

MOVING BEYOND THE BARRIERS

An Inter-agency Research Study on Early School Leaving
in the Dun Laoghaire area

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Foreword

This report is the culmination of nearly two years' work in gathering as a comprehensive picture as possible of all aspects of early school leaving locally, from the perspective of the formal, and non-formal education providers, and the young early school leavers themselves. We believe that the picture, the findings, and the recommendations presented here will be of major significance in working together towards effective solutions to early school leaving in our area.

Neil Haran's report, 'Equality in Education' made the point that *'research shows quite clearly that it is individuals, families, and communities from low-income and socially excluded backgrounds, both rural and urban, that have consistently derived less benefit from the education system over the last four decades relative to their peers from more advantaged and privileged backgrounds.'*

*...the ultimate goal of **equality in education** is to create a situation whereby low-income, poorer and socially excluded groups and communities participate in, achieve in and benefit from education to equivalent levels as higher income and less marginalised groups and communities across all levels and sectors of education'. (ADM, 2003)*

In working towards this goal of achieving equality in education, we need to bear in mind that: *'the well-being of children is heavily influenced by the well-being of parents and vice versa ... and the indicators are that this is not amenable to quick change... strategies which do not fully engage with both parents and children are less likely to be effective.'* ('Springboard: Promoting Family Well Being; Through Family Support Services', Kieran McKeon, Trutz Haase, Jonathan Traschke, Dept. of Health and Children Publication, 2001)

There is a clear recognition from our research that no one agency can tackle the complexities inherent in the area of addressing early school leaving in a strategic way on its own; there is a real need for agencies and communities to work together to respond to the range of needs identified. Collaborative working is essential if responses are to be effective.

While the direct focus of this report was not on community-led youth interventions (such as community homework clubs,) the local initiatives currently operating and their valuable contribution in the area of addressing early school leaving issues needs to be acknowledged.

At a local level, the challenge is for schools, education & training providers, parents, family support services, and the other agencies named in this report, to work

together towards an integration of services for the benefit of the children and their families.

In the course of conducting this research we set out to consult with a broad range of service providers and with young people who had left school early, with the objective of ensuring as participative a process as possible.

We held a Seminar in March 2004 for all those who had participated in the research to present the draft findings and recommendations. The feedback from that day is included in the appendices of this report. From these recommendations, an Action Plan will be drawn up with a time frame to implement the recommendations and to make a significant contribution to addressing early school leaving in the area.

We plan to hold a further information and consultation seminar in the Autumn when this draft plan has been developed. We would like to thank all those who participated and contributed to this research, and look forward to continuing to work together to achieve the implementation of these recommendations.

*Aileen O'Brien, Education Co-ordinator, Southside Partnership
On behalf of the Early School Leaving Research Steering Committee
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This research study involved quite a wide spread consultation with schools, young people, training centres, local agencies and organisations. We are very grateful for the time given freely by all of the research participants to discuss the issue of early school leaving. Each person's perspective and experience added to give a broader understanding of the issues.

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Glossary of Terms

BTEI:	Back to Education Initiative
CTC:	Community Training Centre
DES:	Department of Education and Science
ECAHB:	East Coast Area Health Board
ESRI:	Economic and Social Research Institute
EWO:	Education Welfare Officer
FAS:	Training and Education Authority
FETAC:	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HSCL:	Home-School-Community Liaison
JLO:	Juvenile Liaison Officer
LAB:	Loughlinstown and Ballybrack Diversion Project
LDTF:	Local Drugs Task Force
LES:	Local Employment Service
NAPS:	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS:	National Educational Psychological Service
NESF:	National Economic and Social Forum
NEWB:	National Educational Welfare Board
NYP:	Neighbourhood Youth Project
SCP:	School Completion Programme
VEC:	Vocational Education Committee

Chapter 1 Background and Context

1.1 Background

Rationale for the Research Study

The proposal for this research study emanated from the Southside Youth at Risk Network, which is a network of local agencies, organisations and service providers who work with and on behalf of young people at risk. This Network, which is facilitated by Southside Partnership meets on a regular basis throughout the year to share information and also to focus on specific issues that affect young people at risk.

From the point of view of a number of agencies, it was felt that there was a need firstly to access up-to-date information on the extent of early school leaving within the area currently; secondly, to research the situation through a wide spread consultation process to identify the needs of early school leavers, how these needs are currently being responded to, and thirdly to identify in what way supports and services to this target group could be improved upon.

Funding for the Research Post

The funding for the research was secured through the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Local Drugs Task Force. The funding for the position is supplemented by Dun Laoghaire VEC and Southside Partnership. The research worker was employed by Dun Laoghaire VEC and based in Southside Partnership. The day-to-day work of the research project was supported by the Partnership's Education Co-ordinator.

In addition, a Research Steering Committee was formed to guide and support the work. This committee is comprised of representatives from the following organisations: Dun Laoghaire VEC, Southside Partnership, Dun Laoghaire Youth Services, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Local Drugs Task Force, Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project and Cabinteely Community School.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Research Study

The overall aim of the Early School Leaving Research Study was:

'To work, within the context of the Youth at Risk Network, to research the extent of early school leaving with a view to establishing the nature and type of services and interventions needed within the Dun Laoghaire VEC catchment area.'

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the research study were as follows:

- ❖ To audit and review existing local provisions/services and interventions for early school leavers.
- ❖ To collate and review existing reports/research at regional, national and international level relevant to this local research.
- ❖ To access figures from the Department of Education and Science, FAS, schools and other relevant sources on the numbers of early school leavers and those at risk of leaving school early.
- ❖ To engage in a qualitative and interactive process of consultation with the community, schools, service providers, young people and their parents.
- ❖ To link into and engage with local pilot projects, for young people who are out of school.
- ❖ To complete report findings with recommendations.

1.3 Methodology

The research methodology was as follows:

- Questionnaires completed by Principals of Primary Schools.
- Questionnaires completed by the Principals of Secondary Schools.
- One to one interviews held with Managers of the three Training Centres in the area: Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre (CTC), Tivoli Training Centre, and Sportsreach Centre, Sallynoggin.
- One to one interviews with Young People who have left school early and who are now attending Training Centres in the area.
- One to one interviews held with staff members within the Training Centres.
- Review and Evaluation of the Futurama 'Out of School' Transition Pilot Project, Loughlinstown, for 12-15 year olds who are out of school.
- Wider consultation process was completed through a mixture of focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and questionnaires with a range of

personnel who work with young people locally including Juvenile Liaison Officers, Health Board Social Workers and Family Skills Development Workers, Dun Laoghaire VEC, Youth Development Workers, School Completion Co-ordinators, School Guidance Counsellors, Educational Psychologists, etc.

- Consultative Research Seminar held in March 2004 to feedback key findings and draft recommendations to a wide range of local agencies, schools and centres who participated in the research study and give them an opportunity to discuss and inform the recommendations before the report was finalised.

1.4 Report Structure

Following this introductory chapter,

Chapter 2 presents a profile of the catchment area.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of the policy and legislative contexts.

Chapter 4 presents a profile on the extent of early school leaving locally.

Chapter 5 presents the profile and perspective from the primary schools.

Chapter 6 presents the profile and perspective from the secondary schools.

Chapter 7 presents the profile and consultation with existing education and training service providers for early school leavers.

Chapter 8 presents the feedback from the consultation with young people.

Chapter 9 presents the key issues emerging from the research findings

Chapter 10 outlines the key recommendations emerging from the research findings.

Chapter 2: Area Profile

2.1 Introduction

The area chosen as the focus for the research study is the geographic area of the Dun Laoghaire VEC catchment area.

This area within the County was chosen as the site for the study as it was felt that a countywide study would be too large an undertaking for one project. The Dun Laoghaire VEC area is situated within Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County.

2.2 Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown lies to the southeast of Dublin City and is made up of 69 district electoral divisions (DEDs). It is a county demonstrating great disparity of wealth. Of the 69 DEDs, 55 are classified as being among the wealthiest 10% in the state. In contrast, 9 of the County's DED and 22 specific pocket areas are severely impacted upon by social and economic disadvantage.

The 2002 Census shows that the total population in the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Regional Authority Area is 191,792. The gender breakdown is 91,337 males and 100,455 females. Of this number, 40,076 are aged between 5 and 19 years old. This equates to 21% of the entire population.

In relation to the age at which the population aged 15 years and over in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown ceased their full-time education: of a total of 128,030, 7% had ceased their full time education prior to 15 years of age, 5% has ceased full time education by the age of 15 years, 9% ceased education by the age of 16 years and 10% had ceased their education by 17 years.

2.3 Key Geographic Areas

The key areas focused on within the catchment area for this study were: Ballybrack, Dun Laoghaire, Loughlinstown, Mounttown, and Sallynoggin. These areas are highlighted in the map overleaf.

The reason that these areas were chosen were because they were identified as areas that have been affected by disadvantage and social exclusion. The majority of estates in these areas are local authority housing estates and all of the areas included are among Southside Partnerships targeted areas of disadvantage. Loughlinstown is also included in the RAPID Programme. RAPID is a Government programme, (under the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs), which aims to address urban disadvantage,

through front loading investment into 25 urban areas identified as the most disadvantaged in the country.

2.4 Common Issues

The following are issues that were cited as being common to all these areas (as identified through Southside Partnership consultation process from their United Vision Plan, 2000-2006).

They included:

- (a) Lack of youth activities, facilities and services
- (b) Physical conditions of the environment
- (c) Issues of drug misuse and anti-social behaviour
- (d) Lack of affordable childcare

INSERT MAP OF CATCHMENT AREA

Chapter 3: National Legislative and Policy Context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an outline summary of the most recent legislation and policy documents relevant to educational disadvantage and early school leaving.

3.2 White Paper on Education ‘*Charting Our Education Future*’, 1995

The 1995 White Paper outlines the direction of government policy on education generally.

A number of key objectives in relation to early school leaving outlined in the paper were:

- To encourage and facilitate as many students as possible to continue in full time education after the end of the Junior Cycle, with the aim of increasing the percentage of 16-18 year olds completing the Senior Cycle to at least 90% by the year 2000.
- To raise the school-leaving age from 15 years to 16 years or completion of the 3 years of the Junior Cycle whichever is the later.

The White Paper also acknowledged that the traditional Leaving Certificate Programme does not cater adequately for the variety of needs and abilities of students completing the Senior Cycle. The Paper makes a commitment on behalf of the Department of Education and Science (DES), to oversee a fundamental restructuring of the Senior Cycle to cater more effectively for the needs and aptitudes of all students. It stated that the syllabi on the established Leaving Certificate Programme would be reviewed and updated on a phased basis by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA was established on a statutory basis under the 1998 Education Act. This review of the Senior Cycle is currently being carried out.

3.3 National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) 1997

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy is a government plan for reducing and preventing poverty in Ireland. A range of targets were set under different areas. In relation to tackling educational disadvantage, NAPS set a target *to eliminate the problem of early school leaving before the Junior Certificate and reduce early school leaving such that the percentage of those completing the senior cycle will increase to at least 95% by the year 2000 and 98% by the year 2007.*

In terms of strategies to achieve this objective, it was stated that consideration will be given to:

- Closer integration of the community dimension of provision;
- Development of integrated area-based links between schools, youth; community and welfare services;
- Out of school education and training;
- Introduction of a range of pilot initiatives to tackle truancy;
- A process for formal evaluation in order to inform national policy in this area;
- Special supports to encourage teenage parents to remain in school to completion of the senior cycle.

In the Initial Assessment of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2000, problems were identified in attempting to deal with the education targets that had been set. One of the factors making it difficult to achieve higher retention rates was that some school-goers were choosing to leave school early to take up jobs that are available in the current economic climate. The point was also made that *expecting the mainstream education system to suit as many as 98% may be unrealistic*. In this context, the education target was reconsidered and it was suggested that it may be appropriate to restructure the system to give due regard to other, less formal, education and training opportunities and to interventions outside the mainstream setting.

3.4 Education Act, 1998

One of the main provisions within the Act of relevance to this report was the establishment of an *Educational Disadvantage Committee*.

The role of the Committee is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage. The Committee was established in March 2002 under section 32 of the act and is comprised of members from voluntary and other bodies who have particular insights and experience in the area of tackling disadvantage.

The Committee advises the Minister on a number of areas including:

- The creation, co-ordination and implementation of new and existing initiatives;
- The identification and commissioning of research and evaluation;
- In-career development for teachers and other personnel serving the needs of those experiencing educational disadvantage;

- The development of inter-departmental and inter-agency links to ensure greater cohesion among the initiatives catering for educational disadvantage.

An Educational Disadvantage Forum has also been established, the inaugural meeting of which was held in November 2002. The forum ensures that there is wide representation from agencies, organisations and other education partners interested in tackling educational disadvantage and social exclusion, and to ensure that they are given the opportunity to have their views heard and have an influence at national policy level.

3.5 Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act, 'to provides for the entitlement of every child in the state to a certain minimum education and for that purpose to provide for the registration of children receiving education in places other than recognised schools, the compulsory attendance of certain children at recognised schools, the establishment of the National Education Welfare Board and the identification of the causes of non-attendance on the part of certain students'.

This act heralds a shift away from the model of the previous school attendance system, focusing on interventions to a more preventative/holistic approach, which seeks to assist children and their families to avoid establishing patterns of non-attendance and the problems related to this. The focus of this act is on child welfare.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) has been established and a number of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) have been appointed throughout the country who will work in close co-operation with schools, parents, teachers, community and voluntary bodies and other state agencies with a view to encouraging regular school attendance and developing strategies to reduce absenteeism and early school leaving.

This act and its implementation should have a significant impact in terms of responding to the needs of children and young people who are considered at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving because of their attendance patterns.

It is envisaged that with the new service in place there will be fewer cases of children leaving the education system without being identified or followed up. The EWOs will provide a valuable support service by following up and making contact with the families of children/young people who are presenting with attendance difficulties. Their role will be to try to identify the

causes for their absenteeism and also to identify the most appropriate responses.

The National Education Welfare Act also provides for the identification of young people aged 16 and 17 years who leave school early and enter the workforce and, once identified, assist them to access continuing education and training. All early school leavers who leave to take up employment have to register with the NEWB and by law, employers are not permitted to employ early school leavers who are not registered with the Board.

3.6 National Children's Strategy, 2000

The National Children's Strategy sets out an ambitious series of objectives to guide children's policy over the next ten years. The blueprint is viewed as a strategy for improving the lives of all children, especially those children who experience disadvantage or who have particular needs.

A number of actions in relation to children's education are outlined within the strategy under objective (b), which states that "children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences, which reflect the diversity of need" (2000:53).

The strategy notes that while it is important that all children leave school with a suitable qualification, the wider focus of education on social, emotional and behavioural well-being and physical and mental health is also recognised.

Further actions proposed under this objective are for the

- Development of an after-school and out-of-school care services to support the provision of quality services,
- Implementation of personal development programmes in school
- Introducing specific supports to ensure that all children have the necessary literacy and numeracy skills when leaving school
- Assessment of the effectiveness of measures to address educational disadvantage and early school leaving. (2000:54)

3.7 Youth Work Act, 2001

The purpose of the Youth Work Act, 2001 is to provide a legal framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services by the Minister for Education and Science and the Vocational Education Committees (VECS).

The definition of youth work given within the Act is that "*youth work means a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary*

participation, and which is (a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and (b) provided primarily through their voluntary participation”.

A National Youth Work Development Plan for 2003 – 2007 has been developed. The plan, which was developed by the NYWAC, sets out a blueprint for the development of Youth Work in Ireland. It puts in place a framework for the delivery of a comprehensive Youth Service at local and national level.

Each VEC will establish a Youth Work Committee and a local voluntary youth council for its area. Each VEC area has to prepare and implement a Youth Work Development Plan.

This will have an influence for all young people in terms of improved co-ordination, planning and delivery of youth services. It could also mean an increased level of interagency work. The Development Plan will identify gaps in service provision on a country-wide level.

3.8 NESF Recommendations on Early School Leaving, 2002

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) completed a second report ‘Early School Leavers’ in March 2002. This report was a follow-up to their 1997 report on ‘Early School Leaving and Youth Unemployment’. The purpose of the second report was to evaluate the action taken and the impact of the 1997 recommendations and, on the basis of this, put forward revised proposals to the government.

The main findings from the report were that:

- Initiatives to address the root causes of education inequalities at the junior and senior cycle are too late;
- Programmes should be better geared to group/individual needs and should include consultation with young people through student councils and youth clubs;
- Vocational training alternatives to the traditional leaving certificate should be actively encouraged;
- A ‘whole child approach’ is needed, with the student’s needs as a starting point, and involving the family, school and broader community in a more effective ‘joined up’ delivery of services at local level.

The forum was strongly of the view that meeting the needs of those who leave school early in a more effective way is an achievable target, but it must involve greater co-operation and commitment by the wide spectrum of educational and non-educational interests involved, each of whom have key roles to play in complementing one another. The report repeatedly emphasised that educational responses alone will not suffice in terms of responding to early school leaving, and that there is a need for them to be reinforced and complemented with multi-dimensional cross-sectoral responses and supports.

3.9 National Framework of Qualifications, 2003

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 provided for the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority. The Authority, which was set up in 2001, launched the National Qualifications Framework in October 2003.

The concept behind the framework is to establish clearly defined standards about the quality of the awards and what a learner can expect to achieve for each award.

The relevance of this framework for early school leaving is that if a young person leaves school early, under the new framework they can build on their educational qualifications, and the standard and level of their qualification will be recognised. This contributes very significantly to the concept of continual learning at different stages and in different forms.

Chapter 4: Extent of Early School Leaving Locally

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the extent of early school leaving and educational disadvantage locally. It begins by giving an overview of early school leaving nationally and then moves on to describing the local situation.

4.2 Setting the Context: National Level of Early School Leaving

The central source for statistics in relation to early school leaving at a national level is the School Leavers Survey, which is carried out on an annual basis by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Education and Science (DES). The survey, which has been carried out since 1980, examines the status of a cohort of young people approximately one year after they have left school.

The following information is based on the findings from the 1999 survey of 1997/1998 school leavers:

- ✓ 3.2%, approximately 2,400 young people, left school with no educational qualifications.
- ✓ A further 15.3%, approximately 13,000 young people, left school after the Junior Certificate.
- ✓ Of those who began the second level course, 81.6% sat the Leaving Certificate.

