



**Promoting digital transformation  
and social innovation in VET  
for better access of deaf students  
to the labour market**

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# Practical Guidebook



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## 1. Introduction

The integration of deaf people into the labour market is one of the most important challenges; in Europe, more than half of the million people who have experienced hearing loss are unemployed, and those who have found employment tend to work in low-paid and unskilled jobs. Nowadays, educational provision for people with severe hearing loss in Europe is very limited and largely focused on school education and apprenticeships rather than long-term employment.

Because of this, this practical guidebook aims to provide support and empowerment for the three target groups:

- VET Trainers/Teachers
- VET Students
- Entrepreneurs

in the labour market, especially in Industry 4.0 jobs. Through the acquisition of digital and social entrepreneurship skills people with hearing impairments and professionals working with them (VET trainers/teachers and entrepreneurs) will be better integrated into the digitalised labour market.

Priory developing the following guidebook, 3D4DEAF Project Consortium conducted indeept desk research to describe the state of the art in the field of digitalization and the situation of deaf people in education and in the labour market. Also, in each Partner Country (Poland, Spain, Cyprus, Greece and Italy) focus groups with target groups were organized to identify their needs and opinions.

For each target group, a section with tips and guidelines is followed on how to support deaf/hearing loss people to effectively transition people with hearing impairments in the labour market.

## 2. Glossary

### Hearing loss

According to World Health Organization (WHO) a person is said to have **hearing loss** if they are not able to hear as well as someone with normal hearing, meaning hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better in both ears. Hearing loss can be mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe or profound, and can affect one or both ears. Major causes of hearing loss include congenital or early onset childhood hearing loss, chronic middle ear infections, noise-induced hearing loss, age-related hearing loss, and ototoxic drugs that damage the inner ear.<sup>1</sup>

### Vocational education and training (VET)

Eurostat defines vocational education and training, abbreviated as VET, sometimes simply called vocational training, as the training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation in which the student or employee wishes to participate.

Vocational education may be undertaken at an educational institution, as part of secondary or tertiary education, or may be part of initial training during employment, for example as an apprentice, or as a combination of formal education and workplace learning.<sup>2</sup>

### Entrepreneurship

The European Commission sees entrepreneurship as acting upon opportunities and ideas and transforming them into value for others, which can be financial, cultural, or social. You can read more on how the EU supports entrepreneurship here: [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/supporting-entrepreneurship\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/supporting-entrepreneurship_en)

### Industry 4.0

IBM, one of the world's biggest and oldest IT companies, says that Industry 4.0 is revolutionizing the way companies manufacture, improve and distribute their products. Manufacturers are integrating new technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and analytics, and AI and machine learning into their production facilities and throughout their operations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.who.int/health-topics/hearing-loss#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/hearing-loss#tab=tab_1)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_\(VET\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_(VET))

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ibm.com/topics/industry-4-0>

### 3. VET Trainers/Teachers

#### Description

In the dynamic landscape of vocational education and training (VET), educators play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their students, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. As a VET trainer or teacher, your mission extends far beyond imparting technical knowledge; it encompasses nurturing the confidence, skills, and motivation necessary for your deaf students to embark on successful journeys into the labour force. This guidebook is designed to provide you with invaluable insights, strategies, and actions to empower and assist your deaf learners, equipping them with the self-assurance and capabilities they need to find employment swiftly and with confidence.

In an ever-evolving job market where diversity and inclusion are increasingly valued, VET trainers and teachers stand at the forefront of transforming educational experiences for all learners, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The role you play in preparing these students for the labour force is multifaceted, extending beyond the classroom walls. You are not merely educators; you are mentors, advocates, and catalysts for change. This guidebook recognizes the significance of your mission and seeks to equip you with the knowledge and strategies needed to inspire and support your deaf students as they embark on their professional journeys.

