



PES to PES Dialogue
The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme
for Public Employment Services

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

**Core competences in PES,
entrance requirements and on-
going professional
development: the current
position**

Discussion paper

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Executive Summary

European countries differ in terms of PES service models including operational structure, priority tasks and activation strategies which in turn influence the diversification of the job and competence profiles of employment counsellors. With a growing need to pinpoint the common elements of employment counsellors' work in different organisational and structural contexts, both in terms of the tasks and respective competences, **this paper seeks to crystallise comparable core competences common to most Member States.**

Due to a major shift in the roles of PES – towards services focused on activation and facilitation of transitions – the counselling and guidance elements in the job of employment counsellors are strengthened leading **to a job profile that combines the role of broker, counsellor, social worker and includes administration tasks.** As the tasks of the employment counsellors change, so do the competency requirements in general. This **differentiation of the tasks requires a broad range of interdisciplinary knowledge as well as adequate “hard” and “soft” skills** with the expected balance between key administrative and customer service competences.

The analysis indicated that **the lower entry-level requirements can to some extent be traded-off to in-service inception or initial training of the inexperienced employment counsellors,** as the specialised inception/adaptation training is provided in all of the analysed countries. However, the **employment counsellors are formally/legally obliged to undertake on-going training on a regular basis** in a minority of the analysed countries. The main training provided for employment service staff has been found to be administrative rather than career guidance-focused. As such, the **role of employment counsellor calls for a more specialised training in terms of interviewing and counselling competences.**

As the PES characteristics strongly influence the division of work to be performed by PES employees, including employment counsellors, **the need** (due to differences of the service provisions) **or even the possibility** (taking into account the different starting points) **to ‘standardise’ the competency profile of employment counsellors in all European countries is limited in terms of strict definitions and enumerative lists; however, a certain set of ‘key’ competences should be developed.**

While looking at the core competences profile of employment counsellors in European PES, one notes that the list is biased rather towards ‘general’ competences as compared to ‘country/service-specific’ competences. As such, **it seems possible to define a certain minimum standard of service based on the identified set of core competences.** However, given the different starting points regarding entry requirements as well as training offered to employment counsellors, one cannot expect it to be a self-regulating system. **The PES should adopt a competency-based perspective and a ‘life-cycle’ approach to employment counsellors.**

1. Introduction

'PES to PES Dialogue' is the European Commission's mutual learning support programme for public employment services (PES) in the European Union. It aims to contribute to the implementation of the priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy and the Employment Guidelines by helping to increase the capacity and effectiveness of PES. The Commission launched 'PES to PES Dialogue' to help PES to anticipate new trends and needs which require adjustment of their service offer and business models.

The PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper calls for an 'aligning [of] labour market actors with labour market policy' and refers to the 'importance of PES ability to operate with agility in order to ensure maximal labour market policy impact'. In doing so the PES are required to develop into modern transition agencies, delivering and facilitating the delivery of services including a more demand-oriented offer. This fresh perspective poses new challenges for all PES staff.

As the peer reviews, conferences and analytical papers prepared under the PES to PES Dialogue Programme have shown, staff competences and training are key to offering quality services for jobseekers and employers. An analytical paper on the *Job profiles and training for employment counsellors*¹ was prepared in order to better understand **the job profiles, competences requirements and training programmes of employment counsellors who deliver employment guidance and counselling or employer services within the context and role of PES in each Member State**². There is a growing interest in the public sector in European countries, including the PES, in competency modelling which focuses on describing a set of attributes that are specifically linked to an organisation's business strategy and goals³. It is as a result of such analysis that required competency profiles are created.

In preparing the paper a clear emphasis was placed on primary data collection and the development of a comparative evidence base. As the existing data sets and systematic evidence were scarce, the information had to be gathered directly from PES both through the analysis of available documentation as well as direct research (survey and telephone interviews). The major source of information was a structured survey of 22 PES⁴ completed in mid-2012.

Primary research was undertaken allowing us to provide an evidence base and comparative analysis of the models of job and competence profiles and training for employment counsellors prevailing in countries responding to the survey. **The paper seeks to crystallise comparable core competences common to most Member States**. It does not, however, pretend to highlight one or the other approach as best practice as all systems are rooted within their PES's operational context, as well as other existing structures such as prevalent education and training frameworks.

This paper is intended to start the discussion regarding key tasks, competencies and corresponding training for employment counsellors in PES and how these are changing/need to be adapted as part of a changing environment for PES.

¹ European Commission (2012), *Job profiles and training for employment counsellors*, Brussels, Author: Łukasz Sienkiewicz

² As noted in the original paper, a certain shift can be observed with a decreasing use of the notion "placement officer" and an increasing use of the notions "employment advisor" and "employment counsellor" due to a shift of public employment services from more passive (benefit-payment oriented) authorities to activation and more service-oriented labour agencies.

³ Brannick M.T., Levine E.L., Morgeson F.P., *Job and Work Analysis*, SAGE Publications, 2007, p. 156.

⁴ Austria, Belgium (including two answers from FOREM and VDAB), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Romania, Hungary, Malta, Slovenia, Spain and United Kingdom.

2. Core competences of employment counsellors

2.1. Organisational and structural differences of PES are the backbone of the differentiation of job and competency profiles for employment counsellors

Generally speaking there has been a major shift in the roles of PES which originally functioned as more passive and administrative authorities. In more recent years greater emphasis on activation and facilitating transitions together with a shift to new public management have changed the job profile towards more service and client orientation. As a consequence, the counselling and guidance elements in the job of employment counsellors are strengthened⁵, **leading to a job profile that is a combination of a broker, counsellor, social worker and administrator**. This differentiation of the tasks requires a broad range of interdisciplinary knowledge comprising both theoretical foundations (with psychological knowledge being more important in relation to career guidance counsellors) and profound knowledge of the labour market situation and trends, placement, integration and ALMPs⁶.