These figures show that even though there is a commitment by the DES to increasing the percentage of young people staying in school to complete the senior cycle, the percentage has remained in and around 80% over the last four years.

The NESF in their 2002 “Early School Leavers” follow up report to the 1997 publication “*Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment*” noted that the number of early school leavers leaving with no educational qualifications has remained unchanged since 1997.

Taking a more long-term perspective, the percentage of young people staying in school to complete the senior cycle has increased from 60% in 1980 to current levels of 80%.

A number of key points emerged from the school leavers survey, highlighting some of the trends and patterns in relation to early school leaving.

- In terms of gender differences, more females than males complete the senior cycle. The findings from this survey found that 87% of females completed the senior cycle as compared with 77% of males.
- More males than females leave school early with no qualifications; 4.1% males compared with 2.5% females.
- Unemployment levels were considerably higher for those young people who had left school with no educational qualifications. 40% of the young people who had left school with no educational qualifications were unemployed a year on after leaving school, (this compares with an unemployment level of less than 4% for those who left school with the Leaving Certificate).
- Females leaving school early with no qualifications are at higher risk of unemployment than males leaving school early with no qualifications.
- Of those who leave school early with no qualifications, they are most likely to leave school in 2nd year (45%), this is followed by 34% leaving in 3rd year and 16% leaving in 1st year.
- The percentage of young people leaving school in first year increased from 13% in 1998 to 16% in 1999. This could be an indication that unqualified early school leavers are departing earlier in the second level system
- The percentage of young people who left school with no educational qualifications who were categorised in the unskilled manual group was 9% compared with 1% from a professional background.
- Of the young people who left school after the Junior Certificate, 45% came from an unskilled manual background as compared with 8% of young people from a professional background.

These figures highlight the strong link between educational attainment and socio-economic background. Young people from a lower socio-economic background are much more likely to leave school without the Junior or Leaving Certificate. They are at a distinct disadvantage to their peers who have attained these qualifications and as a result, have a wider range of training and further education opportunities open to them.

The ESRI are currently working on surveying those who left the second level school system in June 2002. It is expected that a more up-to-date School Leavers Survey will be published over the next few months.

The most recent information in relation to national levels of early school leaving is available from the DES report, "Retention Rates of Pupils in Post-Primary Schools - 1994 Cohort". Which was published in May 2003.

The findings in this report are based on a detailed analysis of the records of pupils in the Department's Post-Primary Pupils Database. This report is based on the 1994 cohort of 69,103 pupils. Their progression is tracked from September 1994 to June 2000, (the 6 year cycle from 1st to 6th year).

The key findings were as follows:

- Of the initial cohort of 69,103 pupils, 1031 of these pupils did not go on to 2nd year (1.5%).
- Of the 68,072 pupils who were in the database at the start of 2nd year, 1469 pupils did not go on to 3rd year (2.1%).
- Of the 66,603 pupils who did go on to 3rd year, 1442 pupils did not go on to do the Junior Certificate (2.1%).
- The analysis of the database showed that 94.2% of the initial cohort sat and were graded in at least one subject in the Junior Certificate.
- This means that from the 1994 cohort of pupils who began second level school, approximately 5.8% left school with no educational qualifications.

(This figure is not adjusted to take into account pupils who may have left school early for other reasons, apart from "dropping out" such as moving abroad, moving to a privately-funded school not included on database, illness and death).

- Of the 65,161 who sat and passed at least one subject in the Junior Certificate, 11,765 (9.8%) pupils did not go on to the senior cycle.
- 84.5% (53,393 pupils) did go on to the senior cycle.
- Of the 84.5% who did go on to the senior cycle, 78.3% sat the Leaving Certificate. This figure is amended to take into account those pupils opting to pursue the senior cycle in private institutions (estimated 2,200) and emigration/death (estimated 260).

- The final adjusted retention rate to completion of the senior cycle is **81.8%**.
- This means that 18% of those who began second level left school without Leaving Certificate qualification
- The findings show that more females than males are completing the senior cycle, (84.3% to 72.5%).
- The findings also show that the senior cycle completion rates are significantly higher in secondary school (83.4%) as compared to community and comprehensive schools (75.8%) and vocational schools (65.9%).

4.3 Extent of Early School Leaving Locally

The FAS School Returns Lists are currently the key source for statistics on early school leaving locally.

Secondary schools within a specific catchment area make returns to their local FAS office giving details of the students who have left school prior to the completion of the senior cycle.

While the lists give a good indication of the numbers leaving school early from the second level system, they don't capture those young people who never made the transfer from primary to second level or who were out of school at primary level.

The 1997 NESF report '*Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment*' highlighted the fact that from 1993-1995 up to 1000 young people did not make the transition to second level. There is evidence locally that there are a small but significant number of young people who are not making this crucial transition.

To build a profile of the extent of early school leaving locally, the following sources have been used: FAS School Returns List, 2002 and 2003, Local Training Centres, and information from the local School Completion Programmes.

4.3.1. FAS School Returns Lists May 2003

There were 96 young people included on the Schools Returns Lists in May 2003. This number is based on returns completed by five of the six schools involved in the research study. The sixth school had not yet made returns for this period.

The total school population among the five schools was 2000 students. This gives a percentage of early school leaving of 4.8%. However, a qualifying factor in that as part of the form completed by schools, they are asked to indicate if they know of where the young person has progressed. According to the lists, 19 of those who left school prior to completion of the senior cycle had transferred to another second level school. Taking this into consideration, this would indicate that the percentage of young people leaving school early from these five schools is **3.85%**.

Notable findings emerging from the analysis of the 2003 lists were that:

- There are slightly more males than females leaving school early, 53%: 47%.
- In terms of where the early school leavers are from; 19% are from the Dun Laoghaire/Mounttown area, 17% are from Ballybrack, 12.5% are from Loughlinstown, 11% are from Sallynoggin, 9% from Shankill and 19% from other areas (12.5% with no address included on the returns list).
- At the very least, 33% left school with no educational qualifications, while 58% left after sitting the Junior Certificate. The educational qualifications of the other 9% were unknown.
- School Leaving age: 4% left school aged 13 years, 13% left school at 14 years of age and another 23% left at 15 years of age, 25% at 16 yrs, 27% at 17 yrs and 8% at 18 years.
- Schools are unaware of where/what 45% of the early school leavers went on to do after they left school. In relation to the young people that the schools were aware of, 22% went on to employment, 19% transferred to another second level school, 10% went onto an apprenticeship, while 4% went on to do vocational training.

4.3.2. FAS School Returns Lists, May 2002

There were 85 young people included on the schools returns lists in May 2002. This number is based on returns completed by the six schools involved in the research study.

The total school population among the six schools was 2424 students. This gives a percentage of early school leaving of 3.5%. According to the lists, 6 of those who left school prior to completion of the senior cycle had transferred to another second level school. Taking this into consideration, this would indicate that the percentage of young people leaving school early from these six schools is **3.25%**.

Notable findings emerging from the analysis of the 2002 lists were that:

- Again, there are slightly more males than females leaving school early (53%: 47%).

- In terms of where early school leavers are from, 18% are from Loughlinstown, another 18% are from Shankill, 15% are from Sallynoggin, 14% are from Ballybrack, 10% are from the Dun Laoghaire/Mounttown area and 16% are from other areas. (There were 9% with no address included on the returns lists)

- At the very least, 26% are out of school with no educational qualifications, while 74% left school after the Junior Certificate.

- School Leaving age: 1% left school aged 12 years, 3% left school aged 13 years, 11% left school at 14 years of age and another 19% left at 15 years of age, 33% left at 16 years, 27% left at 17 years and 6% left at 19 years.

- Schools are unaware of where or what 61% of the early school leavers went on to do after they left school early. Of those whose progression route schools were aware of, 20% went on to employment, 7% went onto an apprenticeship, 6% went on to another second level school, and 1 early school leaver became a mother while 4% went on to further education and 1% went on to do vocational training.

Summary of Findings from Schools Returns List

- The analysis of the schools returns for May 2002 and May 2003 highlights the fact that there is a significant percentage of young people leaving school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate.

- The early school leaving rate among these schools is at 3.85% (2003) and 3.25% (2002).

- Approximately one-third of these early school leavers are leaving school with no educational qualifications. Nearly one-fifth are leaving school before the age of 15.

- Also of concern is that in the majority of cases (61%) in May 2002, schools were not aware of where their pupils progressed on to after leaving school.

- It is also worth noting that the schools returns lists were not available for October 2002. Some of the schools included their October returns in with their May returns. However, because the October returns were not completed, the actual extent of early school leaving within this time period may be an underestimation. Also the school returns list do not capture those young people who do not make the transition from primary to secondary level.

4.3.3. Profile of Young People attending Local Training Centres

During the time that this aspect of the research was being undertaken, March/April 2003, a combined number of 76 young people were attending the three Training Centres for Early School Leavers that are located in the Dun Laoghaire area: (1) Tivoli Training Centre, Dun Laoghaire; (2) Community Training Centre, Dun Laoghaire and (3) Sportsreach, Sallynoggin.

Practically all of the young people attending these training centres are early school leavers, aside from 8% who have attained the Leaving Certificate. While the profile of those attending the Training Centres is not a precise reflection on the extent of early school leaving at a particular time, it does give a more general picture of the young people who are attending the centres, where they are from, their level of educational qualification and the age at which they left school.

- Of the 76 trainees attending the 3 centres at the time of the research study, 67% were male and 33% were female.
- With regard to educational qualifications, 57% had no educational qualifications, 34% had the Junior Certificate and 8% had the Leaving Certificate.
- In terms of where they are from, 28% were from Ballybrack, 17% were from Loughlinstown, 13% from Ballyogan, 6.5% from Dun Laoghaire, a further 6.5% from Mounttown, 8% are from Shankill, 1% are from Sallynoggin (20% are from other areas).
- The early school leaving age profile was as follows: 31% left school aged under 15 years, 37% left school aged 15 years, 17% aged 16 years, 7% aged 17 years and 8% left school.

The most striking points emerging from this profile is that 31% of the young people attending the training centres left school before they were 15 years of age and 57% left school with no educational qualifications.

4.3.4. *Pupils at risk of Early School Leaving identified through the Local School Completion Programmes (SCP)*

There are two local School Completion Programmes within the research area: the Cabinteely SCP and the Mounttown/Sallynoggin SCP. Both of these Programmes have submitted a School Retention Plan to the Department of Education and Science for 2003/2004. Within the plans, the SCP Committees are asked to specify the number of individual pupils who are 'most at risk' of early school leaving and also those who are out of school. The young people identified are the target population for the programme.

The figures presented below are taken from the retention plans submitted to the Department for the 2003/2004 academic year. Between the two School Completion Programmes, there are 9 schools, 2 secondary and 7 primary. The combined school population is 1,809.

Out of this total, 486 young people were identified as being 'most at risk' of leaving school early. This means that 27% of the combined school population are identified as being at risk of early school leaving.

Of the 486 young people identified as being most at risk of early school leaving, there are 374 (77%) at primary level and 112 (23%) at secondary level. In terms of the breakdown between male and female, 174 (36%) of those most at risk were female, while 312 (64%) were male.

There were also 11 young people identified through the plans as being out of school: 3 at primary level and 8 at second level (7 male, 4 female).

The key points from this data are that:

- A higher percentage of children attending primary school are identified as being 'most at risk' of early school leaving.
- A much higher percentage of males to females are identified as 'most at risk' of early school leaving.

4.4 Conclusion

While this chapter gives as detailed a profile of early school leaving as possible, without a more comprehensive tracking system in place, which would capture all young people who are leaving school early, it is not

possible to give a complete picture of the extent of early school leaving in the area.

Chapter 5: Primary Schools: Profile and Perspective

5.1 Introduction

Ten local primary schools were consulted as part of the research study. This chapter gives an overview of the key findings from this consultation process.

5.2 Primary School Population Profile

5.2.1 Overall School Population

In September 2002, the total school population among the 10 primary schools included in the study was **1,802** pupils.

5.2.2 Identifying Pupils at Risk of Early School Leaving

The calculation of the number of children attending the 10 primary schools considered to be at risk of early school leaving are based on two sources; the two SCP Plans (2002-2003), and for the two schools who are not involved in the SCP, the Principals calculated the number of pupils that they considered to be most at risk based on their experience and knowledge. This method of Principals identifying the pupils they considered to be at risk has its limitations, it is based on more subjective rather than objective criteria.

Within the plans for the SCP, schools were asked to identify pupils most at risk of early school leaving and those potentially at risk of early school leaving. The criteria were used to identify pupils (outlined below) most at risk.

Criteria used to identify pupils 'most at risk' of early school leaving

- High level of absenteeism
- In school behaviour including record of conflict/non-co-operation
- Family dysfunction including drug/alcohol addiction problems
- Disadvantaged circumstances including poverty, poor housing, low income, family pattern of early school leaving
- Parents and siblings level of educational attainment
- Test scores on admission and academic performance to-date
- Long term illness or medical condition

The total number of children considered to be 'most at risk' among the school population for the academic year 2002-2003 was **210**. This equates to 12% of

the overall school population. The criteria outlined below were used to identify pupils potentially at risk of early school leaving.

Criteria used to identify pupils who are potentially at risk of early school leaving

- Child that is quiet and withdrawn in the school
- Low aspirations and low interest in school
- Victims of bullying/isolation
- Record of non-co-operation in school
- Persistent difficulty with homework
- Lack of positive role models in their lives
- Disruption in family life by circumstances e.g. illness, moving, stress

The total number of children considered to be 'potentially at risk' of early school leaving among the 10 schools for the academic year 2002-2003 was 326. This equates to 18% of the overall school population.

5.2.3 *Number of Children 'Out of School'*

Through the consultation with the primary schools two children were identified as being out of school at primary level. Both of these children are male, one is aged between 4 and 9 years old and the other is aged between 10 and 11 years old. This equates to 1% of the overall school population.

5.2.4 *Specific Target Groups*

In terms of specific target groups; there were 25 Traveller children attending the primary schools, 13 children who were asylum seekers, and 6 children with physical disabilities.

5.3 *Supports and Interventions*

5.3.1 *School Staff Resources*

All of the ten schools have full time non-teaching principals. All of the schools have either one or two Learning Support Teachers, giving a total of 16 between the 10 schools. All of the schools also have Resource Teachers, giving a total of 12½ posts between the 10 schools. Each of the schools have HSCL Co-ordinators, but in most cases these are half/shared posts. There is only one school with a full Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Post. Finally, between the ten schools, there are in total 33 Special Needs Assistants in place. (Explanations of these posts included in the appendices)

5.3.2 *Department of Education and Science (DES) Initiatives*

Over the last number of years, the Department of Education and Science has put in place a number of initiatives to support schools to combat educational disadvantage. All of ten schools involved in the study are included in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, the School Book Grant scheme and the 'Giving Children an Even Break' Initiative. (Explanation of these initiatives included in the appendices)

Three of the schools run Early Start programmes for 3-4 year olds. In relation to the Early Start Programme, there are a total of 90 places for children between the ages of 3 and 4 on this programme within the area. The Dominican Convent Primary School also has a Montessori school attached and there are 20 places within this school funded through the East Coast Area Health Board (ECAHB). Barnardos also run a crèche in Loughlinstown. These early intervention supports are crucial given the evidence from previous research indicate that the earlier the intervention takes place, the more effective it is in terms of supporting children at risk of educational disadvantage.

Eight of the schools were selected for inclusion in the most recent DES Initiative, the School Completion Programme (SCP). Only two of the primary schools in this study, both located in Dun Laoghaire, which have designated disadvantaged status, are not included in the SCP. While the Programme alone will not provide the solution to the problem of early school leaving, it does provide those schools involved with the financial resources to put in place the additional activities, programmes and services to support the children that they have identified as being at risk. It also provides schools with a Co-ordinator to oversee the implementation of a School Retention Plan. Therefore, in developing an Early School Leaving Strategy for this area, it would be important to consider how those schools not involved in the SCP could be provided with the additional supports that they may require.

5.3.3 *Other School Supports*

Breakfast clubs, homework clubs, after school activities and counselling supports have been established over the last number of years in conjunction with other local community services and projects.

Breakfast Clubs

- Among the 10 schools, there were 4 breakfast clubs in place. Each of the clubs target small numbers of children who would have difficulties with regular school attendance and who would have been identified as being at risk. The findings would indicate that breakfast clubs have had a positive

impact on school attendance for those children targeted and have been an important intervention in the lives of these children, although they require a considerable investment resource – wise.

Homework Clubs

- Seven of the ten schools run homework clubs. There are also community-based homework clubs in place in a number of areas. These clubs are run by community groups, youth services and local projects. One of the concerns in relation to schools running homework clubs was that they extend the length of the school day for children at primary level. The Mounttown Resource Centre homework support programme run through Dun Laoghaire Youth Services in Loughlinstown Community Rooms is a good example of a community-based programme (see Appendices). Community-based homework clubs are also being run in Shanganagh Park House and Ballybrack. The Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP) also run a homework support programme for the children who are linked into their service.

Counselling Supports

- In relation to counselling supports, the findings show that the types of counselling supports currently in place in primary schools include supports provided through the employment of a play therapist in the school to undertake one-to-one work and support provided by the Youth Service Development Worker through direct individual work with children where there are concerns in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Under a joint initiative, Mounttown NYP and Mounttown/Sallynoggin SCP employ a Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist/Teacher to work with children where there are concerns in relation to their progress in school. The NYP also does direct work with children and families. Prior to the SCP being set up locally, Mounttown NYP directed its services to children aged between 9 and 13 years. However, now that the SCP is in place, the local primary school can refer any child or parent who wishes to avail of the NYP services.

Marte Meo, which is a method using video analysis to promote good communication between parents and children, has also been introduced by the NYP to parents and teachers.

5.4 Issues/Gaps in Service Provision

5.4.1 *Persistent Absenteeism*

Primary school principals identified 4.5% of the school population that they were concerned about because of their persistent absenteeism. At the time the research was undertaken, there was no service in place to support schools to respond to this issue as the transition from the school attendance system to the new Education Welfare Service was being negotiated.

Schools themselves have a number of internal systems in place aimed at tackling this problem. These include requesting written explanations for a child's absences from school, home visits by the HSCL Co-ordinator in the absence of the school attendance service, sending leaflets home with information on the implications of the Education (Welfare) Act, and keeping a book in the classroom to record times and reasons for children being taken out of school early.

