



PES to PES Dialogue
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PES to PES Dialogue Conference

Quality Management:
The Professionalism of Employment
Counsellors
The Toolkit

2013

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1. Introduction

Quality assurance is one of the core themes of the PES 2020 Strategy Paper endorsed by HOPES in 2012. As well as on-going enhancements and individualisation of the service offer to job seekers, it involves a greater demand orientation and enhanced partnerships with other labour market actors, all with the goal of achieving sustainable and efficient activation and job matching. These priorities echo those of the Employment Package, which called on PES to 'transform themselves into "transition management agencies" delivering a new combination of the "active" and "passive" functions'.

Since its inception in 2010, the activities of the PES to PES Dialogue have emphasised the core role played by employment counsellors in achieving positive integration outcomes and effective resource allocation. They are the agents of the successful individualisation of pathways and allocation of suitable measures through the preparation and monitoring of tailored individual action plans. Similarly, they are responsible for ensuring the effective interaction with other providers and services. It is therefore on their competences - skills, knowledge and behaviours - that the frontline delivery of effective PES services depends.

In April 2013, a [PES to PES Dialogue Conference](#) was held in Brussels to specifically address quality management through the professionalism of employment counsellors. The objectives of the conference were to deepen the discussion with PES about quality management with regards to the personalised services offered by employment counsellors in order to define key criteria that might be relevant for all PES despite their different business models and labour market conditions. The conference was attended by representatives from 22 PES, the European Commission, the [European Lifelong Guidance Network](#) and the academic community. Their discussions were guided by the three guiding questions presented below.

Box 1: Guiding questions for the Dialogue Conference

1. Job entry - what are the key ingredients and aspects to be considered for recruitment and initial training of PES counsellors
2. Continuing professional development - what on-going learning and improvement processes are in place?
3. Staffing concepts and leadership - what are the implications of a more diverse client base and changing requirements?

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide PES practitioners with an overview of the conference discussions and highlight examples of good practice to inform thinking on human resource management in PES more widely. The toolkit also serves to flag up opportunities for further discussion and collaboration between PES at the EU level, as a way forward from the conference.

2. Profile of core competences across European PES

The conference directly built on the [analytical paper](#) on job profiles and training for employment counsellors (European Commission 2012; Author: Sienkiewicz). This paper showed that despite the diversity of business models and a degree of diversification in the job profiles of PES counsellors, a common set of core competences for employment counsellors can be identified. These competences include interviewing and counselling skills, assessment and matching, networking, knowledge of labour market trends and regulatory requirements, as well as client orientation.

Box 2: Competence and skills - a shared set of definitions¹

Brief definitions of the main concepts are set out here to aid clarity and inform discussion:

- Competence is a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to achieve observable results. Competences therefore embed or incorporate skills.
- Hard skills or technical skills - are teachable and easy to define and measure, for example, IT skills, the acquisition of a foreign language and financial/numerical ability. They often relate to technical know-how and are based on specific techniques or tools to support their application;
- Soft skills – are less tangible and are often related to personal attributes or traits. Descriptions of soft skills include cognitive dimensions (identify/solve), relational (share/assist) and behavioural (propose/foster) features and which for PES counsellors include problem-solving skills, flexibility and client orientation;
- Knowledge - in the case of PES counsellors, knowledge may be local or PES-specific, such as the labour market conditions and the operational specificities of the administration, eligibility rules and service offer of the PES.

With reference to the above-mentioned analytical paper, Sienkiewicz² observes that due to the changing role of the PES and the greater focus on the activation and integration of jobseekers, the role of the employment counsellor is evolving. The counselling and guidance elements are gaining greater prominence in an attempt to facilitate earlier and sustainable entry to employment. As a consequence, the counsellors' job profile becomes more that of a broker, counsellor, social worker and administrator.

In his review of European PES, Sienkiewicz has found that although job profiles exist in all PES, there is a range of practices amongst PES in relation to the:

- Skills and competences expected of counsellors;
- Entry-level requirements;
- Initial investment in training for new counsellors; and
- On-going provision of training and professional development.

In general terms, this marked diversity is due to the different models of activation used by the various PES and the growing use of digitalisation in the mix of service channels. But nevertheless, Sienkiewicz has been able to identify core tasks in relation to how employment counsellors provide services to their job seekers - tasks focused on placement, counselling, information provision, and administration and monitoring.

¹ Various sources including <http://www.ecompetences.eu/2173,Competences,+skills,+jobs....html>

² [Core Competences in PES, Entrance Requirements and On-going Professional Development: the Current Position](#), Lukasz Sienkiewicz, Conference Presentation, 2013

Similarly, Sienkiewicz has been able to identify a set of core and additional competences that is common to most PES (Table 1 below). It is notable that the balance of competences is in favour of the general rather than the country or service specific skills. Consequently, Sienkiewicz concludes that it seems possible to define a certain minimum standard of service based on the identified set of common competences.

To link back to the definitions of skills above, we have organised Sienkiewicz's list into hard, soft and knowledge based skills. Notable also is the prevalence of soft skills in guidance and counselling. As the list of core competences illustrates, at the heart of guidance and counselling lies relationship building, communication, active listening, problem solving, and an ability to motivate clients. Consequently, this necessitates more than the intuitive application of soft skills in a given PES context. A key feature in the professionalisation of counsellors therefore is that these 'soft skills' must be equally professionalised.

In conclusion, Sienkiewicz recommends the **adoption of a key competence profile** as the focal point of all skills related activities for employment counsellors and a life-cycle approach to the recruitment, training and career development of employment counsellors. He states that a 'key competence standard' would allow for the search of competent employment counselling candidates, regardless of whether their level of competence has been achieved during formal education, additional training or work-related experience. In addition, the key competence approach would facilitate better structuring of employment counsellors' careers and the real possibility of on-the-job development, promoting in-depth (professional) progression rather than simply hierarchical progression.

Table 1- Common Competency Profile for Employment Counsellors³

COMPETENCES	
CORE	ADDITIONAL
<p>Technical Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment and matching skills ▪ Communication and interviewing/counselling skills ▪ Teamwork/cooperation ▪ IT skills ▪ Planning and organising skills ▪ Information finding and analysis skills <p>Soft Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Client orientation ▪ Communication ▪ Problem recognition and solving ▪ Motivational skills ▪ Patience, understanding and the ability to listen non-judgementally ▪ Trust building ability/reliability ▪ Negotiation skills ▪ Flexibility ▪ Stress resistance <p>Country/Service Specific Knowledge</p> <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 	<p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge of vocational structure and vocational classifications ▪ Knowledge of labour law ▪ Knowledge of human resource management ▪ Knowledge of performance measurement/ control ▪ Knowledge of hard and soft skills assessment tools ▪ Knowledge of social case management problems ▪ Knowledge of concepts for recruitment, placement, HRM ▪ Knowledge of occupations ▪ Knowledge of counselling concepts ▪ Knowledge of networking, partnerships <p>Other Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment of psychological and social profiles ▪ Group facilitation skills ▪ Ability to work independently ▪ Innovativeness/creativity

³ Adapted from [Core Competences in PES, Entrance Requirements and On-going Professional Development: the Current Position](#), Lukasz Sienkiewicz, Conference Presentation, 2013 and conference workshop contributions.

3. Recruitment, initial training and continuing professional development

Guiding question 1: Job entry - what are the key ingredients and aspects to be considered for recruitment and initial training of PES counsellors?

Guiding question 2: Continuing professional development - what on-going learning and improvement processes are in place?

3.1 Job Entry

Employment counsellors need a set of core competences – in particular, the essential combination of both hard and soft skills, complemented by in-depth local and country-specific knowledge.

