



Best practice for inclusive VET

(Escola Profissional Amar Terra Verde (EPATV))

Title of the best practice:

Inclusive Vocational Education Through Individualised Support, Multidisciplinary Collaboration, and Adapted Learning Environments in Portuguese VET Schools

Country of the case study

In Portugal, vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role in preparing young people and adults for the labour market. A large share of upper-secondary students choose vocational programmes that combine classroom learning with practical experience, and many graduates take part in work-based learning as part of their studies. VET in Portugal aims to offer a wide range of practical skills, improve employability, and support social inclusion, although there is ongoing work to better align training with labour-market needs and to strengthen employment outcomes for graduates.

Context

Escola Profissional Amar Terra Verde (EPATV) is a vocational school providing upper-secondary level vocational education and training (VET). The school offers a wide range of vocational programmes, including Electrotechnics Technician, Computer Programming Technician, CNC Programming and Machining Technician, Mechatronics, Automotive Mechatronics, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technician, Sports Technician, Hairdressing, Beautician, Kitchen and Restaurant Technician, Management Informatics Technician, Sociocultural Animator, and Graphic Design and Communication Technician.

The school operates within a strong local network of partners that shape and support its educational and inclusive practices. These include local companies from the hospitality, catering, and industrial sectors, the Portuguese Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), the local municipality, the Child and Youth Protection Commission (CPCJ), and Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS). These partnerships play a particularly important role in work-based learning placements and in supporting students' transition to employment, especially for those requiring additional support measures.

Problem and motivation

At the moment, our school only enrolls students with cognitive disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. While this focus allows for specialized support, we identified several key challenges:

- Students with cognitive impairments often experience delays or incomplete curricular modules, which can lower overall course completion rates.



- Adapting the technical components of vocational programmes to match students' learning profiles can be difficult.
- Some work-based learning providers initially show resistance to accepting students with specific educational needs.

Our main motivation is to ensure equity in access, participation, and success in vocational education. We aim to make sure that students' special educational needs do not limit their ability to complete courses or succeed in future employment.

Description of the practical approach

The practice is based on a student-centred and inclusive teaching approach that adapts learning to the needs of each individual. Teachers break down complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps and use a variety of teaching methods such as visual materials, hands-on activities, and digital tools.

A key element is the emphasis on experiential learning ("learning by doing"), especially through practical workshops and real or simulated work environments. Students with additional needs benefit from individual transition plans, which help guide their progress from education into employment.

Support is further strengthened through tutoring, co-teaching, and access to a Learning Support Centre, ensuring that no student is left behind.

Accessibility

Accessibility is approached holistically, ensuring that students can fully participate in all aspects of learning.

- Physical accessibility: The school provides ramps, elevators, adapted sanitary facilities, and clear signage, allowing students with mobility challenges to move freely and safely.
- Digital accessibility: Learning platforms and materials are designed to be simple and user-friendly, including features such as subtitles, screen-reader compatibility, and easy navigation.
- Pedagogical accessibility: Teaching methods are adapted to individual needs through differentiated instruction, flexible assessments, additional time, and co-teaching models.

This comprehensive approach ensures that accessibility is not just about infrastructure, but also about equal access to learning and success.

Results

The implementation of this practice has produced measurable improvements in student performance and engagement.

There has been a reduction in the number of incomplete modules and a noticeable increase in course completion rates. Students show higher levels of participation in both classroom activities and work-based learning opportunities.

Additionally, learners demonstrate improved confidence, independence, and practical skills, which are essential for their future careers.



Overall Impact

The overall impact of the practice is the creation of a more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment. Students with disabilities or additional needs are better integrated into the educational system and are given equal opportunities to succeed.

The practice contributes to:

- Increased student motivation and engagement
- Development of job-relevant skills
- Improved social inclusion

Ultimately, it strengthens the role of vocational education as a pathway to employment and independence.

Work-Based Learning and Transition to Employment

A strong focus is placed on preparing students for real working life. The school collaborates closely with partner companies to provide structured work placements.

Students receive:

- Preparation before entering the workplace
- Guidance from both school tutors and workplace mentors
- Continuous monitoring through meetings, observation tools, and feedback reports

This structured support system ensures that students are not only placed in companies but are also successfully integrated and able to perform their tasks. It significantly improves their readiness for employment.

Outcome Indicators (0, 6, 12 months)

- **At 0 months (beginning):**

Students often face challenges such as low confidence, difficulty adapting to the curriculum, and limited practical skills.

- **At 6 months:**

There is visible progress in participation, skill development, and engagement. Students become more comfortable in practical environments and begin to show increased independence.

- **At 12 months:**

Students achieve higher completion rates, successfully participate in work placements, and demonstrate improved employability skills. Some are ready to transition directly into employment or further training.



Sustainability

The practice has been implemented for approximately eight years, demonstrating its long-term viability. It is sustainable because it is embedded in the school's strategic framework and aligns with national policies on inclusive education.

Importantly, it relies mainly on existing human and material resources, such as trained teachers and support staff, rather than requiring significant additional funding. This makes it both stable and scalable over time.

Transferability

This practice has strong potential to be replicated in other vocational education and training (VET) institutions.

To successfully transfer the model, schools would need:

- A multidisciplinary support team (teachers, special educators, psychologists)
- A dedicated support structure (e.g., a learning support centre)
- Partnerships with local employers

Since the approach is based more on methodology and collaboration rather than expensive infrastructure, it can be adapted to different contexts with relative ease.

Cost efficiency

The practice is considered highly cost-efficient. It primarily uses existing staff and facilities, with only limited additional investment required for teacher training and minor resources.

At the same time, it delivers strong outcomes by:

- Reducing dropout rates
- Improving completion rates
- Enhancing employability

This makes it a high-impact, low-cost solution for inclusive vocational education.

Success Factors

Several factors have contributed to the success of the practice:

- Strong leadership and institutional commitment
- Effective collaboration among teachers and support staff
- Active involvement of partner companies
- A clear focus on student needs and employability outcomes
- A positive and inclusive school culture

These elements work together to create a coherent and supportive system.



Challenges and Solutions

Challenges encountered include:

- Initial resistance from some teachers and employers
- Difficulties in managing time and coordinating activities

Solutions implemented:

- Providing training and professional development for staff
- Sharing successful practices and experiences
- Organising awareness sessions for employers
- Establishing clear planning and coordination mechanisms
- These measures helped to gradually build acceptance and improve implementation.

Reason for Selecting the Practice for WIN

This practice was selected because it represents a strong, practical example of inclusive vocational education. It effectively combines accessibility, personalised learning, and real-world experience.

It is particularly valuable because it:

- Produces measurable positive outcomes
- Supports students' transition into employment
- Can be sustained and replicated in other contexts

It aligns closely with the goals of the WIN initiative in promoting inclusion and equal opportunities.

Contacts for more information and/or references

For further information, the following contacts are available:

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These individuals can provide additional insights, examples, and guidance on implementing the practice.

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