financial assistance has been given to some students from the age of 15 up to third level. Third-level students themselves play an important role in these programmes providing tuition, encouragement and advice to second-level students.

Two intervention initiatives which have been in existence since 1989 are the *Limerick Community-Based Educational Initiative* and the *Ballymun Initiative*

for Third-Level Education. "Both are community-based, rather than school-based, initiatives, have provided supervised study facilities and tutorial support to sustain student ambition and commitment, and both have involved third-level students as tutors, who are thus available to provide information and guidance and serve as role models" (Irish American Partnership, 1995, 1).

An evaluation of the Limerick and Ballymun interventions (Morgan, 1995) suggested that the interventions had had a favourable impact on the experiences of the second-level students involved in them. Positive attitudes in relation to the value of education and staying in school were reported. In Ballymun, a substantial increase was noted in recent years in the number of students who apply for places in third-level education.

1.5 INTERVENTIONS: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 1.4 examined interventions from the pre-school level up to third-level education which have been designed to address educational disadvantage in the last ten years in Ireland. There is a limited number of such interventions throughout the formal education system. Some interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage are recognised and supported by the Department of Education through pilot projects. Pilot projects are intended to be closely monitored and evaluated with a view to disseminating the findings from their work and promoting those projects which are found to be successful. In the case of the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme and Teaching Counsellors this process can be recognised. The *Early Start Programme* has been implemented on a pilot basis with a view to expanding pre-school provision on a wider basis.

The limited number of interventions undertaken under the auspices of the Department of Education does not reflect well on its stated policies on educational disadvantage. A serious policy commitment to tackling educational disadvantage should involve more programmes and resources than those which have been undertaken and distributed to date. In the light of the incidence of educational disadvantage and the complexity of factors associated with the problem, there needs to be more intensive and extensive interventionary mechanisms adopted to address educational disadvantage. This is not to say that the Department of Education is solely responsible for tackling such a widespread and complicated problem; however, its central role in supporting the development

of initiatives, funding interventions and mainstreaming effective approaches cannot be denied.

Interventions designed outside of the education system to undermine educational disadvantage have been initiated in response to particular needs, many of which were not being met within the formal system. Although these interventions are making important contributions within their remit, they need to be expanded and given wider support. Recognition of such work and dissemination of effective practice should be undertaken by the education system. Incentives to replicate and expand successful interventions should be offered and be more widely available. Procedures for mainstreaming these programmes need to be implemented, in order that a greater number of students and early school-leavers can benefit from them.

It could be argued that interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage are serving indirectly to deflect attention from a system of education which is failing a large minority of students. On the other hand, interventions which adopt an holistic approach, such as those mentioned in this section, must be applauded for their ability to see and to respond to educational disadvantage in broad terms, as part of wider 'failures' within society beyond the education system. A commitment to holistic approaches may form the basis for necessary changes in the education system as a whole; these changes can come about only if this vision and commitment are shared at government level.

Recommendations

In the light of the summary report on interventions aimed at addressing educational disadvantage, the following recommendations are made:

- In view of the inadequate provision for the 'educationally disadvantaged', there needs to be an expansion of interventions and substantial funding and support for developing such interventions.
- Research and evaluation in relation to interventions aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, particularly at pre-school and post-primary level, are needed, and dissemination of good practice should be promoted.

- Effective interventions should be 'mainstreamed', and a process for doing so needs to be established.
- Collaboration among providers of interventions is needed in view of the limited resources available at present and to assist in disseminating information and lobbying for support.
- Pre-schooling should be recognised as a distinct stage of education, and its role in addressing educational disadvantage should be highlighted.
- Increased contact between schools and the youth service should be encouraged and fostered.
- A study should be carried out into those considered 'disadvantaged' who have become 'successful' in the education system. Such a study should attempt to establish which influences, skills and qualities were considered to be most useful to these individuals. The findings could be used by those interested in school improvement as well as those who work in interventions.

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1 For example, Greaney and Kellaghan, 1984; Archer and O'Flaherty, 1986; Breen and Whelan, 1986; Crooks and Stokes eds., 1987; CMRS, 1992; Hayes, 1992; Hannan and O Riain, 1993.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the growth of mass education throughout the European Union and increases in the numbers staying on at school, early school-leaving is regarded as a problem throughout the EU.

Educational 'success', or the lack of it, is defined differently in different countries and depends on, among other things, the educational tradition, the requirements of the curriculum and the assessment and guidance methods. Definitions of 'early school-leaving' or 'school failure' vary accordingly. In some cases, only those who drop out of compulsory school are considered. In others, those who continue to the end of the compulsory school period but who leave without having obtained any certification or who leave at the end with partial or incomplete certification are considered part of the same problem.¹

Measures to combat early school-leaving derive, at least in theory, from perceptions of the causes of the problem. Factors such as levels of social inequality, fluctuations in the labour market and labour legislation on the protection of children and adolescents are crucial to an understanding of early school-leaving. However, they are not, in general, the target of interventions, though variables such as the extent to which access to and involvement in education is structured by socio-economic status and family and individual characteristics often are. By and large, causes that can be identified in the organisation and operation of the educational system and the surrounding support services are the focus of intervention.

Banks (1994) argues that three aspects of compulsory schooling are at fault: teaching methods which fail less competent pupils; too rigid and unsuitable curricula; and insufficient attention to personal development and career guidance. The practice of repeating has been identified as a demotivating factor. The fact that schools often lack the freedom, and teachers the expertise and/or resources, to enable them to adapt their teaching methods to suit the range of pupils they are expected to deal with is another factor.

In addition to differences in class, background and ability, the school population is becoming more ethnically diverse almost everywhere in Europe. Inadequate guidance, early specialisation, and selection into specific streams are also identified as contributing to early school-leaving.

Measures directed at early school-leaving can take various forms. Sometimes, they are introduced in the context of overall reforms of educational systems which are designed to adapt those systems to new sets of circumstances and, in the process, to solve some of the problems connected with failure at school. In other cases, measures are introduced within existing systems specifically to tackle the problem. In all cases, the interventions are influenced by the orientation and organisation of the overall educational and training structures as well as the underlying ethical and political mores of the society in question.

Measures are often adopted at national level and implemented at regional or local level. Even independent local interventions are influenced by national policy trends. European countries retain, to a large extent, the distinctive features of their educational and training systems. At the same time, common trends, and even a tendency towards convergence, can be discerned in the member states of the EU. This is likely to be reinforced as EU policy and influence extends more and more into the areas of education and training.

2.2 EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

This paper is organised on the basis of four levels of intervention: nationwide/system-based; school-based; community-based; and family/individual-based. There is, inevitably, some overlap between these different levels.

2.2.1 System-based Interventions

General reforms of compulsory schools

In the past decade, many European countries have been engaged in substantial or even total reforms of their compulsory education systems (Belgium, Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK). Although policies and practical implementation vary from country to country, it is possible to identify some common characteristics in these reforms.

Banks (1994) summarises these as an increased emphasis on:

- teaching required curriculum core subjects but also on the need to offer time for options;
- diversification/individualisation of content and teaching/learning methods, use of local teaching/learning resources, use of a variety of teaching materials of varying degrees of difficulty;

- activity-based learning, group work for co-operation as well as competition;
- how to learn without a teacher;
- partnership with local community, use of human/physical resources;
- assessment that is formative and ipsative as well as summative;
- guidance as part of curriculum or as a cross-curricular theme, recognition of its importance; and
- cross-subject (or inter-disciplinary) themes.

The general reforms are not directed explicitly or exclusively at the problem of school failure but many aspects of them have implications for the rate of drop-out and the way it is dealt with in various countries. In this regard, relevant developments at system level include: an orientation towards inclusiveness, assessment based on achievements rather than failure, different kinds and levels of qualification, revamping of the vocational education system, attempts to diversify the school curriculum, and the designation of areas of educational disadvantage. These all aim at the creation of multiple pathways through the education system and at offering sufficient variety of response to meet the needs of all young people including those who are disadvantaged or at risk of dropping out.

In some countries, there is a link between the direction of system change and the perceived need to develop an education system capable of catering for the needs of all pupils. In **Spain**, for example, the main causes of school failure, including early school-leaving, were identified as:

- the irrelevance of the school as a preparation for life and its isolation from the cultural and economic life of the community;
- lack of contact between teachers and the local community about the school's disregard for pupils' background and educational progress;
- the mismatch between the schools' resources and priorities and the needs of pupils;
- a high rate of teacher turnover, poor professional esteem and lack of in-service training to help teachers adjust their teaching to a wider range of pupils;
- too centralised a curriculum;
- lack of extra-curricular projects; and
- lack of remedial teaching for pupils with learning difficulties (Banks, 1994, 23).

The strategies to combat school failure introduced in 1990 (Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema

Educativo, LOGSE) focused on the reform of the compulsory school. These reforms included:

- curriculum diversification to match pupils' different interests and aptitudes;
- the use of options to increase individualised, more integrated and more active learning; and
- the development of tutoring and guidance to complement and support this type of curriculum.

A similar policy orientation in recent reforms can be seen in the 1991 reform of the upper secondary schools in **Denmark** where the principles of the reform were:

- free access for all young people who have completed the nine-year compulsory *folkeskole*;
- individualised curriculum: one-sixth of total school time to be used for optional subjects chosen by the trainee;
- motivating pupils by relating teaching to the vocational interest of the trainee;
- adoption of a holistic teaching approach; and
- integration of vocational and general subject contents.

The emphasis on inclusiveness and the gradual introduction of success-based teaching with its emphasis on more individualised learning into both compulsory school and vocational school is, therefore, of central importance to many of the changes in compulsory education. It has far-reaching implications for curriculum development, school organisation, teacher training and in-service training. The expectation that all pupils, even those who hitherto have generally been sidelined or quietly allowed to leave, should be 'successful' in compulsory education also presents a new set of problems, not just in coping with negative attitudes and behaviour, but in issues of specialisation (or streaming), assessment, and recognition of achievement (qualifications).

France: Some recent developments in the French education system also illustrate the changes that have occurred at system level. There has been a clear move from early specialisation and the traditional selective grouping of pupils. Changes in the way 'orientation' is used mean that pupils may no longer be 'orienté' (directed/guided) in the second year of secondary school into separate low-level courses. This has been accompanied by the widening of admission to the apprenticeship system, an attempt to upgrade the status of vocational education through the Vocational Baccalaureate and by changes in overall methods of assessment.² At the same time, some practices which

have been shown to be detrimental to the development of the child, such as repeating one or more years, remain firmly in place.

One of the most significant strategies to combat underachievement in France, however, targets not individuals but areas of education disadvantage, the *Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires* (ZEPs). The ZEP programme is based on the principle that positive discrimination is desirable and necessary, which deviates from a basic maxim of French education - that resources should be allocated strictly in proportion to pupil numbers. The programme pinpoints areas of disadvantage on the basis of socio-economic and educational criteria and formulates a policy of social intervention centred on the school.

The ZEP programme was adopted by the French government initially in 1982 and was redefined in 1990. The number of ZEPs has increased from 362 in 1982 when the programme started to 558 at the beginning of the 1994-95 school year. ZEPs cover 9.7% of public school establishments and 11.6% of all pupils in public schools. Some 86% of ZEP schools are in urban areas.

Most of the designated zones also receive assistance under the *Social Development of Areas* (Développement Social des Quartiers - DSQ), which are a combination of structural renovation and socio-economic and cultural development projects. Within this framework, the programme as a whole is based on the concept of a partnership between the health, educational and cultural services, and between the decentralised services of central government and those of the local authorities. In principle the inhabitants of the zone, through their associations, are involved in the planning and conduct of operations.

The ZEP policy, too, is designed to bring together various other services and agencies in a joint undertaking to reinforce educative action in the zones. The programme provides schools which have large numbers of 'young people in difficulty' with extra resources: teachers, psychological-teaching support, *surveillant* (non-teaching) staff. The primary objective is "to obtain a significant improvement in the school results of the pupils, notably the least favoured".

The idea behind the ZEP programme is that the fight against school failure, which involves nurseries, primary, lower and higher secondary schools, should rest on a coherent 'area policy', put in place by a special pedagogical team which is charged with

developing appropriate interventions and ensuring that these are implemented. The team has an area manager, assisted by the team co-ordinator. The ZEP is local but comprehensive in orientation in that it links the efforts of pre-, primary and secondary schools and social workers.

The effect of the ZEP programme appears to be positive on a number of indicators. Evaluations of the programme have, however, been controversial, especially as far as the need for a longitudinal study is concerned. A 1994 evaluation of results of approximately 2,500 pupils in ZEP and non-ZEP schools at the end of primary school showed that pupils from ZEP schools were, on average, less capable in French and maths than others. Much more marked than academic results, however, were the socio-demographic distinctions between the two groups.

One result of the programme to date is a number of recommendations regarding provision for pre-school-age children in ZEPs:

- the cost of access to services and activities for the more disadvantaged sections of the community should be reduced or even eliminated entirely wherever possible;
- particular provision should be made for very young children;
- operations should focus on artistic and general cultural subjects, involving parents and helping to raise the quality of the provision for the young child, its education, its socialisation and its ability to adjust to situations and life outside the family setting;
- co-operation between the school staff and that of other agencies should be encouraged so that the children are not subjected to sudden or difficult transitions; and
- appropriate action should be taken with regard to parents, and mothers in particular, especially where there is a need to provide instruction in the French language or literacy training. (OECD, 1995, p.65)

Curriculum changes

Curricular changes at national/system level have taken two paths - core curriculum developments and alternative provision. Not all of these changes, however, have benefited early school-leavers or children in difficulty in school.

A case in point is the National Curriculum introduced in the UK in 1988. A recent study by the UK's National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) found that, from the perspective of potential early school-leavers and their teachers, the introduction of the National Curriculum was not seen as a positive development (Kinder, et al. 1995). Indeed, the reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s meant that key curriculum and assessment initiatives which schools had developed to meet the particular and often more vocational needs of lower attaining pupils in the last two years of compulsory schooling had to be abandoned.

There was regret at the loss of expertise, enthusiasm and experience of devising relevant courses and modules which had characterised such curriculum development and design, for example the Lower Attaining Pupil Project (LAPP). In this view, the National Curriculum, while still viewed positively, had nevertheless meant an over-hasty setting aside of much that was perceived to be good and useful. Recent changes in examination and assessment policies were often cited as adding to the problems of pupil demotivation and disaffection. The reduced emphasis on course work was noted, as was the unsuitability of GCSEs for many pupils for whom vocational qualifications were more relevant ... Another perspective held that course work could lead to early drop-out and demotivation as pupils recognised ... that they were not going to succeed in certain GCSEs. Publication of examination results which forces a culture of league tables was also cited as having a significant bearing on pupil disaffection, given the fact that significant numbers of pupils would not gain C-grade passes. It was intimated that resources and teaching time were perforce invested in exam achievement ... The National Curriculum's general lack of appropriateness for the less academically able, and the stagnation and lack of progress experienced by such pupils within its attainment structure, was thus directly raised as a source of disaffection... (op. cit. pp7-8.)

Curriculum variation

Initiatives to deal with the whole issue of disaffection and National Curriculum relevance were evident among the NFER sample. There were examples of schools providing alternative curriculum experiences such as mechanics courses, part-time college

attendance, extended work experience, and residential/outdoor activities. Other curriculum initiatives related to extra support for current subjects (including basic literacy and numeracy), negotiated and reduced timetables, curriculum provision in alternative units (on- and off-site) and the introduction of other certification and qualifications. Equally, a whole-school focus on teaching styles and differentiated learning was linked to combating disaffection in many cases.

These attempts to introduce variation into centrally devised curricula to facilitate the participation of disaffected or 'weaker' pupils are echoed in other systems. In France, for example, there have been several attempts to provide better and more suitable alternative courses (or classes) for those not succeeding in the regular curriculum at the end of their first cycle of secondary school. One initiative is the introduction of a slower-paced three-year cycle in place of the two-year norm for lower secondary school without this being treated as repeating a year or cycle. The initiative also includes tutoring to improve supervision and support of the pupil's progress, in activities both in and out of school.

The use of remedial streams which were stigmatised as 'relegation' classes has been discouraged and reduced. In addition, in 1991, the Ministry of Education launched an experiment covering the last two years of compulsory schooling. This *4ie'me d'aide et de soutien a la 3ie'me d'insertion* is a new two-year qualifying course leading to vocational qualification (albeit at the lowest level).

As well as offering a valid qualification as an incentive to finish it, the course is designed to cope with the total situation of the person and provides support to deal with the personal and social problems surrounding young people in severe difficulty. The school is expected to provide the young person with help not only on his/her studies but also to deal with the outside world.

Research seems to indicate that the success of the programme varies widely from school to school and depends, largely, on how well the school implements the initiative and how effectively it can intervene in support of the social and economic life of the student. The operation of this programme can put a severe strain on the school's resources particularly where guidance and pastoral resources are already limited.

Guidance

Guidance and the growing importance of this function in schools is one of the recurring themes in the literature, both on educational reform and on the prevention of early school-leaving. The importance of the school's role in developing the ability of all young persons to think about and choose an educational and career pathway is widely recognised. The difficulties of providing guidance to young people, especially those from families with little educational background, so that they think seriously about their futures and develop realistic career plans are enormous. The concept of guidance in schools is also sometimes used to include, not just information on jobs, but 'pastoral' care, guidance and help within the school, particularly for pupils in difficulty.

Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of guidance, much remains to be done to develop acceptable provision of educational and vocational guidance in compulsory schools. Foremost among the difficulties is the fact that class teachers lack background and experience of the economic world and few of them are trained in guidance. Furthermore, providing information and advice to class and pupil calls for co-operation between teachers and guidance specialists. There are few such specialists in most countries and the structures for co-operation are underdeveloped in many systems.

Guidance is an integral part of compulsory schooling in Denmark and is often cited, along with other aspects of the Danish system that foster continuous and meaningful contact between pupils and teachers, as one of the reasons for the relatively low drop-out rate in that country.

Guidance in Danish schools consists of:

- teaching activities about working life in general, job profiles, structures in the labour market and the work environment;
- work practice which gives all pupils the possibility of spending time in work so that they have direct experience of the conditions of working life; and
- information arrangements and study visits to gymnasia and special vocational schools for the commercial, agricultural, social and health sectors where the pupils are informed about further education possibilities and have the opportunity to talk to teachers, guidance officers and older students.

In the last stages of compulsory education, guidance is aimed at stimulating the school-leaver's commitment to further education and training. The course is designed to ensure that pupils are sufficiently well informed about the possibilities that exist for the 16-19 age group and about working life to enable them to make informed decisions about their future career.

Responsibility for guidance is divided between form teachers and school guidance counsellors. The former are responsible for information activities and for interviews with pupils and their parents while the school guidance counsellor organises work experience and operates as facilitator in support of the form teachers.

In Denmark, there is a National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (RUE) which reflects the stress given in national policy to guidance and to the importance of ensuring good co-ordination between the many actors taking part in its provision. It includes the social partners, the Ministries of Education and Labour and representatives from the counties and municipalities. Parallel co-ordinating bodies exist at county and municipal level.

Recently, efforts have been made to improve the quality of the guidance system. The form teachers have no training in careers counselling. An eight-week training programme in careers counselling has been introduced but it is directed at school guidance counsellors. This has proved to be somewhat controversial as it is seen as expanding the role of the counsellors at the expense of the form teachers.

Guidance in other countries

In Spain, the LOGSE (Law of the Reform) lays down that tutoring and guidance are to be part of the teaching curriculum at every stage of compulsory schooling. To prevent teachers from being overwhelmed by their responsibilities, specialist staff are to be available to support them. Each centre (school) is to set up a guidance department responsible for developing a plan for guidance in the school. Guidance thus will be a part of the teaching/learning process, not a narrow function concerned only with selecting pupils for the next stage of education, as it was before the reform.

Unlike the other countries considered here, guidance has a bad name to live down in France where 'guidance' (orientation) was the instrument of relegation early on in a pupil's secondary school life.

In the past, in France, the less able/motivated pupil would be channelled (through the process of selection or 'orientation' at the end of the second year of secondary school) into one of a variety of lower-level streams:

- vocational education courses leading to basic vocational qualifications (CAP, CAB);
- a catching up or remedial, pre-vocational class (CCPN); or
- pre-apprenticeship classes (CPA)

This practice was formally abolished in 1992 when the third year of college became the first year of selection. Nonetheless, it remains the case today that much of the technical and vocational education sector is still seen as inferior partly because its intake is the result of a process of progressive selection. This weakness has become more evident with the growing tendency to stay longer in school and partly because, despite efforts to give it improved standing, apprenticeship continues to be the destination of those who have 'failed' (Banks, 1994).

Careers Services

It is one thing to recognise the need for guidance. Who should provide it, the role of teachers and the relationship between them and support personnel are additional issues. Career guidance, almost of necessity, involves shared responsibility between class teacher and guidance counsellors/career advisers. The former deals with the development of the skills and qualities needed to make career choices well and the specialist counsellor is expected to assist that process and especially to liaise with the outside world, particularly the world of work.

Germany relies heavily on advisers from outside schools for providing careers information and advice, leaving to the school only the task of introducing pupils to the world of work (*Arbeitslehre*, see below).

In the **UK**, too, the Careers Service for secondary schools is provided largely by outside bodies. A survey of guidance in the UK in 1991 showed a wide variation in availability, methods of organisation and quality. This has led to the setting up of a new Careers Service. Careers education continues to be provided by teachers but the new Careers Service deliver careers guidance in schools in collaboration with them. Close links between careers education and careers guidance are encouraged.

One of the top priorities for the Careers Service, in the view of many Training and Enterprise Council

directors, is the provision of earlier careers advice, as many pupils blindly choose their subjects for their GCSE - a major decision in terms of future career. Because Careers Services are provided, on the basis of tender, by different outside bodies, the quality of provision is uneven. The Employment Department is addressing this by undertaking baseline studies of Careers Service work and developing national standards for it.

Nevertheless, although deficiencies and difficulties persist, the situation with regard to career guidance is regarded as having improved. Most secondary schools have a careers co-ordinator, a written policy statement and a good careers library and many schools have a written policy statement for both guidance and careers education. However, only one-third of schools provide more than 20 hours a year of careers education in Year Eleven (age 15/16) and the level of provision for Year Ten (age 14/15) is even less.

