Early School Leaving and Learners with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs

To what extent is research reflected in European Union policies?

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES AND/OR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission, and supported by the European Parliament.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools. An enhanced funding system for schools in Ireland.
ELET	Early Leaving from Employment and Training
ESL	Early school leaving
European Agency	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
EU	European Union
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SEN	Special educational needs
SEND	Special educational needs and/or disabilities
SES	Socio-economic status
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early school leaving (ESL) is broadly defined as the phenomenon of young people leaving formal education before they have successfully completed upper-secondary schooling. The European Union (EU) has identified reducing ESL as a priority for action and set a goal of reducing ESL to 10% across all member states by 2020.

Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are among those who are at particular risk of ESL. This report summarises the key research literature on this group and compares its findings and implications to the positions adopted by EU policy documents.

> *The European Union defines early school leavers as people aged 18-24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training.*
>
> *Early school leavers are therefore those who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years* (European Commission, 2011a).

Box 1: European Union definition used by Eurostat

There is general congruence between policy documents and the research literature about the nature of ESL and the actions that might be taken to tackle it. Policy, therefore, is broadly in line with research findings. However, there are significant gaps in the research evidence on ESL, while the evidence on ESL and SEND is particularly limited. Moreover, it is not clear whether appropriate policies are in place in every EU country, nor how far policies are enacted in practice.

Policy texts and the research literature agree that defining ESL is problematic due to its complex nature. The EU definition (Box 1) is a good starting point in recognising both formal arrangements in member states for determining the legal age for leaving school and functional aspects of needing appropriate qualifications at the point of leaving.

Policy and research also agree that the complex nature of ESL means that there are challenges with defining and identifying at-risk groups, especially those with SEND.

There is some recognition in policy texts that ESL is the result of processes that run throughout an individual learner's life. The research literature describes three main processes of *push-out, pull-out* and *fall-out*. Each process has associated risks, protective factors and the possibilities for different preventative strategies to reduce risks, and interventions to enhance protective factors. Any individual learner's chances of experiencing ESL will depend on the balance of risks, protective factors, preventative strategies and interventions available. Policy documents also

focus on compensation as a strategy to support those who experienced ESL with opportunities to return to education.

The research evidence suggests that preventative and intervention strategies need to be cognisant of the three main processes and have different foci. To deal with the process of *push-out*, the focus needs to be on school improvement; for *pull-out*, the focus is on improving learners' lives; and for *fall-out*, the focus is on improving individual academic success, motivation and school belonging. Despite some acknowledgement of this complexity in the policy texts, it is challenging for policy-makers to marshal equally complex policy responses. Their task is easier when they can identify clear targets, well-defined at-risk groups and straightforward interventions. However, the research evidence suggests that a more holistic approach is needed.

There are many examples of promising strategies that have been adopted in policy texts and in the research literature. However, there are no large-scale studies that have evaluated these strategies in a way that allows policy-makers to take them up with confidence. This could be helped in part if there were sophisticated monitoring systems in place at the national level (agreed across member states), at the local level and at the individual learner level.

The review leads to some recommendations for how policy-makers might tackle the issue of ESL more effectively, particularly as it impacts on learners with SEND.

- Current policy efforts in respect of ESL are promising, but they need to be extended. Policy-makers should set up sophisticated monitoring systems that allow the scale of the problem to be identified and the impact of preventative strategies and interventions to be evaluated.
- The measures need to be sensitive to a range of factors that lead to educational marginalisation to take account of a range of vulnerable groups that might experience ESL. Having SEND is one factor that often overlaps with the other at-risk groups.
- Good use of information and monitoring systems needs to operate at different levels within the education system. Schools need to be supported in developing systems that allow an individual focus on the risks and protective factors involved in the three processes that can lead to ESL and allow responding to interventions and preventative approaches to be monitored.
- Monitoring systems should be used to support effective interventions and preventative approaches. These need to run through the life-course of learners and are likely to extend beyond the school setting and to include societal, locality, school, family and individual approaches. They should focus not simply on reducing leaving before some arbitrarily defined point, but on

ensuring that all young people are equipped to do well when they leave school.

- School improvement is a key aspect of reducing ESL, particularly through addressing the process of push-out. Good information and teacher training is also likely to impact on how schools work to improve learner motivation and engagement and, in so doing so, reduce fall-out.
- The evidence base on SEND and ESL is less substantial than one might like, but it suggests that the risks for that group are not substantially different from those for other groups and, therefore, they need to be included within mainstream interventions and practices. The development of inclusive schools able to respond to individual characteristics and intervene early in individual difficulties is key to reducing ESL.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the report

This report brings together research reviewed in the first ESL report (European Agency, 2016) with an internal review of key information and EU policy sources to explore the extent to which research is reflected in policy. These sources principally comprise texts produced at European level and include working papers, guidance documents, conference reports and surveys, among others.

Context

Having an upper-secondary education is crucial to young people's life chances. It is often seen as the minimum entry requirement for the labour market and is an important protector against unemployment (European Commission, 2015a; OECD, 2014; Schoon, 2015; Schwabe & Charbonnier, 2015; Staff, Ramirez & Vuolo, 2015). In 2014, 40.8% of 18–24 year olds who left school early were unemployed, compared with the overall youth employment rate of 20.9% (European Commission, 2015b, p. 37).

ESL is considered an important factor in terms of poorer outcomes for the individual and society. Those who do not complete upper-secondary education tend to come from groups that are marginalised in many other ways, and tend to go on to experience multiple disadvantages into adulthood. ESL is associated with a greater likelihood of being unemployed (Bäckman, Jakobsen, Lorentzen, Österbacka & Dahl, 2015; Przybylski, 2014), a greater risk of poor life chances and poor health outcomes (Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2007; Gallagher, 2011) and a greater risk of wider social exclusion (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2016; Jahnukainen & Järvinen, 2005; Wilkins & Huckabee, 2014). Young people who are identified as having SEND seem likely to be particularly at risk of ESL and also at a greater risk of poor psycho-social outcomes in life (Humphrey, Wigelsworth, Barlow & Squires, 2013).

In Europe, not all young people enter or complete upper-secondary education and the rate of completion varies by country (European Commission, 2015a). The concerns about poorer outcomes presented in the literature are reflected in policy priorities. The EU has identified the reduction in rates of ESL as a priority for action and set the goal of reducing ESL to 10% in all member states by 2020 (European Commission, 2010, p. 9). There is evidence that the ESL rate is dropping and the mean value fell from 14.3% in 2009 to 11.1% in 2015 (European Commission, 2013, 2015a). However, learners with SEND continue to be over-represented among early school leavers. Across the EU, ESL is almost three times higher among people with disabilities than non-disabled people (Limbach-Reich & Powell, 2016, p. 8).

DEFINITIONS

What policy says

ESL is recognised as a significant issue at the European level and by many individual countries. This has led to efforts to develop appropriate policy responses. Most of the resultant policy documents include an attempt to define ESL. However, as the European Commission has recognised, ESL is a 'complex phenomenon', and there has accordingly been a widespread recognition that definitions are problematic (European Commission, 2014a; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; European Parliament, 2011a; OECD, 2012).

In this situation, some definitions focus on certain aspects of ESL, such as the age at which a pupil leaves school or the lack of achievement of upper-secondary qualifications (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 27). UNESCO, for instance, uses the term 'ESL' to refer to those pupils who do not reach the last stage of primary education (UNESCO, 2012), while Eurostat indicators define ESL by measuring upper-secondary school completion rates (for example, European Commission, 2014a, 2015a; OECD, 2014). Specifically, the definition sees early school leavers as 'people aged 18–24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training' (Brunello & De Paola, 2013; European Commission, 2011a, 2011b; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; European Parliament, 2011a). This means that:

> *Early school leavers are therefore those who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years* (European Commission, 2011a; 2013).

