

Early School-leavers

Citation for published version (APA):

Meng, C. M., & Verhagen, A. M. C. (2013). *Early School-leavers*. ROA. ROA Fact Sheets No. 003E
<https://doi.org/10.26481/umarof.2013003E>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2013

DOI:

[10.26481/umarof.2013003E](https://doi.org/10.26481/umarof.2013003E)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
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Early School-leavers

ROA Fact Sheet

ROA-F-2013/3E

Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt | ROA
Research Centre For Education and the Labour Market | ROA

1. Introduction

The targetted number of new premature school-leavers (dropouts) should not exceed 25,000 by the 2014/2015 school year. It is therefore even more important than ever to gain insight into what characterizes this group of young people. Why do they break off their education prematurely? What were the early signals for their dropping out? What are they mainly doing eighteen months after dropping out? Do they intend to go back to school? And, looking back, do they regret their decision to leave education prematurely? This fact sheet gives answers to these questions.

The results presented here are based on questionnaires completed by 2,033 dropouts in the autumn of 2012. These were pupils who left secondary school (Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education (PSVE), Senior General Secondary Education (SGSE), Pre-University Education (PUE)) or Secondary Vocational Education (SVE) in the 2010/2011 school year without having obtained a basic qualification. The current survey among unqualified school-leavers forms part of the annual school-leaver surveys carried out by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA). ROA has carried out these school-leaver surveys since the early 90s. For a number of sections of the questionnaires, the items for unqualified and qualified respondents are the same, allowing a comparison between the two groups for a number of key indicators. "Qualified" in this case refers to school-leavers who left school with a diploma, regardless of whether this constituted a basic qualification or not.

In addition to the results for the total group of unqualified dropouts, this fact sheet focuses in particular on the group of "inactive dropouts". This is the group of unqualified dropouts who have not returned to an education programme or training course approximately eighteen months after dropping out, and who are neither working nor looking for a job. 27% of all respondents can be placed in this group, and are hence in a vulnerable position.

2. Respondents' background characteristics

We will first describe some background characteristics of the respondents. For a more detailed overview of the background characteristics by education level, refer to Table B1 in the annexes.

It is important to note that the group of unqualified dropouts described in this fact sheet does not correspond to the total group of dropouts as defined at the national level. As the focus in this survey is on the reasons for prematurely leaving school, those who obtained a diploma which does not constitute a basic qualification (i.e. a diploma at PSVE or SVE Level 1), have not been included in the sample. Since these individuals have not terminated their courses prematurely, they cannot be asked about their reasons for

having done so. For this reason, the background characteristics described here may differ from those described for the total population of dropouts in the Netherlands.

Education level

Three quarters of all respondents were taking a course at SVE level in the 2010/2011 school year (35% at SVE Levels 1/2, 40% at SVE Levels 3/4), approximately two out of ten were taking a course at PSVE level, while the rest was involved in a programme at SGSE or PUE level (GSE). Among the inactive respondents, three quarters were also doing a course at SVE level. The percentage of PSVE and GSE students among the inactive respondents is the same as among the total group of dropout respondents.

Age and gender

The average age of respondents is 19, and half of them are female. Among the GSE respondents, there are slightly more girls than boys, while among SVE Level 1/2 respondents, there are relatively more boys than girls. The average age of PSVE respondents is 17, which means that the average PSVE respondent dropped out at the age of 15-16, in spite of the fact that compulsory qualification requirements still applied to them at that age.

Compared to the group of dropouts as a whole, there are relatively more girls among the inactive respondents (54%), but the average age is the same.

Ethnicity

The majority of the respondents belongs to the Dutch native majority (75%), while among qualified school-leavers, this proportion is 84%. The percentage of Dutch native respondents is particularly high among GSE dropouts. Among the PSVE and SVE Level 1/2 respondents, there are relatively more non-Western immigrants.

The group of inactive respondents contains relatively more immigrants compared the group of dropouts as a whole.

