

## **New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 14**

### **Helping Unemployed Youths into Work**

#### **Context of the Research**

In the rapidly changing conditions of a “globalising” labour market, changes will be needed in the way professional intervention enhances social and economic participation for unemployed young people. This is particularly so in an era of the widening of employment choices and empowerment opportunities for unemployed 18-25 year olds.

Through research conducted in six European countries, - Portugal, Germany, Denmark, England, Holland and Flanders/Belgium - the limitations and opportunities resulting from EU polices in education, training and guidance programmes have been explored.

#### **Key Conclusions**

Conclusions based on new attitudes: -

1. Defined as “working identities” - young adults have a variety of diverse and individualized views and attitudes when it comes to work. These can be loosely identified as: -
  - a) Traditional wage earner identity - see a long-term job as a way of gaining money and self-respect.
  - b) Eroding wage earner identity - want a long-term job but have a low endurance and rarely stay in work, education etc. for a significant length of time.
  - c) Abrupt and disorientated wage earner identity - confused about the purpose of work and unsure about what they want from it.
  - d) New labour identity urged by desire and self-fulfilment - consider job fulfilment is more important than the wage.

These identities often clash with those held by professionals, projects and the labour market.

2. Therefore, young adults need greater choices when meeting with projects, professionals and the labour market, in order to shape “working identities” that can match current developments on the labour market.
3. Professionals also need to pay attention to these different “working identities” and plan trajectories and training in co-operation with each individual’s working identities.

4. In addition, young adults need the capacity to weigh up the risks and uncertainties of different jobs, and need to be valued as equal and competent decision-makers, who have a right to control their own career.
5. Disadvantaged low qualified young adults also need help facing existing barriers, like: -
  - a) Bottle-neck policies
  - b) Labour market traps
  - c) Growing demands for flexibility.
  - d) A small amount of boring and badly paid jobs.
6. Two big groups need extra focus and support: -
  - a) Young people in need of basic support (e.g. emotional binding, orientation, rules, continuity) would benefit greatly from long-term projects, individual counselling and finance. It is likely such projects would pay off financially and biographically in the long run.
  - b) Young people experiencing societal discrimination because of race and/or gender need projects that concentrate on sexual or racial discrimination.
7. For all groups, professionals have to establish an emotional binding with the young adults to ensure the young adults stay in projects and remain interested in learning. This can be done by: -
  - a) Understanding, respect, recognition and acceptance.
  - b) Challenging but not infantilising.
  - c) Acknowledging different life experiences.

#### Problems with professional intervention

8. Current professional intervention focuses on “adapting” low qualified young adults to the needs and demands of the labour market, which excludes any participation from unemployed youths and can reinforce their disadvantaged position.
9. Performance indicators and target pressures also force professionals to stick to traditional methods of education, training and guidance. This removes the possibility of working intuitively.

## **Key Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made: -

1. Policy should concentrate on diverse learning programmes.
2. Policy is also needed that supports alternative initiatives to gain contact with the most marginalized group of “hard-to-help” young adults.
3. Professionals need to work with young adults to help individuals understand and critically reflect on their own situation and connect it in a meaningful way to the reality of the labour market: -
  - a) Professionals should present themselves as co-producers of this meaning with the learner.
  - b) Both professionals and learners should interpret and negotiate possibilities and limitations directly relating to each individual including social and labour market changes.
4. Young people and professionals together should continually interpret and reinterpret the possibilities and limitations of the young person’s biography and the reality of the labour market.
5. Professionals should also be paid accordingly and resources for further training and supervision are required.
6. Policy must offer some freedom for education, training and guidance professionals to explore the possibilities and difficulties of working in an interpretive way and promote an exchange of know-how and experience between professionals on both organisational and inter-organisational levels. This know-how should also be made explicit and refined, and translated into flexible ‘guidelines’ that are continuously reviewed.
7. Policy should also create the possibility for practitioners to constantly gain insights into general changes in the “working identities” of young adults today. A theoretical knowledge of such changes is crucial to the future integration of young adults at risk.
8. Concerted efforts should be made to provide flexible environments that allow approaches to be adapted to individual clients; these include flexible procedures and instruments.
9. Policy needs to provide opportunities, resources and support for practitioners in different contexts to work more interpretively.

10. Educational settings need to: -

- a) Connect learning activities with the demands and possibilities of real labour and socio-cultural practises.
- b) Be part of a broader social network that can integrate learning with experiences in work placements and social involvement.
- c) Provide learners with chances to negotiate, discuss and reflect on their learning activities with their coaches and teachers.
- d) Take into account the rapid changes in the labour market and the required qualifications.

11. Policy needs to take into account both the needs and demands of the labour market, and the needs and competencies of unemployed young people.

12. Policy makers need to balance between social and economic concerns that are assessed through indicators that clearly express the social output of economical policies.

13. Education, training and guidance initiatives should empower young adults to use their own initiatives to find their own options.

14. Exploration into the factors that keep someone alienated and excluded is needed. Starting with the assumption that people are not lacking abilities but choose how and where they use their abilities

15. Similar problems and processes that lead to exclusion were found amongst the regions, but standardized or short-term solutions should be avoided.

### **Further Information**

Full title of study – “Enhancing the participation of young adults in economic and social processes: Balancing instrumental, social and biographical competencies in post-school education and training” (December 2000)

[Full report](#), [Abstract](#), [Summary](#) [Partner details](#), [Comparative paper on convergence and divergence](#), [Joint paper on mainstream practices](#)

## **Contact Person**

Dr. Danny Wildemeersch  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven - Leuven  
Departement Pedagogische Wetenschappen - Faculteit Psychologie en Pedagogische  
Wetenschappen  
Afdeling Sociale Pedagogiek en Gezinspedagogiek  
Vesaliusstraat 2  
Leuven  
3000  
Belgium

Tel: +32 16 326205

Fax: +32 16 326211

Email: [danny.wildemeersch@ped.kuleuven.ac.be](mailto:danny.wildemeersch@ped.kuleuven.ac.be)

*or contact pjb Associates [pjb@pjb.co.uk](mailto:pjb@pjb.co.uk) Tel +44 1353 667973 for more information  
about other Briefing Papers on “New Perspectives for Learning”*