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## VET STUDY VISIT IN RACIBORZ, POLAND

28 - 30 May 2012

### Visit details

#### **Study visit participants:**

Serge Ebersold (expert from France)

Regina Labiniene (Project Advisory Group from Lithuania)

Witold Cyron (expert from Poland and host)

Victoria Soriano (European Agency staff member)

Katja Reuter (European Agency staff member)

#### **Other participants:**

Representatives from local authorities at both regional and city level, a representative from the National Parliament, headmasters and staff from the visited schools, a representative from the Ministry of Education, Ms. Elżbieta Neroj and employers.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> day**

#### Visit to the Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Racibórz

Presentation of the school ([see PL-1.pdf](#))

The Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Racibórz welcomes students from an early age (as soon as a hearing impairment is noticed) until the age of 25. There are currently 230 pupils, 27 of whom participate in early childhood intervention (age 0-6). Other stages of education are primary school (age 7-12), middle school, (age 13-15) vocational school (age 16-18/19, for students who cannot go to technical college), technical college (4 years, age 16-19) and post secondary school (20-21, for students who do not go to university). In the Polish education system, there is also a complementary technical college (age 19-20).

The school's target group is people with hearing impairments, some of whom may also have slight mental disabilities, autism or other disabilities. The school has a significant number of workshops, including a training café, workshops for ceramics, technical work, printing, carpentry, cooking and sewing, as well as an art studio, garden, music classroom, computer room and a multimedia room. The school benefited from a number of EU funded initiatives for students with special needs. Vocational training is held in accordance with the established Polish educational system for students with SEN in special education. In addition, the transition to employment is supported by aid programmes such as PFRON (budget in 2009: 4.5 billion Euro). This programme promotes equal opportunities for disabled persons. The primary task of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons is to promote the professional and social rehabilitation and activation of the disabled person. The PFRON programme complements the activities carried out within the framework of the Fund.

The school employs a full-time counsellor who is responsible for Vocational guidance, orientation and professional counselling. The curriculum is the same as the one for non-disabled students, but the manner and duration of its execution is



adjusted, taking into account the student's psychological and physical capabilities. The school doesn't have any data about the number of students who found a job afterwards, only on the success or failure rates for final VET exams.

In general in Poland there are 1,016,213 young people, 29,710 of whom have special needs. 25,956 go to special schools while 3,754 go to public schools.

The Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Racibórz has links with several factories, particularly with the Rameta factory.

### Visit to the Rameta Factory

This factory produces furniture. 60% of its employees have a disability, corresponding to 269 of 515 employees. 163 belong to group 1 (high level of personal autonomy). 74 of the 163 have a hearing impairment and an additional impairment. 86 employees belong to group 2 (middle level of autonomy). 26 of them have a hearing impairment and an additional impairment. Employees are paid a salary of 400 Euros per month, 300 being the minimum salary in Poland.


There are three categories of employees with disabilities; they are categorised by a medical team that evaluates their working capacity as high, middle or very low. The state can provide some technical facilities and support some costs for these categories according to the level of disability through, for example, the PFRON programme. Support can be provided to employers, employees and vocational centres.

Pupils from the special school in Raciborz have the opportunity to carry out practical training at Rameta. This cooperation between the factory and school has existed since the 1950s. The factory is a kind of co-operative run by employees. The State provides some subsidies to companies employing a certain number (20%) of employees with disabilities. The level of subsidies depends on the degree of disability mentioned above. This can usually be considered a measure for providing supported employment but this does not appear to be the case for Rameta; it is an open company with a social commitment, combined with good skills and results.

### Visit to the Centre of Continuous Education, Racibórz

(see presentation PL-2.pdf )

This is a mainstream vocational centre with special units for pupils with learning difficulties. A number of mainstream and special schools cooperate with this centre (mechanical schools, building schools, special and vocational schools). The centre organises theoretical and practical vocational classes. Practical training is mainly carried out at the school through workshops. There are several departments in the centre, for example mechanics, gardening, tailoring, landscape design, health workshops etc. The aim is to pass the regular examination prepared by the National Centre for examinations. Last year only 2 students with special needs passed it, as did only 40% of the students without special needs. They all failed the theoretical exam, but passed the practical examination. However, both exams need to be passed in order to receive the official diploma. SEN students have more time to



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complete the theoretical exam, but they have to do the same exam as students without SEN. This exam is already quite difficult, so almost all SEN students fail. The idea has been put forward to keep SEN students in school an additional year for the same programme (4 years instead of 3) but legislation would need to be changed in order to implement this. Another idea to prevent the students from failing would be to let SEN students pass the theoretical exam with 50% instead of 75%. Legislative changes would also be required for this. The centre also organises several activities regarding professional orientation in order to integrate special school students with students from other schools.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> day**

### Presentation “The Polish vocational education system from 2012”

(see presentation PL-3.pdf)

The presentation covers the legislative changes that have recently been adopted in respect of the Polish VET system and that will come into force in September 2012. The intention was to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the vocational training system and to harmonise it with the labour market. The first of the measures is the introduction of a uniform 3 year system for VET. It will also now be easier for students to obtain professional training, supplement their skills and enter a new profession. Examinations will not be conducted at the end of schooling, but instead at various stages throughout education. A new classification of vocational education has also been proposed, including a number of different professions and the equivalent qualifications to be obtained for persons with disabilities. Finally, the new core curriculum in vocational education will be in force from September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012. It sets out the knowledge, vocational, personal and social skills that the student must obtain, in short: the core curriculum describes the expected education outcomes.

