

# Work-based learning Programme for dropouts

*Liceo del Lavoro*

## Description

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Due to a quite unique origin, Cometa VET school (Como, Italy) has always been developing its educational approach of Inclusive Excellence, providing the students with high-quality professional skills, but carefully fostering also their social and emotional skills. The main aim of this approach, designed for former early school leavers or young people at risk of social exclusion, has always been their holistic human development.

In particular, for the early school leavers, the school has specifically developed a 2-year work-based training, called Liceo del Lavoro (LdL, Job High-School), providing the participants with an EQF3 certificate and a smoother transition to the labour market. Aiming at their holistic human development, Cometa developed a model of intervention which can be described in 3 steps:

- Encounter
- Commitment
- Accompaniment

## Beneficiaries

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 **Early leavers from education and training**    **Unemployed young people**  
 **Young people with complex needs (e.g. health issues, in poverty, with caring responsibilities, socially disadvantaged, living in a remote location)**

The specific group of beneficiaries of this programme, early school leavers, may have experienced problems in counselling and in the choice of their secondary level school after completing primary education. Most of them show learning disabilities, often not officially recognised, or complex familiar background which have affected their motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Strong support, including psychological, is required, to recover from school failures as well as to re-discover their own potential capabilities. They are usually 16-19 years old and:

- did not complete first or second year in any secondary level school;
- changed school one or more times at secondary level;
- got an EQF2 qualification but their school history shows more than one failure;
- attended but did not complete a high school programme due to emerging difficulties.

Besides the lack of professional skills, this group of beneficiaries, more importantly, shows a need to foster motivation and soft skills to build self-awareness.

The specific target group of this good practice is composed by tutors, teachers, head teachers and counsellors.

## Countries

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## Education level and sector

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- ⇒ **Upper secondary vocational education and training (work-based learning)**

## Type of policy/initiative

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- ⇒ **Intervention**
- ⇒ **Compensation**

## Level of implementation / Scope

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- ⇒ **Regional level**

This programme was born in 2003 and since then, the format of this training program inspired other centres in Italy.

## Aims of policy/initiative

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This model aims at the recovery of young dropouts thanks to the School-Enterprise method, personalised work placements and socio-emotional learning that allow the development of vocational and socio-emotional skills.

## Features and types of activities implemented

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This practice is divided into 4 phases:

- Phase 1: Recruitment process
- Phase 2: Engagement with families and/or social workers
- Phase 3: Class group composition
- Phase 4: Good practices

### Phase 1: Recruitment process

This first phase aims to assess and select beneficiaries. Recruitment takes place through data collection, interviews, and analysis of the learner's social/emotional psychological situation.

#### Activity 1A: Selection interview with Head Teacher

After an initial brief meeting with the family, aimed essentially at collecting anamnestic data, we focus on the student, going on to investigate why motivation has been blocked or negatively interfered with in the growth pathway and what the young person's demand or motivation is for embarking on a new pathway. At this stage it is essential to understand whether the young person's presence is closely linked to a family decision/pressure or whether there is a personal motivation.

#### Activity 1B: Convocation of the beneficiaries and training agreement

In a second interview, the Head of Education reports that the necessary requirements for the student's inclusion in the pathway exist. Encouraging the young person involved to be protagonists in their own growth pathway, they are asked to actively adhere to the proposals, regulations, and didactic and training activities envisaged by the school:

agreement, contract.

## **Phase 2: Engagement with families and/or social workers**

The second phase is a general analysis of the student's family situation to identify possible correlations between the causes of school dropout and parental responsibility.

Activity 2A: Interviews between social services, educators and families

The inclusion of young dropouts into the experimental pathways is often facilitated by family involvement when family is a resource and not an obstacle. It has to be quickly understood whether to invest in the family as well or to give the young people more responsibility so that they are not constantly justified and protected by family members with little parental responsibility. Often, they are looked after by social services or community educators; in this case, network work is necessary to enable the sharing of project goals and the school progress.

## **Phase 3: Class composition**

One of the most delicate aspects of working with early school leavers is the composition of the class group: this accounts for the creation of dynamics, sometimes very complex, that could negatively interfere with the classroom climate. Belonging to the group turns out to be a valuable source of support for individuals, who are strengthened in dealing with their own problems in a process of circular influence that stimulates mirroring and the development of empathy. Over the years, it has been observed that the young people benefit positively from the group itself, because the individual members share the same failure experiences and frustrations; the point they have in common is their 'limits' and this allows to lower performance anxiety levels.

Activity 3A: Observation of the class group

From the first interview, it is necessary to identify those who could take on negative and positive leadership roles, in order to create a balanced group that allows each individual to emerge with their potential and fragility. The class group designed for experimental projects often presents the same dynamics as mutual aid groups, proving to be an advantageous tool for countering the marginality and insecurity shared by all members. Below is a list of the main factors to be observed during the class group composition process:

- positive and negative leadership;
- resources and potential of individuals;
- fragility of individuals;
- ways in which growth is interrupted;
- acts carried out;
- reports received by Court;
- sense of autonomy and responsibility;
- level of motivation;
- level of previous schooling;
- any certifications and diagnoses;
- ways of managing free time.