The Eurostat definition is seen as a pragmatic solution by dealing with the variation of measuring ESL in member states through setting a common measure of upper high school qualification (Dale, 2010). The advantage of operational definitions of this kind is that they enable countries to achieve an overview of the extent of the ESL problem in their education systems and to monitor the impacts of any action they take. This is also true at the European level, where the existence of a more or less common measure facilitates comparisons between countries. So, in 2003 the EU Council of Education Ministers stressed the importance of reducing ESL to 10%, by emphasising the need for adequate qualifications to 'ensure full employment and social cohesion' (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 4).

Policy efforts to arrive at a common definition, however, are complicated by the tendency for different administrations to prefer different definitions for their own purposes. The Eurostat definition, for instance, is not used by all member states (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Moreover, different

administrations and different policy texts use different terms to describe ESL-like phenomena. For instance, the OECD uses 'drop out' and 'ESL' interchangeably (Lyche, 2010; OECD, 2012). In contrast, the European Commission differentiates between 'drop out' and 'ESL' (European Commission, 2011b), with 'ESL' referring to all forms of leaving secondary education before completing upper-secondary school education while 'drop out' is reserved for the discontinuation of a course (ibid., p. 5).

Even where the term 'ESL' is used and is defined in terms of the legal aspect of leaving school before completing compulsory education, this does not necessarily lead to a common definition. This is because there are different leaving ages in different countries. These range from age 14 to age 18 with variations in part-time and full-time requirements (Eurydice network, 2012). Consequently, while some European countries consider ESL to denote exit from education before completing upper-secondary education, others define it in terms of leaving school without a formal qualification (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Again, however, this does not really resolve the definitional problem since different countries have different end-of-schooling qualifications with different proportions of young people expected to achieve them.

A further complication is that ESL has also been used to mean those who leave education without completing upper-secondary education and who are then not in education or training (Council of the European Union, 2011). In some countries, the term 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) has been used to represent young people who are not in upper-secondary education and who are also not in any form of education, training or employment at a given age. At the EU level, an equivalent term has been introduced: 'early leaving from education and training (ELET)' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). However, while there may be an overlap between the ESL population and the NEET population, they are not exactly the same. For instance, it is possible that someone would complete upper-secondary education, but not then enter employment or training and so would count as NEET. This means that counting learners who are NEET does not equate to a measure of ESL. The NEET category has its own definitional problems and in some countries, such as Malta, NEET may be further broken down into those who are 'in transition', 'floating', or 'core' NEETs (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2015).

What research says

The problems of defining ESL are very much reflected in the research literature. Not surprisingly, researchers tend to use the definitions prevalent in their home jurisdictions, or devise their own definitions that happen to be appropriate for

particular studies. Often, researchers view ESL as an outcome of non-completion of education. However, there are different interpretations of what is meant by non-completion and, consequently, different ways of defining ESL (for example, refer to Fitzpatrick & Yoels, 1992; Frostad, Pijl & Mjaavatn, 2015; Lundetræ, 2011).

Likewise, many alternative terms are used in the research literature, such as 'drop-out', 'push-out', 'pull-out', 'fade-out', 'fall-out', 'ease-out', 'opt-out', 'early departure' and 'non-completion' (Cederberg & Hartsmar, 2013; Doll, Eslami & Walters, 2013; Frostad et al., 2015; Jugović & Doolan, 2013; Lundetræ, 2011). Such terms pay less attention to finding a simple, operational definition around which policy interventions can be formulated and monitored, and more to the different processes leading to ESL and, therefore, to the causes underlying those processes. So, for instance, 'fall-out' calls attention to a process whereby learners leave education apparently of their own volition, while 'push-out' implies that the education system in some way rejects learners, who then become early school leavers. As shall be seen later, distinctions such as these are powerful means of focusing on the complex ways in which learners come to leave school, but they are less useful for monitoring the situation within and across countries.

In this confused and confusing situation, a useful distinction found in the literature is that between 'formal' and 'functional' definitions of ESL (Estêvão & Álvares, 2014). Formal definitions are those that select one or a small number of indicators that a young person has left school 'early' – for instance, that they have not completed upper-secondary education, or that they do not have a qualification at a politically expected level. Functional definitions, on the other hand, see ESL in terms of young people who have not acquired from the education system the skills and knowledge they will need to do well in the world beyond school. Such definitions helpfully open up questions about what those skills and knowledge should be, how they relate to a particular state of 'the world beyond school' (most obviously, for instance, the labour market), and why many years of schooling apparently fail to equip some young people appropriately. They make it possible for policy action to be marshalled around the real needs of young people, national economies and societies, rather than around what will inevitably be somewhat arbitrary targets for reducing the proportions of young people leaving school at this or that point. On the other hand, like many of the definitions in the research literature, they offer policy-makers less operational clarity and fewer opportunities for straightforward monitoring.

For learners with SEND, using functional definitions opens up wider debates around inclusion that go beyond the nature of education and schooling. These include, for instance, the nature and availability of different types of employment that are aimed at particular groups of adults with low-incidence and severe SEND versus the adaptation and support that can be made available to all employers to provide

access to work. The point here is that the level of skills required for successful inclusion in meaningful employment depends upon the extent to which barriers to employment are removed in the workplace itself. In turn, this allows for a more relaxed functional definition of what constitutes the levels of education and skill required at the end of formal education and training.

GROUPS AT RISK OF ESL

What policy says

Different European policies have recognised that some groups of learners are more at risk of ESL than other groups. Not surprisingly given the policy definitions of ESL, these groups tend to be those that are considered vulnerable to many other risks of educational failure or social exclusion (e.g. refer to Council of the European Union, 2011). The target groups include:

- those from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds (European Commission, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2014a, 2015a; Council of the European Union, 2015; European Network of Education Councils, 2013; European Parliament, 2011b);
- migrants and those with language barriers (European Commission, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2013, 2014a, 2015a; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; Council of the European Union, 2015);
- learners with SEND (European Commission, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2014a, 2015a; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; Council of the European Union, 2015);
- learners with a long-term illness (European Commission, 2014a);
- learners in a minority ethnic group (European Commission, 2011b, 2013, 2015a);
- Roma children (European Commission, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2013; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; Council of the European Union, 2015; FRA – European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014);
- children from one-parent families (European Commission, 2014a);
- children of teenage mothers (European Commission, 2011b);
- learners who are or have been in public care (European Commission, 2011b, 2011c);
- learners from families with a history of violence (European Commission, 2014a).

There is an important understanding that belonging to one of the at-risk groups does not in itself lead to success or failure and that education has a role to play in 'neutralis[ing] these inequalities' (European Commission, 2014a, p. 9). Most countries across Europe have developed policies to combat ESL across these at-risk groups (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 63).

Complications arise, however, from the fact that the definitions of these at-risk groups are themselves not always precise; it may be unclear which learners belong to which group, or whether the definitions encompass the same learners in different countries. This is particularly the case with terms such as 'disabilities' and/or 'SEN', since these terms are not used consistently across European countries. This makes direct comparison of EU-wide policy impacts on ESL for learners with SEND more difficult. For example, some countries have very low numbers of pupils defined as having SEND in mainstream education (European Agency, 2014, p. 11). This *may* be because they have a tighter definition of the category SEND, more closely linked to low-incidence, medically-diagnosed disabilities. In other countries, the majority of pupils with SEND are educated in mainstream and these countries may have a broader definition of SEND that also covers high-incidence needs resulting in underachievement at school.

