



**MEETING OF THE NETWORK OF MISEP
CORRESPONDENTS**

Pierre Mendès–France Conference Centre, Paris, France

**Achieving the activation of jobseekers: successful
strategies for case management**

3rd – 4th November 2008

REPORT



1 INTRODUCTION

A meeting of the MISEP network took place on 3rd and 4th November 2008 at the Pierre Mendès–France Conference Centre, in Paris, France, and focused on achieving activation of jobseekers: successful strategies for case management.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss approaches to achieving the activation of jobseekers and to exchange good practice and policies.

There were two sets of two parallel workshops:

- Workshops 1a and 1b: Successful tools for the assessment and profiling of jobseekers: how can early diagnosis help to improve reintegration outcomes?
- Workshops 2a and 2b: Shaping individual commitment and intervention – what works?

The main participants were the national MISEP correspondents, who are representatives of national Employment Ministries and Public Employment Services (PES), as well as the European Commission.

Background information prepared for this meeting and copies of overhead slides used by the speakers can be found on the EEO website.

<http://www.eu-employment-observatory.net/>

Readers should also refer to the French EU Presidency website:

<http://www.ue2008.fr/PFUE/lang/en/accueil>

2 EMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE

Ms. Annie Gauvin, Director of the Studies, Statistics and International Affairs Department, National Employment Agency (ANPE), France, welcomed participants to the meeting and introduced the theme of case management as means of achieving the activation of jobseekers. Supporting jobseekers in finding work is a key concern and is critical to employment issues. Furthermore this issue is crucial to achieving both the Lisbon Strategy and European Employment Strategy. Significant progress has already been achieved, with diverse programmes for the activation of jobseekers and unemployed people implemented across Europe. The current economic downturn and the potential impacts on employment were also highlighted. In light of this situation, unemployed people and jobseekers need programmes that help return to employment quickly, with job vacancies made available as soon as possible.

An overview of the current situation in France was also presented. The current merger between the national employment agency (ANPE) and the benefits agency will provide a renewed service to jobseekers.



The role of public employment services (PES) in flexicurity was also discussed. The basics of PESs remain the same – delivering the right service, to the right people, at the right time. It is important to continually deliver appropriate and better services to jobseekers to support them into employment.

Mrs Isabelle Eynaud-Chevalier, Head of employment and vocational training policies service, “Délégation générale à l’emploi et à la formation professionnelle” (DGEFP) (Ministry for Economy, Industry and Employment in France) provided the opening presentation to the meeting. Target employment and unemployment rates were discussed. It was highlighted that the overall employment rate was not as good as it could be, with particular reference made to the rise in unemployment over the last two months. To tackle this issue, flexicurity must be considered.

The reform and modernisation of the public employment service (PES) to facilitate labour market mobility was outlined. On 1 August 2008, new legislation on the rights and obligations of jobseekers was introduced, emphasising the joint responsibilities of the PES and jobseekers in their return to work. An aim of this legislation is to achieve equilibrium between the needs of the labour market and those of the jobseeker.

‘Jobseeker personal projects’ (JSPP) for people from more vulnerable groups were also discussed. The PESs must consider new terminology such as ‘reasonable employment offers’ when identifying the types of contracts and jobs on offer, updating jobseekers’ personal projects accordingly. ‘Professional transition contracts’, originally introduced as a pilot in seven employment areas will shortly be introduced across France.

A flexicurity system, the Professional Transition Contract CTP, was explained. This system enabled workers whose redundancy has been notified to keep their original income (when working) or to receive a subsidy when they look for new employment and learn new skills. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are able to access the Contract for a maximum of one year. The CTP has been regarded as an innovative tool in promoting employment; indeed, this approach helped people return to employment quickly, with an average contract duration of 7.6 months and 78% of potential beneficiaries covered by the scheme. Such results were achieved by all components of the PES working effectively together and the use of private providers in the case of mass lay-offs. It was explained that this approach would be used as inspiration for years to come.

Mr Egbert Holthuis, DG Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission provided an overview of the current employment situation and the importance of active labour market policies (ALMPs), from a European perspective. The importance of involving in training all groups, particularly those classified as blue-collar workers, was highlighted.

