

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

1) Short abstract

A variety of educational and training settings were visited during the VET study visit in Poland. The first school was the Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Racibórz, which is currently attended by 230 pupils. The education levels provided at the Centre are early childhood intervention, primary school, middle school, vocational school, technical college and post secondary school. The school's target group is people with hearing impairments, some of whom may also have slight mental disabilities, autism or other disabilities. The school has a significant number of workshops, allowing students to do different types of practical training. The curriculum is the same as the one for non-disabled students, but the manner and duration of its execution is adjusted. The school has informal links with several factories, allowing students to do training there and possibly find a job afterwards.

The Centre of Continuous Education in Racibórz is a mainstream vocational centre with special units for pupils with learning difficulties. A number of schools cooperate with this centre, which organises theoretical and practical vocational classes. It has several departments, such as mechanics, gardening, tailoring, landscape design, health workshops etc. The centre also organises several activities within professional orientation in order to integrate special school students with students from other schools.

The Educational Centre for students with learning difficulties in Wodzisław Śląski is a special school for pupils with learning difficulties, which offers many types of classes: early intervention, special primary school, special middle school, special VET, special job-oriented school and classes for learners with autism. There are a number of different training facilities. 313 pupils currently attend, from birth until 25 years of age. 102 teachers work at the school, together with 54 other staff members. Classes are organised according to the Polish system of classification of mental disabilities: mild (IQ 69-55), moderate, severe (IQ 54-25) and profound mental disabilities (IQ 0-25). Class sizes and duration as well as curricula and the number of teachers present in classrooms vary according to this classification. Students with mild mental disabilities can sit the VET exam, while students with moderate or severe disabilities can do job-oriented classes that aim to better prepare them for functioning in society.

One of the training facilities visited was Rameta, an open market factory. There are 515 employees, 269 of whom have a disability (60%). 163 belong to group 1 (high level of personal autonomy) and 86 employees belong to group 2 (middle level of autonomy). Employees are paid a salary of 400 Euros per month, 300 being the

minimum salary in Poland. Pupils from the special school in Raciborz have the opportunity to do practical training at Rameta.

Participants also visited a restaurant where students from Wodzislaw Slaski centre carry out training in all tasks related to the restaurant trade. Some students have been employed following their training. It was possible to talk to some of the students, who are apparently happy with their practical training.

2) Highlights / Uniqueness

The schools visited proved to be of a high quality in the field of special education; school staff reported that the parents seem satisfied. Equipment and materials are good. Headmasters and staff are highly motivated, committed and enthusiastic, which leads to good results. Some teachers have completed further training at their own cost in order to be better prepared. The atmosphere seemed very positive. A significant number of activities are being organised with the local community. Co-operation with the local authorities is satisfactory, as is cooperation with local companies regarding practical training and further employment. A formal network of all partners involved in training and further employment is lacking, but the schools have managed to build one up in a very informal way. Although the success rate for the regular VET examinations is very low, the schools have found alternative paths to this examination, leading to very high employment rate for young people with disabilities.

3) Availability of evaluation data

Concerning national Polish statistics, it is interesting to note that in Poland there are currently 1,016,213 young people, 29,710 of whom have special needs. 25,956 go to special schools while 3,754 go to public schools.

The Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Racibórz does not have any data on the number of students who found a job afterwards. The Rameta factory is, however, currently employing 40 graduates of the Special Educational Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In the case of the Educational Centre for students with learning difficulties in Wodzisław Śląski, the employment rate of young people with disabilities is very high (60%).

As previously mentioned, it is very difficult for SEN students to pass the theoretical general VET exam: in 2012, only 30% of the students from the Educational Centre for students with learning difficulties in Wodzisław Śląski passed the theoretical examination, while all of them passed the practical one. In the Centre of Continuous Education in Racibórz, only 2 students with special needs passed the theoretical exam last year, as did only 40% of the students without special needs.