

PARES Strategic Dialogue 13 March 2012, Brussels

Fields and forms of co-operation: Recommendations to employment services



Background

The PARES (Partnership between Employment Services) initiative is part of the Europe 2020 strategy. The initiative supports EU-level dialogue to promote cooperation between different forms of employment services (public, private and non-profit) and to identify where they can deliver complementary services, with the ultimate objective of improving the functioning of labour markets in Europe. PARES Strategic Dialogues (SDs) provide a forum for relevant stakeholders to discuss specific issues within this remit in order to develop consensus based recommendations targeted at policy makers and/or practitioners in order to take the issue forwards.

This first PARES SD held in Brussels on 13th March 2012 brought together representatives of both public and private employment services from around the EU to discuss "Fields and forms of co-operation". The discussion was restricted to non-commercial co-operation between employment services¹ and considered the fundamental questions as to how to promote co-operation, in which fields (or categories of service) cooperation should take place, and how cooperation should organised in order to ensure mutual benefit for partners as well as efficient, effective and high quality services?

This document presents a series of recommendations for employment services and relevant actors which are derived from key consensus observations from the meeting. These recommendations will be presented at the next PARES conference in autumn 2012.

The basis for cooperation between employment services: Not why, but how!

Consensus observation:

When considering cooperation between employment services the question to be addressed is not why, or if, partnerships should be established, but how. In order to fulfil the Europe 2020 objectives, ensure efficient labour markets, transparency of information, and free access to quality services for all those that need them, cooperation between service providers is a necessity, not an option.

In some countries cooperation is well established and even routine. In others, however, there is little interaction between public and private employment services, and positive actions are needed to try and introduce a new culture of cooperation and break down the persistent barriers and silo mentality that exist.

Recommendation:

Employment services and their stakeholders at national, regional and local level should take note that there is a strong legal framework and political consensus to support and promote active cooperation between public and private employment services. In particular, we note:

- ILO conventions n°88 on Employment Service² and n°181 on Private Employment Agencies³ and its accompanying Recommendation 188⁴ which actively encourage cooperation between public and private employment services;

¹ Commercial arrangements are to be dealt with separately under the heading of "Contracting out", which is the subject of an on-going study. The results of the study will be presented at the next PARES conference in autumn 2012.

² Article 1: "The essential duty of the employment service shall be to ensure, in co-operation where necessary with other public and private bodies concerned, the best possible organisation of the employment market.." http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C088



- European Court of Justice rulings that consider placement services to be services of general economic interest and therefore preclude monopoly provision by the state;
- The Europe 2020 strategy;
- The PES mission statement⁵ and PES 2020 Strategy output paper which together represent a consensus commitment for European public employment services to collaborate with public and private partners.

Initiating cooperation

Consensus observation:

Successful cooperation between employment services is founded on trust, mutual recognition (of common objectives) and respect (for different agendas). It can take time for a common understanding of this kind to be reached and it is by necessity a progressive process. Cooperation should be initiated from the top with the first step being for senior executives to meet, build a relationship and get to understand each other's business. However, a bottom up approach can also be developed, based on joint actions needed at local level, especially in the case where political reluctance at national level hampers the development of cooperation between employment services. Both approaches can also be developed in the same time, as they are mutually reinforcing.

Recommendation:

Setting up a platform to start discussing cooperation is a pre-requisite: Heads of public employment services and their counterparts in federations of private employment services (and/or some representatives of the most interested private employment agencies) should arrange to meet either on EU level or on national/local level within a year in order to learn about each other's business, identify common objectives and agree a process to explore potential cooperation.

Ideally the meeting should result in a joint statement of intent to take the process forwards and commit to a further series of actions. These actions might include preparing a baseline statement that outlines the potential benefits of cooperation, describes the current situation and clearly identifies existing obstacles, which can then be systematically addressed.

Representatives of social partners should be informed and consulted about the process.

³ ILO, C181, Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997: Article 13 specifies that Members should "... formulate, establish and periodically review conditions to promote cooperation between the public employment service and private employment agencies." http://actrav.itcilo.org/actrav-english/telearn/global/ilo/law/ilo181.htm

⁴ ILO, R188, Private Employment Agencies Recommendation, 1997: Section III deals specifically with the relationship between public and private employment services, notes that cooperation "Cooperation between the public employment service and private employment agencies should be encouraged; ", and gives examples of areas for possible cooperation (e.g. pooling of information, exchange of vacancies). http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R188

⁵ EU/EEA Public Employment Service Network: Mission statement. http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=531&langId=en



Building a common understanding and formalising agreements

Consensus observation:

The process of building a cooperation agreement should be undertaken systematically. Initially a very general memorandum of understanding (MoU) that sets out the basis for cooperation and main objectives may be enough but as the cooperation matures this may be extended with statements about mutual recognition, details of the form of cooperation and the specific role of each partner. The precise contents of any MoU will be dependent on the national and institutional situation and the type of cooperation envisaged but it would be helpful if some examples of existing agreements between employment services and/or a template MoU with basic elements could be made readily available as a guide to those considering embarking on a cooperation process. The win-win dimension of the cooperation should be clearly stated and elaborated, making the interests of both sides very explicit. This will allow developing crossfertilisation between all parties.

