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Inclusive Vocational Education and Specialised Tailor-made Training

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The Europe 2020 Strategy wishes to develop a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. In this perspective, attention should be given to the inclusion of persons with disabilities on the labour market. They can represent a significant addition to the labour force and contribute to the economic production. A qualitative and inclusive vocational education and training (VET) system is crucial in this regard.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes two key principles, Universal Design and Reasonable Accommodation, according to which products should be designed to be usable by all people and be accompanied with specific accommodations, in order for the product to be accessible to the greatest extent possible.

Based on these principles, the project 'Inclusive Vocational Education and Specialised Tailor-made Training', or INVESTT, wants to provide vocational schools with specific tips in order to guide all students towards the open labour market.

A teaching programme is thus produced in each partner country to help practitioners to create a universal design in their learning environment. This teaching programme is assessed through a cyclical approach, where it is first developed theoretically then tried and tested in the field throughout two years.

In this perspective, the project was developed in four countries representing different social cultures in Europe – Belgium, Norway, Austria and Slovenia. In each country, three partner organisations are involved, each with their specific expertise. The university develops the theoretical framework, the school implements the teaching programme and the service provider supports the national team with its expertise in special needs education.

The research team has developed 1) a research paper developing the theoretical framework of the project, 2) a research paper evaluating the teaching programmes at country level, as well as 3) the Strategy at European level which extracts from the national contexts studied suggestions for practitioners across Europe to develop a universal design in their own VET context.

The schools have implemented the teaching programmes from September 2013 until August 2015, and have all noted remarkable changes in the approach and practice of both teachers and students.

At the end of the school year 2013-2014, the teaching programme was thoroughly assessed and adapted following the remarks of teachers, students and families. The new version was then tested between August/September 2014 and June 2015, after which the teaching programme were once again evaluated. A final version was then produced with how the teaching programme with a universal design was implemented accompanied by a list of reasonable accommodation.

We have in the end four teaching programmes with a universal design, one per partner country, along with four lists of reasonable accommodations. The recommendations from these four programmes were analysed and compared to lead to recommendations at European level.

INVESTT was also committed to raising awareness on inclusive education and universal design in education. The project developed a large database of stakeholders and tried to foster stakeholder networks both at national level and at European level. An online knowledge centre was developed, www.investt.eu, to bring together information on 1) the project, 2) education framework in 11 European countries, 3) models of good practices, 4) links to other relevant websites.

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1. Project Objectives

The project aimed at contributing to a society:

- Where equal opportunities are guaranteed for all.
- Where every citizen can enjoy the right to high-quality vocational education and training in an inclusive setting, meeting his/her personal abilities.
- Where every citizen can enjoy the right to freely choose a career path in the open labour market and actively contribute to the society, meeting his/her personal abilities.

Its concrete objective was to provide vocational schools with specific information and suggestions in order to guide all students (including those with disabilities) towards the open labour market. The project developed and implements a teaching programme – intensively cross-referenced with the expectations of the labour market today – in the mainstream educational system in order to improve the inclusiveness of these settings and the employment in particular of students with a disability into the open labour market.

The project thus aimed to develop a universal design in the learning environment in order to include persons with disabilities in the mainstream vocational education system, helping them to achieve the same qualification as other students, and to improve their transition from school to the open labour market.

In that sense, the project contributed to the educational objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

In concrete terms, the project set out to:

- Develop a teaching programme, helping practitioners to create a universal design in their concrete learning environment, including curriculum adjustments, inclusive teaching methods and a revision of the evaluation methods, in each partner country. This teaching programme consists of a cyclic process of research and action, evaluated on a continuous basis.
- Develop a strategy at European level, helping practitioners to work towards a universal design in their own VET context, enabling them to provide a specialised tailor-made training for all. This strategy is based on research carried out in the partner countries focusing on universal design and reasonable accommodation.
- Further elaborate a sustainable network of all those committed to inclusive education, which was originally developed by the Comenius project 'Pathways to Inclusion', including now stakeholders from the VET sector.
- Further develop the web-based knowledge centre on 'Inclusive education for all', which was originally developed by 'Pathways to Inclusion', now focusing on inclusive VET.

2. Project Approach

In order to achieve the project objectives, the project adopted a 4-phase approach.

The first phase was dedicated to the research on what has been done with regard to 'universal design' and 'reasonable accommodation'. This research led to a first strategy on setting up of an inclusive learning environment, helping the national project teams to develop a concrete teaching programme in their country.

From September 2013 to June 2014, the second phase saw each national school implement the programme in their learning environment with intensive support from the service providers. At the end of the second phase, the teaching programmes were assessed and modified to fit the feedback of teachers, students, families and employers.

The third phase of the project took place in the following school year, from August 2014 to September 2015. On the one hand, the schools implemented the updated and improved teaching programme for a second year. On the other hand, the students who had received a qualification were followed in their job in order to further streamline the programme with the requirements of the labour market. The teaching programmes were once again assessed and adapted following the feedback of all stakeholders to produce a final, thoroughly tried-and-tested product.

