



Module 4

Counselling networks for the support of dropout prevention

Birgit Rodler and Dr. Jürgen Zieher, University of Applied Labour Studies, Mannheim



Detecting and Preventing Drop out from Higher Education
or Supporting Students to Switch Successfully to VET



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Definition

- A network can be characterised as “complex relationships of persons and systems, in which exchange processes are carried out” (Miller 2005, S. 107-108).
- Networks consist of different levels (e.g. persons, organizations) which interact with each other and are interdependent.
- The persons involved in a network not only act as representatives of an institution, but also as a partner in the network (Bauer 2005, S. 38).

Networks in counselling of students with dropout risk and dropouts

- Networks for students with dropout risk and dropouts exist almost exclusively at a local level.
 - The networks usually include an employment agency, one or several universities and the chambers (sometimes also the student unions).
 - The formation and maintenance of networks require a great deal of effort; while building up a network, existing contacts and cooperation should be considered
- Clear agreements between network partners increase
 - the chance of win-win-situations for all parties involved
 - the benefit for the advice-seeker

Characteristics of networks

Generally speaking:

- A network of counselling institutions is always unique because the given framework conditions as well as the institutions and persons involved differ from place to place.
- Therefore, it is not possible to present an approach which can be completely transferred to every (intended) network in a university city.
- There are some relevant aspects that should be taken into consideration when it comes to network formation and maintenance by counsellors.

Characteristics of networks

- Common understanding of the counselling process (orientation of advice-seeking person)
- Reference structure between the network partners, depending on the needs of those seeking advice
- Common activities for advice-seekers, e.g. information sessions or workshops
- Pooling of competences
- Optimisation of resources
- Regular meetings of the network partners
- Centrality of trust

Exchanging experiences:

- Where does cooperation for networks for students with dropout risk and dropouts exist? To what extent are those cooperations already networks?
- How does cooperation or networking work?
- Which aspects promote successful networking?
- There is an inherent conflict between universities and chambers: prevention of dropouts versus transfer to vocational education.

Which solution approaches do you see for this conflict?

Please form small groups and discuss the issue. Record the key findings on cards or flip chart.



Best practice example

SWITCH, Aachen (existing since 2011, network of 18 regional partners, e.g. Aachen-Düren Agency of Employment, RWTH Aachen University, Aachen Chamber of Industry and Commerce)

Background

- More than 3500 dropouts every year in Aachen
- At the same time regional companies aren't able to fill apprentice positions with qualified applicants.
- SWITCH brings together companies and dropouts.
- Getting the possibility of a shortened vocational education, SWITCH is providing attractive as well as alternative training routes for dropouts.



Best practice example

SWITCH, Aachen

Aims

- Improving connection to additional training routes for dropouts
- Improving the switch from higher education into vocational training
- Credits should be recognised for vocational training with the option to shorten the training period



Best practice example

SWITCH, Aachen

Target groups

- Initially SWITCH focused on college dropouts from STEM fields- particularly on advanced students with prior knowledge
- In 2011 SWITCH started with a class of IT specialists for application development
- Since March 2015 SWITCH has offered its services for all dropouts regardless of discipline
- Since 2011 more than 170 apprenticeships have been initiated (mainly in STEM fields)

Best practice example

SWITCH, Aachen

How it works

- University dropouts send their application documents to the project office of SWITCH, located at the department of economic promotion of Aachen.
- Based on an aptitude test for the envisaged vocational training the possibility of a shortened training period is examined.
- SWITCH is sending the applicant profile to companies offering apprenticeship places for the target groups.
- Interested companies contact the applicant.
- Once both sides agree on an apprenticeship a training contract is concluded.
- Beginning of vocational training.



Best practice example

Centre for Educational Counselling Ulm (ZBB)

Background

- For years, close cooperation between consultants from the Ulm University of Applied Sciences, University of Ulm and Ulm Employment Agency
- 2012 successful application of Ulm University of Applied Sciences and University of Ulm for funding by Ministry of Science Baden-Württemberg
- In 2013 opening of a common city office in collaboration with the employment agency (Centre for Educational Counselling – ZBB)
- All parties are fully engaged in the counselling process

Best practice example

Centre for Educational Counselling Ulm (ZBB)

Aims

- Increasing transparency and sustainability
- Professionalisation of counselling services
- Bringing together regional skills
- Increasing orientation on needs and target group
- Increasing closeness to citizens

Best practice example

Centre for Educational Counselling Ulm (ZBB)

Target groups

- Interested parties in higher education and vocational training
- Students (including dropouts)
- Alumni
- Job returner/professionals interested in further education

Best practice example

Centre for Educational Counselling Ulm (ZBB)

Characteristics

- Common counselling concept, which includes focusing on the advice seeking person, a principle of neutral, open and unbiased counselling process, mutual counselling standards
- Individual counselling, open consultation, lectures and information evenings
- Counselling requests are not associated with an involved institution
- Extended range of counselling through regular exchanges between counsellors

Best practice example

Centre for Educational Counselling Ulm (ZBB)

Results

- Transparency and sustainability regarding the counselling service have been perceived by the target groups
- Improvement of counselling quality
- Dissolving of double structures and pooling of regional counselling capacities
- Enlargement of target group
- Target group can be better reached, especially professionals
- Positive evaluation of low-threshold accessibility and centrality by the target groups

Exercise

- What benefits do you see for counsellors when a counselling network for students with dropout risk and dropouts has been established?
- What impediments do you see for students with dropout risk and dropouts regarding counselling networks?

Please form small groups and discuss the issue. Record the key findings on cards or flip chart.

Recommendations for successful counselling networks

- To identify the concrete benefits of an envisaged network for the institution to which the counsellor belongs, for potential partners and for the intended target group
- To use existing cooperation and personal contacts when building a network
- To initiate long-term personal contacts on the basis of mutual trust.
- Common activities might reach more dropouts because more communication channels and marketing tools can be used.
- Common activities strengthen the cohesion of the network.
- Trust plays a key role in the set-up and maintenance of a network.

Recommendations for successful counselling networks

- To establish common goals and standards of interaction with advice-seekers.
- To build a network of equal partners. Otherwise a feeling of competition will persist and mutual trust can't emerge.
- To have regular mutual exchange and agreements on regular meetings as they are vital for the maintenance of the network.
- Each network partner should concentrate on his core competences.

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Thank you for your attention!

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