Recommendation:

Employment services that enter into cooperation arrangements should formalise these through a memorandum of understanding or similar form of joint agreement. The signing of such agreements should be publicised in order to further spread the message about the benefits of cooperation. It would be useful to include in the memorandum of understanding a description of each party's respective portfolio of services.

The European Commission should co-ordinate the collection and dissemination of example MoUs and consider developing a general template MoU or guidance document describing the basic elements required in a cooperation agreement.

Areas of cooperation

Consensus observation:

Cooperation should start with areas within the core competences of each party; politically-driven agendas should be avoided. Generally this means job matching and placement services with cooperation focused on exchange of information. This exchange might include sharing details of vacancies and/or of jobseekers and their CVs, providing access to matching tools, sharing information about supply and demand in the market, etc.

Once this first level of partnership is established then it becomes possible to extend the cooperation to incorporate concrete actions aimed at improving transparency in the market and access to quality services for clients. This is likely to include active referral of clients to the most appropriate service for their needs (e.g. PES to PRES for vacancies, PRES to PES for training). This could also cover the systematic publication of PRES job vacancies on the PES job vacancies database or the development of joint training schemes.

In some cases, particularly when there is no existing culture of cooperation, it can be helpful to focus cooperation on a particular area of common interest. For example, preventing discrimination in the labour market, providing access to employment for disadvantaged groups, how to ensure the stepping-stone function of temporary jobs, etc.



Recommendation:

Employment services should seek to build cooperation from solid foundations, which means working together in areas for which both parties have existing competences but can improve their service through better information.

In general, cooperation will be facilitated if it starts with an exchange of information and develops progressively to cover more concrete actions that require specific input from both sides. It can be helpful to focus cooperation on tackling issues of common interest (e.g. non-discrimination).

Effective cooperation

Consensus observation:

The success of any cooperation between employment services depends on both sides actively buying in to the agreement. It is helpful, in this respect, if operational staff can fully appreciate the benefits of the arrangement and understand what the part that they deliver means for the day to day work of their counterparts and their business generally.

Direct meetings between employment services' staff, for example in forms of common seminars, training, etc. have proved to be successful.

Exchange of information is most effective when there are compatible IT tools and standards.

Recommendation:

Employment services with cooperation arrangements should:

- Actively support staff in understanding how the cooperation benefits both partners. This might be achieved through short-term staff exchanges, temporary placements, joint training, etc.;
- Pay particular attention to how information will be exchanged and consider possibilities to adopt open, common standards and tools.

Resources to promote and support cooperation

Consensus observation:

An online resource should be established to showcase the benefits of cooperation between employment services and to provide inspiration and guidance to those looking to initiate or further develop cooperation.

The material to be made available should include as a minimum:

- Case studies of existing cooperation. These should be practical and easy to digest for policy makers, with a focus on outcomes and costs.
- Examples of existing agreements between employment services (e.g. memorandum of understanding).

Consideration should also be given to developing and making available through the site:

- Guidance on how to establish cooperation (e.g. list of prerequisites for effective cooperation, key steps in establishing cooperation, problems that can arise and examples of how to overcome them).
- Template memorandum of understanding that could be adapted to local circumstances.



- Statistical material showing the role of public and private employment services in the allocation of labour.

Recommendation:

Within the context of the PARES initiative:

- the European Commission should:
 - o support the implementation of a website offering access to a range of materials related to cooperation between employment services
 - o consider co-ordinating work to develop material offering guidance on how to establish and develop cooperation agreements
 - o consider commissioning a study to identify the current extent of cooperation between employment services in each country and the barriers that exist to initiating or further developing cooperation
- employment services should support the Commission in the above work by:
 - o providing case-studies of existing cooperation
 - o providing examples of existing agreements on which cooperation is based
 - o evaluate their partnerships and make these evaluations publicly available.

For more information on the PARES initiative, please contact DG EMPL C3: EMPL-C3-UNIT@ec.europa.eu