Family situation and children

Just over half of the respondents (53%) come from two-parent families. This percentage is considerably lower than among qualified respondents (81%). Compared to the other respondents, unqualified dropouts from SVE relatively often live on their own. Those from GSE and PSVE relatively often live with their parents. Compared to the total group of dropouts, inactive respondents are much less likely to come from two-parent families (43%).

At all education levels, the vast majority of respondents indicate that they (nearly) always speak Dutch, or Dutch and another language, with their parents. Parents of GSE respondents relatively often have a higher education level (HVE/UE). Parents of SVE Level 1/2 respondents relatively often completed an education programme in lower vocational education. Although 95% of the respondents have no children, the percentage that do is relatively highest among

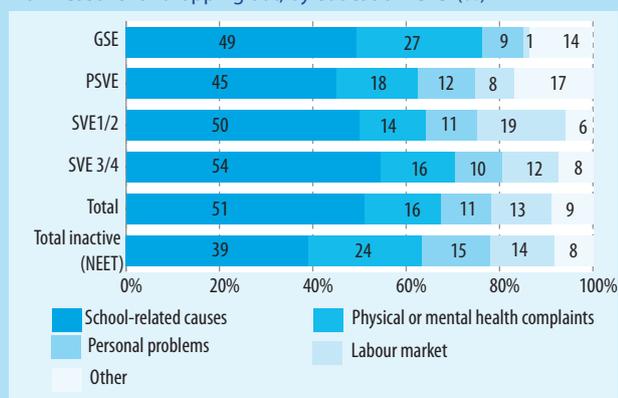
SVE Level 1/2 respondents (7%) and lowest among GSE respondents (1%).

The domestic situation of the inactive respondents is generally comparable to that of the total group of dropouts, except that inactive respondents indicate relatively slightly more often that they have children (9%).

3. Main reasons for dropping out

The dropouts were asked what was their *main* reason for dropping out. Figure 1 shows the main reasons by education level.

Figure 1
Main reasons for dropping out, by education level (%)



School-related causes

As in previous years, “school-related causes” is listed as the main reason for dropping out most often. But whereas in the 2010 survey, 41% of the respondents said that they had stopped because of school-related causes (45% in the 2011 survey), in the present survey this percentage has risen to 51%. This approximately 5 percentage point increase applies to all education levels.

Looking at the underlying school-related reasons (see Appendix Table B2), we can see that “the content of the course was not what I wanted (after all)”, “the course was too difficult and/or I failed the final examination”, and “the course was badly organised” are listed most as the main reason for dropping out. This is comparable to the 2011 survey.

The reason “the content of the course was not what I wanted (after all)” is often given in particular by SVE Level 3/4 respondents (16%). The percentage of PSVE respondents that gave this as their main reason, increased from 2% to 8% since the previous survey.

The reason “the course was too difficult and/or I failed the final examination” is particularly frequent among GSE respondents (27%) and SVE Level 1/2 respondents (10%). Last year, the percentage of GSE respondents who mentioned this as their main reason, was considerably lower (17%). In SVE too, this percentage increased slightly compared to the previous survey. Only among PSVE

respondents, the percentage of those who called this their main reason did not rise since last year.

Like last year, the reason “the course was badly organised” was given as the main reason in particular by SVE Level 3/4 respondents.

Physical or mental health complaints

Looking at the replies as a whole, we see that (mental) health complaints are in second place when it comes to the most frequently listed reasons for dropping out. In particular in GSE (27%) and among the inactive respondents (24%), the percentage of those who indicated that they stopped for this reason is relatively high.

Underlying reasons in this category include “physical health problems (illness/disability)”, “mental health problems” and “addiction problems”. These reasons are also mentioned relatively often by GSE and inactive respondents.

Compared to last year, we see that the percentage of PSVE respondents who indicate that mental or other health complaints were the main reason for dropping out has decreased considerably, from 27% to 18%. This is caused by a decrease of the percentage of PSVE respondents who indicated that they stopped because of mental problems.