Closely related to guidance is the inclusion of vocationally oriented subjects in the normal curriculum. One distinctive example of this is the long-established *Arbeitslehre*, 'Preparation for the world of work,' in Germany. This can be found as a separate subject in the curriculum or an element in several subjects. It enables the young person to examine and learn about society as he or she is going shortly to encounter it as a young adult. Nearly all pupils in compulsory school in Germany and certainly all those in non-grammar schools follow a course in *Arbeitslehre*. Schools usually undertake this in co-operation with firms offering training and with job counsellors from local labour offices. 'Preparation for the world of work' is generally closely integrated into the rest of the school curriculum and varies in form and content according to local conditions.

Arbeitslehre can include:

- practical experience in a firm or social institution;
- plant visits/field trips;
- discussion with business representatives in school;
- on-the-job work experience for teachers;
- visits to career information centres;
- job-orientation events at school;
- specific job-orientation events for classes or groups (e.g. on job application procedures);
- regular consultation hours in school;
- parent meetings in the career information centres or in school;
- information afternoons with employers' representatives;

- local or regional 'job fairs';
- group counselling; and
- individual counselling.

New Qualifications

One of the results of the move towards diversified paths and the attempts to have equal status for academic and vocational education is the need to provide recognition of achievement, particularly for more marginal students. Recognition is seen as a preventative measure which avoids some pupils being seen as failures and lessens the chances of premature drop-out. Some countries, notably **Denmark** and **Germany**, have highly developed systems which cover a wide array of recognised vocational qualifications but this is not the case everywhere. The need for a national system of qualifications, generally recognised and standardised, is, for example, seen as a major gap in **Spain**. In **Italy**, the problem was one, rather, of a proliferation of different kinds of qualification. As part of the 1992 reform, Progetto 92, hundreds of specialised qualifications were reorganised into 17 types of broad-based certificates.

In the **UK**, major steps have been taken in recent years to develop a comprehensive system of curriculum standards and qualifications. A central aspect of recent reforms in vocational education is the new qualifications structure and the individual's access to it. The ethos of inclusiveness that underlies this structure means that almost anyone can take part.

The first step was the introduction of new, more vocationally relevant, courses, allowing for more choice as part of mainstream compulsory education and, it is hoped, with 'parity of esteem' with the existing, more theoretical, GCSE courses. The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 was accompanied by a series of initiatives to strengthen the technical-vocational elements in compulsory schooling. These were designed, explicitly, to assist those young people who were least well served by the current arrangements.

An important aim is to facilitate progression to vocational courses at the age of 16 by reducing the time devoted by all pupils to compulsory subjects to allow up to 40% of curriculum time for other studies. This gives greater choice to students in the later years of secondary school. More opportunities for pre-vocational options are introduced at that stage.

The objective of developing a vocational pathway as an alternative to the regular academic courses within

compulsory education is strengthened by offering a new 'general diploma' at age 16 as a vocational equivalent to GCSE. The diploma covers 14 broad vocational areas and is modular, that is, it is made up of a mixture of GCSE courses and vocational equivalents, the new General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs).³

The GNVQs are intended to provide both a route to further vocational training and an alternative route to higher education. They are also intended to accommodate 'the lower attainers'. Although primarily aimed at the over-16 age group, foundation level GNVQ (the lowest of the three levels of the award) is equivalent to the lower levels of the GCSE and is seen as a possible alternative for some low attainers.

The modular basis of the programme, the unit structure of qualifications and the explicit provision for incremental progression are seen, in theory, as a means of encouraging the disaffected and the low achiever to stay on and acquire some level of vocational qualification before leaving or dropping out of the formal education/training system.

The new pathway is aimed at 25% of the age cohort, which would indicate that its target group is much wider than the disaffected. Whether it will achieve its aims of enhancing the prestige of vocational education and of providing an alternative, equal, route to qualifications for disadvantaged young people remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Awareness of the problem of early school-leaving and its effects, together with a policy emphasis on inclusiveness, has had some effect on the direction of reform of education systems. The overall tendency is to encourage young people to stay on at school and, if that fails, to facilitate their transition to work. The individualised focus of recent changes can be seen in the diversification of curricula and the perceived need to offer a wide range of options to suit individual talents and needs. Linked to this are the questions of qualifications and the recognition of achievement for all students.

The focus on the individual pupil is balanced by the approach which targets, not individuals or groups, but geographical areas. The French *Zone d'Education Prioritaires* (ZEPs) provide a well developed example of the use of positive discrimination as a tool for combating educational disadvantage.

There is growing recognition of the role of guidance in schools in the prevention of early school-leaving. Guidance as an integral part of the curriculum is most developed in Denmark though other countries, Spain for example, are also recognising its essential nature. Guidance is a means either of encouraging young people to stay on in education or training or of facilitating their smooth transition to the world of work. In its latter function, it is part of the work of the careers service which is losing its 'tangential' nature and is increasingly an integral part of the school system of European countries.

2.2.2 Interventions at School Level

This section looks at interventions that occur at the level of the school. Schools, in this instance, are taken to include initial vocational training as this often takes place within the compulsory school system and is a place where much drop-out occurs. It is also an area where many measures to reduce the rate of early leaving have been introduced. However, schools/training institutions are not autonomous and there is considerable overlap between system, school, community and individual/family level interventions.

Improvement of the operation of schools

The efficiency and effectiveness of schools and the identification of measures to improve the way they operate is one focus of current educational developments. This is part of a tendency to recognise that schools, as the central agents in the education process, can, in themselves, counteract disadvantage that may have its origin in the wider society. A recent evaluation of the UK's GEST (Grants for Education Support and Training) programme listed 'new or renewed confidence, particularly in schools serving disadvantaged areas, that schools can make a difference in improving attendance rates and in reducing pupil disaffection' as being among important changes that were taking place in the area of prevention of early school-leaving (Department of Education and Employment, 1996, 6). However, the evaluation also noted that some schools still believed that attendance rates were primarily determined by factors apparently outside the school's control, such as parental attitudes or local community malaise.

The focus on the school has helped identify factors that contribute to their effectiveness. Summarising research and practice in this area, the Eurydice report identifies 13 such factors and divides these into two categories;

- **Structural variables:** self-management of the school, head teacher, stability of staff,

preparation and organisation of curricula, the school's image and educational success, optimum use of time devoted to learning and support from the local area.

- **Variables of practice:** consultation and staff relations, sense of community, clarity of objectives (Eurydice, 1994, 64).

Within these factors the role of head teachers has been repeatedly singled out as being of crucial importance in determining the effectiveness of schools.

An important initiative in the 'movement' for school effectiveness is the international project on the improvement of the operations of schools (ISIP, 1982/86) organised by the OECD Centre for Research and Innovation in Education. This project involved 14 countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden and Switzerland). The work was carried out through international groups entrusted with specific subjects including self-analysis of the school, the role of head teachers, and of internal agents of change in the process of improving the operation of the school, etc.

Improvement in the operation of the school was defined as '*a systematic and sustained effort aimed at changing, in one or more schools, teaching conditions and other related internal conditions, the ultimate aim being to attain more effectively the objectives of education*' (Van Velzen et al., 1988, 54)

The subjects of in-depth analyses carried out by the project included:

- the MAVO reform in the Netherlands, which was aimed at supporting national individualisation measures in secondary education;
- school self-analysis in secondary schools in France;
- the Guidelines for Review and Internal Development in Schools (GRIDS) pilot project launched by the University of Bristol in the UK which was aimed at the preparation and assessment of self-analysis material for schools; and
- school self-analysis in Denmark. (Eurydice op. cit.)

The conclusions of the ISIP work drew particular attention to the technique of school self-analysis and regarded this practice as a necessary condition for improving the operation of the school. Self-analysis of

school operation and practice, often with the help of external support, consultation and training, thus became a fashionable prelude to the introduction of changes in the individual school system.

2.2.3 School-based Measures

Measures to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of the school may not, however, always be to the benefit of the weaker pupil. There may, indeed, be a conflict between being an effective or 'good' school and catering for the needs of disaffected pupils. Caul's analysis of effective schools, which was carried out for the Standing Advisory Committee for Human Rights in Northern Ireland, identified the factors which appeared typical of the 'good' school:

- universal entry to public exams;
- an emphasis on academic standards;
- consistently high expectations of pupil achievement;
- commitment to quality in all aspects of school life;
- an integrated management policy of the school including support systems;
- a set of balanced systems including pastoral care, careers guidance and special needs;
- clear leadership;
- delegated authority;
- policy development close to the points of implementation;
- staff development plan directed at the needs of the organisation;
- a school plan;
- clear sets of organisational priorities;
- involvement of parents in the school's life; and
- good middle management in the school at head of department level. (Caul, 1994)

Even bearing in mind the important fundamental differences between education in Northern Ireland and the rest of the **United Kingdom** (most notably the retention of selection at age eleven and a school system model which perceives grammar schools as the means of achieving the paramount goal of high levels of academic attainment), the 'good' school as defined by the factors listed above would not appear to be geared towards specific support for pupils in danger of dropping out.

In addition, new orientations in education analysis, research and practice can impose conflicting demands on schools, particularly as regards catering for pupils at risk. The difficulties encountered with mainstream curriculum developments in the UK have already been

mentioned. There is also the problem of educational priorities, particularly in times of shortage of resources and of cutbacks in expenditure and funding. The climate in which some current educational reform has been introduced means that concepts like 'value for money', 'efficiency' and 'cost effectiveness' have introduced variables that have little to do either with the educational orthodoxy of the past, contemporary beliefs in tailoring education to individual needs or with the specific problems of children at risk of dropping out of the system.

Nevertheless, many schools out of choice or necessity develop measures for coping with disaffected pupils. Many of these measures are listed in a UK National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report which is part of a two-year project with a brief to look at innovative practices in the areas of non-attendance, reducing exclusion and providing alternative education in the UK (Kinder, et al., 1995). Findings from the NFER are reported here.

The 30 schools examined in the first phase sample of the NFER study were all approached because some aspect of their work in the area of attendance and/or disruption appeared to be 'innovative'. The sample was initially designed to include examples of innovative school-based work under four 'themes':

- new roles of Education Welfare Service staff;
- the adoption of various IT registration systems;
- a school focus on some aspect of behaviour policy, management or support; and
- the provision of alternative curriculum experiences (both within school and off-site).

All the innovative strategies and practices investigated were classified as directed at one of the following:

- (i) maintaining and monitoring pupil attendance in school;
- (ii) providing direct support for emotional, social and/or behavioural needs;
- (iii) offering an alternative learning environment and/or curriculum experiences.

The first of these, which is largely concerned with measures to monitor and reduce truancy, is considered in the section on individual/family measures (below). The results of the audit of the other two measures are reproduced here. The audit of school initiatives associated with addressing these three areas showed that such initiatives might include three dimensions. These were:

- whole-school policy: organisation, structures;
- new school-based roles;
- external support.

The most positive results were invariably associated with initiatives which included more than one, if not all, of these dimensions. Examples of the types of innovation are given below.

Providing direct support for emotional, social and/or behavioural needs

This category included all those initiatives which focused primarily on dealing with disaffection as exhibited by pupil behaviour, relationships and attitudes within school. Rather than addressing pupil 'flight' strategies (like truancy), these examples have targeted the 'fight' strategies (like disruptive behaviour).

Whole-school policy: organisation, structures

This category would invariably involve establishing behaviour or discipline policies, and/or anti-bullying policies. These typically included staff awareness-raising or INSET, and classroom or behaviour management might also be a particular focus. The school-wide introduction of agreed procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour or bullying was an integral part of such policy work. A number of schools adopted AD (assertive discipline techniques), with a clear-cut escalating hierarchy of sanctions. In the case of one anti-bullying policy, inclusion within a well-defined whole-school discipline policy and procedures was seen as an important aspect of its success.

Communication to parents about the school's discipline and reward procedures was described as a crucial part of policy work. In a number of cases, the involvement of pupils by encouraging their contribution in devising codes of conduct or a bill of rights, by getting new pupils to learn and even formally sign these on arrival in the school, or by making the behaviour policy and bullying issues a focus of PASE work, was important. Involvement by pupils might also include design tasks to accompany policy introduction and dissemination.

The value of outside support, in the form of local education authority (LEA) staff with expertise in behaviour management or anti-bullying strategies operating with the whole staff or sub groups, was acknowledged.

School structures or organisational features

School structures or organisational features which addressed behaviour/relationship issues included a general increase in pastoral support, for example, the extension of form tutor periods (assisted, in one school, by the use of 'swipe' cards which reduced time spent on form registration); assigning senior pupils as mentors to forms; or instituting 'college' or 'house' systems. Increasing pupils' sense of belonging by 'building a family atmosphere' was intended in the latter case.

Other general strategies had pinpointed lunch time as a particularly 'vulnerable' period of the school day. Some schools instigated behaviour management training for lunch time supervisors (or at least ensuring their involvement in policy and practices for dealing with misbehaviour and bullying). One school reduced the lunch period by adopting continuous school day timetabling to minimise opportunities for disruptive behaviour as well as truancy problems.

All the schools in the sample operated systems of sanctions for unacceptable behaviour, though there was less evidence of an equally well-defined schoolwide system for rewarding good behaviour, (as opposed to good attendance or good work). As one interviewee suggested, successful social development was not given the same kudos as successful academic achievement. Nevertheless, expressions of approval and praise for good behaviour would typically be linked to the school's existing currency of merits, credits, certificates, etc.; while sanctions would invariably involve a clear sequence of reprimand - detention, on report, parental contact, temporary exclusions and so on.

Withdrawal or isolation units as a response to classroom misdemeanours were also used though there was considerable variation in their precise place within each school's sanction system. Some schools used their unit as part of the first line of sanctions, to remove problem children from class for the rest of the lesson or sometimes for the rest of the day. In other schools, pupils entered such units at a later stage in the sanction system and therefore its use was associated with more serious or sustained offences. Some schools operated this sanction as the 'final chance' before permanent exclusion, and one school required pupils to enter their unit directly on return from temporary exclusion, to catch up with work and also, as the head teacher put it, to impress on the youngster that exclusion from school was a serious business. In these

instances, longer stays in the unit were evident (for some schools this was a matter of days; for others, it involved the pupil being away from their classes for several weeks). The withdrawal of free time at break and lunch might also be part of a unit's regime, and typically the pupils would be under close and strict supervision by senior staff, with work sent by the pupils' subject teachers.

These units were created from within a school's existing resources and appeared to have a strong measure of censure in their purpose. As such, they should be distinguished from certain other in-school behaviour support units, which were operated by specially appointed staff who provided focused behaviour modification programmes or specific learning support. Notwithstanding this distinction, it is important to stress that informal support, encouragement and counselling for pupils in the former type of unit was often described.

New school-based roles

Innovative school-based roles with a behaviour-related focus were also evident in the NFER study. For example, in the case cited above, teachers were selected to provide in-school supportive supervision for pupils referred with behavioural problems. In these instances, there was a strong emphasis on redemption or preventative work. This might be done either in a special unit within the school (sometimes attached to the Special Needs department) or involve mostly in-class support, or a mixture of both approaches. Referred pupils might work with these staff (either within the unit or in class) for periods ranging from single weekly sessions to a substantial part of the week. The supervision might involve individualised behaviour modification techniques and/or group work (including assertiveness training for children experiencing bullying), as well as learning support for the pupils as they worked within mainstream curriculum requirements. Nevertheless, despite a focus on the statutory curriculum, these behaviour support teachers often recognised the particular value of extra-curricular activities as an incentive to, or reward for, good behaviour.

Other school-based roles included targeting support on pupils who potentially - or already - showed disaffected behaviour. This work essentially would focus on attitudes and was often combined with attendance-related strategies, involving procedures aimed at self-esteem building, developing co-operative/team attitudes and so on. School-based

Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) most typically operated in this capacity.

Other behaviour-related roles involved working with parents and liaison with feeder (or partner) primary schools, including involvement in Year Six induction programmes. Those with responsive buddying and counselling roles (such as welfare assistants and school counsellors) might also find pupils with behaviour-related problems as part of their clientele.

Some schools instituted behaviour-related buddying/counselling roles for senior pupils. There were several examples of sixth formers acting as mentors to younger troubled pupils, with pastoral staff operating as 'matchmakers' to provide the most suitable mix of personalities. Other instances involved senior pupils working at 'listening posts' to offer first-line support to youngsters coming forward with problems. Another example, from a primary school in the sample, was to involve Year Six pupils as mediators in peer group disputes and confrontations. This, in turn, involved some training responsibility for school or Education Welfare Staff (EWS).

External support

External support for disaffected behaviour within school was most evident in the work of LEA Behavioural Support Services, though Educational Psychology Services and EWS staff also might be involved in certain cases.

The Behavioural Support Service's work (which was followed up in two LEAs) usually included a dual role of operating outreach work in schools and the provision of places in special off-site units for referred pupils (now given Pupil Referral Unit or PRU status). Outreach work would typically involve working with individual pupils (and, in primary schools, their class teachers), and might offer analysis of a particular behavioural problem from structured classroom observation as well as providing improvement programmes and targets for the pupil. INSET work with individual teachers, whole staff, and school governors was also offered, and might include support for instituting behaviour policies, reward systems, etc.

The same kind of behaviour-related strategies would be offered to those pupils in off-site units and centres, often there on a part-time basis while still on roll at their school. Hence, in many instances, the curriculum followed would be that provided by the school.

Offering an alternative learning environment and/or curriculum experiences

This section deals with the ways in which the sample of schools addressed the curriculum as part of their strategies to deal with the needs of disaffected pupils. Where curriculum-related strategies were directly targeted at disaffected pupils, two different approaches were evident. In some instances, existing statutory curriculum requirements were supported, though perhaps tailored or delivered in some sort of specialised way. In other cases, schools also attempted to add to the kinds of learning opportunities available.

Whole school-level strategies: structures, organisation
Curriculum-focused strategies at school level included development work on differentiation, with INSET for staff and LEA advisory support, and other strategies such as working parties, departmental reviews, resource development, non-contact time for department heads to observe subject delivery in classrooms, developing teaching styles and varying the learning experiences of pupils.

School structure or organisational features
Curriculum-related alterations in this area included additional curriculum support such as extra assistance to those undertaking GCSE work through tutorial support which monitored progress by target-setting. The form of curriculum support tutorials varied; one school had weekly meetings for tutor groups of four pupils.; another provided individual tutorials on a three-monthly basis. Homework clubs (offering after-school supervision and library facilities) also provided additional learning support and one school ran extension modules in key subjects such as mathematics, English, science and technology for pupils who had fallen behind or wanted higher grades. In one case, tutorial support was offered by senior pupils.

The continuous day system also had a curriculum spin-off in that it involved a longer working period in the morning, when most pupils were felt to perform better. (Equally, doing away with morning assembly was said to have improved punctuality, as pupils no longer 'drifted in' to school in order to avoid having to attend.)

Curriculum strategies directly aimed at the (potentially) disaffected involved offering alternative vocational qualifications for lower achievers at key stage 4, including, in one school, their own 'in-house' certificates and qualification. A number of schemes

offered accreditation in areas such as sport, business and basic literacy. School strategies for rewarding curriculum achievement included certificates, stickers and, in one instance, praise postcards (sent through the post to the pupil's home). Records of achievement also featured.

New school-based roles

School-based roles for dealing with disaffected behaviour sometimes involved staff, often from the EWS, identifying key problem areas with pupils who had severe attendance problems and negotiating re-entry through an initial reduction in their timetabled curriculum. Counselling and support would accompany this return. In addition, those with specific responsibility for disaffected pupils might be engaged in alternative curriculum activities and vocational initiatives, such as trips, motor-mechanic schemes and outward bound activities. Some schools operated special units, run by trained teaching staff, to provide small numbers of severely disaffected pupils with an opportunity to undertake basic mainstream curriculum activities in a secure environment.

External support

In this area there were examples of disaffected pupils being provided with placements on college courses and work experience, though the former were felt to have particular cost implications under current funding arrangements. Off-site provision within LEA-based services usually offered some version of the mainstream curriculum. Tensions and time constraints in addressing the dual remit of behaviour and attitude difficulties were referred to.

Role of staff

The NFER analysis highlighted the increasing complexity of the teacher's role, especially in the context of combating failure at school. The concern to equip teachers to deal with problems of disaffection is also reflected in the policies adopted in other European countries. Some have focused on the role of head teachers as a crucial factor in improving the operation of the school and in implementing strategies to combat early school-leaving. But the role of teachers in general has also come under examination.

One problem is that teachers are not trained to meet the individual requirements of very different pupils, and even where the teacher has the desired teaching skills, the structure of the system may not allow sufficient autonomy and flexibility to give him/her real room for manoeuvre.

There is little point in demanding individualised courses and teaching and assessment methods which are better adjusted to the differences in pupils' abilities if the teacher does not have the independence, the training and the resources to devise and implement them. Some countries have gone some way towards increasing flexibility in this regard.

In **Spain**, the royal decrees implementing the LOGSE reform were aimed at developing wide-ranging, open and flexible curricula which would permit teachers to adapt them to the individual characteristics of the pupils and to the educational situation in each school. In France, the new structure of educational cycles was aimed in particular at giving greater responsibility and flexibility to the teacher in organising the work, while in Italy, the reform of primary education adopted on 5 June, 1990, gives the teacher responsibility for grouping subjects by topics, choosing the teaching method and organising the timetable - the curricula being defined at national level in terms of objectives.

The Danish teacher enjoys a great deal of autonomy in organising teaching jointly with the pupils. This is reinforced by the form teacher system in **Denmark**, where typically one teacher (normally the teacher of Danish) is connected to the same group of pupils throughout their time in school. The system has existed since the beginning of the century but it has undergone many changes and developments over the years. The form teacher system also facilitates the establishment of partnership relations with the world outside the school, in particular with the parents. The form teacher has, in fact, the task of providing the essential links with the family and the degree and nature of parents' participation in the school life of their children depend on the teacher. His/her role as the family's special contact enables the family to be more involved in the search for solutions to problems which may hinder the pupil's education. The teacher's room for manoeuvre also enables him/her to initiate partnership activities with businesses, to organise job placements and to make a better contribution to guidance.

Teacher training

The need to combat early school-leaving has implications for the way teachers are trained. Some measures have been developed to deal with this.