Referring back to the set of core competences developed by Sienkiewicz, client-orientation, problem-solving and other soft skills are particularly valued by PES. It is therefore essential to identify candidates with – or at least the strong potential to develop - these skills at the entry stage. By contrast, hard skills, such as IT skills, numerical ability and fluency in a foreign language, and PES-specific knowledge can be developed following recruitment, if needed.

A range of factors need to be taken into account when determining the entry-level requirements.

When considering entry-level requirements, there is value in referring back to the findings of Sienkiewicz's research⁴, as presented in Box 3 below.

⁴ European Commission 2013a, Core Competences in PES, Entrance Requirements and on-going Professional Development: The Current Position, Brussels, Author: Łukasz Sienkiewicz; p.10

Box 3: Diverse entry level requirements for Employment Counsellors evident

The review of PES highlights a range of entry-level requirements in the recruitment of employment counsellors. Entry-level education requirements range from general secondary education through to a Bachelor's degree or above. It is not unusual in some PES for counsellors to be qualified to Master's degree level and higher.

'Other entry-level requirements' include additional certifications, additional languages and some professional work experience.

In terms of the subject matter, educational achievement preferences cover the social sciences, including psychology, pedagogy, sociology, law and so on.

While there is a complexity of requirements, there is a general consistency across the different types of entry level requirements – broadly,

- Higher education-level requirements are mirrored by high levels of requirements in the other criteria.
- The exception to this is where low levels of educational attainment are required and the 'other entry-level requirements' are used as an *alternative* indicator for recruitment.

There is **no 'one-size-fits-all' approach** to setting the entry-level requirements for employment counsellors. PES need to establish their criteria by taking account of

- the availability and quality of the labour supply;
- adequacy of the national education and training systems;
- relative pay, terms and conditions of employment;
- and recruitment legislation, especially pre-prescribed criteria and centralised recruitment for the civil service

A number of PES operate within the regime of a general civil service recruitment process, which can limit their flexibility to recruit specifically for the employment counsellor competency profile. Greater emphasis therefore needs to be placed on 'shaping' the candidate to the role through the initial training. Pay, terms and conditions of employment varied across PES with, as one would expect, differing consequences for entry-level requirements, subsequent staff turnover and, the gender profile within the PES. Examples included: the correlation between lower level entry requirements and concomitant relatively lower entry-level pay; higher staff turnover where PES pay rates were less competitive than in the wider labour market; and, how women in some PES may have traded relatively lower rates of pay as counsellors in return for employment stability, family friendly policies and greater flexibility in working hours.

Box 4: From rigid categories of counsellors and professional licences to the new generic 'customer counsellor' role in Poland

The job profiles at the Polish PES are prepared at government level and set out in laws and regulations at central level. The 2004 Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions defines six main categories of PES staff. The functions of placement officers and vocational counsellors are sub-classified, according to the level of acquired qualifications, into trainee specialists, (regular) specialists, and specialists of 1st and 2nd grade. Professional licenses authorising the people to perform a function of a certain grade are issued by a voivode (regional office) according to criteria defined in law.

Job placement officers deal with administrative aspects such as administering unemployment benefits and making recommendations regarding job search whereas *vocational guidance counsellors* are professional career guidance counsellors who help with orientation and the profiling of job-seekers' qualifications.

Trainee level for both types of counsellors can be entered with secondary level education. However in order to obtain the basic professional licences after 12 months of practice/experience in a local PES a different educational background is required– for placement officers a secondary level education is sufficient, for vocational counsellors a higher tertiary education (Bachelor level) is required.

At the 1st grade of professional licence at least 24 months of professional experience is necessary and for 2nd grade professional licence at least 36 months are required. For each type of counsellor higher education levels (Master's Degree and other post graduate degrees) are required with further specialisation for each of the respective job profiles. Vocational counsellors typically specialise in psychology or vocational counselling.

Counsellors have an obligation to take part in PES continuous training programmes.

Future reforms in 2014 by the government foresee the reorganisation of PES introducing a less rigid structure for PES job profiles by abolishing the system of professional licences and replacing them with position profiles with differentiated levels of responsibility and by unifying the job profile of the two types of counsellors into one generic profile – a *customer counsellor*.

PES need fit-for-purpose and flexible recruitment methods for the selection of counsellors.

Recruitment methods traditionally tend to emphasise individuals' academic and professional backgrounds, with the criteria sometimes extended to language requirements, IT skills and relevant work experience. However, PES examples demonstrate how the effective use of assessment centres, psychometric tests and Simulation Recruitment Methods can help to capture applicants' capabilities and potential more broadly, in particular their soft skills which are so essential to the role.

Box 5: Recruitment Simulation Methods for Employers and the PES in France

To eliminate discretionary factors in the recruitment process, the French PES has developed a method of recruitment by simulation. This method focuses exclusively on jobseekers' capacities rather than previous skills or experience.

The method involves preselected jobseekers taking part in a simulation process where they are required to perform a series of tasks which replicate particular workplace environments. With this process candidates are selected on the base of behavioural performance and ability to complete given tasks.

Tasks are developed in co-operation with employers to ensure the right profiling of skills required in the labour market. This method was well-received by employers and allowed PES to select and successfully employ hard to place job-seekers.

This same model is used to good effect in the recruitment process for PES counsellors.

3.2. Initial Training

The duration and design of initial training is diverse, reflecting the different educational attainment levels of recruits on entry as well as different HRM approaches across the PES.

According to Sienkiewicz, initial training is diverse while broadly in line with the country groupings of entry-level requirements, with some evidence that low-level requirements are being compensated for by higher levels of initial training – in terms of duration and content - but this is not universally the case⁵. However, the general view amongst PES is that whatever the duration, initial training is best comprised of formal study/off-the-job training and on-the job learning/experience, i.e. dual training or study course.

Initial training covers the development of hard skills and PES-specific knowledge, such as labour market intelligence, legal frameworks of entitlement and responsibilities, recruitment and Active Labour Market Policy options and performance management. Approaches to developing 'soft skills' include formal training e.g. in counselling, and experiential learning including observation of colleagues, on-the-job supervision, coaching and mentoring.

According to the French example, the critical success factors in initial training are the provision of:

- a consistent training offer;
- the mobilisation of funds for training resources and tutorials;
- the determination of the appropriate training plan at the time of recruitment;
- giving time for practice and observation between different training modules; and
- tutorials and support from 'buddies' while in work.

⁵ European Commission 2013a, Core Competences in PES, Entrance Requirements and on-going Professional Development: The Current Position, Brussels, Author: Łukasz Sienkiewicz; p.14

Box 6: In-house University level training in Germany

For one of its entry level paths, the Federal Labour Agency (BA) provides a specialised Bachelor's degree in two fields of study at its own University – Labour Market Management and Analysis which is a more general training for employment counsellor for jobseekers or employers; and Case Management and Counselling with focus on integration of special target groups into the labour market. The selection process of candidates is ensured by a local BA – direct application to the University is not possible. Each selected candidate will be hired by the BA and for 3 years follows a dual study programme with theoretical and practical trimesters. The “trainees” are remunerated during the entire course of studies. Once studies are finalised the newly trained counsellor will follow a short period of on-the-job training under the supervision of the local manager. If the latter determines that additional individual training needs remain, an individual training plan will be set up. Once all training is completed the counsellor acquires recognised professional status and starts to work fully as an employment counsellor.

An indicator of the success of having its own university programme and investing in a relatively long period of training is the low staff turnover rate at the BA. Taking into account that approximately 300 students start this type of training each year it can be considered as a kind of ‘high potential future leadership’ training.

(An extensive explanation of this example can be found in the PES analytical paper – European Commission 2012, *Job profiles and training for employment counsellors*, p.39, Author: L Sienkiewicz).