Personal problems

At all education levels, personal problems are mentioned as the main reason by approximately one in ten respondents. The percentage is slightly higher in the group of inactive respondents (15%).

The most frequently mentioned underlying reason in this category is “relational problems/family problems (e.g. parents’ divorce)”. At all education levels, approximately 5% of the respondents indicate that this is the main reason for their dropping out. The same applies to the group of inactive respondents.

Labour market

Just over one in every ten respondents indicates that a labour market-related reason was the main reason for their dropping out. As in previous years, this reason is mentioned particularly often by SVE respondents. This is not surprising, considering the fact that these young people come into contact with the labour market through their apprenticeship or traineeship.

Looking at the underlying labour market-related reasons, we see that “I preferred to work” is most often mentioned as the main reason (8%). The percentage that mentions this as the main reason for dropping out is relatively slightly higher among SVE Level 1/2 respondents than among SVE Level 3/4 respondents.

4. Early dropout signals

The dropouts were asked a number of questions in order to find out whether, looking back, there were any early signals for their dropping out.

Talking about the decision

The most clearly recognisable early dropout signal is probably the moment when the young person concerned talks with someone about the decision to terminate the course prematurely. That is why dropouts were asked whether they discussed their decision to drop out with anyone, and if so, with whom. Table 1 shows that, looking back, this early signal was present for a large majority of respondents (80%). Among GSE respondents, the percentage that indicated that they had discussed the decision with one or more people is even higher (89%). Please note that respondents could indicate multiple parties with whom they spoke, so that the percentages reported for specific parties are not mutually exclusive.

Most respondents who discussed their decision to terminate the course prematurely with one or more people, indicate that they had talked about the decision with their parents (68%). This percentage is relatively high among GSE respondents (87%), and considerably lower among SVE Level 1/2 (61%) and inactive respondents (60%).

In addition, there is a relatively large group of respondents (48%) who indicate that they discussed their decision to terminate the course with someone at school. Again, the percentage is relatively high among GSE respondents (56%), but here - in addition to inactive respondents (38%) - it is the PSVE respondents who show a relatively low percentage (38%). This is mainly because PSVE respondents were relatively unlikely to have discussed their decision to drop out with their teachers and/or mentor. Table B1 in the Appendix shows that the average age of the PSVE respondents is 17 years, which means that for the average dropout at this level compulsory qualification requirements still applied. This makes it even more worrying that only 38% of the PSVE respondents indicated that they discussed their decision to stop with someone at school.

Most respondents who say that they talked with someone at school say that they spoke with their mentor. It is not surprising that relatively few respondents indicate that they had spoken with the care advisory team, because contact with the care advisory team is usually via the mentor.

Help offered

The fact that there was an early dropout signal need not mean that there was also an attempt to prevent the student dropping out, or that the help offered was recognised as such by the young person. For this reason, dropouts were asked whether the school (teacher, mentor, school management, care advisory team) or other institutions (e.g. school attendance officer) had tried to help them to obtain their diploma or change courses in spite of their situation.

Almost half of all respondents (47%) indicated that they thought no one (neither the school, nor any other institution) had tried to prevent their dropping out (see Table 2). This percentage is comparable to that seen last year (45%). Among the group of inactive respondents, there are even a majority of dropouts (56%) who report that no one tried to help prevent their dropping out. At all education levels, approximately 45 to 50% report that no one had tried to prevent their dropping out.

The respondents who indicate that mental or other health complaints or personal problems were the main reason for their dropping out, are the ones who are most likely to report that someone had tried to prevent their dropping out (64% and 60%, respectively). Among those reporting other aspects as the main reason for dropping out, the percentage who indicated that someone tried to help them is around 50%.

Approximately two thirds of all respondents who said that they had not spoken with anyone about their decision to terminate the course also report that no one tried to help them. This suggests that talking about the decision may be an important first step towards obtaining help. At the same time, no less than 42% of the respondents who said that they had discussed the decision with someone said that they nevertheless felt that no one had tried to help them. If we look at the people with whom these respondents discussed the matter, we see that especially dropouts who talked with family and/or friends think that neither the school nor any other institutions tried to help them. This may suggest that the “social network” around the young people who risk dropping out is not always effective in involving the school or other institutions in order to prevent their dropping out.