The current financial and economic crisis and its potential effects on employment were discussed. The concept of ‘last in, first out’, regarding people who have changed jobs within the last three years, was highlighted. In light of this, it was expressed that there is a definite need for activation in the current economic climate.

Europe has made significant progress in working towards the 70% employment target set by the Lisbon Strategy. However, a high number of vacancies remain unfilled. Additionally, a further 20 million jobs are required to achieve the 70% target. This is especially true for selected groups, such as older workers. Effective labour market integration of disabled people was also highlighted as an area where further work is needed.

In line with the theme of the meeting, tax benefits - making it more attractive for people to work - and the effectiveness of sanctions when jobseekers refuse suitable job offers, were



also discussed. It was hoped that the meeting would reveal further information about these issues.

Ms. Nathalie Georges, Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi, CEE - France, provided international comparisons of case management and activation services for unemployed people in Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, based on a survey undertaken by the CEE and the Inspection Générale des Affaires Sociales (IGAS). She first outlined the context for the case management and activation services in the three countries, which included tightening conditions for receiving benefits, improved offers of vocational training and wide-ranging Public Employment Service reforms (introduction of one-stop-shops, use of private providers, professionalisation and tailoring of services, and new tools such as profiling).

The definition of case management includes its objective to provide more efficient services to jobseekers and helping them to take more responsibility for their careers. It also includes defining a personal path to employment, individualised monitoring and provision of services such as coaching or training.

The three countries considered have low unemployment rates in the EU context. However, the strategies for case management differ significantly in the three countries. In Sweden, emphasis is put on training, and the role of the PES and municipalities is significant. In the Netherlands, the role of unemployment insurance and municipalities is crucial, and outsourcing and the notion of protected jobs are also significant elements. In the UK, there are few active programmes, the benefits are low, and the PES acts as a one-stop-shop in intensive activation. Expenditure on the various services also differ substantially between these countries. The similarities include moves to individualised case management and the use of unique case managers, with the PES acting as one-stop-shop for all services, granting of benefits under contractual obligations and introduction of sanctions, and greater use of profiling, outsourcing, experimentations and evaluations.

Such developments can also be detected in France, where the merger of the PES and unemployment insurance is associated with the implementation of one-stop-shops, individual pathways and plans, regular monitoring and profiling, as well as an increase in outsourcing of services, experimentation and evaluation of interventions.

Discussion

The concept of the unique case manager was discussed, highlighting different approaches in various countries, from some countries where the work of PES counsellors is segmented and concentrated on a certain element in the process, to other countries where counsellors undertake all case management tasks.

Another point of debate concerned the definition of a reasonable job offer to a jobseeker. One of the elements of such job offers in France is expected wages, which are related to previous wages and geared to the realities of the labour market, and are subject to change during the individual's job search process.

Mr. Jean-Marc Boulanger, IGAS – France, introduced the service for jobseekers offered by the new merged institution ANPE / UNEDIC in France. A decision to merge the territorial networks of the two institutions was made at the end of 2007 by a tripartite agreement, and from 1 January 2009 a new body, “*Pôle Emploi*”, will be operational.

The introduction of this new organisation was based on the review of key lessons from other countries.

The work of the new merged institution is based on the following principles:

- It will be an *active* intermediary.



- Its priority will be to act in the short term to ensure a fast return to work. However, it will also support individual careers and companies in the longer term.
- It must also ensure a return to work for people with specific social problems.
- It will take into account the fact that it works in regional and local labour markets with independent stakeholders.
- It will work with other stakeholders, such as local authorities, private partners, with clear responsibilities and lines of accountability.
- It will be a tool for implementing the aim of providing better services to jobseekers and meeting the needs of the labour market.

The merged institution will offer a new service to jobseekers, which will consist of the following elements:

- The service will be customised and implemented systematically
- The customised service will begin immediately.
- It will involve frequent contacts with a single referral agent.
- It will seek a fast return to work based on an initial diagnosis and will implement an individual action plan.
- It will mobilise a unique range of services.
- It will be based on mutual commitment.

In the service offer, the initial diagnosis will be important as the level of service provided will depend on the initial diagnosis. The new merged institution will also aim to provide a dedicated team to assist jobseekers.