Another problem with policy definitions of SEND is that they tend to bundle together a wide spectrum of very different difficulties. These typically range from visual impairment to autism, or from learning disabilities to emotional and behavioural difficulties. Yet the way the term tends to be used in policy texts is as if the group were homogenous, rather than reflecting the true heterogeneity of the population.

Similar issues could be identified in respect of other at-risk groups. Defining such groups is clearly useful for focusing policy efforts, monitoring the impacts of those efforts on different parts of the learner population, and facilitating comparisons of how different countries are doing in combating ESL in different groups. However, as with the definition of ESL itself, there is a good deal of arbitrariness in such definitions. This is not necessarily a problem where this arbitrariness is acknowledged, but there is the danger that it could lead to policy efforts being targeted inappropriately, and that any monitoring based on such definitions might be misleading and not recognise the diversity of learners within the definition.

What research says

The research literature by and large supports the tendency in policy texts to identify some learners as more at risk of ESL than others, and tends to identify broadly similar groups (Dale, 2010). Although the range of groups identified in this way is large, there is agreement between policy and international research that there are strong links between ESL and the wider issues of social background and educational disadvantage. Specifically, a disadvantaged social background is a risk factor for not completing upper-secondary school education (Borg, Camilleri, Caruana, Naudi, Vella & Raykov, 2015; Cardona, 2015; Dale, 2010; Fernández-Macías, Antón, Braña & De Bustillo, 2013; Lyche, 2010; Markussen, Frøseth & Sandberg, 2011; Schoon,

2015; Staff et al., 2015; Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Similarly, there is also agreement between policy and the research literature that learners with SEND are at greater risk of ESL than their peers and more likely to end up being classified as NEET (Hakkarainen, Holopainen & Savolainen, 2016; Kemp, 2006; Myklebust, 2012; Thurlow, Sinclair & Johnson, 2002; Wexler & Pyle, 2012).

However, the research literature tends to emphasise the difficulties with constructing meaningful definitions of at-risk groups that were noted above. In particular, it points to the difficulties of defining SEND (Squires, 2012) and the ways in which the populations so defined vary from country to country and change over time (Banks & McCoy, 2011). Moreover, almost regardless of the particular ways in which SEND populations are defined, the diversity of the learners encompassed in such definitions makes them problematic as a means of identifying with any precision which learners will or will not be at risk of ESL.

Specifically, researchers show that there will be some subgroups of learners with SEND who academically make comparatively good progress and some who do not (Humphrey, Wigelsworth et al., 2013; Humphrey, Lendrum, Barlow, Wigelsworth & Squires, 2013; Humphrey & Squires, 2011; Squires, Humphrey, Barlow & Wigelsworth, 2012). Effectively then this means that SEND represents a varied population with a range of needs that potentially impact on academic success and the likelihood of achieving educational qualifications that can lead into successful employment. This means that some learners with SEND may fulfil the first part of the Eurostat definition in being placed in upper-secondary education, but may not fulfil the second part of the definition in terms of educational achievement and qualifications and therefore be counted in the ESL population. Other learners with SEND will fulfil both sets of criteria in completing upper-secondary education and achieving suitable qualifications and not be counted in the ESL numbers. This means that it is not a given that an individual who has been categorised as having SEND will also go on to leave school early or have inadequate qualifications on leaving.

ESL CONCEPTUALISED AS A PROCESS

What policy says

By and large, policy definitions of ESL tend to portray it as an educational outcome rather than seeing it as the result of an on-going process (Lyche, 2010). In other words, they focus on the point where the education system has already failed and the learner leaves school. This creates a useful census point for monitoring the ESL phenomenon, but it does not allow the processes leading to ESL to be interrogated and therefore makes it harder to target policy interventions effectively (Dale, 2010). This approach also lumps all learners who are early school leavers into a single group and does not acknowledge their heterogeneity.

However, not all policy texts fall foul of this problem. There is a recognition at European level, for instance, that early school leavers are not a homogenous group and that there are no single predictors of who will leave school early (European Commission, 2011d; European Parliament, 2011a). Drawing upon the literature, the European Commission concluded that:

> *… neither underachievement nor early school leaving is a result of only interpersonal factors, but rather a combination of personal, social, economic, education and family domains* (European Commission, 2014a, p. 22).

Such a recognition focuses attention away from the (important but limited) task of counting those who leave school early or are at risk of doing so and instead begins to explore the complex processes that lead to ESL. In some policy documents, these processes are seen in terms of a set of risk and protective factors that operate throughout a learner's life (for example, refer to Dale, 2010; European Commission, 2014b). These factors can be thought of as being in opposition to each other and to represent a force field (leading to analysis based on ideas from Lewin, 1943). If the risk factors outweigh the protective factors, then the chance of ESL is more likely than when protective factors outweigh risk factors.

It is possible to change the probability of ESL by finding ways to help reduce or mitigate against risk factors or to help enhance or support protective factors. In doing so, the balance point is moved for the individual learner to make it less likely that ESL will occur. In the policy documents this attempt to move the balance point has been referred to as prevention and intervention. Some writers (e.g. Lyche, 2010) seem to use the term 'prevention' to cover both prevention and intervention. Similarly, other writers use 'intervention' to cover both prevention and intervention. For example, Dale (2010, p. 35) uses the terms 'pre-emption', 'prevention' and 'rescue'. In policy documents which draw upon the research literature, prevention involves tackling the kinds of problems that might eventually lead to ESL. Prevention can operate at the macro or societal level, as well as the meso level of the school

and the micro level of the individual learner. Intervention requires steps to improve the quality of education and support given to particular groups of learners to combat emerging difficulties. To be effective, prevention and intervention need to start early in order to operate throughout the learners' education (European Parliament, 2011b; Lyche, 2010, p. 7).

Given that the Eurostat definition is both a formal and a functional definition, it is possible to offer strategies that support those who left school before they were legally allowed to do so by providing the chance to return through 'second-chance education' or alternative schools in order to achieve the qualifications that they need and that such learners should actively be encouraged to take up these opportunities (Council of the European Union, 2011; European Parliament, 2011a, 2011c). This is an example of a third strand mentioned in policy documents, referred to as 'compensation'. Compensation (sometimes referred to as recovery programmes) involves ways of creating new opportunities to re-engage learners with education once they have left.

This is summarised as a model in Figure 1 that extends the initial ideas from the literature presented in the previous ESL report (European Agency, 2016) by incorporating ideas expressed in policy documents. Force Field Analysis is a technique devised by Lewin (1943). It considers that in any social system there are forces acting in different directions that can either lead to one outcome or another.

For a learner entering school there are two possible outcomes that are considered here: they will either complete upper-secondary education satisfactorily with appropriate qualifications, or they will leave school early. For any given individual, there will be a set of risk factors acting in one direction to increase the likelihood of ESL and there will be a set of protective factors acting in the opposite direction to increase the chance of successful completion of secondary education. These can be thought of as two opposing forces. Actions by policy-makers can try to alter the balance of the forces. They can try to reduce risks through prevention. For example, there is an increased risk of ESL if the learner is in an area of low socio-economic status (SES), so a policy-maker might decide to tackle social inequality as a preventative strategy in order to reduce the risks associated with low SES. Equally, there are protective factors for the individual (for example, access to good quality teaching), so a policy-maker could decide to enhance this force through an intervention such as increasing funding to schools in areas of low SES.

