



PES to PES Dialogue

The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

PES to PES Dialogue Report 2014

**Results from the fourth year of the PES to PES Dialogue
programme**

November 2014

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1 Introduction

This document summarises the results from the fourth year of the PES to PES Dialogue programme. It is based on information gathered through:

- the activities - Peer Reviews, Dialogue Conferences and follow up study visits - that have taken place during the year;
- a series of analytical papers on PES topics; and
- the final Dissemination Conference entitled 'PES organisation and service delivery: digitalisation, decentralisation, performance and activation', which took place in Brussels on 9 - 10 October 2014.

PES have an important role in helping to achieve the aims of the European Employment Strategy, Employment Package and goals of Europe 2020. In 2014 in particular, the PES to PES Dialogue activities have addressed Guideline 7 by exploring tailored approaches to activation and the role of engaging with employers. Activities have also addressed Guideline 8 as topics have included skill-based profiling and matching and the work first versus train first debate in the context of the long-term unemployed.

Employment Guidelines addressed through PES activities in 2014:

Guideline 7: Increasing labour market participation of men and women, reducing structural unemployment and promoting job quality

'Employment services play an important role in activation and matching and they should therefore be strengthened with personalised services and active and preventive labour market measures at an early stage. Such services and measures should be open to all, including young people, those threatened by unemployment, and those furthest away from the labour market.'

Guideline 8: Develop a skilled workforce responding to labour market needs and promoting lifelong learning

'Member States should promote productivity and employability their Employment services support this through assisting in the adequate supply of knowledge and skills to match current and future demand in the labour market. Quality initial education and attractive vocational training must be complemented with effective incentives for lifelong learning for those who are in and those who are not in employment.'

In addition, the activities of the PES to PES Dialogue have been guided by and contributed to the work of the European Network of Heads of Employment Services (HoPES). Each of the themes covered by the PES to PES Dialogue in 2014 has supported the HoPES network areas of work. The programme's fourth year of activities has built on the results and discussions from the previous three years. Activities have focused on adapting PES delivery to increased budgetary pressures and challenging labour market conditions. The areas covered under the fourth year of the PES to PES Dialogue activity can be categorised under two broad strands:

- Enhancing cooperation for better labour market integration of specific target groups
- Fostering new ways of developing, delivering and measuring services

The remainder of this paper presents the key findings from PES to PES Dialogue activities under each of these strands.

2 Enhancing cooperation for better labour market integration of specific target groups

Firstly, **tailoring activation** to the specific needs of jobseekers remains a key theme. It is also a key aspect of the PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper¹. Taking a personalised approach, producing individual action plans and giving jobseekers the confidence and skills they need to re-enter employment can have positive outcomes for jobseekers and on the overall statistics. These approaches can cater for the different nature of certain target groups, such as older workers, young people and the long-term unemployed. However, PES need to strike a delicate balance between resource-intensive personalised approaches for jobseekers and meeting budgetary and resource demands. This year, this topic was discussed in relation to the needs of long-term unemployed at a Peer Review in Bulgaria on PES approaches for sustainable activation of the long-term unemployed and also at the recent Dialogue Conference in terms of wider target groups.

Secondly, on the supply side, PES to PES Dialogue activities discussed effective strategies to **engage employers**. Meeting the needs of different types of employers can be challenging; however, some PES have established employer-specific teams who develop and build on sector-specific or location-specific knowledge. In addition, PES are shifting an increasing amount of their vacancy matching services online. The PES to PES Dialogue Conference explored the different service needs for SMEs and larger companies. It also highlighted a recent trend for PES entering into agreements with employers and engaging with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies to encourage the recruitment of hard to reach target groups.

The theme of 'building relationships' has also been taken forward by the programme this year through examination of how PES build and **manage partnerships**. The PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper² states that PES have a 'conducting' function in stimulating other labour market actors to work together and innovate. Analytical papers, including the recent paper on 'Central Steering and Local Autonomy', have explored how and with whom PES collaborate.

The remainder of this section outlines key findings and issues for further reflection in relation to each of these three themes.