In 1989 the IUFMs (Teacher Training Institutes) were set up in **France** as a response to the unprecedented challenges faced by the schools and have been quite

controversial in their departures from traditional attitudes and techniques. There is some controversy about how teachers can be trained to handle the full diversity of pupils without detracting from their training in specific subject areas. One of the techniques introduced by the IUFMs is to teach trainee teachers destined for primary and secondary levels together. This was seen as a way of developing a more rounded and coherent professional overview of schooling. The time devoted to this joint training was, however, limited to 10% of course time. Opposition to such training measures focuses on the fear that teachers will become more like social workers than teachers and that 'standards will suffer' as a result. These strains have not really been resolved in France - or probably in any other country - either at primary or secondary level.

Working with underachievers in schools

A current initiative in training teachers is an in-service course on *Working with Underachievers in Schools* which is being organised by Stranmillis College, **Belfast**, in association with the Comenius Action 3.2 Programme⁴. The aim of the course is to develop a network of teachers across Europe interested in working with disadvantaged and disaffected pupils. The target audience for the course is pre-primary/primary and secondary school teachers.

The objectives of the course are to:

- stimulate teachers to examine their professional practice critically;
- provide a forum for the exchange of views with regard to good practice;
- encourage teachers to explore alternative means of working with underachievers;
- construct a network of European teachers of underachievers/disaffected pupils;
- compare the incidence of underachievement across the European Union.;
- challenge teachers to explore the role of new information technologies in the education of underachievers;
- provide opportunities for teachers to visit schools specialising in the education of underachievers;
- illustrate Open Distance Learning in the education of underachieving pupils.

The course is based on three parallel pathways: visiting and studying practical examples of education intervention related to the disaffected and disadvantaged; school-based work including critical

consideration of a number of approaches adopted at present in Northern Ireland; workshops where participants analyse classroom interaction, parenting skills, linguistic development and truancy.

A similar project, the *Collaborative Learning Project*, is currently being organised by the Inner London Education Authority to deal with the same issue.

Vocational Training

Like the educational system in general, the vocational training systems are not designed to deal exclusively with pupils with difficulty. Although, traditionally, 'weaker' pupils were channelled into vocational streams, the primary concern of training systems has been to prepare the 'mainstream' trainees for jobs. The heavy demands on mainstream training may leave few resources for those who are at a particular disadvantage and/or at risk of not getting trained at all.

Schools and training systems must also balance the aim of keeping disaffected pupils from dropping out with the more general function of ensuring the smooth transition from school to vocational training and from education/training to work.

Finally, there is the challenge of combining the training of large numbers of young people with an individualised approach. The 'right to training' is being added to social and economic rights in many countries. This guarantee is sometimes expressed in terms of a right to an individually designed programme, rather than just a guaranteed but generalised offer of training. However, although an individual right to basic training has become official policy in some countries and is being discussed in others, the implementation of that right does not depend on training systems/institutions alone.

The right to training has to be widely agreed and implemented in practice and this is by no means the case in Europe today. In **Denmark**, for example, the social partners take very divergent views on this question. This divergence in approach can constitute a problem, particularly for the training of young people at risk, in a situation where the need to link work experience and training depend, largely, on co-operation between the educational system and industry.

From the point of view of early school-leaving, there is a major difficulty with existing systems of vocational

training. They have restricted 'normal' levels of entry and ages of entry, based on the traditional pattern of progression through school, into qualifying training and so to work and adulthood. Apart from the difficulty of responding quickly to changes in industrial requirements, these systems fail too many and are too inflexible to suit the diversity of entrants. There is also the recurring question of the low status of the vocational training path in compulsory education.

A recent example of attempts to change the image of vocational training and, therefore, to encourage more young people to enter and complete vocational training, is the **Italian** reform of 1992. Following the success of the curriculum development experiment, Progetto 92, an Education Ministry decree of (1992) set out a new framework for all Istituti Professionali di Stato (IPS - State Vocational Training Schools). In a move that, in some ways, echoes the introduction of the GNVQs in the UK, the decree increased the general educational content of IPS courses and provided virtually a common curriculum of general education in the first year of training. In addition to rationalising the number and type of qualifications, the reform introduced a modular approach and flexibility in curricula and teaching methods and included tests of transversal skills and relational ability in the certificate exam. It also allowed for some individualisation in course content.

Broad-based training

One policy trend that has a direct effect on potential drop-outs is the move towards broad-based training. This is introduced generally because initial training is no longer seen as comprehensive training for a specific job but rather the basis for the kind of life-time learning that will enable the trainee to adapt to changes in the labour market. Consequently, any job-specific content in initial training has to be broad. Examples of this emphasis on broad-based training can be found in initiatives in **Germany** and **Denmark**.

The German 'Concept for Action' (1994) outlines three kinds of abilities and knowledge that the new training requires:

- basic technical knowledge and skills that can be used in several occupations;
- work-method and technology-related skills and knowledge;
- personal, i.e., social, intellectual and motivational skills and abilities.

A similar perspective can be seen in the 1993 reform of vocational training in Denmark. Although 60% of total training is spent on practical work experience in one or more approved firms, the reform lays down that the trainee must be given, not only specific vocational trade skills, but also transversal and general skills. To this end, the reform allows for different access routes and for transition between courses. The Danish Education for All Action Plan of 1993 was designed to implement these reforms. Its overall aim is to create a more flexible and pupil-centred system of youth education.

The reform also adopted the principle of 'holistic teaching approaches', i.e., ensuring that vocational schools provided training which integrated vocational and general subjects and practical and theoretical learning, to motivate and assist the learning process and to ensure that specific professional skills as well as general qualifications were developed. The broad-based vocational courses (GNVQs) introduced in the U.K. have already been mentioned in the context of developments in overall qualification systems.

Alternance training

Alternance training has gained wide recognition as the best way to implement a mixture of theoretical and practical training. The most well known is the German Dual System which has been in operation for many years. Alternance is also seen in Denmark as the best way to train young people.

The practice is also widespread in other countries. In **Spain**, the new law LOGSE calls for the replacement of all existing school-based vocational training by two new levels of broad training, an intermediate level and a higher level. Both will include a period of work experience or training in industry. Although implementation has begun, it will probably not be complete until 2000. The old and new systems will coexist until then.

While the practice of alternance is clearly attractive, there is little doubt that it is more suitable to periods of expansion in employment than of contraction. Alternance systems depend for their success on a sufficient number of training places or work experience placements being available. As alternance training spreads, the willingness of firms to offer places (and to ensure they are attractive to trainees) becomes an essential part of the training system in more and more countries. If the number of training places contracts, alternance as a means of training

mainstream trainees becomes problematic and the possibility of placing disaffected and disadvantaged young people even more so.

The experience in **Germany** is worth recalling in this regard. The German Dual system was first put under strain as far back as the late 1970s following the oil-price recessions and the high numbers of young people coming out of compulsory education. The underlying causes of the shortage of training places proved, however, to be structural as well as cyclical. In Germany, manufacturing and agricultural employment has declined and is projected to continue falling while service sector employment continues to rise. In-plant training opportunities in Germany have been further reduced by 'lean production' methods: in 1993 places fell by 29,000 in the private sector alone. Demand for training places exceeds supply in Germany. As a result, major efforts are required to increase the supply of training places. In addition, a series of 'preparatory measures' (see below) have been introduced to cater for those waiting for a placement.

The shortage of training places has certainly contributed to the increase in drop-out from training, the so-called 'Training Deficit' in Germany: about 25% (with wide variation between trades) now drop out of Dual System contracts without completing their training.

Denmark has faced similar difficulties. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a prolonged shortage of practice places which made it impossible for many students to complete their training programmes. The drop-out rate increased as a result.

In 1990, a scheme was introduced to allow school-based training placements to be substituted for in-firm placements but it proved to be ineffective. In 1992, subsidies were introduced to encourage firms to provide more places to meet the demands for training placements. This was financed from a pay-roll tax and supported by a 1993 campaign organised by the Ministry of Education, the social partners and local authorities as part of the Education for All Action Plan. These measures succeeded in bringing the number of training placements back to the 1987 level.

The willingness of employers to offer places is also a constraint on the working of vocational training in the UK and an important role for the Training and Enterprise Councils is to persuade them to increase the supply.

In **France**, there is a tendency to site interventions to combat disadvantage or potential disadvantage in the employment sector, rather than in education. This found expression in an innovative alternance measure targeted specifically at young people with a poor school and vocational training record, *Nouvelles Qualifications*. It was launched in 1983 and extended nationwide in 1989. *Nouvelles Qualifications* (New Qualifications Initiative) is aimed at a fundamental rethink of basic vocational training and at a re-examination of alternance training itself. It resulted from what were perceived as disappointing results from alternance training:

- alternance training provided work experience periods which were too short to enable trainees to obtain a qualification, and jobs which were undemanding and menial;
- there was not enough cohesion between the periods of training and work, with the result that the young person's training was disrupted;
- supervision and teaching skills were unsatisfactory: teachers/trainers were not assisting or supporting the young people effectively, and they did not know enough about the world of industry and lacked the resources to ensure proper integration of their teaching with the young person's practical work.

An additional impetus was provided by a marked rise in youth unemployment which was caused by the restructuring of the workforce and a decline in the demand for unskilled workers.

At the heart of the experiment is a new concept of learning by alternance and the need to redefine the content of basic training and the jobs to which it was related. Training is seen as 'inductive' i.e., training has to be derived from the job. It pays specific attention to young people who experience failure in school by avoiding school-based teaching methods and excessive abstraction.

The approach involves immediate immersion in a working environment as the basis for learning and acceptance of the possibility that completely unqualified young people can be given skilled jobs in the production process. The idea is that the trainee moves to and fro between work and training. The content of the training is individualised. It is not determined in advance but is a product of what happens in work situations and the resultant training needs they reveal to the young person. The work

experience provides the starting point for going back and acquiring the necessary formal or theoretical knowledge. This approach challenges the normal link between training and work, because here the two are obliged to develop at the same time.

The programme pays considerable attention to the need for real cohesion between work-based and other training periods, through closer interaction between the tutor, the trainee and the 'trainer co-ordinator'. This also helped to motivate the trainees as they could see themselves as influencing the development of their own training, through participation in successive discussions of the problems they had encountered in their working situations.

In 1989, a national structure, with decentralised regional teams, was set up to run the programme and the remit was extended to include older employees. Although *Nouvelles Qualifications* gained recognition as a useful experiment, it was controversial. One difficulty was the fact that its approach was totally opposed to general practice and there was, therefore, no real basis for comparison. The programme also had difficulties with the other institutions involved in training, partly because of the considerable resources and partnership requirements needed to support the measure. The initiative was rather isolated within the training system.

Evaluations of *Nouvelles Qualifications* indicate that it was successful in training and placing young people who had difficulties in the mainstream system. However, in practice, the experiment did not work exactly according to plan. In particular, the level of dialogue between the tutor, the trainee and the trainer, which was so essential to the cohesion of its individualised approach, was not always sufficient. The jobs offered as a basis for training were not always suitable to the approach of the programme: some did not lead to a real qualification, or the content of the job was such that it was impossible to assess and accredit what had been learnt.

The experience of *Nouvelles Qualifications* is clearly relevant because of its success rate with unqualified young people. The programme has challenged the concepts and practice of standard alternance methods, not only because of their inadequacy in meeting the needs of unqualified young people but also on the grounds that they encouraged employers to recruit applicants who were over-qualified. It is relevant to attempts to improve alternance and to

break down the strong tendency in initial training to separate the two learning contexts of workplace and school (Banks, 1994).

New apprenticeship contracts - Spain and Italy

Unlike traditional apprenticeship, which is a one-to-one training in craftsmanship, new forms of apprenticeship contracts refer to more generalised forms of training through work in the modern workplace. In **Italy** and **Spain**, recently introduced apprenticeship contract schemes can be linked to the need to involve employers in the training and initial employment of young people.

The Italian CFL - *Contratto Formazione Lavoro* (training-work contract) - is targeted at unemployed, unqualified school-leavers aged 15-29. These represent about 10% of the age group. It is a temporary two-year work contract with an enterprise and includes a training element which takes up about 20% of the time. The initiative was popular when it was introduced in the late 1980s but participation began to fall in the early 1990s when the 50% reduction in social security contribution for employers who hired trainees was abolished. In 1993, the number of young people in the scheme was one-third of that in 1989.

In Spain, the replacement of training contracts by new apprenticeship contracts in 1994 proved to be more controversial. In the first five months of 1994, it appears that 100,000 young people were engaged under these new contracts. Many of these had completed compulsory education and therefore had displaced less qualified young people who were being assisted under the previous type of programme. Furthermore, although the programme is alternance based, the amount of time given over to training is low. Trade unions in Spain have opposed this scheme, partly because they see it as a form of deregulation and, partly, because it is seen as being used as a source of cheap, temporary labour for employers. In fact, the introduction of the apprenticeship contracts scheme was one of the causes of the general strike in Spain in January 1994.

Preparatory vocational training

Preparatory vocational training, as the name suggests, consists of measures directed largely at young people who are judged not ready for mainstream training. Increasingly, however, preparatory training is being used as a holding place for people waiting for a training place in alternance systems. The country with the most developed preparatory measures is **Germany**

which introduced a series of preparatory measures to deal with the situation of disadvantaged young people⁵ but also to cope with the lack of places in the mainstream dual system. Some of these measures are outlined briefly here.

School-based measures in Germany include:

Berufsvorbereitungsjahr - vocational preparatory year
The vocational preparatory year (*Berufsvorbereitungsjahr*) is a very traditional school-based preparation measure to promote vocational training for young people with educational shortcomings and/or social problems. The target group is disadvantaged young people who have no training placement or who do not fulfil the entry requirements for other measures. It is mandatory for disadvantaged young people in some regions though the measure has not been introduced at all in Brandenburg.

The course is for one year and is composed of technical practice, technical theory and general education. Ideally, it is delivered to small groups of between eight and 16. Sometimes pupils can familiarise themselves with several vocational fields but more often only one (and frequently a gender-specific) vocational option is available.

Berufsfachschulen (bzw. Sonder berufsfachschulen)

These are full-time vocational schools for young people with learning difficulties and offer one or two-year full-time training to improve the level of the student's school certificate or to impart vocational knowledge/skills as an introductory or partial qualification for vocational training. The training is concentrated on ten occupations. Training is often combined with the vocational preparatory year for disadvantaged young people. Many of the participants are young immigrants.

Berufsgrundbildungsjahr - basic vocational school year

The basic vocational school year (*Berufsgrundschuljahr*) is designed to provide broad, elementary vocational training in standard occupations, e.g. in the wood and metalworking trades. For some (those with good grades) it is, in effect, a transition period until they find a training place. In some regions, it is obligatory for entry into vocational training; in others it is not even recognised by firms as part of the young person's training.

Germany also has a series of non-school preparatory measures. These are the responsibility of the Federal Labour Office and are seen as 'a flexible instrument for appropriate support for the integration of young

people into work, for lowering the percentage of young people who do not have vocational training and for helping competitiveness by ensuring that the younger generation is well and suitably qualified'. In addition to special educational measures in the area of vocational rehabilitation, non-school based preparatory training measures include:

Grundausbildungslehrgänge - basic vocational training courses

These are preparatory measures to assist young people who cannot enter in-plant or non-plant vocational training. The aim is to prepare young people to enter mainstream vocational training. The target groups are disadvantaged young people, i.e., those who have dropped out of the compulsory school system, young immigrants, the disadvantaged and young people who have not decided on an occupation.

Förderungslehrgänge - Remedial training courses

The target group for remedial training courses is school-leavers who are not yet eligible for work, primarily young people with learning difficulties and/or personal development problems. The aim is to provide special assistance to enable school-leavers to enter vocational training/employment. The courses are company based and normally last 12 months. Special emphasis is placed on providing additional remedial instruction and guidance during training in order that young people do not drop out of the courses.

On the whole, preparatory training is not regarded as very successful in Germany. This is particularly true of school-based measures and some regions have given up offering courses of this kind. For young people who have had a bad experience of school and/or feel themselves to be failures, preparatory vocational training often proves unsuitable. This is exhibited in high rates of truancy, poor motivation, attention-seeking behaviour, aggression, depression, escape into alcohol, drugs or psychosomatic illness, etc. Other criticisms are:

- groups are usually too large, up to 25, instead of the intended maximum of 16;
- teaching personnel seldom possess the requisite skills and the quality of staff is poor because of the low social prestige of being assigned to these types of course;
- formal school regulations hinder the flexibility needed to work with the target group.

A survey by the vocational teachers association of Rheinland Falz (1993) concluded that the current design of preparatory vocational training is basically faulty and recommended the replacement of the school by other places of learning, for example, autonomous training institutions which do not have fixed class schedules and are not school-like in their operations.⁶

In **France**, the recent re-launch of pre-vocational classes using work experience, for young people from age 14 who are 'in severe difficulties', is very controversial since evaluation of similar classes in the 1980s showed little effectiveness either in helping young people to catch up or helping them enter an apprenticeship which is the traditional form of training for those that have 'failed' in school.

In **Denmark**, preparatory vocational training is provided in two types of course.

EGU-Basic vocational training

EGU-Basic vocational training course is targeted at young people who are not enrolled in youth education and who have no foothold on the labour market, particularly young people who are more keen on practical training and work experience than on theoretical studies.

EGU courses are based on a two-year individual education plan (in certain cases extended to three years). The plan outlines what skills the pupil intends to learn and the course consists of practical work experience placements in private/public sector and periods in education/training institutions. The school-based education is less individualised in that it must be composed of existing education/training modules. The periods of education/training can take place in the mainstream system or at production schools, folk, day, high schools, etc. The aim is to provide qualifications which will allow the pupil access to mainstream vocational education or employment.

EGU was introduced in 1993. In October, 1994, less than 5% of the youth cohort were enrolled in EGU courses. This slow uptake has been attributed to a lack of work experience placements and financial/administrative barriers. Changes in financing of the EGU which took effect in January 1996 are expected to increase attendance. The goal is to have a further 3% of the age cohort enrolled.

EIFU-Introductory vocational training course for young people

EIFU courses take place at Labour Market Training (AMU) Centres and are targeted at drop-outs and other young unemployed people. The programme is one of introductory vocational training courses providing a broad introduction to the labour market and vocational guidance. The courses consist of theoretical teaching and practical work experience. Vocational guidance, based on workshop teaching, is a central feature. The programme is regarded as rather successful with a large number of pupils entering or re-entering ordinary vocational education and training on completion of the course and another large group entering employment.

'Bridge Building'-transitional programme

A new departure in Danish policy is a transitional programme known as 'bridge building' aimed at reducing the numbers dropping out after lower secondary school. The target group also includes those who change from one programme to another and pupils in last year of lower secondary school who are uncertain about the future and need extra time for education and career guidance.

'Bridging' is a combined process of guidance and training and provides a way of integrating lower secondary school and mainstream vocational education. It introduces young people to a variety of youth education programmes, facilitates decision-making and offers supplementary learning facilities. Bridge-building was initially introduced on an experimental basis and is now being expanded nationwide.

The programme is based on a guidance plan set up by a guidance counsellor in co-operation with the young person. The plan allows the youngsters to combine elements from different vocational training and educational programmes into a coherent individual programme. The course can be a combination of two to four different elements from existing programmes. At least two elements must be in different kinds of institutional settings and one must be at youth education level. The content should enable the pupil to choose further education/training, stimulate personal development, supplement the qualifications s/he already has (if any) and provide the opportunity for practical training. Counselling is a key element. Depending on the specific contents of a bridge building scheme, credits may be transferred to later mainstream education. Local and regional authorities are responsible for the implementation of 'bridging'

courses which require close co-operation between them and the youth employment officers, instructors and schools. Because of the level of resources it requires, the course is available only to pupils who are disaffected with school and want to start working, who cannot decide on their further education or who lack skills in very specific areas (*Undervisningsministeriet*, 1995).

Alternative provision/institutions

Many measures to combat early school-leaving are designed to allow greater flexibility in the school's response to individual needs. For some pupils they are insufficient and alternative solutions, outside the compulsory school, are felt to be needed.⁷

The Danish Production Schools

One of the most innovative institutions in this field are the production schools. Here, production is used as a teaching instrument to initiate training. The special characteristics of the school are great flexibility of curriculum and teaching methods as well as close association with the market. The schools must combine practical work and theoretical education with productive activity and the products produced by the students are sold under market conditions.

Young people who have not completed any form of education/training are eligible. The schools accept them from a wide range of backgrounds and offer opportunities to try out different trades and skills. These can range from office work and data-processing, through media and textiles, to carpentry, food processing, agriculture and horticulture. The emphasis is on practical experience as the starting point for learning.

The aim is to help young people make informed career choices through a combination of theoretical and practical training and to improve their access to the labour market and the education system.

Production schools may co-operate with mainstream institutions and up to one-third of the time spent at a production school may consist of general or vocational elements provided by mainstream training institutions. EGU, FUU and Bridge Building courses may take place at production schools. All staff have had trade experience as well as being professionally qualified as teachers

Production school courses do not lead to a recognised qualification, though credits from mainstream elements incorporated in a programme may be

transferred. Courses are characterised by great flexibility in terms of duration and time of starting/ending. The schools are not residential though they have a marked home-like atmosphere. The length of stay varies considerably but it is usually 12 months. Enrolment can take place at any time. Students receive a modest weekly allowance.

There are now 120 production schools in Denmark. They are independent institutions set up by the local authorities. The board of managers must include a representative from the local labour market organisation. The schools have close links with the local communities. They are usually financially helped by them and work closely with the local organisations to help their ex-students to find jobs.

The Danish Continuation Schools

Another experiment in alternative provision in Denmark is the continuation school. These schools offer an alternative social and cultural environment for the pupils who are resident. While the production schools are geared very clearly at vocational training and eventual integration into the labour market, continuation schools have a more broadly social function and are directed at more marginalised, though widely different, young people. In particular, they provide an opportunity for the less motivated to finish their compulsory education and so are directed explicitly at young people who have dropped out or who are in danger of doing so.

There are now about 100 continuation schools in Denmark. They provide for more than 10% of pupils of the last two years of the *folkeskole* and it is reckoned that this proportion is likely to increase. Continuation schools are seen as one of the factors contributing to the high completion rate in compulsory education in Denmark.

These Danish alternatives are seen as 'stepping stones' to mainstream training and the production schools in particular provide a good example of engaging young people in some form of productive activity as a way of getting them interested in learning. These alternative institutions address young peoples' total situations and the problems they face, in order to help them regain their sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and direction.

