



Tailored learning pathways

Problem statement

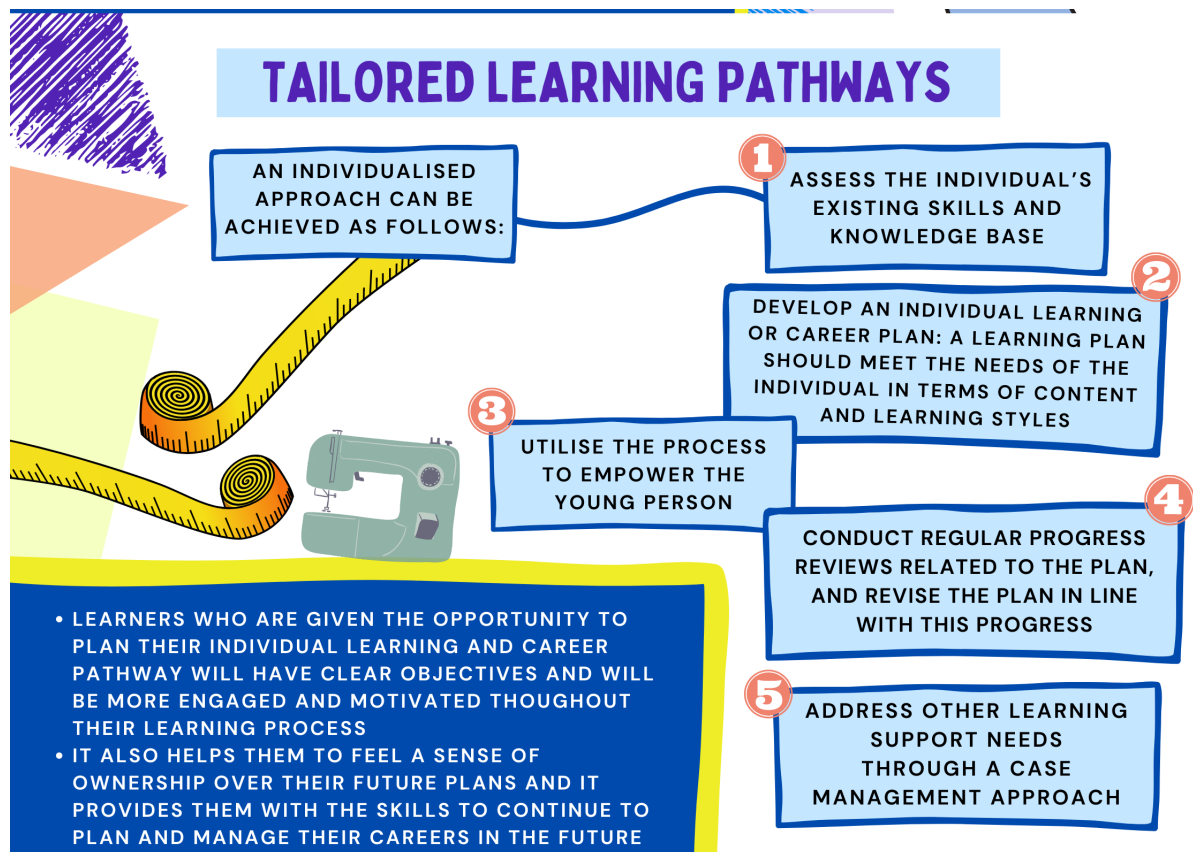
Addressed problem: "One-size-fits-all" approaches and risk of early leaving

Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems often struggle to respond effectively to the diversity of learners they serve. Many programmes remain standardised in structure, pace, and delivery, limiting their capacity to address individual needs, backgrounds, and aspirations. This "one-size-fits-all" approach is particularly ineffective for young people at risk of early leaving, as well as for those who have already disengaged and wish to return to education or training.

Learners in these situations require individualised and flexible educational responses. However, current VET systems frequently offer limited personalisation, with rigid curricula and teaching methods that do not adequately reflect different learning styles, prior experiences, or personal circumstances. As a result, many learners experience disengagement, face difficulties in re-entering education, or struggle to overcome personal, social, or academic barriers.