Discussion

The role of private operators is becoming increasingly important. One fruitful aspect of the case management process involves private operators providing placements for jobseekers. However, it is also possible to envisage entire paths to work being managed by private operators. In France, for example, there are discussions currently as to whether 20-25% of the caseload of, around 100,000 jobseekers, could be handled by private operators.

The level of service in the new merged organisation of ANPE/UNEDIC was also discussed. Increased productivity from a merger such as this can be reasonably expected. The level of service of 40-60 jobseekers per counsellor is being considered, but no precise targets have been set.



WORKSHOPS ON THE ACTIVATION OF JOBSEEKERS: SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Workshop 1a: Successful tools for the assessment and profiling of jobseekers: how can early 'diagnosis' help improve reintegration outcomes?

Chair: Els Van Winkel (European Commission)

Presenters: Todor Krastev (MISEP Bulgaria)

Margaret Grierson (MISEP United Kingdom)

Rapporteur: Roger Sumpton (EEO)

Mr. Todor Krastev, MISEP Bulgaria, began the workshop with a presentation on the assessment and profiling of jobseekers as part of the reintegration services offered by the Employment Agency in Bulgaria.

A brief overview was provided of the origins of the PES in Bulgaria and how it functions today. This was followed by a look at one of the main policy priorities of the PES; the activation of unemployed and inactive persons. After a sharp decline in unemployment, a number of innovative ALMPs were developed. Since 2005, a process model reform has been implemented throughout the PES, offering a one-stop service to jobseekers and employers. This breaks the available service down into smaller parts, making it more transparent and accessible to jobseekers. For employers, the service is much more interactive, with telephone and online vacancy advertising available. For jobseekers, an officer collects as much information from them as possible at the first appointment, so they are placed in the most appropriate group. Furthermore, particular attention is paid to engaging jobseekers in lifelong learning, as Bulgaria has one of the lowest lifelong learning participation rates in Europe.

A special system is in place for mass lay-offs. Employers are required to contact the PES 30 days prior to lay-offs occurring. Specialist emergency teams are then formed to identify resources and vacancies in the local area.

Results show that the system is most effective in larger cities. The service is trying to place more emphasis on employers in smaller regions, to serve them in a more dynamic way.

Ms. Margaret Grierson, MISEP United Kingdom, provided a second presentation that also highlighted the modernisation of a PES and an improved service to unemployed people.

The presentation began with a description of the services provided by the PES - Jobcentre Plus. It is a 'work first' organisation that delivers labour market services to activate harder to reach groups. More recently, improving jobseekers' skills has played a bigger part in its overall offer. Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), first introduced in 1996, has been very successful; 60% of claimants find work in three months and 80% in six months. Eligibility for JSA emphasises jobseekers' rights, such as benefits and jobsearch support, and their responsibilities to actively search for employment. The jobseeker attends an interview every two weeks, and 13- and 26-week reviews are used to discuss their jobsearch activities. Specialist support is provided to those who are unable to look for work or are not doing so.



If jobseekers are unsuccessful in finding work after the 26-week period, they are assigned to the New Deal. This is a programme specifically targeted and delivered according to the needs of selected groups. New Deal for 18-24 year olds, is a mandatory programme which provides job application, CV completion and interview support to young jobseekers. New Deal 25+, is mandatory for jobseekers aged over 25, who have been claiming benefits for 18 months. After six months on this programme the jobseeker is handed over to a private provider who will look for work placements and training. The hand-over from the jobcentre to private providers is reported as very successful; the jobseeker sees the agency as supporting them as it provides a greater focus on their individual needs.

In April 2009, a further programme - the Flexible New Deal - will be introduced. It is planned that after 12 months of claiming JSA, a jobseeker will be handed over to the private sector. Private providers will be paid on outputs; these will include placing people into work, as well as the sustainability of jobseekers' employment.

Discussion

The success factors of the approach in Bulgaria were discussed. It was queried how far migration was responsible for the success of the programme (and the reduction in unemployment). The increase in demand for labour was the main driver for the decrease in unemployment, although migration has also helped. The classification of jobseekers and its subjectivity was also discussed. It was explained that the system has some flaws, although it is possible to renegotiate employment goals with the jobseeker during interviews. The importance of matching labour market demand and supply was highlighted. To help with this, employers are able to use the information system to search for unemployed people with specific skills.