The Spanish Social Guarantee Programmes (PGS)

Spain shows another example of alternative provision, the Social Guarantee Programmes (PGS) which was introduced by the LOGSE reform of 1991. The idea is to provide supplementary help for those who have

dropped out of compulsory schooling and/or who do not have the entry qualifications for basic, or specific, vocational training. The programme targets pupils with special needs as well as young offenders and a percentage of young people from ethnic and other minority groups. The one-year course combines general education, guidance and (pre-) vocational training. The young people are all accredited for participating, even if they drop out or do not pass the competence test at the end. The aim is to enable them to enrol in training or facilitate their smooth transition to the labour market. Another possibility is access to post-compulsory education courses. Centres providing PGS courses are separate from the school system.

It is still unsure how many young people will end up in PGS courses. Apart from the characteristics of the course itself, the level of take-up will reflect the degree of success various regions have in implementing the aims and methods of the new compulsory education system. In Andalusia, it is hoped to keep the figures in PGS at a maximum of 10%-15%.

One problem of the PGS courses is that they are proving more attractive than regular school provision (particularly in the interim period when the overall reforms laid down by the LOGSE are being introduced), thus drawing people away from compulsory school. On the other hand, the level of enrolment is an indicator of the success PGS has in motivating young people to finish their education.

German examples

An experiment in alternative provision in **Germany** which resembles the Danish initiatives is currently being tried out with disaffected pupils in the final year of compulsory school in Northrhine-Westfalia. Here pupils in exceptional cases can attend class in non-school institutions, i.e., in workshops where they can receive a one-year remedial vocational course, involving 20 practical hours in six different fields. Sometimes they may be lodged in a boarding school 'where it seems desirable to offer a new start, under better conditions, away from their unfavourable domestic environment'.

Other alternative schools exist for pupils who are further on the periphery of the system. Some of these are special units within larger schools. An example is the Honey Factory, Hamburg, which is an alternative unit within the free school of Hamburg. Initially, half financed by the Federal Government as an experimental programme, the school is now funded partly by the local government and partly by donations.

The target group is young people from age 14 who are seriously disaffected from school, some because they have been bullied, others because their schooling has been interrupted by illness, some are immigrants with little German, some have been in trouble with the law. Others attend because they have nothing else to do. Access to the Honey Factory is free and unregulated and there is no fixed curriculum. Some students find this degree of freedom too strenuous. Regular, conventional classroom teaching is made available coming up to examination time for those who want to sit exams. The school is run on an egalitarian basis by two teachers, one craftsman and one social worker.

The objectives of the school are to help students to respect their own individuality. An essential element is that there is always time to discuss whatever individual or group problems arise. Avoidance of discrimination in structure and functioning of the school is another goal. A long-term objective is to have an influence on the operation of regular schools.

2.2.4 Community-based Measures

With the realisation that school/community co-operation can add to the effectiveness of a school and that, conversely, the remoteness of the school from the local community can be a weakness, policy orientation has changed in recent years and many interventions now focus on the involvement of community in the work of the school. One area is the development of programmes within the community for young people in difficulty. Another is co-ordination between service providers, both from social welfare and from a training point of view. A third area, which is of particular concern in the context of training and transition to work, is co-operation between schools/training institutions and local employers/firms.

Co-ordination of services

The co-ordination of school and out-of-school services takes various forms in different countries. There are often difficulties in terms of overlap, lack of co-operation and even conflict between the aims and operating methods of different providers. Furthermore, most countries except Germany and Denmark have little experience in this type of co-ordination. Measures to improve co-operation between service providers can focus on areas like post-school follow-up, involving the social partners in the development of policy on all aspects of vocational training, and efforts to close the gap between the world of school and the world of industry. Follow-up of young people is an

important general feature of measures to prevent early school-leaving. This is organised differently in different countries. It can be school-based, as it is in France, co-ordinated by a community-based youth team as in Denmark, or run by a specific youth service as it is in Germany.

Degrees of follow-up also vary. In **Denmark**, the local youth guidance service, since 1993, has acquired a very central role in co-ordinating a local network of co-operation between schools, municipalities, vocational training institutions and the local labour market organisation. The guidance service must make contact with all early school-leavers at least twice in the two-year period after they have left school and youth education institutions must let the service know when a pupil/trainee is dropping out. This means that the structures necessary for a 'follow-up' service are well established. More recently, Denmark has moved to a system of compulsory registration: all young people are required to register with the youth guidance service within two weeks of moving house. This enables the local services to contact them, once they know where they are. In the UK, on the other hand, follow-up is much more loosely organised. Indeed, the Danish system, however effective and benevolent, might seem a bit Orwellian to people in Ireland and the UK who do not have national identification systems and who are very resistant to the idea.

Involvement of local government structures is another important variable. This can be determined, in part, by the role of these structures in the educational/training system in general. In the **UK** and **Denmark**, for example, although these systems are centralised, the local authorities play a major role in implementing them and, particularly in the UK, have some leeway in terms of the additional or alternative measures they adopt. In **Germany**, general laws are laid down in Federal legislation, the regions have their own additional laws, and some interventions in education and training are organised and implemented at commune level.

In **Spain** and **Portugal**, the role of local authorities is particularly important in promoting compensatory educational projects aimed at pupils from disadvantaged areas or children who find it difficult to adjust to the traditional education system (children from remote rural areas, travellers, children of seasonal workers, etc.). In **Italy**, local authorities have become associated with particular initiatives, e.g., measures to prevent drug abuse at school.

In **France**, school projects can be based on partnerships with local institutions, businesses and local authorities. In Aix-en-Provence, for example, the municipal authorities have, in co-operation with associations, organised study days, think tanks and committees on educational support and reading, and have urged action in these areas.

In **Germany**, out-of school provision by various bodies in partnership with the school is becoming an increasingly important factor in community involvement. Outside the school, a wide range of institutions are catering for youngsters on behalf of both public and private bodies. Cultural and educational institutions offer leisure facilities and help with home work. Among the main examples of co-operation between the school and those responsible for youth and sports activities, particular mention should be made of the music and art schools, youth and cultural centres and sports clubs.

Measures to Co-ordinate Services

Attempts to co-ordinate services at community level can take various forms. An example is the initiative in **France**, *Mission Locales* (Local Task Forces).

Missions Locales

This is regarded as one of the most developed initiatives in the field of 'search and contact', i.e., identifying 'dropped-out', unqualified and unemployed young people and trying to arrange that they are given an individualised training plan which will help them reintegrate into the educational/training system or into employment. The *Missions Locales* were introduced as an experimental measure before they were extended to the entire country. There are approximately 230 *Missions* throughout France and, in areas where there is no *Mission*, the general information, assistance and guidance centres (PAIO) fill in for them. The target group is young people aged 16-25. The aim is to provide information, assistance and guidance through a holistic approach that considers all the needs of the target group. The main fields of activity are employment and training but they are also concerned with culture, recreation, housing, health. They take a partnership approach. The *Missions* also aim to contribute to the development and implementation of local policies assisting entry into employment. The idea is to mobilise all local institutions with responsibility for assisting young people's transition into employment.

Jointly sponsored at national level by the Ministry of Work, Employment and Vocational Training and co-ordinated by a high-level Interministerial Office on the Social and Occupational Integration of Young People, the *Missions Locales* are, nevertheless, firmly embedded in the local political structure. They are co-financed, on a 50-50 basis, by central and local authorities (the commune). The commune provides further support by lending staff and supplying other resources and the mayor of the commune is, ex officio, chairperson of the steering committee of the *Mission*.

Having started with a mainly 'social brief', the *Missions Locales* have increasingly concerned themselves with issues of industry and employment:

- analysing employment markets; surveying firms' labour requirements;
- identifying employment niches; taking part in other experiments such as the *Nouvelles Qualifications*;
- organising meetings between young people and employers; and
- supporting local economic development.

Odense Commune

The SSP project in the city of Odense in **Denmark** is an example of a municipal region tackling the problem of co-operation. This programme is directed at young people in difficulties at school and with the law and was directed at breaking down departmental and technical demarcations which, it was felt, were not useful in dealing with problems of social adjustment which required a holistic approach.

DIJEN

Another example of a community-based programme is the DIJEN initiative in **France**. DIJEN (Dispositif d'insertion des jeunes de l'Education Nationale) is based on the recognition that continuity in the life stages is important and that transition to work is as important a stage as entering school. As a youth integration strategy DIJEN is based on three principles:

- *Guidance and monitoring of young people*: This includes an individual assessment of skills, abilities and motivation.
- *Work study programmes*: This includes alternating study with on-the-job experience. It requires real dialogue between companies and teachers to ensure cohesion between work experience and training programmes.

Placements must be satisfying and help to overcome feelings of failure. The relationship between pupil and teacher is crucial.

- *Individualisation*: This is the establishment of a plan with each pupil that corresponds with his/her aspirations and on an acceptable time scale.

The target group is all young people who have left school in the last year with or without qualifications, whose destinations are not known to the head teacher. The distinguishing feature is that the school is expected to take the initiative in finding and contacting the young person. The objective is the integration of the young person, to be achieved through such measures as assessment, the individualised training plan, alternance-based training and the use of courses and facilities that exist at local level.

DIJEN can draw on a variety of existing measures to provide training adapted to the needs of the young people. These include:

- CIPPA: 10-month 'alternance'-based orientation and catching-up course.
- CEEFI: Follow-on to CIPPA. One-year preparatory work experience and two years of qualifying training infirm.
- MOREA: Repeat-preparation module for those who have failed an exam to assess the problem and correct it.
- ITHAQUE: Short 'waiting-room' course for those waiting to join a mainstream course.
- FCIL: three to nine-month 'alternance' course to prepare for employment.
- ARE: Assistance in job-finding.

(Banks, 1994)

In 1990/1991, an evaluation showed that one-third of the target group had been contacted. In 1993, over 100,000 young people had an assessment interview. About half of these went on to one of the preparatory courses while about 22% went straight into normal initial training.

British Clubs

An approach that has been developed in the UK is the use of 'clubs' as the focus for keeping young people engaged in education and training at the end of compulsory school.

Choices is a service developed in south and east Cheshire to help young people who need extra help to enter training or employment. It is organised as a club and offers:

- a need-led service;
- mentors who conduct in-depth initial interviews and assessment using the young person's National Record of Achievement and may act as advocates for their client with other services as well as providing advice and guidance;
- very flexible provision ranging from training in presentation skills, assertiveness, survival cookery or talks by the police as well as Wordpower and Numberpower (basic skills courses) and specialised services such as speech therapy and counselling;
- inter-agency liaison; more information than formal action but agencies' assessments and solutions may clash.

Another example is the *Prospect Club*, also in the UK, which provides a way of integrating young people with local providers of training and guidance at the end of compulsory schooling. The target group is early school-leavers needing extra help to enter training/employment.

Federal Youth Aid, Germany

The Federal Youth Aid Programme (FYA) in Germany is an instrument through which the Federal Government influences youth services and gives financial support to them. The programme runs experimental programmes in different areas. Each of these focuses on specific aspects of support services for integration into the labour force, such as different target groups (e.g. women, young immigrants).

Support for young people in the transition from school to work has gained importance within this programme, especially since the shortage of training places has raised considerable problems for established training structures. For example, the 1989-1993 phase included projects which:

- aim at and participate in structures for improved co-ordination with other services for the orientation, qualification and employment of young people at the local level;
- try to develop strategies to prevent the segregation of disadvantaged young people into youth service measures.

The aim of these experimental programmes is to give incentives and information to the local youth vocational assistance agencies. Programmes normally include a research element that aims at the evaluation of the projects.

Jugendberufshilfe

On a more grassroots level, the *Jugendberufshilfe* (youth vocational assistance) programme provides community-based guidance through *youth counselling officers* who assist disadvantaged young people with career planning/personal development; *youth workshops* which support activities by young people/adults to prepare them for vocational training, and school social workers who work to provide individual/group counselling, and support in most mainstream schools. School social workers also have the task of helping teachers to develop a more holistic approach in their teaching.

School social workers face many difficulties in their work including:

- a lack of professional acceptance and status; no reserved place in the curriculum;
- confusion on the role and value of social work on the part of the school and, sometimes, also on the part of the head teacher.

2.2.5 Individual Community-based projects

All of the programmes mentioned above are community-based but often system-wide. There are also many individual projects organised at community level. Some examples of these are now outlined.

DROP-IN, Odense

DROP-IN is a project developed by Commune of Odense, **Denmark**. It is aimed at young people of average intelligence who are not involved in serious drug abuse, but whose social background offers few positive stimuli, who have little self-confidence and few resources for conflict resolution. These young people are generally excluded from job opportunities, have typically dropped out of school, or their school results do not qualify them for further education or employment. Some have been expelled from school and have been involved in crime. The project operates from a special workshop and is based on co-operation with small firms in the area. It allows for practical and theoretical teaching as well as collective and individual work. The purposes of the project are:

- To set up individual activity programmes enabling the participants to improve their present situation. These activity programmes are examined at quarterly intervals, partly to establish whether goals have been reached and partly to establish new goals.
- To motivate the young people, through practical

work based on their own plans for the future, to finish their basic education to the entry level for basic vocational training.

- To introduce participants to the basic requirements of trade and industries.
- To make each participant responsible for the work/school, and to make them collectively responsible for observance of rules, norms and requirements.
- To establish routines and a rhythm between home, spare time and work.
- To work with the young people's demands and general view of life.
- To make the young people aware of the activities available in their local area.
- To give each person an idea of the signals they are giving to people around them and the effects that these have.

The long-term goal for each participant is to improve his/her present situation by acquiring a vocational qualification. The project, therefore, includes teaching in basic subjects and preparation for exams in co-operation with Odense Vocational Training Authority.

Mannheim Street Project

This is a social work project run from a shop in the city centre of Mannheim, **Germany**. This acts as a base for the project's street work activities. The project offers counselling on a broad range of problems, and refers young people to special services, schools and providers of vocational education and training. The project functions as a link between young immigrants and their families on the one hand and German agencies like schools, administrative services and companies on the other. Since the project participates in the Jugend-Arbeit-Zukunft (Youth-Labour-Future) programme, launched by the region Baden-Wurtemberg, local co-ordination is mandatory and organised by the youth welfare administration of the city. Because of this, the exchange of information and the co-operation with other providers has been improved. As is typical for the 'street work' method of social work, the young people are counselled at their meeting places in the city.

A special component of the Mannheim project is its emphasis on 'street work' with Turkish youth. This was introduced as one component of integrated regional measures for reducing youth unemployment in the city. The members of this target group have already had successive experiences of social segregation and exclusion and their re-entry into paid labour is seen as

of central strategic importance. But to achieve this aim, a whole range of social and personal support measures have to be brought simultaneously to bear on their situation (OECD, 1995, 117).

Football Coach Training, Odense

This project was established in **Denmark** in 1992 and is directed at young people who have left school without qualifications and who are unemployed. The aim is to tackle the apathy felt by young people when they have been unemployed for a long period. Thus its primary goal is to increase motivation among the young unemployed, using training as a football coach for junior teams as a starting point to encourage them to get either a job or an education. The secondary goal of the football coach project is to help the football clubs in Odense train coaches for the youth teams, which need qualified youth coaches.

The selection of participants is regarded as very important and the project team make a point of having a talk with each young person, before he/she is admitted to the project. It is considered important, too, that participants maintain a normal daily routine, i.e., get up at fixed hours and follow a fixed daily routine, are given responsibility, experience success, increase their self-confidence and get a zest for life.

The overall training plan for the whole course is in two sections. In the first section, participants are trained as a football coach (following regular Danish Football Association courses) and are gradually motivated to search for a job or for training. The second section focuses on identification of and preparation for work or training.

Music is another area where the interest of disaffected young people can be harnessed and, perhaps, extended to other areas. Examples of programmes which use music as a means of integration are Teenager, Sarcelles, France⁸ and various programmes organised by Associazione Idea, Bologna, Italy⁹.

Partnerships between school and businesses

Links between schools and firms have grown enormously in the past decade. Some of these are part of national level developments. An example is a series of agreements signed in Italy in the last few years between the government and the social partners, with the aim of strengthening school-industry co-operation. Another variation is partnerships, often between individual schools and individual or groups of firms.

In **France**, for example, 87% of colleges and 99% of vocational schools are linked with firms. A great many different kinds of activity can result from these links and partnerships but it is notable that over half are with small firms (less than ten employees). The main aims are to give pupils a favourable view of firms; to help ensure that all pupils, especially those in difficulty, get vocational training before they leave school; to help motivate them, and to widen their possible career choices.

Partnerships in Denmark have also taken the form of 'adoption' of the school by a local firm. These are co-ordinated by the local labour market organisations and can take various forms, for example, linking a group of pupils with a company. Companies provide tours and training sessions and illustrate subjects like the organisation of work, factory line production, the company's impact on local society.

In the **UK**, partnership is steadily becoming the means by which all major local educational and training decisions are taken. The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) work with the local authorities, colleges, employers and other training providers to develop a co-ordinated training strategy for areas. School-industry links are so common that 'quality objectives' for such links have been set by the central government. These include:

- the provisions of a week's work experience for all pupils in their last year of compulsory education and another later for those who stay on;
- the provision of a business placement each year for 10% of all primary and secondary teachers, especially head teachers, and of a week's placement in school for at least one employee from enterprises employing over 200 people;
- the endorsement by employers of pupil's work experience achievements in the National Record of Achievement (NRA) and the spread of the use of the NRA in recruitment procedures.

Compacts and Business-Education Partnerships (BEOPS) are two initiatives that have been introduced and supported to strengthen school-business co-operation. Compacts are area-based agreements between firms and schools. They were originally introduced in 62 inner city areas with a high proportion of relatively disadvantaged young people but were later extended nationwide.

Business Education Partnership (BEOPS) are developed by the UK TECs to promote collaboration between school and business at many levels, including primary. The objective of the partnership is to try to raise the aspirations and motivation of young people and to create opportunities for them to acquire vocational qualifications. They are also designed to help teachers, trainers and guidance personnel in schools to develop their skills and to win community and employers' commitment to its work with young people. Partnerships may support teaching in various subjects, provide a channel for work experience and for visits to firms.

Conclusion

The development of community-based measures often arises from the recognition that the school is not a separate entity and that there are many resources in the local area which could be tapped to help the school in its work. Another major concern is the need to co-ordinate the efforts of the various bodies which deliver services for the disadvantaged. Although some countries, for example, Denmark and Germany, do have more developed monitoring systems and mechanisms to ensure a more integrated youth service, the problem of overlap - and even conflict - is universal.

France has several examples of community-based attempts to integrate disaffected young people. The measures described in this paper are the *Missions Locales* and DIJEN project. Both of these are remedial, rather than preventative measures and are designed primarily to integrate disaffected youth into the workforce rather than back into the education system. Partnerships between local businesses and schools are another type of community initiative aimed at facilitating entry into work.

2.2.6 Individual/family based measures

Programmes that involve the family appear to centre on two areas - measures to improve early learning and efforts to monitor and prevent truancy which is often a prelude to leaving school altogether. In addition, there are considerable variations in the normal structures to involve parents in the education of their children. These are all considered in the following section.

Structures for home-school co-operation

In most countries, the participation of families in the organisation of the school is essentially consultative. An exception is **Denmark**, where parents have been

given tasks in the school council and committees which can have major implications for the operation and organisation of the school. As far as their own children are concerned, Danish parents are expected to act in close co-operation with the form teacher to find solutions to any difficulties being experienced.

In **England and Wales**, a 'Parents Charter', published in 1991, explains how parents can be involved in the education of their children and informs them of their right to choose the type of education and school for their child and the right to be informed and to be heard, if they consider that the authorities are not fulfilling their statutory obligations.

In **Italy**, there are parent representatives on the provincial school councils who are consulted on the educational problems of the province. Since 1991, parents can have some influence on the curriculum of compulsory schools: they can require the introduction of *progetti formativi di tempo lungo*, various activities which complement and enrich the teaching programme and which can be offered to pupils from different classes. There are also many local actions aimed at developing individual parental participation in the education of their children, particularly in pilot projects intended for young people in difficulty.

In **France**, the report of the Council of Education Areas of 19 April, 1990, stressed the importance of promoting work with local residents to ensure real family involvement in the school and in the education of their children. Parents are involved in the guidance of their child and they have a right of appeal in the event of disagreement with the conseil de classe, for example, with regard to repeating.

In **Germany**, as well as being represented at area and Länd levels, parents, along with teachers and pupils, are also part of the 'school conference' which operates at school level and deals primarily with matters of school organisation and teaching, the organisation of school events, the adequacy of the text books, marking systems and educational and disciplinary measures. These arrangements are directed at parents in general. The involvement of marginalised parents or parents of disaffected pupils requires a different kind of effort.

Work with parents is one of the elements funded under the GEST programme in the **UK**. This work is usually based on the acknowledgement that much pupil absence is parentally condoned, that parents have a

key role (as well as a legal duty) in ensuring good attendance, and that schools may have some influence in securing parental co-operation in this matter.

The evaluation of the GEST programme describes some of the ways in which schools attempt to involve parents of low attenders and disaffected pupils. These include providing opportunities for parents to meet, discuss common problems and/or have opportunities to develop their skills as parents. Most local educational authorities involved in GEST projects send parents information and guidance about school attendance. Some also provide drop-in advice or hotlines for parents in difficulties over their children's attendance. Other initiatives include organising workshops for parents, providing teaching staff with training to deal with parents, releasing class teachers to do home visits, arranging for parents to be accompanied to meetings, tackling problems caused by poor punctuality by employing a parent to meet and settle latecomers, and ensuring that a humane, community-based person is there to react sympathetically and informally in a context where a more formal approach might alienate parents (Department of Education and Employment, 1996, 31-33). Much of the work with parents is based on the belief that early intervention and prevention work is better in both educational and cost-effective terms. Consequently, much of it is based in primary schools.

Early Learning Measures

Projects to foster early learning are usually developed in the context of educational disadvantage and, thus, are a more indirect method of preventing early school-leaving. Some examples of early learning projects designed to involve families and the community in the education of young children are outlined below.