Tailored learning pathways are therefore essential. This implies that the content of learning programmes, the modes of delivery, and any additional support mechanisms should be adapted to the learner's needs, identity, and goals. Such personalisation enables learners to follow pathways aligned with their interests and aspirations, while also providing targeted support to address challenges and barriers.

Without this shift toward more learner-centred and flexible approaches, VET systems risk perpetuating exclusion and early leaving, particularly among vulnerable groups. Strengthening tailored pathways is thus critical to improving retention, re-engagement, and overall learner success.



Beneficiaries

- Early leavers from education and training
- Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training
- Migrants / refugees
- Low-performing learners

Addressing the problem

How can a tailored approach be achieved?

A tailored, individualised approach can be implemented through a combination of pedagogical, structural, and support measures that respond to learners' diverse needs and circumstances.

Key elements include:

- **Developing individual learning and career plans**, enabling learners to set goals and follow pathways aligned with their interests, skills, and aspirations.
- **Providing needs-based learning support**, including academic assistance, skills assessment, and targeted interventions to address learning gaps.
- **Establishing individual health and well-being plans**, recognising that personal circumstances and mental health play a critical role in learning outcomes.
- **Implementing a case management approach**, ensuring coordinated support that addresses both educational and non-educational needs (e.g. social, financial, or personal challenges).
- **Offering mentoring and coaching**, to guide learners, strengthen motivation, and support decision-making throughout their learning journey.

- **Leveraging digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI)** to enhance engagement, personalise learning experiences, and support the development of learning and career pathways.

An individualised approach also depends on the availability of flexible learning pathways, which allow learners to progress at their own pace, re-enter education when needed, and combine different forms of learning (formal, non-formal, and work-based).

The following recommendations are addressed to policy-makers and practitioners involved in the design and delivery of such measures. They are based on research by Cedefop on effective practices in VET systems.

Tip 1: Develop an individual learning or career plan

Establishing an individual learning plan that outlines personalised learning objectives enables young people to benefit from a tailored learning experience. The learning objectives should be clear, realistic and measurable, so that the learner understands what is required to achieve them and can measure their achievements against them.

A learning plan should meet the needs of the individual in terms of both content and learning styles. It could cover for example: subjects to study as part of a learning programme; academic support to be provided; long-term goals for the learner; and post-secondary plans and how the young person can prepare for these. Similarly, a career plan is a way of identifying the learning and development needed to be undertaken in the transition towards or through working life. It may set out a career objective as well as short-term career goals, and identify potential barriers to progression.

An individual learning plan or career plan should be developed in collaboration with the teacher/trainer or other support staff (e.g. counsellor, mentor). It is important that the staff involved in preparing these plans receive appropriate training on how to design and implement them effectively. Where appropriate, parents or guardians may also be involved in the process.

Tip 2: Assess the individual's existing skills and knowledge base

An individual learning or career plan should be formulated based on an initial assessment of the young person's profile and existing skills, and should build on these. This assessment might look at, for example, the level of basic and digital skills of the learner, prior learning and work experience, as well as motivation. It should also identify the individual's needs, for example in terms of learning support. A self-assessment by the learner might form part of this process.

To ensure efficiency in the assessment process, digital tools and AI-powered diagnostic applications can be used to access and verify the level of pre-existing knowledge. Moreover, digital open badges, e-Portfolios or digital micro-credentials can be used to capture "hidden" or under-recognised skills, that may not have received formal recognition. This can ensure that all skills and competences of the learner are taken into account for the learning and/or career path.

Taking this kind of holistic approach to the development of the plan and basing it on an in-depth individual assessment, rather than providing 'directional' guidance (i.e., offering a number of options and asking the young person to choose one) is more likely to be effective with this target group.

Undertaking this kind of initial assessment can help to ensure that the learning programme offered (in terms of level and content) is suited to the young person. It also means that the learner's pathway within that programme can be tailored to their needs.

Tip 3: Tailor the plan to the young person

A learning and/or career plan should take account of the young person's individual circumstances, as well as their existing talents, competences and skills, including their strengths and weaknesses. It is important, for example, to take account of any basic skills that are lacking and to ensure that these are tackled in the early stages of the learning pathway.