Additional forces have been added to the model which show prevention acting to reduce risks and intervention acting to enhance protective factors. The other option open to policy-makers is to try to address the situation when it has gone wrong. For those learners who have left school early, it might still be possible to offer a compensational strategy such as second-chance education. This is represented in

the model as a force that leads from the failed outcome of ESL back to the desired outcome of successful completion of secondary education.

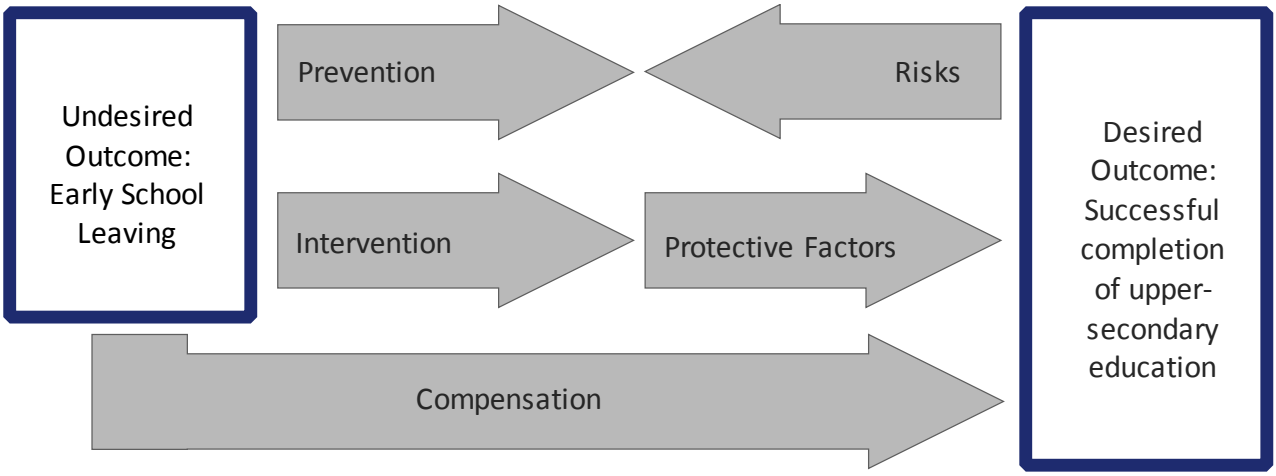

Figure 1. Forces leading towards and away from ESL

What research says

There is a recognition within the policy documents that ESL is not simply an end-point, but the result of risks operating throughout education (European Commission, 2014a). The research literature facilitates a move from considering the populations that are at risk, to considering the processes that are at work to produce those risks.

The previous ESL report (European Agency, 2016) covered the different terms used for the processes and the literature they were based upon (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; De Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot & Maassen van den Bri, 2013; Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Doll et al., 2013; Jugović & Doolan, 2013; Lamote, Speybroeck, Van Den Noortgate & Van Damme, 2013; Lee & Breen, 2007; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Lindsay, 2007; Markussen, Frøseth, Sandberg, Lødding & Borgen, 2010; Persson, 2015; Persson, 2013; Pijl, Frostad & Mjaavatn, 2013; Prince & Hadwin, 2013; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005; Smith & Douglas, 2014; Watt & Roessingh, 1994a, 1994b; Wehby & Kern, 2014; Winding & Andersen, 2015).

ESL can be seen to result from three distinct processes of *push-out, pull-out* and *fall-out.* For each of these processes, different risk factors are at play and the source of action leading to ESL differs. *Push-out* implies forces acting within the school system which marginalise or alienate the learner and ultimately result in ESL. It is the way that the school is organised that creates the conditions that lead to the learner being *pushed out* of education. In the case of push-out, the source of action is with the school. *Pull-out* refers to factors outside of the school that *pull* the learner *out* of education or divert them from completing school. The learner is the primary source of action (or the situation in which they find themselves is the source of action). *Fall-*

out refers to a gradual disengagement from education and a gradual loss of interest in school, school activities and goals.

Knowing which factors contribute to the increased risk of ESL provides foci for targeted policy actions. The different processes are summarised below in Table 1. For examples of risk factors taken from the research literature, please refer to an expanded table (Table 2) in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Sources of action and foci for action in push-out, pull-out and fall-out

Sources of action and foci of action	**Push-out**	**Pull-out**	**Fall-out**
Source of action	School organisation	Learner or learner situation	Interaction between the learner and the school
Focus of action to target ESL	School improvement	Improving learners' lives outside of school	Improving learners' academic success, motivation and sense of belonging

In common with the policy documents, many researchers split the risk factors across social factors (to do with the wider lives of learners and those focused on the school), family factors, and individual factors (Lundetræ, 2011; Schoon & Duckworth, 2010; Wade & Dixon, 2006; Winding, Nohr, Labriola, Biering & Andersen, 2013).

It can be seen that the approaches to be taken can operate at the societal or education system level (for example, allocating more resources to schools in areas of low SES; improving learners' lives outside of school), the school level through school improvement, the individual level (e.g. developing skills or improving school engagement) or family level.