Deaf individuals, like anyone else, possess unique talents, aspirations, and potential contributions to the workforce. However, they may encounter barriers and biases along the way. As VET trainers and teachers, your commitment to inclusivity, equal opportunity, and tailored support can make a world of difference. This guidebook delves into practical approaches, drawn from best practices and real-world experiences, to ensure that your deaf students not only find employment but do so with enhanced confidence and self-worth. Together, we can build a labour market that thrives on the richness of diversity, where the unique perspectives and abilities of deaf individuals are valued and integrated into the fabric of our society.

## Tips and Guidelines

In this section, VET trainers/teachers can find useful tips and guidelines to follow:

### Tip 1: Establish a Supportive Environment

Creating an inclusive and welcoming classroom atmosphere is the first step toward motivating your deaf students. Foster a sense of belonging by promoting open communication, encouraging questions, and respecting individual learning styles. Ensure that your teaching materials and technology are accessible, and consider the diverse needs of your students. Building a supportive community within your classroom can be a powerful motivator, as it reinforces the idea that everyone has a valuable role to play in the labour market.

### Tip 2: Set Clear and Achievable Goals

Motivation often thrives in the presence of clearly defined objectives. Work with your deaf students to establish personalized career goals. Break these goals down into manageable steps, allowing for a sense of achievement along the way. By helping students see a clear path towards their desired careers, you can ignite their motivation and determination to succeed in the job market.

### Tip 3: Encourage Self-Advocacy

Empower your deaf students by teaching them how to advocate for themselves in educational and workplace settings. Equip them with effective communication strategies, such as using assistive technologies or requesting accommodations when necessary. By fostering self-advocacy skills, you not only boost their confidence but also prepare them for the challenges they may face during their job search and career.

#### Tip 4: Emphasize Transferable Skills

Highlight the importance of transferable skills that transcend specific job roles. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability are highly valued by employers. Tailor your curriculum to develop these skills in your deaf students, enabling them to stand out in a competitive job market.

#### Tip 5: Connect Learning to Real-World Experiences

Make learning tangible and relevant by incorporating real-world experiences into your teaching. Engage your deaf students in internships, job shadowing, or industry-specific projects. These hands-on opportunities not only enhance their skills but also build their confidence and understanding of their chosen field.

#### Tip 6: Offer Mentorship and Role Models

Introduce your students to successful deaf individuals who have navigated the labour market successfully. Arrange mentorship opportunities or invite guest speakers to share their stories. Seeing deaf role models thriving in various careers can inspire and motivate your students, reinforcing the belief that their goals are attainable.

#### Tip 7: Provide Comprehensive Career Guidance

Guide your students through the entire career development process. Offer assistance with resume building, interview preparation, and job search strategies. Equip them with the tools and knowledge they need to navigate job applications, interviews, and workplace interactions with confidence.

#### Tip 8: Foster Inclusive Learning Environments

Promote inclusivity in your classroom by providing a variety of accessible learning resources. Utilize captioning for videos, provide written transcripts, and use visual aids to support your deaf students. Encourage collaborative learning, where students of different abilities work together, fostering a supportive and inclusive atmosphere.

#### Tip 9: Stay Informed About Assistive Technologies

Stay updated on the latest assistive technologies and tools available for deaf students. Familiarize yourself with communication devices, real-time captioning services, and other assistive apps or software. By



incorporating these technologies into your teaching methods, you empower your students to access information more independently.

### **Tip 10: Celebrate Diversity and Achievements**

Recognize and celebrate the diversity within your classroom, including the achievements and progress of your deaf students. Highlight their success stories to inspire and motivate the entire class. Building a culture of inclusivity and acknowledgement reinforces the idea that everyone has a valuable role in the labour force.

### **Tip 11: Accessible Course Materials**

Ensure that all course materials, including textbooks, handouts, and online resources, are accessible to your deaf students. This may involve providing digital versions with text-to-speech capabilities or using learning management systems that support accessibility features.

### **Tip 12: Individualized Learning Plans**

Work with each deaf student to create an individualized learning plan that addresses their unique needs and goals. Tailor your teaching methods, assessments, and support services to accommodate these plans.

### **Tip 13: Collaborate with Support Services**

Collaborate closely with support services on your campus, such as disability resource centres and sign language interpreters. These professionals can provide valuable assistance in ensuring your deaf students have the necessary accommodations.