2.1 Tailoring activation

The PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper, prepared by the Heads of PES (HoPES network) recommends that PES strengthen the customisation of services with tailored, individual approaches for jobseekers combined with high quality employer services³. The paper suggests that services should be organised around the needs of specific target groups as more personalised services improve customer satisfaction, increase cost-efficiency as resources are more focused on those at need.

Results from the Dialogue Conference on PES Organisation and Service Delivery show that across PES there is a range of mechanisms in place to identify what works best for different target groups and motivational techniques. External providers are generally used to add value and expertise to PES provision and delivery is regularly monitored.

Key findings

Personalised services have increased and with that, the role of the PES counsellor has become more important

- One of the most important trends in recent years is the individualisation of services for different target groups. Jobseekers' needs are diverse and PES are using different approaches to meet their needs. The recent Peer Review in

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9690&langId=en>, see page 9

² Ibid. see page 1

³ Ibid. page 9

Bulgaria found that successful services for the long-term unemployed are organised around a person-centred approach with tailored, individual counselling⁴ and Individual Action Plans (IAPs) playing a pivotal role in supporting this. Further, the recent Dialogue Conference highlighted that some PES are now improving their IAPs to meet the needs of specific target groups. In the case of Belgium (ACTIRIS), they found that their previous IAP was not responsive to the needs of young people. As a result, their new process includes a more intensive follow-up and better support. Interestingly, face-to-face appointments are by invitation only but young people are supported via the website, telephone and SMS. In addition, the young person will be able update their IAP online giving them more responsibility for recording their actions.

- Today, many PES carry out one-to-one interviews between jobseekers and PES counsellors upon registration with the PES, and some use this opportunity to develop individual action plans (IAPs) with the jobseeker. The PES to PES Dialogue Conference in 2012 already noted that PES were placing a 'strong emphasis on tailoring IAPs to the specific needs and nature of jobseekers⁵' and the recent Peer Review in Bulgaria confirmed this point again, across a number of PES.
- It is clear that the role of the PES counsellor is key to activating certain target groups. It is worth briefly mentioning that the relationship between a PES counsellor and a jobseeker is important in order to build trust, understand jobseekers' needs (and any barriers), thus empowering the individual jobseeker. Motivating jobseekers through a person-centred approach can help to maximise labour market outcomes⁶, however such approaches, if delivered face to face, can be costly, requiring well-trained counsellors. In Lithuania, they have developed a counselling model to motivate unmotivated young people which is delivered by trained in-house PES counsellors. The model covers three topics; 'I am' which enables the young person to undertake self-evaluation and understand who they are; 'I can' where the young person explores their vision and finds out about the possibilities that are open to them; and lastly 'goal setting' where the counsellor works with the young person to develop suitable goals to help them achieve their vision. This process takes place in small groups of 8 to 10 young people who have similar skill and knowledge levels.
- Personalised services are also offered through digital services, as some PES offer counselling services to jobseekers online. This offers jobseekers a more flexible option and it may be more efficient for counsellors. However, these approaches require initial investments in technology and up-skilling of PES staff. The recent Dialogue Conference highlighted that in some countries, including the UK and the Netherlands, jobseekers are signed posted to digital services at first and face to face services are largely only provided for those who need extra support.

Personalised services differ between target groups

- The long-term unemployed, younger people and older jobseekers may be more in need of individualised approaches than others, as they are more likely to lack relevant skills or experiences that are required to enter the labour market. Over the years, these topics have been explored by the PES to PES Dialogue through Peer Reviews on the long-term unemployed, young people and the low-skilled. These reviews have found that some PES have established partnerships with schools, NGOs and youth organisations to identify young people at risk of

⁴ European Commission (2014), *Approaches for Sustainable Integration of Long-Term Unemployed - Toolkit*, page 6

⁵ European Commission (2012), *Activation and integration: working with individual action plans: toolkit for PES*, page 5

⁶ European Commission (2012), *Activation and integration: working with individual action plans: toolkit for PES*, page 3

becoming unemployed and thus considering these as a priority group. This group then receives specific service offers and early individual action planning⁷.

