

Summary from the 4th Dialogue Dissemination Conference on 'PES organisation and service delivery'

The 8th Dialogue Conference (9-10 October 2014) brought together PES practitioners to examine innovative and effective approaches to PES organisation and service delivery. Reflecting this year's PES to PES Dialogue activities, discussions focused on digitalisation, decentralisation, performance management and activation. An executive summary has now been circulated, highlighting the following messages:

Cooperation takes many forms for PES, whether by setting up formal and informal partnerships to deliver specific services, or engaging with employers to increase the quality of job matching and to maximise vacancy filling.

Engaging employers is a priority for most, if not all, PES today:

- Segmenting approaches by size is important for many PES on two grounds: i) to better tailor services and meet the expectations of SMEs in particular, whose needs can require PES to play a greater advisory role; ii) to maximise access to large numbers of vacancies when focusing (or tailoring) approaches on identified groups of larger employers.
- However, size does not always matter; there are important sectorial and geographical aspects to how PES design and tailor their employer engagement processes.

PES extend cooperation to other partners in the labour market, and they do so on many grounds:

- To access external and expert advice, to deal with complex social problems, to gain access to additional capacity or specialist competences or to cope with budget constraints.
- In most cases, partnerships aim to extend the ability of PES and capacity to deliver services and ALMPs effectively and efficiently, by bringing in resources, knowledge, skills and know-how.

Partnerships are also central to the activation of specific target groups for PES:

- PES use a range of partners to address the needs of particular target groups, including the long-term unemployed, young people and the disabled.

- These groups are often more challenging for PES and they require more intensive support as they are likely to be lower skilled and have motivational issues that need to be addressed.
- For harder to place jobseekers, PES partners include NGOs, youth organisations, training providers, the education sector and trade associations, among others.

PES aim to develop and deliver more effective and efficient services that meet user needs under increasing budgetary constraints. Digitalisation and greater local autonomy are part of the answer, but more needs to be done to understand the effectiveness of new approaches.

Today, digitalisation of services is an important vehicle to increase efficiency of PES services:

- Since 2011, the digitalisation debate has moved, from discussing basic elements, to discussing how best to evaluate the effectiveness of online channels and how to introduce innovative, interactive elements in PES service delivery.
- For digital services to become the norm, it is important for PES staff to receive on-going training and buy into the digital agenda themselves
- Designing, testing and piloting new tools, with the involvement of users, can improve their usability and ensure that they are 'fit for purpose'.

How PES are structured and restructure themselves can enhance their ability to design and deliver services and policies more effectively:

- Well managed decentralisation takes place when some conditions are met, for example: capacity-building to equip local staff; modern performance management

- systems; clearly defined minimum standards to reduce fragmentation; information cascading through all layers of PES staff.
- Other trends point towards centrally defined procedural standards and routines, improving the availability of and access to robust labour market data, enhancing performance management systems and greater cooperation with private placement agencies to increase the capacity of PES at the local level.

Finally, performance management systems are central to PES's understanding of their services, and the degree to which these are efficient and effective:

- It is important to ensure that incentive-based systems, aimed at improving performance, do not have the unintended effect of encouraging 'quick wins'.
 - It is possible that some systems are therefore too complex, potentially based on too many indicators.
 - A balance between quantitative (e.g. output indicators) and qualitative measures (such as customer satisfaction) of performance is important.
 - PES highlight the benefit of designing systems that are sensitive to local contexts and offer some flexibility in target-setting and reporting.
- More information on the Dialogue Dissemination Conference is available [here](#).



The PES to PES Dialogue has helped bring about further changes in PES across Europe

The results of the second European Commission survey carried out among PES in the summer 2014 again confirmed that the activities of the PES to PES Dialogue have had a positive impact on PES. The results were shared at the recent Dialogue Dissemination Conference, highlighting the following key messages.

In 2013 and 2014:

- 136 instances of change were recorded and 72 of those have taken place in 2014.
- On average, 2.7 changes have taken place or have been initiated per PES in 2014.
- The changes reported in 2014 mostly related to services for employers and the quality management and professionalism of PES counsellors.

One of the biggest influencers is that PES to PES Dialogue events have taken

place in periods of planned change:

- Ideas and practices highlighted at such events have either re-asserted the importance of the change, or have helped to further shape planned activities.
- in addition, specific working groups that involve senior management are useful. Many PES also reported that having sufficient financial and human resources available is critical to make change happen.
- Motivated, highly-skilled PES counsellors with appropriate IT infrastructures and

support also help to facilitate change.

Following on from suggestions made in 2013, PES suggested that future programmes could make greater use of:

- Smaller working groups and more tailored follow-up activities where PES can explore a particular topic in detail, in a smaller group.
- Best practice sharing through reports and a dedicated webpage were also mentioned.

Publication of the Analytical Paper ‘Central steering and local autonomy in PES’

Findings in this Analytical Paper provide answers to three overarching and interrelated questions: (1) What can be considered minimum requirements for effective PES operations at the local level?; (2) What mix of decentralisation and centralisation is needed to provide these minimum requirements?; (3) What are the most important recent trends with regard to decentralisation, and relatedly, are there any emerging models?

Experiences in the investigated countries suggest that effective implementation of public policies by local PES requires:

- Adequate and predictable budgets;
- The availability of a variety of high-quality instruments;
- Adequate number of staff with appropriate skills; and
- Durable and trust-based partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

Granting local autonomy without compromising nation-wide goals requires a mix of centralisation and decentralisation on the various dimensions under discussion:

- Central steering is crucial when it comes to: (a) demarcating the nations’ labour market policy goals and providing legally defined instruments; (b) defining procedural standards and routines;

- and (c) collecting, preparing and disseminating relevant labour market data.
- Local autonomy is crucial when it comes to implementing instruments; “how” goals are met should remain largely at the discretion of regional or local PES.
- Experiences suggest that local budgetary flexibility is possible and desirable, but conditional on effective and accepted performance management systems.
- No clear verdict can be drawn on the subject of outsourcing in relation to the level of tendering (national, regional, local) or the type of provider relations established through outsourcing.

No common PES model is emerging:

- Legal, political and cultural differences prevail, often with deeply seated roots.
- However, there are common reform trajectories, including:
 - Standardising procedures and standards;
 - Improving the availability and access to robust labour market data;
 - Enhancing existing performance management systems; and
 - Experimenting with different forms of cooperation with private placement agencies (to increase capacity at local level).

The full paper is available to read and download on the PES to PES website [here](http://ec.europa.eu/social/pes-to-pes).

Analytical Papers coming soon

Competence-based profiling and matching in PES

- This Analytical Paper will look at current developments in skills-based profiling and matching in PES, outline lessons for effective practices and draw out key considerations of such tools for counsellors and jobseekers.

PES partnership management

- The aim of this Analytical Paper is to provide an overview of how PES establish and manage the partnership arrangements they have with other services, including partnerships with public, private and third sector providers of employment services.



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