The job profiles and training for employment counsellors are less clearly defined in the analysed available studies than for career guidance counsellors but the survey revealed that **job profiles for employment counsellors exist in all of the analysed countries**. The process of job and competence profiling of employment counsellors can be regarded as well structured and important in shaping the quality of the service by meeting increasing job requirements. However, international comparisons are difficult as a significant differentiation in relation to the tasks and competencies of employment counsellors, as well as to the features of the profiling process, has been observed. The level of diversification of job profiles varies as can be seen in graph 1 below.

Graph 1. Level of diversification of job profiles of employment counsellors



Diversification of the job profiles is to a large extent dependent on the PES model and activation approach used in the country. European countries differ in terms of service model changes with one being more active in the implementation of new service models while others prefer a more traditional approach. As can be seen in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Latvia, Poland, Sweden, Romania, Hungary and

⁵ However, as noted, a clear distinction has to be drawn between career guidance counsellors and employment counsellors. One important distinction is that employment counsellors usually play a double role – supporting clients on the one hand, but monitoring and sanctioning them on the other. Their work is also more outcome/result oriented with the focus on a rapid (and perhaps sustainable) labour market integration of the clients. Career guidance counsellors' work is more client-oriented with the focus on the longer-term personal and career development. Their work allows for more in-depth and profound counselling services.

⁶ *Professionalisation of Career Guidance in Europe: Training, Guidance Research, Service Organisation and Mobility*, Kraatz S., Ertelt B.J. (eds.), Dgvt-Verlag, Tuebingen, 2011.

Spain, only a generic job profile for employment counsellors is used. In such services the counsellors provide assistance both to jobseekers and employers as there is no specialisation for jobseekers' services or employers' services. **A generic job profile of the employment counsellors can be attributed to the service models in which the counsellors deal with a broad range of clients.** As noted by European Commission (2011a)⁷, this model offers more flexibility to the PES organisation but seems to be drawing the attention of counsellors away from employers to jobseekers as the service for the latter is more time-consuming.

In the rest of the cases the clear diversification of job profiles according to the client group is noticeable (Table 1).

Table 1. Existence of specialised job profiles for employment counsellors

Job profiles for:	Countries:
Employment counsellors for employers	BE FOREM, BE VDAB, HR, EE, DE, LT, MT, NL, PT, SI, AT, UK
Employment counsellors for jobseekers	BE FOREM, BE VDAB, HR, EE, DE, LT, MT, NL, PT, SI, AT, UK
Employment counsellors for unemployed with more complex problems	BE FOREM, BE VDAB, HR, FR, LT, MT, NL, PT, SI, AT, UK, DE
Employment counsellors for young jobseekers	BE VDAB, HR, DE, LT, UK
Employment counsellors for long-term unemployed	BE VDAB, HR, SI, DE
Employment counsellors for older job seekers	BE VDAB, HR

The diversification of job profiles according to two major client groups (counsellors for employers and counsellors for jobseekers) is prevalent in the analysed countries. This is in line with the general changes of the PES service model in which a significant change from a jobseeker-led to an employer-led business model of PES can be found in a number of countries (Sweden, Netherlands, Canada, UK, Finland)⁸. This change causes not only a substantial redefinition of the job task but also requires employment counsellors to develop new sets of competences to deal with rising (or different) job requirements.

Therefore **job profiles for employment counsellors for employers** have been introduced in Belgium FOREM, Belgium VDAB, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, United Kingdom and Austria. This list of countries corresponds with the examples used in European Commission (2011a); this document records a strong commitment to employer-focused services in the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Norway and Finland. At the same time a similar group of countries (Belgium FOREM, Belgium VDAB, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Slovenia, Portugal, Austria, United Kingdom) also have specific **job profiles for employment counsellors for jobseekers**. This supports the observation that the job profiles of employment counsellors are driven mainly by the prevailing PES strategy.

⁷ European Commission (2011a), *How to best structure services for employers?*, The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Analytical Paper, December 2011. Authors: J. de Koning and J. Gravesteijn

⁸ Ibidem.

A number of PES use specialised forms of support for different groups of clients, also requiring differentiation of the job profiles. Clearly visible is the specialisation of the **employment counsellors for the unemployed with more complex problems** followed by the diversification of the job profiles as well (11 countries). Less common is the diversification of the **job profiles of employment counsellors for young jobseekers** which seems to be crucial in terms of the role of PES in labour market integration of young people as it often works as a moderator between training institutions, companies and young people, alongside the development of their own integration strategies⁹. The **least common** is the diversification of the **job profiles of employment counsellors for long-term unemployed and for older jobseekers**. This observation is quite surprising, especially in relation to the latter group. As noted in European Commission 2011c¹⁰, there is a growing number of PES in which interventions are organised to address certain target groups including older workers (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Finland, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia, and United Kingdom), as well as special guidance and tailor-made support to find a job dedicated to the groups of 45+ and 50+ on a project basis (Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden). Furthermore, the paper notes that this tailor-made approach requires the employment counsellors (especially case managers) to have knowledge and skills in dealing with the specific characteristics of older jobseekers. Thus, if the counsellors do not receive relevant training, it may restrict positive placement outcomes for the older unemployed¹¹. However, such specialisations should be carefully considered and implemented in a manner that does not increase the sense of discrimination against this group¹².