Reading Pals, Kickstart, Manchester

The *Kickstart Reading Project* has been developed to raise reading achievement in Manchester schools. It was based on the recognition that a holistic approach involving the family and community was necessary if any real progress was to be made. Initially the project focused on a reading intervention programme for six - and seven-year -old pupils and was implemented through training for teachers, classroom assistants and parents. As the programme developed the idea for a mentoring scheme was conceived as a way of giving effective support to both pupils and adults who wished to develop their basic literary skills.

Reading Pals aims to raise standards in literary skills through a partnership between mentors and learners.

A key objective is to increase the mentors' knowledge of the process of reading in order to develop skills in supporting learners in literacy activities. Through the *Reading Pals* course, which is accredited by Manchester Open College Federation, both the mentor and the learner are able to gain credits. Mentors are students, parents, volunteers and secondary school pupils who are confident in their own reading and writing skills. Learners can be adults, secondary school pupils or primary school pupils who need support with their reading and writing skills.

The Partnership in Education Project (Strathclyde, Scotland)

The initial objectives of this programme were to:

- create a supportive total environment to sustain the young child's growth and learning by activating local resources to achieve this;
- confirm the status of the parents as the child's prime educators, enhancing parents' understanding of their role in relation to the child's long-term development and stability;
- develop new working relationships between all statutory services and voluntary groups in an area, maintaining the child's effective learning through parent/child partnerships; and
- raise the educational levels of local children in an area.

Once partnerships had been set up with parents and professionals, programmes of work were formulated making use of such facilities as pre-school environments, primary schools, community buildings and local libraries. Activities included outings and family activity holidays organised jointly by local professionals and parent groups. The method of operation was based on constantly analysing and learning from experience. The principle was to develop parents' and children's abilities to solve a particular problem and to plan the most suitable forms of organisation to promote the group's progress. This meant that groups had to be small and function on a fairly regular basis.

One of the reasons for the success of this method was the freedom and flexibility it allowed organisers to adapt their strategies in line with how groups and local partnerships were developing. Similar early interventions, based on the same principles, have been replicated in a number of other areas (OECD, 1995, 67).

Türkische Kinder und Mutter (Gelsenkirchen, Germany)

The project is located in a recession-hit mining town in western Germany. A large number of Turkish families and, more recently, Lebanese refugees live there alongside German families that are themselves facing socio-economic difficulties. The project's basic purpose is to prepare Turkish children for school entry but it also includes activities aimed at mothers (literacy courses, German language courses, domestic science courses and leisure activities).

The children are given a year of pre-schooling in the primary school itself. Their mentor subsequently helps with their transition to first-year primary school by working together with the class teacher during the first few months. Mothers sit in on lessons so that they can more easily understand the learning processes. Sessions are also arranged for the purpose of encouraging parents to provide their children with educational support.

The emphasis is placed on the intercultural dimension of relationships both inside and outside the school, the idea being that, in the process of integrating immigrant families, the host society must also learn to be less categorical about cultural norms and assumptions. The practice of questioning the validity of beliefs and prejudices about members of another culture is, therefore, considered essential in order to arrive at a balanced view of the situation and avoid proposing ethnocentric and completely inappropriate intervention schemes. The project attempts to end attitudes of resignation and apathy and restore to women both the desire and the power to take action with regard to their own lives. Another aim is to change the host society's views of specific cultural traits which frequently mask the similarities that exist between all human beings.

It also clearly sets out the limitations of intervention in general and of this type of intervention in particular: an attempt can be made to reduce the effects of risk factors but if the situations in which the target groups for this intervention are ensnared do not change (and this is the crucial point as regards all of the problems mentioned above) the success of certain strategies over a longer period will very quickly be jeopardised (OECD op. cit. 68).

North West Riding Home-Visiting Project, UK

This UK mother and child project had four aims:

- to study the educational environment of the young child and the mother-child relationship;

- to study the child's stages of development in play and learning;
- to discover with the mother any problems in the child's progress;
- to work out with the family and community an acceptable programme to overcome the difficulties.

The project made five basic assumptions:

- it is possible in a non-school setting to change attitudes in such a way that they foster school success;
- the educational environment which influences achievement includes the home, the school and the community;
- the potential for change is greater during the child's early years;
- at this stage mothers feel they play an important role in their children's lives and early intervention could help them sustain this role;
- in a small close-knit community, the influence of community norms or mother's attitudes to education had to be accepted and built on rather than be rejected in favour of new, possibly conflicting, ideas.

To avoid any family feeling neglected, the home-visiting programme was offered to every family in the catchment area of one school whose pupils were disadvantaged. The programme ran for eleven months with 20 children aged between one and a half and two and a half years at the start of the programme. Mothers were interviewed about their child's development and ability. Home conditions were assessed independently by child psychologists. A control group of children matched for age, gender and father's occupation was drawn from a similar mining community. The children in the experimental group were visited every week and were presented with games to develop concepts and skills. Mothers were always encouraged to become involved with the exercises (Caul, 1993).

Policies to monitor and prevent truancy

In the NFER study of UK schools with innovative practices to combat early school-leaving, one of the three areas covered is that of maintaining and monitoring pupil attendance. The summary results of NFER's audit of measures in this area are reproduced below (Kinder, 1995).

Maintaining and monitoring pupil attendance in school

At whole-school level, examples of initiatives which dealt directly with attendance issues included:

- the production of written policies (with dissemination to parents);
- the adoption of IT registration systems;
- ways of restructuring the school day, either informally (for instance, by instituting a *Breakfast Club* starting at 8a.m.) or formally (by reducing lunch time);
- the introduction of reward systems for attendance (and sometimes punctuality).

New school-based roles to deal with attendance issues included a wide range of practices and personnel. On general attendance monitoring, it was common for a staff member to be given responsibility for the introduction and maintenance of the school's IT registration system. Research roles on general attendance issues were also evident. These might include analysis of the school's statistical data on absence rates; using interview or survey techniques to look into causes of and attitudes towards non-attendance among pupils or parents; and gathering staff views on IT registration system issues. Attendance-related roles might also operate with a general preventative or support focus. Here, examples included intensive liaison with feeder or partner primary schools; playing a key role in induction programmes for Year seven pupils (including involvement in summer holiday provision); and the identification and monitoring of pupils with potential attendance problems.

Liaison work with parents and the community also featured as a special role for school-based staff, and might involve setting up support groups, networks and workshops for parents offering advice, the opportunity to discuss problems, or specific input on aspects of parenting skills or family issues. Liaison to secure the involvement of other agencies, such as police, community workers and social services, was also a feature of some attendance-related school-based roles. In addition, pupil counselling or befriending roles, offering direct interaction with individual pupils on issues of attendance, were adopted. These might be undertaken by specially appointed staff such as a school counsellor, welfare assistants or GEST project secondees, who, essentially, were non-teaching. The counselling role could involve either operating in a responsive capacity (supporting any pupil who chose to come forward) or proactively working with

individual pupils targeted as having attendance-related problems. Alternatively, existing staff were said to perform this counselling/befriending function unofficially - examples here included the registration secretary, and the school nurse. Some schools were also developing the use of senior pupils in this befriending role, or, in one instance, using them as 'mindes' to accompany post-registration truants between lessons.

However, counselling roles could also mean undertaking direct remediating action, such as negotiating reduced re-entry timetables; offering learning support in class; providing behaviour modification programmes; and liaising and making contracts with parents.

Beyond individual work with non-attending pupils, other roles involved working with groups of pupils and undertaking behavioural and relationship-focused activities such as fostering self-esteem and team building exercises. Such work might also include an alternative curriculum dimension (off-site vocational projects, trips, etc.). These approaches were also often used in dealing with pupils showing disruptive behaviour. A further variation was to run special small-group withdrawal units, offering support for pupils to continue with aspects of their existing curriculum, as well as to resolve their attendance difficulties.

The final dimension of attendance-related strategies involved external support or agents. Here, public monitoring systems such as, attendance hotlines and *Truancy Watch* were all used to encourage local people to report and challenge pupils who might be out of school without authorisation. Providing information about school holiday dates, uniforms, etc. were also seen as a way of building up good relations with the community and raising the profile of attendance generally. An example of external surveillance which was regarded as a valuable support was an information and support service for non-attenders in a shopping precinct, with links with local schools.

Other examples of external support included the use of theatre-in-education teams working on the theme of non-attendance. The possibility of introducing and debating the causes of truancy was seen as a particular advantage here. Finally, the regular work of the Educational Welfare Service would naturally be included in this category of attendance-related external support. Here schools often raised the issues

of the benefits of having sustained continuity in their allocation of welfare officers and the degree to which the EWO and school agreed on purposes and actions. (Kinder, 1995)

GEST Truancy and Disaffected Pupils Project

The GEST programme for the 1996-1997 period also emphasises support for disaffected pupils projects. It is envisaged that about two-thirds of the available funding will be allocated to those projects, one-third to truancy projects. The objectives of this part of the GEST programme are to help Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to improve attendance levels for children of compulsory school age at designated schools with poor attendance records or particular problems with truancy; to improve the provision for disaffected pupils, including those in pupil referral units, to assist reintegration of excluded or other disaffected pupils into mainstream schools; and to promote and disseminate good practice.

The programme will provide support for the following kinds of measures:

Truancy:

- identifying and disseminating good practice in promoting regular attendance;
- investigating unauthorised absence;
- improving home-school liaison;
- improving the quality of pastoral care;
- encouraging greater parental and community awareness;
- improved monitoring of attendance;
- training of Education Welfare Officers.

Disaffected pupils:

- identifying and disseminating good practice in promoting good behaviour and discipline in schools;
- the establishment and training of LEA support teams, or the development of existing teams;
- schemes for involving parents and/or developing multi-agency approaches to help schools improve the behaviour of disruptive pupils;
- helping to reintegrate excluded or other disaffected pupils into mainstream schools;
- whole-school action on bullying: in the designated schools or at others where there is a particular problem;
- improving curriculum coverage;
- the installation of information technology facilities designed, for example, to provide enhanced learning opportunities for pupils;
- improved support for individual and home tuition.

Also in relation to the GEST programme, the Department for Employment and Education has published and disseminated a leaflet on school attendance for parents outlining duties and responsibilities. A recent evaluation of the programme concluded that there was little evidence that specific approaches to improve attendance were in themselves more effective than others. Rather the quality of the process made the difference. Thus, although the use of information technology in monitoring attendance has become fairly widespread in recent years, in projects involving the introduction of information technology, it was the quality of the planning, training and analysis of data that made the investment cost-effective (or not), and accepted (or not) by members of the school community.

The evaluation also noted that, while pupils reported 'boredom with lessons' as one of the main reasons why they did not attend school, there was insufficient attention in GEST projects to curriculum development. In this regard the evaluators suggest that 'bridge courses' for 'hard core' non-attenders offer an important model for the future, particularly in reconnecting young people with the education system (Department of Education and Employment, 1996).

Anti-Truancy Measure in Spain

A recent initiative to reduce truancy in **Spain** is the Social Workers' Intervention in the School Psychopedagogical Services, Local Authority of Valencia - Generalitat Valencia 1995. This programme was carried out in compulsory schools and involved co-operation between teachers, social service volunteers and school psycho-pedagogical services. It is a global action involving family, child and school.

The programme distinguishes between levels of absenteeism (high, medium and low) and aims, mainly, at the lowest level where it is hoped greater success can be achieved. It also aims at reducing the number of 'high' level truants by increasing their level of attendance without expecting to eliminate their truancy altogether. The method adopted involved very close monitoring of attendance and continuous and stringent collection and analysis of data about truants, their family background and friendship patterns in relation to truancy. The organisers also tried to ensure that teachers were well informed about family background and developments and to facilitate parent/teacher contact through the organisation of co-ordination meetings.

Intervention focused on parental involvement. When a pattern of truancy was established, parents were invited to the social centre to have an interview with the social worker and the teacher, if possible. If this did not produce a drop in truancy, it was followed up by a home visit by the social worker. If this also failed to produce results and parents did not respond, the case was referred immediately to the social services (Generalitat Valencia, 1995).

Brandenburg report

In **Germany**, the Länd of Brandenburg has recently published a two-part report on disaffection with school, truancy and dropping out. The problem of early school-leaving in Brandenburg is compounded by the erosion of the Länd's former ideological commitment to equal access to education and the consequent high expectation that all pupils should finish compulsory school.

The interventions already adopted and the further measures proposed in the report focus on the notion of creating school as a place for living and learning via project-oriented forms of teaching to provide a broadly based education. The 'school as a place to live in' project was first launched, on an experimental basis, in 1994. Pupils in the selected project school have some autonomy in the physical organisation of the school and its surroundings and are expected to contribute their own ideas about how school should operate. Individualisation is built into the curriculum though the report reiterates the Länd's commitment to the development and maintenance of group norms and solidarity. Respect for the individuality of the student is a recurring theme. At the same time, Brandenburg has introduced fairly draconian punitive measures for truancy - demotion/transfer to other classes and hefty fines on parents (Landtag Brandenburg, 1996).

Individualised support in curriculum and training

Various individually oriented interventions introduced towards the end of the compulsory school period to encourage the young person to compete his/her schooling/training have been identified. Measures such as the availability of individualised curriculum and of individualised monitoring and guidance reflect the trend towards individualisation in education in general and can be seen as ways of 'empowering' young people by giving them the chance of making their own informed decisions about their future.

The idea of associating the young person, including those at risk, in the search for a solution to their needs

is very much in fashion in the **UK** at the moment. The introduction of youth credits is a case in point. Youth credits are available mainly to 16- to 17-year-olds who are leaving the educational system. The scheme enables young people to purchase training in the mainstream system. In effect, youth credits are vouchers which show a money value, typically, of at least £1,000. They represent an entitlement to train to approved standards and can be presented to an employer or training provider in exchange for an approved course of training. The stated aims of youth credits are to:

- motivate the individual to train and also to train to higher standards;
- encourage employers to invest in training;
- establish an efficient market in training provision.

Youth credits are designed to offer incentives to training providers and to young people to gain more and higher-level qualifications. They are also seen as a way of enabling TECs to focus the training of young people on sectors which meet the local labour market needs. Research in the pilot stages of the scheme showed that, while two-thirds of young people did not think the credits had affected their training in any way, more than half reported that they 'had made me want to find training and employment' and that they 'have made me feel in charge of my training'.

An individualised focus on recognition can also be seen in the UK in the **National Record of Achievement** (NRA) which is intended to provide a nationally recognised document which individuals can use throughout life as a record of their achievement and to plan their personal development. Research in 1992-1993 found considerable support for the NRA as a source of information about school-leavers among colleges, training organisations and employers.

In **France**, an individualised training curriculum, the *Crédit Formation Individualisé* (CFI), is targeted at young people with minimal or no vocational qualification. It is a three-stage individualised training plan based on modular units:

- assessment and profiling of all aspects of the student, including health;
- catching-up/preparatory courses;
- on-the-job training contract or 'alternance'-based course leading to a recognised qualification.

One attraction is that it offers a 'one-stop' contact point with all the services available in the employment area. Originally, the upper age limit was 15 years, but this has been extended. When it was introduced in 1990, there was a high take-up of this measure. Numbers have declined slightly since then because the backlog has been reduced and because the number of young people leaving school without a qualification in France has fallen.

Individualised training curricula arrangements in **Denmark** take the form of the FUU Open Youth education scheme. The target group is young people who are about to drop out of existing mainstream programmes. The FUU is a two to three-year cycle composed of existing education/training modules (mainstream as well as others) or specially designed courses. The programme is based on an individual education plan aimed at developing general/personal qualifications and motivation for continuing in the mainstream education system or entering the labour market. The education plan is designed by the young person in collaboration with an educational institution.

The scheme takes account not only of skills learned during the course but also of voluntary and other activities, including periods spent abroad. Depending on the content of individual training programmes, credits may be transferred to later mainstream education.

Personal/social development

Although personal and social development are very often part of the measures provided by the education and training systems, public interventions that focus exclusively on these aspects are relatively rare.

An exception to this are the Information and Motivation courses, Informations und Motivationslehrgänge, provided in **Germany**. The target group is young people and young adults at risk of not entering work or without full vocational training. Their objective is to increase readiness to enter vocational training, employment or vocational preparation courses. The courses are in the form of modular learning units with a focus on coping with personal problems, the development of social skills, and choosing an occupation.

Outside the formal mainstream system, the focus on social and personal development is more common. An example is the *Janus* programme currently being developed by the INAB, in Rostock, Germany. The

target is 15- to 20-year-old drop-outs or students who are at risk of criminality, drug addiction or of active racism because of difficulty in school, unemployment or because they are immigrants with integration difficulties. The primary aims of the programme are to strengthen self-confidence, to provide help in finding jobs and to improve social and professional skills through multi-cultural contacts between students and teachers. The *Janus* programme also has a strong regional focus. One of its objectives is to strengthen the student's identification with his/her home region. At the same time, it aims at increased mobility between regional and European job markets. It also focuses on immigrants and the problems of immigration and racism.

From a vocational point of view, *Janus* aims at developing skills in several areas, for example, in woodwork, brickwork and in paint. From the point of view of employment, it focuses on restoration work and has a strong ecological bent. As a Youthstart programme, it has a European dimension and aims at European and nationwide dissemination of results. A further aim is the development of transnational training modules.

A more established programme is that of *Drifters* in Niederursel, Germany. The term "drifters" refers to young people whose problems are not really pathological in nature or socially aberrant but who have failed up to now to find their way into the world of work. The programme offers residential training to a dozen 17- to 24-year-olds for a 10-month period. The young people selected for the programme suffer from severe psycho-social problems ranging from a history of drug and alcohol abuse to anorexia and attempted suicide. They are described as having in common a fundamental disorientation and 'homelessness'. They often come from broken homes but not necessarily from poor or disadvantaged families.

The aims of the orientation year at Niederursel go far beyond vocational orientation and learning, using work experience mainly as a means for personal development. The work experience offered is concentrated on kinds of work which allow for a high degree of personal identification with the activity and its results. Therefore, craftwork and tasks with aesthetic quality dominate. The facility is run by a staff with different qualifications: one is qualified in both joinery and therapeutic pedagogy; the others provide career-related training courses and artistic seminars.

There is a rigorous application procedure for places on the programme, including a detailed handwritten curriculum vitae, a lengthy orientation talk, a trial week and a fee of DM 1,700 for the 10-month period. This self-motivated decision is seen as 'the cornerstone of the orientation process'.

On completing the programme, some participants return to the education courses from which they had previously dropped out, and others begin vocational education and training related to the experience and orientation that they acquired on the programme. The facility tries to keep contact with those who have left, and also tries to give limited additional support to them if needed, if accepted, and if within the means available. However, if a participant regresses to their earlier situation, there is no further commitment on the part of the programme.

Horus is another Youthstart project based in the **UK** and aimed at school-leavers who are 'disengaged' from the educational system. They have no qualifications and are undecided vocationally. They are likely to have one or more of the following: learning difficulties, behavioural disturbance, poor motivation or disability. They could achieve more given the right course and approach.

The programme is organised around the development of six skill areas:

- lifeskills, with particular reference to responsible behaviour and personal autonomy;
- communication skills;
- numeracy skills;
- information technology;
- self-management; and
- enterprise.

The programme includes the creation of materials which offer a bridging course to school-leavers. Interactive CD ROM materials, designed to motivate the target group, are being developed. The materials, like the programme itself, do not focus on particular jobs or types of vocational training but are designed to attract young people to go on to further training or into work. The programme puts considerable emphasis on group work.

Hessen region

Another example of a motivation course has been developed by the International Association for Social Work and the Educational Board of the Hessen region

and the Nuremberg Federal Institution for Work in **Germany**. It is directed at 16- to 24-year-olds who have missed out on between two to four years of education. The course uses an action-based pedagogical approach to encourage self-analysis of perceptions of career. On the other hand, it operates very strict rules as regards certain aspects of behaviour, for example, punctuality, tidiness and organisation.

Individual/family-based measures - conclusion

All the countries considered here have structures to ensure parental involvement, mostly on a consultative basis, in the running of their children's schools. However, the aim of these is to ensure parental representation. On an individual level, parents have certain rights, as well as duties, with regard to their children's education but, from the point of view of early school-leaving, the problem is one of how to involve more marginalised parents whose children are educationally 'at risk'.

The current policy emphasis on prevention means that many strategies include early learning measures to counteract educational disadvantage as soon as possible. Most early learning measures try and involve parents, particularly mothers, in the child's education.

Policies to prevent truancy are many and range from the use of information technology to *Truancy Watch* programmes. In addition to truancy, there is the issue of parentally condoned absence. This is another area where the need to inform and involve parents becomes of crucial importance.

A final area which is covered in this chapter on individual or family-based measures is the development of individualised curricula or individualised support in dealing with the curriculum. Individualised measures which affect young people at the end of their formal schooling include the UK's *Youth Credit* scheme and the *French Credit Formation Individualisé*. The report also identifies some projects aimed at the personal and social development of disaffected young people. Increasing motivation is the explicit aim of some individual projects. In more systematic measures, however, this is usually one aspect of an overall programme.

2.3. CONCLUSION

The recognition of early school-leaving as a problem with long-lasting socio-economic effects is common to all the countries considered in this report. The

measures adopted to deal with the problem, however, vary widely. Some are preventative and some remedial. Target groups range from pre-school children to young drop-outs, from parents to teachers to local businesses. Some measures are introduced at a system level. Others are organised on the level of the school or the community while yet others are directed at individual children and/or their families.

There is a discernible difference in style in the approaches adopted in the various countries. This reflects both overall policy and the way the educational and training system is organised. Thus, in **Denmark**, educational policy is holistic and comprehensive. Measures are worked out at central level, piloted in a limited number of areas and then extended countrywide. There is a relatively small number of well developed system-level measures and the main instrument used to encourage children to stay on in school - guidance - is an integral part of the compulsory education system. The centralised nature of the system is balanced by assigning administration to local levels and by the relative autonomy that teachers have to organise teaching jointly with their pupils.

In the **UK**, by contrast, although some measures have been introduced and implemented at national level (e.g. youth credits) measures to combat early school-leaving are often on a project basis. Particularly notable in this regard is the nationally organised Truancy and Disaffected Pupils element within the Grants for Education Support and Training Programme. This funds projects organised at LEA or school-level on the basis of applications made to the Department for Education and Employment. The result of organising interventions in this way is that there is a great variety of measures and a great deal of experimentation in what is being done.