Box 7: Extensive in-house training in Austria

The Austrian PES has standardised in-house training paths which include extensive basic training and further in-depth training on cross-cutting topics.

The basic training focuses on three pillars: development of goals, uniform delivery principles and curriculum.

Training on goal setting and professional development aims at building up a portfolio of qualifications for the future job, specifically on contents, methods and tools. Additional goals concern employees' motivational training through identification with PES and its targets.

The training procedures are standardised for all new employees irrespective of their educational background, with a mix of training in a central training institution and in local PES offices. The basic training starts at the beginning of the employment period and focuses on qualifications required in order to work with clients.

There is a comprehensive and standardised curriculum which comprises of:

- 40 weeks of total training
- 23 weeks in the central training institution
- 288 hours of IT training
- 17 weeks of applied training in local PES offices
- 3 sections with two compulsory segments for all employees and one customised segment according to dedicated areas (services for job seekers, services for companies, contact centre). Each segment leads to a final exam.

Additional topics embedded in the basic training relate to the structure, mission and goals of PES; the Austrian labour market; occupations; communication; quality management and practical case training in relevant fields.

Further training is provided on promotion of the strategic and organisational development of PES, resources and competences of staff.

Box 8: Labour Market Training Centre in Croatia- the introduction of a professional certificate for the role of employment counsellor

Within the Croatian Employment Service (CES) job profiles of employment counsellors are highly diversified according to economic sectors and their regional labour market specificities and target groups of clients. Employment counsellors are therefore involved in regional/local specific activities depending on client/partner's needs. As from 1992 the entry level requirement for employment counsellors is to be in possession of a university degree (ISCID level 6) in the field of social sciences and humanities.

The Labour Market Training Centre (LMTC) is a training centre that aims to develop a clear, transparent, quality based system of gaining and developing employment counsellor competencies - from the CES and other private employment services and civil sector organisations. The programme of training is based on an analysis identifying individual counsellor's training needs in each of the regional CES. Furthermore, the training is provided by a trainer in each regional CES who is supported by a regional mentor that will follow up the training more closely on the job with each trained individual.

There are two types of training: initial training for newly hired staff and continuous training.

The initial training aims to provide a mix of general knowledge and skills of all staff (such as communication, interpersonal and personal competences, planning and organising work, entrepreneurship competences, digital and analytical competences) and specific applied knowledge content for future job responsibilities according to the job profile. It is a sandwich learning module including a one week theoretical course and a three week practical session relating to on the job specific training content. The general length of the training depends on the job profile, the individual's previous work and training experience and the general professional regulations established by the professional chambers and associations to acquire the professional licence. It could last for more than one year.

The continuous training programme is provided by CES trainers and external trainers and training services. It includes seminars, conferences and specialised regional training events.

CES sets out quality standards for training and monitors and evaluates them continuously through quality performance indicators. It makes competences and training standards visible for clients, partners and society at large. One of the success factors of having an institutionalised training procedure as established by the LMTC for employment counsellors is that it enables counsellors of the CES (and those in private and other civil service organisations) to manage their career and training needs providing also for more job development opportunities.

The CES is currently working on establishing a training procedure for an employment counsellor professional certificate to be delivered by the LMTC which would lead to a recognised profile of employment counsellor.

One of the current challenges for the development of the LMTC is the restricted public budget to further invest in its structure and partnerships.

Mentoring and coaching are essential components of initial (and on-going) training for the development of counselling skills

The general logic applied by PES is that 'soft skills' needed for counselling and individual action planning are often acquired on-the-job over time, not necessarily - or to the same extent - through initial training. This is especially the case when 'soft skills' development

is supported by effective supervision and support from colleagues. Currently there are indications that only a few PES offer formal training to professionalise counselling, interviewing, and assessment skills. Examples include *Germany*, where the Bachelor's degree for employment counsellors includes modules on guidance and counselling and includes behavioural training where trainees can practice their counselling, interviewing and assessment skills using role play and *Estonia* which offers a 3 day work-focused interviewing training programme (see Box 8 below).

Mentoring and coaching are frequently highlighted as an important feature of both initial and on-going training, not only in terms of supporting the new recruit, but also in helping to bring out the 'soft skills' and attributes required of the job.

Viewed from the delivery side, in-depth knowledge and direct experience of the counselling job are key pre-requisites of competent mentors, coaches and trainers (as well as managers). Moreover, the role of mentor/coach can be an effective way of developing the career and maintaining the motivation of employment counsellors who are already very experienced in the job - particularly those who would like to progress professionally, but not directly into the echelons of management.

As mentoring and coaching are considered to be important components in skills development for employment counsellors, there is potential benefit in exploring the role, its contribution, the skills of mentors and their selection and training more fully.

Box 8: Work focussed counselling in *Estonia*

Since 2011, the PES has developed and implemented work-focused counselling. In-house trainers were trained and a training programme was developed in cooperation with a consultant from the UK. As a result, a 3 day training programme was delivered in 2011-2012 to all employment counsellors (around 300 staff members were enrolled). The next planned stage (in 2013-2014) is to train coaches who support the daily use of work-focused counselling skills at the work place, to develop and establish a national employment counsellor qualification (by adjusting the European Employment Practitioner Certificate), to train assessors to assess skills in practice and to award qualifications. The training programme will be regularly updated according to labour market developments.

A climate of learning (which allows counsellors to make mistakes as well) and of trust is a preliminary condition to make this type of CPD a success. Mentors are currently being trained to help counsellors deal with difficult situations they encounter.

Despite a set of similar core tasks for employment counsellors the diversity of recruitment and training approaches across the PES is striking. Section 5 of this paper discusses this diversity and the next steps for addressing this in more detail.

3.3 Continuing Professional Development

Box 9: What is continuing professional development and why does it matter?⁶

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a core component in the recognition of a profession and maintenance of professional standards. CPD involves maintaining the knowledge, skills and practical experience of a profession and can involve any relevant activity including formal, structured and informal, experiential learning.

The benefits of CPD for the individual include increased competence, leading to greater confidence and credibility, greater awareness and management of career goals, greater self-direction of learning and skills development. The most effective CPD focuses on setting goals and achieving results and outcomes, rather than measuring inputs or time spent.

For organisations, CPD promotes staff development with the potential to increase skills and productivity and staff motivation. CPD encourages staff to actively think about their own and their organisation's development.

CPD is particularly important with regard to 'talent management' - bringing out the best of people in post and encouraging those with the greatest potential to progress.

Most PES have in place CPD provision, often framed as **a minimum number of days training to be undertaken per annum**, for example 5 days per year in *Portugal, France* and *Germany*. However, this criterion is seen as the bare minimum and should be supplemented by measures to frame and support CPD across the whole PES organisation.

Good practice examples include **competence profiles and personal development plans** incorporated into structured and regular appraisal processes. Training should directly and explicitly reflect individual work situations, tasks and skill needs. The evaluation of CPD and learning gained should also be linked through to the review process - creating a 'virtuous circle.'

Career paths of employment counsellors can be limited but there are progression routes into team leadership and higher levels of management. While vertical routes may be constrained, there are a number of opportunities for horizontal moves that are used by PES. These offer new roles, the opportunity to acquire new skills and keep the job fresh and interesting. Examples include counsellors developing as mentors and coaches, becoming trainers in their own right, taking on specialist counselling functions for example for target groups such as young people, and working with external partners either on a regular basis or around a specific project.

A range of CPD opportunities should ideally be offered in order to cater for different learning needs, contexts, styles and motivations.