In terms of the effectiveness of responses that are currently in place, schools noted that in the majority of cases the measures employed have been effective in that they have led to improvements in attendance. Suggestions for additional responses included the provision of alternative education programmes for pupils that are persistently absent, ensuring children have positive experiences within schools and establishing the Education Welfare Service, because schools need external support to address this issue.

5.4.2 *Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*

All of the schools consulted identified that they have a number of pupils that they would consider as having emotional or behavioural difficulties. They are identified through their behaviour in the classroom setting i.e. pupil's inability to concentrate on work or control their behaviour in class. At present, schools are doing their best to respond to this issue within their existing resources. Current responses include learning support, special classes, resource hours, special needs assistants and positive discipline programmes such as Discipline For Learning.

The types of supports that Principals identified as needing to be in place for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties were trained Special Needs Assistants, counselling supports and alternative education programmes, that would be designed to meet the individual child's needs.

Schools noted that the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) doesn't respond to behavioural issues and there are difficulties in relation to accessing and referring to the services offered through the Lucena Clinic Child Guidance Service, (as well as there being a long waiting list for the

service). The service that Barnardos provided in schools, where childcare workers worked on a one-to-one basis with targeted children, was a very valuable service that is no longer available to schools due to lack of funding for the service.

Schools identified the need for access to specialised counselling supports that would help them to identify the child's needs, and respond accordingly.

5.4.3 *Psychological Support Services*

All of the schools had issues in relation to adequacy of the NEPS service and access to this service (all of the schools had waiting lists). While the service that NEPS provides was viewed an excellent support service for schools, the main issue was in relation to the limited amount of time that the psychologist allocated to their school could give. It was felt that each psychologist was overburdened and had too many schools to cover.

Another issue in relation to this service is the link between the allocation of Resource Teaching hours and Special Needs Assistants and the NEPS assessment. Schools understandably prioritise the assessment aspect of the service. However, this means that the broader support and development role that the Educational Psychologist could provide to the school is lost to some extent.

5.4.4 *Suggestions and Recommendations*

Suggestions and recommendations for responding to combating educational disadvantage and early school leaving from the Principals included:

- *Learning Support Systems:* having the resources to provide the pupil with the learning supports they require, and also to maintain small class sizes to enable teachers to respond to individual children's needs in a more effective way.
- *Counselling Service:* Having access to different types of counselling supports within the school for children, particularly for those with behavioural and emotional difficulties.
- *Links between Schools and Community based Youth Activities:* Creating the links between schools and other youth activities so that school is viewed more as part of the community rather than in isolation and also so that the range of activities offered to young people is extended.
- *Parent and Family Support Services:* Increasing the level of support to parents in general and particularly for those families with the greatest

level of need, thus enabling teachers to respond to the individual child's needs in a more effective way.

Chapter 6: Secondary Schools: Profile and Perspective

6.1 Introduction

Six secondary schools were included in the consultation for this research study. This chapter gives an overview of the school population, numbers of pupils at risk of early school leaving, the supports in place within schools, key issues identified by schools and suggestions for combating educational disadvantage.

6.2 Secondary School Population Profile

6.2.1 Overall School Population

In September 2002, the total population among the 6 secondary schools included in the study was **2424** pupils.

6.2.2 Identifying Pupils at Risk of Early School Leaving

The calculation of the number of young people attending the 6 secondary schools considered to be at risk of early school leaving are based on two sources: the two SCP Plans (2002-2003) and, for the four schools who are not involved in the SCP, the Principals calculated the number of pupils that they considered to be most at risk. Schools used the following criteria to identify pupils at risk of early school leaving.

Criteria used to Identify Young People at Risk of Leaving School Early

- Absenteeism
- Academic Difficulty/Inability to cope with the Curriculum.
- Lack of Parental support or guidance for the child in education, leading to decisions in relation to education being taken by the young person on their own, rather than with the support and guidance from their parents.
- Lack of parental support for the school - parents not responding when the school makes contact in relation to a difficulty they may be having with the young person concerned.
- Family history in education - there is an Early School Leaving culture within some families and areas. Perceived irrelevance of school.
- Combining Work and School at a Young Age

When asked about the number of young people who were identified as being at risk of leaving school early, collectively an estimated **257** students were identified. This equates to **10.6%** of the overall school population.

There were significant variations between the numbers of young people that the individual schools identified as being at risk of early school leaving. One of the estimates was very much above the average at 183; other schools gave estimates of 30-40, 25-30, 5-10, 2-3 and 1 on average every year. The limitations of identifying pupils at risk using this approach is that it is based on the Principals experience and knowledge of the pupil, which is based on subjective rather than objective criteria.

6.2.3 Target Group

In terms of target groups, there were 10 Traveller children attending the schools, 47 pupils who were asylum seekers, and 2 pupils with physical disabilities.

6.3 Supports and Interventions

6.3.1 School Staff Resources

In terms of staff resources within the six schools, there are a total of three and a half HSCL Co-ordinators, five and a half Learning Support teachers, four and a half Resource Teachers, one Resource Teacher for Travellers with an allocation of six hours for the week, four and a half Guidance Counsellors and one and a half Special Needs assistants posts.

6.3.2 Department of Education and Science (DES) Initiatives

The DES has put in place a number of initiatives aimed at supporting schools to combat educational disadvantage. Three of the schools are involved in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme, all of the schools are involved in the book grant scheme, two of the schools are included in the School Completion Programme and one school is receiving final funding under the previous Department Initiative, the Stay in School Retention Initiative.

6.3.3 School Curriculum

In terms of curriculum choices available to pupils, one of schools offers the Junior Certificate Schools programme, three of the schools offer the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, one school offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and all of the schools have a transition year.

6.3.4 Other School Supports

One school runs a breakfast club. Five of the schools provide homework support. In three cases, this means that the secondary school provides supervised study after school. Two of the schools also run homework support programmes for pupils who are targeted as needing additional supports. All of the schools run various after school activities and five of the

schools have counselling supports in place, which include Guidance Counsellors, Student Care Officers, Chaplains and a Bereavement Support Programme.

6.4 Issues/Gaps in Service Provision

6.4.1 *Psychological Support Services*

The issues for secondary schools in relation to the NEPS service are similar to those experienced by primary schools in terms of access and adequacy of the service. It is considered a very valuable service. Schools noted that it is through consultation with the Psychologist and through assessments that it is possible to get a clear definition and understanding of the particular student's needs and difficulties. The school benefits in terms of getting assistance with developing appropriate learning programmes for the students concerned. The priority for schools is that the number of Psychologists employed by NEPS needs to be increased so that the service is adequately staffed.

6.4.2 *Young People with Behavioural and Emotional Difficulties*

Secondary schools also identified a significant number of students that they would identify as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some of these students are identified through their disruptive behaviour within the classroom and lack of concern with regard to the consequences of their behaviour. Others are identified through difficulties that they are having outside of the school setting that are brought to the attention of school staff.

In terms of the supports that are currently in place, the main supports identified were the Pastoral Care structures that attempt to respond to the difficulties that these young people are having. However, these attempts are not always successful as the expertise or specialised supports are not always in place. Outside of the school setting, the main referral option is Teen Counselling in Ballybrack, which is an excellent but over extended part-time service.

What schools have suggested in terms of putting in place more effective support structures include:

- Employing a behavioural therapist between a number of local schools
- Reaching an agreement with a local psychotherapeutic body to provide counselling services to schools at a nominal rate
- Putting in place a system of withdrawal within schools
- Incorporating different teaching methodologies that would help teachers to deal with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

6.4.3 *Persistent Absenteeism*

Secondary school principals identified 4% of the school population that they were concerned about because of their persistent absenteeism. As has been stated within the consultation with primary level, there was no service in place to support schools to respond to this issue while the transition from the School Attendance System to the new Education Welfare Service was being negotiated.

Schools themselves have a number of internal systems in place aimed at tackling this problem. These include keeping records of attendance, contacting the home of the pupil following continuous absences, asking parents to meet with the teacher to discuss attendance problems and ways of resolving this issue, home visits being made by the HSCL Co-ordinator, and in some cases making contact with the Health Board Social Worker.

In terms of the effectiveness of responses that are currently in place, schools noted that in the majority of cases the measures employed have been effective in that they have led to improvements in attendance. However this is dependent on the parent being responsible and responsive to the problem. Schools stressed that if the parents aren't responsive, then the problems with attendance will be ongoing.

In light of this, it was felt that while the new Education Welfare Service, if properly resourced, offers great potential for dealing with the problems of absenteeism. It will not however, have an impact in cases of real difficulty unless there are other support services in place, in particular, access to family support services for those families under high levels of stress.

6.4.4 *Transition from Primary to Secondary*

In terms of making the transition from primary to second level, it was suggested that there was a need for improved information sharing between primary and second level schools as regards educational history of pupil's transferring to their school. This would be of benefit to secondary schools in terms being prepared to meet the needs of their incoming students.

The other suggestion was for an introduction to second level programme for targeted pupils identified as being most at risk, that could run towards the end of the summer holidays and incorporate a mixture of subject, sports and social activities and help prepare these pupils for transition.

6.5 Suggestions and Recommendations

- *Curriculum:* To have the full range of curriculum options available to all students at second level in particular the Junior Schools Certificate Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied.
- *Transition to Second Level:* To have transfer programmes in place to support the transition from primary school, which would enable pupils to be more prepared and to have a more positive experience at second level.
- *Parental and Family Support:* Schools identified the need for increased levels of both parental and family support services. Parental support refers to supporting parents in general to become more engaged in their child's education and with the school. While HSCL posts have made a significant difference to those schools who have an allocation, it is still felt that there is a need to encourage greater involvement on behalf of parents, particularly those parents whose children are at risk of leaving school early. Family support refers to a more specialised type of support, as provided through the Springboard Family Support Project, Loughlinstown and Mounttown NYP. The Springboard Family Support Project is a community-based, Department of Health & Children Initiative that is specifically focused on supporting families who are having difficulties and who need additional supports. The Springboard Initiative is designed to have an impact on the well-being of children and parents. A profile of the NYP Mounttown and the services that it provides is included in the appendices.
- *Special Support Projects:* To have access to an education support project either within or outside of the school structure catering for personal and educational needs of young people who are at risk of early school leaving. This project would be less formal than mainstream education, but focused towards attaining an educational qualification, either the Junior Certificate, FETAC Certification or Leaving Certificate Applied or the Leaving Certificate. This Project would work with no more than 5 or 6 pupils and the work would be supported by a qualified Counsellor.

Chapter 7: Profile and Consultation with Existing Service Providers

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to reflect the consultation that was undertaken with the staff providing services to early school leavers. One to one interviews were held with staff members using an open-ended theme sheet.

This chapter attempts to give an overview of their responses and their experience of working with the target group of this project. It begins by giving a brief profile of existing training, education, tracking and guidance provision for early school leavers in the area.

7.2 Profile of Existing Service Providers

Name of Service Provider	Type of Service Provision	Target Group
Dun Laoghaire Community Training Workshop	Education, Training, Guidance and Counselling	15 to 25 year old early school leavers
Tivoli Training Centre	Education, Training, Guidance and Counselling	15 to 18 year old early school leavers
Sportsreach Sallynoggin	Education, Training, Guidance and Counselling	15 to 18 year old early school leavers * Some aged under 15
Futurama 'Out of School' Transition Initiative	Education, Training, Guidance and Counselling	12 to 15 year olds who are out of school
Linked Work Experience Programme	Work Experience and On the Job Training	15 to 25 year old early school leavers
FAS Youth Advocate	Career Planning and Guidance	15 to 25 year old early school leavers
FAS Employment Services	Tracking of Early School Leavers through the School's Returns List	14 to 18 year old early school leavers

(See appendix 2 for further details on each of these services)

7.3 Main Challenges of working with Young Early School Leavers

Staff explained that the challenges change constantly. The challenges of the work vary depending on the type of situation that has to be dealt with and this in turn depends on what is going on for the trainee. A lot of the time is spent managing crisis situations.

Specific challenges/difficulties in the work included:

- The continuous intake of trainees
- The different levels of ability among trainees
- Attendance difficulties with some trainees, lack of punctuality etc.

Staff noted that trainees can be untrusting of anyone within an education setting, so they need to spend time gaining their trust and building a rapport with the young person *'so they know you are there to help them'*

7.4 Reasons for Young People Leaving School Early (Staff views)

Through their work with young people staff have, in general, found that the trainees are quite negative about school and their school experience.

'In a lot of cases, it seems to be a personality conflict with one person in the school that causes the difficulty and they (young person) leave after a blow-up.'

The main factors identified for young people leaving school early were:

- Being given the choice to leave school by parents who are under pressure in their own lives
- Difficulty in making the transfer to secondary school, in terms of the increased number of teachers and the different structures

Another staff member also noted that a lot of the trainees that she works with have said to her that they always 'felt stupid' in school and partly because of this decided that they would rather not be there.

7.5 Main Issues/Needs of Young Early School Leavers (Identified by Staff)

(A) Unstructured Chaotic Lives/Unmet Basic Needs

Issues for a significant number of trainees included:

- Many of the trainees lacked structure in their lives; at times chaotic and in crisis
- Trainees were often carrying a lot of difficult issues in relation to their personal/family relationships
- Homelessness
- Lack of Proper Nourishment
- Need for intensive supports

(B) Lack of Concentration

One of things noted by staff is that the trainees have very short attention span and it is difficult for many of them to concentrate for significant periods of time.

(C) Attendance

- Feedback from the qualitative interviews with the staff indicated that in a number of cases there is a marked improvement on trainees attendance in the centre as compared with their school attendance

- Many of the trainees have a problem with attending everyday and many have a problem with attending everyday on time.

‘There are some weeks when attendance is very low. This causes difficulties in terms of making progress. Also it tends to be those who are weakest that miss the most days’.

(D) Non-Completion of Training Course

A related issue raised during the consultation was that some young people leave training courses prior to completing their course. It is difficult to quantify but there is evidence to suggest that there is a significant number of trainees coming and going, between jobs and between Training Centres. Some of the reasons for leaving early/non-completion of courses are:

- Employment and the attraction of increased wages
- The young person may not be getting what they want from the centre – in terms of the type of courses offered
- The young person might be excluded from the centre because of their behaviour i.e. non-attendance or drug use.

(E) Literacy Levels

Staff noted that it is difficult to quantify overall literacy levels. In general, literacy levels of the young early school leavers are reported to be significantly below their age profile.

(F) Learning Difficulties

A related issue raised during the consultation was that it was estimated if assessments were undertaken, they would show that many of the trainees have some form of learning difficulty, including ADHD, or some form of Dyslexia.

(G) Access to a Counselling Service

Staff reported that there is a very identifiable need to have a counselling service for all the young people attending the Centre.

‘Some families are under very high levels of stress. We come across a range of issues within families including separation/divorce, poverty, drug and alcohol misuse, illness and bereavement’

(H) Drug Use among Young People

Key issues in this area:

- Anecdotal evidence of frequent use of drugs such as hash and consumption of alcohol as regular aspect of social life of trainees.

- Concerns around referring young people on methadone maintenance programmes onto existing full-time courses in Training Centres. Concerns centred on ability to attend a full-time programme, (not considered a suitable option).
- Importance of maintaining centres and projects for early school leavers as drug free zones.

7.6 Key benefits for Young Person attending Training Centre

Some of the key benefits identified by the staff were as follows:

- Attending the Training Centre provides **a structure and a focus** for Trainees, which in some cases is the only place where there is structure in their lives.
- A **network of supports**, both practical and personal, which they may not have outside of the centre.
- **Building Confidence** in themselves and **motivation** to work towards a goal, because in many cases when they join the Centre they lack self-confidence and are unsure of their future direction.
- **Social Network:** Benefits of making friends and mixing with their peers and adults.
- **Individual Support:** Working in small groups, which means that the trainees get more time, attention and support on an individual basis.
- **Family Intervention:** Training centre can act as a 'buffer' between the young person and their parents as the option of the Training Centre in some cases prevents escalation of conflict in relation to the school/home situation.
- **Learning new skills** and their achievements being recognised through certification.
- **Employment Opportunities:** Real opportunity of progressing onto employment through the Linked Work Experience Programme or other progression routes.
- **Childcare Support:** Access to childcare facilities for those trainees on the Young Mothers Programmes.

Chapter 8: Consultation with Young Early School Leavers

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents feedback from one-to-one interviews that took place with young people who had left school early and who were attending one of the three local Training Centres.

To guide the interviews, a theme sheet was used. The theme sheet asked general questions in relation to current experience of training, previous school experience, previous employment experience, and also plans for the future. A cross-section of trainees in relation to males and females, age groups, areas and courses were interviewed. The format used to present the consultation with young early school leavers is a combination of case studies and themes, beginning with a number of case studies to give an overview of the individual circumstances for the young person leaving school early.

8.2 Case Studies

Case 1

This young person who was interviewed had left school by the November of his first year in secondary school following a suspension. This means that he only attended second level school for, at most, 2 to 3 months. He told how he had been suspended almost every second day in 6th class of primary level. Despite the school encouraging him to return, stating that they would give him a second chance, he explained that he decided not to '*bother going back*', because he knew that he would get in trouble again and end up '*getting kicked out*'.

Case 2

This early school leaver explained that he had been 'kicked out' in 1st year, taken back in 2nd year and then '*kicked out*' again. He also stated that he had been expelled from primary school and had been at home for a year and a half before starting secondary school. He stated that the reason he was expelled from school, both at primary and secondary level, was because of his '*messing*'. The second time he was expelled from secondary school was because of a confrontation with a teacher who was following him after he had decided to go home early.

Case 3

This early school leaver who was interviewed was now aged 14 and had left school when he was 13 years of age. He explained that while he had enjoyed primary school, he only stayed in secondary school for the first half of first year. He went '*on the hop*' from April to the end of May. His parents received a letter from the school saying that he had only attended a total of 59 days in the school year.

The school in question asked for a meeting with the young man and his parents to discuss matters before he started second year. He is unclear about whether this meeting took place or not. He believes that the school probably didn't want him back, because he says himself that he '*caused hell*' in the school and was always '*kicking up murder*' and this is why he decided to join the Training Centre, which he was attending at the time of the interview.

His behaviour was also a problem in primary school. He stated that he was temporarily expelled for throwing a chair in the classroom.