Changing job requirements may also stem from the **digitalisation of services**. The use of ICT has undoubtedly had a large impact on extending access to counselling services¹³. As a consequence of the digitalisation of services a major shift towards self-help services has been observed¹⁴, supported by the substantial investment in software and ICT developments to facilitate self-help mode access to required information. Based on the above, two major observations can be made: (1) the time spent by employment counsellors on information and administrative services can be put to more effective use through an in-depth approach to more difficult cases (in relation to clients with more complex problems); (2) the rising ICT skills requirements of the work should be supported by relevant ICT training. **As the use of ICT technologies in the work of employment counsellors seems to be increasing, it also influences respective job profiles, competence profiles and training.**

As stipulated in the analytical paper, the **diversification of job profiles is to a large extent dependent on the operational PES structure, priority tasks and activation strategy used in the country**. Therefore, the various approaches to how the job and competence profiles are defined and used in different countries may help to serve the ultimate goal of meeting the job specifications of employment counsellors which ultimately focus on the successful (re-) integration of job seekers. Nevertheless, **there is a growing need to pinpoint the common elements of employment**

⁹ European Commission (2011b), *The Role of Public Employment Services in Youth Integration. A Review of European Good Practice*, The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Analytical Paper, April 2011. Authors: Duell N., Vogler-Ludwig K.

¹⁰ European Commission (2011c) *The Role of Public Employment Services in Extending Working Lives. Sustainable Employability for Older Workers*, The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Analytical Paper, September 2011. Author: B. J. Hake

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Peer Review "PES and older workers", Nürnberg, Germany, 10-11 May 2012.

¹³ CEDEFOP (2009), p. 14.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 61-62.

counsellors' work in different organisational and structural contexts, both in terms of the tasks and respective competences.

2.2. Analysis of key tasks and related competences reveal commonalities that support the formulation of a core competence profile of employment counsellor

Countries in the analysed group point to some of the key competencies and professional tasks which are reflected in the job and competence profiles of employment counsellors. From this perspective **although not fully fledged at the moment as an occupation, the role of employment counsellor is characterised by distinctive features in terms of tasks and required competences.** It is further strengthened by the fact that in the majority of the analysed countries **the process of preparation of job profiles is centralised.** However, the trend towards increasing autonomy for regional and local offices observed in other research¹⁵ is visible to a limited extent in the survey responses; the process of job profile preparation is clearly decentralised in Belgium (FOREM), Lithuania, Sweden, United Kingdom and Spain where they are prepared at regional/local/municipality level.

Literature analysis and the survey lead to the conclusion that the key tasks of employment counsellors comprise, in addition to a significant area of placement tasks, mixed tasks of a guidance character, elements of social work and administrative tasks. A number of **tasks performed by employment counsellors** have been identified in two major work areas of employment counsellors: (1) services for unemployed and (2) services for employers.

In relation to **the core tasks for employment counsellors specialising in employer services in Europe**, the adequate job profile should include:

1. Tasks focused on **placement** – both in terms of filling vacancies and places for apprenticeship/work placement, as well as monitoring (follow-up of placement) which requires a mix of assessment and human resource management knowledge and administrative skills.
2. Tasks focused on **networking and sales** – with a more active approach to searching for new job offers from employers and informing employers about ALMPs/other forms of support, requiring strong communication and cooperation skills, as well as service-specific knowledge (e.g. on ALMPs)
3. Tasks focused on **organising** – with emphasis on the organisation of group sessions for employers as well as speed dating/job fairs, requiring a high level of organisational knowledge and skills.

In relation to **the core tasks for employment counsellors specialising in services for jobseekers in Europe**, the adequate job profile should include:

- Tasks focused on **placement** (e.g. initial interviewing of individual jobseekers; job search assistance) – requiring communication and interviewing skills as well as client orientation.

¹⁵ European Commission (Sultana & Watts), *Career Guidance in Public Employment Services across Europe*, p. 10; European Commission (2011d) *Decentralisation of Public Employment Services*, The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Analytical Paper, July 2011. Author: Mosley H. G.

- Tasks focused on **counselling** (e.g. assessment/profiling of the jobseeker's strengths/weaknesses and the adequate need for support; preparation of an individual action plan (IAP); group sessions; referral to appropriate ALMP measure/provider e.g. specialist assessment, training) – requiring counselling, assessment and matching skills, ability to motivate and inspire clients, stress resistance, patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgmentally.
- Tasks focused on **information provision** (e.g. providing information on available job offers; information about ALMP measures) – requiring knowledge of the current labour market situation and trends, communication skills and client orientation.
- Tasks focused on **administration and monitoring** (e.g. monitoring of implementation of IAP; maintaining direct, in-person contact with registered jobseekers) – requiring communication and cooperation skills and service-specific knowledge.

A number of **competences required from employment counsellors** were identified during the desk research and included in the survey.

The job content (job profile) and competency requirements (competency profile) are interrelated. The description of competencies and other job characteristics form the basis of a 'job description' – a useful tool to communicate key functions of the job to employees by providing clear definitions of the job requirements and underlying characteristics needed to perform a job in an effective way. **It was thus possible to generate a common profile for employment counsellors on the basis of the analysis of key job tasks and required competences** (presented in Table 2).