At the same time, the school itself also does not always appear to be effective in their attempts to help. Of all respondents who said that they had spoken with someone at school, 35% indicated that they did not think that the school or other institutions had tried to prevent their dropping out.

Truancy

Another potential early dropout signal is truancy. After all, dropping out is often preceded by a lengthy period of truancy (or “staying at home”). Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents said that they had at one time or another skipped school (55%). This is a slight decrease compared to last year (60%). Especially in PSVE and SVE Level 1/2 there are fewer self-reported truants than last year; in both groups, the decrease is approximately 10 percentage points. On the other hand, the number of truants in GSE increased slightly compared to last year, from 48% to 53%. The respondents at SVE Levels 3/4 are still the most likely to be self-reported truants.

5. Current occupation

Main occupation

To get an idea of what respondents considered their main activity at the moment of the survey (approximately eighteen months after dropping out), they were asked what they were doing at that time (see Table 4). Most of the respondents approximately eighteen months after their dropping out, indicated that they were studying (39%) or working (37%). This does not necessarily mean that 37% of the respondents are part of the official labour force. It is possible that some of these respondents work less than 12 hours a week, do voluntary work or are do casual cash-in-hand work.

Although the majority of the GSE and PSVE respondents indicated that they had returned to the education system eighteen months after dropping out, this was not the case among SVE respondents. Of the SVE Level 1/2 respondents, the majority (54%) reported work as their main activity. At SVE Levels 3/4 the number of respondents indicating that work is their main activity is about the same as that of respondents stating that they mainly study.

Compared to the previous survey, the main occupation for PSVE respondents has remained about the same. GSE and SVE Level 3/4 respondents were relatively more likely to have returned to school, and relatively less likely to have found a job than was the case a year ago. A higher proportion of SVE Level 1/2 respondents indicated that they had found a job than was the case last year.

Especially respondents who dropped out for labour market-related reasons said that their main occupation was “work” (66%) approximately eighteen months after dropping out. Respondents who had stopped because of “other reasons”, school-related reasons or mental health complaints were most likely to have returned to school.

Labour market indicators

Table 5 gives an overview of some of the main labour market indicators for dropouts, with a comparison to respondents who did obtain a basic qualification (SGSE, PUE or SVE Level 2). For most indicators, obtaining a basic qualification appears to be positively related to labour market success. On average, dropouts are relatively more often unemployed, and if they did find a job, they more often have a temporary appointment, and on average have lower gross hourly wages and monthly wages than respondents with a basic qualification. This suggests that dropouts are a vulnerable group in the labour market.

Compared to the previous annual survey, unemployment among dropouts has increased slightly (from 20% to 23%). Of the respondents who did find a job, the average gross hourly wage dropped from €7.26 to €7.05, and the average gross monthly wage from €991 to €951. The other labour market indicators for the group of dropouts as a whole are comparable to those of the previous survey.

Of all dropouts, those from PSVE are the most vulnerable in the labour market. These respondents have the worst scores for all the labour market indicators that are

presented. No less than 40% of them are unemployed, and of those who did find a job, two thirds have a temporary appointment. In addition, they have relatively low wages (€5.75/hour, €603/month). The average gross monthly wage of dropouts from PSVE has also decreased compared to last year (€657).

At 28%, unemployment among SVE Level 1/2 respondents is relatively high, but those who did find a job have relatively better scores for the other labour market indicators compared to respondents at most other education levels. Compared to the previous survey, the percentage of working SVE Level 1/2 dropouts with a permanent contract has even increased, from 40% to 47%. Average gross hourly and monthly wages on the other hand dropped from €7.41 to €6.87 and from €1.072 to €931 respectively.

