

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

1) Short abstract

Iceland is an island of 103,000 square kilometers with a population of 319,575. Job activity is very high, with an unemployment rate steady at approximately 7,5% since 2008. Iceland's GDP is high despite the country being severely hit by the crisis in 2008. A fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone should have an equal opportunity to receive an education irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, disability or cultural or social background. According to the Upper Secondary School Act (2008), pupils with disabilities and pupils with emotional and social difficulties shall be provided with instruction and special study support. Specialised assistance and appropriate facilities shall be provided as required. Pupils with special needs shall study side by side with other pupils wherever possible. The Ministry of Education, in agreement with an upper secondary school, may authorise the implementation of special study programmes for pupils with disabilities.

Borgarholtsskóli is a mainstream upper secondary state school in Reykjavik. It has 1500 students in total, aged from 16 - 20 years. Students with SEN are included in mainstream programmes, with additional support provided on the basis of their individual needs where required. The school offers a variety of studies, both in general education, academic education, vocational educational training and education for students with SEN. There are currently 23 students with SEN (moderate, severe mental or multiple disabilities) following special programmes. Some of these students attend classes for subjects within mainstream courses. Borgarholtsskóli offers the 23 students with SEN a four-year programme in which the first and second years are focused on maintaining and improving the skills and knowledge already available. During the third and fourth years the students receive vocational education training with a focus on connecting the student with the labour market.

2) Highlights / Uniqueness

Last year, Borgarholtsskóli initiated a pilot project based on various teaching methods. The basic method is the Talent Assessment model, adopted from the USA, which aims to give students independence in society. The vocational training used is carried out both in school and on the labour market. 23 third and fourth year students participated in the pilot, of whom 8 were selected to participate in a new VET project aimed at teaching students how to work independently, whilst making them aware of their strengths and capabilities. The 8 students were selected on the basis of their capabilities (as students able to work independently). The training focused on types of behaviour used in various situations: at work, during breaks, during daily life (i.e. a focus on social skills, not only academic and professional skills). There is a good balance between theoretical and practical training on the basis of individual needs. This project was modelled on a project from the USA and adapted to the situation in Iceland. In the process of implementing the project, some ideas were also borrowed from the Rose project in the UK. The Director and the professionals involved in this project are very committed and strongly believe in the abilities of the students. Throughout training, as well as after the students' graduation, there is good cooperation with the supported employment service with a view to finding jobs for the young people.

3) Availability of evaluation data

In 2011, 29,389 students attended upper secondary schools in Iceland, of whom 370 attend in special programmes. As the Icelandic example is a pilot programme, there are not yet any concrete findings or figures to report.