In the UK, it was noted that whilst the PES is interested in training jobseekers to help in their jobsearch, it will not train people in completely new skills. Discussions with jobseekers focuses on the skills and experience that they already have; any re-training that the jobseeker wants to undertake is to be undertaken in their own time.

In summary, it was clear that the modernisation of employment services for unemployed people in Bulgaria and in the UK has been very effective. There has been a definite trend towards increased assistance for jobseekers and extending activation to those groups that need additional support. Lastly, outsourcing and greater involvement of the private sector in labour market services is very present in today's PESs.

2.2 Workshop 1b: Successful tools for the assessment and profiling of jobseekers: how can early 'diagnosis' help improve reintegration outcomes?

Chair: Tina Weber (EEO)

Presenters: Wolfgang Müller (MISEP Germany)

Nessan Vaughan (MISEP Ireland)

Rapporteur: Łukasz Sienkiewicz (EEO)

Mr. Wolfgang Müller (MISEP Germany) provided a presentation on profiling, action strategies and evaluation in Germany. Focusing on all three strands together – profiling, action strategies and evaluation – is critical for the success of this approach. Actions are delivered according to two social codes. The aim of the 'social code III' approach is to integrate people back into the labour market as quickly as possible, with actions based on



being in the system for a maximum of one year. For those who have suffered from long-term unemployment or are otherwise disadvantaged, social code II aims to make the client capable and to develop their employability. An overview of future profiling was also provided. This will be based on a strength analysis and will comprise: educational achievements; professional experience/qualifications; professional skills in a targeted profession; and soft skills and personal strengths.

Key lessons learned through this approach were also reported. An integrated approach is the most effective way of creating an impact and 'hard' skills alone are insufficient for complete profiling. Finally, in identifying what works best, outcome and impact assessments should be undertaken.

Mr. Nesson Vaughan (MISEP Ireland) provided a second presentation on the national action plan preventative strategy. The Employment Action Plan (EAP) is provided for people receiving unemployment benefit (Jobseeker's Allowance/Benefit). Once jobseekers have reached a certain threshold on the register they are identified and referred to the Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the Training and Employment Authority, for an interview, with a view to supporting people back into employment. As part of the process, the client agrees an action plan with the Employment Services Officer and receives priority in terms of the support options available. These include: an intensive support process; access to training/employment programmes; pathways – including group support; increased contact with employers; and enhanced self-help facilities.

Outcomes of the support have been positive. An independent evaluation estimated that approximately, 73% of claimants left the unemployment register last year. This evaluation also revealed that the EAP had reduced the risk of long-term unemployment and recommended that it should be extended to other client groups. It is planned to pilot the EAP with other target groups, including 18 and 19 year olds, lone parents and people with a disability.

Discussion

Control groups for the testing of strategies and the ethics of offering, or not offering, support measures were discussed. This is a difficult issue, as the decision as to whether to include an individual in a control group can be subjective, relying on the personal judgements of case managers. Not all managers will make the same decision and inevitably some customers will be excluded from support measures. The discussion also considered the testing of the skills of jobseekers in ways that are also beneficial to employers. To help address this issue, the employer lists five key skills that are required and jobseekers list five skills they have to offer, allowing effective matching between labour market demand and supply.

2.3 Workshop 2a: Shaping individual commitment and intervention – what works?

Chair: Roger Sumpton (EEO)

Presenters: Ahti Avikainen (MISEP Finland)

Regine O'Neill (MISEP France)

Rapporteur: Tina Weber (EEO)

Mr. Ahti Avikainen (MISEP Finland) provided a presentation on PES reform in Finland between 2004 and 2007; this concerns the establishment of Labour Force Service Centres.



The aim of the reform was to reduce long-term unemployment and involved Employment Services Offices (ESO) and Labour Force Service Centres (LFSC). The reform allowed for ESOs to concentrate on placement, guidance and training, while LFSCs were to focus on people who were most difficult to place. The reform provided tailor-made services to those most in need of additional support and steered others, through the provision of self-directed services, such as online job search support, to help them get back into the labour market. An evaluation of the reform showed that the number of activation plans had increased and that there had been some success in reducing unemployment. Furthermore, the LFSC was able to offer targeted and specialised services. The evaluation also highlighted some areas for improvement: some target groups are still difficult to place; specialised services are not available in all areas, resulting in the exclusion of some potential beneficiaries; and the mobility of clients between the LFSC and ESOs can be limited.

