

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

1) Short abstract

Vocational Education in Cyprus is available at mainstream gymnasiums, lyceums and technical schools across the island. 3 year vocational courses for learners with SEN are offered either in mainstream classes with additional teaching support for students with learning difficulties, or in special units for students with mild mental disorders. Students attending the special unit courses receive an 'attendance certificate', while the students on mainstream courses receive a regular leaving certificate.

All courses provide students with the opportunity to complete education and training programmes and acquire the skills needed for increased employability and a professional career.

The Technical School of Archbishop Makarios II, is a mainstream lyceum that provides technical education to young people of 15 years of age and over. There are 700 students in total, of whom 170 are students with SEN attending mainstream courses with additional support. A further 19 attend the inclusion unit. The school provides practical education with an emphasis on workshops (13 hours per week) and theoretical education on technical subjects that could lead to a university education. There is a good balance between the theoretical and practical workshops with a focus on the skills needed for employment and the future (eg: selling the items that they produce).

There are 7 different workshops: mechanical engineering, civil engineering, art design, hotel, catering, fashion design, services.

The IDALION Lyceum is a mainstream general lyceum with a total of 800 students. 23 are students with SEN who attend mainstream courses with additional support and 12 attend a special unit. There are 117 periods of support with 23 children supported.

Special unit: 12 students in 2 groups of 6 have 2 days work experience and 3 days of school per week. They spend approximately 17 hours in the inclusion unit and 5 hours in mainstream lessons, working with 6 school assistants.

School work focuses on the link to supported employment in the open labour market (e.g. supermarket, municipality hall, plant nursery, school).

2) Highlights / Uniqueness

The course offered to pupils with learning difficulties with teaching support is externally recognised by the local authorities, higher education institutions and national associations. The catering students, for example, receive a training programme of 20 hours per week in catering establishments, which is supported by the National Human Recourse Authority.

The inclusion unit courses for students with mild mental disorders are at an early stage of development and are therefore not yet qualified for recognition at national level.

The parents associations and career counsellors are involved in the programmes and give their views where necessary.

Students have practical training to prepare them for employment situations. The schools have good connections with local employers (municipality office, plant nursery, supermarket etc) to provide this.

Job coaching for supported employment is carried out by teachers/teaching assistants, whose job descriptions must be various, clear and specific to the particular position available. The link with the Ministry of Labour is key; they could offer a job coaching programme with school support.

The Ministry's liaison officer is the co-ordinator between the school, Ministry and employers. The co-ordinator at school level co-ordinates all the people involved in the inclusion unit, with a link to the practical work experience. Both roles are key.

3) Availability of evaluation data

Students attending mainstream classes with additional teaching support in gymnasiums, lyceums and technical schools in Cyprus amounted to 11.24% of all students during the school year 2010-2011. This figure is the average for all Technical Schools in Cyprus; in city schools the figure is slightly lower while in the countryside it is higher.

As the work experience is a pilot programme, there aren't yet many concrete findings or numbers to report. However, some technical school graduates are employed in the open labour market.

Employers have responded positively to the practical work experience and are open to employing these students later on.