The plan should set out realistic learning objectives and clear goals, and should also cover how the individual's support needs will be addressed. For instance, for young people with a high record of absence, the individual plan could address how missed learning time will be recovered.

The use of predictive career mapping tools, digital representations of work in different sectors, or other AI tools that link VET modules to real-time labour-market data can allow learners to see where each pathway leads in the local, regional, and national economy. Such tools can be leveraged to help learners see the relevance of VET programmes, maintain their interest, and thus prevent early leaving.

Tip 4: Utilise the process to empower the young person

It is important that any individual plan is developed in collaboration with the learner. There should be opportunities for the young person to decide what and how they will learn, for example, through opportunities to choose work-based options.

The initial assessment can be an empowering process for the young person. Helping them to identify existing skills and competences, and how these relate to the curriculum, can help to boost their self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem.

This is particularly important for young people who have never achieved a formal qualification, or who have been led to see themselves as a 'failure' in a formal educational context. A supportive and participatory approach can help to rebuild learners' confidence and foster a more positive engagement with education and training.

Tip 5: Conduct regular reviews of progress against the plan

Once the plan has been agreed, ongoing support should be provided by a teacher/trainer, mentor, careers adviser, counsellor or other support person. This ongoing support means that the learning objectives can be regularly reviewed to assess progress. There should be periodic opportunities to provide one-to-one feedback on progress in relation to the plan, and if necessary, to revise the plan in line with this progress.

Digital tools, such as AI-powered dashboards, can be used for monitoring purposes. Such tools can keep track of the learning path of each learner, and flag to teachers, trainers, parents, and other relevant stakeholders if there is any sudden change in the learner's trajectory.

In this way, monitoring progress against the plan can also serve as an early warning system, helping to identify signs of risk of early leaving.

Tip 6: Ensure the young person is committed to the plan

For any individual plan to succeed, it is important that the young person is committed to achieving the targets and goals set out. This commitment can be achieved in a number of ways, including through a positive relationship with the staff member responsible for reviewing the plan, as well as regular opportunities to receive feedback on their progress.

Contracts can also be used as a way of setting out an individualised learning pathway and support plan, which formalises the commitment of the young person. A contract might include, for example, objectives for the young person, together with details of the help and support they are entitled to receive. It may also refer to financial support the young person will receive whilst participating in the contract.

Signing the contract can demonstrate the young person's commitment to meeting their obligations as set out in the contract, e.g. regular attendance, timely completion of assignments, etc. Having the contract in place establishes a two-way agreement, outlining the expectations of the young person and the organisation supporting them and can help to secure the young person's buy-in.

Lastly, validating each step or achievement attained by the learner - for example through the issuance of physical or digital recognised diplomas or badges - can help them feel a sense of accomplishment and motivate them to complete the agreed upon plan.

Tip 7: Address other learning support needs

It is important to ensure that any learning support needs are addressed in order to enable the learner to achieve the objectives set out in their learning plan. These support needs could relate to learning difficulties such as dyslexia, ADHD, autism, and other needs associated with neurodivergent profiles, or to language needs in the case of learners from migrant backgrounds or ethnic minorities for example.

Learners who are often absent need support to develop a plan to make up missed learning time. It is also important to provide alternatives to suspension or expulsion, including onsite support services with multidisciplinary teams.

Digital tools, such as translation software, or applications developed for neurodivergent learners with learning difficulties, can be leveraged to support teachers and learners in implementing learning plans effectively.

For young people facing **complex barriers** to learning, an individual health or well-being plan, or an integrated education and health plan, may be required. Similarly to learning and career plans, a health plan should be based on an initial assessment and should take account of the basic physiological needs (e.g. sleep, hunger) of the learner, as well as their social and psychological needs.

It should aim to achieve the best possible health outcomes, whilst at the same time maximising engagement in learning. A health plan should be regularly monitored. Ideally, parents or guardians should be involved in the process, together with the young person, a staff member from the learning provider, and where appropriate, a health professional.

Tip 8: Strengthen coordination between all actors around the learner

A tailored approach is most effective when **all actors involved in supporting the young person work in a coordinated and coherent way**. This includes teachers, trainers, career advisers, mentors, social workers, psychologists, health professionals, and, where appropriate, employers and parents or guardians.