He also explained that he also found the classes in secondary school too long and stated that there were too many teachers, who were in his words '*yapping away*'. He said that he found classes very boring.

Case 4

This young person left school in the first term of first year. He stated that the main reason for leaving school early was because he was working on a paper round with his father that started very early in the morning. He found that he couldn't handle working and going to school as well.

He spoke of how he liked primary school and found that the teachers were really nice, but he had missed a significant amount of time in school, because he was working early mornings.

When asked about the amount of time that he missed, he said that he would have missed weeks of school at a time. The primary school did follow him up about his attendance and his attendance would improve for a short period of time, but would worsen again.

He was out of school by the time he was 13 years of age. He went on to work full time over the next year, but during that time he wrote three or four letters to the secondary school asking them if he could go back. The school did reply to his letters, but stated that they could not take him back because of the amount of time that he had missed.

By coincidence, shortly after he finished work on the paper round a leaflet came in the door with information on a Training Centre in Dun Laoghaire. He contacted the Centre and is now attending the Pre-Apprenticeship course and hopes to become a carpenter. Aside from the leaflet being dropped to the house, he had no other information about the training and education options open to him.

Case 5

Helping out at home was one of the main reasons why this young person left school early after completing her Junior Certificate. With regard to school attendance, the girl explained that her attendance was very good in first year of secondary school, but it got worse in second year and by third year, she was attending school approximately one day a week.

She didn't like secondary school to begin with, and she started missing out on more and more school when her mother had a baby and she felt that she was needed at home. *'I preferred to stay at home and clean the house instead of going to school'*.

It is interpreted from the interview that her mother could have been finding it difficult to cope on her own within the home and came to rely on her daughter's support and help within the home. *'She loved it when I stayed at home and would lie to Dad that I had gone to school'*

She explained that she had missed out on so much in third year that from then on she lost interest in her schoolwork. She stayed on to do her Junior Certificate, which she passed and she then left to go working, which she did for the next three years before she began attending a Training Centre in Dun Laoghaire.

Case 6

This young person attended secondary school for first, second and half of third year with, according to himself, good attendance. *'I liked going to school to meet people, but I got bored sitting in the classroom all day. If you couldn't do something, you wouldn't really get helped.'* While initially he found it a *'good laugh'*, he explained that being lost in the class and not understanding what was going on started to get to him. He started to hate going to school so much that he decided to stop going and to stay at home instead. He did this for six months, but then got fed up with having nothing to do and decided to join one of the Training Centres in Dun Laoghaire and now wants to go on to do an apprenticeship.

Case 7

Two of the young people interviewed explained that they had left school after the Junior Certificate, because they did not want to do Transition Year prior to 5th and 6th year. Instead of going on to Transition year, one of the young men decided to join a Training Centre for the year with the intention of returning to school for 5th year, but after spending a year out of school, he didn't return. The other young man spent a year at home and also intended to return to school for 5th year, but after the year joined a Training Centre instead.

Case 8

This young early school leaver left school in the September of 3rd year. She stated that she was expelled in the first week of 3rd year for knocking a table into a teacher. She said that the school took her back after this incident, but she left a week later. The local Juvenile Liaison Officer (JLO) was involved in getting her back into school.

She said that she had always caused trouble in school and had being suspended for *'messing and being cheeky'* lots of times, and as well as that she was always *'going on the hop'*.

She explained that she found it difficult to sit down and concentrate in the classes that she didn't like. She found that most of the teachers were *'never in good form'* and they were *'always having bad days'*.

The subjects that she did like were maths, English and Environmental Social Studies. The teachers of these subjects were also the teachers that she liked.

At the time she left school, she was living with relations. She had not been living at home since the start of the summer. She remembers not having any lunch money and deciding to stay at home. For her leaving school was gradual. She doesn't remember making a decision not to return.

She moved back home in the January after leaving school and turned 15 in the March. After moving home, herself and her mother had a meeting with the school Principal and the Year Head and the decision was made that she would return to school for 5th year. This agreement was reached on the basis that in the meantime, she would attend one of the Training Centres in Dun Laoghaire for the rest of 3rd year and show an improvement on her previous behaviour in school. At the time this interview took place, she was just about to start her Junior Certificate, which she decided to sit despite having missed most of third year.

She planned to spend the summer attending the centre and then to return to school in the September. When asked why she was going back to school, she explained that she missed *'the laugh'* that she has with her friends in school. She also wants to do her Leaving Certificate. *'It's worth doing and you need it'*.

She is going back into the same year as her friends and is really looking forward to it, but she was also a little afraid that she would start messing again.

Towards the end of the interview, she explained that she was starting to get into her new routine of going to bed at night and getting up early. During the time she wasn't attending school or the training, she got into the habit of staying up all night and watching television. She has found it quite difficult to break this habit.

Case 9

The young woman interviewed in this case had attended primary school within this area, but transferred to a secondary school outside the area. This was because she moved from the area, following a family separation, to live with her sister. She told how she had taken a year off between primary and secondary school.

She said that she left school in 1st year because she hated it and also because of her English teacher. She told how she wasn't allowed to attend English class for most of first year. She said that the teacher allowed her into class every now and then, but most of the time she wasn't allowed to stay for the class. She felt that this teacher picked on her unfairly, and other people commented on this as well.

She did like her Geography teacher and really made an effort not to mess in her class. She commented how this teacher was really nice and explained everything. She also said that if she did mess in class, the teacher would ask her to stay back after the class and talk to her; *'I'm trying to be fair to you, you have to be fair back'*.

This young early school leaver has been out of school for the last two years. She explained that she would not return to school at this stage, because she would be too old at 16 to start 5th year.

When asked if she got bored being at home for the last couple of years, she replied that she didn't because she minded her nephews some days and as well as that, there were about five or six of her friends who weren't in school either and they hung around with each other. Three of these friends, including her, joined one of the Training Centres in Dun Laoghaire in the same week.

8.3 Themes in relation to School Experience, Reasons for Leaving School Early and Experience of Training Centres

The key areas covered during the interviews were the young peoples experience of school, their reasons for leaving school early and their experience of training centres.

As the individual cases demonstrate, each of the young person's experiences is an individual story. However, a number of key themes/issues were identified from the interviews with young early school leavers. The findings are presented under the following themes:

8.3.1 *Difficult/Disruptive Behaviour in School*

It is clear from some of the cases that certain young people had difficulty containing their behaviour in school. One of the young men interviewed held the belief that he didn't have the capacity to change his behaviour, he said that he knew if he went back to school that he would end up getting '*kicked out*' again.

In many cases, the difficulty in relation to behaviour was identifiable at primary level. In the cases cited at the start of this chapter, the young people interviewed referred to the difficulties that they had in school at primary level.

It appears that in many cases their needs and the underlying causes of their behaviour weren't identified at this stage and therefore it was not possible to put the appropriate responses/interventions in place.

It is also clear that suspension/expulsion, as an intervention wasn't effective in terms of instigating a change of behaviour on behalf of the young person. One observation by a secondary school Principal was that suspension is most effective in cases of one-off misbehaviour by a pupil who there are generally no difficulties with, but it has little or no impact on other pupils where difficult behaviour in school is more the norm.

In terms of responding to this issue, a number of key learning/ observations would need to be considered in terms of reaching a more holistic and effective response to difficult behaviour within schools, to take account of the different levels of need.

In terms of responding to the needs of young people where there are behavioural problems in school, suggested responses include:

- a) Closer co-ordination and information sharing between primary and secondary schools; Primary school teachers have in-depth knowledge of their pupils background, needs and abilities. Sharing this knowledge and experience of working with the pupil would be of immense benefit to secondary school teachers beginning to work with the pupil.
- b) In-school systems and structures such as shortening the length of the school day temporarily and limiting the social aspect of the school day for the pupil as a means of motivating them to take control and to improve behaviour within the classroom.
- c) Therapeutic group or one-to-one work facilitated by a skilled professional, creating a forum for discussing behaviour within the classroom.
- d) Time out from school e.g. (St. John's Educational Service, Glasnevin)
- e) Mediation Service e.g. (St. Dominic's Secondary School, Ballyfermot)

It should also be acknowledged that the mainstream school system is not the most appropriate placement for all young people. This needs to be accepted and alternative settings need to be considered for those young people.

8.3.2 *Learning Supports*

It is clear from the interviews that many of these young people were not benefiting from school in terms of furthering their education and learning within the school setting.

They spoke of being bored, of the teacher 'yapping away' and of not being able to keep up in class. It seems that the young people were lost and became increasingly disengaged and disconnected from what was going on in the class. In some cases, this must have extenuated difficult behaviour within the school.

From the point of view of the teacher, working with a significant number of pupils, (generally 20 per class), is a difficult task, particularly given the demands of the second level curriculum and the different levels of need within the classroom.

From the outset, there needs to be an accurate assessment of the individual pupil's needs. The learning support that the pupil requires also needs to be available and put in place for the young person including one-to-one support and an adjusted curriculum if necessary.

Ensuring that the pupil receives the supports they need is dependent to an extent on the school accessing the necessary resources such as psychological assessments, resource teaching hours, capacity to run additional programmes including the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, etc. It is also dependent on the school ethos, and the planning and allocation of resources within the school.

8.3.3 *Relationships with Teachers*

A number of the young people consulted recalled getting on very well with one or two of their teachers.

One young woman spoke about her Home Economics teacher: she felt that the Home Economics teacher liked her, but all of the other teachers *'hated her straight away'*.

'She's really friendly and you could talk to her about whatever you wanted. The other teachers could be narky with you and might say something smart, you say something smart back and then you end up getting in trouble'

Another early school leaver who was consulted explained that he liked the teachers that you could have a laugh and a joke with and who didn't whine on all the time, but disliked those teachers that tried to have the *'perfect class'*.

He had a science teacher, who was young and knew how to deal with the class. *'He knew how to handle an argument and didn't feel that he always had to be right, he knew what it was like'*. It is clear that this young person felt understood by this teacher.

Less positively, one of the young people interviewed explained how he and his class had given one of their teachers a really hard time and he thinks that

this is the reason why the teacher left the school. He commented that some teachers just weren't able to handle the class, while others could.

It seems that there are some teachers who adopt a certain approach within the classroom that works very well with pupils that can be difficult. The approach that seems to work best is one where the teacher is open-minded with the class and relates to them as young adults. Being fair, reasonable and listening to their opinions are identified as key in terms of engaging successfully with young people.

In the interviews with young people, reference was made to confrontations and conflicts developing between the teacher and the pupil, which over time become intransigent. As the professional in the setting, the responsibility to handle these types of conflict situations lies with the teacher. With this in mind, teachers themselves also need to be supported to deal with difficult situations that arise within the classroom setting.

As well as providing teachers with opportunities for ongoing professional development, they should also have the opportunity to access practical support and advice with regard to management of classes and dealing with conflict or difficult behaviour.

8.3.4 *Transition Year*

Transition year is considered an important preparation year for the senior cycle. Research indicates that it is of significant benefit to those who do take this option. A report published by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in 2001 found that transition year students secured an additional 26 CAO points compared to those who did not take the year. The report also noted that while Transition Year is not an intervention targeted at educational disadvantage, it may have a significant impact on it.

That said, not all young people see the value of doing this year, particularly those who want to get their qualifications as soon as possible so that they can start working. Two of the young people interviewed had opted out of doing transition year and had left school after the Junior Certificate with the intention of returning to school in 5th year. However, after taking the year out of school neither of them returned to school to complete the senior cycle.

It is important that, as much as possible, flexibility within the education system is maintained so that young people who prefer not to take the transition year, and who will leave school instead of doing it, can be

accommodated to remain in school and complete the senior cycle within two years if that is their preference

8.3.5 School Rules

The research feedback indicates that young people disengage from school if they feel that they are being treated unfairly. Some of the school rules were not perceived as being very fair.

'Taking your jacket and you have to pay for it back'.

It is evident that rules need to be fair and reasonable and that the purpose of the rule needs to be explained. There may be a case for allowing more flexibility/negotiation around some of the school rules for pupils at senior level. Young people at this age are going through a stage of forming their own identity and trying to assert their independence.

Having an input into school decisions and rules would be a way for schools to recognise this development. The National Children's Office (NCO) is currently working on promoting the development of student councils in second level schools. The right to student councils was outlined within the 1998 Education Act. A Student Council Working Group has been set up since 2003 to guide and support the development of councils within schools. When set up, they will provide a mechanism for young people to have their views heard in relation to school matters and to have an input into decision-making.

8.3.6 Choice of School

Some other issues that arose in relation to school were that in a number of cases, young people who left school early were attending secondary schools that their parents had chosen for them, but that they didn't want to attend for various reasons (the most common being that the majority of their friends were attending other schools). This seemed to have caused the most difficulties in terms of their settling into the new school.

In another case, one young person who was attending a school which was her father's choice for her, had to take two buses to school and this in conjunction with the her home situation, (where regular school attendance was not insisted upon because her mother needed support within the home), all converged to lead to this young girl making the decision to leave school early.

The choice of secondary school can in some cases be a complex issue. There are a number of influencing factors on this decision including the primary school's recommendation, parental preference, the young person's preference

and where a place can be secured. Differences of opinion in relation to the choice of school, in terms of what is the most suitable placement for the young person, needs to be negotiated and talked through so that in as far as possible an agreement is reached. Ultimately, given the age at which the transition is made, it is the parents decision and choice.

8.3.7 *Second Placement*

A significant number of the young people consulted stated that once they had been expelled from the school, and submitted applications to other local schools, in all cases their applications weren't accepted.

In one example, a young person had been expelled from school at primary and secondary level:

'I'd like to go back to school, but no school will take me'

When he was asked why he wanted to go back to school given that he didn't get on well and didn't like it the first time he explained that he was a bit older now, and he realised that he would act differently this time.

Given this young person isn't in a position to go back to school, he is going to do some Junior Certificate subjects in one of the Training Centres.

This case highlights the fact that it is very difficult to regain access to a secondary school once a young person is out of the school system. This situation is referred to again in the next chapter on key issues 'Second Chance at Second Level'.

All young people have the right to access education, including those young people who are out of school early and who want to return. While this right needs to be supported locally, the concerns of the school also need to be acknowledged and addressed. They need to be supported when working with young people who have in the past had difficulties within the school system.

Having interventions in place such as time-out options and supported reintegration measures would help in terms of responding to and addressing the concerns of schools. There would also need to be fairness around all schools in an area working with pupils where there have been difficulties in the past.

8.3.8 *School Attendance, Child Welfare and Family Support*

In two of the cases cited where there were attendance difficulties, the cause of the persistent absenteeism was because of circumstances within the family.

In the first case, the problem in relation to school attendance centred on the mother's difficulties including maybe lack of confidence in her own ability to cope and also lack of home support available to her apart from through her daughter. It does seem like the kind of case where a service such as Springboard Family Support Project would be of great benefit as they respond in a very practical way to the needs of individual family members.

Identifying the reason for the non-attendance would be key in terms of initiating the appropriate response in this case. The young girl herself did not have any serious issues with school and an intervention within the home would have increased her chances of staying in school until completion of the Leaving Certificate.

In the other case, the young man interviewed worked from a very early age on a paper round that started very early in the morning. Working these long hours had an adverse effect on his chances of receiving or benefiting from education. An intervention by the Health Board and follow-up family support services would be necessary in a case such as this.

The chances of identifying and responding to the underlying causes of persistent absenteeism at an early a stage is now more likely with the coming on line of the new Education Welfare Service.

8.3.9 *Information on Education and Training Options*

There appears to be a gap here, in that young people who have left school early have no information about their education and training options once they have left school.

In the main, the young people who were interviewed had found out about the training centres through people that they knew personally, which included family members, friends, neighbours and people they knew in school. Other ways in which young people found out about training centres in a small number of cases was through the FAS Employment Centre, FAS Youth Advocate, the LAB Co-ordinator and the NYP Co-ordinator. In one case, one of the young people found out about the Training Centre through a leaflet being dropped through the door.

Many of the young people interviewed had spent a significant amount of time out of school and not attached to any other training or education service. It

took many of the young people who left school early a long time before they linked in again with a Training Centre. A number of these young people were 'at home and doing nothing' for significant periods of time after leaving school.

At this stage, they would be a vulnerable group in terms of not being attached to any service and as a result could be more at risk in many ways, of being isolated, of losing self-confidence, motivation, of losing direction in their lives, of getting involved with their peers who are in a similar situation and looking for diversions from the day-to-day reality of hanging around. Ultimately, they are at risk of losing out, and not making a successful transition to young adulthood by not being in a place where they can avail of training/education opportunities.

The interviews with the young early school leavers do demonstrate a need for a service that would link to a place where they can get information, guidance and advice on exploring their options whether that is returning to school, pursuing a vocational training or education course, or accessing some work experience.

8.3.10 Reasons for Joining a Training Centre

In explaining why they had joined a training centre, a number of trainees referred to the fact that they were out of school and were getting bored doing nothing, so when they were told about the training centre, being bored at home was the main motivating factor for deciding 'to give the training centre a go'.

'Because I knew I had to do something. I was sick of sitting around doing nothing. I'm not that sort of person.'

The young man quoted above decided that he wanted to do his Junior Certificate, so he could go on to do an apprenticeship. He wasn't aware of any other place where he could go to do this, so he decided to join the training centre. This young man had no real interest in the vocational subject that he had chosen in the centre, his main interest was in completing the eight FETAC modules that are pre-requisite to accessing an apprenticeship.

One trainee who had a number of jobs since leaving school explained that he didn't want to go working in the same kind of jobs again. He started attending the centre because he wanted to get some qualifications and get into a job that he liked.

Another trainee, who was attending the Young Mothers' Programme, explained that she wanted her daughter to attend a crèche, where she would learn how to socialise and play with other young children. She also wanted to get out of the house and meet other people.

8.3.11 *Differences between Schools and Training Centres*

The following are some of the main differences between schools and training centres as identified by young people attending training centres in the area.

'You have a choice about being here – it's not like school where you have to be there. There's less pressure than in school you're just asked to give it a go'.

'The centre is different from school, because you can go at your own pace, one subject at a time, you can also pick whatever subjects you're interested in doing and you don't have to do Irish'.

'The main difference with school is that the days go by a lot quicker. The days in school were too boring, just listening to people going on and on'.