Table 2. Common job and competency profile for employment counsellors

TASKS			
	Area:	CORE	ADDITIONAL
Services for jobseekers	Tasks focused on placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial interviewing of individual jobseekers ▪ Job search assistance ▪ Networking with other stakeholders, providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Registering unemployed (formal registration process)
	Tasks focused on counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment (profiling) of the jobseeker's strengths/weaknesses and the adequate need for support ▪ Preparation of an individual action plan ▪ Referral to appropriate ALMP measure/provider (e.g. specialist assessment, training) ▪ Group sessions for jobseekers ▪ Guidance on career planning/development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of specialised IT and other tools for assessment ▪ Planning of ALMPs
	Tasks focused on information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing information on available job offers ▪ Information about ALMP measures ▪ Providing telephone/on-line job information and assistance ▪ Providing and maintaining on-site and on-line information on available job openings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision and up-keep of on-site and on-line information on available training/ALMPs
	Tasks focused on administration and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of implementation of IAP ▪ Maintaining direct, in-person contact with registered jobseekers ▪ Maintaining contact with registered jobseekers through telephone/e-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring in case of referral to another provider/training
Services for employers	Tasks focused on placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Filling of vacancies/ selection of candidates ▪ Filling of place for apprenticeship or work placement ▪ Follow-up of placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vacancy intake/registration
	Tasks focused on networking and sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actively searching for new job offers at employers (networking with employers) ▪ Informing employers about ALMP/ support (e.g. subsidies, support to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consulting about age management, human resources, gender issues,

		integrate disabled)	etc.
	Tasks focused on organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group sessions for employers ▪ Organisation of speed dating/ job fairs 	
COMPETENCES			
CORE		ADDITIONAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of current labour market situation and trends ▪ Knowledge of ALMP measures/concepts ▪ Assessment and matching skills ▪ Communication and interviewing/counselling skills ▪ Ability to motivate and inspire clients ▪ Teamwork/cooperation ▪ Client orientation ▪ Stress resistance ▪ Patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgmentally ▪ Flexibility ▪ Knowledge of service-specific tools/ activation practice ▪ Knowledge of disadvantaged groups in the labour market ▪ IT skills ▪ Planning and organising skills ▪ Problem recognition and solving skills ▪ Negotiation skills ▪ Trust building ability/reliability ▪ Information finding and analysis skills 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of vocational structure and vocational classifications ▪ Knowledge of labour law ▪ Knowledge of human resources management ▪ Knowledge of performance measurement/ controlling ▪ Knowledge of the gender aspects ▪ Knowledge of hard and soft skills assessment tools ▪ Knowledge of social case management problems ▪ Assessment of psychological and social profiles ▪ Skills relating to employer services ▪ Group facilitation skills ▪ Ability to work independently ▪ Innovativeness/creativity 	

As established during the analysis, the changing service requirements observed in many European PES pose new challenges to the work of employment counsellors, requiring them to focus more attention on those client groups in need of extra support (like young unemployed, long-term unemployed, unemployed with more complex problems, etc.), rather than the more broadly understood definition of 'jobseekers'. At the same time increasing attention is being given to building up relationships with employers. **As the tasks of the employment counsellors change, so too do the competency requirements in general.**

The mix of tasks requires adequate 'hard' and 'soft' skills with the expected balance between key administrative and customer service competences. **Of special importance are the 'soft' skills which are becoming more relevant due to the growing intensity of the external contacts of employment counsellors** such as flexibility, teamwork, stress resistance or 'sales' skills when working with employers. Networking and coordination skills are required as it is important to cooperate with private and non-profit providers (temporary work agencies, external service providers like career guidance or training providers), as well as other actors important for the labour market integration of PES clients (e.g. schools, universities, NGOs etc). However, a wide range of requirements can be a big challenge for counsellors themselves (as job holders) and may also render the process of designing relevant training more difficult in the short term (both at the level of the teams within which they work and the entire PES). Employment counsellors need the relevant competences and time to be able to fulfil these tasks. This would allow counsellors to

focus on the tasks most important from the point of view of the value creation process within the framework of their work (in PES) and to develop competencies necessary for their effective performance.

3. Cohesion of entry requirements, initial and on-going training

3.1. Differentiation of entry level requirements for the positions of employment counsellors paint a complicated picture of PES but the in-depth analysis shows some common patterns

The review of available current research¹⁶ indicated a high level of differentiation of approaches to initial entry requirements for employment counsellor positions in European PES. This observation has been further confirmed by the PES survey which indicated strong differences of approach between countries in relation to:

1. Entry level education requirements (secondary education; bachelor's degree; master's degree; postgraduate studies degree),
2. Other entry requirements/qualifications (certified qualifications; specialised training; foreign language certificates; previous work related professional experience),
3. Preferred education/study disciplines for the openings in the positions of employment counsellors (general education [unspecified]; Psychology; Pedagogy; Sociology; Social work; Law; Economics; Management [including Human Resource Management]).

In relation to the **entry level of education** relatively lowest requirements can be observed in Belgium FOREM, Finland and France where secondary education is *desirable*, and in Belgium VDAB, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania where secondary education is *essential*. Also in Germany, secondary education is accepted for further internal development, if the needed competences of the employment counsellor profile are recognised by the direct management. There is also a group of countries that clearly do not require education levels higher than bachelor's degree (either master's degree or postgraduate studies degree) including Belgium FOREM, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal and Austria. In Estonia higher professional education is required (3 years of education after secondary schooling). However, the majority of these countries focus on the continuous learning of employment counsellors with a philosophy of developing the required competencies in-house. Relatively speaking, the **highest entry-level education requirements** are observed in Hungary and Croatia (master's degree essential) and a number of other countries where a bachelor's degree is essential (Sweden, Portugal, Netherlands, Latvia, Hungary, Germany, Slovenia). In the United Kingdom online testing is being used in the recruitment of employment counsellors.

