

Description of an example of successful national/local VET programmes for learners with SEN in Switzerland

1) Short abstract

There is a wide range of VET programmes in Switzerland, with many career opportunities for young people. Among the 200 institutions that offer VET, the Bächtelen Foundation is one of the oldest as was established in 1840 in Bern by the Swiss charitable society. This was initially as a salvation institution and since 1960, as a provider of vocational training programmes. The Bächtelen Foundation promotes work, vocational and educational training and home to people with physical or mental impairment, people with learning difficulties, or people with psychiatric disorders. The foundation includes: 55 assisted living and work areas for trainees, 8 vocational education workplaces, 5 assisted living quarters and 65 employees. The VET programmes include: carpentry, painting, construction, metalwork, garden service, housekeeping, agriculture/farming and kitchen. In 2010, there were a total of 50 trainees doing the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of apprenticeship and the average age of trainees was about 17.8 years of age.

A new Directive (May 2011) at federal level gives priority to the integration of students with SEN in the open labour market. The Bächtelen Foundation illustrates the possibilities of the Swiss VET system, which is apprenticeship-based, strongly implemented (majority of the population are participants), employer and market driven. The dual-track VET approach is based on a good combination of theory and practice and good cooperation among all partners involved (confederation, cantons, professional organisations, VET schools, companies). Alongside with this the Foundation offers support measures for job learning, job searching and professional integration:

Vocational and educational training in the Bächtelen Foundation:

1. Competence assessment and orientation (before starting an apprenticeship). VET programme has a 3 tier approach: personal, social and vocational competences
2. Three different levels of professional qualification and certification :
 - 3-4 years training course with Federal VET Diploma (like the majority of the people in Switzerland)
 - 2-Year basic training course with Federal VET-Certificate (intended for students with low academic achievement)
 - The Pra training started in 2007, which is a lower vocational and educational training qualification, intended for people with SEN) (well known in Switzerland, although not officially acknowledged).VET lasting 2 years, mainly practical, small and complex tasks. Includes theoretical sessions (min. 6 hours per week). Addressed to young people (approx. 15-20 years old)

3. Flexible ways to achieve the VET qualifications (possibility to move from one module to another, eg from certificate to diploma on the basis of individual development and abilities and from Pra to federal VET programmes):
- theory in professional schools/practice in private enterprises with support of the Foundation
 - theory and practice in internal (to the foundation) schools or companies

Professional integration:

- Jobs in internal companies or in the free economy in the basis of the students' abilities.
- Integration in free economy is facilitated thanks to external stints and accompanying the candidates in their job research.
- Good plans for transition to the open labour market (2 coaches to support the transition, learning session on how to fill in an application form, act in interviews, etc)

Job coaching: support to youngsters and employers during job research and employment (promoted by the new directive through the payment of 70 -100 Swiss francs per day for coaches who support students in the open labour market)

2) Highlights / Uniqueness

The Bächtelen Foundation illustrates the possibilities of the Swiss VET system:

- o Different levels of qualifications acknowledged at a state level
- o Permeability of the system: flexible pathways to allow mobility and avoid dead-ends, possibilities to switch from one level to another completing the training.
- Collaboration with a local network of enterprises (stints and jobs in the free economy) and remarkable amount of the work done in Vet programmes is carried out on clients orders.
- Internal training companies with workshops and full-time trainers

Motivation on the side of the trainees, the development of social competences and a nice VET environment all play a key factor in success on facilitating the transition to the open labour market.

3) Availability of evaluation data

At national level, in 2010, 64 people who had completed a PrA VET programme moved to a Federal 2 years VET programme. On average, after completing the PrA programme, 1/3 of graduates find a job in the open labour market, 1/3 of

the graduates work in sheltered workshops and 1/3 either follow another VET programme of the Federal VET system, get a job, or are lost in the system. Between 30,000 = 35,000 people with disabilities are in sheltered workshops.

In the Bächtelen Foundation, 80% of graduates of PrA VET programmes get a job in the open labour market, but the Foundation does not keep records on how long they keep these jobs. It is easier for PrA students to get a job than those with a Federal Certificate because the PrA students get support from the Invalidity Insurance so employers pay less salary (part of the salary is subsidised by the Invalidity Insurance). The majority of the youngsters have a professional qualification and certification acknowledged at a Swiss Federal level. 10 - 20 % need sheltered workplaces after their vocational education and more places are needed in social enterprises and sheltered workshops for people with disabilities who cannot get a job in the open labour market.

4) Publications

Häfeli, K.; Schellenberg, C. (2009). Success factors in VET. Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK). Bern.

Häfeli, K.; Hofmann, C. (2010). Two year basic training course as an opportunity for youngsters with low academic achievement? Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Heilpädagogik, 3, 27-32.

Kammermann, M. (2009). Well Prepared for the Labour Market? Employment Perspectives and Job Careers of Young People after a two-Year Basic Training Course with Swiss Basic Federal VET-Certificate. In F. Rauner; E. Smith; U. Hauschildt & H. Zellroth (Eds.). Innovative Apprenticeships. Promoting Successful School-to-Work Transitions. Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 127-130.

Kammermann, M.; Hofmann, C. & Amos, J. (2009). Two year basic training course and capacity to work on the free labour market – a longitudinal study of professional paths of students with low academic achievement.. Vierteljahresschrift für Heilpädagogik und ihre Nachbargebiete (1), 73-74.