

Briefing: Erasmus Project - France

Employment pathways for young people with SEND

Findings from the French Visit

October 2017

NDTi have been working on an Erasmus funded project to look at employment pathways for young people with learning disabilities in France, England and Portugal.

Our recent trip to Laval in France identified some similarities to employment pathways applied in England but some stark differences too.

Key findings:

- **The definition of learning disability.** In Laval, young people being defined as having a learning disability seem to have a range of needs including mental ill health, social and emotional needs, anxiety and mild to moderate learning difficulties. Young people described as having a “severe” disability are young people we, in England, would most likely see in mainstream schools on SEN Support or possibly in a special school for those with moderate needs.
- **There is a much stronger emphasis placed on “vocational training”, with vocational courses being defined as “professional training”.** Young people can start an apprenticeship at the age of 15 and start receiving payment at 16. This is different to the system in England which continues to place a high value on academic achievement, which is reflected in our inspection system and frequently referred to by education colleagues as a barrier to inclusion.
- **The strong regard placed on vocational training means there is a very professional set-up around employment pathways.** This leads to vocational opportunities in areas like building, the caring profession, food and hospitality and agriculture. Schools and the post-16 sector seem to have amazing resources to support young people with their learning and a professional feel to

what they are offering with much less emphasis on academic subjects. The vocational route to qualifications appears to have equal status, along with what seems to be a more simplified school system that supported by a central team similar to the Local Authority SEND department in England.

- **Schools offer huge subsidies to children and young people with additional needs, meaning that fees are kept to a minimum.** Children and young people with additional needs are supported through a system that is described as “inclusion” but is really a segregated system with opportunities for integration.
- **There are layers within the system which means that France retains a somewhat institutional approach** – we didn’t visit the hospital schools but they appear to support young people with more severe and complex needs who, in England, would be educated either in special school or mainstream school with support. There is still a definition of “uneducable” in France as there is in a number of European countries. In 2013/2014, there were 78,217 children and adolescents identified as both taken into a medical-social or health establishment, and as pupils – 71,286 in medical-social centres and 7,931 in health centres. To these can be added at least 10,729 children with disabilities aged 3 to 16 years who are considered as not schooled or uneducable.¹
- **Since 2015 through a programme called ULSIS (Localised Units for School Inclusion) children and young people follow inclusion modules in mainstream schools** according to their interest and ability and age through primary, secondary and FE. These modules can be of a vocational nature following a “professional” pathway. Great emphasis is placed on supporting young people to develop autonomy.
- **Access to support and services is via a multi-disciplinary team who assess a child or young person and decide which education pathway they should follow.** In Laval, a local area team called DJINH are funded to support young people in a person-centred way, including a job coach pilot to provide supported employment opportunities and supported apprenticeships. DJINH also run group activities for young people to develop independence and friendships. They have a

¹ [European Agency for Special Needs and Education](#)

multi-disciplinary team and work together across professional disciplines including social work, youth work, psychology support and OT with a strong emphasis based on social pedagogy.

- **Support for children and young people with Autism seems to be via a different route.** A 2016 report by Autism France criticised the approach highlighted that they are behind their European neighbours by continuing to follow a psychoanalytical/medical model in how it supports those with Autism. ² We asked our guests about this and were advised that support for those with Autism is under review.

- **As part of the segregated approach, France still run sheltered workshop for disabled adults.**

We visited one such workshop in Laval which was run by a voluntary organisation called Adapei 53³ who are also commissioned to provide a range of health and social care services including hospital education for children. The sheltered workshop (ESAT) is funded centrally by the state and caters for 127 people at a cost of around 10,000 Euros per person per annum. “Employees” at ESAT are paid by results at around £1,200 Euros a month and work is contracted by local businesses.

² [Euro news](#)

³ [Adapei 53](#)