### **Tip 14: Use Visual Aids Effectively**

Incorporate visual aids, diagrams, and infographics into your teaching materials to enhance comprehension. Visual elements can help convey information more clearly to students who rely on visual cues.

### **Tip 15: Encourage Peer Support**

Foster a sense of community and peer support within your classroom. Encourage students to work together and support one another, creating an inclusive learning environment where everyone benefits from each other's experiences.

### **Tip 16: Regular Communication Check-Ins**

Schedule regular one-on-one check-in sessions with your deaf students to discuss their progress, address concerns, and provide feedback. Open lines of communication can help identify and resolve issues promptly.

### **Tip 17: Incorporate Real-World Scenarios**

Bring real-world scenarios and case studies into your lessons to illustrate practical applications of the content. This approach can make the material more engaging and relevant to your deaf students.

### **Tip 18: Sensitivity Training**

Consider offering sensitivity training to your entire class to promote understanding and awareness of the challenges faced by deaf individuals. This can create a more empathetic and supportive classroom environment.

### **Tip 19: Stay Updated on Accessibility Standards**

Stay informed about current accessibility standards and best practices. Familiarize yourself with regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure your teaching materials and methods comply with legal requirements.

### **Tip 20: Encourage Self-Advocacy Skills**

Empower your deaf students to advocate for themselves. Teach them how to communicate their needs, request accommodations, and assertively seek the support they require both within the classroom and in future workplace settings.

## 4. VET Students

### Description

For deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals pursuing vocational education and training (VET), the journey into the labour force can be both an exciting opportunity and a unique challenge. As a deaf VET student, you bring a wealth of potential and talent to the table, and your aspirations deserve every chance to flourish. This guidebook is specially crafted to empower you with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to not only navigate the labour market effectively but also to position yourself as a competitive and confident candidate. Your journey is important, and with the right guidance, you can overcome obstacles and realize your professional dreams.

The transition from education to employment is a crucial step in your life, and it's essential to recognize the role you play in shaping your future. While challenges may arise, your potential for success is boundless. This guidebook acknowledges your unique journey and the diverse skills and experiences you bring to the workforce. It is a roadmap designed to help you unlock your full potential and thrive in a world of professional opportunities. Together, we will explore practical tips, strategies, and actions that will not only enhance your job-seeking capabilities but also empower you to stand out in the competitive labour market. Your journey into the world of work begins here, and we're here to support you every step of the way.

## Tips and Guidelines

In this section VET students can find useful tips and guidelines to follow:

### Tip 1: Know Your Strengths and Goals

Understanding your unique skills, strengths, and career goals is the first step toward a successful transition into the labour market. Take time to reflect on your interests and what you excel at. Identify the industries and roles that align with your aspirations. This self-awareness will not only guide your job search but also boost your confidence when discussing your potential contributions with potential employers.

### Tip 2: Build a Support Network

Don't hesitate to seek support and guidance from mentors, teachers, career counsellors, and fellow students who have walked a similar path. A strong support network can provide valuable insights, advice, and encouragement throughout your job-seeking journey. They can also help you identify job opportunities and connect you with potential employers.

### Tip 3: Develop Strong Communication Skills

Effective communication is a key asset in the labour market. Work on enhancing your communication skills, both written and spoken and consider learning sign language or other modes of communication that suit your needs. Clear and effective communication during interviews and in the workplace will set you apart as a professional and capable candidate.

### Tip 4: Showcase Your Accomplishments

Create a comprehensive resume and portfolio that highlight your achievements, skills, and experiences. Tailor your application materials for each job you apply for, emphasizing how your qualifications align with the specific job requirements. Providing evidence of your capabilities will impress potential employers and boost your competitiveness.

### **Tip 5: Pursue Continuous Learning**

In today's rapidly evolving job market, continuous learning is key to staying competitive. Consider enrolling in additional courses or certifications related to your field of interest. This not only enhances your knowledge but also demonstrates your commitment to professional growth to potential employers.