Ms. Regine O'Neill (MISEP France) provided a second presentation on monitoring and case management for jobseekers. An overview was provided of the PES service offer from 2006 to the end of 2008 and the planned service offer from 1 January 2009. Individual action plans (IAPs) were introduced, with the aim of achieving early placement. These plans are regularly updated, based on a diagnosis by an adviser. Importantly, upon registration with the PES, a risk assessment of long-term unemployment is undertaken with an adviser during an initial interview. After four months, if the jobseeker has not found work, a second interview takes place. From then on, if the jobseeker is still unable to find work, an interview takes place every month.

Discussion

The consideration of social and labour market conditions when trying place jobseekers is an important part of the service offer. The scheme, “cap vers l’entreprise”, where an adviser works solely with a jobseeker for six months, contacting them once a week, with at least two interviews a month and follow-up once they have been hired, was discussed. This scheme will also make use of services from private providers to supplement the service offer.

In summary, the workshop demonstrated the complexity of implementing reforms and the intended and unintended outcomes that can come with them. Both presentations provided examples of innovative ways to providing specialist support to groups that need it most.

2.4 Workshop 2b: Shaping individual commitment and intervention – what works?

Chair: Łukasz Sienkiewicz (EEO)

Presenters: Theo Keulen (MISEP the Netherlands)

Cristina Mereuta (MISEP Romania)

Rapporteur: Michelle Harrison (EEO)

The workshop began with a presentation by **Theo Keulen (MISEP the Netherlands)** who discussed approaches to achieving the activation of jobseekers using personalised case management. The presentation focused on the need for a balanced approach between the rights of jobseekers to receive a service from the PES and the obligations of jobseekers to actively seek work. All PESs have a duty to contribute to the reduction in unemployment, by focusing on the shortest route to getting people back into work.



A merger is planned between the Centre for Work and Income and the Insurance Board, to be effective on 1 January 2009. This will establish a one-stop-shop where all actors – jobseekers and employers – are represented. Importantly, several new features will be introduced as part of the merger, including the use of the internet for the registration of jobseekers and unique advisers, who remain the single point of contact throughout the jobsearch process. The traditional profiling tool is no longer used. Now, the focus has shifted to the skills that the jobseeker should take to the labour market.

Indeed, a key lesson learned has been to ensure the provision of a tailor-made service. A risk assessment should be undertaken, relating job search behaviour and labour market vacancies. Using this approach means that both jobseekers and employers get the service that they need. Another key element of good practice described included the concept of ‘ownership’. When using the PES, the jobseeker is in charge of their jobsearch process; this encourages them to take responsibility for their efforts to find employment. This approach has been effective in enhancing compliance from the jobseeker by optimising the service provided.

Particular challenges in delivering the appropriate services to jobseekers were also reported. Importantly, the PES has to strike a balance between acting as a coach and as a gatekeeper; offering further support to those who need it and simply signposting individuals who need less support. PES clients like this approach.

Ms. Christina Mereuta, (MISEP Romania) gave a second presentation on paths to a targeted approach in ALMP design and delivery. Initially, ALMPs were designed to address the large scale restructuring process. However, 2003 to 2004 was a significant turning point, marked by better economic prospects, labour migration and less pressure on the unemployment benefits system. This demonstrated a need for a change in ALMPs.

To identify any necessary changes, four ALMPs, in two regions, were selected for evaluation. These included;

- vocational training;
- business start-up;
- mobility; and
- temporary employment in works of public interest.

Only one ALMP - temporary employment in works of public interest - produced negative results. It resulted in lower employment prospects in the longer-term. Key lessons learned from the evaluation included: designing and delivering ALMPs according to individual characteristics and expectations works better; and providing sufficient training to PES staff for personalised services to jobseekers, including vulnerable groups, is very important. In particular, the training raised awareness about the needs of selected jobseeker groups.