- In comparison, the long-term unemployed require similarly intensive, personalised support and IAPs, however there may be deeper underlying issues and/or barriers that prevent this group from entering employment. For this group, some PES take a gradual approach by firstly tackling motivation and/or personal issues; then providing active job-search skills (e.g. workshops); and lastly, offering work experience in a protected environment, allowing them to regain skills, motivation and provide space to look for jobs in the meantime⁸. In Latvia, they are piloting a project where 182 PES counsellors each work with 10 long-term unemployed jobseekers to provide more intensive counselling. This support can include encouraging them to attend information days and organising meetings with employers between the PES and the long-term unemployed person. Since the project began in March, 27% of those involved are now employed.
- In order to offer work experience in protected environments, many PES offer financial incentives for employers to compensate for the lack of skills and experience jobseekers may have, or more specifically to compensate for the higher levels of training and resources required to integrate these jobseekers in the work environment. In Poland, they have recently introduced a voucher scheme, which include vouchers for young people to undertake internships. The PES provides the employer with a financial payment if they hire the person after six months.
- However, the 2014 Peer Review in Bulgaria on sustainable approaches for the integration of the long-term unemployed found that some PES are going *beyond* simply offering wage subsidies. These PES combine subsidies with skills development, actively encourage and appeal to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitment of employers and cooperate with NGOs who may have more capacity to work more closely with hard to place jobseekers and employers⁹. Such approaches are a positive development in themselves, given that subsidies alone are not enough to secure sustainable, meaningful work for harder to place groups of jobseekers.

Work-first or train-first; neither are universal approaches

- The work-first versus train-first debate has been the focus of previous PES to PES Dialogue activities. The ultimate aim of PES is to get jobseekers into sustainable employment as quickly as possible. However, some jobseekers may require further training before entering employment, or may need a work-trial to gain more confidence and work-related skills before entering full-time employment. These two approaches can be tailored to specific groups.
- PES play an important role in supporting people to make the transition from training or work-experience placements into work. The design of both actions, coupled with the PES referral system, are important in avoiding deadweight. Training is more effective if it is close to the labour market as it increases a person's ability to transition into work. For example, training that includes work experience and on-the-job training is more effective than class-room training¹⁰.
- For example, a Peer Review in Austria in 2011 on Youth Guarantees found that some PES prefer a train-first approach for young people, so that they can gather

⁷ European Commission (2011), Youth Guarantees: PES approaches and measures for low skilled young people, page 10

⁸ European Commission (2014) Approaches for Sustainable Integration of Long-Term Unemployed - Toolkit, page 20

⁹ Ibid. page 19

¹⁰ European Commission (2013) "PES Approaches for Sustainable Activation of Low Skilled Adults and Youths: Work-first or Train-first?" Analytical Paper, page 20

more skills, knowledge and competences to build up their motivation¹¹, resting on the understanding that real-life work situations are useful for young people to develop their skills and useful for employers to get a better understanding of their abilities. In contrast, a Peer Review held in Lithuania in 2013 on PES approaches for low-skilled adults and young people found that work-first approaches are predominantly used to integrate low-skilled adults if they are able to work, and if suitable jobs are available in the local labour market¹². Importantly, both activities highlight that there is no universal, correct approach, but that approaches need to be appropriate for the needs of an individual or a sub-target group.

A personalised approach places high demands and challenges on PES resources

- Discussions have highlighted a number of key challenges that PES face today. Most importantly, a person-centred approach requires more time from each PES counsellor. With increasing caseloads, PES counsellors are facing significant pressures on their time. As a result, they may not be able to 'undertake a thorough assessment of a jobseeker in order to design a suitable action plan'¹³. It was highlighted at the recent Dialogue Conference that the optimum caseload for counsellors, particularly those dealing with harder to place groups, is 70. In some PES changes in approaches have led to this being achieved. For example, in Belgium (ACTRIS) each counsellor had a caseload of 450 persons in their previous approach but under their new Youth Guarantee Service, counsellors focusing on young people have a caseload of 70 which means that they have more time to focus on the clients' needs.
- Budgets are also stretched in many PES thus potentially limiting the range of training solutions on offer to jobseekers.
- In addition, working with external partners can involve resource intensive processes and challenges, such as clarifying specific roles and activities and establishing subcontracting arrangements - these can be bureaucratic and time-consuming. It is worth mentioning that in some cases external bodies have provided constructive feedback to PES that has led to service innovations.¹⁴