Many of the measures introduced in the UK in recent years have been directed at prevention. **France** and **Germany**, on the other hand, are like **Denmark** as far as the centralisation of policy development is concerned. The emphasis in measures they adopt at national level would appear to be, primarily, of a remedial nature and designed to 'salvage' young people who have already dropped out of the educational system and to ensure that they are integrated, as far as possible, into the workforce.

One of the difficulties encountered in carrying out the research was the difference in the levels of information available from and about the different countries. There

was not much information available for this review on initiatives to combat early school-leaving in **Spain** and **Italy** but what was available would suggest that, in Italy in particular, nation-wide measures focus on the encouragement of disaffected youth who have already left school to acquire qualifications, through, for example, employment incentives to employers to take them on a type of apprenticeship basis. A similar pattern can be identified in Spain although the recent reform there has also tried to introduce more preventative measures, such as an adequate guidance service in the compulsory education system.

From the point of view of early school-leavers in Ireland, several issues arising from the research are of relevance.

The first is that the response to the problem in other countries has given rise to a wide variety of measures, at least some of which should provide a stimulus for policy development here. At the same time, despite the current emphasis on the need to disseminate good practice, differences in the organisation and the ethos of education systems mean that measures can rarely be transferred from one country - or even from one level of intervention - to another without adaptation to local conditions.

In addition to organisational factors, cultural differences and the acceptability in Ireland of solutions proposed elsewhere also need to be considered. An example is the type of alternative support provided by the Danish production schools. While these are seen as an innovative and successful way of dealing with disaffection in Denmark, they might not find great favour in Ireland where memories of residential (and essentially punitive) 'industrial' schools might lead to a much more negative perception of this type of measure. Similarly, levels of monitoring, registration and identification systems that are quite acceptable in countries like Denmark and Germany might not be tolerated, much less rated as a positive intervention, in Ireland.

A serious drawback to effective transfer is the lack of evaluation, particularly of measures introduced at educational system or national level. There is a considerable amount of material on national policies, their development, goals, etc. and some statistics on take-up rates but, while intuitive judgements and assessments abound and do give some idea of the results of intervention, there is little systematic analysis of the relative success of the various measures adopted. Experimental projects and pilot schemes are

more likely to be evaluated than national policies. Examples of these are in the NFER and GEST evaluation studies on UK interventions referred to in the report.

Despite this drawback, there are certain conclusions to be drawn from interventions elsewhere. One is that the prevention of disaffection is increasingly being considered as more effective, in educational and cost terms, than attempts to remedy its effects. This trend is reinforced by the emphasis on inclusiveness (rather than, for example, the pursuit of excellence) in educational policy. Preventative measures can be introduced as early as the pre-school stage in which case they can also act as a means of involving marginalised parents, while measures such as educational and vocational guidance are concentrated in the last stages of the compulsory school period. In the case of symptoms of individual disaffection, truancy and absenteeism, measures that provide staff and resources for immediate ('same day') intervention have been found to be particularly effective at prevention.

A systematic and holistic approach is a characteristic of the Danish system which is considered to be the most successful of the countries examined here in terms of low levels of drop-out and of school 'failure'. This contrasts with the much more fragmented approach adopted in Germany where a variety of remedial measures are not considered to have proved particularly effective in dealing with the problem. On the level of the school too, a 'whole school' approach, rather than compartmentalisation of the issue, is considered to have a better chance of success.

The experience of the alternance (between school and work placements) system of initial vocational training in both Denmark and Germany underlines the importance of defining clear objectives that are relevant to the target group. This system was highly regarded in both countries but ran into difficulties when declining employment made real training places hard to come by. The introduction of various types of simulated work placements was not successful and showed very clearly that young people who are disaffected from school curriculum which they regard as irrelevant are most unlikely to become 'reconnected' by participating in schemes which are obviously of the 'marking time' or 'get them off the streets' variety. One of the central findings of the GEST evaluation was that the quality of the intervention was a crucial factor and that high quality involves the identification and pursuit of relevant objectives as an aspect of overall planning and organisation.

Preventative measures and individualised attention on any basis requires more and different resources than are often available to schools. Teachers need time to pursue these measures and serious policy decisions have yet to be made to determine the balance in teacher training between the need to equip teachers to impart knowledge and to provide other forms of support to their pupils. There is also the question of the role of support personnel, personnel from agencies outside the school and their relationship with the teaching staff, particularly within the context of the development of an integrated or 'whole-school' policy. Developments in the activities of the educational welfare officers in the UK and the various kinds of youth services in Denmark and Germany provide useful examples in this regard.

Finally, there is the issue of the level at which interventions are introduced. Some measures, such as guidance facilities, can be introduced at national level. On the other hand, there is little doubt that experimental projects can introduce imaginative measures that can have an immediate effect at a local level but cannot always be translated into system-level interventions. For example, the role played by a parent hired to provide an informal contact with marginalised or potentially marginalised families in a local project is totally changed if that role becomes institutionalised at a national level.

The advantages of flexibility that localised projects undoubtedly have can be offset by their short-lived nature or by the on-going need to find funds. Nevertheless, the formula of using national funds to resource local projects would appear to be well adapted to the Irish situation given that Ireland has already adopted a variety of experimental and localised measures. Of particular interest in this regard is the focus on the individual school and the policy of allowing selected schools to develop their own initiatives in a local community context. Such a policy does not pretend that any school can eliminate the socio-economic inequalities that underlie educational disadvantage, but it does recognise that schools have a potential role to play, that they can vary widely in terms of effectiveness and that the effective school can do much to counterbalance the outside forces that lead to early school-leaving.

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Footnotes

- 1 For an account of the definitions of school failure, early school-leaving and of rates of drop-out in various countries see Eurydice. (1994). *Measures to Combat Failure at School: A Challenge for the Construction of Europe*. Eurydice. Brussels: 40-44, 1994.
 - 2 In France, the use of assessment as the basis for more individualised learning started in the early 1980s and became generalised from 1989. Assessment of each pupil's basic skills on entry to college has enabled teachers to adapt the curriculum to the pupil's individual needs and arrange remedial teaching where needed.
 - 3 The Scottish National Vocational Qualifications in Scotland.
 - 4 Communication, Sandra McWilliams, Stranmillis College, Belfast.
 - 5 'Disadvantage', in the context of school-leavers, is defined by law in Germany. Under paragraph 40c of the Employment Promotion Law, the category of 'disadvantaged' young people includes secondary general school-leavers who leave school without a school-leaving certificate; former special school pupils; young foreigners; and socially disadvantaged young people (for example, those being supported by welfare payments directed at young people; former drug addicts and ex-detainees; young resettled persons; young people suffering from dyslexia; and young people diagnosed by the school psychological service as 'exhibiting conspicuous behaviour') (Banks, op. cit., 139-140).
 - 6 In Germany, the Assistance of the Disadvantaged Programme has a major role in helping young people in difficulty. It consists of two parts: Non-plant Vocational Training, i.e., full initial training, leading to a recognised qualification, for disadvantaged people in non-plant institutions; Training Secondary Assistance under which disadvantaged young people who have an in-plant training receive additional remedial instruction/tutoring and socio-pedagogic guidance. (See Banks op. cit., 92-97).
- In addition, many local and regional measures exist in Germany for the support of training of disadvantaged people, often with the support of the Länder. Some of these are based on the approach of linking training with employment and are often aimed at young adults who are unemployed and unqualified. The programmers may offer a range of temporary employment, vocational orientation and be designed to lead on

to a recognised vocational training. They may embody measures such as:

- individualised employment and training plans;
 - learning by doing the practical work experience in companies;
 - support of practical learning by the teaching institutions;
 - participating in selected course modules in the training institutions;
 - preparation for taking an 'external trade test' in a recognised trade.
- 7 'Alternative' is a much used word in education and training. It is used to mean several quite different, though related, things:
- at a different level, for example, alternative courses established at a level lower than the normal and perhaps unrecognised as a result, though realistic for some young people;
 - under different conditions, for example, normal or adapted courses provided in a regular school but under special conditions, e.g. supported by remedial teaching;
 - in a different, non-traditional, non-school, style of provision, for example, production-based learning provided in an alternative-style institution, under special conditions;

While many interventions to prevent early school-leaving fall into one or other of these categories, this section refers, largely, to the third.

- 8 Communication, Jean-Luc Salmon, Sarcelles.
- 9 Communication, Eugenio Bortolini, Bologna.

3.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1.1 *Structure*

This paper is divided into three sections. This first section provides some basic information on the research evidence on early school-leaving. The second section details approaches to tackling early school-leaving in other countries and the third section discusses the appropriateness of these interventions to Ireland. This report draws mainly from North American examples.

3.1.2 *Defining Early School-Leaving*

There are no universally-agreed definitions of early school-leaving or 'dropping-out', nor, indeed, of the related concept of truancy. The definition of a drop-out proposed by Morrow (1987) is generally accepted:

"A drop-out is any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by 15 days of consecutive unexcused absences, who has not satisfied local standards of graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrolment in another educational institution."

Thus, while the definition and identification of an early school-leaver should be simple, in practice it is anything but clear and consistent. Local standards for designating early leavers, for example, may differ in terms of the period of absence required before classifying a student as a drop-out. Furthermore, there are considerable differences between countries in what is regarded as local standards of graduation as well as the categories of institutions regarded as acceptable for students to continue their education. Because there is a lack of agreement on the meaning of 'drop-out', the calculation of drop-out rates is also problematic. Morrow (1987) noted that three factors influenced the mathematical computation of a drop-out rate:

- the *time frame* during which the number of students who drop out is counted;
- the range of *grade levels* selected to represent the pool of possible drop-outs;
- the *accounting method* used - average daily attendance or average daily enrolment.

(Average attendance refers to the numbers actually attending school, while average enrolment refers to the number of students on the register of the school, without taking attendance into consideration.) Extending the time frame, limiting the range of grade levels to the levels where most dropping out occurs,

and using average daily attendance (instead of enrolment) will all serve to increase the estimate of the numbers dropping out of school early.

3.1.3 *International Estimates of Early School-Leaving*

Two distinctly different types of drop-out rates are reported in the international literature. The first is the *event rate*, that is, the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing a certain level of schooling. The second is the *status rate*, which provides a measure of the entire population of a given age who have not completed a certain level of schooling and who are not currently enrolled.

In the United States, the 1990 event drop-out rate for twelfth grade students (equivalent to fifth year post-primary) was 4% (National Education Goals Panel, 1991). At the same time, the status drop-out rate for the same group of students was 12%. As might be expected, there is considerable variation in the number who drop out in different school districts. Rumberger (1987), for example, noted that the drop-out rate for 63 high schools in the Chicago area ranged from one in 10 (10%) to almost two-thirds (62%).

A study of high schools in Ontario, Canada, (Lawton, 1989) indicated that the annual drop-out rates (event rates) in seven schools had increased from 10.6% in 1984 to 15.3% in 1987. Furthermore, there is evidence that where secondary school education is not well established the drop-out problem is of significance even at lower levels of schooling. For example, in India the indications are that about 35% of students drop out during the first two years of secondary school, while the drop-out rate at the end of four years exceeds 70% (Seetharamu & Ushadevi, 1985).

3.1.4 *Consequences of Early School-Leaving Labour Market Experiences of Early School-Leavers*

Research in Ireland indicates that early school-leavers often experience difficulty in transferring to the world of work (Breen, 1991, NESF, 1997). An examination of the association between early school-leaving and unemployment in other countries indicates that Ireland is by no means unique in this respect and also reveals some interesting features about this relationship. The indications are that in Ireland, the UK and the United States, early school-leavers have unemployment rates that are relatively greater than in some other countries (OECD, 1995). Among the population aged 25-34 years of age, the level of unemployment was nearly six

times greater among early school-leavers in these countries than in many others. By contrast, however, in Switzerland, for example, there seems to be very little association between level of education (or early school-leaving) and employment prospects.

A report published by the OECD (1995) presents comparative information on the number of unemployed early school-leavers in 1992. Unfortunately, the study only includes information on those who left school after they had obtained their junior secondary qualifications (i.e., the statistics exclude students who left with no qualifications). The study found that approximately one-third of those who left school with only their Junior Certificate or equivalent in Ireland (35%), Spain (34%) and the United States (37%) reported that they were unemployed, while in France, over half were in this situation.

It is also interesting to look at the international data on early school-leaving and relative earnings from work (comparable Irish data on this issue is not available). As might be expected, the average earnings of those who leave school without qualifications is substantially lower than for those with qualifications. On average, those without qualifications earned one-tenth to a quarter less than those with qualification, but with some variation around this average. In Portugal and the United States, the income difference was in the region of a third (35%), while in Finland it was less than one-tenth (7%).

Two additional points concerning the OECD study are worth noting. First, the effects of early school-leaving on income did not vary by gender in any of the countries covered in the survey. Second, the findings of the survey indicate that some of the disparities between the earnings of early school-leavers and those who stay on in school can be explained by differences in the working hours between these two groups. The indications are that those with educational qualifications tend to work more hours per year than those with lower levels of education or no qualifications. This may be due to the fact that those with educational qualifications find it easier to get full-time employment.

Social, Personal and Health Consequences of Early School-Leaving

While the most obvious consequences of early school-leaving are in terms of the labour market, it may also affect other important broad areas of personal and social functioning. A study conducted by Hannan and

O'Riain (1993) found that leaving school without any qualifications or with a junior secondary qualification only had a profound effect on future 'life-chances' including independent residence, marriage and family formation. This study was based on a sample of individuals who had left school in 1982 and who were interviewed five years later in 1987, then aged, on average, 22 years.

A number of studies have been carried out in North America on the mental health implications of early school-leaving. One example of such a study is the work undertaken by Kaplan, Damphouse and Kaplan (1994) in which 4,141 young people were tested in seventh grade and again as young adults. The scales of psychological functioning included:

- (i) a 10-item self-derogation scale;
- (ii) a nine-item anxiety scale;
- (iii) a six-item depression scale and;
- (iv) a six-item scale designed to measure coping.

The results of the study indicated a significant damaging effect of dropping out of high school on mental health functioning as measured by these scales. Furthermore, this effect was evident when controls were applied for psychological mental health, as measured at seventh grade. In addition, the effect of dropping out of school was evident even when controls were applied for gender, father's occupational status and ethnic background.

3.1.5 Factors Associated with Early School-Leaving

The literature on factors associated with early school-leaving can be grouped into several broad categories as follows: demographic/family-related; peer related; school factors; economic factors; and individual factors.

Of the factors known to be associated with early school-leaving, the effects on socio-economic status are perhaps the best documented. As in Ireland (Hannon and O'Riain, 1993), the international literature in this area has found that drop-out rates are higher for students of families of low socio-economic status (SES), regardless of how SES is measured (see Kolstad & Owings, 1986). Particular family-related factors associated with early school-leaving include low educational attainment by parents, single parent families, and the absence of learning material in the home (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Of particular interest is a study by Astone & McLanahan (1991) that examined the relationship between family structure (single parent versus traditional families) and early school-leaving in the United States. The study found

that living in a single parent family or with step parents resulted in young people being more likely to drop out from school.

Two comments on these findings are appropriate. First, it is noteworthy that the factors associated with dropping out are the same as those associated with the broader concept of educational disadvantage. Second, it is important to establish the extent to which socio-economic influences are mediated by other factors such as low expectations and aspirations (Kellaghan et al., 1993). The same point can be made in relation to family structure. A study by Astone and McLanahan (1991), for example, found that the effects of family structure on early school-leaving were mediated by less encouragement and less attention and help with homework in the single parent and step-families compared to 'traditional' families.

The influence of peers and friends has not received much attention in research on the issue of early school-leaving, although there is evidence to suggest that many of those who leave school early have friends in a similar situation (Rumberger, 1987). Part of the reason for the failure to give due attention to this topic is the belief that such friendships are a result of the common disaffection with school. However, it is of interest that, in the Irish study by Morgan (1995a), having friends who intended to apply to go to college was one of the strongest predictors of intention to apply. It is also of interest that Morgan's study showed that this was especially the case with close friends, rather than with others who were simply in the same class.

School-related factors associated with dropping out of school have received considerable attention. It is well established that poor academic achievement as measured by grades and test scores is associated with early school-leaving (Rumberger, 1987). Also of importance in the student's decision to leave school are features of the school itself including its organisation, leadership and teachers. School rates of drop-out are found to vary widely even when controlling for differences in student population, thus suggesting that school-related factors exert a powerful influence on a student's decision to leave school.

It is also of interest that when early leavers are asked about the reason for leaving school, they often cite school reasons such as disliking school or being expelled or suspended (Rumberger, 1987). The pattern of reasons is somewhat different for girls and boys. Being suspended is a much stronger motivation

in the case of boys while pregnancy, marriage and family reasons are quite important in the explanations advanced by the girls (Finn, 1989).

Economic factors also influence students' decisions to leave school. In a study in the United States, it was found that about one-fifth of those who left school early did so because they felt they had to work to help themselves or their families (Rumberger, 1983). In Ireland, it has frequently been suggested that economic factors play an important part in the decision to leave school.

A number of individual factors are also associated with early school-leaving. Young people who leave school early are known to have low self-esteem and less sense of control over their own lives (Ekstrom et al., 1986). There is also a strong association between early school-leaving, attendance problems, disruptive behaviour and delinquency. A number of studies (summarised by Rumberger, 1987) have demonstrated a relationship between non-attendance at school and subsequent drop-out. Other studies have shown a relationship between disruptive classroom behaviour and delinquency and early school-leaving (Ekstrom et al., 1986). Early school-leavers were also found to have low occupational aspirations.

3.1.6 Learning and Early School-Leaving

Early school-leaving and functional literacy problems

Considerable attention has been given to the number of people who have functional problems of literacy in contemporary society (Ireland, 1992). The green paper on education drew attention to the fact that the incidence of illiteracy as classically defined is low in Ireland. However, it also drew attention to the:

"alarming rate of functional illiteracy ... individuals who fall within the lower and middle range of literacy scales and who ... are unable to participate fully in the economic and civic life of today's advanced nations" (212).

The extent of the association between such functional literacy problems and early school-leaving has been demonstrated in the work carried out by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit on the National Child Development study in the United Kingdom (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1987). This study is based on data gathered in a longitudinal study of a cohort of 20,000 children born in 1958. When interviewed in 1981, about one in eight (13%) of respondents reported having basic skills difficulties,

particularly in writing, reading and numeracy. The study also found a strong association between experiencing these problems and early school-leaving. Almost all (93%) of those who report having problems in basic skills had left school at the earliest opportunity. Furthermore, nearly three-fifths of those with literacy problems had no educational qualifications of any kind.

The study found that many respondents experienced problems relating to literacy at work and were more likely than the general sample to be unemployed and not to have had any training since they left school. It is also of interest that the problems of these early school-leavers were evident from their years in primary school and that their level of absence from school was significantly higher than those who went on to complete school.

Second Chance and Adult Education

An important part of the context of early school-leaving has to do with developments in other areas of the educational system. For example, early school-leaving might not be considered a major problem if a high proportion of people who leave school early later returned to complete courses and obtain qualifications. However, the indications are that, while there has been an increase in the numbers undertaking adult education in Ireland, few early school-leavers seem to be returning to the education system to gain qualifications.

A review of the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) funded by the Department of Education concluded that there was a lack of co-ordination between the different courses on offer, particularly those referred to as 'basic education' (Kavanagh and Morgan, 1994; Morgan, Martin, Kavanagh and Quigley, 1994). The review also found that courses tended not to be interrelated, which is necessary if students are to progress from 'basic education' to qualifications.

The report noted that the number of students who are involved in acquiring formal qualifications (in all schemes taken together) is small compared to the number who leave school without qualifications in any given year. The report concluded that there was no coherent plan as to how second chance and adult education would develop despite the heavy involvement of so many government departments and other agencies (statutory and voluntary).

A recently published study by Morgan, Hickey and Kellaghan (1997) was concerned with literacy skills in the Irish adult population, in the context of an international study in eight countries. From the point of view of the present work, it is especially striking that three-fifths of those who left school without educational qualifications were at the lowest level of literacy performance (level 1). Roughly one-quarter of those who left with junior secondary qualifications were also at level 1. In contrast, only about one-tenth of those who had completed the Leaving Certificate were at this level, and only about 1% of college graduates.

It is also of interest that the study by Morgan et al. revealed a very strong effect of early school-leaving on literacy activities. More than four-fifths of the people who left school without any qualifications indicated that they never used a public library. This was also true of two-thirds of those who left with Junior Certificate qualifications but of only half of those who had completed the Leaving Certificate course. There were similar differences in writing activities. More than two-fifths of those who left school without qualifications said they never wrote anything substantial (a page or more), while this was true of only one-fifth of those with a Leaving Certificate.

Because literacy skills have an effect that encompasses a wide range of activities, it is interesting that early school-leavers tend to be less involved in a range of other activities that seemingly do not centrally involve reading and writing. These include involvement in sporting activities, as well as participation in community and voluntary organisations. The difference in frequency of involvement between early school-leavers and others is quite striking (Morgan et al. 1997, 89).

Another striking finding from the survey was that early school-leavers were much less likely to participate in adult education/writing. It is worth mentioning that participation in adult education/training was low in Ireland in comparison to other countries. However, college graduates were six times more likely to have attended a course in adult education/training than was the case with those who left school without qualifications. In the case of those who had completed the senior cycle the difference was almost as great; these were nearly four times more likely than early school-leavers to have been involved in adult education.

Thus, while it is acknowledged that the level of activity in adult education is increasing rapidly, considerable progress has still to be made before early school-leavers will be adequately catered for in this forum. Furthermore, while it is difficult to quantify the relative costs of keeping a young person in school as opposed to providing adult education programmes for them later on, any estimates suggest that completing school is by far the least expensive.

3.1.7 Conclusion

This section of the report has provided background information on the numbers of people who leave school early, the possible reasons why they do so and the likely effect on their future life-chances of leaving school without qualifications. It is apparent from the research cited above that, for many, failure in the education system can preclude negative life experiences such as long-term unemployment and inability to gain independence. The research also indicates that programmes to address this problem must reflect an understanding of the complex dynamics that underpin the decision to drop out of school. These principles are also very relevant to the development of interventions to tackle early school-leaving in Ireland.

3.2 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

3.2.1 Introduction

This section of the paper focuses on what other countries are doing to combat early school-leaving. The programmes are outlined under four broad headings: system; community; school; and individual level interventions.

