



## Peer Review:

### ***‘Integrated multi-channelling: combining e-services with personalised services in a customer oriented and efficient way’***

**(VDAB Antwerp, 30 June – 1 July 2011)**

## Executive summary

### Introduction

In the context of increased demands coupled with greater budgetary stringency, finding the most effective and efficient ways to deliver services to job seekers is among the core priorities of many Public Employment Services. At the same time as striving for a greater personalisation of services, PES in the EU-27 have been working towards a more ‘targeted’ approach, designed to enable those job seekers who are likely to be reintegrated quickly into employment to help themselves while concentrating more in-depth services on those individuals with the greatest distance to travel towards labour market integration.

Multi-channel management (MCM) is one of the important ways in which PES have been seeking to deliver these goals. While the Peer Review highlighted the different national contexts and levels of maturity of MCM strategies in the host and peer countries present, it was also able to identify a number of core elements of good practice and key policy considerations to help advance effective approaches.

The following summarises key messages of the Peer Review in relation to the main questions to be addressed.

### **Each channel has specific characteristics: Importance of exploiting the various advantages of different channels effectively within given national constraints**

As a result of the Peer Review the various channels of interaction available (face to face, telephone, online) can be argued to have the following advantages and disadvantages:

- **Face-to-face services** for more complex situations

As a rule of thumb, clearly the more complex and sensitive the advice to be given, or information to be communicated, the greater the value of using face to face communication. This most ‘personal’ channel also has a particular value in providing motivation and a feeling of ‘social connection’ to the most disadvantaged and / or demotivated job seekers.

- **Online services** for routine and selected complex functions

However, as online channels become more sophisticated (including the use of automatic matching tools, e-monitoring and the exploitation of the networking and information multiplier potential of social networking tools), their use has become more widespread to perform routine as well as more complex functions.



- **Telephone channels** for all kind of services

This form of communication is often used for information giving and to supplement online and face to face channels and range in their functions from the basic (through automated messages) to personalised follow up of PES clients. However with the increasing use of online-services this channel might lose weight, other than as a back-up or support structure for the online channel.

It is important to note that the choice of channel available to different job seekers is not only conditioned by the determination of the 'best channel available for different purposes'. What can and cannot be done via online channels in different countries is **determined by various factors** like political, economic, or managerial decisions, the level of internet penetration in different countries, concerns and strategies relating to the 'digital divide' and different legal constraints .(e.g. in relation to initial registration and / or application for benefits).

### **What makes an effective multi-channel strategy: specific goals, clear assessment criteria and strong integration**

The critical concern is to offer the best package of services and channels of delivery to jobseekers and employers in a way which most effectively meets their requirements. This does not necessarily mean that all services have to be delivered fully on all channels. However, the Peer Review highlighted that at the moment it appears to be difficult to clearly determine what is an effective multi-channel strategy as approaches developed cannot be separated from the drivers for change (e.g. financial, political or technological considerations). As a result, different countries have developed a variety of MCM strategic mixes essentially falling into two main groups:

- **Group 1: Focus on steering by PES**

Countries striving towards the widespread use of online channels with face to face provision largely reserved for those in need of the most intensive level of activation (e.g. Netherlands, UK)

- **Group 2: Focus on customers' choice**

Countries aiming to keep all channels open for job seekers (and employers) to choose the channel which suits them best. At the same times these countries often use soft steering and marketing mechanisms to guide channel choice (e.g. Belgium – different regional PES, Sweden, Slovenia, Austria, Germany).

It was acknowledged that **political and financial decisions driving MCM strategy** sometimes lead to a lack of an overall coherent approach with clear targets or assessment criteria. The latter are important to measure progress towards efficiency and / or effectiveness criteria.

Although it is difficult to **measure the effectiveness of different channels** in achieving eventual integration outcomes (one study from the UK showed that reducing short face to face contacts for monitoring had the effect of reducing / slowing offloads into employment), more use could in future be made of techniques (like tracking entry, dropout and re-entry) used in the private sector.



Irrespective of decisions regarding the use of different channels for different clients, the **availability of back office IT integration** is critical to the success of any multi-channel strategy which aims to avoid duplication of effort.

### **The effective application of different online tools: exploiting the full potential of technology**

Among the many online tools which are being developed by PES, three were explored in more detail during the Peer Review: automatic vacancy matching, the use of e-workbooks and social media applications.

#### **1. Automatic vacancy matching tools – role of compatible profiles**

A number of PES, including VDAB have developed sophisticated **automatic vacancy matching tools** which, with the use of data matching, bring together details of vacancies with individual job-seekers' profiles. They regularly send out vacancies (to job seekers) or information on suitable job seekers (to employers). The most fundamental requirements of such systems are the accuracy and compatibility of data, which can be difficult to achieve, particularly in an 'unmediated' environment, where job seekers and employers enter their own information. It is therefore useful to retain a strong potential for review of such systems by PES staff to assess the matches created and the follow-up and job placements achieved.

#### **2. E-workbooks – role of data integration**

An increasing number of PES are using **e-workbooks** to monitor the actions and progress of individual job seekers. In some countries and for certain client groups, such digital tools are used on their own from the beginning to the end of the integration process (e.g. registration, action planning and monitoring, matching, information about active labour market policies deregistration). In others, e-workbooks are largely used to provide PES staff with a single entry point for access to information. Again, data integration and compatibility is a critical factor in the success of such tools. Legal restrictions at Member State level can determine what can and cannot be done with the use of an e-workbook (also in relation to data sharing with third parties delivering training or other support to job seekers).

#### **3. Social media – new opportunities and open questions**

PES interest in exploiting the networking and information multiplier potential of online **social networking** is growing as the use of these tools is expanding. The use of such tools still varies. Some PES are only using them for 'branding' or advertising, while others use them for more sophisticated communication purposes. In a number of countries PES are using tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn and twitter for marketing purposes, to better reach young persons, but also to facilitate networking like e-job clubs above all for higher skilled job seekers. Social networking can make it possible to access many clients without a significant infrastructural investment, with the PES becoming an 'enabler and facilitator' rather than a direct provider. However, in many countries PES remain reluctant to use such tools, partly because of a perceived lack of 'control' over information in this sphere.



### **Importance of organisational change management and staff buy-in**

It is strongly recommended that MCM developments must be lodged within an overall organisational change management strategy linked with a commitment to staff training and consultation. To be successful, ownership should be taken at the top level with line management acting as multipliers and enablers of change to foster the use of different channels. The implementation of MCM strategies inevitably brings with it a reorientation of budgetary and staff resources.

Communication on the reasons for the implementation of changes and training for PES practitioners is therefore vital to the success of these approaches. A number of PES have used approaches of working with 'early adopters' of relevant technologies to help train and motivate others staff and some are experimenting with ways of fostering and rewarding innovation. On the whole PES prefer to have the same staff responsible for a mixture of channels to allow them to combine different tasks and skills.

Finally, it was emphasised that strategic consideration should be given to **how to utilise any time freed up** through the automation or online delivery of certain channels in order to maximise positive outcomes for jobseekers.

On the whole multi-channelling was considered to have significant potential for service improvement and efficiency savings, of course bearing in mind often significant upfront costs for the development of sophisticated systems.

More information on the Peer Review is available [here](#).