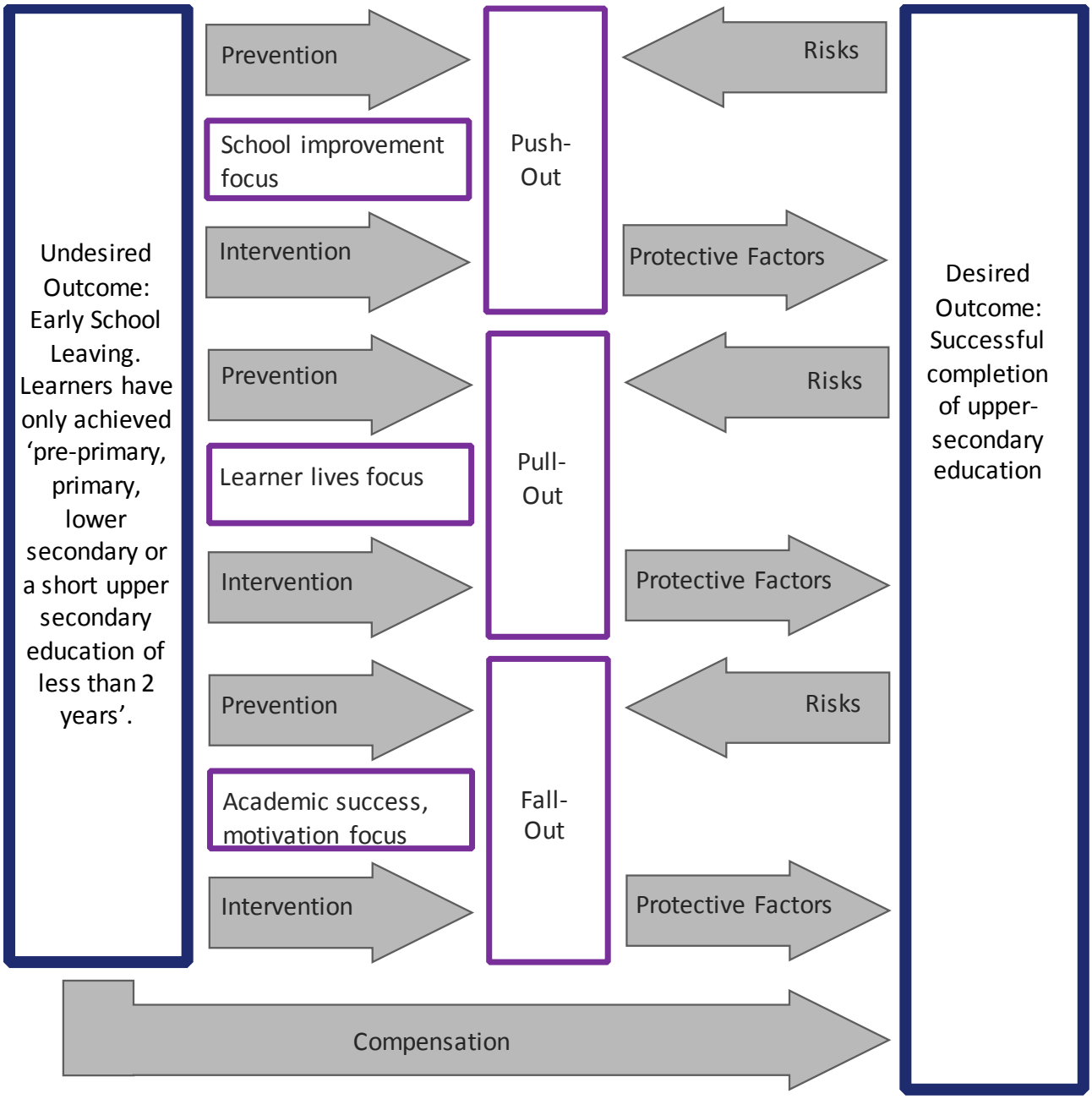

Figure 2. Model of forces and processes involved in ESL

If these ideas are added to this model, it captures some of the real complexities of how ESL arises and might be combatted. Figure 2 shows that there are three distinct processes in which different forces act to produce '*push-out*', '*pull-out*' and '*fall-out*'. Each has its own set of risks and protective factors.

Interestingly, a report commissioned by the European Parliament split ESL learners into six subgroups which overlap with the three main types of processes focused on here. These subgroups were referred to as 'troubled', 'discouraged', 'circumstantial', 'confused', 'positive' and 'opportune' (European Parliament, 2011c, pp. 43–44). Those in the troubled category are those who the school may regard as

having social, emotional or behavioural difficulties or may have been victimised or bullied. This seems to overlap with *push-out*. Those in the discouraged category have a negative experience of school that has reduced their motivation or they have low performance levels. Those in the confused category also lack direction and motivation and are unsure of the relevance of education to their future careers. These two categories overlap with *fall-out.* Those in the positive category are actively choosing to leave school to take up a job that they are positive about. Those who are in the opportune category are undecided about their future, but take up the offer of a job rather than staying in education. Those in the circumstantial category leave school because of changes in their social, family or personal circumstances. These three categories overlap with *pull-out.*

It might be that these processes act on distinct groups and subgroups, as suggested by the European Parliament study (2011c), or it might be that the different processes interact to different degrees for any given individual. In this conceptualisation, the complexity of what might be happening for a given individual becomes more apparent.

One might imagine a learner with SEND, more specifically a learner with a learning disability or difficulty. He starts out in life disadvantaged economically and lacking resources within the family setting to develop early learning skills and prosocial skills needed for school. He goes on to struggle with the cognitive demands of the curriculum, which are not adequately recognised by teachers or supported in school. This leads to him developing a negative view of himself as a learner. He reacts against the demands of teachers, who in turn use sanctions such as detentions and temporary exclusions. He starts to play truant and, while doing so, becomes attracted to social pressures outside of school, such as drugs or petty crime. In this imagined scenario, there is an interaction between wider social factors, the school discipline processes, school organisational factors, and learner motivational factors. All three processes of push-out, pull-out and fall-out come into play and interact with potential prevention and intervention strategies.

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE ESL

Examples from policy documents

Approaches to tackle the three processes require combined prevention and intervention strategies aimed at addressing school improvement, improving learners' wider lives, and improving academic success, motivation and sense of belonging. Compensation strategies remain as a 'catch-all' approach and potentially can operate over the lifespan of the individual.

By 2014, six countries – Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Bulgaria, Malta, the Netherlands and Spain – had developed comprehensive strategies that involved all three elements of prevention, intervention and compensation (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014, p. 51). There was a stronger emphasis on prevention in Belgium, Malta and the Netherlands, while in Austria there was emphasis on compensation. Many of the policy documents clearly list different approaches to prevention, intervention and compensation (for example, refer to Cardona, 2015; European Commission, 2011d; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; European Parliament, 2011b). Examples of approaches of these kinds found in the policy documents are presented in Appendix 2.

The different ways of responding can usefully be thought of as acting at different levels, such as societal, school, and individual/family. A comprehensive plan needs to operate at all levels and some ways of responding may cross different levels.

What research says

Prevention and intervention

An idea found in special education is that teachers can intervene when learning is not progressing as expected. This is often seen as a reactive strategy or one that targets a subgroup of learners. However, the focus can be shifted from special education with interventions focused on the individual, to inclusive education with interventions focused on the way that the school is organised, relationships maintained and the curriculum arranged. This is a more preventative approach. Attempts to improve academic performance for learners with learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties are a feature of many school-based programmes to reduce ESL and a good instructional design has been raised as an important consideration.

In discussing instructional design, Bost and Riccomini (2006), for instance, set out 10 principles that they consider help to reduce ESL. These overlap with some of the actions identified in policy texts (refer to Appendix 2):

- Increasing learner active engagement in tasks through effective design and delivery of the lesson (good quality teaching) and selection of curricular materials that have meaning and generate interest for the learner. Ensuring that the materials are accessible to the learner and the learner can make a variety of responses.
- Encouraging social and academic success.
- Finding ways to increase the opportunities to learn content.
- Considering alternative groupings to allow different kinds of support (e.g. whole class teaching allows shared learning, while small group teaching allows the teacher to better match individual needs).
- Scaffolding instruction by providing just the right amount of adult guidance to allow the learner to be successful in the learning task.
- Addressing all forms of knowledge. (Bost and Riccomini consider that special education has often emphasised procedural – how to – knowledge and declarative – facts – knowledge at the expense of conditional knowledge – when and where to use particular strategies).
- Organising and activating knowledge, designing the programme of instruction in such a way that it recognises what learners already know and helps them to extend their knowledge in a structured way.
- Teaching learners how to learn, rather than teaching what to learn.
- Making instruction explicit by making it teacher-directed, highly organised, task-orientated and presented in a clear manner.
- Teaching sameness. (By this, Bost and Riccomini mean supporting learners with learning disabilities by showing how the same knowledge can be applied in different parts of the curriculum to solve novel problems).

Widening the focus beyond the classroom, Lyche (2010) looks at how the school is located in the local community and breaks prevention and intervention down to actions at different stages of education (pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary). This recognises that the processes of push-out, pull-out and fall-out operate over time. The list of actions suggested also overlap with many of the actions outlined in policy documents (refer to Appendix 2).

Broadly, these are aimed at:

- supporting families;
- engaging parents in children's education;
- improving relationships between peers and between adults and children;
- developing a sense of belonging in school and connectedness to the community;
- targeting risky behaviour, such as substance abuse, through school programmes;
- identifying and tackling slow learning;
- providing alternative educational tracks, such as vocational education and training (VET).

Schools may also have a role to play in developing resilient individuals who can thrive despite the risks that are at play (Bartley, Schoon, Mitchell & Blane, 2007) and through developing positive attitudes towards learning (Schoon & Duckworth, 2010).

Compensation

Second-chance education is one compensatory strategy that is being widely used across Europe. Learners who have left school early are provided with an opportunity to return to education. In Ireland, for instance, learners aged 15–20 who left school without formal qualifications and who are unemployed can attend Youthreach centres and are paid a weekly allowance.

