Best practice for inclusive VET

UICI Florence

Title of the best practice

Integrated Support for VIP Students and Pedagogical Diversity.

Organizations

University of Primorska (UPR) & Centre IRIS.

Country of the case study

In Slovenia, inclusive education is governed by the Higher Education Act and national strategies for the integration of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). These frameworks mandate that VET providers ensure accessibility. The system relies on a network of specialized centres (like Centre IRIS) and academic institutions (like UPR) to provide a bridge between general vocational standards and the specific sensory or pedagogical needs of diverse learners.

Context

This study combines the expertise of two major institutions:

- Centre IRIS: A specialized Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion, and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted. It provides field-based support for pupils and young adults in VET.
- University of Primorska (UPR): An academic institution focusing on "Pedagogical Preparation for Diversity," ensuring that future VET trainers are equipped with inclusive skills.

Problem and motivation

The driving motivation is the principle that "every child should have at least approximately equal access to education." Traditional VET approaches often lack the specialized technical knowledge or the pedagogical flexibility to handle sensory disabilities. The goal was to move from simple integration to "inclusion-by-default," ensuring that students with visual impairments are not just present, but actively succeeding.

Description of the practical approach

1. **Individualized Learning Experiences**

The cornerstone of this practice is the transition from standard individualization to a model of "extreme personalization" delivered through Itinerant Specialized Teaching. In this framework, specialized teachers work one-on-one with pupils to ensure that every aspect of their education is tailored to their specific functional profile. This goes far beyond simple curriculum modification; it involves a deep adaptation of the very methods and forms of work used in the classroom, ensuring that the student's unique sensory needs are met with precision.

2. **Strengthening Multidisciplinary Support Teams**

The success of the itinerant model is built upon a robust and highly supportive team environment. The itinerant teacher does not function in isolation but acts as the field representative of a larger multidisciplinary network from Centre IRIS and UPR. This collective expertise provides a safety net for the student and, perhaps more importantly, serves as a catalyst for changing the institutional mindset regarding disability, moving the school culture toward a more collaborative and inclusive outlook.

3. **Adapted and Accessible Learning Environments**

To ensure that students can perform at their highest potential, educational settings are physically transformed through the installation of Specialized Computer Workstations. For VET students specifically, this involves a meticulous audit of both traditional classrooms and practical workshops to ensure that these environments are modified to accommodate assistive hardware and specialized software, allowing for seamless participation in technical tasks.

4. **Implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**

The practice adopts the core principles of UDL by making accessibility a proactive rather than a reactive measure. By ensuring accessibility from the start, all learning materials, including PDFs, videos, and digital platforms, are designed or adapted to correspond to universal standards. This systemic approach ensures that the curriculum is natively reachable for all students, regardless of their sensory abilities, eliminating the need for last-minute, makeshift adaptations.

5. **Workplace-Based Learning (WBL) Support at RTBS**

A primary focus of the partnership is the provision of market-relevant inclusive skills that prepare students for life beyond the classroom. By effectively bridging the gap between academic theory and practical vocational training, the model ensures that students are ready for the rigorous transition to the labour market. This is achieved through carefully managed preparatory internships and specialized mentorship, both of which are designed to facilitate a confident move into competitive commercial roles.

Accessibility

1. **Physical Accessibility**

The model is designed to be inherently flexible, removing geographical barriers by having the itinerant teacher bring specialized expertise directly to the student's primary location. Furthermore, any remaining physical barriers within the learning space are addressed through the strategic provision of tactile materials and specialized equipment, ensuring the environment is conducive to the student's specific needs.

2. Digital Accessibility

Digital inclusion is treated as a technical requirement where all content undergoes a rigorous audit for compatibility. This process ensures that online VET modules, digital resources, and even research questionnaires are provided in formats that are fully accessible to assistive software, allowing students to navigate digital learning landscapes with total autonomy.

3. Pedagogical Accessibility

Pedagogical accessibility is reached through the philosophy of "Extreme Personalization." Teachers are specifically trained to adapt their delivery methods in real-time, which ensures that a visually impaired student can access the same conceptual information and achieve the same learning outcomes as their sighted peers without any loss of content quality.