Unemployment among GSE respondents is fairly low (9%). It is even a little lower than among respondents with a basic qualification (11%). This is a major difference compared to the previous year, when the unemployment rate among GSE respondents was three times higher (25%). The decrease in unemployment within this group seems to be related to the fact that they more often found/accepted jobs with relatively unfavourable job characteristics. For example, compared to last year the percentage of temporary appointments among working GSE respondents has risen from 41% to 50%, and average gross hourly and monthly wages dropped from €7.48 to €6.08 and from €872 to €631 respectively.

Other important labour market indicators are the level of satisfaction in the current job (Figure 2), career opportunities in the present job (Figure 3), and the education level required by the employer for the present job (Figure 4).

Of the respondents who have a job eighteen months after dropping out, the majority (58%) are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. However, this percentage is a little lower than that for respondents with a basic qualification (67%). Compared to the latter group, dropouts are also relatively more often dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their current jobs.

Again, we have an indication that GSE respondents – were more likely to accept jobs with relatively less favourable characteristics than was the case last year: although many of them found jobs, they are relatively often dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with those jobs. Moreover, the percentage of GSE respondents who are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs dropped compared to last year, from 63% to 39%. However, among SVE Level 3/4 respondents, the percentage who are satisfied or very satisfied with their current jobs rose against last year, from 54% to 60%.

Table 4
Main occupation at the time of the survey (%)

	Work	Study	Combination of working & learning	Other	Total
Total	37	39	6	18	100
Education level					
GSE	8	77	2	13	100
PSVE	13	73	4	11	100
SVE Levels 1/2	54	19	4	24	100
SVE Levels 3/4	38	36	9	17	100
Main reason for dropping out					
School-related causes	37	43	8	13	100
Physical or mental health complaints	20	42	2	35	100
Personal problems	35	31	7	27	100
Labour market	66	15	4	15	100
Other	31	51	3	16	100

Table 5
Unemployment and characteristics of current job (eighteen months after dropping out)*

	GSE	PSVE	SVE Levels 1/2	SVE Levels 3/4	Total	GSE/SVE 2 graduates
Unemployed (%)	9%	40%	28%	17%	23%	11%
Paid job (%)*	78%	54%	74%	70%	71%	67%
Temporary appointment (%)*	50%	66%	53%	56%	55%	43%
Number of contract hours (hours)*	27	27	32	32	31	32
Gross hourly wages (€)*	6,01	5,75	6,85	7,38	7,05	9,15
Gross monthly wages (€)*	631	603	931	1011	951	1283

*Selection: working population (excl. students)

Table 6
Intends to do a(nother) course at a later stage? (%)*

	GSE	PSVE	SVE Levels 1/2	SVE Levels 3/4	Total	Total inactive respondents
Yes, I have already registered for a course	24	23	8	11	11	14
Yes, but I do not know what course or when	71	57	58	68	63	64
No	5	20	33	21	27	22
	100	100	100	100	100	100

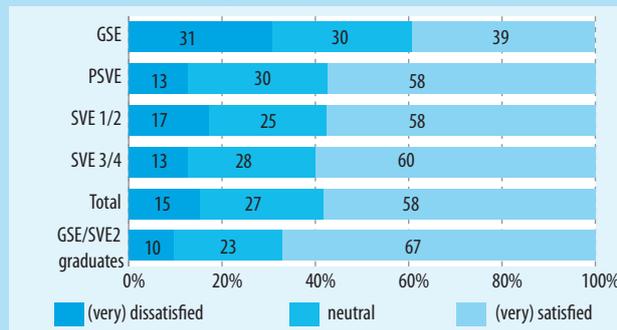
*selection: not studying at the moment

Table 7
Intends to do a(nother) course at a later stage, by occupation (%)*

	Working	Looking for work	Inactive	Total
Yes, I have already registered for a course	8	12	14	11
Yes, but I do not know what course or when	59	71	64	63
No	33	18	22	27
	100	100	100	100