Clear communication channels and shared responsibility help ensure that the individual learning or career plan is consistently implemented across different contexts. This prevents fragmented support and reduces the risk of conflicting guidance or duplicated interventions.

Multi-disciplinary collaboration is particularly important for learners with complex needs, where educational, social, and health-related challenges are interconnected. Regular coordination meetings and shared digital case-management systems can support this integrated approach, ensuring that all stakeholders have a common understanding of the learner's progress, needs, and risks.

Strengthening coordination ultimately improves the coherence, efficiency, and impact of tailored learning pathways, and increases the likelihood of successful re-engagement and completion.

Expected outcomes

Giving young people the opportunity to steer their own educational pathway through the development of individual learning and career plans and clearly setting-out learning objectives, can increase their engagement and motivation. It also helps them feel a sense of ownership over their future plans and a greater sense of control over their future. Furthermore, if they are actively involved in developing the individual plan, this will give them skills to continue to plan and manage their careers in the future.

Ensuring provision is needs-based and addresses the additional support needs of the young person can break down barriers to learning. This is likely to contribute to increased motivation, attendance, and ultimately higher success rates.

The following outcomes can be expected at different levels:

 INDIVIDUAL	 INSTITUTIONAL	 SYSTEM
• Defined learning and career goals • Increased motivation and positive attitude towards learning and education and training • Improved educational outcomes • Improved well-being • Better understanding of education and training options • Lower absenteeism and early leaving risk • Better understanding of education and labour market pathways • Improved perceived relevance of VET programmes for labour market integration • Recognition of “hidden” skills and competences through digital badges, micro-credentials, or qualifications.	• Provision better meets the needs of learners, in particular at-risk groups • Improved satisfaction among learners • Improved engagement, motivation, and commitment among learners • More effective monitoring and supervision of learner progress, including through digital tools and AI-supported systems • Stronger capacity for personalised learning design and delivery • Improved coordination between teaching staff, support services, and guidance professionals within the institution	• Reduced drop-out and early leaving rates • Improved completion and success rates in VET programmes • Improved labour market integration and career progression of learners • Improved inclusion of learners from minority and high-risk groups • Stronger cross-sectoral coordination between education, employment, and social/health services • More coherent and integrated learner support systems across institutions and regions • Improved policy efficiency through data-informed decision-making and shared monitoring systems • Greater system responsiveness to learner needs and labour market changes

Related protective factors



Education achievement and attendance



Inclusive environment



Positive view of education and training compared to low-paid jobs

Related resources

Statistics and data

 Statistics and data

Links between ELET policies and language support policies for students whose mother tongue is other than the language of instruction

In most countries in Europe policies for language support for students whose mother tongue is other than the language of instruction is not directly linked to policies for tackling early leaving.

 **Austria**  **Belgium**  **Croatia**  **Cyprus**  **Czechia**  **Denmark**  **Estonia**

 **EU level**  **Finland**  **France**  **Germany**  **Greece**  **Hungary**  **Ireland**

 **Italy**  **Latvia**  **Lithuania**  **Luxembourg**  **Malta**  **Netherlands**

 **Poland**  **Portugal**  **Romania**  **Slovakia**  **Slovenia**  **Spain**  **Sweden**

 **United Kingdom**

Good practices

 Good practice

Second chance schools - France

Écoles de la deuxième chance

French second chance schools (E2Cs) offer training programmes which incorporate individualised learning paths tailored to the needs of each participant.

 France

 Good practice

Second Chance School of Matosinhos

The Second Chance School of Matosinhos in Portugal offers a unique education and training programme. Learners design their own training plan which includes vocational training, artistic training, personal and social development and educational support.

 Portugal

 Good practice

Orienta4YEL

Supporting educational and social inclusion of young early leavers and those at risk of early leaving through mechanisms of orientation and tutorial action.

 Germany  Portugal  Romania

 Spain  United Kingdom

Tools

 Tools

DIDO - Dropping-in the dropouts toolkit

The DIDO toolkit contains practical tools aimed at preventing dropout in adult education.