The community based approach, targeted at the vulnerable Roma group, was also discussed. It described how the best social support is paid employment, and how effective this approach can be in engaging disadvantaged groups. This approach was targeted at young people from the Roma community, where they were provided with training and support to find employment. It demonstrated how partnership working at community level is crucial in working with selected groups.

Discussion

Key points raised during the discussion included the importance of early intervention when working with jobseekers. This has been very effective in helping people get back into work as quickly as possible. Furthermore, a personalised customer approach and encouraging



people to take responsibility for their own actions are important. In particular, the two presentations highlighted the complexity of actions and approaches between different Member States. Not all countries are ready to implement all aspects of a personalised customer approach; labour market conditions, such as the number and types of jobs available, must first be considered.

2.5 Plenary session, Day 2

Dr. Tina Weber, EEO, provided a summary of the previous day's discussion as well as an overview of the main findings arising from the background material submitted by the MISEP correspondents. It was emphasised that it is difficult to look at the issue of successful PES approaches to the activation of job seekers without reflecting on the possible impact of the current financial and economic crisis. This is already translating into an increase in redundancies and short time working and the recession is expected to be longer and harder than originally thought. A specific feature of this recession may be a rise in the number of skilled jobless from sectors previously considered to be growth areas. Looking to the short and medium term future, it will be important to see how the PES can adapt their offer to such "new" types of job seekers. The challenge of the current situation for the flexicurity model was also highlighted, as increasing economic difficulties may lead to a temptation to reduce employment security to encourage hiring. Expenditure on training could at the same time increasingly come to be seen as a luxury in companies. Such developments would be short-sighted and should be avoided by ensuring a continued **balanced** flexicurity approach.

Away from the current concerns, some general trends can be discerned in the development of PES approaches to the activation of job seekers over the last 5 years. On the whole, these are very much in line with the recommendations of Guidelines 19 and 20 of the European Employment Strategy, focusing on the modernisation of the PES and the provision of individualised services for job seekers. Such approaches show significant links to the flexicurity strategy in balancing greater emphasis on individualised active labour market policies with greater responsibilities for job seekers through the tightening of eligibility criteria and sanctions for those not actively seeking work. The question whether increased placement rates and lower case loads have been the result of service improvements or simply the outcome of an improved economic situation in many countries is one that needs to be answered, particularly in the context of a changing economic situation, to assess if such positive outcomes are sustainable.

The use of Individual Action Plans is now a key feature of the PES offer in most countries, although there are a number of significant differences in relation to timing; frequency of interaction; profiling and development of specific offers for certain target groups; the offer of a "unique" case worker and case load.

The question of timing is an important one, as the issue of deadweight in relation to early intervention needs to be addressed. Some countries start the process of individual action planning with case workers from day one (or even prior to redundancies occurring); others start only after a significant period of unemployment (up to 21 months). The general trend is towards earlier activation, but some countries still emphasise that very early intervention has significant deadweight issues. Some statistics show that 40% of jobseekers find work within the first 4 months of unemployment. In some countries, the later onset of intensive activation is a resource issue, while others make clear distinctions in the onset of individual action planning with a case worker between different groups of job seekers on the basis of an assessment of their potential risk of long-term unemployment.



Once an action plan has been developed, the frequency of meetings with the case worker also varies significantly from every 1-2 weeks to every 16 months. Again, this sometimes depends on the profile of the job seeker.

There also remain important differences in the level of use of - and access to - individual action planning which ranges from provision for 5% of job seekers to 100%. Decisions about the use of IAPs and individual case worker approaches largely depend on the profile of the job seeker, whether or not the term *profiling* is used. In some countries, the use of the IAP approach is limited to certain target groups, but there is an increasing trend towards the use of this approach for all job seekers because of the demonstrated success of this approach.

Profiling of job seekers is used as a more or less “scientific” method to tailor services to specific client profiles. Some approaches, such as seen in the case of Germany, make extensive use of the measurement of soft and hard factors and evaluation evidence assessing the types of measures which have proved to be most successful in integrating different target groups. Other countries rely less on such methods and models but conduct a more general categorisation into target groups, often coupled with an individual assessment of capabilities and motivational factors. Further assessment is needed to evaluate which types of approaches work better.