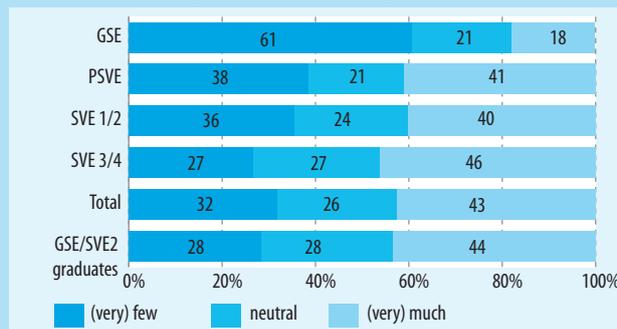
*selection: not studying at the moment

Figure 2
Satisfaction with current job (%)



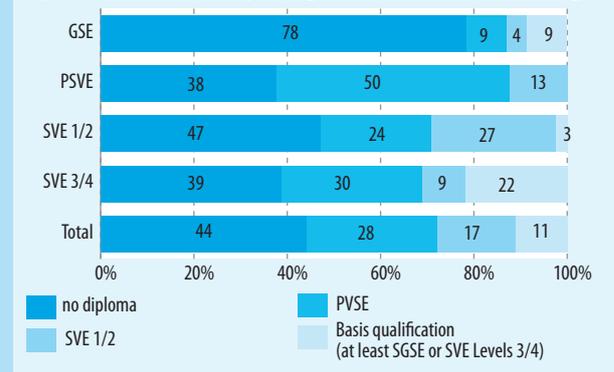
There is little or no difference between dropouts and respondents with a basic qualification in terms of how they view their career opportunities in their present jobs. This applies to dropouts from all education levels, except GSE. Of the latter group of respondents, the majority (61%) have the idea that there are few or very few career opportunities in their current jobs.

Figure 3
Number of career opportunities in current job (%)



It is not surprising that a large majority of working dropouts (89%) have a job for which no basic qualification is required. Nevertheless, the percentage of working dropouts at SVE Levels 3/4 who have jobs for which the SVE Level 3/4 qualification (that they did not achieve) is required, is relatively high (22%). Half of the working dropouts at PSVE level have jobs for which the PSVE qualification (that they did not obtain) is required. Of the working GSE respondents, a large majority (78%) have unskilled jobs.

Figure 4
Required level for current job (eighteen months after dropping out)



6. Plans for the future and regrets

Plans for the future

Table 6 shows the future educational career plans of respondents who indicated that they were not studying at the time of the survey. This gives an indication of how likely it is that these respondents will return to school at some time in the future.

Approximately one in every ten respondents who were not studying at the time of the survey were registered for a course. These are presumably young people who have already registered for courses that have not started yet.

Most (63%) of the respondents who said that they were not studying at that time, indicated that they did intend to return to school, but that they did not know what course they wanted to do, or when they would do that course. This percentage is also very high when we look only at inactive respondents. Especially GSE and SVE Level 3/4 respondents who are not currently studying appear to need help finding the right course.

More than a quarter of respondents who are not currently studying have no plans to do a course at any time in the future. Especially SVE Level 1/2 respondents appear to be reluctant to enroll in a(n)other course. It is alarming that 22% of the inactive respondents do not intend to take a(n)other course at any time in the future.

Broken down by the respondents' main activity (Table 7), we can see that working respondents relatively often indicate that they have no intention of doing a(n)other course at any time in the future. Nevertheless, the majority of them (59%) do think they will do a(n)other course in the future, although they do not know what course or when.

Almost three quarters of the respondents who were actively looking for a job at the time of the survey intend to do a(n)other course in the future.

Regrets

Dropouts were asked - looking at their current situation - whether they regretted having prematurely left school in the 2010/2011 school year (Table 8). Most of them (57%) said that they did not regret their decision. GSE respon-

dents were relatively least likely to regret their decision. SVE Level 1/2 and inactive respondents are relatively most likely to regret their decision. Compared to SVE Level 1/2 respondents, however, inactive dropouts are relatively more likely to indicate that they had no choice at the time.