'More time is given on a one-to-one basis'

One of the respondents explaining why her attendance at the centre was much improved on her attendance at school stated that *'You always know what you are going to be doing in the centre and who you are going to meet, whereas it wasn't the same in school'.*

8.3.12 *Benefits of the Training Centres*

The following are a number of quotes aimed at demonstrating what trainees perceive to be some of the benefits of attending the training centre.

Self Confidence: *'It has helped me to talk to people, before I wouldn't talk to people that I didn't know'.*

Confidence in Ability to Learn: The main change for one of the young mothers has been the fact that her confidence has greatly improved and she now feels that she is able to do different subjects. Before joining the centre, she never felt that she could learn and always thought that she was stupid. She explained that someone pushing you gives you confidence and now she wants to learn.

Preventative: *'Being here keeps me out of trouble'*

Training Centre Staff

The tutors and instructors have very important and responsible roles within the Training Centres. The quality of the relationship that they build with the trainees is a crucial element in the work of the centre. Because of their day-to-day contact with the trainees, they are in a position to act as a positive role model for the young people that they work with.

It needs to be stressed that the feedback from the trainees in relation to the staff was overwhelming positive.

'Teachers are very friendly, you can talk to them about whatever you like'

'Meetings with the Advocate are very helpful, you can see what you want to do and what progress can be made'

8.3.13 Conclusion

The consultation with young early school leavers was a vital part of the overall research study. It gave an insight into their individual circumstances and situations, the background behind the identifying factor of being an 'early school leaver'. The National Children's Strategy makes a commitment to ensuring that children will have a voice in matters, which affect them.

This commitment should be reflected at a local level. Given the value of hearing the perspective and experience of the young person, it is important that continual and meaningful consultation with young people is incorporated as a key element with regard to implementing the suggestions/recommendations arising from this report.

Chapter 9: Key Issues Emerging from Research Findings

9.1 Key Issue 1: Identifying and Tracking of Early School Leavers

The FAS School Returns Lists are the most valuable local source of information on levels of early school leaving within a specific area. However, the FAS School Returns Lists are not designed as a means of measuring the extent of early school leaving within an area. Their central purpose is to implement the Social Guarantee, which states that every school leaver is entitled to at least two years training/education on leaving school, and FAS have taken on responsibility for implementing the guarantee.

The returns lists rely on schools forwarding a list containing the contact details of the students who have left school early onto the local FAS office (FAS Employment Office in Dun Laoghaire).

Having viewed the lists as part of this research study, and also having interviewed the FAS Placement Officer with responsibility for following up on the information provided through the schools returns lists, a number of gaps in this limited tracking system were identified:

- The information gathered through the FAS School Return Lists is not collated at a national level. Once it is collected locally, it remains within the local office. There are Placement Officers in local FAS offices throughout the country with responsibility for working on the school returns list, but there is no central mechanism to which they can feed this information into for further analysis.
- Another gap is the absence of a forum for Placement Officers with responsibility for school returns lists to discuss common concerns, trends, additional supports, resources or responses required. The information collected through the returns lists is not used to generate statistics on early school leaving in specific areas. However, this is something that could be achieved through maintaining and systematically updating a database and, based on this information, trends and patterns in relation to early school leaving could be detected. With the relevant data on their area, local services would be in a much better position to respond to local needs that are identified.
- There is one Placement Officer in FAS allocated the responsibility of collecting, collating and following up on the school returns list. For that person, this is one aspect of their job that they focus on twice during the

year. A certain amount of time is allocated to following up on the Schools Returns List with the schools on for contacting and inviting the early school leavers to interview. However, the capacity for any further or more pro-active follow-up of these young people is not currently in place. If the current system is to be improved, additional time and resources will need to be concentrated on the issue of tracking early school leavers.

- As part of an extended system of identifying and following up early school leavers, it is important to recognise the ineffectiveness of following up early school leavers using only the postal system. For example, from the follow-up of the May 2003 Returns, there was an overall response rate of 23%. This includes anyone who contacted the office. The percentage of young people who came into the office for the informal interview with the Placement Officer was 9%. Tracking systems that have been developed in other areas such as the Pathways Model (Waterford) or the Youth Support and Training Unit (YSTU, Clondalkin) have built on the FAS School Returns List to develop more effective tracking mechanisms that include outreach work, development of stronger links with schools, provision of informal drop-in service for early school leavers, etc. (See Appendices for further information on Pathways and the YSTU.

In relation to the secondary schools making the returns, there were a number of important findings:

- The schools generally have to be followed up a number of times to ensure that they make the returns to FAS. In many cases, the returns are submitted late. In some cases schools only do one set of returns for the academic year.
- The set times during which schools make their returns needs to be reviewed. If returns are made in October and then May, there could be a five month gap between when someone leaves school and when FAS are notified. For example if someone leaves school in November, FAS will not be notified until the next May. Young people who leave school early need to be identified and followed up as soon as possible so that they can be supported and guided to access the services if needed.
- It is also worth noting that some schools have better track records in terms of making returns to FAS. Not all schools make returns to FAS. Some schools send back an empty sheet stating that they have no early school leavers.

- There are a significant number of cases where schools make incomplete returns to FAS. This could include returning the list to FAS without the addresses of the young people, which means that they have to be returned to the school again and this causes further delay in making contact with the young person. Another gap in the information provided by the school is in relation to the current status of the young person. In a substantial number of cases, schools are unaware of where the young person has gone on to once they have left school. In May 2003, the current status of 45% of the early school leavers was unknown and in the previous May 2002, the percentage was even higher with 61% status unknown.
- It would be important to acknowledge that some of the issues in relation to schools making returns stem from the fact that the practice of making the returns is viewed to a certain extent as a paper exercise. If schools were made more aware of the effectiveness of a tracking system, then they would be under increased pressure to make complete and punctual returns to the FAS office.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset, that, without an integrated system for identifying and collecting data on the number of young people who are out of school, trying to measure the true extent of early school leaving within a particular area is currently an inexact science. This needs to be borne in mind when reviewing the information provided on the current extent of early school leaving in the Dun Laoghaire VEC catchment area.

Suggested Responses:

In response to the gaps in the current system for identifying and tracking early school leavers, it is suggested that, in order to improve on current provision, schools need to co-operate with timely completion of the returns. Thereafter, there needs to be a more pro-active follow-up of the young people on the lists, which may include home visits, outreach work etc. An improved tracking system would be immeasurably strengthened through the building of formal links and lines of communication between the Education Welfare Officer, HSCL Co-ordinators, School Completion Co-ordinators, Youth Services, FAS, Local Employment Service, Youth Advocate, School Guidance Counsellors and other personnel in the area.

The Education Welfare Officer is going to have a key role with regard to the development of a tracking system for young people who are out of school, and young people who are at risk of being out of school early. Young people who are aged between 16 and 18 years old who are out of school and who are working, have to be registered with the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). At a national

level, there is a need for a more integrated approach between the NEWB and FAS, the two agencies with key responsibility for the identification and tracking of early school leavers.

9.2 Key Issue 2: Second Chance at Second Level

Finding a School Placement

Research findings noted that it has become increasingly difficult over the last number of years to access a school placement for a young person who has previously left or has been expelled from another school. The FAS, the Youth Advocate, Juvenile Liaison Officers, Social Worker and others have all reported on the increased level of difficulty over the past number of years in accessing a school placement for young people who have left the formal education system, either through expulsion or other factors.

The point in relation to securing placements for young people who have been expelled from school or left early is that it can be difficult for a young person to make the decision to return to school after an absence, and when they do it can be disheartening when it is not possible to secure a placement at second level. It also needs to be noted that at present some schools have a better record for taking in 'difficult' students than others.

Parents sometimes need support in approaching schools as they can be intimidated, and this may be linked to their own experience of education. Some parents need advice on how to approach the school and how to advocate on behalf of their child.

Some of the reasons given for schools not being in a position to give placements have included the following:

- (a) The young person is not living within their catchment area,
- (b) The young person is a past pupil of the school and because of their previous experience with the young person s/he is not be accepted back,
- (c) The school has a policy of not taking in new students during exam year,
- (d) There would be an awareness through contact with other school principals of a pupil's past difficulties within a school setting.

Suggested Responses to Issue:

Hosting a Seminar for Secondary schools in the area on 'Second Chance at Second Level'.

The suggestion is to organise this in conjunction with the County Education and Learning Forum of the County Development Board. From this seminar, a Schools Network could be initiated.

Setting up Schools Network/Establishing Protocols

Establishing a local network for secondary school Principals.

The Network could focus on issues such as:

- Sharing of common concerns
- Working on protocols between schools re. system of securing school placements, and distribution of students who are out of the system
- System of supports for students
- Establishing a central information and referral source for local schools

The membership of the network should include all of the secondary schools within this specific catchment area.

The regional offices of the Department of Education, which for this area are located in Tallaght, will be a forum to which local educational issues can be brought, and will be linked with the County Education and Learning Forum. (County Development Board).

The new Education Welfare Service could make a significant impact locally both in terms of preventing early school leaving through following up young people who schools are concerned about because of their irregular attendance and also in securing placements for young people who are out of school and who want to return.

Establishing Links between Schools and Learning/Training Centres re. Placements

If a young person attends another learning/training centre for a specific amount of time and a recommendation for the young person to return to school is made by the centre to the school, then there could be an agreed approach between schools to accept students who are supported in their reintegration to school.

9.3 Key Issue 3: Limited Learning Options for Early School Leavers - The need to develop a broader range of education options for early school leavers

Currently, the education options for early school leavers are limited. Their choices are concentrated in the area of vocational training as offered by the Community Training Centre, Tivoli Training Centre, or Sportsreach. While this is a strength of existing provision, not all early school leavers want to pursue this type of option, and it may not always be the most appropriate

choice. The fact that the Linked Work Experience Programme is no longer an option for early school leavers in this catchment area limits their choices further.

There is a need to bridge the gap between the formal and non-formal education providers, and to explore possibilities of training centres and schools working together to provide joint programmes, which would give young people attending schools/training centres the opportunity to pursue a mixed academic and vocational education. The opportunity to pursue the Junior and Leaving Certificate and FETAC modules would be key elements within a joint initiative between a school and a training centre.

The flexible nature of the Back to Education Initiative (B.T.E.I) is another avenue to consider in terms of designing suitable educational programmes for this group. Currently there is a BTEI Programme running for young Asylum Seekers (Separated Children) and one planned, in conjunction with the CTC, for early school leavers not currently attending/able to attend full-time programmes in the centres.

9.4 Key Issue 4: Targeting Early School Leavers Locally

- **Targeting Specific Areas: Loughlinstown and Ballybrack**

The research findings show that 45% of the Trainees attending the Training Centres were from the Loughlinstown/Ballybrack area. There were also an additional 8 young people who were attending the Futurama Project.

There are no training centres for early school leavers within the Loughlinstown/Ballybrack area. However, the Futurama Project is an education support project for 12-15 year olds, based in Loughlinstown. There are also direct Bus services from Loughlinstown and Ballybrack to Dun Laoghaire. There is a need to prioritise this area in terms of putting in place supports for potential and existing early school leavers.

- **Targeting Young People with No Educational Qualifications**

What is most striking about the information compiled from the training centres is that 57% of the young people attending the centres have no educational qualifications. This is a significant number of young people who have not benefited from the mainstream educational system in terms of achieving qualifications. It also highlights the fact that Training Centres are working with a significant number of young people who would be the most marginalized and most at risk within this age group and who would

need intensive supports to respond to the difficulties and challenges that they are faced with in making the transition to adulthood. Young people without any educational qualifications should be prioritised within an early school leaving strategy.

- **Targeting Young Male Early School Leavers**

Another important point to note from the profile is that two-thirds of those attending the Training Centres are male.

At a national level, the Annual School Leavers Survey shows that more males than females leave school early with no qualifications: (4.1% compared with 2.5% females). Also fewer males than females are staying in school until the completion of the senior cycle (77% compared with 87% for females).

This was reflected in the findings from the research at a local level. Two-thirds of the young people attending the Training Centres were male. In the local School Completion Programme, which identified the number of young people most at risk of early school leaving, a higher percentage of those identified were male (64%), females (36%).

One of the new Initiatives offered at a local level (in Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre) is the Pre-Apprenticeship Programme, for which there is currently a waiting list. This offers an alternative route to an apprenticeship, particularly for young males who left school before completing the Junior Cycle. It may be useful to explore expanding this programme or offering other bridging options that would be appealing to this target group.

- **Targeting Young Mothers who are Early School Leavers**

There is currently a waiting list in the Community Training Centre for the Young Mothers' Programme. This indicates that there is a need for an extension or duplication of this type of course either in the same centre or in another area/venue.

In a number of cases, the young women who were interviewed as part of this research study had started the course when their child began school. In most cases, the young women had spent a significant amount of time at home full time with their child. There was a sense that some of these young women found this very isolating. When they started at the CTC they were very happy to be in the company of other mothers and also to have the time, space and option of exploring their own educational opportunities.

The real need for such a course where intensive supports and childcare are provided, is reflected by the number of people on the waiting list for this programme.

The CTC have created links with the Cottage Childcare Project (Local Barnardos Childcare Service) and a number of places are reserved in the crèche for mothers who are attending the CTC. The mothers who don't get a place in the Cottage Childcare Project receive assistance in finding alternative childcare arrangements in other local crèches. In both cases, the childcare places are subsidised. Until last year, 2003, these places were subsidised through Dun Laoghaire VEC. They are now subsidised through FAS.

There are difficulties in terms of progression routes for this group. This is partly due to the fact that in most cases it is only possible to progress onto a part-time job or a part-time course. New childcare arrangements also have to be organised, and bearing the full cost themselves can be a barrier to progression. For some, the most achievable route to progressing on to further training, education or employment is to wait until their child starts school.

- **Young Mothers: Staying on in School**

There is also a need for a response to young mothers who wish to remain in the formal education system and to complete their secondary education. At present there are no crèches or childcare facilities offered locally to the under 18 age group in secondary education. It is currently at the discretion of the school as to how individual situations are handled.

It may be useful for a working group to be established to further explore the needs of this group, and to develop responses. This could be in conjunction with the local Childcare Action Network and the County Childcare Committee.

- **Targeting Early School Leavers with Drug Issues**

There is no local drugs and alcohol counselling service available for young people under 18 years of age in Dun Laoghaire. Young people are generally referred to the clinic in Trinity Court, located in the city centre to avail of services.

The Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Outreach Project (DROP), located in Dun Laoghaire, and is funded by the Health Board and Dun Laoghaire VEC,

runs a programme for 18 year olds who are on a drugs maintenance programme.

There is a proposal being pursued, which is a joint VEC and Community Training Centre Initiative for a part-time programme for young people with drug issues for whom the full time training programme is not a suitable option.

The range of responses and services available locally for this target group need to be improved upon.

9.5 Key Issue 5: Limited Education Provision for 12 to 15 year olds who are out of school or who are having at serious risk of being out of school early; the need to develop services for this target group

The research findings have highlighted the fact that there are a significant number of young people under the age of 15 years who are out of school early with no educational qualifications. It is evidenced through the information compiled from the FAS School Returns Lists, the local School Completion Plans, the evaluation of the Futurama Out of School Transition Project and the profile of trainees attending the training centres.

In addition, these sources do not capture the true extent of those young people who did not make the transfer from primary to secondary level. From the experience of the Futurama project, we are aware of at least five young people in the Loughlinstown area not making the transition to second level. In some cases because of difficulties in securing a placement at second level.

With the coming on stream of the Education Welfare Service, it is expected that there will be a more effective following up of those pupils who are identified as being at risk of not making the transfer, in order to ensure that they are placed at second level. This should reduce the numbers who do not make this crucial transition.

Within this area, there is in effect only one part time support service available to young people in this age group who are out of school early, the Futurama Out of School Transition Project in Loughlinstown. This project runs three mornings a week. It offers an educational support programme for young people within this age group who are out of school.

Sportsreach in Sallynoggin also maintains flexibility in terms of working with young people under 15 years of age. They generally work with young people aged 15 years or over, but this is reviewed on a case-by-case basis and if

appropriate and necessary (because of lack of any other suitable placements), they do work with young people aged under 15 years.

Among this group of young people who are out of school early, within this age group, it would seem that there are different levels of need ranging from:

- those for the whom the mainstream education system as it is currently structured is not a suitable option, no matter what types of additional supports are put in place
- those who may need short term intervention in terms of time-out from second level to
- those for whom a joint school/project programme may be the most suitable option
- those young people who are out of school, but for whom, with the appropriate supports in place, there is a realistic chance of re-integrating at second level.

In the course of the research study, a number of different models of service provision that are in place for this target group in other areas were reviewed. One such model was the Acorn Project in Edenderry, Co. Offaly, which is considered a very effective and appropriate intervention that has worked well.

The Acorn Project targets a core group of young people between the ages of 12 – 17 years who have left the formal education system or are at risk of leaving early. They deliver a module to 12 participants who are actual early school leavers. This module incorporates three elements; (1) educational, (2) personal development, (3) social development and sport activities.

The educational programme is delivered to the participants daily from 9am to 4pm. Subjects are taught at three levels: Foundation, Junior, and Leaving Certificate Applied. The delivery of the educational programme differs from formal education in a number of key ways:

- a) An individual timetable is drawn up for each participant
- b) Classes take place in small groups
- c) Participants receive one-to-one tuition
- d) Books, uniforms and food are supplied
- e) The pace of the programme is set by the participants themselves

The programme also incorporates a personal development aspect. A worker, experienced in the area of personal development, has been funded to spend an hour and a half with each of the participants. These counselling sessions

help to support the young person within the programme and each of the participants have shown remarkable improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem.

The Acorn Project contains many similar elements to the part-time Futurama Project using approaches which seem to work very effectively with this target group. It is important that these elements/approaches are included within any future development of services/supports for this target group.

9.6 Key Issue 6: Challenges for Training Centres

While there are a number of strengths within the existing provision in this catchment area for early school leavers, there are also a number of challenges/issues for this sector.

- a) The number of vocational training places available to young early school leavers between the ages of 15 and 18 within the area (approximately 100 places)
- b) The range of vocational choices available to early school leavers, which includes catering, horticulture, computers, industrial skills, pre-apprenticeship and woodwork
- c) The quality of the work undertaken and training skills provided within the centres
- d) Certification and increased opportunities for progression on to further training and employment for young early school leavers
- e) The overall level of support that is given to trainees in all areas from practical support, assisting with preparation of CVs, literacy, etc. to personal support, listening, advising, accessing information, etc
- f) The availability of advocacy and career guidance support to trainees through the FAS Youth Advocate.