There is also a trend towards the use of the “unique” or single case worker approach where job seekers (and in some cases also employers) deal with the same member of PES staff at all times. The clear benefit of such an approach is the ability to build up trust, continuity and reduce bureaucracy (although some countries use IT systems to avoid the repeated collection of similar information). Some disadvantages for such single case worker approaches could include potential character clashes and the development of a “fixed perception” of the abilities of a particular job seeker. The greatest difficulty in maintaining this model is currently linked to financial constraints and staff shortages.

Very significantly, different countries show a huge variation in the case load of PES workers, which early experience from France has shown to have an important impact on outcomes. Case loads vary from 60 job seekers per case worker to 600 or above.

The particular offer made by the PES to job seekers is largely tailored to target groups and/or individual needs, but on the whole the content (if not the balance) of the offer is similar from country to country. It includes self-help; employment mediation; job search skills; coaching; career guidance; training; subsidised work; assistance with start ups and so on. It is significant that in the background materials few countries were able to offer an evaluation of the types of measures which worked best in integrating different groups of job seekers. Having said that, it is clear that the use of evaluation is becoming more widespread. In some countries it is becoming a part of planning the offer of the PES. Evidence presented at the meeting does not appear to provide consistent findings on the most successful measures as some countries argue that subsidised employment works best, while others consider this to be the least successful approach. It is clear that more research is needed in this area to assess what works best for different target groups.

The background material also looked at the nature of the commitment made between the case worker and the job seeker. In two thirds of countries, a signature on the IAP is compulsory, in other countries it is simply considered desirable. This often ties in with the question of whether participation in activation measures is compulsory. While some countries only impose sanctions on those refusing “reasonable” job offers, others also impose sanctions on those failing to take part in activation measures. Sanctions imposed differ significantly from country to country, but are mostly staged and progressive (ranging from the removal from the benefit register from between 1 week to 12 months). In most



countries, the case worker has the authority to impose such sanctions. In others, such cases have to be referred to a higher PES or external authority.

Over recent years, an increasing link has been created between rights and responsibilities of job seekers, as the extension of tailored approaches has gone hand in hand with a tightening of definitions of what is considered to be a “reasonable job offer” (which cannot be refused). “Reasonableness” is linked to a number of factors such as education/qualifications; health status; personal situation; previous salary or status; working hours and/or length of contract offered; and distance from work. The number of offers which can be refused without sanction also differs. There are significant variations between countries regarding the shape of the factors which make up “reasonableness”. Little assessment has been carried out as to the impact on job seeking behaviour of different definitions and levels of sanction.

In terms of providing various activation services, only two countries argue that the private sector plays no role at all in delivery. Providers other than the PES directly can be private companies or NGOs. These are largely used to deliver specialised services such as counselling, training, job placement or services to specific target groups. The details of the service to be provided are usually set out in detail by the PES and regulated through service level agreements. Payment is often governed by targets or outcomes achieved. In some countries innovation has been achieved by organising regular meetings with and between external providers to share best practice.

A number of questions and concerns have been raised in relation to successful approaches to job seeker activation. These include the impact of more individualised activation on the other services provided by the PES – in particular the direct interaction with employers. Some countries have developed successful strategies to deal with this problem. There appears, so far, to have been little evaluation of the involvement of private providers and the areas where their input can prove most useful. More assessment is also required between the links between PES funding and the services offered/outcomes achieved. As well as the question marks over the sustainability of improving PES outcomes in a worsening economic climate, the issue of potential hardships caused by a tightening of eligibility criteria and sanctions also needs to be addressed.

Mr. David Grubb, Employment Analysis and Policies Division, OECD, described success factors in early activation and case management, based on recent OECD research.

Services and arrangements at the start of the unemployment spell (e.g. initial registration, immediate referral to job vacancies, detailed registration interviews, other early client contact) and regular contacts between a jobseeker and the PES were outlined in different OECD countries.

The success factors in early activation and case management can be grouped into three categories:

- Benefit generosity. International comparisons suggest that both active measures and fairly modest changes in benefit generosity (e.g. replacement rates of 65%, rather than 50%) have a significant impact on outcomes.
- Counsellor qualifications and experience affects outcomes significantly. Research has indicated many case-worker factors that influence re-employment rates; case-worker specific training and experience can have positive effects, whilst case-worker age can be a negative factor.