3.2.2 System Interventions

Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI)

Probably the most influential initiative in transition education is the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) which was launched in the UK in 1984 and is now a major influence in the education of 14- to 18-year-olds (Dale et al., 1990). Like so many other programmes, the TVEI was not concerned specifically with meeting the needs of individual students but was intended to bring about a complex set of changes including the following:

- change the traditional academic hierarchy by shifting scientific and technical subjects to the centre of the curriculum;
- make school experience relevant to the world of work and the actual requirements of industry;

- promote an experiential pedagogy which more accurately reflected the problem-solving situations of the real world; and
- develop 'appropriate' attitudes and values among young people by promoting enterprise values.

The TVEI has been extremely successful in terms of numbers involved and is perceived by its exponents to have made a valuable contribution to reforming education (Dale et al., 1990; Shilling, 1989). There is an extensive literature on the effects of TVEI, much of it published through the Open University. However, most of the literature on TVEI is concerned with the effects of the scheme on the education system with little attention given to the effects it has had on individual students. One of the consequences of the initiative is that the power of local education authorities has declined considerably. It has also proved to be a catalyst for changes in the curriculum, methods of teaching, and assessment of pupil performance (Dale et al., 1990). What does not seem to have been given attention is how it affected different kinds of students, their rates of participation in the initiative and completion of schooling.

Evaluation of Transition/Work Experience Programmes

Despite the enthusiasm for transitional education, there seems to be very little stringent evaluation that would inform decisions about its effects. However, in the United States, there has been a systematic evaluation of one such programme, the Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE), but it is of questionable relevance. The central aim of this programme was to integrate school learning with lifeskills learning as well as work experience through work experience in the school and the community. One of the aims of the evaluation was to identify the characteristics of quality learning experiences (Owens, 1982). What emerged was that students found most valuable the experiences of encountering challenging tasks as well as the opportunity to take responsibility.

More recently, an American study by Arum & Shavit (1995) examined the effects of vocational education with particular regard to college attendance, prospects of employment as well as school completion. Their research found that vocational education was associated with a reduction in the likelihood of attending college and subsequently of finding employment in the professional and managerial sectors. However, such education was also found to have reduced the risk of unemployment and increased their chances of employment as skilled workers. They

concluded that, for students who were unlikely to go to college, vocational/transition education might act as a safety net that reduced the risk of experiencing unemployment.

Despite the lack of evidence, it seems reasonable to suggest that vocational education will form an important part of programmes that are tailored for potential early school-leavers.

The California Peninsula Academies

In 1981, a school district in the San Francisco peninsula set up academies within schools with the specific purpose of preventing early school-leaving. Each academy is a school within a school and those who attend are normally aged between 15 and 18 years. Academy students at each grade take most or all of their classes together (i.e., language, mathematics, science and social studies). A critically important feature is that each academy focuses on a particular occupational sector such as health and hospitals, or the computer industry. Representatives of local employers in the relevant occupational field participate in the scheme, for example, through one-to-one student mentors (Dayton et al., 1989).

An evaluation of the academies, which included a control group, indicated that the drop-out level in the academies was in the region of half that of the comparison group (Stern et al., 1989). While there are problems with using control groups, particularly in that those who volunteer for the academy may be more ambitious than those in the comparison group, similar evaluations have been generally supportive of the contribution that academies can make. It is less clear which feature of the initiative is making the contribution to this decline in dropping out. However, it is noteworthy that the academies have a broader curriculum and also have an element of work experience.

Findings on 'Dropping Out' from Australia

Australia experienced a dramatic increase in the numbers completing secondary school over a 10-year period starting in the early Eighties. In 1981, two-thirds (66%) of students in Australia failed to complete secondary school; by 1992 this figure had dropped to about one-fifth (20%). In fact, this sharp decrease in the numbers leaving school early exceeded a target set by the Australian government which was that, by the early Nineties, only one-third of students would leave school without senior secondary qualifications.

Studies have indicated that this sharp decrease in early school-leaving is due to a combination of pull and push factors. A decline in the number of jobs available to early school-leavers coupled with changes to the curriculum to make it more responsive to the varying abilities of students has made staying in school a more attractive proposition for pupils. The social welfare system was also amended to give extra financial assistance to low-income families with children still in high school. Increased access to higher education also helped to reduce the number of early school-leavers (Williams and Carpenter, 1990, Lamb, 1994).

Linking Secondary Schools and Employers: The Japanese Experience

During the course of the literature search for this study it proved impossible to locate studies that examined initiatives to tackle early school-leaving in Japan. However, it is worth pointing out that the Japanese educational system has strong links with employers in that vacancies in firms are filled by students nominated from specific secondary schools, rather than through an open market competition as is the norm in other countries (Rosenbaum et al., 1990).

3.2.3 School-Community Interventions

Restructuring Urban Schools: The New Futures Experience

The term 'restructuring' has reverberated through educational circles in the United States over the last decade. Rather than denoting a single form of reorganisation, the literature on restructuring reflects four different themes:

- Concern with the experiences of students in school, with the quality of the curriculum, and student support in non-academic areas;
- concern with the professional lives of teachers and the new roles and responsibilities that define teachers' work;
- emphasis on management and leadership in schools and new mechanisms for making decisions that involve parents and others in the community;
- finding ways to draw on community resources in trying to enhance the chances of disadvantaged youth achieving success in school.

This form of restructuring includes attempts to integrate and co-ordinate health and social services for children and families, programmes for youth unemployment, incentives and mentoring for higher education, and involving the private sector in the curriculum and academic experience of students.

The *New Futures* initiative, which operated in four districts in the United States (Little Rock, Arkansas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Dayton, Ohio; and Savannah, Georgia) is an example of restructuring. The specific focus of the *New Futures* programme was on the various symptoms of failure, specifically: high drop-out rates, low academic achievement, teenage pregnancy and unemployment.

In particular, the initiative aimed at providing new institutional strategies for many of the organisations that serve young people at risk of experiencing failure. The programme included a specific emphasis on attitudinal change, to try to ensure that the schools' focus would not be on 'problem kids' but on situations that gave rise to problems for these young people. Other key features of the *New Futures* project are outlined below.

- The co-ordination of services including setting goals and offering strategies for youth who were regarded as being 'at risk'.
- Providing some 'at-risk' young people with a caring adult who could offer support during the middle school years, together with access to an array of services within the community.
- A case management strategy that was intended to produce more co-ordinated strategies as well as gathering information on key outcomes including achievement, drop-outs, attendance and suspensions.
- Teacher empowerment procedures to free them from centralised bureaucracies.
- Flexibility in scheduling and grouping students.
- Training and staff development procedures.

A qualitative evaluation of the programme, drawing on observations, interviews, conceptual analysis and insights, argued that if students' alienation and disengagement were to be overcome, far-reaching institutional reforms rather than supplemental 'add-on' programmes were needed (Wehlage et al., 1992). On this basis, the evaluation proposed five criteria for judging the extent to which schools were restructured, as follows:

- the degree to which the programme stimulated school-wide changes that fundamentally affected students' experiences;
- the degree to which it led to the development of positive and supportive social relations;
- the degree to which changes in the curriculum generated higher levels of student engagement;

- the degree to which the programme led to greater responsibility and accountability by teaching staff; and
- the degree to which the interventions brought new additional material resources from social services, colleges, businesses and other organisations from the private sector to support school reform and enrich student experiences.

The conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the interventions were similar across all school districts which took part in the programme. The evaluation found that the educational initiatives had not stimulated the restructuring of schools in their efforts to better serve at-risk students. For the most part, interventions were supplemental and left the basic activities of the schools and students unaltered. There was very little change in the relations between staff and students; curriculum and instruction left students largely unengaged in serious academic work; new roles for teachers failed to materialise; and schools were unable to find new ways of collaborating with other institutions (both public and private) to strengthen their educational resources.

Despite these disappointments, the evaluators concluded that *New Futures* had succeeded in bringing together most of the major stakeholders concerned with youth in the community. Important dialogue had developed and the inadequacies of the interventions had stimulated a debate about how schools would need to change to become more effective. However, it is evident that school culture can impede the introduction of new programmes that require core changes to beliefs, practices or social relations. The possibility of this resistance has to be acknowledged in the development of new programmes that attempt to tackle the variety of problems associated with early school-leaving.

Service Integration in Communities

One of the problems which young people who are at risk of dropping out of school encounter is the diversity of agencies and services which deal with particular aspects of their problem. In many countries single-issue policies and single-issue solutions have dominated social and educational policy (Kirst and McLaughlin, 1990). As problems are 'discovered', there is a patchwork of solutions, specific responses to specific problems without regard for the aggregate situation. In the case of Ireland, where many services are still at a developmental stage, a young person who has had a relatively minor problem involving substance abuse may deal with any of the following agencies:

- *Educational professionals* including teachers, home-school liaison teachers, guidance counsellors and educational psychologists;
- *Gardaí* including juvenile liaison officers, community gardaí and possibly probation officers;
- *Health professionals* including doctors, psychiatrists and addiction counsellors.

With such compartmentalisation, young people can easily fall between the cracks of the various administrative definitions of the 'problem'. The fragmentation of services can also lead to a failure to recognise the linkages between various problems and an oversimplification of the nature of a person's situation. Below, examples of co-ordinated services for young people in North America are given.

- The *New York Community Schools Programme* in which approximately 20 schools were funded to undertake activities such as early intervention with families, providing services for a range of offerings to the community (e.g. tutoring, vision testing, counselling), providing a community health education focus in relation to substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, providing a school-based food co-op, and workshops for parents.
- The *New Jersey Human Services* project in which 29 schools linked with social services to offer a comprehensive range of services including employment counselling, training and placement, drug and alcohol-abuse counselling, family crisis, and academic counselling as well as recreation services.
- The *Cities in Schools* project which involves a network of local schools in 16 states in the United States. It provides a support system for 'at-risk' students with case-management teams that includes social workers, employment counsellors, recreation leaders, health professionals, volunteers and others.

Despite the widespread interest in co-ordinated community services, there have been few in-depth evaluations of the success of such programmes (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). However, there are indications that, despite the enthusiasm for co-ordination, these projects encounter the ubiquitous problems of professional training differences,

communication gaps, resources constraints, authority and 'turf' issues, as well as legal and leadership problems.

Some of these difficulties were identified in an evaluation of social services integration in six states in the northern United States (Syracuse University Research Corporation, 1971). Although this evaluation is now 25 years old, a number of its conclusions are still interesting. First, they found that expectations of cost savings were unfounded; indeed, the radical changes in the structure and delivery of services actually lead to increased costs. Second, the early project encountered a range of time-consuming legal problems from restrictions on the use of facilities to problems relating to client confidentiality. Finally, social service integration also sometimes led to what the evaluators termed 'bureaucratic immobility' which was caused by leaders of the various agencies fearing a loss of autonomy.

The experience of the amalgamation of the welfare, health, and education services in secondary schools in the UK is also worth considering (Johnson et al., 1980). As this evaluation makes clear, teachers were normally accustomed to a sense of boundary between school, home and other social service agencies so that it was difficult to introduce new care-giving norms to the institution. The changes were also hindered by teachers not fully understanding the roles of other service providers and the help to be expected from them, and by an undervaluing by other service providers of the contribution of the school towards the larger welfare of pupils (Johnson et al., 1980, 95-97).

3.2.4 School-Based Interventions

Extracurricular Activities and Early School-Leaving

On the whole, studies examining the effect of extracurricular activities on preventing early school-leaving have not been experimental or interventionist in nature. However, there are a number of longitudinal studies which have examined the effects of such activities on academic success generally and early school-leaving in particular and which have managed to demonstrate an effect over and beyond the effect of other factors. Given the recent volume of work in this area, such studies merit considerable attention in any intervention that might be considered.

One of the first studies that examined the association between academic performance and educational aspirations and attainment was a study by Spady (1970) which compared the impact of extracurricular

participation, achievement, motivation and grades while controlling for socio-economic status and intelligence. The results suggested that extracurricular involvement had by far the strongest association with curricular success and realisation of educational potential. High school students without a major extracurricular interest, when compared to their involved counterparts, were much less likely to have college aspirations, and, if they did, to fulfil them.

Of more immediate interest is the finding that over 60% of high school drop-outs were not involved in any extracurricular activities during their high school years (Beacham, 1980) - a level that is far higher than any estimates of the overall number not participating in such activities. There is also evidence linking this finding with the effects of school size on early school-leaving. American research has found that students from small high schools are somewhat less likely to drop out than those from larger schools and that this may be because small schools are better at getting students involved in various kinds of extracurricular activities than larger schools (Rogers, 1987).

A recent study by McNeal (1995) sought to establish whether certain kinds of extracurricular activities were more influential than others in preventing dropping out. Drawing on a database of over 20,000 high-school students, it was found that participation in certain kinds of activities, especially sports and fine arts, significantly reduced the likelihood of a young person dropping out, whereas participation in academic or vocational clubs seemed to have less effect. McNeal's study also found that the beneficial effects of athletics and fine arts remained even when crucial factors like race, socio-economic status, gender and ability were controlled. This finding is one of the strongest and most consistent of those emerging in the literature.

Organisational Effects of Schools on Dropping Out

Until recently, relatively little attention was given to the effects of schools as institutions on dropping out. An influential study was that of Coleman and Hoffer (1987) which found substantial differences in drop-out rates between Catholic and public schools in the United States. This study found that, even after different student characteristics are taken into account, the probability that students will drop out is substantially less in Catholic schools than in the public sector. Furthermore, the study showed that Catholic schools were especially effective in catering for 'at risk' students who have had a history of discipline problems.

There has been considerable debate since these findings were published as to whether the effects of Catholic schools on dropping out are due to school or community factors or some combination of the two. Coleman and Hoffer suggest that the beneficial effects on dropping out have their origins in the community organised around parish churches, which brings parents and students together, promoting greater face-to-face interaction across the generations and thus creating a kind of 'social capital' that facilitates the work of the school. This assumption is questioned by Bryk and Thum (1989) who note that this explanation is based on the assumption that Catholic schools draw their student population from a single parish. In fact, only about one in eight (13%) of Catholic high schools are attached to a single parish with the vast majority drawing from diverse geographic areas. Bryk and Thum suggest that the origin of the differences may lie in school organisational factors.

Which school organisational factors are likely to be most important in bringing about beneficial effects? Based on a data set with over 30,000 students and over 1,100 high schools, Bryk and Thum (1989) identified two school factors as being particularly important in causing drop-out. The first of these was a high level of internal differentiation within schools. In other words, in those schools with strong differentiation of programmes and strong emphasis on rigid organisation (e.g. rigid streaming), there was a greater percentage of students dropping out. Second, in those schools where teachers held high expectations of academic performance, there was a tendency for fewer students to drop out and also, indeed, a better overall academic performance.

The Effects of Ability Grouping (Streaming) and Grade Retention

It is difficult to say with certainty how many schools in Ireland organise their classes by ability grouping (streaming or tracking). The research on this issue is limited and schools seem reluctant to give details of their practices. However, evidently streaming is the norm in the voluntary sector for post-primary schools and is quite widespread in the community/comprehensive sector. Given that this practice is widespread, it is appropriate to consider what is the evidence regarding these effects on school-leaving, and especially early school-leaving, particularly among disadvantaged children. It is also worth mentioning here that the majority of young people who were identified as being at risk of early school-leaving in the earlier pilot study were in the lower streams (Morgan, 1995,b)

The effects of ability grouping and grade retention on early school-leaving is well researched (Gamaron and Berends, 1987; Slavin, 1987). The evidence indicates that assignment of students to self-contained classes according to ability (i.e., the classical streaming approach) does not have an effect on the overall average achievement of students. However, the actual stream to which students are assigned does have an effect on achievement even when prior achievement is taken into account (Gamaron, 1987). For those in higher streams, streaming has the effect of leading to greater academic performance above and beyond the student's initial ability; for those in lower streams, placement in a lower stream causes them to do rather less well than their ability would warrant. Therefore, the overall net effect of ability grouping is to widen the gap between high and low achievers.

It should be stressed, however, that not all forms of ability grouping have these effects. There is evidence that grouping for specific subjects (reading and mathematics) can be beneficial (Slavin, 1987). If grouping is for one or two subjects only, if students remain in heterogeneous classes for most of the day and if group assignments are frequently reassessed, then ability grouping can have positive outcomes. The effects described in the paragraph above occur with the most rigid (and most commonly found) streaming.

A third important finding is that streaming affects students' social relationships with one another. Research indicates that most of a student's friends are found in the same track and that peer relations affect what goes on outside the classroom. The evidence summarised by Schwartz (1981) indicates that high stream students frequently support and help each other with their class work while low stream students tend to make derogatory remarks about those who make academic efforts and compete against others in the same track.

The evidence on peer relations and on the widening of the gap between low and high achievers suggests that streaming may be one factor that contributes to poor achievement and alienation that, in turn, brings about a situation where young disadvantaged people may be likely to leave school. There is no suggestion that this is the only or the major school factor affecting dropping out. Rather, it may be an influence among several others.

The association between grade retention and dropping out from school is also worth considering. Specifically, it has often been found that students who

are required to repeat a grade are more likely to drop out. The extent to which there is a causal connection in this association was investigated by Roderick (1994). Her work used event history analysis to explore whether, and how, grade retention influenced dropping out among youths in an urban school system. Her results indicated that repeating a grade from kindergarten to sixth grade was associated with a substantial increase in the odds of dropping out, even after controlling for differences in background and attendance. A particularly important influence is being over age for a given grade. Roderick found that students who ended sixth grade over age experienced substantial disengagement during middle school with nearly a quarter dropping out and those who remained in school reported a significant decline in attendance. She concluded that being over age for the grade was a major factor mediating the effect of grade retention on dropping out.

School Interventions Targeting Risk Factors

Research findings on programmes focusing on the risk factors shown to be related to early school-leaving are worth particular attention in this review. The *Success for All* project, developed in Baltimore, United States, is designed to prevent students in primary school from falling behind in their studies. The rationale of the programme is that, once students fall behind, they find it difficult to catch up with their studies because of poor motivation, lower self-esteem and behavioural problems that can undermine the effectiveness of even the best remedial programme.

There are several components to the *Success for All* programme, including:

- an innovative reading programme, involving heavy use of 'real books' as well as a variety of activities to foster language development;
- a family support team providing parenting education and help with behaviour problems;
- a programme facilitator who oversees the work and helps in decisions on management of the instruction as well as on the services available; and
- a programme of in-service training for teachers.

An evaluation of the *Success for All* programme found that, over the four years of the study, the *Success for All* schools did significantly better than a control group in relation to reading proficiency, attendance in school and retention (Madden, et al., 1993). The control group against which the programme was compared was composed of classes in which extra funding was

used to reduce class size and to provide 'pullout services' to low-achieving students. (Such 'pullout services' are similar to remedial education in the Irish system.) Nevertheless, while the programme was successful in tackling those factors that contribute to school failure generally and early school-leaving in particular, the actual effects on school-leaving will only be demonstrated in years to come.

Outward Bound Programme in New York

There are several new programmes at both primary and post-primary levels that attempt to change dramatically the curriculum in ways which make it relevant to all children's aptitudes as well as to social and personal development. The *Outward Bound* programme is an example of such a programme, the central idea of which is to create experience-based education, including learning by doing, bringing students' academic work to life and providing a bridge to self-insight. As part of the *Outward Bound* programme students learn to explore the idea of a 'group' while on a back-packing trip where they have to wrestle with the idea of what it means to work together. As the activities in such trips are group-dependent (including navigation, food preparation and tent construction), students are required to interact with their peers in ways in which they may not have done previously.

Herdman (1994) reports that almost all (90%) of the high-school classes from New York communities involved in an *Outward Bound* programme graduated, where the norm had been to drop out before the end of high school. However, beyond these kinds of figures, and despite the large number of programmes of this type, evaluations of their effectiveness have not been published. Nevertheless, there would seem to be considerable potential in these kinds of developments.

Roots and Wings Programme

Roots and Wings is also aimed at those factors that are particularly associated with early school-leaving. There are two main objectives:

- to guarantee that every child, regardless of family background, will achieve the highest standard in basic skills such as reading and writing (the roots); and
- to engage students in activities that enable them to apply everything that they learn so that they can see the interconnected nature of knowledge (the wings).

There are a number of indications that this programme is having considerable success (Slavin et al., 1994). One of the outcomes has been to help to keep children in the mainstream and to minimise the need for long-term remedial or special education services. The long-term effects of this programme in relation to numbers dropping out from school have not yet been established.

3.2.5 Interventions at the Individual Level

Approaches Based on Social and Personal Skills

Many programmes that have developed from a social and health education background are also relevant to the prevention of early school-leaving, for example, the *On My Own Two Feet* programme. Other programmes focus on factors known to be associated with early school-leaving in particular groups, for example, teenage pregnancy and truancy. Examples of such programmes include:

- The *Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects* (YIEPP) in the United States guaranteed jobs to 16- to 19-year-olds enrolled in school if they stayed in or returned to school and met specified attendance and performance records (Hofferth, 1991). In addition, the programme offered a part-time job during the school year to youths who had not yet graduated from high school and who were still enrolled in school. The evaluation of the programme has shown that the number of students completing high school under this scheme was substantially greater than what might be expected with this group. Furthermore, the evaluation found that the girls in the group were somewhat less likely to become pregnant and their employment rates were substantially enhanced (Hofferth, 1993).
- The *Teen Outreach* programme, also based in the United States, focuses on teenage pregnancy and the association with school-leaving. The intent of this programme is to teach a set of life-management skills which encourage students to learn to set goals for themselves. The programme seeks to do this by focusing on reducing school suspension, course failure, school drop-out, as well as pregnancies, through a combination of non-directive small group discussion and by providing a volunteer service experience in the community. Only one evaluation of this programme seems to have been reported (Hofferth, 1993).

In this evaluation, the *Teen Outreach* students began the programme at higher risk of negative behaviour than a comparison group of peers. Despite these pre-existing differences, the experimental group ended the year with lower rates of school failure and lower rates of leaving school than did the comparisons. In addition, participation in the programme was significantly related to lower pregnancy rates.

These programmes illustrate the association between various kinds of problem behaviour and dropping out. They suggest that success in one kind of target domain may have a snowball effect on other kinds so that the net beneficial effect may be greater than predicted for any one domain.