In the last phase of the project, the research team developed a final evaluation paper covering the situation in each partner country, as well as a strategy at European level offering European stakeholders tips and suggestions on how to develop teaching programmes with a universal design in their own VET context.

This 4-phase approach ensured that input from all the stakeholders in the education process is taken into account – from the parents, students, students with disabilities, schools and employers. Furthermore, it ensured that the final outcome of the project is grounded both in sound academic theory as well as in concrete day-to-day practice.

To disseminate the progress and results of the project, a database of stakeholders on inclusive education was continuously expanded. Through social media interaction such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, as well as periodic newsletters, the project was disseminated throughout Europe to raise awareness on inclusive education and foster cooperation between stakeholders both at national and European level. National seminars were organised in the partner countries to foster a local stakeholder network and encourage other schools to develop teaching programmes with a universal design, while stakeholder forums were organised in the UK, Ireland, Finland and Macedonia to present the results of the project and convince local stakeholders of the benefits of inclusive education and universal design.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The objective of INVESTT was to provide VET schools with specific information and suggestions in order to guide students with disabilities towards the open labour market.

The results of the project were :

1. A teaching programme in each partner country. Developed by the universities in collaboration with the schools, the programmes were implemented in schools with the support of service providers. The difference in the teaching environment – the way the class was prepared as well as the way it was given and the content it included – was recognised and appreciated both by the teachers and the students. This can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
2. A research paper outlining the theoretical framework of the project, as well as a dissemination paper summarising the findings of the research, available in English, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Slovenian and Easy-to-Read. This can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
3. A research paper presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the project. It also includes the evaluation methodology that was used as well as the outcomes in each partner country. A second dissemination paper was also developed to summarise these findings, available in English, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Slovenian and Easy-to-Read. This can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
4. A strategy at European level helping practitioners in other countries to implement a universal design in their own VET context, based on the findings in the partner countries. This can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
5. Four national seminars and four stakeholder forums, raising awareness and encouraging stakeholders to implement teaching programmes with a universal design in their own learning environment. The reports can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
6. An online Knowledge Centre on inclusive education in mainstream education as well as in the VET sector. This can be found on the website www.investt.eu.
7. Five INVESTT newsletters on the state of play of the project, as well as other projects and events related to inclusive education. You can subscribe to the newsletter through the INVESTT homepage, www.investt.eu.
8. A database of stakeholders interested in inclusive education, counting 899 stakeholders and growing. This covers universities, research centres, schools, VET centres, service providers, local, national and European authorities as well as individuals and media outlets.