Illustrations of CPD opportunities include:

- a PES university and dedicated PES training centres/programmes;
- a rolling programme of seconding experienced PES staff to an in-house team of trainers;
- blended learning – using a mix of practical experience and study including self-assessment and line manager assessment;

⁶ <http://www.cipd.co.uk/cpd/benefitscpd.htm>

- effective on-the-job training including mentoring and coaching, peer-to-peer learning and the use of case conferences; and
- ICT and e-communications as platforms for effective learning and dissemination, including Intranets for Frequently Asked Questions, good practice modules and discussion fora. The European Social Fund is an important source of finance to support these initiatives.

Promoting CPD and its take-up by (busy) counsellors is essential and activities to support CPD include having:

- a learning culture within the organisation (linking to the importance of leadership);
- a structured appraisal process;
- a career path for counsellors;
- the opportunity for mentoring and coaching; and
- formal and informal learning opportunities, including external accreditation.

Box 10: Career development routes in Germany - guided by individual training plans, assessment centres and tailored training⁷

In the BA there are two specific paths: vertical mobility to management positions and horizontal mobility to deepen expert competence, both are usually supported by specific training for these positions. The BA develops an individual training plan for each counsellor which is assessed each year. The plan is developed in a dialogue between the line manager and the individual counsellor. There are also some recent experiences mirroring similar practices from the private sector.

To fill specific positions in more senior positions, assessment centres are used. This practice entails the development of competency profiles for the designated positions and a mixture of various tests to ascertain a good fit to the competences of the individual. Tools used are intelligence tests, aptitude tests, questionnaires of personal characteristics and interests as well as workshops which simulate situations where candidates can display behaviour which may be important for undertaking certain tasks in the future workplace. This is very often the case in the private sector when top managers have to be chosen internally from second line managers.

The BA has its own Leadership Academy which also develops tools and concepts for continuous professional development such as an internal E-learning tool.

CPD needs to sit within an overall strategic and organisational development approach

Individual employees' investment in CPD cannot be fully effective in isolation. Their personal development plans have to link to and sit inside a wider strategy for the PES that identifies its vision and direction of travel and how the skills and competences of staff can contribute the achievement of the vision.

⁷ European Commission 2013b, Staffing Concepts and the Role of Leadership in PES, Brussels, Author: Sanja Crnković-Požaić

Box 11: Norway: Competence development and monitoring to ensure quality of service

In the Norwegian PES (NAV), there is a comprehensive approach to competence development and monitoring to ensure quality of service and goal attainment. The approach begins at the top and reference to competence development is built into strands of the organisation's corporate strategy – management, services to customers and partners, operational and organisational efficiency, cohesion and reliability. (See further information in Annex 1)

There are a number of supporting features that underpin the development of skills within NAV:

- Profiles of abilities for various tasks and services are registered on Competence@NAV;
- There is an e-learning portal – Learning@NAV with around 60 e-learning courses. Employment-related follow-up is the most important competence development activity; and
- A questionnaire on 'performance competence' has been developed for employees to register/asses how they perform in key tasks and service areas. This is a management tool for improving quality and professionalism at work.

Alongside these, regular job assessment meetings between managers and employees form the basis for individual job/career development plans. Participation in training is decided on the basis of these meetings. Multi-tasking at local offices is assessed by reference to common standards, but managers take individual challenges into account.

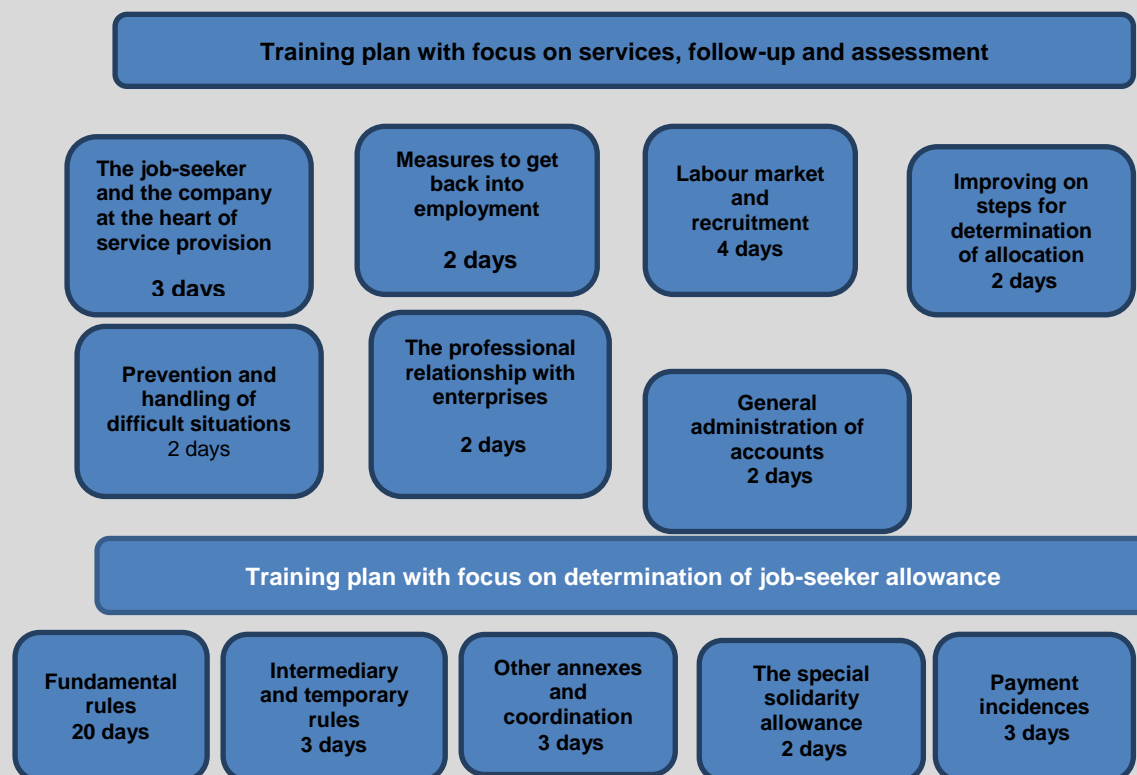
Managers are subject to the same competence development system. Competence management is seen as essential to ensuring the quality of work of the whole organisation and not just the front-line.

The management approach to addressing motivation, health, stress and career development comprises:

- Annual/regular job assessment meetings with employees;
- Employee career development plans for all staff members;
- Skills upgrading and local wage adjustments are used as incentives to improve work performance; and
- Follow-up on how employees perform within the human resource guidelines. A national agreement on Inclusive Working Life for which NAV is responsible, requires individual work adaptation for employees with mental and physical health problems.

Box 12 CPD: training modules in France

Continuous training modules can be determined according to the specific focus of training for example on services or on more administrative and financial tasks as seen in the diagram below:



Continuous training is obligatory for employment counsellors. Each year an annual evaluation meeting with the line manager is held. The objectives of the meeting are an assessment of work activities of the year, determining where progress should be achieved in the coming year and analysis of training needs by taking into account national strategic orientations for Pole Emploi. Each counsellor is entitled to 5 days of training each year.

The continuous training modules are taught in regional specialised training centres which are part of Pole Emploi. These centres employ in-house trainers and work with an extensive network of external trainers.

The following factors can help make this type of CPD successful:

- Leaving enough time between training modules so that newly gained knowledge can be applied;
- Ensuring adequate support from line managers; and
- Using on-the-job mentors to follow up on progress or any problems.

4. Staffing concepts and leadership

Guiding question 3: Staffing concepts and leadership - what are the implications of a diverse client base and changing requirements?

4.1 Diversity management

Diversity management is a highly relevant issue to PES, both in relation to staff and clients.

A definition of diversity is presented in the box below.

Box 13: What is diversity management?