- The extent of centralisation or decentralisation of PES work. On the one hand, decentralisation allows strategies to be adapted to local conditions. However, extensive local autonomy can result in local variation beyond that which can be justified (e.g. possibly driven more by the individual judgements of managers, local politics and historical choices). In addition, there is a relative lack of management information, since statistics are not comparable when the underlying procedures differ; this makes it difficult to analyse relative performance between local offices.

Discussion

The tool of group guidance and registration was debated. In the Netherlands, such a group approach was used with older people, and collective guidance sessions have worked well. In Germany, in contrast, group guidance has been more successful with younger groups. OECD research shows that group sessions can be cost-effective in some roles, for example they can provide initial orientation on jobseeker responsibilities and the PES service offer, allowing individual counseling to take place a little later in the unemployment spell when caseloads are smaller. The contact between the jobseekers and the PES is itself very important to achieve successful outcomes, and group guidance is one of the tools to achieve and maintain such contact.

The discussion also touched on the definition of a reasonable job offer (and the ensuing sanctions, to be applied if a jobseeker does not accept the offer). There is a wide range of definitions and OECD research shows that the definition used tends to vary by client group. In terms of sanctions, some sanctions applied in the early 1990s in the UK have been shown to be effective. Sanctions also play a role in enforcing other PES intervention regimes, such as the obligation on jobseekers to regularly attend the PES office, which can be very effective in achieving job outcomes. Finally, whilst the existence of sanctions can be seen to make a difference, the details of the sanctions themselves are less important in influencing results.

Mme. Wallis Goelen, Head of Unit, Employment Services and Mobility, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, provided concluding comments for the meeting. The PESs make an important contribution to the process of the European Employment Strategy (EES) and they provide invaluable advice to the Commission. The PESs have played a crucial role in the implementation of flexicurity. ALMPs and flexicurity are closely linked, in particular through the ability of PESs to manage transitional periods in the labour market.

There will be several challenges to case management and to the activation of job seekers in the current, global financial crisis. SMEs, in particular, have been affected by difficulties in accessing finance. Linked to this, the PESs can play an important role in raising confidence in the labour market, amongst both employers and jobseekers.

In the future, the PESs will have to do even more to anticipate labour market requirements and competences. They will need to continue developing customised action plans and meeting the needs of individual customers. This has prompted Member States to assess whether the traditional 'target group' approach, or the individual, customised approach, is the most suitable.

To summarise, the flexicurity model is critical in the current economic climate to achieve the EES objectives. The PESs play a very important role in the implementation of all Employment Guidelines and the meeting has been informative in discussing these issues.



Dr Roger Sumpton, EEO, provided an overview of EEO activities. The MISEP network was reminded that their contributions and ideas for further work are welcome.

Mr. Stanislav Benes and Mr. Jaroslav Marousek (MISEP Czech Republic) introduced the next MISEP meeting, to take place in Prague on 5th and 6th March 2009. The meeting will focus on “Labour force mobility: overcoming administrative constraints for foreign migrants” and will include discussions on more effective methods for handling migration in the context of the labour market.

Mr. Jean-Marie Marx, Deputy Director General of the French Employment Agency (ANPE) closed the meeting and thanked delegates for their participation. The current economic climate and financial ‘crisis’ affects European activity as a whole. A rise in unemployment is inevitable in the current climate. As a result, national governments will develop policies to deal with this issue. Critically, a rapid response is necessary and it is important to take measures before people lose their jobs.

In France, a new legislative framework has been introduced. This will manage the merger of the employment and benefits agencies. A new minimum wage and active solidarity revenue will help people get back to work. Furthermore, a range of activities will be developed to cover more people and effectively support them in their return to work. Significant negotiations are also taking place on the future for vocational skills and training. Securing commitment from jobseekers is essential in effectively addressing unemployment. Subsequently, France is actively pursuing a case management approach to reduce its 50% non-compliance rate. It will be useful to see what results the merger will bring.

All delegates were thanked for their contributions to the meeting and to the theme of the activation of jobseekers.