 Belgium  Denmark  Finland

 **Netherlands**  **Portugal**

 **Switzerland**

Publications

 Publications

Bringing it all back home: An innovative approach to the provision of tailored education and training for young people

The Irish ABLE programme offered a flexible curriculum. Students' interests were taken into account both for content and delivery, in order to develop a tailored, relevant course for each individual.

Read more about this programme [here](#)

 **Ireland**

 Publications

Immigrant background and expected early school leaving in Europe: evidence from PISA

This technical brief analyses the relationship between immigrant status and educational expectations in PISA. Migration flows from outside and within the EU have increased in recent years, and this has raised the attention of policy makers and the general public, with special interests on the implications that those flows can have on, among other, the education system and the labour markets.

 **EU level**

 Publications

Recommendations on inclusive education

Based on the COFACE Disability S.H.I.F.T. guide for a meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families. COFACE Families Europe is a pluralistic network of civil society associations representing the interests of all families.

According to article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), signed and adopted by the European Union and all its Member States, and of its General Comment No. 4, State parties must ensure the realisation of the right of persons with disabilities to

 Publications

School achievement and changes in inclusive vs exclusive support

Review of 50 years supporting students with intellectual disabilities and special educational needs in Sweden

Sweden's education system has seen a shift towards more segregated support for students with intellectual disabilities since the mid-1990s, despite its reputation for inclusivity. The study reveals that inclusive approaches were more common before the 1990s but have since given way to more specialised solutions.

 **Sweden**

education through an inclusive education system at all levels, including pre-schools, primary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational training and lifelong learning, extracurricular and social activities, and for all students, including persons with disabilities.

 Publications

Report on the digital transformation in blended learning environments

European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) analytical report

This report aims to highlight the contribution of blended learning to social inclusion through flexible educational pathways as part of a whole-school approach. Blended learning combines traditional face-to-face instruction with digital and online methods, offering a range of benefits such as improved student performance, increased engagement, and support for diverse learning needs, including those with special educational needs (SEN).

 EU level

 Publications

Tutors' relational professionalism

Facilitating innovation in a formalist pedagogical culture

The Italian education system is largely formalist, but a case study of a vocational education and training (VET) programme shows that personalised approaches can be introduced.

 Italy

 Publications

Second chance schools and their impact on youth

Analysis of the profile of youth in second chance programmes and their impact on educational and labour transitions

The article analyses the profile of youth participating in second chance programmes in Spain.

 Spain

 Publications

Second chance schools as socio-educational organisations

Characterisation, offering, functions and mission

The article examines the characteristics and processes of the second chance schools, their educational, labour, and social functions, and their mission and institutional identity.



Teaching basic skills: Literacy

New EC teaching guide for literacy

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission has published a new set of thematic guides for teaching basic skills. These guides support the European Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan, and aim to boost teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments.



Teaching basic skills: Mathematics

New EC teaching guide for mathematics

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission has published a new set of thematic guides for teaching basic skills. These guides support the European Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan, and aim to boost teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments.



Teaching basic skills: Science

New EC teaching guide for science

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission has published a new set of thematic guides for teaching basic skills. These guides support the European Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan, and aim to boost teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments.



Teaching basic skills: Digital skills

New EC teaching guide for digital skills

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission has published a new set of thematic guides for teaching basic skills. These guides support the European Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan, and aim to boost teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments.



Teaching basic skills: Citizenship



OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026

New EC teaching guide for citizenship

The European Education and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission has published a new set of thematic guides for teaching basic skills. These guides support the European Commission's Basic Skills Action Plan, and aim to boost teaching and learning, support educators and enable supportive environments.

 **EU level**

Exploring Effective Uses of Generative AI in Education

The OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026 analyses emerging research that suggests Generative AI (GenAI) can support learning when guided by clear teaching principles.

 **EU level** **International**

 **Publications**

Authentic learner engagement

Pathways to school success - Policy brief

This policy brief focuses on learner engagement as a fundamental driver of school success, well-being, and democratic participation.

 **EU level**

Quick wins

 **Quick win**

Promote the development of individual learning plans

Developing individual learning plans with students helps to secure their ownership and commitment to participating in their chosen learning pathway. They can also be a way of encouraging learners to work towards achieving their goals.

 **Denmark**  **Ireland**

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