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing difference based on ethnicity, gender, colour, age, race, religion, disability, national origin and sexual orientation while striving to achieve equal access, opportunity and support in a changing and increasingly competitive labour market.⁸

There are two applications of diversity management within PES. The first – which is commonly understood in the field of human resource management (HRM) – relates to the management of an increasingly diverse workforce within the PES itself. The second has been more specifically raised by PES and relates to how the organisation and its staff respond to a diverse client base. Each of these applications is addressed in turn.

A diverse cadre of staff brings particular added value if well managed.

Diversity management is not an issue that solely concerns frontline PES staff – it must be reflected and championed at the highest levels of management in order to deliver benefits for the organisation. In *Germany*, for example, the potential value of diversity is recognised by senior management in the organisation:

‘...Diversity management supports variety and uses it deliberately for business success.

For BA, diversity is an opportunity and an asset. This is why we expressly declare our support for diversity management. Openness towards and appreciation of diversity and its deliberate furtherance supports equality of opportunity, strengthens the BA’s innovative force and attractiveness to employers as the motivation and loyalty of employees. Only in this way can we create and experience a performance-oriented, innovative administration culture and measure up to future challenges’.⁹

The best of diversity can be realised by using multiple, tailored practices.

There is a wide range of staffing concepts and approaches that are deployed by PES to manage and support a diverse workforce; and a number of PES have comprehensive HRM and diversity management practices in place. Some of the policies and practices of diversity management are presented in the table below.

⁸ Deloitte 2011 in European Commission 2013b, Staffing Concepts and the Role of Leadership in PES, Brussels, Author: Sanja Crnković-Pozaić

⁹ Frank-J. Weise, Chairman of the Management Board, Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2008 Diversity management at the BA

Table 2: A 'menu' of diversity management practices for PES staff

Family friendly policy	Older workers	Ethnic minority staff	Disabled
Flexible working hours; working hours accounts; school term-time working arrangements Alternating working from home/office Assistance (financial, logistical) in sourcing child- care/care for dependents Skills checks and up-dates on return to work	Sensitising managers Flexible working hours Health management policies and health and well-being practices Lifelong learning opportunities Targeted use of experience on projects, in mentoring and coaching	Training for staff and managers in cultural diversity Integration and working in mixed teams Development of specialist counselling skills for specific groups Support for language training	Sensitivity training for managers and staff Flexible hours/working from home Accessible buildings and facilities, adaptation of working environment Provision of specialist technical aids and personal assistants
Equality of opportunity Gender mainstreaming Gender training Competence-based assessments for advancement and progression The exercise of affirmative action, where appropriate			

Box 14: Holistic human resource policy in Germany¹⁰

The German PES sets out the following guidelines:

'We consider the individual life situation in different phases of life to make the employment relationship attractive, to develop individual motivation and employment potentials and thus to secure employability (HR focused on phases of life).

We promote diversity of our staff to professionally react to different needs of different groups of clients. The BA clearly embraced the promotion of diversity by signing the 'Charter of Diversity' (Charta der Vielfalt).

We create learning and working conditions as well as personnel development appropriate for all ages and without any age restriction. We thus guarantee a high standard of qualifications.

We systematically focus HR development on the competencies demanded in the future.

We promote talents with performance-oriented career options without any career barriers'.

¹⁰ Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA) With competence and motivation to succeed: HR policy at the BA, October 2010, www.arbeitsagentur.de

Diversity management can start with targeted recruitment, especially from the local community.

Targeted recruitment can ensure the PES workforce better reflects the client population by age, gender and ethnicity. PES offer examples of using local recruitment flexibilities, especially in urban areas, to attract individuals from local communities of minority groups to join the PES. Rapid responses to working with new migrant groups, especially those who have no skills in the language, are considered important. Moreover, the flexibility to recruit locally can enable quick action.

In terms of recruiting young people to the role of employment counsellors, *Austria* and *Germany* offer an apprenticeship programme. This has proven to be a useful route into the occupation as many stay with the PES and move into counselling on completion.

Talent management forms an integral part of diversity management in the higher echelons of the PES

Talent management programmes can ensure that the composition of the senior management teams reflects the composition of the overall PES workforce. For example, while it appears that the majority of employment counsellors are female, females do not make up the same proportion of management. In *Belgium Flanders*, they found that there was reluctance amongst female members of staff to apply for management roles. At the same time, they identified the ageing profile of managers and future bottlenecks in management. They consequently put in place a development programme to prompt progression by spotting future managers, exploring and strengthening their leadership talent and preparing them for taking on a management position (see Box 19 for more details).

Box 15: Talent management: Tapping into the wealth of knowledge of the most experienced employment counsellors

According to the discussion paper (European Commission 2013b; (Author: Crnković-Pozaić)), various methods can be used to tap into the knowledge of the most experienced employment counsellors, including:

- Recruitment – experienced workers profiling skills and knowledge of the job requirements is important for successful recruitment of new employees – HR role
- Training – from inception to further training for professional development and development of training materials – HR role
- Mentoring and coaching – both on the job and for career development – quality assurance role
- Assessment and quality management – for those who have interest in entering this rather specific area – quality assurance role
- Developing new services and support to customers – innovative role
- Entering management and/or team and project management roles – career development option
- Working with labour market partners and stakeholders – networking role
- Analysis and knowledge gathering, systematising and adjusting for use in intranet portals, training sessions – information/knowledge management role¹¹

A 'lifecycle' approach can prove effective in managing a diverse workforce in the longer term

On-going training in professional and 'soft skills' (including personal effectiveness and coping skills) can enhance retention, potentially reduce absenteeism and ultimately improve performance. The PES role can be stressful and early recognition of the potential impact of the job on health and well-being can avert negative consequences. Effective practices include:

- Training for stress reduction, focusing on abusive and aggressive customers and how to handle difficult situations. In *Belgium Flanders*, counsellors are encouraged to develop skills to influence, modulate and redirect negative customer behaviour; and
- Providing private and confidential support to counsellors to support them through issues in their personal life in *Germany*.

¹¹ European Commission 2013b, Staffing Concepts and the Role of Leadership in PES, Brussels, Author: Sanja Crnković-Pozaić

Box 16: Life-cycle management in the German PES¹²

The concept of 'life-cycle' management is well developed in the German PES. A comprehensive approach and flexible working arrangements can ensure the retention of staff (and their skills) throughout their life cycle. Alongside a changing working environment, the needs of individual staff and their values change over their careers; for example, according to their life-cycle, their personal work-life balance priorities may change as their children are first born, then grow and ultimately become independent. Responding to the different phases of the life cycle is a key element in ensuring sustained staff motivation and successful performance. Given the increasing average age of workers within some PES and the relatively high proportion of female workers – active ageing policies and family friendly policies are critical HRM tools.

While for some PES, high levels of staff turnover are an issue, elsewhere the relative job security and terms of conditions of employment mean there is a cadre of long-serving and highly experienced counsellors. This gives rise to two challenges. The first is ensuring that longer serving counsellors stay motivated and committed to their work and clients, and the second is ensuring that the skills and talents of the most experienced workers are fully utilised by the PES.

Effectively responding to a diverse client base can impact on sustainable activation and integration outcomes.

Diversity management is highly relevant with regard to working with a more diverse client base, particularly in terms of ensuring sustainable job outcomes. There are effectively three approaches to managing a diverse client base:

- Training for all staff to work with a diversity of clients;
- Recruiting and training specialist staff; and
- Partnering or contracting out specialist services.

All three can be used to varying degrees in order to provide a comprehensive PES response.

A range of diversity-related interventions need to be deployed to ensure that all employment counsellors (and other frontline staff) can work with all client groups.

