



BITSE

BARRIERS WHICH INHIBIT THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

Newsletter 1

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Introduction

Persons with Disabilities who are in transition from school to employment and work opportunities are either prevented, or at the least, inhibited from both accessing employment and/or sustaining themselves in the workplace, through interaction with various barriers which in effect hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other citizens”.

Whilst the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 focuses on eliminating such barriers and has identified eight main areas for action at EU level to supplement national ones, there is of yet no structured focus or examination of these barriers at local or coal face level and which is specific to people with disabilities and who are in transition from school to work.

The ‘BITSE’ Partnership which is comprised of schools, service provider organisations, VET professionals, social partners, umbrella organisations, 3rd level institutions and National Federations of Employers is uniquely equipped with the professional diversity, skills, expertise, competences and resources, to provide this focus and examination, and fill this gap through achieving the following objectives:

1. To develop a Report on Barriers which Inhibit the Transition from School to Employment
2. To develop a common toolkit to empower people with disabilities to overcome these barriers
3. To design a template of best practice for examining and overcoming such barriers which is transferable across member states
4. To produce a set of recommendations to raise awareness amongst authorities and all relevant stakeholders
5. To improve the transition process and outcomes from school to employment for persons with disabilities

The BITSE Leonardo da Vinci Project Partnership consists of 14 organizations representing 10 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, and is focused on an examination of ‘Barriers which Inhibit the Transition from School to Employment for Persons with Disabilities’.



Focus Groups



As the BITSE project is continuing at a steady pace, it is time to have a look at the state of play and report on the Focus Groups, which were held on a dual basis. First, there was the participation of experts, teachers and learners in focus groups reflecting and discussing on barriers, resources and recommendations for stakeholders. These focus groups were held at the national level with the support of a questionnaire, which guided the participants towards common opinions and conclusions.

We can stress the fact that from the beginning of the project the involvement of users and learners has been a priority. After these focus groups, summaries were made to assist the participants towards the next part of the discussions.

Second, around 70 people (representatives from expert groups, teachers, learners and project members) gathered in Linz, Austria, for the third Action Meeting, discussing the national summaries and working towards project recommendations which will be used in a later stage.

This third Action Meeting was not solely used as a theoretical meeting but also gave the stakeholders the opportunity to have a look at some practical, grassroots activities. The group went on a field trip to Caritas and visited some technical workshops, among which a wooden bakery where people with disabilities can learn skills required for being a baker or a confectioner. These visits focused on international and intercultural exchange, but also exchange of good practices to overcome several barriers. Recording to several testimonials, both experiences were a great success!



“My name is Marguerite Darcy. I went to Linz in Austria with a group from Cope Foundation. There was a conference on employment for people with a disability. There were people from other countries as well. It was very interesting to listen to their stories—Marguerite Darcy.”

During the third Action Meeting the representatives of the expert groups gathered to discuss common barriers and possible solutions in the context of **trainer/learner focus groups**.

Many of the same factors were identified as important for succesful transition outcomes in all the countries. These factors may be within the person or within the environment. The participants noted that each factor can be perceived as either being a barrier or a support, depending on the situation. For example, supportive parents can be a support, but can become a barrier if they are being 'over-protective'.

When speaking about transition, the experts came up with following common elements: collaboration among everyone involved; keeping the transition a real process; navigation to support youth and their families; accessible information; awareness is necessary on all levels; overcoming a narrow focus.

Progress is possible when everybody works together to create and raise awareness and everyone –including society as a whole – is actually living "inclusion".



*"Because most countries face the same barriers, it's important to learn from each other—
Martien Lekkerkerk"*

Although confronted with different languages and diverse (cultural and social) backgrounds, the **learner focus groups** were a huge success. During the third Action Meeting in Linz, 24 people with disabilities from 6 European countries discussed several topics. They cooperated in a very active way while friendships were created and emotions were shared. The worker learnshops brought forward that there are many common barriers which inhibit the transition from school to employment.

They have to face prejudices and negative perceptions in the society; deal with harassment at school and at work; they are confronted with a lack of opportunities and information regarding jobs; accessibility is low, as are the opportunities for education and work.

Discussing their own stories and experiences definitely helped and will help to learn from each other and set recommendations. The exchange of information and sharing common feelings is on the one hand emotional, but on the other hand also crucial to eliminate these barriers.





Testimonials: an Overview

- “They gave me and my colleagues a lot of compliments for our presentations. ...it’s always helpful when people let you know that your work is appreciated-Martien Lekkerkerk.”
- “... learners were satisfied to meet new friends, share experiences and introduce by themselves during one of the meetings the Centre they belong to-Fabrizio Fea.”
- “We have heard the story of a young man, who follows an education-workproject at a bakery. He goes to school two days a week and works two other days. He’s guaranteed to have work his entire life-Martien Lekkerkerk.”
- “Not everybody could speak English but with gestures we could understand each other-Stans Kroon.”
- “In some countries people with disabilities are very lonely. If they can’t find a job, they are dependent of their families willingness and ability to help-Stans Kroon.”



Upcoming: Employer/Service Provider Focus Groups

The 5th Action Meeting of BITSE partnership will be held from 4th till 7th of June 2013 in Varna, Bulgaria and will coincide with NASO’s Annual National Forum of Social Service Providers.

This event will provide the opportunity to include more stakeholders and interested parties, and to disseminate and assure the continuity of the project in Bulgaria.

During this Forum there will be representatives at policy level, from the business and social sector, as well as from the civil society.

BITSE partners envisage making new contacts and will be able to actively participate in the Forum.

Furthermore, focus groups of employers and service providers will be held at its venues, during which the project's interim results on *Barriers which inhibit the transition from school to employment* will be presented and discussed.



Varna
Fifth Action Meeting
4-7 June 2013

Thank You

Special thanks goes out to everybody who worked on the Action Meeting in Linz, but also to everybody who participated (teachers, learners, project partners) in the focus groups!

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