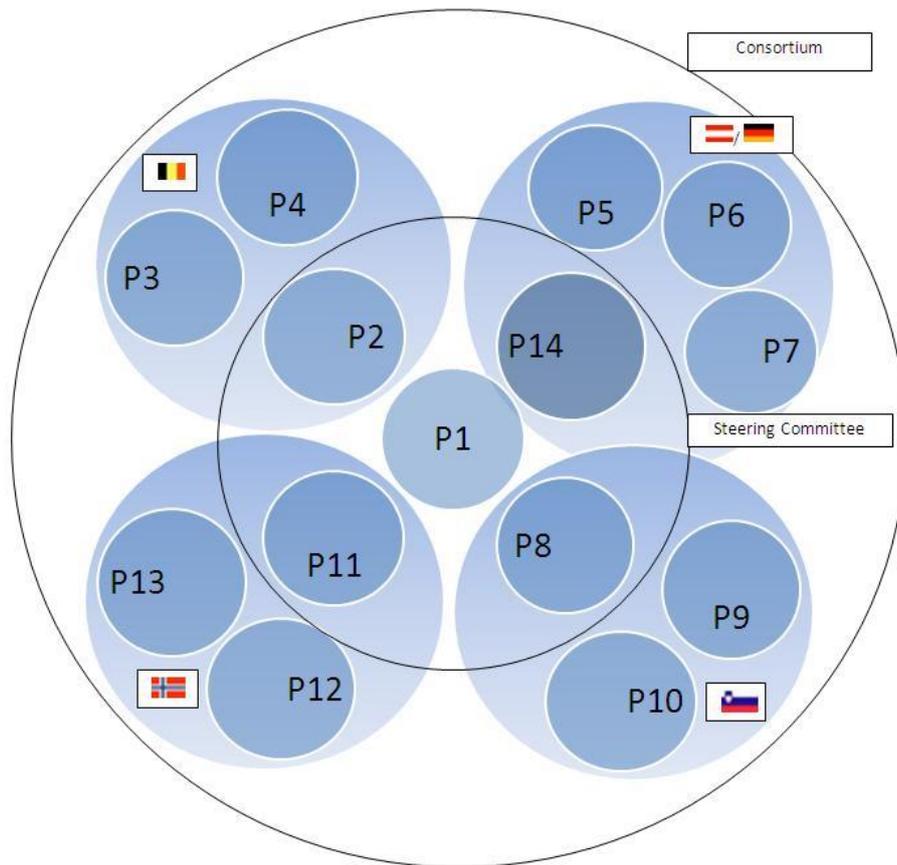
4. Partnerships

Partner ID	Partner name	Country	Type
1	European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities (EASPD)	BE	European Network
2	Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Buitengewoon Onderwijs (VVKBuO)	BE	Service Provider
3	University of Leuven	BE	University
4	Scheppersinstituut	BE	School
5	Behandlungszentrum Aschau Gmbh	DE	Service Provider
7	Schule für Sozialbetreuungsberufe	AT	School
8	Center za usposabljanje, dela in varstvo Dolfke Bostjancic Draga (CUDV Draga)	SI	Service Provider
9	Institut Republike Slovenije za socialno varstvo	SI	Research Centre
10	Poslovno-komercialna sola Celje	SI	School
11	The National Service for Special Needs Education (Statped vest)	NO	Service Provider
12	University of Stavanger	NO	University
13	Gand videregaende skole	NO	School
14	Pädagogische Hochschule Salzburg	AT	University

The INVESTT consortium was composed of one European Association and 12 partners spread in 5 countries. The countries were selected for the close ties the partners had and to represent the particularities of different regions in Europe. This in turn allowed the findings of the project to be extrapolated to neighbouring countries and to a Strategy at European level.

The European Association, EASPD, was the coordinating partner and was, thanks to the 11000 organisations represented in its membership, able to maximise the project results at a transnational, European level. It could also provide input from and disseminate to a large and varied stakeholder community.

In each country, 3 project partners were chosen to translate the outcomes of the research at European level into the daily practice at local level, and to incorporate the best elements of each education system in a European perspective, keeping into account the local context of each country. Each national team was composed of a university, a VET centre and a service provider, each bringing their own expertise to the discussion.



The universities and research centres with their academic expertise were responsible for the research to be carried out. In close cooperation with other partners they also developed the inclusive teaching programme at local level and evaluate continuously the implementation of the programmes.

The schools, having practical experience and knowledge, cooperated closely with the research centres in the development and implementation of the teaching programme and the strategy at European level.

The service providers supported the implementation of the programmes with their specific expertise in special needs education, and formed the steering committee of the project.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was also involved as associated partner in order to ensure the quality of the project outcomes and their relation to the expectations of the labour market.

5. Plans for the Future

By the end of the project, we were left with a solid legacy and much work to be done.

After the theoretical and the first adjustments, adapting your learning environment to a universal design relies mostly on the positive attitude and mind-set of teachers and staff. Following the success of the teaching programmes' implementation in the schools, positive results in teaching outcomes and learner engagement were recognised and appreciated by all stakeholders. The schools are thus convinced by the benefits of having a learning environment with a universal design, and will continue implementing and building on it in the future, while sharing their success-stories with other schools in their country. This will have a spill-over effect, spreading the concepts developed in the project in the local and regional education setting.

Both research paper on the theoretical framework and on the conclusions of the project offer sound foundation on the concepts of inclusive education, universal design and reasonable accommodation, and on how to implement these in your own learning environment.

The last research documents having been produced at the end of the project, all partners will be sharing and disseminating these results in their local agora, using in particular the well-designed, reader-friendly dissemination paper summarising the findings of the project.

As the project focused heavily on the development of a theoretical framework and on the implementation in the national schools, the dissemination of information and the development of the knowledge centre received at time less emphasis.

Partners will build on these foundations to further promote and implement inclusive education and universal design, in particular through the organisation of trainings for professionals. A follow-up project is also being developed, which focuses on raising awareness on inclusive education, strengthening and promoting the knowledge centre and reaching the frontline workers, the teachers, trainers and staff.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The responsibility for education policy lies mainly in the hands of the different Member States. Research, however, shows that the challenges faced in this field are very similar throughout Europe. In spite of the theoretical background of international and European declarations and policy documents (such as the Salamanca Statement, Council of Europe Action Plan 2006-2015, EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020, EU 2020 Strategy, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), inclusive VET for all is not yet a reality.

Although the educational systems are very different in the EU countries, we strongly believe that analysing the strengths of each system is helpful to increase the quality of all systems. There is no need to make an identical copy of the educational systems or to create one uniform way of working, but it is crucial to incorporate the best elements of each of them.

Based on the relevant key aspects of vocational education and training programmes for students with special educational needs, defined by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and other research at international level, we produced a strategy at European level identifying common needs and recommendations. This resulted in inclusive teaching programmes at local level which focused on a universal design in the learning environment. These outcomes are the founded in a scientific ground and an international basis, and have been tried and tested in classes, and as thus they will be particularly useful for schools or training centres in other European countries to implement or adapt their local learning environment.

The INVESTT partners developed stakeholder networks both at national and European level with a large range of different realities, models and success stories. Such a community will help spread the expertise gained and impact the inclusion of the VET system across the EU.

In that sense, the partners strived to contribute to the achievement of effective inclusion, where all students or pupils can develop according to their own special prerequisites. We contributed to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the Employment Strategy by spreading good practices and developing competences in vocational schools and training centres.