The PES expectation is that all employment counsellors should be able to work with all client groups. This is especially the case in the early stages of registration or a claim when the offer to a client is standardised and the process is framed by legislation. To meet this expectation, diversity-related interventions can include:

- Cultural awareness training, including inter-cultural competences;
- Sensitising counsellors to the needs of special groups (e.g. for the disabled, Germany);
- Early recognition of potential special issues e.g. mental illness;
- Assessment methods for groups with different abilities and needs;
- Development of communication and coping skills, for example, on risk assessment and management, and handling violent behaviour;

¹² Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2008 Diversity management at the BA

- On-the-job coaching by experienced staff in relation to good practice in working with the long-term unemployed, individuals not in education, employment or training (NEETs), ex-offenders, etc;
- Case conferences to share experiences, issues and solutions (e.g. for NEETs Advisers in Denmark); and
- Coaching from external specialist organisations who work with specific groups.

Diversity training for all employment counsellors

Modes of diversity training for all counsellors can include formal training courses internally and externally, coaching and mentoring, plus incentivising staff to invest in their own specialist skills to become more qualified and to get better results. In *Sweden*, there is a rolling secondment programme for counsellors to spend three years as trainers. The advantage of this model is that it ensures that those with experiential knowledge of counselling are the trainers – theory and practice come together. *Croatia* has mobile trainers and *Estonia* uses external mentors. *Austria* also offers a hotline for counsellors.

Specialist PES counsellors can help to address the needs of specific groups.

Alongside training for all employment counsellors, PES can recruit or train staff for specialist counselling roles, reflecting the diverse client base, for example, for working with:

- Young people;
- Long-term unemployed;
- Individuals over 50;
- Disabled;
- Minority groups or non-native language speakers;
- Roma; and
- Individuals with multiple issues (substance abuse, victims of violence) and so on.

PES offer training for existing staff to develop their specialist skills for working with special groups, while others will recruit externally, developing specialist job profiles to bring in the required skills (*Norway, Belgium Flanders*). Advisers for migrant groups who do not speak the national language are classic examples of where there may be new recruitment and/or the use of external specialist services.

The advantages of using specialist counsellors include having more outcomes delivered more quickly. This is in part due to the fact that specialist advisers:

- are more equipped with the specialist skills and tools for working with different groups; and
- have more in-depth understanding of needs, which is matched with more detailed knowledge of solutions and the PES service offer.

Consequently, clients are more likely to be assisted towards a positive outcome, such as a work placement and more quickly. However, there has been a call from PES for more evidence on whether these positive outcomes are really more probable with the use of specialist advisers generally or whether it is perhaps only true for certain groups only.

Matching clients with specialist advisers can have implications for resources and the general nature of the PES service offer.

It can be a challenge to have a wide enough range of specialist counsellors to cover all the diverse groups within the client population and/or sufficient counsellors to meet demand from certain groups. The greatest demand for specialisation, especially for

migrant groups, is in urban areas, but this is not exclusively the case. Telephony may be able to offer some cost-efficiencies certainly in relation to foreign language support. For managers within PES, the biggest challenge is achieving the right balance between specialised services for customers across the service and within large and small offices, especially when advisers have to multi-task.

Box 17: Diversifying the PES workforce to better meet the needs of customers in Slovenia

The Slovenian PES identifies two main benefits of diversity amongst employment counsellors: to better understand the needs of and better communicate with diverse customers. The PES is currently a relatively culturally and demographically homogeneous organisation, but it has a **number of counsellors from different ethnic minority backgrounds** in local offices in regions with ethnic minorities, and counsellors from a different nationality in the Information Office for Migrants. In addition in some of the bigger local offices the PES matches older or younger jobseekers with counsellors of a similar age.

Although the PES recognises the advantages of matching clients with counsellors of a similar background, it also faces the challenge of effectively balancing general and specialised services for the customers. The PES uses a call centre which has a number of multi-lingual advisers; effectively this means that non-native language speakers are able to access counselling in their own language, regardless of their location.

An operational issue associated with specialisation is its narrow focus, which may limit flexibility and the ability to respond to general demand within the local PES office. For the individual adviser, specialisation could mean that the job is more demanding, may lack variety and over time may have limited options for the individual counsellor's career path. Awareness of these potential issues should however be resolvable within effective HRM practices.

Sub-contracting can be an advantageous option, depending on the volume of demand and degree of diversity in the PES.

The third strand to managing a diverse client base is using external providers. Contracting out offers many of the advantages of being able to match the use of suppliers with need – either by specialism or volume. While contracting offers greater flexibility in terms of scope and responsiveness, there is a need to monitor any potential negative effects. For example, whether contracting out results in a potential loss of skills internally, reduces the scope to add variety or depth of specialist expertise to employment counsellors' work or results in greater fragmentation in service delivery for the customer with the potential loss in momentum as clients move from PES delivered services to external services.¹³

4.2 The role of leadership in ensuring quality

The value of leadership in maintaining and improving the quality of frontline employment services cannot be underestimated.

¹³ Further information on sub-contracting in PES can be found in the analytical papers on [Subcontracting in Public Employment Services – The design and delivery of 'outcome based' and 'black box' contracts](#) (2012) and [Subcontracting in Public Employment Services](#) (2011).

Effective PES leaders – at all levels of PES management - require an in-depth knowledge of the ‘business’ of employment counsellors, as well as adaptable leadership. Furthermore, PES are organisations under pressure - demand for PES services are rising, their remit is changing and resources to meet needs are constrained. In terms of human resources, the potential negative consequences are loss of job satisfaction, increased stress and absenteeism, and low staff morale. In such circumstances, the role of PES leaders is essential to manage the demands of the service, whilst looking after the ‘interests’ of their staff. Both of these come together in the essential role leadership plays in ensuring the professionalism of staff and the quality of service offered to customers.

Box 18: Clarify the roles and tasks of leaders and managers in securing success in Austria

The Austrian PES assumes that the quality of managers is essential for the organisation’s further development. Managers:

- represent the values and principles of the organisation;
- are responsible for the organisation’s culture;
- are role models;
- work as change promoters;
- take responsibility actively; and
- have to improve their leadership knowledge on an on-going basis (for example in leadership training and coaching).

An elaborated leadership culture is one of the most important factors for a successful organisation. It leads to good quality customer services.

In order to have a positive influence on the leadership of employment counsellors, the manager has to:

- have an overview about the qualification of the team members. If there is a lack of qualification the manager has to find ways of compensation;
- create a climate of cooperation between the team members;
- divide work within the team correctly, team members should not be over- or under-challenged;
- actively take the role of a coach in the unit and support team members whenever they need it; and
- take the opportunity to praise counsellors when they deliver a good service.

Quality leadership hinges on the PES’ ability to nurture and invest in leadership talent

There are many tools for leaders and managers to use in enhancing the quality and performance of PES. Fundamentally, the challenge is how to motivate staff with limited levers and resources. Thus, the critical success factor lies with the quality of the leadership throughout the organisation and the investment in that talent.

Box 19: Investing in talent management and leadership development ahead of demand in *Flanders* region, Belgium

VDAB has put in place a development programme to prompt progression by spotting future managers, exploring their leadership talent and preparing them for taking on a management position.

The target group for the programme were people that did not commonly apply for management roles because they were not sure if they would be effective leaders. VDAB wanted to offer them the opportunity to explore and strengthen their managerial talent with the ultimate goal of applying for and obtaining a management role. The programme began with a two-day event at which participants had the opportunity to experience different aspects involved in management so they would be better prepared for a management role. This included exercises similar to those conducted at an assessment centre which mainly involved role-playing in which the candidates demonstrated their skills and identified their strengths and weaknesses, but the objective was personal development, not a selection procedure.