Legislative changes were also made in respect of the area of vocational lifelong learning outside school. Professional courses can be provided by centres of lifelong learning, practical training centres and centres of lifelong education and professional development. Adults will be able to study for any of 251 different qualifications. The examinations are conducted by regional examination commissions and will be available online from this year onwards. Legislation concerning vocational examinations has also changed: after passing the exam the candidate will receive a new certificate stating the concrete qualifications acquired for the profession in question. A person who can prove their capabilities across all the qualifications will receive a diploma certifying their competence in a particular profession.

Generally speaking there are three learning options in Poland for students with special needs:

- 1) Inclusive Education: this term is slightly misleading. It means that SEN students go to mainstream schools, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the school is equipped to deal with their special needs
- 2) Integrated Education: Students go to mainstream schools, but attend courses in special classes
- 3) Special Education: Students go to special schools



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(see presentation PL-4.pdf)

### Visit to an Educational Centre for students with learning difficulties in Wodzisław Śląski

This is a special school for pupils with learning difficulties, which offers many facilities: early intervention classes, special primary school, special middle school, special VET, special job-oriented school and classes for autistic pupils. There are 313 pupils who attend the school from birth up until the age of 25. 69 pupils participate in early childhood intervention, 72 are in primary education (of those, 39 presenting mild learning difficulties), 71 attend lower secondary education (of those, 34 presenting mild learning difficulties), 26 pupils with mild learning difficulties attend vocational training and 52 pupils with severe learning difficulties attend job-oriented programmes. 102 teachers work at the school, together with 54 other staff members. The school runs a 'training flat' for daily activities.

Classes are organised according to the Polish system of classification of mental disabilities: (mild (IQ 69-55), moderate, severe (IQ 54-25) and profound mental disabilities (IQ 0-25). The class sizes and duration, as well as the curricula and the number of teachers present in the classroom vary according to this classification. Students with mild mental disabilities have the possibility to take the VET exam, but very few actually pass it because of the difficulty level of the theoretical exam (in 2011 only 30% passed the theoretical exam while 100% passed the practical one).

Parents are involved in the individual education planning for their child, but the child is not. The school chooses an individualised approach but doesn't offer an Individual Education plan as defined by the Agency.

Concerning VET examinations, there are 3 different options in Poland: firstly, the student can take practical and theoretical classes in school, where examinations in both are also taken. If the student succeeds, he receives the general VET diploma indicating the level of education (X has the qualification of a baker). If he doesn't he only receives a certificate confirming that he has followed the class. This certificate has no value on the labour market. Secondly, the student can take practical and theoretical classes in a company. The theoretical classes here are less complicated than those in school and it is easier for students to succeed, as the focus is on the praxis. Students don't receive the official diploma, but instead a certificate issued by the company. This certificate is recognised by the employers on the open labour market, but this possibility only exists in traditional professions. Finally, students with moderate or severe disabilities can do job-oriented classes in their school; they receive a certificate from the school confirming that they have followed the classes, but their education is mostly based on knowing how to function in society.

### Presentation: Upper Middle School Education

(see presentation PL-5.pdf)



In Poland there are three approaches to upper middle school education: a student can either do general secondary education (3 years), VET school (3 years) or technical college (4 years). Following this period, students can go to post-secondary school or follow tertiary education. Education at both general secondary school and technical college allow the student to take the Matura exam. Post-secondary school lasts a maximum of 2.5 years and qualifications can be obtained for different types of professions.

Practical classes take place at the school's laboratories and workshops, in practical education institutions (such as the Centre of Continuous Education in Raciborz visited on Monday) or in a company. There is no official cooperation between schools and employers and between a school and chamber of commerce; normally parents find companies for their children, but often the school and the vocational counsellor use their contacts to find an employer for the students. Two types of training contracts can be negotiated, either an employment contract or a school contract. The employment contract is concluded between a company owner and a student or a company owner, a student and a guild of craftsmen. In this case, the student is treated as a worker - he receives a monthly payment and has the right to take one month holiday. The School contract is concluded between the school headmaster and a company worker. Under the terms of this contract a student doesn't receive payment but has full-time holidays like a regular student. 70% of the students have a school contract and 30% have an employment contract. The choice depends on several factors, including the age of the student, the working conditions and, predominantly, whether an employer is willing to give an employment contract.

### Visit to a Restaurant

In this restaurant students from Wodzislaw Slaski centre can carry out training in all kinds of tasks related to the restaurant trade. The owner voiced his satisfaction with the way training is going, but expressed the wish that the school would prepare the students better. Some students have been employed following their training. It was possible to talk to some of the students, who are apparently happy with their practical training.