

## School–job transition in Utrecht, Netherlands

### Situation in Utrecht

Dutch law requires all persons under 18 to attend some form of education. Officially, people are considered sufficiently qualified for the labour market if they have a degree at the highest levels of secondary education, or at any level of higher education. In Utrecht and the surrounding municipalities, about 2/3rd of the young (ages 16–27) and unemployed do not meet this standard: either they did not complete secondary education at all, or they only have a degree at the lowest level of secondary education. The majority of the rest are considered to meet the minimum level of qualification: they either only finished secondary education at the higher levels, or they hold a degree at the lowest levels of vocational training. Therefore, our main aim to aid the transition from school to job is to ensure that as many people as possible do not leave school before they have a degree at a level or in a field that gives them a good chance at employment.

### National law

On a national level, it is important to note the measure called *Wet Investeren in Jongeren* (Law concerning investing in youths). Under this law, municipalities are obliged to offer a job and/or education to any person under 28 years old who applies for welfare support – and that person is obliged to accept the offer. This law makes it impossible for young people to receive welfare support unless they are studying to improve their chances at the labour market and at the same time it makes the local authorities responsible for providing an effective infrastructure to match unemployed youths to the labour market. It is the Dutch experience that once people become dependent on welfare for more than a few months, it becomes more and more difficult for them to find employment. Furthermore, the success or failure of a person during the first few years at the labour market seem to have a long term influence on his/her career chances. This law is designed specifically to prevent young people from entering such a negative spiral from which it is hard to recover.

### Regional cooperation

Utrecht works together with neighbouring municipalities in an *RMC* (Regional centre for reporting and coordination) to prevent school drop outs. Truants and students who leave school without a degree are reported at this centre. In case of truancy, a consultant contacts the youth and their parent. Together with them he identifies what caused the truancy and makes plans to ensure that the truancy ends. When youths leave school without a degree, an RMC consultant helps them to find education and/or occupation.

### Youth counter

The *Jongerenloket* or youth counter is a helpdesk which youths can visit, call or email for advice on various subjects like education, employment and debts. Like the RMC they too help youths to continue their education or to find a job if they do have a degree. Youths can walk in without an appointment for a talk of about half an hour. If a follow-up is needed an appointment is made. Otherwise they are put in contact with a professional who can aid them further. The key is always to find a solution that best suits the person's individual needs and abilities.

### Cooperation with schools and colleges

Naturally schools and colleges are an important partner in this approach. They offer a range of trainings to their students to help them make educational choices (for example by providing information about chances of employment in specific sectors) or to train secondary skills that enhance their chances at the labour market (like social skills and job interviews). In many cases these trainings have become part of the curriculum one by one. As a result, they form a 'patchwork' of individual measures aimed to help students. In cooperation with Utrecht, a number of colleges that offer low level

vocational training are now working to create a more coherent approach, by mapping the pathway that students follow to finish their education and pinpointing the moments at which they most need additional guidance, training or advice.

## **Media Literacy**

### **Utrecht policy**

At this time, Utrecht does not have a formal policy on media literacy. Just recently, talks have started on this topic and a first official meeting is scheduled later this month. Thus, we are very curious to hear what other cities have to say on media literacy. To us, media literacy should be aimed at two things: 1) the knowledge and skills needed to handle modern media and 2) being able to critically evaluate information provided by various media.

### **Kids' Press Agencies**

*Kinderpersbureau's* (Kids' Press Agencies) are aimed at children in elementary schools. Through a democratic process a small group of children in each school is selected to take part in this project. Children receive training on how to make news reports using various media. This includes 'soft' skills on what a news item should look like or interviewing techniques, but also the technical skills required to make videos or photographs. Children choose their own topics and post their reports on a website. Funding for this project ends in December 2010, at this time it is uncertain if it can be continued after that.