Challenges for Training Centres include:

- **Attendance Difficulties and Non-Completion of Training Courses**
Unstructured chaotic lives, erratic attendance of some trainees, and non-completion of training course were identified by the staff of training centres as some of the key challenges faced by training centres in terms of working effectively with this target group.

One of the suggested responses to this issue is that Individual Training and Education Plans be drawn up for each trainee. Part of the process of developing a plan for the young person would be to identify what the young person wants to achieve during their time in the centre, and

realistically reflecting these goals within a concrete plan. It is also a stage where assessments can be carried out, which would help to identify any learning or literacy difficulties. The individual plan would also be of benefit in that it would focus on the needs of the individual in a holistic way, rather than solely on their training needs.

- **Lack of Learning Support and Resource Teachers**

An important issue that arose during the consultation process with existing service providers was that the young people attending the Training Centres are very educationally disadvantaged; 58% of the trainees had left school with no educational qualifications.

Staff highlighted the fact that many of the trainees have significant literacy difficulties. It was estimated that the trainees literacy levels were generally below their age profile, with some to a greater extent than others. Tutors also estimated that if educational assessments were undertaken, they would reveal that many of the trainees have some type of learning difficulty such as dyslexia, that has never been identified.

However, one of the difficulties for Training Centres is that they do not have the same level of support that is available within schools through Learning Support and Resource Teachers. They are reliant on the tutor hours allocated through Dun Laoghaire VEC to provide literacy/communications support. While this is viewed as a very effective service, the number of hours allocated to the provision of this service needs to be extended so that a more comprehensive literacy and learning support service can be put in place.

- **Limited Psychological Support Service**

While there is no specific timeframe, it is envisaged that the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) will in time provide a service to Youthreach centres. The current provision of Psychological Support Services are allocated to Training Centres through Dun Laoghaire VEC from the Further Education Section of the DES. The funding is allocated according to the number of trainees, and works out at approximately 5 hours per fortnight per group of 25 trainees. The findings highlighted the need to substantially increase this allocation.

During the consultation, it emerged that the preference for how the Psychological Support Services is provided to trainees was for the provision of a counselling service with an accredited

counsellor/psychotherapist possibly working in the three Training Centres within the Dun Laoghaire VEC area.

Staff felt that that what the trainees needed most was someone whom they could trust and talk to and in a confidential and supportive setting.

- **Supporting Staff**

It was very evident during the consultations with staff of Training Centres that there is a real need for staff to be supported in their work. The need for additional support structures to be put in place came out clearly from the research findings.

The stress and difficulty of the work, as within the teaching profession, is something that needs to be more clearly acknowledged and responded to. Supporting staff members is equally as important as looking after the young people who attend the centres. It is the staff who are their first line of contact and the people that trainees spend most of their time with during the day. If staff are not supported, then they are not in a position to properly support the trainees.

- **Understanding and Responding to the Behaviours of At Risk Young People**

One of the criticisms made in relation to current provision for early school leavers in the area is that the structures/systems in place within Training Centres can be too rigid. While structure and rules are important, it is felt that in some cases there is a lack of understanding of difficulties facing the 'at risk' young people they are working with. Local agencies are aware of some of the young people who have been asked to leave Training Centres for various and mostly valid reasons. One of the difficulties in this is that the choices in terms of other education placements for these young people are very limited. It also explains to some extent why young people are moving between Training Centres.

The fact that these young people are out of the mainstream education system indicates that they need more flexible responses, and this needs to be kept in mind. It is understandable that there are cases where the young person's behaviour has been unacceptable and they have to be asked to leave, so that the core work of the centre can continue. However, that said, the Training Centres in the area were set up to work with those young people who are at risk and on the margins. Some type of 'time-out/anger management' module could be of benefit in terms of supporting young people to maintain their training placement, and also in

terms of helping staff to work with young people who are having/ causing difficulties in the Centre.

This point also highlights the fact that there is a need for closer working relationships and information sharing between Training Centres and agencies in the area that are working with and on behalf of the same target group of young people. An increased level of interagency work between Training Centres, JLOs, Social Workers, Youth Workers, Youth Advocates, etc. could make the crucial difference in terms of supporting the young person in a holistic way.

- **Quality Framework Initiative and FAS Productivity Agreement**
There are two processes that are being initiated at national level that will have an impact at a local level for the Training Centres. One is the Quality Framework Initiative for Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres that arose from the YOUTHREACH 2000 consultative process, and the other is the FAS Productivity agreement that is being negotiated with the Community Training Workshops/Centres.

The Quality Framework Initiative is a process initiated through the Youthreach programme that aims to support individual Youthreach centres by providing planning and evaluation support to address issues such as: developing a long-term plan for the centre, and developing good practice guidelines and quality standards in relation to a number of key areas including the following: code of discipline, programme design, delivery and certification, support structures for trainees, assessment of staff training needs, staff supervision and provision of staff support and provision of work related counselling where required.

In relation to the Community Training Centres, the FAS Productivity Agreement is the agreement that is currently being negotiated between FAS and the Community Training Centres nationwide. Following agreement being reached, each CTC will develop a three year strategic development plan for provision of an integrated needs based service. A variety of responses should be available to meet the needs of a range of participants. These will include full-time and part-time courses, courses for trainees registered elsewhere, and courses for specialised groups such as Travellers, Young Offenders, Lone Parents.

9.7 Key Issue 7: Limited Guidance, Information and Advocacy Service available to Early School Leavers; the need for improved services.

The research findings highlighted a real need for the development of information, guidance and advocacy services for young early school leavers. There is no service in the area for those young people who have left school early and are not attached to any other training or education service.

The main guidance services in place available to young people are within schools and are provided through the Guidance Counsellor. If a young person leaves school early and links into a Training Centre, the youth advocacy service is available. The Youth Advocate provides a guidance service to a large number of young early school leavers within the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown area. It is a very valuable service, but also an overstretched one. There is also a Youth Information Centre in Dun Laoghaire, run by Dun Laoghaire Youth Services, which is open to all young people and which holds information on various careers, education and training opportunities. The two other guidance services in the area, the Southside Local Employment Service in Mounttown and Dun Laoghaire Discover Guidance (VEC Service), target their services to people aged 18 years and over.

The interviews with trainees highlighted the fact that young early school leavers were very unaware of their options once they have left school. There are generally significant time delays between when a young person leaves school and when/if they linked into another training/education service. This would indicate that early school leavers need somewhere they can go where they can get information, advice and guidance on the most suitable option for them. They may also need someone to advocate on their behalf if they are trying to secure a place at second level so that they can return to school.

Key elements within a new guidance service would include:

- identifying and tracking young early school leavers through an outreach service
- linking in with the relevant personnel in the area in particular the Education Welfare Officer
- provision of information, guidance and advice, advocacy and referral onto education and training services.

9.8 Key Issue 8: Accessible Adolescent Crisis Intervention/Mental Health Service

Through the wider consultation process, the gap in terms of adolescent mental health services was identified. The current adolescent mental health

service that is provided through the Cluain Mhuire clinics has long waiting lists and does not always reach the young people that are our target group.

The model used by the clinic is a medical model, which involves both parents of the young person attending the initial interview. Only General Practitioners can make direct referrals to the service, which is perceived as being limiting in terms of access.

The type of service that was identified as being needed is an accessible mental health/crisis intervention service which would have an emergency service attached and to which young people could be referred to by Training Centres, schools, NEPS, Health Board, Gardai, etc.

9.9 Key Issue 9: Family Support, Preventative Initiatives, Working Collaboratively

One of the findings from the wider consultation was that at departmental level, the Departments of Health and Education are not currently working in a collaborative way to the extent that is necessary, and this is being reflected at a local level.

The need for a clearer understanding, improved information sharing, and collaborative work between the Social Work Department of the ECAHB, Schools and Training Centres was identified. It was felt that even though they are working with the same young people, there is a tendency for them to work in isolation from each other and, in order to improve service delivery to this target group, this needs to be addressed.

Mounttown NYP is a good example of a Health Board funded initiative that works very closely with the local primary school in supporting children who need some additional supports because of difficulties they may be facing in their home or school lives.

In terms of providing a family support service, the findings indicate that the Social Work Department is under resourced in terms of staff, and only have the capacity within the service to respond at crisis intervention level. However, the Health Board does employ Family Skills Development Workers who provide support in a practical way to families in crisis.

The Springboard Family Support Project is another Health Board funded initiative based in the community that supports and responds to the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Although not the main focus of this research study, there are a wide range of community-based initiatives in place that have been very effective in terms of working to prevent young people leaving school early or becoming at risk of leaving school early. Examples of these include community-based homework clubs ran in Mounttown Family Resource Centre, Loughlinstown Community Rooms and Shanganagh Park House and Ballybrack.

The key point in relation to family support services and community based education prevention initiatives is that each have a key role in terms of responding to the complex issue of early school leaving. It is increasingly recognised that no one agency or organisation has the capacity to respond to or address inequality in education, on its own.

Therefore, all of the relevant agencies and stakeholders at a local level including youth workers, teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers, family support workers, need to begin to work in a more collaborative and strategic way to put in place effective local integrated services, supports and interventions for young people at risk of being marginalised and socially excluded.

Chapter 10: Recommendations for the Development of Supports and Services to Early School Leavers

The following are a series of recommendations that have arisen from the research findings. They have been divided under three headings,

- a. *Recommendations for Schools*
- b. *Recommendations for Training Centres*
- c. *Recommendations for Development of New Services*

10.1 Recommendations For School

10.1.1 *Counselling and Individual Work with Therapeutic Aspects*

The research findings would indicate that there is a real need for the development of this type of intervention within schools for children who are having difficulties, at as early a stage as possible. Some counselling interventions have been put in place through the School Completion Programme including play therapy, child therapy and therapeutic group work, and support to parents.

While there are some services in place, the counselling supports available within schools need to be more comprehensive than currently available.

The introduction of peer mentoring programmes, are recommended as an effective way of supporting young people who are having difficulties in school, as they can help to normalise the situation for the young person, whatever the difficulty is. (The Rainbow Programme is a good example of a peer support programme that offers support in a groupsetting to young people who have had a bereavement or separation in their lives).

Recommendation 1:	To extend the provision of different types of counselling supports within schools, particularly for pupils with emotional and behavioural issues. In particular, extend the provision of therapeutic individual and group work, peer mentoring and support programmes.
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10.1.2 *Transition from Primary to Secondary School*

Making the transfer from primary to secondary school can be a difficult time for some young people. They have to adjust to having seven or eight different teachers everyday, a range of new subjects and a new structure to their day. A young person who has difficulties making this transition can be at a higher risk of leaving school early if they don't settle into second level school.

There is a need for improved transition programmes to support those young people for whom the transition to second level may prove difficult. A similar model to Preparation Programme ran by Mounttown NYP could be developed for other schools within the catchment area. Given the differences between the school systems at primary and second level, preparation for second level programmes are important as are follow-up supports once the transition to second level has been made.

In addition to transition programmes, there is also a need for more structured information sharing between Primary and Secondary Schools, so that the secondary schools are aware of information that they may require helping them to support the young person transferring to their school.

The ESRI/NCCA have just published a study, which examines the experiences of students in their first year at post-primary level (April 2004). One of the key findings was that while most students settle into post-primary school relatively quickly, some students are at greater risk of having difficulties. 'At risk' students include those with less self-confidence and a poor self-image, and students from Traveller and non-national backgrounds.

The report recommended that where possible 'schools should be encouraged to develop links with feeder primary schools so that students become more familiar with their new school'. It also recommended that 'schools should be supported in setting up such structures for first year students. In particular, they should be encouraged to introduce (trained) student mentors as a source of support and information to new students'. (ESRI, 2004)

Recommendation 2:	To extend and develop Preparation Programmes and follow-up support for young people making the transition from primary to second level.
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10.1.3 *Designated Schools not included in School Completion Programmes*

Within the early school leaving strategy for the area, priority should be given to supporting the schools, who are not included in the School Completion Programme, but who have a significant number of students identified as being at risk of leaving school early.

Recommendation 3:	To develop a strategy for supporting non-school completion schools, particularly those schools that are designated disadvantaged by the Department of Education & Science.
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10.1.4 *Links between Secondary Schools, Youth Services and Community Groups*

It is recommended that more structured links be developed between Secondary Schools and the Youth Services. Joint programmes could be developed where the Youth Service or Community Groups would work within the school setting. This could involve the Youth Service visiting schools and giving information on their various groups/services or developing closer links with community-based initiatives. This could lead to more developed programmes that could add to the pastoral care provided by schools.

Recommendation 4:	To strengthen the links between schools, youth services and community groups and to explore possibilities of working together to the benefit young people at risk of leaving school early.
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10.2 Recommendations for Training Centres

10.2.1 *Individual Education and Training Plans*

One of the proposals being put forward is that Individual Education and Training Plans should be drawn up for each trainee attending any of the Training Centres or the Futurama Project. The Youth Advocate, the Young Person, the Core Instructor and the Tutors could work together to devise these individual plans.

Recommendation 5:	That Individual Education and Training Plans should be put in place for all young people who have left school early and have returned to access further education/training.
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10.2.2 *Literacy Provision*

Currently with the number of tutor hours available, the literacy tutor is a part-time position within centres. Given the level of need and also given that there are no Learning Support or Resource Teachers in Training Centres, a key issue for consideration is for the increased allocation of tuition hours to Training Centres. This is key in terms of providing the necessary one-to-one tuition support that those young people with serious literacy difficulties require. A full time position could also facilitate the provision of additional FETAC modules within Training Centres.

Recommendation 6:	(A) To increase allocation of tuition hours to Education and Training Centres working with young early school leavers so that a more comprehensive literacy and learning support service can be established within Training Centres.
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(B) Also, with a more developed and resourced service in place it is proposed that more extensive education programmes with FETAC modules, Junior Certificate or Leaving Certificate subjects could be provided within Training Centres.

10.2.3 *Counselling/ Psychological Support Service*

Another issue arising very strongly from the research findings is that the young people attending the Training Centres are vulnerable and, put simply; they 'need someone to talk to'. More than that, however, is the fact that they need a professionally qualified counsellor/ psychotherapist who has the skills and experience of working with young people to be a support to them. While this may not be the type of support that all trainees need or want to access, it is important that this support is available to all young people attending Training Centres.

Recommendation 7: To increase the allocation of hours allocated for the provision of a Psychological Support Service within Education and Training Centres for early school leavers, and to change the focus of the provision from psychological supports to a counselling service for trainees, with qualified and experienced staff.

10.2.4 *Supporting Staff*

It was very evident during the consultations with staff of Training Centres that there is a real need for staff to be supported in their work and resources need to be allocated further. The two types of supports that need to be put in place include:

Staff Supervision: If there is a qualified Counsellor working within the Training Centre, then the staff should have access to the Counsellor for a period of time during the week when they can go and talk issues through and look for advice, guidance, direction. If this is not possible, some other form of external staff supervision could be considered.

Training: Structured access to courses/training that are recognised as being of benefit to staff in their work, with staff training needs to be assessed on an ongoing annual basis at least.

Recommendation 8: To introduce supports for the staff of the local Education and Training Centres including structured access to staff supervision and training.

10.2.5 *Programmes for Specific Target Groups*

The recommendation is that, where necessary, Education and Training Centres should aim to design programmes that respond to the needs of the particular target groups of early school leavers.

The Pre-Apprenticeship and Young Mothers Programmes delivered in the Community Training Centre, both of which have waiting lists, are good examples of this approach. Another example could be setting up a programme that responds to the needs of young drug users and for whom the full time general programme available in Training Centres is not suitable.

Recommendation 9:	To extend existing and develop new programmes designed to meet the needs of specific target groups such as early school leavers who are young mothers, young asylum seekers, young unqualified male early school leavers, and young early school leavers with drug issues. Focused targeting of groups for whom the main programme may not be a suitable option.
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10.2.6 Programme Development

The fact that the Linked Work Experience Programme (see appendices for further details) is no longer in place, emphasises the need for the introduction of a work experience module into the main vocational programme offered within the centres. It is felt that this type of module would be of benefit to young people in terms of making the transition from training to employment.

Other programme developments could include the introduction of a 'time-out' placement for those trainees who are at risk of losing their training placement because of their behaviour within the training centre. There is a precedent for this type of module that is run by the Clondalkin Youth Support and Training Unit, which offers the young person the time and space to reflect on their behaviour, and look at new ways of responding and dealing with group and social situations. This has proven to be a very effective intervention.

Recommendation 10:	To explore possibilities of: (a) Introducing a work experience module as part of the main programme with Training Centres. (b) Develop a 'Time-out' course to support young people who are at risk of losing their placement because of their behaviour within the centre..
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10.2.7 *Strengthen Links between the three Training Centres - Cross Programme Work*

As part of the development of new services, it is suggested that each of the Centres could have particular area(s) in which they specialised. For example, football in Sportsreach, horticulture in the Tivoli, pre-apprenticeship in CTC.

With a proposed youth community-based guidance initiative in place (see recommendation 11.3.3.), there would be one central co-ordinating point, which could refer a young person who has left school early onto an appropriate education and training placement. The Guidance Service before making a referral, could work with the young person to develop an Individual Education and Training Plan tailored to meet their specific needs and interests.

It would be of great benefit if the Guidance Service was in a position to offer the young person the opportunity to explore the range of options and courses available to them through a 'taster course' that could include modules from each of the three centres. Their experience of the various 'taster courses' could then inform the development and design of the Individual Education and Training Plan.

There would obviously be logistical implications in offering this and there would need to be very clear agreements between the centres outlining how the programme should work in practice. The idea is challenging, because it is asking service providers to explore new ways of working together. However, if piloted and proved to be successful, resulting in an improved/high quality service provision with guidance, choices and opportunities for these young people, it could also become a model of best practice.

Recommendation 11:	To strengthen links/information sharing between the three Training Centres and explore possibilities for working collaboratively with young early school leavers.
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10.2.8 *Strengthen Links between Training Centres and Secondary Schools*

The consultation process highlighted the need for strengthened information-sharing and referral links between secondary schools and training centres. The research findings show that schools are not fully aware of the progression options available to young people who leave school early. This is an information issue that needs to be addressed. Schools could in turn support Training Centres by providing them with educational backgrounds and needs of the young person that they are referring. (See 11.3.1 for further recommendation on Training Centres and Schools working collaboratively).

