

## **Description of an example of successful national/local VET programmes for learners with SEN in Austria**

### **1) Short abstract**

The Austrian VET system is characterised by a choice of different pathways. Students generally attend vocational school for 8 to 10 weeks a year for 3 years, with education consisting of 1/3 general education and 2/3 occupation-related technical tuition. In 2003, two options were introduced for students with SEN: an extension of the apprenticeship period and the possibility to acquire a partial qualification. In selecting the first option, the apprentices must complete the entire curriculum and sit the regular apprenticeship leaving exam. Apprentices who select the second option have their own curriculum (by means of an individual education plan) and sit an individualised final exam. Inclusive vocational education and training is generally aimed at people with special educational needs who are nearing the end of compulsory schooling, as well as people with disabilities, people who are not likely to find an apprenticeship in the near future and people without any qualifications at lower secondary level.

The system is also characterised by a “clearing” process, which is a service for young people transitioning from school to work who fulfil certain criteria in terms of needing special support. The goal of the process is to support the young people individually in their transition.

As regards the example itself, the centre for apprenticeship training was created by “Jugend am Werk”, a non-profit organisation whose goal is to create life perspectives and improve care and integration possibilities for persons with disabilities living in Styria. The centre supports approximately 50 young persons in companies and 25 young persons in training phases, all of whom are persons with learning disabilities who have not yet been able to find an apprenticeship. In the course of a year they participate in various workshops and classes, followed by an apprenticeship in a company. This apprenticeship is organised by the establishment, which provides the companies with various incentives to employ trainees with special needs.

The pastry shop “Café Famoos” is a sheltered workshop with 21 employees and 3 trainees. It was founded in order to help people with disabilities who had not been successful in finding an apprenticeship or job post-VET, by giving them the

opportunity to learn and work. The strategies employed include on-the-job training in various professions, theory classes in vocational school and job coaching.

The Bad Radkersburg vocational school specialises in the food trade and offers the two VET options discussed above. It runs an actual food shop, giving students the opportunity to learn in a realistic work environment and the possibility to acquire the skills necessary for later employment.

## **2) Highlights / Uniqueness**

One of the highlights of the Austrian VET for SEN system is the clearing process, which is the same all over Austria but can produce different results in different regions and schools. The good, flexible collaboration between companies and the chamber of commerce with regard to training places should also be highlighted. The flexibility of the policy system means that it is relatively easy for young people to switch between the partial and extended versions of the apprenticeship. The region is also flexible with regard to students with psychological disabilities who are not formally eligible to receive support offered by assistants: they do have access to the required assistants in Styria. Furthermore, special needs education is approached on an individual level; every SEN student has an individual job plan that has been determined by the job service. Finally, the role of job assistants should be mentioned; as the unique point of contact for all relevant offices, they reduce the complexity of the system and allow people to feel more secure.

## **3) Availability of evaluation data**

In terms of the Austrian VET system generally, it is noteworthy that approximately 50% of SEN students are in inclusive settings in Austria, while 50% remain in special settings. In Styria however, more than 80% are in inclusive settings. This disparity was explained by the lack of a national parents' organisation. Concerning the concrete examples, it should be mentioned that, on average, 80% of the participants in the "Jugend am Werk" establishment go on to find a job in the labour market (60% being the minimum). Finally, it is interesting to note that 80%-90% of apprentices are taken on by the company following their apprenticeship.