4. Assistive Technology

The centre provides a comprehensive and sophisticated suite of hardware and software that serves as the student's primary interface with the world. This includes essential tools such as screen readers with speech synthesis, Braille displays, and specialized magnification tools like ZoomText, all of which are integrated into the student's daily academic and vocational work. Technical guidelines for these adaptations are drawn from the EQUAL Project Manual and the Tactiles.eu 3D resource repository, both co-developed by Centre IRIS.

Results

1. Academic & Training Excellence

The University of Primorska (UPR) has successfully demonstrated that specialized faculty training is a powerful tool for institutional change. By improving the readiness of VET trainers, the university has ensured that academics are now better equipped to implement inclusive pedagogy not as an experimental project, but as a standard, integrated feature of their regular curricula. The pedagogical framework is rooted in the University of Primorska’s Master’s programme in Inclusive Pedagogics, ensuring that training is evidence-based and professionally accredited.

2. Operational Success

Centre IRIS has achieved the critical goal of providing approximately equal educational access for VIP students. Over the last two years, the itinerant teaching model has provided empirical proof that students with sensory disabilities can complete high-level vocational training successfully when they are supported by dedicated 1:1 mentorship and the appropriate technical tools.

3. Overall Impact

The most significant outcome of this practice is the fundamental shift in the institutional

mindset regarding disability. By proving that "inclusion-by-default" is entirely possible through the combination of technical adaptation and specialized support, the practice now serves as a replicable, evidence-based model that can be adapted by other VET providers across Europe.

Work-Based Learning and Transition to Employment

The practice is designed to bridge the entire professional lifecycle by aligning VET training with the actual demands of the modern market. By mastering assistive technologies during their educational phase, students gain the professional autonomy required for competitive roles. The multidisciplinary team plays a crucial role here, supporting the student in identifying career paths where their technical adaptations allow for full professional functionality and long-term success.

Outcome Indicators (0, 6, 12 months)

The progress of the intervention is tracked through a structured timeline:

- at 0 months (Enrolment), a baseline assessment of sensory needs is conducted alongside the provision of hardware;
- by 6 months (Mid-term), the student is evaluated on their ability to use these adapted materials independently within the curriculum;
- and at 12 months (Completion), success is measured by the completion of vocational modules and the student's readiness for employment or high-level internships.

Sustainability

The model has proven its viability by remaining operational for the last two years. Its sustainability is anchored in two pillars: the integration of inclusive pedagogy into the permanent UPR curriculum and the secure, established funding for itinerant teachers provided through national SEN strategies. This model aligns with the Slovenian National Programme for Education 2023–2033, which prioritizes the modernization of inclusive VET.

Transferability

This practice is highly transferable to other European VET contexts provided that institutions are willing to invest in three areas: training staff in assistive technologies, adopting the UDL ideology for all digital materials from the outset, and fostering active collaboration between specialized centres and general VET schools.

Cost efficiency

The practice is considered cost-efficient to a significant extent because it prioritizes the strategic deployment of specialized human resources and digital adaptations over expensive,

permanent structural renovations. By focusing on the mobility of the teacher and the accessibility of the software, the model maximizes impact per Euro spent.

Success Factors

The primary drivers of success for this practice include the presence of a strong, supportive team behind each individual teacher, the absolute mastery of specialized hardware and software, and a proactive, top-down institutional commitment to the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Challenges and Solutions

The main challenge encountered was the need to change the deeply ingrained mindsets of staff and overcome the social tendency toward labelling students. This was successfully overcome through direct contact and by demonstrating through results that extreme personalization leads to academic and vocational performance that is equal to that of any other student.

Reason for Selecting the Practice for WIN

This practice was selected because it represents a truly systemic approach to inclusion. By combining high-level academic training from UPR with the practical, field-based technical support of Centre IRIS, it proves that "inclusion-by-default" is an achievable standard for VET through the right mix of mentorship and digital accessibility.

Contacts for more information and/or references

- Organization: Centre IRIS – Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Inclusion and Counselling for the Blind and Partially Sighted (Slovenia).
- Academic Partner**:** University of Primorska (UPR).

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC). Neither the European Union nor HRDC can be held responsible for them.