Recommendation 12: To strengthen the information sharing between local secondary schools and the three Training Centres and explore possibilities for working collaboratively for the benefit of young people at risk of leaving school early and existing early school leavers.

10.2.9. Strengthen Links between Training Centres and Local Agencies

The consultation also highlighted the need for an increased level of information sharing between Training Centres and other local agencies that work with the same young people, but in a different capacity. It was felt that an increased level of information sharing and a more integrated way of working between agencies, would be of real benefit to the young people concerned, in terms of meeting their needs at all levels.

Recommendation 13: To strengthen the links/information sharing between the three Training Centres and local agencies who work with the same at risk young people, but within different contexts, such as Social Workers, Youth Workers, JLO's, Probation and Welfare Officers, and explore the possibilities for working more collaboratively to support young early school leavers.

10.3 Recommendations for the Development of New Services/Initiatives

10.3.1 Broadening Learning Options for Early School Leavers

One of the weaknesses of current local provision is the lack of academic options for early school leavers. Through the Training Centres, young people take subjects for FETAC certification or for the Junior Certificate. However, this is more of an add-on to the main focus, which is vocational training.

Pursuing vocational training is not always the route that early school leavers want to take. Therefore, there is a need explore ways through which academic options could be expanded and enhanced for early school leavers, which would give them the option of doing the full Junior Certificate Programme or the Leaving Certificate. This is particularly important given that it is very difficult for a young person who has left school early to reintegrate into school.

An example of this type of provision is the 'EXC Project' in Waterford, which is run under the umbrella of the Youth Services. This project offers young people aged 15 years and over the option of studying for their Junior or Leaving Certificate in one year. This option has proven very successful and there is a high take-up of places on the course. The placements for the

programme are decided upon in conjunction with the Education Welfare Officer. The CTC in North Great George's Street also offers a two year and four year Junior Certificate Programme.

Developing an education programme based around FETAC modules at different levels would also be another option worth exploring as a means of broadening learning options for early school leavers. The "New Options: New Choices" Project based in Drimnagh offers this type of programme.

Recommendation 14: To broaden the range of learning options available to early school leavers, which will include the opportunity to complete the Junior and Leaving Certificate.
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10.3.2. Education Provision and Supports for 12 to 15 year olds who are out of school or at high risk of being out of school early

During the consultation, a number of agencies identified a need to further develop learning options for young people in this age group who are out of school or at a high risk of being out of school early, and who need an alternative or additional education support service.

One of the options is to develop a service along similar lines to the Acorn Project in Edenderry, establishing strong links and partnerships with the local secondary schools and to become very much a school linked initiative.

This would include offering a short-term time-out option for young people who are still attending school but who are identified as being at high risk of dropping out.

However, there is also a need to cater for the needs of young people who are disengaged from school and for whom mainstream education is not suitable. The Futurama Project is currently working towards developing a structure that can offer a response to this combination of needs. The project has recently received funding from the Dormant Funds (March 2004). It is in the processing of reviewing its current structures with a view to identifying the future direction and sustainability of the project. The supports that could be offered through this type of programme include one-to-one tuition, lifeskills and personal development, certification, advocacy and counselling support.

There may also be a need to develop this type of service for the same age group in other locations in the catchment area.

Recommendation 15: To build on and develop the range of services and supports available to young people between the ages of
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12 and 15 who are out of school or who are having difficulties within the school system.

10.3.3 Community-based Youth Guidance Service

Mapping of existing guidance provision highlights the fact that the key existing services for young early school leavers under 18 years of age are the FAS Youth Advocate and the Youth Information Service, which is run by Dun Laoghaire Youth Services.

There is clearly a need to further develop guidance services for young people who are out of school. Models of guidance provision for adults in this area such as the VEC Adult Guidance Service, Discover Guidance, and the Local Employment Service could be reviewed with regard to this initiative.

Key elements of the service would include: A drop-in facility, advocacy and guidance support, referral, tracking of early school leavers, provision of information, counselling and developing an outreach aspect of the service.

Recommendation 16: To establish a Community-based Youth Guidance Service for young early school leavers, which will incorporate a comprehensive integrated Tracking System, drop-in and outreach services.

10.3.4 Responsive and Collaborative Planning

When looking at ways through which the needs of young early school leavers can be addressed, it is important that a certain degree of flexibility in terms of the range of responses and interventions that can be put in place should be maintained.

To-date, there has been no ongoing collation or analysis of data in relation to the levels of early school leaving within the area. This is a key issue that needs to be addressed at the outset and which is achievable through the development of an integrated and comprehensive tracking system for the area. Reviewing of early school leaving tracking models in place in other areas is recommended in particular the Clondalkin Youth Support and Training Unit, (County Dublin VEC funded Initiative) and the Pathways Programme in Waterford, (FAS funded Initiative) are recommended.

Once this is achieved, it will be possible to identify the patterns and trends in relation to early school leaving locally. Maintaining a flexibility of responses is important because there can be changes in the local environment with regard to new target groups being identified, new initiatives coming on line, new patterns in relation to where early school leavers are coming from, what age they are leaving school at, etc, needs can change as a result.

Also, there is ongoing learning in relation to which initiatives work well in terms of meeting the needs of young early school leavers, which initiatives aren't working well and how they can be adapted or changed.

This research study was initiated and developed as a local inter-agency project. The Research Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from Dun Laoghaire VEC, Dun Laoghaire Youth Service, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Local Drugs Task Force, Mounttown NYP, Southside Partnership and a local secondary school.

The research proposal originated from the Southside Youth at Risk Network, which is a local network of agencies, training centres, residential centres and organisations that work with young people in this target group.

This inter-agency dynamic has been a central influence on the approach of the research study. It is important that, with regard to further developments vis-à-vis the implementation of the research recommendations this inter-agency approach is maintained. Working collaboratively will be key to the process of implementing an effective local response to early school leaving.

Recommendation 17:	That the needs of young early school leavers and young people at risk of leaving school early within the area are assessed on an ongoing basis and the appropriate responses are put in place in a co-ordinated and collaborative manner.
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Appendix 1: List of Schools, Centres, Agencies and Organisations involved in the Consultation Process

Primary Schools

Archbishop Mc Quaid Junior and Senior School, Ballybrack
Dominican Convent Primary School, Dun Laoghaire
Holy Family National School, Mounttown
Scoil Cholmcille Junior and Senior National School, Loughlinstown
Scoil Mhuire, Shankill
St. John's National School, Ballybrack
St. Joseph's National School, Dun Laoghaire
St. Kevin's National School, Sallynoggin
Benin Casa, Blackrock

Secondary Schools

Clonkeen College, Blackrock
Cabinteely Community School
Sallynoggin Community School
Presentation College, Glasthule
Rockford Manor, Blackrock
St. Laurence College, Loughlinstown

Education and Training Centres

Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre
Tivoli Training Centre, Dun Laoghaire
Sportsreach/Youthreach Centre, Sallynoggin
Futurama Out of School Transition Initiative

Local Agencies and Organisations

Cabinteely School Completion Programme
Discover Guidance, Dun Laoghaire
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Local Drugs Task Force
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Outreach Project (DROP)
Dun Laoghaire VEC
Dun Laoghaire Youth Services
ECAHB Social Work Department
FAS Local Employment Office
FAS National Programme Co-ordinator
Local Juvenile Liaison Officers
LAB Garda Youth Diversion Project
Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project (NYP)

Mounttown/Sallynoggin School Completion Programme (SCP)
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
National Youthreach Co-ordinator
Post Primary School Inspector
Probation and Welfare Service
School Guidance Counsellors
Southside Local Employment Service (LES)
Southside Partnership
Springboard Family Support Project
St. Vincent de Paul
Visiting Teacher for Travellers

Appendix 2: Profile of Existing Service Provision for Early School Leavers in the area

(a) DUN LAOGHAIRE COMMUNITY TRAINING CENTRE

Background and Origins: The Community Training Workshop was established in 1985 as a result of concern from members of the community and local councillors about the level of early school leaving in the area and also the lack of opportunities for these young people. FAS were approached with a view to supporting a project. This CTW model was introduced to Dun Laoghaire. The CTW changed its name to CTC in early 2004.

Catchment Area: The catchment area for the project is the greater Dun Laoghaire Rathdown area. There is some flexibility in terms of taking young people from outside of this catchment area if there are particular circumstances or needs to be met. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

Aim of the Centre: The aim of the CTC is to assist and support young people to access training, education and employment opportunities.

Specific Objectives:

1. To provide relevant practical and personal skill training programmes and services to young people, which will increase their employability.
2. To enable young people to obtain certification and improve chances of accessing further employment and validate their achievements.
3. To raise the self-esteem of young people and also to encourage and facilitate them to realise their potential.
4. To provide programmes in lifeskills, personal development, job search skills, career guidance, literacy and numeracy, computer skills and work experience.
5. To provide participants with an agreed “career path” programme through the advocacy service.

Practical Training Modules: Computers (ECDL), Catering, Industrial Skills, Pre-Apprenticeship and Young Mothers Programmes.

Capacity: 50 places

Target Group: Young people aged between 15 and 25 years who have left school with no or inadequate qualifications. The CTC also works with young people who may have finished school, but who are having difficulties accessing employment.

Referrals: The two primary sources of referrals to the CTC are self-referrals and also through FAS Employment Office. The Local Employment Service, Social Workers and some schools also refer young people to the centre.

Course Duration: Up to 2 years, depending on the individual's needs

Waiting List: At the time of the research, there were 50 names on the waiting list. This figure represents the number of people who have applied for a place in the CTC over the last 6 months. It should be noted that a significant number on the waiting list are looking for a place on a specific type of course: the Young Mothers programme has a waiting list of 13 and the Pre-Apprenticeship programme has a waiting list of 7.

Funding: FAS pay the training allowances, staff costs and day to day costs such as rent, etc., Dun Laoghaire VEC provides approximately 23 teaching hours per week, which funds the communications and maths programmes. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Local Drugs Task Force funds the lifeskills programme. Funding for the provision of Psychological Counselling Support Services is also channelled through the VEC. (Four hours per week are allocated.)

Certification: FETAC, ECDL and City & Guilds, Junior Cert. Foundation Subjects.

Progression Options for Participants: FAS Mainline Training Centre, CERT, Linked Work Experience Programme, Mainstream Education, Further Education Programmes, Employment. The FAS Youth Advocate works with the trainees to make the transition onto further training, education or employment.

(B) TIVOLI TRAINING CENTRE, DUN LAOGHAIRE

Background and Origins: Originally opened as 'Youth Project Dun Laoghaire' in 1984 by a voluntary management committee comprising of professionals in the area of youth work and concerned individuals. The centre was the first of its type in the area and was set up as a response to the identification of a number of young people who were out of school and who were at risk of/or involved in offending behaviour. In 1997, the name of the centre was changed from the Youth Project to the Tivoli Training Centre due to the growing number of local youth projects and summer projects.

Catchment Area: The Centre does not refuse individuals on the basis of location. The decision to take someone into the centre is based on the needs of the individual and whether the centre can meet those needs.

Aim of the Centre: The aim of the centre is to provide training, personal development and work experience for young people with a variety of personal, social and training needs. Through the training provided, trainees are encouraged to work on issues such as Offending Behaviour, Personal Effectiveness, Health & Hygiene, as well as preparing for further training and/or employment.

Specific Objectives:

1. To provide achievable accredited training in skills linked to the individual capabilities, thus promoting self-esteem.
2. To develop self-awareness, identify strengths, and improve communication and life skills.

Programmes: The programmes are individually based and are flexible as agreed by the Manager, Instructor and Trainee upon entry to the programme. At induction the trainees agree to an individual training plan and choose a core subject in one of the following areas: Catering, Woodwork, Computers or Horticulture and are then time tabled into different groups to get experience in each of the other 3 subjects. The benefit of this is that the trainee gets experience in a number of different areas and learns to work with different instructors. All of the trainees also undertake communications, art, and sports classes.

Capacity: There is capacity for 24 trainees, 6 in each group. The preference is to remain at this number so that the one-to-one and small group work can be accommodated.

Target Group: 15 to 18 years are the main target group, but exceptions for older trainees can be made depending on circumstances.

Referrals: Probation and Welfare, JLO, Schools, FAS, Social Services, family members and friends.

Course Duration: Initial training plans are for one year with structured reviews. Training extensions can be granted for up to an extra year depending on circumstances.

Funding: The main funders are Probation and Welfare. The Dun Laoghaire VEC provide teaching hours and FAS pay the trainee allowances.

Certification: FETAC, ECDL and City & Guilds, Junior Cert. Foundation Subjects.

Duration of Course: Young people remain for maximum length of 2 years.

Progression Options: The FAS Youth Advocate, the Manager and the Instructors support the trainees to make the transition from the centre to employment or further education.

(C) SPORTSREACH, YOUTHREACH CENTRE, SALLYNOGGIN

Background and Origins: The Sportsreach Project was set up in 1990. At the time, the Manager was employed by the Health Board and was seconded Dun Laoghaire VEC to run the project. It is a Youthreach Programme; Dun Laoghaire VEC are co-funders of the project. The project was set up to respond to the needs of young people who were identified as being out of school and 'at risk' because of their situations due to factors such as coming into contact with the Justice System, or having drug issues. Some of these young people would be in the care of the Health Board.

Aim of the Project: The stated aim of the project is to help the young people to become better people and prepare them for life.

Catchment area: Sportsreach are not confined in terms of their catchment area. If a young person is referred from outside the local area, and they are interested in sport, they will be taken on.

Programme: The main focus of the programme is on sports, mainly football. There is not as much focus on academic subjects, but the trainees are encouraged to do core subjects at Junior Certificate level. Work on literacy and numeracy is undertaken on a one to one basis. The participants can avail of Psychological Services. Following the move to new premises in St. Joseph's Football Club, a new programme is being

drawn up which will offer a mix of academic and a wider range of sporting activities including canoeing, absailing, etc.

Capacity: There is capacity for 25 young people.

Course Duration: It is a two-year programme, but this is not strictly adhered to. If a young person needs to stay longer then they will be facilitated.

Target Group: Young people aged between 15 to 18 years. At the time of the research all of the trainees were male and this is generally the case, with the odd exception.

Provision for Young People aged under 15 years: If a young person aged under 15 years is in need of being placed and they are referred to the project, then they will take them into the programme, if it is a suitable option and there are no alternative placements available. Decisions are taken on a case by case basis.

Referrals: The main referrals come through the Health Board, schools and also self-referral.

Funding: East Coast Area Health Board and Dun Laoghaire VEC co-fund the programme. All of the funding for the project is managed through the VEC.

Certification: Junior Cert. Subjects and FETAC.

Progression Options: When the young person is ready to move on, staff and manager use their contacts with employers to try and get them placed in employment.

(D) FUTURAMA OUT OF SCHOOL TRANSITION PROJECT, LOUGHLINSTOWN

Background and Origins: Futurama, which is an interagency project, is an 'out of school' transition initiative that was established to identify and work with young people aged between 12 and 15 years old who are out of school and living in the Loughlinstown and Ballybrack area. The Co-ordinator of the LAB Garda Youth Diversion Project, who works on the ground in the area, became aware of a number of young people between the ages of 12 and 15 years who were not attending any secondary school. Following the convening of an inter-agency meeting in November 2001, approximately 8 young people were identified as being out of school. Futurama began in January 2002.

Aim: The aim of the project is to provide a child-centred, educational, supportive environment for the young people with the objective of assisting them to return to school, or to an alternative education/training facility. The project aims to work towards equipping the young people with the skills needed to allow them to re-integrate successfully into the formal education system if possible. Therefore the programme aims to address the needs of young people who are out of school. Needs identified include literacy and numeracy, guidance, personal development, self-esteem, social integration and social skills.

Programme: The programme consists of the following subjects: Maths, literacy, art, computers, cookery, woodwork, personal development and social outings. The programme content includes two tuition mornings on the project premises and one morning where they generally go on an outing. The purpose of the outings is to provide the opportunity for the group to get to know each other outside the setting of the project, and also to develop social skills, and to visit places of interest.

Capacity: 8 places currently.

Links with Secondary Schools: The mainstream education system has been involved in Futurama from the outset. The HSCL Co-ordinators from three local secondary schools are on the Advisory Committee of the Initiative. In the second year of the project, September 2002 to June 2003, one of the HSCL Co-ordinators organised for the Futurama learners to do woodwork classes in school after school hours with the option of sitting the Junior Certificate in this subject. Two of the Futurama learners are also registered with one of the secondary schools. The project and school have worked together to support these young people. Exploratory meetings have been held with the Principals of local secondary schools, the Futurama Project, Dun Laoghaire VEC, facilitated by the Southside Partnerships Education Co-ordinator, to look at the possibility of developing structured school/project links.

Catchment Area: Priority is given to young people living in the Loughlinstown/Ballybrack areas.

Target Group: 12 to 15 year olds who have left or are at high risk of leaving the formal education system.

Referrals: Schools, JLOs, Health Board, Youth Advocate, Youth Services, Parents/guardians, School Attendance Officer (now Education Welfare Officer).

Course Duration: Up to 2 years, according to individual need.

Funding: The project has been funded through the Department of Education 'Children at Risk' fund. Funding and support have also come from LAB, Dun Laoghaire VEC, Springboard Family Services Project, Southside Partnership, and others.

Certification: FETAC and Junior Cert. Foundation Level subjects.

Progression Options: Participants progression plans are developed while attending the project with the aim of returning to school, or accessing further education or training options.

(E) LINKED WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME, (LWE) DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN

Aim of Programme: The role of the Linked Work Experience Programme is to provide young people between the ages of 16 to 25 years with six months of meaningful work experience. The underlying aim is to progress young people into employment or into further training and education. The LWE is viewed as a stepping stone into work and it is envisaged that the LWE will provide the young person with the experience, skills and/or personal development to make this transition to full time employment.

Catchment Area: The catchment area for the LWE is the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown area.

Target Group: The LWE is aimed at people who have been out of work or school for a number of months and for whom something is not working in terms of finding and keeping a job.

Referrals: Referrals to the programme come from the Community Training Centre, Tivoli Training Centre, the Youth Advocate, Local Employment Service, FAS Local Employment Office, and also through word of mouth.

