

1. Tsukuba conference poster
2. Hello, Let me start with an apology: Andreas Frey, the rector of the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency, in Mannheim, Germany can unfortunately not be here with us today due to another commitment he could not change. He has asked me to present his sincere apologies to you .
3. My name is Jean-Jacques Ruppert and I am the Head of the Luxembourg based Applied Vocational Psychology and Policy research unit.
4. I will now give you some general thoughts on 'Prevention of Dropout from Higher Education' as well as / ...
5./ introduce PrevDrop, an EU funded Erasmus+ project on Detecting and Preventing Drop out from HE or Supporting Students to Switch Successfully to VET.
PrevDrop is being managed by the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency in Mannheim, Germany and the project partners are:
 - from Germany: ZAB Consult GmbH from Aachen and Nürtingen-Geislingen University,
 - from Italy: the University of Macerata,
 - from the UK: Plymouth University,
 - from Bulgaria: Infoart, and
 - from Luxembourg: the Applied Vocational Psychology and Policy research unit.
6. Five years ago, in *Europe 2020*, the European Union's strategy for jobs and growth, the Commission set a target of getting at least 40% of the younger generation into a third level education qualification. Additionally, the Commission also undertook to reduce the dropout rate in Higher Education.
7. The report 'Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe' produced in 2013 by Professor Jocey Quinn from Plymouth University on

behalf of the Commission points out that far too many students still drop out from Higher Education in Europe, with the OECD reporting an average graduation rate of 70% i.e. an average dropout rate of 30%.

8. Dropout from HE is a sensitive political issue, it is therefore hardly surprising that conflicting points of view as to the reasons for dropout are also echoed in the media. The conservative 'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung' from Germany believes it is the price to be paid for mass university whereas the liberal 'Die Zeit', also from Germany, argues that dropout reflects the failure of both the "new" Bachelor programmes and the Bologna process as a whole.

9. "Academic success is a central indicator of the excellence of a university." These words by the Science Minister from North Rhine-Westphalia underline that improving completion rates is high on the political agenda and that universities are under serious pressure to reduce dropout.

10. The PrevDrop project has three objectives:

- to enable students to assess their own dropout risk as well as to enable academic counsellors at universities, educational counsellors in secondary schools and career counsellors in Public Employment Services to assess the dropout risk of students by means of a tool that is to be developed as part of the project;
- to prevent dropout from Higher Education through adequate counselling; and
- to facilitate the switch from Higher Education into Vocational Education and Training.

11. This 3rd aim may surprise some of you but we should not forget that dropping out of HE can also be a **positive** decision when a student realises that a certain course is not the "right" one or that the time is simply not "right". These students are on the whole quite well educated individuals whose potential to the employment market is neither fully appreciated nor adequately used.

12. PrevDrop is a work in progress and therefore we are currently in a position to present you with only a selection of descriptive results from the surveys we have done to determine the needs. We surveyed students in Higher Education as well as counsellors working in relevant settings (using both paper as well as online questionnaires on these occasions).

13. **298** students returned their questionnaires: **178** (58.4%) from **Germany**, **51** (17.2%) from **Luxembourg**, **50** (16.9%) from **Italy**, and **22** (7.4%) from the **UK**.

208 or 70.5% were **women**, **87** or 29.5% **men**. Their average **age** was **24.1** years.

14. Furthermore, **40** counsellors returned the questionnaires: **22** (55.0%) from Germany, **7** (17.5%) from **Luxembourg**, **6** (15.0%) from **Italy**, and **5** (12.5%) from the **UK**.

15. **4** counsellors (10.8%) worked in institutions where they saw students **before** they went into **HE**, **7** (18.9%) saw students **both before** they went to **university** and while **already at university**, **16** (43.2%) were **academic counsellors**, and **10** counsellors (27.0%) worked in **PES**.

16. Around **42.3%** (± 19.6) of students were seen by counsellors **before** the students went into **HE**, typically about **a year and a half before university**.

17. Counsellors estimated that around a third of students were likely to experience some difficulty in successfully completing their course.

18. As you can see on this graph, students considered 1. **structural aspects** (*e.g. unclear or inflexible curricula, too high a workload, poor teaching quality, lack of supervision, insufficient resources, etc.*), 2. **lack of information before HE**, and 3. **financial aspects** (*e.g. lack of funding, juggling part-time work with studies, etc.*) as the **most likely** factors to put their studies at risk with 1. **lack of educational/psychological/social support**, 2. **individual aspects** (*level of overall maturity, lack of social skills, communications skills,*

self-reflexion etc.) and above all 3. **cultural aspects** (*e.g. ethnic or religious issues, etc.*) judged to be the **least likely** factors.