## **Phase 4: Good practices**

The fourth phase brings together "good practices", a series of activities aimed at encouraging the young people to return to school life.

Activity 4A: Welcoming

Welcoming young people to build with them a relationship based on the daily sharing of their needs and to introduce them to adult life. At Cometa, the experience of welcoming is closely linked to the experience of beauty. Each person is unique and must be welcomed through constant gestures of attention, in the perspective that even those who have difficulties can be involved in a continuous, ongoing growth made up of small acts of attention that encourage the flourishing of all their talents.

The word 'welcome' thus becomes a daily practice through constant gestures and attention such as:

- The presence of an adult figure waiting for the students at the gate when they arrive in the morning.
- The presence of the headmaster, who waits and greets the students, calling them by name at the entrance.

- The teachers' attention to each student's talents, abilities, and interests in their teaching programme.
- The presence of the tutors, who constantly gather everyone's needs and criticalities, taking them seriously.

#### Activity 4B: Clear and shared regulations

The presence of each student in the school represents a conscious choice of a personal path: the students are not passive recipients of the education given to them, but active protagonists of their own training and education. The provision of tasks and rules, aimed at developing behavioural skills, helps and supports co-responsibility in the construction of the school's educational culture.

Students and families enter a co-responsibility agreement with the school, which includes a set of rules:

- attention to attendance and punctuality;
- withdrawal of mobile phones at the start of classes;
- prohibition of smoking in school premises;
- care and respect for school furniture;
- care of the uniform in all its components.

Sharing the rules with each student and with all the adults in the school makes it easier to comply with them: in the internal coherence of an inhabited place, attention to and respect for the rules becomes possible and transgression appears more and more out of context and inconvenient.

Disciplinary measures, envisaged in the event of a breach of the rules or inappropriate behaviour, always and exclusively have an educational purpose: this purpose is expressed in encouraging students to become aware of the environment in which they live and of the co-responsibility they are invested with within the educational structure. Therefore, the school provides for the application of educational measures in the form of so-called 'socially useful activities' for the school community. Types of measures described (by way of example): restoring the premises, tidying up and maintaining the common areas, assisting with secretarial tasks. All these activities are carried out under the direction and monitoring of teachers and school staff.

#### Activity 4C: Educational practices

The format "Educational Practices" is a document that makes it possible to keep track of the relevant actions of each student, the educational interventions that have taken place, the disciplinary measures taken by the management and the verification of their effectiveness. Thanks to the Educational Practices, teachers and tutors are able to:

- share effective strategies on the individual or group;
- monitor the effects of their educational interventions and seek alternatives in case of ineffectiveness;
- share the attention and care of the young people not dropping the acts, looking together at the dynamics at work and dialoguing for the construction of projects and new proposals;
- having a history of the young people's progress (qualitative data collection).

#### Activity 4D: Personalisation

Attention to the person and their history constitutes the guiding criterion for the creation of training pathways: the starting point is therefore openness and attention to each young person, their specific characteristics, needs, abilities and learning styles. The customisation of the pathways makes it possible to flexibly structure the course in order to support each young person and accompany them to educational success.

## Resources

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The implementation of this practice, which is one of the practices included and showcased in the Guidelines of the GIVE project (Erasmus+ project), is financed by EU funding ([www.thegiveproject.eu](http://www.thegiveproject.eu)).

## Evaluation of the measure

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The practice is constantly monitored and evaluated by Politecnico di Milano in terms of increase of social-emotional and professional skills; 6 months, 1 year and 3 years after the completion of this cycle, graduates are surveyed in order to assess their working conditions (employment, type of contracts, range of wage, among other indicators).

## Evidence of effectiveness of the measure

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Cometa's Liceo del Lavoro, over the years, has tried to develop a model for recovering youth dropout by combining the development of vocational skills, thanks to the school-enterprise method and customised internships, and socio-emotional skills, thanks to the socio-emotional learning and customisation work carried out by the tutor.

This practice was comprehensive thanks to the research that describes the training and educational model of the Liceo del Lavoro, highlighting in particular its results in terms of quality assessment and social impact thanks to the contribution of the Politecnico di Milano. Upon initial observation of the results, there is a general improvement, both in terms of student self-assessment and tutor assessment. The average grade point at the end of the school year is 75, behavioural performance improved on average and a positive trend is also confirmed for skills. Students feel they have significantly improved their technical and professional skills, their ability to manage working time and to plan activities. These results are supported by the tutors' answers, which confirm the students' perceptions.

## Success factors

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Two key elements can be highlighted: The training method and the educational approach. The training is strongly inspired by a work-based learning method: theories such as learning by doing (Dewey, 1916), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), or action learning (Marquardt & Yeo, 2012) have found concrete realisation in Cometa Formazione's reality-based learning approach.

In order to activate learners' holistic human development, attention cannot focus solely and exclusively on the dimension of professional skills. Human capacities, behind the person and their development, are manifold. It is only by working harmoniously on several aspects that Cometa and its Liceo del Lavoro have been able to generate an encouraging result in terms of recovering the dispersion condition of these learners.

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## Related intervention approaches

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### **Work-based learning and simulations**



### **Tailored learning pathways**

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