Capacity: There are 30 places on the programme, with a 6-month turn over. Approximately 60 young people go through the programme on an annual basis. There were 6 people on the waiting list at the time of the research.

Supporting the Placement: If needed, the Co-ordinator will help to access supports that the young person may require such as childcare/crèche or going to a counsellor to deal with personal problems.

Note: The LWE Programme was discontinued by FAS in January 2004, due to funding cuts.

(F) FAS YOUTH ADVOCATE, DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN

Background: The position of the Youth Advocate was developed approximately 5 years ago. There are Advocates in place in a number of areas nationally, working with Youthreach and Community Training Centres, providing a Career Guidance/Support Service.

Role of the Youth Advocate: The role of the FAS Youth Advocate is to prepare individual career plans for young people. This involves intensive one-to-one work with participants, over a period of time, which can be measured in months or even years. Other aspects of the work include bringing young people to interviews, to training centres: providing practical support, helping the client group to do their CVs, finding work experience placements, checking FAS Web site for job opportunities, and sourcing and supporting young people into progression routes in a wide range of ways.

Catchment Area: The catchment area for the Youth Advocate is the wider Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County area.

Target Group: The target group for the Youth Advocate are early school leavers aged between 15-25 years.

Caseload/Referrals: The young people who are attending the following centres: Rathfarnham Youthreach, Tivoli Training Centre, Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre and Futurama Out of School Transition Project. The Advocate also works with approximately 40 young people who are out of school and who are not linked into any training or education centre. Some of these young people may have been attending one of the Centres and may have lost their place for reasons such as behaviour in the workshop, serious drug use, drug dealing etc. Some referrals also come through the Probation and Welfare Service, Southside Local Employment Service and Discover Guidance.

Re-integration to Mainstream Second Level School: As part of the work, if the young person wants to return to school, the Advocate will work with the young person to try to access school placements. To date, it has proven difficult to get school placements for young people who left school early and who want to return.

Assistance is also given to young people wishing to return to education through FAS mainline courses or courses offered by local senior colleges. Assistance with funding may also be given to support people returning to education.

(G) FAS EMPLOYMENT OFFICE, DUN LAOGHAIRE

Schools make returns to FAS twice a year giving details of the young people who left school early. FAS follow up this list by sending letters to the homes of those whose details are on the list and inviting them to an informal interview to discuss their options. Not all early school leavers are contacted by FAS. Young Asylum Seekers are not sent letters because FAS cannot offer them any services and very young early school leavers (aged 13 years) are not contacted because there are no services available, but from age 14 years, the young person will be called in to begin the process of signing them up for a training centre/programme.

Response Rate: One of the main issues in relation to this follow up is that there is a very low response rate. The latest response rate (May 2003) to the letters was 16 young people out of a total of 70. A total of 6 young people called into the office and were interviewed. All of these young people were referred onto either the CTC or the LWE programme.

Interviews: During the interview, general questions are asked to ascertain what the young person has been doing since leaving school, and what they would like to do. The young person is given information on the options that are available to them. The FAS Placement Officer has identified a need for guidance support for these young people. The Placement Officer has found that early school leavers are often not aware of the choices that are available to them in terms of courses, further training, etc. In a number of cases, the Placement Officer felt that the young people would like to go back to school, but may not have the support that they would need in order to make the transition back into school. However, a small number of young people do return to full-time education. FAS place great importance on trying to encourage that action if feasible.

Options for Early School Leavers: FAS place an emphasis on encouraging young people to go on to further training, as opposed to employment, but if someone does want to go to employment, they are supported in that. The main options for early school leavers are:

- **Linked Work Experience Programme** - Mostly girls came for the interview this year and they were referred to the Linked Work Experience. The Placement Officer has found that this is the most useful of all of the referral options, because sometimes young people who leave school early may not want to go on to do a

course, so 6 months work experience can be a suitable option. (Note: Programme now discontinued).

- **Community Training Centre** – In terms of training and education centres, the strongest link is with Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre.
- **Pre-apprenticeship Course, CTC**- A lot of the early school leavers who are in contact with the office want to go on and do an apprenticeship. However, some of the issues are that there are a limited number of places on the course and some of them would not be eligible for the course.
- **FAS Jervis Courses:** This can occasionally be a referral point, but generally the young people that the Placement Officer meets want to remain in the area and to attend local training centres.
- **Catchment area for the FAS Office:** Booterstown Avenue up to Dalkey, up to Sandyford and out to Stillorgan.

Appendix 3: Community-based Preventative Supports and Initiatives

(A) MOUNTTOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH PROJECT (NYP)

Mounttown Neighbourhood Youth Project is a community-based project, which offers an interesting example of collaborative work between the education and community/voluntary sectors. The project is based in the grounds of Holy Family Primary School and is funded by the East Coast Area Health Board. It targets young people aged between nine and thirteen years within the catchment area of Monkstown Farm. It aims to provide an integrated, preventative service drawing on the strengths of family, school and community to young people who need extra support to stay on in school and/or are at risk of becoming marginalised within the community.

The project employs three core staff with backgrounds in youth/community work, childcare, and social work/psychotherapy. A teacher/child and adolescent psychotherapist, and a housekeeper work on a sessional basis.

Young people meet after school in a small group setting and each young person is offered individual work as well. Family work is offered. The project staff work closely with school staff who can also use the project premises. Young people may attend the project for specific pieces of work during school hours with the consent of parents and teachers. Staff on the project have offered a transition programme for 6th class in the school, and staff from the school have contributed to specific programmes on the project. There is a close working relationship with the School Completion Programme, which has allowed for some earlier interventions with younger children in the school. The Project staff also work closely with Dun Laoghaire Youth Service and Mounttown Community Development Project and both organisations are represented on the Project Management Committee. The Chairperson of the Project is a member of the school staff. There is also a representative from St. Augustine's School, Springboard Project, East Coast Area Health Board, Southside Partnership, and the local community.

(B) DUN LAOGHAIRE YOUTH SERVICE HOMEWORK SUPPORT PROGRAMME, LOUGHLINSTOWN

The Homework Support Programme began in 2002 at the request of the local community. The children who attend are aged between 10 and 12 years old and they are all from the Loughlinstown area. However, they do not all attend the same primary school.

The Youth Service employed a coordinator to work with the Development Officer to run the project as a community-based alternative to school-based homework support

programmes. A further worker has been employed and is now paid through the local School Completion Programme.

The most important aspects of the project are that it involves intensive individual support, the style is relaxed and child-centred and the children are provided with a small hot meal.

They arrive after school and sit together to discuss the day's events. This is when issues concerning bullying or any other problems are brought up and the children are taught to use their problem-solving and social skills. If issues are brought up that require more attention and support that can be given during this time, the Development Officer works with them individually and liases with their home and school.

Once they have eaten they begin work. With three staff members working with only twelve young people this time is generally productive and positive. Communication and feedback between the programme and home and school is a regular feature and ensures the care the programme provides is holistic rather than simply academic.

A large number of the children have learning or developmental difficulties including ADHD and Dyslexia but this has not proven to be a difficulty due to the high number and quality of staff. Having now become so valuable to those who attend, we look forward to providing this service indefinitely into the future.

Appendix 4: EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING RESEARCH SEMINAR

The following is an overview of the feedback from the early school leaving research seminar, which was held on the 23rd of March 2004 in the Fitzpatrick's Castle Hotel. It is presented under a number of key themes.

Collaboration

- Don't reinvent the wheel; look at what is already in place and what is working and build on this i.e. information sharing and collaboration. Urban Junction in Blackrock is a facility for young people, which are now looking for the young people to use the facility.
- Good directory of local services and database of all services involved locally is needed. Pooling of information/awareness of what's out there, especially where resources are an issue.
- Addressing confidentiality issue around agencies sharing information.
- Making the connection between informal supports in the communities/community based groups and schools and build on this e.g. after school clubs and community groups.
- Sharing of resources - opening up the Training Centres to local community groups who can make use of the facilities. Schools could do the same.
- The Youth Development Strategy should address substantial youth needs, improve youth service provision and reduce cracks in the system. Shared responsibility - tie activities in Youth Development Strategy with recommendations from this research and develop linkages.
- Collaboration between various agencies - Health, Education and Justice probably able to identify the same target group.
- New guidance service needs to be independent and inter-agency, not just under one organisation. There needs to be shared responsibility between local agencies, organisations, school etc. in relation to the issue of early school leaving.
- Schools have equal responsibility for the target group and all should carry the problem equally.
- Strategy should have a countywide impact. It should link into the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Development Strategy.
- There is also a need to recognise the difficult nature of collaborative work.
- There is a need to develop Community Education Forums, which would those involved in education in the area the opportunity to discuss these issues.
- Implementation and delivery of plan needs to be collaborative
- Identify models of good practice in the area - Mounttown NYP and Holy Family National School.

Funding/Resource Issues

- The willingness to improve services is there, but the financial commitment also needs to be there. That said, some of the recommendations may not cost a lot of money, but new developments would need funding i.e. Drop-in/youth guidance service.
- There is a need to try to secure funding for the programmes and services that are already in place e.g. funding for the Cottage Childcare Project, the withdrawal of which affected the Young Mother's Programme in the Community Training Centre. Funding for the FAS Linked Work Experience Programme has also been withdrawn.
- The School Completion Programme is funded for a 3-year period. It was felt that the Department of Education needs to take a more long-term view and one way to do this is to fund long-term programmes. When there is only short term funding in place, it is difficult to plan ahead.
- A question over funding of the plan – how realistic is it to access funding for the implementation of recommendations?
- The ideas for schools are good, but what is needed is money.
- Funding mechanism – whose responsibility for developing the recommendations? There is a need to identify a funding mechanism for implementation of the recommendations.

Tracking/Transition Issues

- Tracking of all young people: young people making the transition from primary to secondary, young people in the 12 to 15 age group, young people who drop out of school, young people who drop out of training centre, what services are in place to support them?
- More comprehensive Tracking System is needed to follow-up early school leavers: FAS contact with early school leavers is by letter. Some early school leavers would have literacy difficulties – to what extent can they be reached? Letter is not the best way of getting in touch with early school leavers, because young people don't respond to letters. A more effective could be communicating via text message or hand writing letters so there is more chance that they will be opened, or following up the list by calling door-to-door.
- Tracking history of education needs to be addressed. Local knowledge is available through primary schools. Primary school teachers are a very valuable source because they know the children, their history and their families. Link in with primary school teachers to access information on educational history of the young person.
- Some sections of the youth population can be very transient – moving around Dublin, around the country and to England and back – this section of the population are very difficult to track. This includes young people living in residential centres and young people who are homeless.

Parent and Family Support Services

- Emphasis also needs to be placed on families and family support services– Work of Springboard Family Support Service or Family Skills Development Workers needs to be recognised.
- Family support services in the area are under funded and under resourced.
- There is a need for programmes that involve families with children at an early age, from two and a half years up.
- The families that need most support are generally the most difficult to contact. In schools that don't have supports such as HSCL Co-ordinators, the parents in these schools need to be aware of supports that are in place for their child and themselves.
- Parents experience affect children's links with the schools i.e. if parents left school early themselves or had negative experiences of school/education. There is a need to re-educate those with negative school experiences, to reach out to parents and bring awareness of the new education system. When parents have positive learning experiences, they will want their children to go on to further education.
- Further research is required into how parents fit into the overall picture of early school leaving, but not sure of exactly which line of research should be followed up? Suggestion to investigate link between early school leaving and early childhood development. Early Start has had a very positive impact. What childcare services are in place? What parenting courses and family learning courses are in place?

Recommendations/Suggestions

- It is important to have a plan to implement the recommendations – break down the recommendations into actions. This type of information has been discussed before, but no action has been taken to implement changes. Research has been comprehensive and informative and the follow-up needs to be the same.
- There is a need for additional speech and language services and psychological services.
- Counselling for schools and training centres, also expansion of the Teen Counselling Service to a full time service.
- Issue of staff support is vital. Provide different courses for staff in centres and in schools.
- Provide training for personnel dealing with young people i.e. In touch with Children and other programmes for staff.
- Make alternative arrangements for young people who can't manage large classes i.e. one-to-one tuition, small group work. Arrangements could be made between schools and centres.

- Community based outreach/ drop in centre is regarded as a good idea – provision of informal one-to-one support, making contact with young people through outreach services.
- Opportunities for young people who have left school early to complete the Junior or Leaving Certificates are also viewed as being a good idea. (e.g. CTC in North Great George’s Street offers a 2- year and 4 year Junior Certificate programme).

General Comments

- *Alternative Qualifications* to Junior or Leaving Certificate. Mainstream qualifications are important, but FETAC options need to be considered as well. FETAC qualifications are very flexible. If young people are placing emphasis on Junior and Leaving Certificate, is that because they aren’t aware of any alternatives? FETAC has different levels – from 1 to 10 – which is useful in the way that you can track the stages of certification and progression. It also means that you could leave mid-way through the programme and return to take up where you left off easily enough. FETAC could be introduced into the school system, but it would require change within the education system in general to recognise alternatives to the Junior and Leaving Certificates. Retention rates would be higher if there were alternatives in place within schools.
- *Definition of Early School Leaving*: Would not consider those who have gone on to vocational training such as apprenticeships as early school leavers. These young people are continuing with their education and taking an alternative route. Other young people could be in school but struggling and may not fall within this category and therefore not be targeted. It would be better to widen the definition.
- *Accessing Apprenticeships*: One of the difficulties for young people is that it is so difficult to get an apprenticeship – trades have become more technical.
- *Early intervention* is very important. It was felt that children who are at risk can be identified from the age of 5 or 6 years of age. The Youth Service and the Probation and Welfare Service work with an older age group of young people, from 10 years for the Youth service and 12 years for the Probation Service. It is felt that there is no general support in place for this age group. The Health Board and the new Education Welfare Service need to intervene earlier in relation to this age group.
- *Staying in School*: Support for the School Completion Programme was identified, because they are trying to intervene at an earlier stage and they are also trying to make school a nicer place for children. Emphasis needs to be on keeping the young person in school. There is also need to build on ways of opening opportunities for young people to return to school after leaving early.
- *Alternative Provision*: for those who have been out of school and returning to school is not an option, there is a need for alternatives to be in place. Alternative learning centre/projects need to be mainstreamed and linked into schools.

- **Counselling Service** – there is a need to look at how to ‘sell’ the counselling service to young people. Traditional counselling may not work. This type of service needs to be carefully planned and developed. It needs to be set in certain contexts that might work.
- **Innovation:** It is important to encourage creativity and innovation for new programmes to meet local needs. There is also a need for more creative ways to deal with difficult students. Strategies are limited – afterschools groups, homework clubs, sports clubs – and it is still very difficult to engage some young people. Try all possible interventions to keep them in school. Look at the models in place in other areas. Alternatives to suspensions are required.
- **Access to Professional Support Services:** There are a limited number of psychologists available. Only 1 play therapist could be located and there is also difficulty finding speech therapists.
- **Immediate Response:** This target group of young people need to be responded to straight away, important that they are not put on waiting list for any significant period of time.
- **Community based services** are very successful. Voluntary homework club in Mounttown is very successful. This good practice should be replicated. (Prevention is better than cure)
- **Building self-esteem** of young people should be the governing principle within training centres. Introduce programmes dealing with self-esteem and ensure that there is quality input from trained people.
- **Getting young people involved** in the design and delivery of the programmes

Appendix 5: Definitions

Learning Support Teacher: The role of the Learning Support Teacher is to provide support to children experiencing learning difficulties, particularly in the core area of literacy and numeracy.

Resource Teacher: The role of the Resource Teacher is to offer one-to-one/small group tuition on a withdrawal from class basis to pupils who have been assessed by an Educational Psychologist and identified as having serious learning difficulties.

Resource Teacher for Travellers: The role of the Resource Teacher for Travellers is to support and optimise teaching and learning opportunities for Traveller children and provide learning support to those Traveller children with identified supplementary needs.

Home-School-Community Liaison Co-ordinator: The role of the Co-ordinator is to enhance working relationships between home, school and community. Particular emphasis is placed on working with parents with a view to improving the quality of children's education.

Special Needs Assistants: Special Needs Assistants are non-teaching staff members funded by the Department of Education and Science who care for and work with pupils who have special needs – physical, emotional and/or psychological – throughout the day.

School Completion Programme: The School Completion Programme is a Department of Education and Science programme that aims to have a significant positive impact on levels of pupil retention in primary and second level schools and on numbers of pupils who successfully complete the senior cycle. Local School Completion Programmes and their Committees are comprised from a secondary school, a number of feeder primary schools and local representatives from relevant statutory and voluntary agencies.

Each committee are requested to draw up and implement a collaborative programme of focused and targeted integrated in school and out of school actions with the aim of providing holistic support to young people at risk of leaving school early.

St. John's Educational Centre, Glasnevin, Dublin: The aim of St. John's Educational Centre, is to support young people who are having difficulties in school by giving them time-out from school to reflect on the difficulties that they are having and to

work with them to develop some new coping skills, so that they can be more positive about themselves and school. The centre runs a five-week programme for a maximum of eight students that incorporates academic subjects, art, music and drama, circle time and one-to-one counselling as needed.

Youth Support and Training Unit (YSTU) Clondalkin: The main aim of the YSTU is to identify young early school leavers in need and support them to link into and benefit from local educational and training opportunities that are open to them. The Unit has developed a pro-active, comprehensive and integrated model for identifying and tracking young people from the area who are out of school early, which includes following up on the FAS schools returns lists and other local sources of information on young people who are out of school through home visits and community outreach work.

Pathways (Tracking), Waterford: Pathways Waterford is a tracking project for young people who have left school early. It offers support and guidance to them in making choices about their future, whether that involves going into employment, going on to further training or going back to school. The two main elements of the project are tracking and mentoring.

Key Reports

'Charting our Education Future' Department of Education, 1995.

'Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment', National Economic and Social Forum, 1997.

'Early School Leavers', National Economic and Social Forum, 2002.

'Equality in Education', Neil Haran, ADM, 2003.

'1999 Annual School Leavers' Survey', Economic and Social Research Institute, 2000.

'Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage' Proceedings and Action Plan of National Forum, St. Patrick's College, 2002.

'National Children's Strategy: Our Children, Their Lives', Department of Health and Children, 2001

'Retention of Pupils in Post-Primary Schools', Department of Education and Science, May 2003.

'United Vision 2000 - 2006', Southside Partnership, 2000.