The employee designs their own development plans with assistance from a career coach; this development process may run for a period of two years. The development plans include:

- training and courses to improve any weaknesses;
- traineeships in a different department to obtain a better picture of the organisation;
- discussions with managers about the pros and cons and how to manage them;
- coaching exercises;
- establishing and leading their own project; and
- further developing a network.

The project will continue to run until May 2014 but several intermediate assessments have been extremely positive.

The model in VDAB is preparing the organisation to be ready for the future through the:

- integration of a strong leadership vision into their human resource function;
- focus on talent among counsellors; and
- provision of sufficient targeted support.

Leaders in the public sector face particular challenges, not only in relation to operating within a politically determined policy environment, but also with regard to the degree of autonomy and the resources they can bring to implementing change. They do not have at their disposal some of the 'tools' for performance management and motivation that facilitate change and adjustment easily – thus they must have even greater leadership qualities to lead their organisations through periods of change and restructuring.

'Entrepreneurs in the public sector, while having the same qualities as leaders in the private sector must have the additional capacity to provide non-material incentives and lead by example and personal integrity'. (European Commission 2013b (Author: Crnković-Pozaić))

In terms of the leadership function itself within PES, key elements include:

- establishing a vision;
- developing strategy;
- adopting innovation;
- decisiveness;

- focusing on performance; and
- communicating and being an ambassador for the PES both inside the organisation and externally.

In the *Norwegian PES*, 'learning and being able to motivate employees and to strengthen the entire organisational attainment capability is a leadership requirement. Leadership abilities are assessed as to how they succeed in this field, including how managers use the various means and incentive measures'.¹⁴

Box 20: Identifying the key features of management to meet the challenge of changing requirements - the *French PES*

According to the French example, under the Pole Emploi 2015 strategy, there is support for management in cohesion with the new five new management reference styles – a common identity and a new dynamic.

Management features include:

- Responsibility: backing the political line, taking decisions, being result driven, human resource administration and provision of career development to co-workers;
- Confidence: in his counsellors and collaborators, in his management style, with oneself;
- Proximity: to service provision, providing support and guidance to counsellors, partners and with other managers;
- Simplicity: in work organisation, communication, in providing direction and reporting, decision-taking procedures; and
- Performance: searching for customer satisfaction, establishing a balance between operational and social performance, using his tools of management discretion.

Leaders can come from inside the business or from outside, bringing potentially new ideas, particular expertise or practices, but in both cases their understanding of frontline operations is critical to success.

Human resource management practices are the backbone of leadership development

Organisation-wide resources are essential to support the implementation of HRM activities across the full spectrum of recruitment, core competence development, career progression and training – which in turn will yield benefits for PES leaders.

Investment in the HRM of leaders – and PES staff more generally - can come in the form of:

- **Developing HRM strategies and policies** – including talent management, appraisal processes and CPD, flexible working and life-cycle management;
- **Training staff to achieve.** In Austria, the content of training at all levels tries to help employees to achieve goal orientation; develop competences for achieving targets; professionalisation of steering the processes; knowledge in using tools, instruments and channels and good results against targets set (client monitoring system).¹⁵

¹⁴ Competence Development and Monitoring to Ensure Quality of Service and Goal Attainment at NAV, Peter R. Myklebust, Senior Adviser, The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, Conference Presentation, 2013

¹⁵ Susanne Loudon (2012): [Training concepts for Austrian PES staff, presentation at conference](#), Bruxelles, July 2012, in European Commission 2013b (Author: Sanja Crnković-Pozaić)

- **Preventive measures** and creating opportunities for staff can lower the occurrence of health and well-being issues, including:
 - the early identification of health, stress and motivation issues; and
 - actively monitoring the impact of changes in potential triggers, such as targets and caseloads;
- **Reviewing organisational structures and control** – for example, cascading through the organisation greater operational control - empowering staff and managers to set their own goals and to monitor achievement; using quality circles to capture and implement improvements on the frontline; using structures to enable managers and staff to lead, for example, through:
 - creating smaller teams;
 - using job rotation;
 - using mixed teams (functions); and,
 - job re-design.

Some PES, such as in the *German* example have a comprehensive and established in-house personnel service and offer for delivery to local operations. This demonstrates how HRM can operate as a core corporate function and offer real added value to the frontline.

Box 21: Using corporate HR as consultants can serve the needs of internal customers , Germany¹⁶

In *Germany*, the in-house service of the Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA) advises and assists the operational divisions through a range of services:

- professional and flexible consulting tailored to the needs of managers and executive boards
- in-house personnel professionals can advise on issues such as
 - personnel planning
 - HR policy and development
 - life-cycle management,
 - preventive health management
 - diversity management
 - age-appropriate learning and working conditions
- conducting recruitment and HR development measures
- provision of a comprehensive training programme
- qualification measures
- HR administration

The in-house service also promotes networks for the exchange of practice across regions and with similar corporate institutions.

It also manages an intranet-based platform with information on HR development, diversity management and company health management.

Performance management is an important element in the leadership approach.

Performance management can be actively used in order to support and frame leadership across the organisation. This includes:

- Designing relevant indicators that stimulate desired behaviours and priorities;

¹⁶ Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2010, With competence and motivation to succeed: HR policy at the BA

- Setting team targets (*Belgium Flanders, Slovenia*) - empowering managers to design local targets or to decide on the allocation amongst staff;
- Monitoring achievement and support performance through:
 - Developing managers' skills as coaches and mentors;
 - Using managers as in-house trainers;
 - Developing peer-to-peer support;
 - Putting in place on-the-job staff observations (*Estonia*) to provide feedback on counsellors practice; and
 - Sharing good practice and success stories;
- Introducing some degree of competition - relative performance benchmarking can be used to stimulate and focus activity effectively, although careful management is needed to avoid 'gaming' the system. The introduction of what may be considered private-sector practices can work effectively in PES (European Commission 2013 (Author: Crnković-Pozaić)).

Box 22: Measuring staff engagement to improve organisational performance in Norway

The PES in *Norway* conducts an annual survey that measures features of staff engagement - including energy, knowledge, autonomy, expectations and identity. The survey has a 90% response rate which means it provides a robust assessment of engagement in the organisation - as a whole and at branch level. As an annual survey, introduced 10 years ago, it is also a consistent, longitudinal measure of development over time.

A correlation between the level of staff engagement and the performance of the organisation overall has been observed - there is a co-determination between the two.

Staff are asked to respond to a series of statements to capture the key metrics, Statement include for example:

- I know what is expected of me in my job
- I am very committed
- I have the resources and scope to act
- I have command of my job
- Every day somebody inspires me
- I am recognised for my endeavours
- I receive positive attention and support from colleagues
- I learn and develop myself continuously
- My competence is seen and used
- In my unit people are open and give feedback to each other
- In my unit we work in accordance with the NAV Vision to give people opportunities
- In my unit we pursue and emphasise NAV values and integrate them into our work (the values include - clarity, attentiveness, solutions orientated)
- I am proud of working for NAV.

The results are relevant for managerial aspects of the organisation as well as capturing employee satisfaction, and inform the introduction of activities and policies to improve overall organisational performance.

Leadership action requires a focus both within and outside of PES.

Internally, leadership action to increase job quality and satisfaction includes setting the right tone and culture for the organisation, considering both structures (smaller teams) and job content (more variety), offering greater autonomy in personal goal setting for advisers, providing individualised development programmes, investing in managers as mentors, and offering horizontal career paths, as well as vertical ones to provide a range of opportunities.

Externally, connections with the wider community of stakeholders, client and citizens to generate recognition of the work of PES and to celebrate success can motivate staff and generate pride and commitment in their work.