### **Tip 6: Seek Inclusive Employers**

Research and target employers are known for their commitment to diversity and inclusion. These organizations are more likely to provide a supportive and accommodating work environment. When you identify such employers, reach out to them proactively and express your interest in joining their team.

### **Tip 7: Cultivate Resilience and Confidence**

Lastly, believe in yourself and your abilities. Job searching can be challenging, and you may face setbacks along the way. Cultivate resilience and maintain a positive attitude. Confidence in your skills and the value you bring to the workplace will shine through in interviews and interactions with potential employers.

### **Tip 8: Networking and Professional Associations**

Join professional associations related to your chosen field. Attend industry-specific events, workshops, and conferences to network with professionals and potential employers. Building a network can open doors to job opportunities and provide you with valuable insights into your chosen career path.

### **Tip 9: Seek Internships and Apprenticeships**

Consider applying for internships or apprenticeship programs in your field of interest. These opportunities provide practical, on-the-job experience and often lead to full-time employment. Don't hesitate to inquire about accommodations to ensure a supportive work environment.

### **Tip 10: Develop a Personal Brand**

Create and nurture your brand, which encompasses your skills, values, and professional identity. Use social media platforms like LinkedIn to showcase your achievements, share industry insights, and connect with potential employers. A strong online presence can help you stand out and attract job offers.

### **Tip 11: Monitor and reduce fatigue**

During learning, especially if you are using hearing aids, you may experience auditory fatigue, which gradually builds up over the day. Get to know how to recognize its signs- rubbing eyes, headaches etc. Remove hearing aids and take regular breaks.

### **Tip 12: Care for Your Mental Health**

Taking care of your mental health is important. Discrimination, access issues, and school work all have an impact. Try some self-care methods and choose what suits you best. You can spend time outdoors, do relaxing exercises, read something not school-related or just spend time with your friends.

### **Tip 13: Adjust Your learning at school**

Take the right place in the classroom, preferably on the first bench in the row from the window - the light behind you will adequately illuminate the blackboard and the teacher's face. Sit at the desk with a student who can help you during the lesson, e.g. open a book faster, indicate an exercise, help with notes, etc. If you get lost in the amount of material, ask the teacher after each class for a written summary of the most important information in plain language. If you have the opportunity, use educational/learning applications and programs. Use the school common room or reading room, where you can get help in learning from your peers/teacher/librarian.

### **Tip 14: Avoid distractions**

Ensure your learning is free from distractions. Seat away from sources of background noise (fans, open doors to hallways), ask the teacher to repeat instructions that occur in background noise, and try to reduce visual distractions in your learning environment.

### **Tip 15: Learn how to deal with discrimination**

Sometimes deaf people experience discrimination. This can impact them, especially in school and work environments. Discrimination doesn't always look the same, and it can arise in many forms. Speak up: don't ignore the discrimination. If you feel safe doing so, let the person know directly that their behaviours are hurtful or discriminatory. If possible, offer suggestions for the future so they can be more mindful. When such kind of actions are repeated take formal action: report discrimination to an authority such as the disability department of your school or HR in your workplace. Many institutions already have procedures in place to handle cases of discrimination.

### **Tip 16: Choose the proper types of accommodations**

Some commonly used accommodations by deaf students include, but are not limited to:  
Interpreting Services

Speech-to-Text Services  
Assistive Listening Systems  
Note-taking  
Captioned Media

Testing Accommodations

Consider how accommodations may vary for you in different situations. For example, accommodations in an online class may be different from when meeting face-to-face. Also, You need to recognize what type of accommodations will be the best fit based on the information being shared, like for complex/technical courses.

### **Tip 17: Use Technology to Communicate**

Many useful apps can help Deaf students communicate with teachers and peers when an interpreter is not present. Remember that these apps may not work for everyone. There are a variety of apps across different platforms that may help you. Do the research and find out, what suits You best.

### **Tip 18: Acquire Digital Skills**

To acquire digital literacy skills for deaf people, it is important to search for deaf-specific resources, learn digital sign language, use applications and software for communication, take online courses with subtitles or sign language interpretation, use accessible video tutorials, and practice regularly.

