

PARTICIPATION OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

POLICY BRIEF

Policy context

International data shows that people with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) are still disproportionately excluded from the labour market. The Council of the European Union's Education and Training 2020 Strategy (ET 2020) invites European countries to undertake policy reforms that will improve educational outcomes, placing particular emphasis on vocational education and training (VET) in order to increase the employment rate of recent graduates and improve completion rates in upper-secondary education.

VET should:

- be equitable and efficient;
- address all sections of the population; and
- be of high quality, particularly in terms of promoting social inclusion.

The member countries of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education identified VET as a key issue at European level. This is in line with the Lisbon Strategy, adopted by the European Union Ministers of Education in 2000, and with ET 2020.

Between 2010 and 2012, the Agency analysed VET policies and practices in 26 countries from the perspective of learners with 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'.

Project findings

The main findings of the Agency analysis are set out below:

- The project identified numerous success factors – 'what works' – in VET for learners with SEN and/or disabilities.
- Subsequent 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 show ‘why it works’, while the mutual impact of success factors helps to explain ‘how it works’.

- The success factors are grouped into four so-called ‘patterns of successful practice’. These patterns are interlinked and mutually supportive, so any attempt to improve a VET system’s performance must place equal emphasis on all four patterns at the same time.
- 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.
- 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.

Recommendations

Based on its analysis, the Agency formulated recommendations relating to the four ‘patterns of successful practice’ that 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 – namely, head teachers/managers of VET organisations (*‘management pattern’*); teachers/trainers/support staff (*‘vocational education and training pattern’*); learners (*‘learners’ pattern’*); and current and future employers/labour market representatives (*‘labour market pattern’*).

The general policy recommendations derived from this analysis are as follows:

- *The four patterns are overlapping and mutually supportive. Therefore policy must place equal emphasis on all four patterns at the same time in order to achieve improvements within any VET system.*
- *All the success factors are inter-related and cannot be considered in isolation, as this could lead to undesired side effects. In order to detect any changes, whether desired or undesired, policy must establish and continuously monitor suitable indicators throughout the VET system.*

Specific policy recommendations

The project’s recommendations address many countries at once, i.e. they do not focus on any single country’s individual VET situation. The following specific policy recommendations for VET, structured along the four identified patterns, are relevant for many of the participating countries. However, a further phase of project



outcomes is needed for recommendations that are tailored to countries' individual VET requirements.

Management pattern

Policy makers should:

- Set up a legal framework and agreement among all the services involved: education, employment and local authorities. This will allow schools to develop partnerships and networking structures with local companies for practical training and/or employment after graduation.
- Promote effective school leadership by ensuring that schools are properly supported in developing an inclusive policy where differences among learners are considered a 'normal' part of the educational culture.
- Enable schools to implement a teamwork approach, including establishing multi-disciplinary teams with clear roles.
- Put in place clear, coherent training routes for school staff to develop the expertise needed to co-operate with internal and external support services.

Vocational education and training pattern

Policy makers should:

- Promote and ensure an approach where pedagogical methods, materials, assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs.
- Enable schools to safeguard learner-centred approaches with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design to be used in the learning process.
- Create a framework allowing schools to establish individual learning processes using flexible approaches, which allow for the development and implementation of individual plans for learning, education, training and transition.
- Put in place monitoring systems that examine the efficiency of measures being implemented by schools. This will help schools to focus on developing and implementing efficient educational measures that prevent or reduce dropouts and on finding new educational alternatives for disengaged learners.
- Ensure that all VET programmes and courses are under permanent review, in order to match learners' skills to labour market skills requirements.



Learners' pattern

Policy makers should:

- Support and monitor educational policies to ensure that schools focus on learners' capabilities.
- Provide initial and continuous training opportunities for staff, to enable teachers to put learners' abilities at the centre of educational approaches and see opportunities rather than challenges. Teachers should make all learners feel more confident and assertive.
- Ensure that schools respect learners' wishes and expectations in all steps of the transition process.

Labour market pattern

Policy makers should:

- Put clear measures in place at policy level so that schools can establish and maintain resilient connections with local employers.
- Ensure adequate support for learners and employers to back up the transition phase from education and training to employment. Furthermore, in order to sustain the transition to the open labour market, competent staff must provide targeted follow-up activities for as long as required to address the needs of young graduates and employers.

More information, including a guidance document entitled '20 Key Factors for Successful Vocational Education and Training', is available from the VET project web area: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/vocational-education-and-training>

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