The research literature provides two critiques that can be aimed at second-chance education and compensation as a strategy to address ESL. The first is concerned with its broad application to all 'at-risk' groups. Some authors consider that second-chance education is more relevant to some learners than others. It is likely to be of benefit to learners who leave education for personal reasons, such as relationships, financial, family, caring or parenting responsibilities, i.e. *pull-out* (Dale, 2010, p. 44). In Australia, second-chance education seemed to serve the needs of those learners who left school early to take up employment opportunities or to follow some alternative education (Polidano, Tabasso & Tseng, 2013). Dale (2010) argues that, for some learners, second-chance education is likely to be of limited importance and comments that this is particularly true if the second chance is more of what was available the first time around. Second-chance education needs to be in different settings, with greater teacher-learner ratios and an emphasis on career and vocational education.

However, it may be that second-chance education, properly constituted, has something to offer to other groups of young people. In one study in Ireland, although the reason for learners leaving mainstream education was unknown, many of the learners had behavioural problems in mainstream and were asked to leave or be excluded from the school, suggesting that there was a process of *push-out*. Some of the learners reported disengagement with mainstream education and a process of *fall-out* seemed at play (Squires, Kalambouka & Bragg, 2016, pp. 130–131). The learners in the Irish study found a more relaxed pace, enhanced staffing ratios, a more relevant curriculum and improved teacher-learner relationships to be particularly helpful (Squires et al., 2016). This suggests that how education is organised is what matters.

This leads to the second critique that is levelled at how education works as a system. This argues that second-chance education is costly and is simply a belated response to the failure of mainstream education to adequately meet the needs of all learners. As Coffield asked when the idea of second-chance schools was first mooted in Europe:

> … *why is the response to failure in education so often the expensive creation of extensions to the system (in this case, 'second chance schools' with specially-qualified and more highly paid teachers, working with fewer pupils) rather than using the same additional resources to reform the schools which have failed to educate so many young people during their 'first chance'?* (1998, p. 50).

If these critiques are applied to the model, then one way of knowing that strategies to tackle ESL are being effective would be to note a reduction in the need for compensatory approaches. By implication, policy directives should strive towards prevention and intervention, rather than focusing on compensation as the main approach to tackle ESL.

DATA AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

What policy says

As already seen, policy-makers have paid a good deal of attention to the task of defining ESL in a way which makes it possible to set up monitoring systems so that the scale of the problem can be apprehended and policies and approaches to reduce ESL can be evaluated (European Commission, 2013). A simple head count suggests that the general trend is for ESL to be in decline, with 19 countries having reached the 2020 target (for example, refer to European Commission, 2011b, 2011c, 2014b; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014).

However, the simpler such monitoring systems are, the more likely it is that the information they will provide will be of limited use or, indeed, will be misleading. To take just one example, monitoring average ESL rates by country does not allow variations between different groups or regions within each country to be explored or compared (European Commission, 2011b, 2013). These limitations are recognised in some policy texts. The Council of the European Union advocates the need for a broad range of indicators that go beyond the headline figure:

> … *developing or enhancing national data collection systems which regularly gather a wide range of information on learners, especially those at risk and early school leavers. Such systems, covering all levels and types of education and training and in full compliance with national legislation on data protection* … (2015, p. 7).

The conclusions go on to give five uses for this data:

(a) *enable the regular monitoring of educational progress with a view to the early detection and identification of learners at risk of early school leaving;*

(b) *help to define criteria and indicators for identifying educational disadvantage;*

(c) *help to understand the reasons for early school leaving, including by collecting the views of learners;*

(d) *facilitate the availability of data and information at different policy levels and their use in steering and monitoring policy development;*

(e) *provide the basis for developing effective guidance and support in schools with a view to preventing early school leaving, as well as follow-up measures for young people who have left education and training prematurely* (ibid.).

The fourth point deals with the need to establish an evidence base that can be used to compare progress in different countries and to evaluate approaches taken to deal with ESL. There is recognition of the need for more 'comprehensive, consistent and

coherent data from Member States' (European Parliament, 2011b, paragraph 103) which will allow analysis of the reasons for ESL in any region, locality or school (European Commission, 2011c). Some of the policy documents also provide ideas of how to collect and analyse data, such as including measures that cover the entire education system and measures that recognise and account for SEND (for example, refer to European Commission, 2013).

The first three points are consistent with the development of early warning systems and there is some evidence that such systems are being developed in some countries. For example, Hungary has started to develop early warning systems to identify potential ESL (European Commission, 2015b, p. 37).

What research says

The adoption of early warning systems has been recommended for use with learners with learning disabilities at risk of ESL and such systems have been implemented in school districts in the USA (Bruce, Brigeland, Fox & Balfanz, 2011; Heppen & Therriault, 2008; Herzog, Davis & Legters, 2011; Zablocki & Krezmien, 2012). Similar systems in Europe can inform school-based interventions (Nouwen, Clycq, Braspenningx & Timmerman, 2015). These generally include cognitive and behavioural measures, but could also include emotional wellbeing (ibid., p. 2).

This has particular relevance for learners with SEND. One of the strengths of special education in many countries, of course, is that it is based on the careful monitoring of individuals. Therefore, there are good reasons to believe that the established practices of special education could be adapted to identify learners at risk of ESL. As Bear, Kortering and Braziel argue:

> *… there is a host of reasons why a student may drop out of school, and these reasons vary from individual to individual. We see the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process as an ideal way to address individual differences, including factors that are likely to influence an individual student's decision not to complete school* (2006, p. 298).

It is significant that the repeated finding in the literature is that the factors implicated in ESL are not primarily related to the fixed characteristics of young people with SEND. This has been evident in the discussion so far and it is recognised in many of the policy documents. As Doren, Murray and Gau discovered:

> *… the most salient predictors of school dropout included a set of malleable individual (grades, and engagement in high-risk behaviours), family (parent expectations), and school (quality of students' relationship with teachers and peers) factors* (2014, p. 150).

The model (Figure 2) builds on this point and serves as a reminder that ESL is a set of processes with associated risks, protective factors, foci of prevention and foci of intervention and these processes affect different populations of learners who are vulnerable. This leads to the view that monitoring systems and early warning systems should be capable of measuring all of these factors and providing insights into how the different factors interact.

Monitoring systems need to draw on:

- measures of factors at the national and education system level (e.g. rates of school completion, the performance of groups of learners with different background characteristics including SEND, levels of social inequality, and the state of the labour market);
- measures of more 'local' factors (e.g. individual school performance, inclusivity, teacher-learner relationships, quality of teaching and learning);
- measures relating to individual learners (e.g. attendance, emotional, behaviour, cognitive, attainment, motivation, sense of belonging, changes in circumstances, learner views and aspirations).

The aim of such sophisticated systems is not simply to collect data on the state of ESL, but to inform intervention. For example, school improvement could start with Bost & Riccomini's (2006) ten principles of instructional design in that they are focused on what teachers do within the school and could be considered as a preventative strategy. They show aspects of teaching that could be monitored at the school level and as part of the professional development of teachers. Each of the principles could be interpreted as being a preventative strategy focused on the need to improve learner engagement and thereby reduce fall-out. At the same time, they could be seen to be strategies for raising attainment generally in the school and to have a school improvement focus, dealing with poor teaching, dealing with low teacher expectations, considering how the curriculum is designed and how the school is organised, thereby reducing push-out. Similarly, there is research to suggest that teacher training can lead to more inclusive attitudes and practices (European Agency, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

European policy and the research literature

This brief review points to somewhat optimistic conclusions in terms of the relationship between policies on ESL in Europe and the research evidence. Policies at European level and in many European countries reflect research findings that ESL is a significant issue in educational and social equality. Not only is the issue identified in policy texts, but systems are in place to monitor its extent and to enable comparisons between European countries.