Apart from the required level of education the majority of analysed countries use some form of **additional entry requirements**. In some countries certified qualifications are essential (Belgium VDAB, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain) whilst specialised training is required in Croatia. Foreign language

¹⁶ European Commission (Sultana & Watts), *Career Guidance in Europe's Public Employment Services. Trends and Challenges*, p. 79.

certificates are essential in Croatia and Finland. In a number of countries (Belgium FOREM, Belgium VDAB, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Netherlands, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Sweden, Spain), previous work-related professional experience is desirable but is only essential in Estonia. In Malta, relevant experience is also considered. In Slovenia, an internal exam which must be taken within the first 12 months of employment is required, although formally there are no additional requirements. Additionally in Bulgaria references from previous employers are considered and in Lithuania IT certificates are desirable. In the United Kingdom, other entry requirements such as additional qualifications, training or experience are not required but are encouraged.

Clearly **certain education and study disciplines are preferred** for the position of employment counsellors in analysed PES. In more than half of cases looked at, the disciplines of psychology, sociology and social work are preferred while law, economics and management are also considered to be an asset in a more limited number of countries. This observation is in line with other research findings¹⁷. Some additional information has been provided by respondents indicating that there are additional disciplines preferred to enter positions as employment counsellors including social pedagogy and andragogy (e.g. specialisation in adult learning in Slovenia) and specialised postgraduate studies (in Poland postgraduate studies in the area of job placement are preferred). In Belgium FOREM, there has been a degree of deregulation in recent years (since January 2010) with the position of employment counsellor becoming available to individuals with various kinds of educational profiles. In the United Kingdom there is no preference for any specific study disciplines.

In order to further analyse countries' approaches towards the entry requirements for employment counsellor positions, an analytical framework has been proposed in Table 3. The framework is based on a simplified, three-tier model of high, medium and low level entry requirements.

Table 3. Framework for the analysis of entry requirements for the positions of employment counsellors

Requirements:	Entry level education requirements	Other entry requirements/ qualifications	Educational/study discipline specificity
High	Bachelor's, master's or postgraduate degrees essential	Certified qualifications and/or specialised training and/or foreign language certificates and/or previous work related professional experience – essential	Less than half of indicated education/study disciplines preferred (3 and below)
Medium	Secondary education essential (other levels desirable)	Certified qualifications and/or specialised training and/or foreign language certificates and/or previous work related professional experience – desirable (if none deemed essential in a given country)	More than half of indicated education/study disciplines preferred
Low	No entry level education required and no level essential (may be desirable)	Certified qualifications and/or specialised training and/or foreign language certificates and/or previous work related professional experience – not	General education (unspecified) preferred or broad range of educational/study

¹⁷ Ibidem.

		required.	disciplines accepted
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Based on the criteria described above, all of the surveyed countries have been analysed in relation to each of the requirements (Table 4). Again, the analysis paints a rather complicated picture of the countries' positions towards the entry requirements for employment counsellor jobs.

Table 4. Levels of entry requirements for the positions of employment counsellors by country

Requirements:	Entry level education requirements	Other entry requirements/ qualifications	Educational/study discipline specificity
High	DE ¹⁸ , HU, LV, NL, PT, SE, SI, HR	BE VDAB, BG, ES, FI, HR, HU, LT, MT, PT, RO, DE	CY, SI, SK, DE
Medium	AT, BE VDAB, CY, LT, MT, PL, RO, DE, EE	BE FOREM, CY, FR, LV, NL, PL, SE, EE	DE, ES, HU, MT, RO, EE
Low	BE FOREM, BG, ES, FI, FR, UK, DE	AT, DE, UK	BE FOREM, BE VDAB, BG, HR, FR, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, SE, UK, DE

In order to get more insight into the possible commonalities and differences that characterise the EU countries' approaches, five groupings of the countries that meet a certain combination of eligibility criteria have been proposed in Table 5¹⁹.

Table 5. Groups of countries according to characteristics of entry level requirements

Group No.:	Characteristics of entry level requirements:	Countries
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High entry level of education requirements, and ▪ High or medium level educational/study discipline specificity, and/or ▪ High other entry level requirements/qualifications 	DE, HU, SI
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High entry level of education requirements, and ▪ Low level educational/study discipline specificity, and/or ▪ High or medium other entry level requirements/qualifications 	LV, NL, PT, SE, HR
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium entry level of education requirements, and, ▪ High or medium other entry level requirements/qualifications, and ▪ Medium or low level educational/study discipline specificity. 	BE VDAB, LT, MT, RO, EE
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium entry level of education requirements, and, ▪ Low level educational/study discipline specificity, and ▪ Medium or low other entry level 	PL, AT

¹⁸ Germany is positioned in a number of fields at the same time, due to the three different entry modes for the position of employment counsellor.

¹⁹ Although providing a useful analytical perspective (by pinpointing the characteristic dimensions of the country approaches), this grouping does not pretend to offer a classification of countries. It should only be regarded as a starting point for discussion on differences and commonalities of entry-level requirements.

	requirements/qualifications.	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low entry level of education requirements, and, ▪ Low or medium level educational/study discipline specificity, and ▪ High or medium level other entry level requirements/qualifications 	BE FOREM, BG, FI, FR, ES, DE

Two examples clearly stand out from this grouping:

1. The United Kingdom – with low requirements for entry level education, low specificity of educational/study discipline and low level ‘other entry’ requirements,
2. Cyprus – with medium entry level education requirements but high level specificity of education/study discipline preference and medium level ‘other entry’ requirements/qualifications.