### **Tip 19: Make Your community aware**

In the classroom environment or at a new workplace, make sure that your teachers and other students or people who are you working with are aware of your deafness so they can make meetings and conversations accessible to you. You can also have conversations with people you interact with often about deafness and accessibility.

### **Tip 20: Practice Self-Advocacy**

It can happen, that You may not hear somebody or if you can't understand the instructions. Assure yourself of communication access and practice Self-Advocacy. For example, You can prepare for these situations by having some phrases ready to use e.g.. "I missed what you said. Can you repeat that?" or "Please look at me while you're speaking so that I can lipread." You will feel more self-confident when You'll be prepared.

## 5. Entrepreneurs

### Description

I. King Jordan, the first Deaf president of Gallaudet University, famously declared in 1988 that “Deaf people can do anything hearing people can do except hear.” Since then, a lot changed, but still, deaf people are underestimated as employees. The employment of deaf people requires certain conditions to be taken into account: adapting courses and training to the communication needs and perceptual abilities of deaf people, providing a sign interpreter at interviews or a video interpreter service where possible, but above all building an inclusive and welcoming working environment, which may require changes in attitudes and behaviour.

### Tips and Guidelines

In this section, entrepreneurs can find useful tips and guidelines to follow:

#### **Tip 1: Choose the right communication method**

Deaf or hearing loss people will have different communication needs in the workspace. Entrepreneurs or employers can include different methods such as Sign language interpreters, Electronic notetakers which can type a summary of the spoken word onto a computer using specialist software and Speech-to-text reporters which record the speech and transform it into text.

#### **Tip 2: Carry out a workplace assessment**

It's good to start by defining what is the current state of the art in Your company and what may be needed to provide deaf employees with needed adjustments. Carry out an audit on the adaptation of the workplace and the form of training (initial training, emergency preparedness, on-the-job training). This will identify simple changes you can make to remove barriers for your employees.

#### **Tip 3: Provide accessible training**

During the training process, provide captioning on all training videos. It will not only make them accessible to the deaf, but it can also help all new hires retain more information. Employees who are Deaf or hard of hearing must have access to all training materials to have a fair chance at succeeding in their new job.

#### **Tip 4: Build colleague communication & department awareness**

During a new employee's orientation, everyone who will be working with them should be notified of the new hire's preferred communication methods. Educate the department on the proper etiquette and how to provide an inclusive environment. Colleagues should know the best way to get the individual's attention



when needed and how to communicate in writing or verbally. Encourage team-building activities that foster inclusivity through non-verbal means, such as visual aids or interactive group exercises.

#### **Tip 5: Organize the meetings properly**

When setting up for a meeting, choose a space that will provide the deaf employee with good visual access, ample lighting and a direct line of sight if there is a primary speaker. Before the meeting begins, ask the employees how they would like to communicate and contribute during the meeting. Provide all written materials (an agenda, presentation, handouts) before the meeting. Try to inform others in the meeting that they should avoid talking over each other and participate one at a time. This way, it will be clear who the speaker is.

#### **Tip 6: During and after the meeting**

Ask all the participants to raise their hands before speaking. This allows interpreters to switch narrations and allows users to easily identify who is speaking. In virtual meetings, turning cameras on should be obligatory, so Deaf employees can lip-read. Those who can't lip-read can still pick up social cues through facial expressions. It's recommended also to record the meetings. It can be difficult for Deaf employees to take notes while watching an interpreter or reading captions. Having a recording they can refer to is likely to be helpful for your Deaf and hearing team members alike. Additionally, You can provide transcription, note-taking, live captioning or interpreter, depending on the employee's preferences and needs.

#### **Tip 7: Revise Your organization's emergency preparedness plan**

Unfortunately, still, most buildings don't have the proper arrangements to notify deaf employees in the event of an emergency. Flashing lights should accompany any sound alarms. For emergency announcements made over loudspeakers or intercoms, use a buddy system to ensure the employee gets the message. You can use text and email emergency alerts. During orientation, walk the employee through any evacuation plans.