The North Carolina Intensive Protection Supervision Project

The North Carolina Intensive Protection Supervision Project (IPSP) deals primarily with young people (under 16 years of age) who are unlawfully absent from school, but also includes young people who are beyond the disciplinary control of their parents, or who have run away from home. In legal terms, these are referred to as 'status offenders' on the grounds that their offences stem from their age rather than what they have done. Until 1974, status offenders in North Carolina had been subject to commitment to state training schools and even to local jails. Due to a series of legislative changes at federal and state level, this situation was reversed and in 1987 a community-based programme with intensive protective supervision was established for this population of juvenile status offenders.

The intervention began by assessing the social competence of the young person, following which a plan was drawn up to meet the needs identified. Consistent school attendance, improved family interaction and a reduction of anti-social behaviour are examples of the types of objective set in the plan. A central feature of implementing the plan was intensive monitoring by a counsellor.

It is also worth noting that the project was designed to allow a thorough evaluation by randomised design (Land et al., 1990). Randomised designs are considered strong evaluation tools as they ensure the experimental and control groups are equivalent with respect to such characteristics as age, gender, background and previous histories (Rossi and Freedman, 1989). The results of the evaluation

indicate that the IPSP procedures worked well (Danek et al., 1990; Land et al., 1990).

Compared to a control group, the procedures were more effective in reducing the overall probability that the young person would be charged with a delinquent act and the intensive protective supervision treatment seemed to have the effect of reducing the probability of new delinquent offences for those with and without previous records. Furthermore, the evaluation found that the programme had a positive effect in reducing school truancy.

The evaluation concluded that, while these programmes are resource intensive (because of the supervision component), the combination of individualised programmes with the supervision seemed to enhance its effectiveness.

Truancy Interventions

Interventions to prevent truancy are of particular interest to this review as truancy has been shown to be the single strongest factor associated with early school-leaving (Rumberger, 1987; Finn, 1989). As the recent review indicates, interventions for truant behaviour have targeted three areas: the individual, the family and/or the educational institution (Bell et al., 1994).

One method, aimed at the individual student, is self-management as illustrated in the work of Neel and deBruler (1979). This work was based on two underlying premises:

- if students are given specific attendance requirements, they can be given the responsibility to fulfil these requirements; and
- since school is of great value to each student, the right to attendance should be earned.

Based on these two premises, chronic non-attenders in an alternative junior high school were given specific requirements that had to be met in order to attend school. If these criteria were not met, students were denied admittance until they were met. Results showed a substantial reduction in the number of students missing classes following the introduction of the self-management system.

A second approach to truancy intervention focuses on the family of the truant. In some cases, this has simply involved attempts to achieve more parental involvement in children's education. For example, in some experiments, social reinforcement of the truant's parents has served to increase attendance. Sheats and Dunkleberger (1979) conducted a study where

chronically absent students were assigned to either a 'principal-contact' group or to a 'secretary contact' group. The results showed that parental contact by the school, regardless of who contacted them, improved attendance among students.

Other types of intervention are those that are targeted at the school system. A number of schools districts in the US have revised policies with a view to decreasing truancy rates. A review by Duckworth (1988) found that the most successful policies to reduce truancy included the following components:

- installing a system of monitoring and recording absences;
- creating an alliance with teachers and parents committed to reducing absences;
- maintaining consistency in imposing penalties for repeat offenders; and
- having patience and perseverance in implementing the policy.

Research indicates that monitoring of attendance is a crucial feature in the success of such programmes (Bell et al., 1994)

3.2.6 Key Issues

This review of interventions has highlighted key issues which should be considered in relation to the development of programmes to tackle early school-leaving in Ireland, particularly:

- Greater linkages between school and work may help to enhance the quality of the student's school experience and help to prevent early school-leaving and reduce the level of youth unemployment. The problems experienced in trying to export the German dual system to Third World countries should be noted in considering it in the Irish situation. In addition, the lack of formal links between employers and schools, the different traditions of voluntary and vocational schools, and the cost implications should also be considered.
- Radical curricular reform also has an important role to play in tackling early school-leaving. A broadening of the curriculum to be more inclusive of non-academic subjects could reduce student alienation. An increased emphasis on extracurricular activities may also help to reduce early school-leaving. Greater emphasis on personal and social development in schools may also be valuable.
- While this review has highlighted difficulties with inter-agency co-operation, the benefits of such co-operation should also be stressed. In relation

to the Irish situation, as many of the services in this area are currently developing (for example, the home-school-community liaison service) this is an opportune time to dovetail new services with existing ones. It should be noted that imposed co-operation from top-down is unlikely to be successful.

- There is a need for programmes to develop at both the general level (which apply to all students) and at a specific level (to cater for individual categories of students). Students in general would benefit from efforts to enhance self-esteem, give them an opportunity to experience success, attendance monitoring and a broader curriculum. Particular groups of individuals may need specific attention, for example, those who are vulnerable with regard to crime and/or teenage pregnancy.
- Community-based approaches may have more potential in Ireland in addressing early school-leaving than is indicated in this review. This review of the literature has drawn heavily on North American initiatives, where community initiatives are not as well developed as in Ireland.
- In efforts to apply the lessons to be learned from other countries, it may be more appropriate to apply the principles and concepts underlying the interventions rather than the particular way in which the programme was implemented.

Three general points also emerge from the review of the literature.

- It is evident that no single intervention is likely to solve fully the problem of early school-leaving. The evidence reviewed above shows that, while various initiatives contributed at the system, community, school and individual level, none were capable of providing a comprehensive answer to the problem of early school-leaving.
- There is a considerable overlap between problems of early school-leaving and educational disadvantage. Many of the successful initiatives outlined above were concerned with preventing early school-leaving and also with addressing general matters of educational disadvantage.
- While most evaluations did not include an account of the cost of the programme, the scale of many of the successful interventions is such that they must have required considerable resources. Thus, there are grounds for suggesting that efforts should be made to spread that expenditure through involvement of the private sector, voluntary bodies and the co-ordination of existing services.

Our understanding of the dynamics of early school-leaving is much better than is our capacity to address the problem. There is general agreement about the various factors that give rise to early school-leaving: school failure, lower self-esteem, alienation, lack of parental involvement, truancy and low interest in extracurricular activities. However, the efforts to redress the problem have seldom been powerful enough to offset these influences completely. There are two implications that flow from this finding. First, the issue is not one of understanding why early school-leaving occurs but rather the capacity to mobilise the kind of efforts that are needed to redress the problem. Second, it seems that, since most initiatives are largely school-based, there may be limits to what schools can do on their own.

3.3 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Introduction

This final section draws together the main conclusions regarding the factors influencing early school-leaving, sets out the policy context as it impinges on issues related to school-leaving, and examines the implications of the findings of the international research for the Irish scene. Finally, recommendations are made concerning:

- (i) areas for further consideration and study; and
- (ii) the improvement of interventions in Ireland.

3.3.2 Conclusions on Factors Influencing Dropping Out

Given the significance of the problem of early school-leaving, it is important to establish what factors underlie early school-leaving since these provide guidelines for appropriate intervention. The evidence cited in this paper points to some broad factors that are associated with the context within which young people are likely to leave school, while some other factors are immediately relevant to early school-leaving. Of the general factors, educational disadvantage is the most important; dropping out may be the final act of a series of events that begin with the mismatch between the needs of disadvantaged children and the demands of formal schooling. Thus, any attempt to deal comprehensively with early school-leaving will necessarily involve tackling educational disadvantage on a broad basis.

The review of the evidence above suggests a number of influences of immediate relevance to school-leaving

which may give guidelines as to how some inroads may be made in the problem. A first influence is school failure. While there may be occasions when young people who are doing well may leave school, the vast majority will have had a history of doing badly. The issue of school failure is intimately related to the breadth/limits of the curriculum. With a broader curriculum, there is a greater chance of achieving success in some domains, while a curriculum which is based on academic learning only will ensure success only for those with an academic aptitude.

It was striking that a number of features of school involvement and school organisation are especially important in relation to dropping out. The first of these has to do with absenteeism/truancy. The association of these factors with subsequent dropping out is especially strong and consistent. It was striking that the National Child Development study in the UK found that the attendance rates of young people who later left school at the first opportunity were significantly less good than others, even several years before they actually quit school.

A second important factor is grade retention. While this practice is in decline, nevertheless, where it occurs it significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out. Involvement in extracurricular activities is also an important influence. Where this has been studied, it has consistently emerged that those involved in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out of school.

The evidence with regard to the effects of streaming is complex. The effects on early school-leaving are indirect. Nevertheless, there is evidence that being in a lower stream results in worse school achievement than would be warranted by students' ability. Given that poor school performance is a strong predictor of dropping out, it can be argued that streaming is a contributory factor. Certainly, it is nearly always the case that students who drop out are found in lower streams. It should also be noted that this trend does not extend to other forms of grouping that do not have the rigid features of streaming.

3.3.3 The Current Policy Context in Ireland: The White Paper on Education

The issues addressed in this review have been of concern to the Combat Poverty Agency for some time as is evident in the Agency's response to the green paper on Education (Combat Poverty Agency, 1993). In that response, the Agency expressed

disappointment that the green paper did not address the problem of early school-leaving. Attention was drawn to the measures suggested as part of the provision for early school-leavers and the fact that these were for young people who had actually left. The Agency viewpoint was that there should be initiatives to encourage children to remain in school and that greater emphasis should be given to addressing the problem within the school system rather than relying on post-secondary education and training. The Agency's response also drew attention to the need to deal with educational failure at second level, the importance of broadening the curriculum and the modification of the Leaving Certificate examination.

The statement of government policy in the white paper *Charting our Educational Future* (1995) provides an overall statement of policy within which future initiatives to prevent early school-leaving might be addressed. The philosophical framework (Ch. 1, pp. 3-11) sets out the values and bases on which future educational development will occur. Among the core values emphasised is 'to promote equality of access, participation, and benefit for all in accordance with their needs and abilities'. The white paper also:

- puts forward ideas on how the curriculum will be broadened at both primary and post-primary level;
- proposes a major restructuring of the Leaving Certificate with a new Leaving Certificate Applied course as well as the expansion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme;
- emphasises the importance of sport in education and development;
- proposes further developments of the home-school-community liaison programme.
- discusses the need for appropriate accommodation for young people at risk, e.g. those who have come in conflict with the law.
- stresses that efforts will be made to bring about greater participation by Traveller children and greater integration of their schooling with other sectors.
- identifies difficulties in the transition from primary to post-primary schools.

Three aspects of the white paper are of immediate relevance to the present topic. The white paper:

- Indicates that, in future, the school-leaving age will be 16 years (not 15 as at present), or three years of a junior cycle.
- Proposes that a major objective of educational policy is to encourage and facilitate as many

students as possible to continue in school. "A major objective will be that the percentage ... completing the senior cycle will increase to at least 90% by the year 2000".

- Proposes a schools programme which will be designed to reach out more effectively to a small but important minority of students whose needs are not met in the present broadly-based Junior Certificate. This programme will be aimed at those students who are underachieving and whose attendance/behaviour indicates a marked alienation from school (among other groups).

The implications of the international findings in the context of current education policies, with particular reference to these proposals from the white paper, are now considered.

3.3.4 Conclusions on Interventions and Implications

In this section the main implications of the international findings for the Irish system are considered in the policy context of the white paper and the current practices and policies in the Irish educational system. As in the earlier parts of the paper, the system, community, school and individual perspectives are considered.

System Level

Consideration of the international experience indicates that the most powerful effects on educational outcomes occur where major changes are brought about at the overall system level. It has been shown that very substantial increases have occurred in Australia in the numbers who complete secondary school, and that this has been achieved over a relatively brief period. While this was partly due to economic factors, curricular changes were also significant. The German experience has indicated that close links between work and schooling require not only involvement of industry but also require planning at the system level.

The white paper, discussed above, contains several proposals for changes in the system that may affect the problem of early school-leaving. The most relevant seem to be the goal that at least 90% of 16- to 18-year-olds will be completing the senior cycle by the year 2000. While this proposal, if achieved, will result in a halving of the numbers currently not completing their senior cycle, it should also be considered that it will have the perverse effect of worsening the relative position of those who continue to leave school without this qualification.

The research outlined above supports the recommendation to broaden the curriculum. All of the studies reviewed above suggest that such broadening results in greater success for those who might be floundering with traditional academic curricula. However, it has to be a major cause of concern that the white paper also proposes a schools programme which seems to have a very narrow focus on literacy and numeracy. The experience reviewed here, and also of the pilot projects sponsored by the Combat Poverty Agency (Morgan, 1995b), suggests that this programme will not achieve the desired results. In most instances, alienation from school is due to the focus on these topics and a failure to encounter the richness of a broad curriculum.

Community Level

There is no widely accepted definition of what a 'community' initiative is. In some studies it refers to parental involvement, in others to inter-agency co-operation while some others seem to use the title as a kind of slogan. Much of the evidence supporting the potential of community education comes indirectly, e.g. the finding that Catholic schools in the US do better than would be expected - a finding which has been interpreted in terms of the community support available in such schools. The research evidence suggests, however, that community involvement may have more promise than has yet been brought to fruition.

As noted above, the government white paper on education proposes that the home-school-community liaison scheme be enhanced. Based on the experiences of other countries, and, indeed, of the pilot programme of the scheme, this seems a reasonable course of action. However, it is important that the schemes have a genuine *community* dimension, with a particular emphasis on the benefits of parental involvement in the education of their children.

In this regard, the training of personnel involved in the scheme is crucial, particularly their understanding of community. Consideration should be given to employing community workers in the role of organisers or at least of ensuring that teachers would have appropriate training. This is especially important since the home-school-community liaison programme is one of the few developments that formally acknowledges the importance of community in addressing issues of disadvantage.

The white paper makes a number of suggestions about the need for co-operation between the various services that are aimed at young people in school. The research cited above suggests that experiments in inter-agency co-operation have demonstrated the difficulties with such an approach. However, such co-operation may be possible in Ireland. The *Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education* (BITE), for example, did involve several co-operating organisations and interests in order to make some inroads on school-leaving and low levels of participation in higher education.

An evaluation of the programme suggested that the success of the initiative was largely due to the co-operation between the various interests/agencies both at the management level as well as the individual level (Morgan, 1995). The Ballymun schools, the Irish American Partnership (business interest group), Dublin City University (DCU) and recently the Ballymun Area Partnership are involved in running the project. At the level of implementation, arrangements involve the students and teachers from the Ballymun schools, students and staff from DCU and St Patrick's College, as well as parental participation. In addition, there are significant inputs from scholarship holders whose influence as role models is especially important.

School Level

Several aspects of the school policy are relevant to addressing the issue of early school-leaving. The international evidence shows that streaming and retention at the schools level may be especially important in bringing about a situation where young people may be predisposed to leave school early. Streaming has traditionally received support from some teachers and school authorities, possibly because it has positive effects on those in top streams. Thus, there is an important question of values to be addressed when considering this matter.

At school level, a critical influence on the curriculum is the examination system. In this regard, the proposals in the white paper to broaden the Leaving Certificate examination to include more applied subjects is to be welcomed. However, the evidence reviewed above suggests that the curriculum needs to be further broadened to include personal and social development as well as creative and expressive arts. Indeed, the most consistent finding from this review of research evidence suggests that a curriculum that caters for all kinds of abilities is likely to provide success experiences for more pupils and especially those who would otherwise be in danger of quitting school.

The white paper has devoted a full chapter to sport. However, what is not emphasised adequately in the white paper is the way in which extracurricular activities (including sport) contribute to the broad educational goals of school. One of the most interesting findings to come from this review of the literature is that extracurricular involvement is positively and consistently related to school completion. This finding is all the more noteworthy since this feature of school and curriculum has not recently received much attention in this country. Two important points can be made with regard to the implementation of a successful policy in this regard. First, the provision of such facilities is not good in many disadvantaged schools. Second, such activities have often been seen as peripheral at best or even as a distraction from the 'real' work of the school.

Two additional features of recent policy (only briefly referred to in the white paper) are worth mentioning at this stage. The first of these is the growth of the remedial service (especially at primary level) over the last few years - there are currently 1,178 remedial teachers in Irish primary schools (about 5% of the teachers at this level). It would seem, therefore, that the response of the system to the problem of school failure has been to provide a remedial service when children have fallen behind. While an evaluation of the service has not been carried out, it could be argued that the remedial approach needs to be complemented by an approach that stresses prevention, as is the case in the 'Success for All' programme outlined above. The objective of this programme was to ensure, as far as possible, that children had basic skills from an early age, so reducing the need for remedial or special classes at a later stage.

The white paper also suggests that greater effort will be made to have better co-ordination between the primary and post-primary systems. This is welcome as the evidence from research in Ireland (Morgan, 1995b) suggests that, for many young people who drop out of school, their major problems begin during the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Individual and Family Level

An examination of the factors associated with early school-leaving suggests several are important at the individual/family level. Socio-economic factors are associated with early school-leaving (as with other features of school achievement) at this level. However, there is also potential for interventions which focus on changing the experiences of children in their homes

without dramatically altering their economic situation (Kelleghan et al., 1993). An example of such an intervention is paired reading (i.e., joint reading by parent and child) which has been shown to have a positive impact on reading achievement (Bus et al., 1995).

The evidence reviewed above suggests that some young people need particular attention in a sheltered school environment to address the various problems in their lives which make them more prone to drop out of school. The experience of the Youth Encounter Projects in Ireland, and similar projects abroad, highlight the importance of this type of intervention for vulnerable young people.

Research indicates that truancy is an especially important factor in predicting early school-leaving. While addressing this problem will require initiatives at several levels (system and community), attention will need to be given to individual students whose pattern of attendance is unsatisfactory. It is worth noting that the research cited above shows that monitoring of students' attendance is an important first step in tackling truancy and in itself could bring about a significant improvement in attendance rates. Monitoring is an important feature of any kind of intervention designed to address this problem.

Difficulties in Extrapolation from Interventions in Other Countries

Any intervention, whether involving a country, a region or a number of schools, takes place within a unique context and questions arise as to the extent to which the findings from such an intervention can be applied in general to other situations. However, with this proviso, a number of suggestions for maximising the lessons to be learned from foreign interventions can be made, while avoiding unwarranted generalisations.

- Confidence in a particular finding is strengthened if it occurs across different studies in different countries. A finding from a single study in one situation has limited value compared to one which is found in several research evaluations. For example, confidence in the relationship between early school-leaving and subsequent poor labour market performance is bolstered by the consistency of the findings over several countries with differing economic circumstances.
- It is useful to consider how interventions are interpreted by those involved in them. For

example, it would seem that streaming has negative effects on achievement (and subsequently can contribute to early school-leaving) because it signals student failure. However, another system of school organisation might in principle be very similar (e.g. the academy system in America) but yet not convey the same negative meaning for students.

- It is very important to keep cultural differences in mind when considering the appropriateness of foreign intervention to the Irish situation. The efforts to 'export' the dual system in Germany to other countries is a case in point; this system seems to require a strong industrial base like that found in Germany. Therefore, in assessing the appropriateness of foreign interventions to the Irish situation, it may be more useful to consider the appropriateness of their principles rather than the precise details of how they are implemented.

3.3.5 Recommendations

The recommendations put forward here highlight the main implications of this review for approaches designed to tackle early school-leaving in Ireland. These recommendations are set out in the context of current Department of Education policies and practices and are organised on the same basis as the review (targeting various levels).

System Level

The following recommendations are made at a system level:

- The objective put forward in the white paper (that at least 90% of 16- to 18-year-olds should be completing the senior cycle by the year 2000) should be re-examined with a view to making provision for all students in this age group.
- Rather than aiming for certain ages of school-leaving, the aim should be to ensure that students achieve a minimum qualification on leaving school.
- The 'Schools Programme' suggested in the white paper, which has important implications for potential early school-leavers, should be re-examined with a view to providing a broader based curriculum - in line with the other proposals in that document.
- As part of the efforts to combat educational disadvantage at a national level, the issue of early school-leaving should be a major priority.
- Ongoing research should be undertaken on the various influences on early school-leaving in

Ireland and the effects of various policies on numbers and reasons for leaving.

Community Level

The following recommendations are made at a community level:

- While the evidence considered here indicates the need for realistic expectations, a system of inter-agency co-operation should be established between the services currently being developed in schools, with a particular focus on early school-leaving.
- The community dimension of the home-school-community liaison scheme should be strengthened.
- The private sector should be encouraged to have greater involvement in community projects through, for example, a mentoring system.

School Level

The following recommendations are made at a school level:

- Stronger links should be developed between schools and third-level institutions with the objective of increasing the number of pupils from disadvantaged communities who undertake degree and diploma courses.
- In the context of the new Applied Leaving Certificate, a pilot project should be established to link vocational education with specific industries.
- The curriculum should be amended to cater for the complete range of pupil ability in a more responsive way, and with particular reference to the needs of potential early school-leavers.
- The organisational features of schools (particularly ability grouping) which are associated with early school-leaving should be re-examined.
- Schools should be advised and encouraged to develop extracurricular activities as an integral feature of pupils' educational experience.

Individual and Family Level

The following recommendations are made at an individual and family level:

- More resources should be directed to prevention programmes, particularly for 'at risk' families at the pre-school stage.
- In the case of children at risk of involvement in anti-social behaviour, particular attention should

be given to addressing their problems in early childhood and the potential role of schools in redressing these difficulties.

- Greater attention should be given to the monitoring of attendance of all children at each stage of schooling.
- A review should be carried out of the costs of schooling in the context of incentives available in other programmes to ensure that families are not poorer as a result of a child continuing in school.

Research

The following recommendation are made in relation to areas which should be considered for further research:

- Research projects dealing with the general area of disadvantage should give particular attention to the problem of early school-leaving.
- There should be a research programme to examine early school-leaving with particular attention on the factors and policies in Irish schools that contribute to the problem.
- A research project on absenteeism and truancy should be initiated to provide more accurate statistics in this area and to examine the association between absenteeism and early school-leaving.
- A rigorous evaluation should be carried out of future pilot initiatives that attempt to prevent early school drop-out.
- Research projects aimed at educational disadvantage should give particular attention to the international literature in this area and the extent to which the principles that operate in other countries are found to be true in Ireland.

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DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMME ON EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

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This collection of three papers on educational disadvantage, early school leaving and interventions to prevent early school-leaving is published as part of a series of publications emanating from the Combat Poverty Agency's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. An information pack on the programme is published separately.

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