Moreover, countries have marshalled a wide range of interventions to combat ESL and, for the most part, these interventions are congruent with the findings of research as to what is necessary and what is effective. The implication is that the overall direction of policy is one that is supported by the best research evidence that is available.

However, this optimism needs to be tempered in some significant respects, as outlined below.

Gaps in knowledge

ESL as currently understood is an issue that has only relatively recently come to the attention of policy-makers and researchers. It is different in this respect from issues such as how best to improve literacy rates, or how best to provide for learners with SEND. This inevitably means that there are gaps in the knowledge base on which policy-makers might draw.

There is, for instance, no widely accepted definition of ESL and no agreed measures of its incidence and impacts – though some promising early steps have been made in this direction. There is a measure of agreement in the research literature on the kinds of interventions that might be appropriate, but it would be difficult to argue that there is a bank of proven interventions on which policy-makers can draw. By and large, the studies that inform the evidence base are small-scale and focused within individual education systems. There are few robust large-scale studies and there are considerable problems in extrapolating from smaller local studies to other education systems.

All these limitations apply to the evidence base on ESL in relation to learners with SEND. Both policy and research efforts in this field tend to have been focused on improving provision in the school years. Relatively little attention has been paid to what happens once learners leave school, and very little indeed to those who leave school early. It is, therefore, very difficult to find good evidence from Europe on these matters and the situation beyond Europe seems to be little better.

To a significant extent, therefore, policy has to be based on extrapolation from what is known about other groups. There is a clear need for a more substantial research effort in this sub-field.

Policy versus practice

While it is true that policy texts are often congruent with the research evidence, this is not quite the same as saying that practice in European countries reflects research to any significant extent. In part, this is because research on the incidence and causation of ESL is not always paralleled by research on practice in combating ESL or on the effectiveness of interventions. There are relatively few evaluative studies of interventions or rich accounts of practice in relation to ESL in schools and other educational institutions.

In part, however, this is also because the relationship between policy and practice is not clear from the research accounts and policy texts that are available. It is one thing for policy-makers to acknowledge ESL as a problem and to set up monitoring systems – but this is not the same as ensuring that effective interventions are in place at every level of the education system. Likewise, it is one thing for policy statements to be in place at European level or in particular countries – but this is not the same as ensuring that every country has developed appropriate policies.

Insofar as the policy review was able to explore these issues, the impression is that there are elements of appropriate policy in a wide range of countries, but that there may be a task to do in enabling every country to develop a comprehensive policy position.

A holistic view

To some extent, the apparent lack of comprehensive policy approaches may be due to the formidable challenges facing policy-makers in this field. The research evidence is clear that ESL needs to be viewed holistically. It is one of a range of sub-optimal educational outcomes that have similar origins and impacts, that need to be seen as closely inter-linked and that need broadly similar strategies to combat them. It has deep roots in learners' social backgrounds and educational experiences, so it needs to be seen as the outcome of a long-term process rather than as an isolated phenomenon. It impacts on a range of at-risk population groups so that policies need to acknowledge both the differences between these groups (including learners with SEND) and the homogenic nature of each of the at-risk groups, while also offering broad strategic approaches that encompass all at-risk groups. Finally, combating ESL demands wide-ranging and multi-strand interventions both within and beyond education systems.

All of this is necessarily challenging for policy-makers whose task is easiest when it is possible to take bounded action in respect of a clearly defined phenomenon impacting on a specific group of learners. Not surprisingly, a good deal of policy effort appears to have gone into formulating definitions of ESL on the basis of which the phenomenon can be measured and monitored in a straightforward way. There is, by contrast, little evidence of the kind of sophisticated monitoring systems, informing co-ordinated, holistic approaches that the research evidence suggests may be needed.

Looking specifically at the group which is the focus of this report, there is only limited evidence of coherent approaches to combating ESL among learners with SEND, and even less evidence that those approaches form part of a co-ordinated strategy for all at-risk groups.

Recommendations for policy-makers

1. Current policy efforts in respect of ESL are promising. Efforts to define ESL clearly, to set up monitoring systems (at the national, local and individual level) that identify the extent of the problem and the impacts of any interventions, and to make definitions and indicators useful in trans-national comparisons all seem like useful steps. A key task for policy-makers at national and European level is to extend these efforts so that all European countries have an appropriate basis for developing policy interventions.
2. At the same time as the coverage of current monitoring systems is extended, however, there is a strong case for making them more sensitive to the realities of educational marginalisation. The key here is to move away from single-strand definitions and individual indicators. Some account needs to be taken of the links between ESL and other forms of sub-optimal educational outcomes, the complex processes through which ESL emerges, and the many ways in which different groups and individuals come to experience ESL.

   This is possible if policy-makers work towards developing more sophisticated monitoring systems. Ideally, such systems should log a range of educational outcomes (attainments, progression to other educational experiences, employment outcomes, etc.), should do this at the level of the individual learner, and should be able to link outcomes data to data on learners' backgrounds and educational experiences.
3. Sophisticated monitoring systems at national level are only part of the answer. Different levels of education systems need to have good information on what is happening to the learners for whom they are responsible. In particular, schools need to know what is happening to individuals – what risks they are facing, what educational outcomes they are achieving, and how they are responding

to interventions. Policy-makers therefore need to support schools and other system levels in setting up and using their own monitoring systems. In many schools, the necessary data will already be available, but may be scattered in different places and accessed by different teachers and other professionals. The task, therefore, may largely be one of collation and of supporting schools in understanding how to make best use of the data they already have available.

4. Monitoring systems are only of value if they form the basis for effective interventions. The research evidence is clear that such interventions need to be wide-ranging. It is highly unlikely that single-strand interventions undertaken only when the risk of ESL is severe will be adequate to reducing ESL numbers significantly or linking any reduction to a meaningful improvement in educational outcomes. Interventions need to run throughout the life-course of learners, to embrace all aspects of their educational experience and to extend beyond education settings into the background factors in families and societies that place learners at risk. They need to include interventions when risks become apparent, but also preventative measures to prevent risks emerging in the first place.

   Conceptualising and marshalling such interventions are major challenges for policy-makers. The model developed above (Figure 2) goes some way towards offering a conceptual framework within which interventions can be developed. However, it is clear that many aspects of education policy – and of wider social policy – are involved in combating ESL. Co-ordinating across the different sections of ministries presents a formidable challenge. However, this challenge can be reduced by seeing policy to reduce ESL as part of wider policy efforts to improve educational outcomes and reduce educational inequality and marginalisation. Reducing ESL is then not simply *yet another* policy priority, but is an outcome of these wider policy actions.

   In particular, policy-makers might find it useful to shift the focus of their efforts away from preventing ESL as a stand-alone outcome measured in terms of qualifications and/or leaving points, and towards a more functional understanding of the phenomenon. The key question, in other words, is not how many young people leave school before some more-or-less arbitrary point, but how many leave before they are equipped to do well in the adult world. This raises more fundamental questions about the purposes of education systems and their effectiveness in achieving those purposes.

