

## CLIENT-ORIENTED INTEGRATION CHAINS

### COORDINATING A COHERENT SYSTEM OF SUPPORT SERVICES

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Although most of the institutions, agencies and services in the integration system share common overall aims in terms of people with disabilities, many of them work in parallel, operating in separate legislative structures and under different funding arrangements. This has led to fragmentation of, and confusion about, the work of different services in the field of vocational, medical and social integration or rehabilitation. It has also reduced the chances of smooth integration pathways being offered, and the potential for new methods and tools to be developed.

### REMOVING BARRIERS TO HELP INTEGRATE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES INTO THE LABOUR MARKET.

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A European Council Resolution adopted during the European Year of People with Disabilities (2003), calls on the Member States and the European Commission, within the framework of their respective powers, to:

- continue efforts **to remove barriers to the integration and participation of people with disabilities in the labour market**, by enforcing equal treatment measures and improving integration and participation at all levels of the educational and training system;
- pursue efforts to make lifelong learning more accessible to people with disabilities and, within this context, **give particular attention to the barrier-free use of new information and communication technologies and the Internet** to improve the quality of learning, vocational training and access to employment

However, a recent study on illness and disability by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions concludes that: "Various services are offered in the Member States, but often in a fragmented way without any consideration as to whether they will promote real independence. Whereas, the Report of the Employment Task Force recognises the need for more advances and urges Member States to:

- Equip employment services so that they can deliver tailor-made services **and strengthen local partnerships for employment.**

### EQUAL: INVESTING IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPROVED COOPERATION

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EQUAL provides time and money to build Development Partnerships comprising all key actors and stakeholders to work on ways of overcoming fragmentation and providing more effective services for people with disabilities. In the summer of 2003, a survey was carried out covering 24 EQUAL Development Partnerships that were working with people with disabilities and a striking point emerged: more than half of the Development Partnerships questioned said that their composition and cooperative work was the single most important element in their good practice. This is illustrated by the quote from one Development Partnership:

"The principal factor of success is a very strong co-operation between public and private health and rehabilitation bodies, training organisations and enterprises' associations, all fundamental actors in the approach designed by us."

Some of the benefits resulting from the coordinated delivery of existing integration and rehabilitation services are explained by the following examples from EQUAL.

## **PLUGGING THE GAPS**

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Partnerships working in two adjoining regions have identified problems of interface and communication at four different levels:

- Lack of coordination between the bodies responsible for the regulatory framework, funding and supervision of rehabilitation and integration measures;
- Insufficient cooperation between the providers of specialised rehabilitative, psycho-social and job-market oriented services;
- Gaps in cooperation between the two levels mentioned above and
- Gaps between the expectations of the job seekers and the available job offers.

As a response, key stakeholders combined their resources in a common strategy and tested the feasibility and sustainability of a regional network, which included service providers, funding authorities and other strategic partners. The pivot for almost all of the network's practical activities is a Centre for Vocational Rehabilitation and Work that operates as a one-stop shop providing advice, guidance and counselling. In addition, six "pilot sub-projects" are testing new ways of plugging gaps in services, such as the provision of care between the patients' stay in psychiatric departments and their (re-) entry into employment.

The outcome of all of this work has been an improvement in the performance of support systems that is also evident to clients or potential clients. For example, in the first year of operation, there were 64% more clients than expected and this number grew in the second year by 38% to almost 600. Moreover, more people have found placements, the integration processes are shorter and more effective and, perhaps most importantly, there are higher rates of job retention. It is now recognised that this regional co-operation network can serve as a model to underpin the reform process launched under new Social Security legislation in the Member State..

## **PROVIDING LOCAL, COST-EFFECTIVE SERVICES**

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Many municipalities, especially those in rural areas, often lack methods and structures for effective vocational rehabilitation. Thus, EQUAL in Sweden has developed a model that would make it possible for small municipalities to carry out vocational rehabilitation to a better quality and at a lower cost. Research, surveys and reports, including those from the national Board of Social Affairs, clearly indicate that many clients, and particularly those who are unemployed or most disadvantaged, have had negative personal experiences of vocational rehabilitation schemes because of the lack of genuine co-operation between integration agencies. They also state that they would like better collaboration amongst the authorities and organisations involved.

In this innovative approach all clients are offered a personal coordinator who assists, advises and supports them through the whole rehabilitation process, as well as in their contacts with various services and agencies. In addition, the approach adopted by EQUAL makes all actors including employers and partners feel that they are involved in all parts of the process, by communicating experiences and progress at all stages. As a result, there is now evidence to demonstrate that increased co-operation has improved the matching of individual needs with services and that the support to employers has opened up new job opportunities. As concern about the problems of long-term sick leave and the future financing of social security schemes grows, there is a great interest in this approach , which offers a coherent philosophy combining financial benefits with a focus on the individual's own needs.