From the countries in the first two groups (and especially from the countries included in group 1), which is characterised by highly defined expectations towards the entrants into the employment counsellors’ positions, one should expect a different approach towards inception and on-going training as compared to the countries included in the last two groups. In other words, a trade-off effect between the entry-level expectations and training activities within PES should be visible.

3.2 Inception/adaptation training and on-going training is to a large extent in line with the country groupings both in terms of the duration as well as content of training

Current training provision for career guidance and employment counsellors is highly diverse. Appropriate initial and further training of counsellors is crucial as they have a central position in guidance service delivery and development²⁰. The differences in training provision may stem from:

- Differentiation of national delivery systems, where guidance practice is frequently a subsidiary element within another main professional role²¹;
- Extent to which governments directly provide either initial or recurrent training, the extent to which they fund these and their involvement in setting the content of training.²²
- The fact that the training for guidance practitioners occurs at various stages of their personal career journey²³ and is provided in a number of organisational, educational and political settings.

In all of the analysed PES, new employees in employment counsellor positions are provided with specialised inception/adaptation training but the length of this training ranges from 2-5 days in Romania and Lithuania to 205 days in Austria and extends to 1 year in Poland. In some of the cases (Portugal, Latvia, Bulgaria, United Kingdom), the duration of the training is variable depending on the individual preconditions. Again, the situation seems to be highly diversified across PES

²⁰ CEDEFOP, op. cit., p. 1.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 9.

²² OECD, *Career Guidance...*, op. cit.

²³ CEDEFOP, op. cit., p. 9.

in Europe. However, the analysis of the groups of countries proposed above reveals some patterns of the inception training duration (Table 6 in Annex).

The shortest durations of the inception training can be attributed (with some exceptions, of which the most outstanding are Germany²⁴ and Sweden) to the first three groups of countries. What is notable is the relatively long specialised inception/adaptation training in the fourth group of countries (Austria, Poland). The length of initial training is also comparable in the fifth group of countries (Belgium FOREM, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Croatia, Spain) and can be regarded as longer than the average. This observation is in line with the relatively higher entry expectations in the first three groups of countries (although also internally differentiated) as compared to the lower end of the table. **This may indicate that the lower entry-level requirements can to some extent be traded-off to in-service inception or initial training of the inexperienced employment counsellors.** Such a substitution can be especially useful in the countries where the supply of adequately trained counsellors is limited (countries with limited or no formal education in this field) or in which the potential counsellors prefer to work for the private sector agencies/companies due to significant wage discrepancies (as evidenced, for example, in central and eastern EU countries).

Employment counsellors are **formally/legally obliged to undertake on-going training on a regular basis in** the following countries: Germany (from 80 days to up to 3.5 years depending on the chosen entry route), Bulgaria (20 days per year), Finland (10 days), Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal (5 days per year), Sweden, Slovenia (4-6 days). In some cases, such continuous training is required by law but intervals are not regular (Spain, Sweden, Poland, Latvia). In Austria, it is recommended, but not a requirement, to have up to 7 days of training a year on average. However, the main training provided for employment service staff has been found to be administrative rather than career guidance-focused. As such, **the role of employment counsellor calls for a more specialised training in terms of interviewing and counselling competences.**

Commonalities are also visible in terms of the training content in the groups of countries both for inception and on-going training (Table 7 in Annex). While the basic training on PES services is common in all countries, there are similarities also within the analysed groups. Specifically, the analysed groups more often share the content of inception training than the on-going training which may again support the notion that there is a trade-off effect between the entry requirements and this initial training of employment counsellors. For example, in the fourth group (Poland, Austria), not only is the length of training comparable but the majority of the inception training content overlaps. While these countries' entry expectations are relatively low, the burden of the competence development process is vested in in-service training. As a comparison, the first group of the countries is characterised by a relatively more limited scope of the shared inception training content. However, this observation does not relate as much to the on-going training, which may indicate again that the country-specific (and service-specific) expectations tend to differentiate more the demands for training of employment counsellors.

²⁴ In Germany, the regular inception training can take up to 3.5 years.

4. Conclusions: towards a common standard of service on the basis of core competences

The objective of the paper was to highlight, where possible, common core competences considered vital for an employment counsellor. As noted in the OECD report²⁵ comprehensive competency frameworks describing the knowledge and skills required at all levels, in all sectors and for diverse types of clients should be developed.

As presented in the paper, the PES characteristics (e.g. operational structure, priority tasks, activation strategies) strongly influence the division of work to be performed by PES employees, including employment counsellors. The job profiles of employment counsellors (defining the job content) in turn influence the competency requirements for the employment counsellor's position. In such a case, **the need** (due to differences of the service provisions) **or even the possibility** (taking into account the different starting points) **to 'standardise' the competency profile of employment counsellors in all European countries is limited in terms of strict definitions and enumerative lists; however, a certain set of 'key' competences should be developed.**

While looking at the core competences profile of employment counsellors in European PES, it is noted that the list is biased towards 'general' competences as compared to 'country/service-specific' competences (Table 8). As such, **it seems possible to define a certain minimum standard of service based on the identified set of core competences.** If the majority of core competences were service/country-specific, their development would only be possible at the country/service level and also their relevance would be highly contextual.