5. Just as monitoring systems need to be in place at all levels of education systems, so effective interventions need to be deployed at all levels, not least in schools. Stand-alone national initiatives are likely to achieve relatively little unless they are embedded within efforts to improve the quality and

effectiveness of all levels of the education system, and local, school and classroom efforts to ensure that every learner has meaningful opportunities to do well. A key task for policy-makers, therefore, is to support schools and other system levels in undertaking this task.

6. The evidence base on SEND and ESL is less substantial than one might like. However, what it shows is very much in line with the evidence from mainstream education. Policy-makers are right to see learners with SEND as an at-risk group and to ensure that targeted interventions are in place to maintain that group in education. However, the risks for that group are not substantially different from those for other groups and, therefore, they need to be included within mainstream interventions and practices, rather than treated as an entirely separate special case. As might be expected from the evidence on ESL overall, it seems likely that good quality schools which respond to individual characteristics and intervene early in individual difficulties are key to reducing ESL. If the practices of such schools are understood as being characteristically inclusive practices, then the evidence suggests that the development of inclusive education may be an important way to combat ESL among learners with SEND.

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APPENDIX 1: RISK FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESSES OF PUSH-OUT, PULL-OUT AND FALL-OUT

Table 2 contains examples of risk factors drawn from across the research literature (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; De Witte et al., 2013; Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Doll et al., 2013; Jugović & Doolan, 2013; Lamote et al., 2013; Lee & Breen, 2007; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Lindsay, 2007; Markussen et al., 2010; Persson, 2015; Persson, 2013; Pijl et al., 2013; Prince & Hadwin, 2013; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Sinclair et al., 2005; Smith & Douglas, 2014; Watt & Roessingh, 1994a, 1994b; Wehby & Kern, 2014; Winding & Andersen, 2015). The different risk factors have been thematically grouped together to provide foci for potential action.

Table 2. Sources of action, risk factors and foci for action in push-out, pull-out and fall-out

Sources of action, risk factors and foci of action	**Push-out**	**Pull-out**	**Fall-out**
Source of action	School organisation	Learner or learner situation	Interaction between the learner and the school
Risk factors	**School discipline policy focus:** Unaddressed poor attendance. Consequences of bad behaviour. Being expelled from the school. School being perceived as too dangerous. **Teacher focus:** Poor quality of teaching. Low teacher expectations of the	**Financial focus:** Personal financial worries. Financial difficulties at home and the learner having to work to support the family. **Family focus:** Family needs (such as caring for relatives). Getting married. Becoming pregnant (mixed results in the literature).	**Academic success focus:** Lack of personal support. Insufficient educational support. **Motivational focus:** A gradual loss of interest in school activities and goals and becoming apathetic. Not liking school. Learners have poor

Sources of action, risk factors and foci of action	Push-out	Pull-out	Fall-out
	learner. Teachers feeling unable to cope with learners they find problematic. Poor relationships between learners and teachers. **Curriculum focus:** Courses of study that are too hard. The use of testing regimes by promoting teaching to the test. Poor performance in tests. Grade retention. **School within a local community focus:** Drug- and alcohol-related problems. Transport to school being too difficult. Poor social relationships within the school.	**Employment focus:** Wanting to go to work. Enlisting in the armed forces. Being able to get a job without further qualifications. Employment alongside schooling exceeded 20 hours. A lower risk of dropout was evident if jobs were scarce or salaries were low. **Health focus:** Illnesses that prevent the learner from attending school. Illnesses that cause learners to put a greater value on something outside of school. **Peer focus:** Friends leaving school. Being involved in gang activity.	study habits. Negative attitudes towards homework. Low learner expectations of payoff from staying in education. Parents not being interested in the learner's education. Learners who reported that school was supportive of developing autonomy and learners with higher levels of self-determination were less likely to drop out of education. **Sense of belonging focus:** Changing school, e.g. by moving to another city. Lack of access to course of choice. Lack of feeling of belonging to the

Sources of action, risk factors and foci of action	Push-out	Pull-out	Fall-out
			school. Poor relationships with peers.
Focus of action to target ESL	School improvement	Improving learners' lives outside of school	Improving learners' academic success, motivation and sense of belonging

APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLES OF APPROACHES TO PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND COMPENSATION FOUND IN THE POLICY DOCUMENTS

The examples in Table 3 have been taken from policy and guidance documents. They have been grouped thematically.

Table 3. Strategies and approaches to tackle ESL

Strategy	Approach
Prevention	**EU level:** Support learning among member states as to how to reduce ESL. **National level:** Improve ESL data collection and monitoring – for example, by giving each learner an education number to make it possible to track them and produce statistics at the national, regional and school level. Use national data about ESL to allow for a greater understanding of the reasons underlying ESL. Improve the monitoring of absenteeism at the national level. Take steps to enrol Roma children in schools. Analyse the impact of the labour market on ESL. Raise the leaving age of compulsory education to 18. Decrease socio-economic segregation to allow access to schools in less poor areas. This has been tried in the USA, but encountered resistance from middle class parents (Dale, 2010). Introduce reforms to improve the performance of schools in areas of low SES, e.g. increased funding has been used in the UK (England) through the Pupil Premium and in Ireland through the introduction of DEIS schools. Address financial concerns through grants, allowances or extending social benefits which may be contingent on school attendance and punctuality. Introduce other redistributive approaches, such as provision of free school meals, essential sports equipment and school books (European Parliament, 2011b, paragraph 32).

Strategy	Approach
	School level: Raise awareness of ESL in schools: • supply information about ESL directly to schools; • raise awareness of the nature and scale of ESL with school staff through in-service training; • include ESL as part of initial teacher training; • improve teacher training so that teachers are more able to deal with diversity in the classroom; • provide information about ESL on the web. Fund school-based approaches to reducing ESL. Improve transition between educational levels. Improve career guidance. Improve skill assessments, access to mentoring and support services. Improve a sense of school belonging and connectiveness with learners and their families. Increase trust in learners. Build resilience among at-risk learners. Develop clear policies that lead to learners with sensory disabilities being taught in mainstream schools. Develop approaches to tackle bullying. **Curriculum focus:** Increase and improve flexible learning pathways in secondary education. Improve vocational secondary education and access to vocational courses. Increase subjective relevance of the curriculum to learners. Have competency-based or skills-based programmes, rather than subject-based programmes. Develop e-learning content to better respond to learners' learning

Strategy	Approach
	needs. Reduce grade retention. Create greater local management of schools to allow flexible adaptation of the curriculum. Provide learning tasks with immediate and tangible outcomes. **Family focus:** Work with families and parents to improve parental involvement in education. Develop parental support services. Improve extra-curricular activities and out-of-school clubs. Provide free childcare. A Chicago study showed that improved funded early years education led to better school completion rates (Dale, 2010).
Intervention	Identify at-risk groups and improve teacher-learner ratios for at-risk groups. Develop early warning systems and follow-up systems that involve close co-operation between schools, parents and the local community. Provide individual support and academic support for low achievers in a targeted way (financial, social, psychological, educational). Strengthen personalised learning approaches, especially for learners with SEN. Provide mentors for at-risk learners. Mentoring can extend beyond school staff to include members of the community and local businesses. Provide language support for second language learners and migrants. Specialist staff to support teachers and learners. Harness the support of youth workers. Develop systems for managing absenteeism. Network with parents and others outside of school.

Strategy	Approach
	Support teenage mothers.
Compensation	Identify early school leavers and help them to re-enter education through second-chance education provided in alternative settings with small groups. Provide flexible and accessible means for people who left education without qualifications to acquire basic skills and to complete upper-secondary qualifications. Provide transition classes to help those who left school early get back into education. Improve apprenticeship schemes.

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