## **LINKING TOGETHER AN INTEGRATION CHAIN**

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The wide variety of services available and the divergence in both their quality and quantity makes it difficult to create a secure integration chain for young people in their transition from school through vocational training and into an appropriate work setting.

To create such a chain, EQUAL has established and tested an action model for social planning at regional level. The partners include the funding authorities, the services providers, disability

organisations and workshops for people with disabilities. They all took part in the preparations and together they developed a concept for a common interest representation in the social planning committees. The four funding authorities also drafted and signed an agreement of co-operation at the highest possible decision-making level - the federal state. Through this agreement, coordinated action was established in a number of different contexts. This arrangement has produced benefits for everyone involved:

- **The clients** - Within the regional structures, the four funding authorities can now co-ordinate a wide network of well known supportive offers and make the necessary transition from one offer to the next within the clients' individual action plans;
- **The funding authorities** - Co-ordination between all of the participating partners has produced a more effective service offer with higher acceptance and more efficient use of resources;
- **The political decision makers** - Accurate and more financially sound decisions have been made in the area of social planning, based on actual demand and action plan proposals;
- **The service providers** - A continuous planning process proves to guarantee optimal qualitative and quantitative adaptation of the services to the actual local/regional demands

## DESIGNING NEW TOOLS

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While they are of great value to the clients, the construction, monitoring and management of the integration chains or individualised pathways mentioned above can be a very complex and time-consuming process. The partners in one EQUAL Partnership work with about 300 people each year and needed an effective system to jointly monitor the progress of these individuals. They therefore created and tested what they call an "individual guided talk for the evaluation of the situation of people with disabilities". The guide is usually operated with experts from the seven partners, and is essentially a software database that aims to support a holistic approach to the provision of services. Secure access to the "individualised guided talk" is provided through an intranet site. All partners can consult the site to extract data or to make their own input related to the integration pathways of their clients. In addition, more than 70 types of activities that are involved in these pathways to social and vocational integration have been included in the database. This makes it possible to visualise the course of an individual client on an on-going basis from reception and diagnosis through the training actions carried out along the pathway to the final stage of a placement or job.

The main advantages of this approach for professional staff are more accessible information and better management of their clients' progress. The positive points for people with disabilities are more in-depth discussions with the professional workers, improved speed and quality of responses and resulting action that is better adapted to their needs

## EXPLOITING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

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For many people with disabilities who lack mobility or need specific healthcare treatment, travelling regularly to a training centre or finding suitable residential accommodation near to a training centre can be a problem. One answer tested under EQUAL is to develop new forms of computer-based learning so that trainees do not have to give up their social or family environments or systems of health care if they decide to enter training. EQUAL has combined open and distance training and "alternance" (linked theoretical and work-based) training for disabled people. The experiment brings together 12 of these centres, two national companies that have a number of branches and two networks of local tutors, one of which is specialised in working with blind people. Together, their mission is to provide all the measures and support that are needed to facilitate the social and professional reintegration of people with disabilities and to ensure training in their home or as near as possible to where they live. Thus, they have to take account of the psychological and social dimensions, as well as the potential and the constraints of each trainee.

The benefits of this new cooperative approach can already be seen. People with disabilities get better access to training and the chance to gain a qualification. They also have individualised training courses adapted to their constraints and requirements. The co-operation between different actors has improved the matching of individual needs and services and the mutual understanding of each other's measures and provision. At national level, EQUAL is holding a series of working meetings with the representatives of the relevant Ministries to inform them about its results and to promote the integration of the good practices of the DP into guidelines for further funding incentives.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**EQUAL has demonstrated how the cooperative working that has been engendered by its Development Partnerships has led to dramatic improvements in the services that are available to people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Local and regional authorities should promote similar partnership approaches in their labour market integration schemes , and regional, national or European bodies, which finance such schemes should ensure that the existence of an effective local partnership, is one of their most important criteria in the allocation of funding.**

***For those who can promote or support partnerships for labour market integration, particularly local and regional authorities:***

- The difficulties that people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups face in accessing employment can only be overcome by departments and services working together - education and training and guidance and placement agencies. Housing, health and social services also have an important contribution to make as some individuals have to resolve pressing personal problems before they are able to take part in training or employment;
- While increased efforts should be made to ensure that buildings and public transport are accessible to people with disabilities, there is also scope for the further application of open and distance learning methods. By harnessing the knowledge and expertise of different agencies, more offers of training could be provided that match the requirements and life styles of people with disabilities.

***For those regional, national or European bodies which have the resources to finance projects or programmes for labour market integration:***

- Experience from EQUAL and from the former EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative strongly suggests that if people with disabilities or people from other disadvantaged groups are to make a smooth transition from unemployment to employment they require understandable and structured pathways. Such pathways can only be built on the active cooperation of all agencies and services involved. Thus, evidence of the existence of an effective local partnership should be an important criterion for the allocation of financial assistance to integration projects or programmes.