

# 20 KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## PURPOSE

This document provides concrete guidance for policy makers and practitioners for using the main findings of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) project, carried out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency).

Between 2010 and 2012, the Agency analysed VET policies and practices in 26 countries from the perspective of learners with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The analysis focused on ‘what works’ in VET for learners with SEN and/or disabilities, ‘why it works’ and ‘how it works’.

## MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the Agency analysis are as follows:

- The project identified numerous success factors – ‘what works’ – in VET for learners with SEN and/or disabilities.
- The analysis revealed a large degree of coherence across countries, with the same success factors often appearing together in successful examples of practice. The identified combinations explain ‘why it works’, while analysis of the mutual impact of success factors helps to explain ‘how it works’.
- Improvements in VET are possible and do occur in practice. This is evident in the project analysis, which was based on 28 examples in 26 countries, representing the full spectrum of VET approaches in Europe.
- Successful practice demands the involvement of all stakeholders from the VET field.
- What is good and efficient practice for learners with SEN and/or disabilities in VET and in the transition to employment is good practice for ALL learners.

## PATTERNS OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

Four ‘patterns of successful practice’ were identified among these combinations of success factors. These patterns are inter-linked and mutually supportive. Therefore, any attempt to improve a VET system’s performance must place equal emphasis on all four patterns at the same time. They are likely to improve VET system effectiveness and the transition to employment of learners with SEN and/or disabilities.

These patterns focus on the perspectives and roles of key stakeholders within VET:

- Management pattern: this includes relevant factors related to head teachers and/or managers of VET organisations.
- Vocational education and training pattern: this includes relevant factors related to teachers, trainers and support staff.
- Learners' pattern: this includes relevant factors related to learners.
- Labour market pattern: this includes relevant factors related to current and future employers/labour market representatives.

## KEY FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE PATTERNS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICES

The 20 relevant key factors listed here have been clearly identified in the majority of the practices analysed. They lead to successful VET results with a clear link to employment opportunities.

### **1. Legal framework**

A national/federal legal framework on inclusive education in secondary/upper-secondary education is in place, and schools receive the required support (e.g. additional funding, higher staff–learner ratios, support staff, multi-disciplinary teams, adapted educational materials, resources to implement more learner-centred approaches, resources to increase organisational flexibility to deal with diversity, etc.).

A legal framework exists that allows VET institutions to offer different levels of apprenticeship with different curricula leading to different qualification levels. Flexibility in policy allows the VET institutions to offer different levels of VET programmes, different curricula and different qualifications according to individual learners' needs.

### **2. Motivation and commitment**

Head teachers/directors and staff are highly motivated, committed, dedicated and open in expressing their enthusiasm. An authentic

atmosphere of commitment, caring and belonging, together with positive attitudes, contributes to creating equal opportunities. Staff believe in learners' abilities and see opportunities rather than challenges.

### **3. Leadership**

The school director's leadership is effective, distributive, appreciated and respected.

### **4. High qualifications**

Teachers, staff and support personnel are highly qualified, through formal university-level qualifications, a vocational qualification and/or industry-based experience.

### **5. Further training and educational opportunities**

In-service or further training opportunities are offered to all educational and support staff to ensure quality in education. Educational staff receive sufficient support in order to ensure and safeguard a learner-centred approach.

## **6. Multi-disciplinarity**

Multi-disciplinary teams are established that include all professionals involved in VET, have clear roles, adopt a teamwork approach and co-operate well with other services.

## **7. Partnership, co-operation and networking structures**

Partnerships involving all stakeholders and services are established, formalised and co-ordinated. This includes establishing co-operation structures with local companies for practical training and/or jobs after graduation. There is partnership between VET institutions and parents, based on strong, formal co-operation and dialogue with parents as equal partners.

## **8. Suitable ratios/small classes**

There is a suitable teacher–learner ratio thanks to small class sizes. Suitable support staff–learner ratios, co-ordinated at school level, provide the required broad range of support.

## **9. Assessment**

Learners take part in assessment schemes prior to starting the VET programme. This means that the most appropriate VET programmes are selected, matching learners' abilities and wishes.

## **10. Learner-centred approaches**

A learner-centred approach tailors pedagogical methods and materials, the curriculum, assessment methods and goals, etc., to individual needs. The focus is on the learners' capabilities.

## **11. Individual plans**

Individual education/learning/training/transition plans are developed and implemented, and lead to individual curricula.

## **12. Flexibility**

The VET settings are flexible, ensuring that the structure and duration of the VET programmes respond to learners' needs (e.g. by extending the course duration, offering longer internships in preparatory classes, etc.). Furthermore, VET courses are flexible so that learners can start in a lower level programme and move to a higher level programme either before or after graduation.

## **13. Pathways**

There are options to improve a qualification or grade, to switch to a different programme, to choose between different professions and to have an academic and/or professional certificate.

## **14. Certificates**

Documents/portfolios are kept on the learners' skills and achievements and on the support they require in the workplace.

## **15. Quality assurance**

Stakeholders are committed to quality assurance and improvement strategies. Programmes are implemented and certified to enhance VET quality and continuously improve learners' preparation for the labour market.

## **16. Dropout reduction strategy**

The school develops and implements efficient educational measures that prevent or reduce dropouts and finds new educational alternatives for disengaged learners.

## **17. Matching**

The educational institution is capable of matching labour market skills requirements and the learners' skills. Teachers/trainers are able to adapt their pedagogical methods to match the employers' needs. VET programmes are reviewed periodically, both internally and externally, in order to adapt to current and future skills requirements.

## **18. Support in transition**

Career counsellors/officers inform and guide learners regarding employment possibilities. They facilitate and support contact with employers, provide support with job

applications, offer information and assistance to employers and provide additional support to young people, etc.

## **19. Availability of staff and resources**

Staff, such as job coaches, career counsellors and mentors, as well as resources are permanently available throughout the transition to work and during employment. Formal job coaching programmes, career guidance and support services, including after-care and preparation of employers, are permanently available.

## **20. Follow-up**

Competent staff provide follow-up support activities, for as long as required, addressing the needs of employers and young graduates in order to maintain learners' employment in companies.

All of these success factors are inter-related and mutually supportive. Therefore, emphasis must be placed on all of them in order to achieve improvements within any VET system. With regard to monitoring the VET system, suitable indicators must be established throughout the system and continuously assessed against the desired state of progress.

More information, including a VET policy brief, is available from:

<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training>