#### **Tip 8: Learn about accommodations for deaf employees**

Employers are responsible for providing reasonable accommodations to facilitate effective communications, which can range from providing a full-time sign language interpreter to simple adjustments in company culture. Oftentimes, you can use a combination of multiple solutions to support communication and effective work between Deaf and hearing colleagues.

#### **Tip 9: Find a shared comfort level**

When hiring a Deaf employee, don't assume their needs. It's acceptable, respectful, and easy to ask about their preferred methods of communication. Since everyone is different, individuals can have varying needs and preferences. As part of onboarding, consider discussing the most effective options for company-wide meetings, team updates, colleague interactions, employee reviews, and individual workspaces. The more you communicate up front, the better workplace communications will be over time.

### **Tip 10: Prepare proper job adverts**

If You are planning to employ a deaf person, make sure that your job adverts let prospective applicants know that you support people with disabilities and value equality and diversity in the workplace. Some people with hearing loss may prefer not to use the phone, so always provide an alternative contact method for gathering more information (an email or mobile number for SMS messaging). If You are using any recruitment agencies brief them on your ambition to recruit a diverse workforce including people with disabilities. You may also reach Employment Support Services, which supports people who are deaf or have hearing loss to access and thrive in employment. Use plain language form and avoid jargon in the application form. Clearly state on the application form that you offer communication support at interviews if needed.

### **Tip 11: Make interviews accessible**

Make sure the lighting in the interview room is good so that the candidate can see the interviewer's lips. The candidate should not be facing a window, as this puts the interviewer's face in shadow. Check with the candidate that the seating arrangement works for them. Keep in mind that, with support, hearing loss needn't be a barrier to people carrying out most jobs.

### **Tip 12: Make accommodations right away**

Implement the accommodations starting on a Deaf employee's first day. It will show the character of your work culture and make your new employee feel more welcome, as well as help the whole team effectively communicate. It will support also a smoother onboarding process as they easily absorb new-hire information in a way that works for them.

### **Tip 13: Try to reduce unnecessary noise**

If possible, improve the acoustics in an office: use soft furnishings such as carpets, install acoustic panels, and fit rubber caps on chairs and table legs. It will help to reduce noise. If You play music, either turn this off or down. If possible, arrange the position of an employee with hearing loss in a work area that has good acoustics.

### **Tip 14: Take advantage of assistive products and technology**

There's a wide range of products and technology that can help to remove barriers in the workplace for people who are deaf. Check them together with Your employee, and choose what suits you best.

### **Tip 15: Get to know the features of the equipment You already have**

It's also worth considering that assistive technology doesn't have to be an extra or specialised piece of equipment. Lots of everyday software programs and devices, such as smartphones, have built-in features that can enhance accessibility for people with hearing loss.

### **Tip 16: Use visual aids**

Besides professional visual aids such as graphs, maps and diagrams, You can also create Your visual aids eg. on good communication tips. Together with Your team, You can create pictograms showing the rules for communication with deaf employees. It can be also a great team-building activity.

### **Tip 17: Be patient, flexible, and understanding**

Accessibility may be a new practice, but don't give up! It's up to all team members to create an accessible culture and it doesn't take a lot to make someone feel included and valued.

### **Tip 18: Encourage self-advocacy**

Encourage your deaf employees to advocate for themselves. Ask them how to communicate their needs, request accommodations, and assertively seek support in workplace settings if needed.

### **Tip 19: Use external funds and opportunities**

Explore available government incentives, vocational rehabilitation programs, and non-profit organizations to access external funds for integrating deaf employees. Additionally, inquire about EU funds if applicable. Stay updated on changing regulations and seek guidance from relevant agencies or consultants for comprehensive support.

### **Tip 20: Provide a welcoming and inclusive workplace**

Do your best to implement accommodations that can ensure employees who are Deaf and hard of hearing succeed in their position and produce their best possible work for the benefit of the company.



[www.3d4deafproject.eu](http://www.3d4deafproject.eu)



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