19. Counsellors on the other hand viewed 1. **lack of autonomy** (*e.g. difficulties transiting from secondary school to Higher Education, inability to organise oneself, lack of self-efficacy, insufficient coping skills, etc.*), 2. **lack of counselling before Higher Education**, and 3. **lack of intrinsic motivation** (*e.g. entering Higher Education being more a question of ‘why not?’ rather than of ‘because...’, lack of interest in the field of study*) as **most likely** to put students’ success at risk with 1. **family aspects** (*e.g. childcare, family members with special needs, etc.*), 2. **lack of support before entering HE**, and, as did the students also 3. **cultural aspects** as the **least likely** factors to affect students’ progress.

20. On this graph you can see both the students’ and the counsellors’ perceptions: what is striking is that the **students** systematically see the risks as being **lower** than the counsellors do. Furthermore, the gap is impressive for a number of factors such as 1. **lack of autonomy** - (a difference of 55.4 percentage points), 2. **individual aspects** - (a 54.4 percentage point difference), 3. **lack of counselling before HE** - (a difference of 51.6 percentage points) as well as 4. **intrinsic motivation** - (a 49.8 percentage point difference).

21. This graph displays the risk perceptions of the **students as a whole** as well as the perceptions of the **students from** each of the different project **partner countries**. While the perceptions of the students from most individual countries do not deviate much from the average, the **students from the UK** - the **red** line - seem to view the likelihood that these factors might put their studies at risk **consistently higher** than the other students.

22. The students from the **UK** also see the risks posed by all the factors as being **higher** than the students as a whole. Furthermore, the gap is particularly striking for certain factors such as 1. **lack of**

educational/psychological/social support while in HE - (a difference of 42.1 percentage points), 2. **lack of counselling while in HE** - (a 37.6 percentage point difference), 3. **lack of educational/psychological/social support before entering HE** - (a difference of 33.6 percentage points), as well as 4. **lack of counselling also before entering HE** - (a 31.5 percentage point difference).

23. This graph showing the percentages for all the students together as well as from each of the different project partner countries and echoes the previous graph in as far as only **72.7% of UK students** indicated being either '*very satisfied*' or '*quite satisfied*' with their studies as compared to **88.4% of all the students**.

24. We find a similar situation once more, with a noticeably higher percentage of **UK students** thinking **every day** respectively **once a week** - **27.2%** - about leaving HE for good.

25. Finally, a few words on data regarding the 3rd aim of PrevDrop i.e. to facilitate the successful switch from HE to VET. This is a very complex issue in our project as you will see now.

26. The students from **Italy** are the **least knowledgable** about VET whereas those from **Germany** are the **most knowledgable**. This is most likely due to the fact that the so-called dual vocational training system is highly regarded in Germany with 62.1% of German students saying that they would consider or have already considered VET as an alternative to HE. 41.2% of students from Luxembourg indicate that they would consider or have already considered VET as an alternative to HE, in contrast to the UK and Italy where a mere 12 respectively 11.1 % of students would do so or have already done so.

27. The main reasons **students do not** envisage **VET** as an alternative are:

- they simply are not interested in VET,
- HE provides them with a unique experience,
- they love studying,

- there are more and better opportunities on the labour market for graduates than for non-graduates,
- HE leads to their 'dream job', and
- "real", useful information on VET is missing.

28. Those **students** who would consider or have already considered **VET** as an alternative to HE view the proximity of VET to the employment market as an advantage. They also think that the job prospects are more obvious, and that VET is more "practical".

29. As regards the **counsellors**, we again observe distinct differences, particularly concerning counsellors from Italy and the UK where a minority claims to be '*well informed*' or '*quite well informed*' about VET as an alternative to HE. And one cannot but wonder why - despite the admission of not being '*well informed*' about VET - counsellors from the UK would still suggest or have suggested VET.

30. That is all we have got time for. As I said at the beginning, PreVDrop is a work in progress and we are still some way off from realising our objectives. But we are confident that we will attain all of them and we are looking forward to giving you very much more detailed information on PreVDrop next time we meet.

Thank you very much for your attention.