Broken down by main reason for dropping out, we see that respondents who stopped because of “school-related” or “other” reasons were relatively least likely to regret their decision to drop out.

Respondents who stopped because of mental or other health complaints or personal problems are relatively more likely to regret their decision. Nevertheless, approximately half of them said that had no alternative at the time. This is particularly striking because there are now many alternatives available.

Respondents who had stopped because of personal problems or labour market-related reasons are relatively most likely to indicate that they regret their decision and would not take the same decision today. This suggests that, looking back, dropouts who were in danger of dropping out because of personal problems or labour market-related reasons might have had the best prospects for being convinced to obtain a basic qualification after all.

7. Conclusions

This fact sheet gives answers to five questions. The main findings include:

- “School-related reasons” is still the most prevalent reason for dropping out. The percentage of dropouts

who report this as their main reason has increased from 41% to 51% in three years’ time.

- Although most respondents had discussed their decision to terminate their course prematurely with someone at the time, those with whom they did so were not always effective in organising help to prevent their dropping out. 42% of all respondents who had discussed their decision to drop out with someone did not have the idea that the school or other institutions had tried to prevent them from doing so.
- 76% of the respondents indicated that they were studying or working eighteen months after dropping out. PSVE respondents are the most vulnerable group in the labour market; 40% of them are unemployed, and the job characteristics of those who did find a job are relatively unfavourable.
- 63% of the respondents who said that they were not studying at the time of the survey (eighteen months after their dropping out) indicated that they did intend to return to the education system, but did not know what course they wanted to do, or when they would do that course.
- 22% of the inactive respondents had no intention of doing a(nother) course in the future.
- A small majority (57%) said that, looking back, they did not regret their decision to terminate their course prematurely.

Tabel 8
Regrets (%)

	GSE	PSVE	SVE Levels 1/2	SVE Levels 3/4	Total	Total inactive respondents
No	69	62	50	59	57	49
Yes, but I had no choice at the time	28	30	34	30	31	38
Yes, I would not do that again today	3	9	16	12	12	13
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tabel 9
Regrets, by main reason for dropping out (%)

	School-related causes	Physical or mental health complaints	Personal problems	Labour market	Other	Total
No	62	42	35	54	77	57
Yes, but I had no choice at the time	26	50	47	29	19	31
Yes, I would not do that again today	12	8	18	17	4	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Annexes

Table B1
Respondents' background characteristics (%)

	GSE	PSVE	SVE Levels 1/2	SVE Levels 3/4	Total	Total inactive respondents
Total	7	19	35	40	100	27
Average age (years)	18	17	20	20	19	19
Gender						
male	44	49	57	46	50	46
female	57	51	43	54	50	54
Ethnicity						
Western immigrant	8	8	7	7	7	9
Non-Western immigrant	7	21	22	16	18	21
Dutch native	85	71	71	78	75	71
Family situation						
Two-parent family	69	54	54	50	53	43
Single-parent family	18	29	21	25	24	26
I live on my own	8	4	11	14	11	13
Other, namely	6	14	15	11	12	18
Language spoken by parents						
(almost) always Dutch	87	69	64	74	70	68
Dutch and another language	6	15	14	10	12	12
(almost) always another language	3	5	5	2	4	3
Not applicable	4	11	18	15	14	17
Parents' education level						
<i>Father</i>						
Primary education	2	11	12	6	8	8
Lower professional education	15	29	37	28	30	30
Secondary education	6	7	5	9	7	8
Secondary vocational education	15	24	28	29	27	27
Higher education	62	29	18	28	27	26
<i>Mother</i>						
Primary education	2	10	13	5	8	9
Lower professional education	10	31	38	32	32	34
Secondary education	13	9	9	7	8	10
Secondary vocational education	19	27	29	34	30	28
Higher education	55	24	12	22	21	20
Children						
Yes	1	3	7	4	5	9
No	99	97	93	96	95	91



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ROA Secretariat, Maastricht

September 2013



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