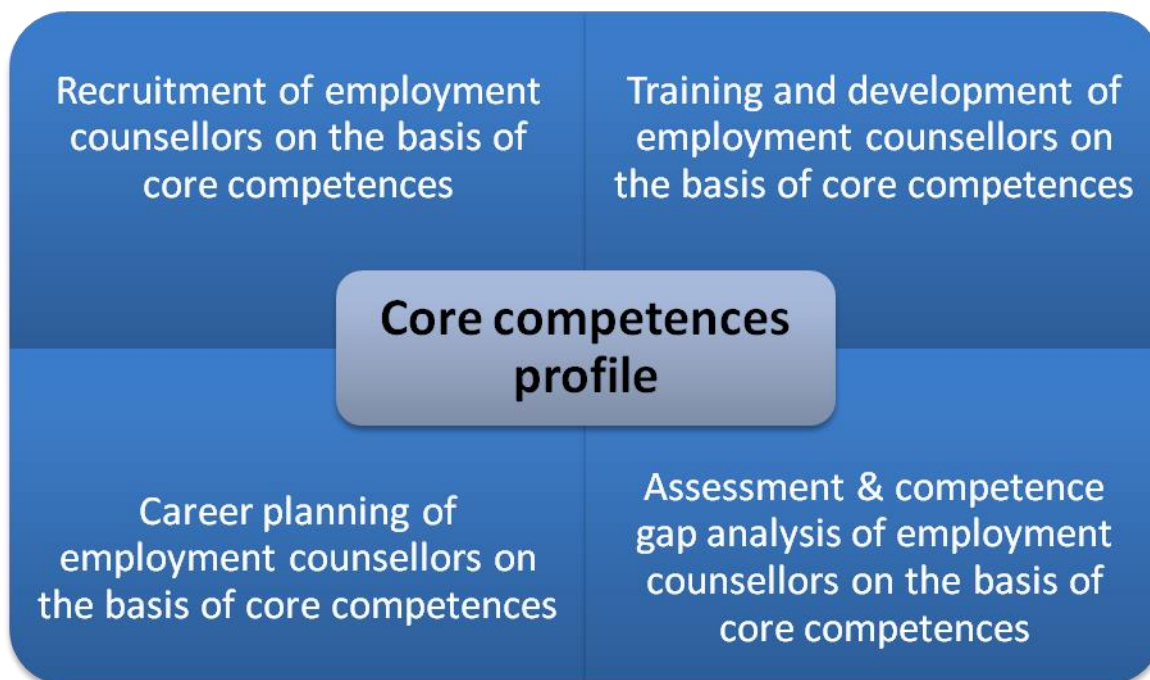
Table 8. General and country/service-specific core competences of employment counsellors

CORE COMPETENCES	
GENERAL	COUNTRY/SERVICE-SPECIFIC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment and matching skills ▪ Communication and interviewing/counselling skills ▪ Ability to motivate and inspire clients ▪ Teamwork/cooperation ▪ Client orientation ▪ Stress resistance ▪ Patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgmentally ▪ Flexibility ▪ IT skills ▪ Planning and organising skills ▪ Problem recognition and solving skills ▪ Negotiation skills ▪ Trust building ability/reliability ▪ Information finding and analysis skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of current labour market situation and trends ▪ Knowledge of ALMP measures/concepts ▪ Knowledge of service-specific tools/ activation practice ▪ Knowledge of disadvantaged groups in the labour market

²⁵ Ibid.

However, given the different starting points regarding entry requirements as well as training offered to employment counsellors, it is not expected to be a self-regulating system. **The PES should adopt a competency-based perspective and the 'life-cycle' approach to employment counsellors** as presented in Graph 2.

Graph 2. Core competence profile as the focal point of employment counsellors 'life-cycle' in the service



In this approach **the key competence profile becomes a focal point of all skills-related activities for the employment counsellors**. According to the idea of 'life-cycle' approaches to training, the key competences set out in the profile should be the basis of recruitment activities for new employment counsellors. In cases in which the defined scope and level of their competence (in relation to the level specified in the profile) would become the most important factor in selecting the best candidates, the means and ways in which the competence is acquired becomes less significant. This approach is consistent with the idea of the European Qualifications Framework which underlines the importance of the learning outcomes. This approach can help in the unification (standardisation) of the employment counsellors' work in Europe due to the current variation in the entry requirements into the service. **A 'key competence standard' would allow for the search of competent candidates regardless of whether their level of competence has been achieved during formal education, additional training or the work-related experience** (this process as the analysis shows already takes place in some European countries). Also, the development of employment counsellors on the basis of regular competency gap analysis in relation to the expected levels of competence in the profile would be easier.

As noted in the analytical paper, the possibility of obtaining people adequately equipped to play the role of employment counsellors from the market in Europe seems to be very limited. Alongside encouraging the policymakers to strengthen institutional and legal provisions towards the development of employment counsellors' education at tertiary level, **the mid-term actions of PES should focus on the development of internally-managed, PES-specific inception and on-going training systems for employment counsellors**. These two should be treated as an inseparable whole, designed to continuously improve their skills and update their knowledge. As the

training activities cannot be prepared ad hoc, they should be planned and tailored to the needs of the specific country's service as well as individual training needs of counsellors. The competency-based perspective would greatly improve the situation.

Moreover, the competency-based perspective of the work of employment counsellors could improve one of the elements identified as weak in terms of internal development systems: the career paths of employment counsellors. The core competence perspective would not only allow for the better structuring of a career path but also could create real possibilities for on-the-job development, directing the careers of employment counsellors to be more 'in-depth' (professional) than hierarchical.

It should also be noted that this approach resembles the 'career management' perspective proposed in the PES 2020 Strategy which stipulates a complex and coordinated approach to gaining and retaining the employability-building skills in different transitional contexts and situations. This approach could be used in relation to the work of employment counsellors themselves.

