

## **New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 16**

### **School to Work Transitions in Europe**

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

Recent decades have witnessed rapid educational expansion and labour market changes across European countries. Such changes have had the greatest impact on those entering the labour market for the first time. As a result, the period of transition from school to work has become more prolonged and less predictable. It is therefore crucial that policy-makers understand the way in which education, training and labour market systems interact to shape the transition process in modern Europe.

This research has aimed to develop a more comprehensive conceptual framework of school to work transitions in different national contexts and to apply this framework to the empirical analysis of transition processes across European countries. The research utilised two complementary data sources for these analyses: the European Community Labour Force Survey and integrated databases based on national school leavers' surveys in France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Scotland and Sweden.

#### **Key conclusions**

The following conclusions were reached:

1. Transition processes and outcomes were found to vary significantly across European countries. Three broad types of national system were identified:
  - a) Countries with extensive vocational training systems at upper secondary level, linked to occupational labour markets (such as Germany and the Netherlands).
  - b) Countries with more general educational systems with weaker institutional linkages to the labour market (such as Ireland).
  - c) Southern European countries with less vocational specialisation and lower overall attainment than the other groups.
2. Each of these three systems has distinctive patterns of labour market integration among young people. In 'vocational' systems, young people tend to make a smoother transition into the labour market while those in Southern European countries find it more difficult to achieve a stable employment position.

3. Across European countries, educational level is highly predictive of transition outcomes; those with lower levels of education have higher unemployment risks and greater chances of entering low-skilled, lower status and/or temporary jobs.
4. Those who have taken part in vocational education/training (especially apprenticeships) tend to have a smoother transition in their first job and achieve more stable employment.
5. Other dimensions of education are also significant with examination grades having a greater effect in more general education systems.
6. Transition outcomes are found to vary by gender, social class background and national origin. There is no evidence that such differences have become less important in shaping the transition process over time.
7. Early educational failure has serious negative consequences for young people across all systems.

## **Key recommendations**

The following key recommendations were made:

1. Given the diversity in education, training and labour market systems across Europe, the same policy interventions are unlikely to be equally effective in different contexts. However, early educational failure has serious negative consequences for young people across all systems. There is a need, therefore, for policy intervention to reduce such failure and/or to provide alternative routes to skill acquisitions for young people.
2. There is also a need to monitor differences among groups of young people in terms of gender, social class and ethnicity and pursue policies to address these inequalities.
3. The project highlighted a number of areas which should be prioritised in future research:
  - a) The role of field of education/training in transitions.
  - b) Employer recruitment strategies in relation to young people.
  - c) Young people's own views of the transition process.
  - d) The role of policy interventions (especially youth programmes).

- e) Regional/local differences in educational and transitional outcomes.
- 4. An overall recommendation is that a European-wide longitudinal survey should be initiated, covering young people from around the age of fifteen and following them over a ten-year period.
- 5. Alternatively, a mechanism should be put in place to encourage agreement on a 'best practice' template to facilitate the partial harmonisation of existing transition surveys.
- 6. In addition, the use of, and access to, the transitions module of the Labour Force Survey should be enhanced.

### **Further Information**

The full title of the project and final report is: "A Comparative Analysis of Transitions From Education To Work in Europe" (January 2001)

[Full report](#), [Abstract](#), [Summary](#), [Partner details](#)

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