

**French Presidency of the European Union
Conference
Career Transitions and Lifelong Guidance: Building an European Response**

September 17th and 18th 2008

Workshop 2: Guidance and workforce entry: preventing students leaving school
without qualification

Subtopic: How to support young people in difficulty

The experience of the Youthreach programme in Ireland

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We are deep into a process of profound social, economic, cultural and technological change. This puts a premium on the preparation and development of skills, understanding and knowledge. Young people who leave school early are at a particular disadvantage in these regards. Yet we must also acknowledge that very often leaving school early is a rational and life-affirming decision. The issue then is not how we might retain young people in circumstances that are unacceptable to them but how we help them complete their education in a way that makes sense to them and helps their integration into society.

The Youthreach programme (www.youthreach.ie) was first established in 1988. It is the principal national response in Ireland targeting those who have left school early. Participants include 15% lone parents and 10% Irish Travellers. It is a national programme that is managed and delivered locally with strong roots in young peoples' own communities. Its general objectives are to help participants build confidence/self-esteem, independence and employability and to provide and promote lifelong learning. It is delivered in 150 centres for education/training. These are small out-of-school units with between 15-90 participants.

From the outset the programme was intended to incorporate best practice from education, training and youth work. As well as being teachers and trainers, programme staff act as key workers (mentors). There is an emphasis on experiential learning and relationship and on a balance of safety and challenge. Youthreach operates on a pathway model and has four phases - Engagement,

Foundation, Progression and Transition. Learners are guided through a self-assessment process called the webwheel (www.youthreach.ie/webwheel) which in turn forms the basis of an individual action plan.

But second chance should not mean second rate and the programme has evolved a sophisticated quality assurance process to ensure that participants experience the best possible education and training. Also, progression towards mainstream outcomes is facilitated by the National Framework of Qualifications. Youthreach participants advance by an average of two NFQ levels as a result of participation.