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Annex

Table 6. Duration of inception training according to country groupings

Group No.:	Country:	Duration of inception training in days:
1	DE	>20
	EE	6-10
	HU	-
	SI	11-15
2	LV	Variable
	NL	6-10
	PT	Variable
	SE	16-20
3	BE VDAB	6-10
	LT	2-5
	MT	11-15
	RO	2-5
4	AT	>20
	PL	>20
5	BE FOREM	16-20
	BG	Variable
	FI	11-15
	FR	16-20
	HR	16-20
	ES	16-20
Unspecified	CY	>20
	UK	Variable (usually 16-20)

Table 7. Most common inception and on-going training content according to country groupings

Most common inception training content	Most common on-going training content
Group 1: DE, EE, HU, SI	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ Support of jobseekers in effective job search methods (use of online job search tools, CV and application documents writing, interviewing etc.) ▪ Communication and negotiation in the counselling process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ Support of jobseekers in effective job search methods (use of online job search tools, CV and application documents writing, interviewing etc.) ▪ Use of modern IT tools in counselling process ▪ Social and labour law in PES services (work arrangements, including flexible, support of unemployed in basic labour law issues etc.) ▪ External cooperation and networking (with employers' organisations, trade unions, private employment services, NGOs etc.) ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Effective activation/motivation techniques of unemployed and inactive ▪ Career planning (including individual action plans) ▪ Communication and negotiation in the counselling process ▪ Special working methods for unemployed with more complex problems (e.g. case management) ▪ Working with difficult clients
Group 2: LV, NL, PT, SE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ Employment and training in EU (EURES, Ploteus, Europass etc.) ▪ Support of jobseekers in effective job search methods (use of online job search tools, CV and application documents writing, interviewing etc.) ▪ Use of modern IT tools in counselling process ▪ Social and labour law in PES services (work arrangements, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ Employment and training in EU (EURES, Ploteus, Europass etc.) ▪ Use of modern IT tools in counselling process ▪ Social and labour law in PES services (work arrangements, including flexible, support of unemployed in basic labour law issues etc.) ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Effective activation/motivation

<p>including flexible, support of unemployed in basic labour law issues etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key competencies on the labour market (employers' needs analysis, EU key competencies etc.) ▪ External cooperation and networking (with employers' organisations, trade unions, private employment services, NGOs etc.) ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Demand and supply on the labour market – vocational and competency perspective ▪ Career planning (including individual action plans) ▪ Occupational and vocational knowledge and legislation (e.g. classifications of occupations, regulated vocations etc.) ▪ Legal framework of PES functioning ▪ Active labour market policies / effective concepts 	<p>techniques of unemployed and inactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Career planning (including individual action plans) ▪ Prevention of discrimination on the labour market (including gender issues) ▪ Working with difficult clients
<p>Group 3: BE VDAB, LT, MT, RO</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social and labour law in PES services (work arrangements, including flexible, support of unemployed in basic labour law issues etc.) ▪ Legal framework of PES functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ External cooperation and networking (with employers' organisations, trade unions, private employment services, NGOs etc.) ▪ Disadvantaged groups on the labour market (50+, youth, low skilled, long term unemployed etc.) ▪ Demand and supply on the labour market – vocational and competency perspective ▪ Effective activation/motivation techniques of unemployed and inactive ▪ Communication and negotiation in the counselling process ▪ Special working methods for unemployed with more complex problems (e.g. case management) ▪ Prevention of discrimination on the

	<p>labour market (including gender issues)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working with difficult clients ▪ Knowledge of human resources management
Group 4: PL, AT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current labour market situation and trends, current economic trends ▪ Employment and training in EU (EURES, Ploteus, Europass etc.) ▪ Support of jobseekers in effective job search methods (use of online job search tools, CV and application documents writing, interviewing etc.) ▪ Social and labour law in PES services (work arrangements, including flexible, support of unemployed in basic labour law issues etc.) ▪ Key competencies on the labour market (employers' needs analysis, EU key competencies etc.) ▪ External cooperation and networking (with employers' organisations, trade unions, private employment services, NGOs, etc.) ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Demand and supply on the labour market – vocational and competency perspective ▪ Effective activation/motivation techniques of unemployed and inactive ▪ Vocational and educational information ▪ Occupational and vocational knowledge and legislation (e.g. classifications of occupations, regulated vocations etc.) ▪ Legal framework of PES functioning ▪ Active labour market policies/effective concepts ▪ Communication and negotiations in the counselling process ▪ Public procurement law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Career planning (including individual action plans) ▪ Vocational and educational information ▪ Communication and negotiation in the counselling process ▪ Project and time management ▪ Public procurement law ▪ Knowledge of human resources management ▪ Knowledge of performance measurement

Group 5: BE FOREM, BG, FI, FR, HR, ES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demand and supply on the labour market – vocational and competency perspective ▪ Vocational and educational information ▪ Active labour market policies/effective concepts ▪ Communication and negotiation in the counselling process ▪ Prevention of discrimination on the labour market (including gender issues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support of jobseekers in effective job search methods (use of online job search tools, CV and application documents writing, interviewing etc.) ▪ Use of modern IT tools in counselling process ▪ Key competencies on the labour market (employers’ needs analysis, EU key competencies etc.) ▪ Customer orientation ▪ Disadvantaged groups on the labour market (50+, youth, low skilled, long term unemployed etc.) ▪ Demand and supply on the labour market – vocational and competency perspective ▪ Effective activation/motivation techniques of unemployed and inactive ▪ Active labour market policies/effective concepts ▪ Stress management training