



## Liceo del Lavoro

### Promising Practice

*Implemented by:*

La Cometa Società Cooperativa Sociale (Cometa)

*Where:*

Italy

*Status:*

Launched in 2003

*Summary:*

'Liceo del Lavoro' is an inclusive excellence model for decreasing early school leaving and fostering the recovery of young dropouts by promoting their integral human development.

## Overview

Cometa is an Italian organization started in Como in 1986 by a network of families involved in the care and education of children and young people with special educational needs. The development of this organization has been a continuous process of co-construction of services based on actual needs, the exchange of ideas and the search for solutions.

## Description

### Distinctive approach to education

Cometa stands out due to its distinctive approach to education, known as inclusive excellence, recognizing that the main goal is to allow people to become themselves and make a unique contribution. This educational institution has always focused on nurturing high-quality professional skills in its students and their social and emotional development. This approach is designed for individuals who may have dropped out of school early or are at risk of social exclusion. The core goal is to foster their comprehensive human development through the innovative School Enterprise Model.

### The School Enterprise Model

A unique and valuable contribution to work-based learning. It blurs the lines between the working and learning processes. Work serves as a guiding parameter for the teaching methodology, with the production process closely related to the learning process. This integration ensures that education is practical, relevant and aligned with real-world work experiences. Cometa, explicitly focusing on early school leavers, offers a distinctive work-based training programme known as 'Liceo del Lavoro' (Job High School) that is flexible in the starting date and can last up to 3 years. It equips participants with valuable professional skills and provides an EQF3 certificate, enhancing their prospects in further education or the job market.

### An intervention model

The model encompasses three key steps: Engagement, Commitment and Accompaniment, offering personalized guidance and student support. This holistic approach to education empowers students to excel in both their professional and personal lives, and serves as an excellent educational investment to ensure that the main results are achievable.

## Objectives

The initiative was designed to help young people find workplaces and to support their socio-emotional learning, despite the obstacles faced during the high school period. The specific group of beneficiaries of this programme, early school leavers, may have experienced problems in counselling and choosing their secondary level school after primary. Most of them show learning disabilities, often not officially recognized, or complex family backgrounds, which have affected their motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Firm guidance and psychological support are required to recover from school failures and re-discover their potential capabilities. They are usually 16-19 years old and:

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

### Creating an educational pathway that is responsive to the needs of students

Liceo del Lavoro was created to address one of the problems afflicting our era, particularly in Italy – the high percentage of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and dropout students.

Many young people are struggling with an increased feeling of disconnection with the education system, which may seem irrelevant or unresponsive to their circumstances or learning needs and a lack of interest in the curriculum, not seeing the value in the education being provided, or not having a sense of belonging within the school community.

The concept of 'Liceo del Lavoro' could be considered an innovative practice for several reasons:

- **Tutoring**

The main ingredient is the educational relationship with students, especially with the tutor and all people involved in the programme.

- **Targeted curriculum**

It focuses on an academically rigorous curriculum closely aligned with the labour market, ensuring students are well-prepared for employment immediately after graduation.

- **Partnerships**

The institution fosters partnerships with local businesses and industries to provide students with hands-on experience through internships or apprenticeships, making their education relevant to current job markets. Philanthropic foundations, public money and fundraising have supported the project for two decades.

- **Skills development** It emphasizes developing technical skills required for specific jobs and soft skills such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving, which are crucial in any career path.

These elements together create an educational pathway that is responsive to the needs of students, the economy and society, making 'Liceo del Lavoro' an innovative model in the field of education.

## Outcomes and impact

The School-Enterprise method is a powerful tool that prepares young dropouts for the real world of work. By providing work placements tailored to their interests and abilities, this model helps them gain valuable experience and develop the skills they need to succeed in their chosen careers. Additionally, the personalized approach ensures that each student's needs are met, including any socio-emotional challenges they may face. This holistic approach to education is critical to unlocking the potential of young dropouts and setting them on a path to success. The positive effects of this programme:

- 90% of dropout students completed their new career at Cometa.
- 95% of students admitted that their soft skills increased.

- After four months of obtaining their degree, 90% of students found employment and are no longer dependent on their families. The employment rate of graduates is 8% higher than other vocational education and training (VET) schools in Italy.

Cometa provides a holistic education focusing on technical skills and soft skills development. This approach has proven highly effective, as evidenced by its graduates' high completion and employment rates.



## Challenges

### Project's sustainability

The project's sustainability requires a solid, personalized approach. It emphasizes learning from real-life, practical experiences rather than traditional academic theoretical teaching. The concept is rooted in the belief that the most effective learning occurs when students are engaged in activities that reflect the complexity and the nuances of the real world.

### Funding

Regular appeals for private funding to complement the public funding are held. Incentives for local industry partners include contributing to the programme's financial success and considering their opinions when specific training opportunities are developed.

### Scalability and adaptability

The initiative should adjust to new technologies, teaching methods and industry trends while maintaining the quality of education and personalized support that are its hallmarks. This attitude requires dynamic curriculum development, continuous teacher training, and the ability to proactively forecast future skill demands to prepare students for the job market.

## Insights

Working on motivation is essential for dropouts because it can rekindle their interest in education, lead to academic success, boost self-esteem, open doors to more opportunities, enhance social integration, support personal growth, and reduce the risk of dropping out again. Motivation is vital in helping these individuals get back on track and achieve their full potential. The main lever to build motivation is a relationship in which the students feel themselves valued for their real potential.

## Next steps

The aim is to pursue the construction of training pathways that allow for the genuine inclusion of target groups at risk. This practice has been implemented to contribute to the ultimate goal of creating an inclusive ecosystem, a multi-level approach (governance, management and training) in which all actors involved in the process of educational and work-related growth of young people can make their contribution.

### Learn more

**Federica Facco and Teresa Salvino**, Cometa, helped to compile this document.

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