5. Challenges with regards to HRM concepts for employment counsellors in the PES

The conference highlighted several divergences and challenges, which would merit further consideration by PES as they move forward:

- **Different starting points for PES discussion** - The starting point for PES discussions around core competences (and the associated recruitment, training and development) is strikingly different to that on leadership and diversity management. The topic of core competences has been fortunate to be able to draw on a recent body of PES-oriented research, as well as related studies – the most notable of which is the analytical paper on job profiles and training (European Commission 2012 (Author: Sienkiewicz)). The Dialogue Conference therefore provided an occasion to build directly on this research and move the debate forward in terms of the scope for EU-wide exchange and collaboration.
- By contrast, whilst there is a plethora of literature about leadership and diversity management, there appears to be little in relation to PES specifically; hence, the European Commission discussion paper (2013b; Author: Crnković-Pozaić) quite rightly called on the Dialogue Conference as a 'first' opportunity to raise awareness and to examine these topics in greater depth from a PES perspective.
- Both the discussion papers and the dialogue highlighted **the need for further research on Human Resource Management (HRM) in PES**. At this stage, while knowledge of core competences in PES has progressed, there is no systematic evidence base on PES HRM practices. The Dialogue Conference highlighted clear examples of comprehensive approaches to HRM and examples of innovative practice in a number of areas, however, the extent to which these practices are prevalent across PES is unknown, as is the assessment of their effectiveness. Consequently HRM in PES is a subject that could benefit from further research.

Recruitment and training

- Despite a set of similar core tasks for employment counsellors there is diversity of competence-oriented approaches and training concepts across PES. It is possible to identify a set of common tasks undertaken by employment counsellors - including: employment oriented guidance based upon knowledge of the labour market, demand for occupations, legal regulations; individual action planning and monitoring; assessment and profiling; job search assistance and placement; co-operation with employers, recruitment if no separate service for employers; referral to / co-ordination with other service providers; and information about ALMP measures or voucher system. The mix of tasks may vary dependent on specific roles and levels but the portfolio of tasks is broadly the same in the majority of contexts. **-However, despite this commonality, one can note a marked diversity in the PES approaches to entry-level requirements, initial training and CPD.** Whilst these differing approaches can be explained in terms of varying national systems and conditions, there is a gap in relation to a common competence framework for employment counsellors. **More research and development work is needed to develop a shared standard or common framework** that can be adapted to a range of contexts but can still inform or underpin investment in the skills and careers of employment counsellors in PES.

- **Rigid civil service regimes for some PES** - Some PES have highlighted the challenge of being bound by rigid civil service regimes, which hinders their ability to identify and recruit suitable candidates. This suggests that the quality assurance of PES needs to be viewed within the wider regime of the public sector, whereby PES can somehow be 'dissociated' or 'exempt' from certain civil service provisions in order to become modern, responsive and flexible organisations.

Diversity management and leadership

- **Concepts for diversity management in PES are at an early stage of development** - Diversity management is a topic that has not been fully examined, in relation to effective PES practice. Whilst highly valuable, the discussions in the Dialogue Conference only touched the surface of this important topic and would benefit from further discussion and examination by PES.
- **Effective leadership and management is fundamental to any organisation's success**, and the dialogue identified a number of interesting approaches being undertaken by PES. The biggest challenges for PES leadership are the political and policy context of their work and the toolkit they have to work with, they do not have the same freedoms and flexibilities to institute change as their counterparts in the private sector. So, is there scope for further exploration of the particular management competences, tools and techniques for managing change in PES?

6. Conclusions: the way forward

A number of conclusions, paving the way forward for PES, can be identified.

The professionalism of employment counsellors is fundamental to the provision of a quality service to customers, particularly when that service increasingly needs to be personalised to the specific needs of customers and needs to deliver more rapid and sustainable integration into employment.

The challenges of fiscal austerity mean public services have to offer 'more for less' - efficient and effective use of funds is critical. The professionalism of employment counsellors has financial consequences. In most PES, counsellors have the discretion and autonomy to direct customers towards (low cost) self-directed job search or to resource intensive ALMP, a significant PES expenditure. These decisions have to be based on skilled assessments and professional judgement in order to deliver cost-effective outcomes.

Investment in the professionalism of employment counsellors matters to customers, to the management and leadership of PES and to the accountable Ministerial leaders.

To enhance professionalism, there is a need for further PES to PES Dialogue to develop a shared understanding of core competences, and how to achieve and to maintain these

There is a common interest amongst PES in developing the professionalism of employment counsellors and identifying shared practices in terms of job roles, competence requirements, training and human resource management. However, while there is broad agreement on the core competences required of PES counsellors, the development of a shared competence framework and a professional qualification requires further investigation. **It is necessary to develop a more detailed specification of the core tasks and related competences - and the levels and standards - that could then be applied in the different contexts of PES recruitment, entry requirements and training.**

As recommended by Sienkiewicz, **the development and adoption of a comprehensive, fit-for-purpose key competence profile could sit as the focal point of all skills related activities for employment counsellors and a 'life-cycle' approach from recruitment though to personal development and career planning of employment counsellors.** This would facilitate the search for competent recruits, regardless of whether their skills have been acquired through education, training or work experience. It would support the design of internally-managed, PES-specific inception and on-going training. It could also underpin the career path of employment counsellors, facilitating in-depth (professional) development, as well as hierarchical progression.

Need to improve the development of diversity management concepts for PES

Recognition of the need to manage both a diverse cadre of staff and a more diverse client base is wide spread amongst PES. A number of strategies have been deployed to meet the challenges and opportunities diversity presents. What appears to be less evident is which strategies are the most effective. In particular, there was a call for **greater evaluative evidence on whether the use of specialist providers is as effective as assumed.** Does specialisation and the matching of adviser skills to the needs of specific

sub-groups of clients deliver greater and more sustainable outcomes? Do the advantages of specialisation outweigh some of the cost and resource challenges that specialisation presents? To what extent can telephony/e-based services help in both meeting specialist needs and providing a cost-efficient service?

Question of further exchange and collaboration on PES leadership development

The particular operational challenges PES face, given external labour market conditions and fiscal constraints, emphasise the need for the highest standards of competence and effectiveness of PES counsellors and highlights the important role of leadership at every level of the organisation.

The focus of the conference was on the development of a common competence model for employment counsellors. Should the same exercise be undertaken for managers and leaders within the PES? It would seem that a number of PES (*France, Austria, VDAB* for example) are investing in the development of future managers and could provide the basis for initial in-depth exploration of competences, training and career development.

The highest standards, the most effective delivery and the development of tailored support – lies with the front-line staff but equally must be enabled by skilled management and leadership.

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Annex 1

A) Corporate Strategy of The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration 2011-2020



Job is focus 1	Reliable management	Active users/clients	Competent societal partner	Operative and instrumental organisation
Strengthen labour market competence	Ensure common and concise quality requirements and similar work processes	Strengthen abilities in guiding and interacting with users	Enhance competence on workable practices	Practice transparent management and comprehensive implementation
Strengthen the labour market focus of users' follow-up	Target competence development	Facilitate co-determination and accentuate users' own responsibilities	Refine and disseminate our expertise on the state of labour market and welfare system	Elaborate the state-municipal partnership
Clarify roles and strengthen interaction with working life, doctors and the school system	Solve managerial tasks by means of competent units	Strengthen the system approach of users' co-determination	Contributing actively in the field of policy development and simplifying standard rule requirements	Induce joint efforts in strengthening NAV as a learning organisation
Maintain a flexible set of active measures and a well targeted application thereof		Offer more telephonic and website services		Continue efforts in inducing efficiency and enhance abilities of change
				Develop new ICT solutions and ensure successful implementation

NAV, 28.05.2013

Side 5