Issues for further discussion

- PES are placing a greater emphasis on tailoring IAPs to the specific needs and nature of jobseekers. However, certain target groups are more difficult to activate than others, due to more complex issues and barriers underpinning their joblessness. ***How can PES tailor IAPs more effectively according to different target groups? How can counsellors be supported as they work with more complex groups? How could IAPs better differentiate and support specific target groups?***
- A Peer Review held in the Netherlands in 2014 on blended service delivery for jobseekers explored the role of digitalisation in delivering services to jobseekers, touching on the extent to which blended service delivery or simply digital service delivery can play a role in the more economic delivery of increasingly personalised approaches. ***To what extent and how can blended service delivery provide more personalised approaches in a cost-effective way? What are the challenges and opportunities of digitalising services in the context of personalisation?***

¹¹ European Commission (2011), Youth Guarantees: PES approaches and measures for low skilled young people, page 21-22

¹² European Commission (2013), PES approaches to low-skilled adults and young-people: work-first or train-first? Toolkit for PES, page 15

¹³ Ibid. page 25

¹⁴ European Commission (2013) Review of Performance Management in Public Employment Services, Author: Alex Nunn, page 25

- There is also room for further exploration of the role of performance management to measure how targets are achieved and the degree to which these are combined with sustainable solutions. Personalised services have to be more effective and efficient for these to justify the investment from PES. How this is measured is not equally well understood across PES. In addition, the role of working with NGOs and social partners in the activation of specific target groups needs further discussion.
How can the effectiveness and efficiency of personalised services be measured? What value can NGOs and social partners add to service delivery for specific target groups? Which organisations are best to work with, why and how?

2.2 Engaging Employers

The activities of the PES to PES Dialogue have regularly emphasised the importance of the service concepts and approaches underpinning how PES work with employers. This has taken place against a backdrop of rising unemployment in many Member States and changing employer demands, even in those Member States which have not had significant increases in unemployment. This is coupled with increased budget demands for PES across the board. An important part of PES core services in all Member States is vacancy matching, and engaging with employers is key to ensuring that matching services are effective and efficient. Furthermore, sustainable solutions to integrate harder to place jobseekers benefit from closer engagement with employers, as incentives and protected employment are not providing the expected long-term outcomes. These topics have been addressed at Peer Reviews on young people, multi- channelling, older workers and the low-skilled. The topic of employer engagement was also a major theme of the 2014 March Dialogue Conference and discussed further at the recent Dialogue Conference.

Key findings

Digitalisation of services is changing the way PES meet employers' needs

- Many PES have developed services and partnerships for and with employers, capitalising on digital channels to increase vacancies and the quality of matching. The PES to PES Dialogue activities have explored the level of digitalisation of services that is possible for PES, in contrast with a multi-channel, blended approach. Multi-channel approaches, used by many PES, often combine face-to- face, telephone and online support. Such a 'blended approach' is said to respond to employer needs more flexibly, in particular SMEs¹⁵. The PES to PES Dialogue activities have observed a change from PES using online services for purely information services¹⁶ to an array of personalised, interactive services now being deployed. The October 2014 Dialogue Conference found that some PES are considering piloting online interviews between jobseekers and employers (in the case of Sweden). Similar practices are carried out in Mexico City as they the PES offers an employer meeting service where PES can provide pre-screening interviews online, according to the ILO. Indeed, the March 2014 Dialogue Conference found that budgetary pressures are pushing more PES towards digital delivery¹⁷.
- A number of PES have developed online matching tools so that employers can upload vacancies and job descriptions directly, view potential candidates and begin the pre-selection process with limited intervention from a PES counsellor. The precise nature and functionality of online services, including matching

¹⁵ European Commission (2014) PES to PES Dialogue Conference Targeted Services for Employers - Toolkit, page 14

¹⁶ European Commission (2011) Integrated Multi-Channelling in PES Services: finding the Right Mix, page 11

¹⁷ European Commission (2014) PES to PES Dialogue Conference Targeted Services for Employers - Toolkit, page 14

services, varies between each PES¹⁸, however services exist that do have the potential to reduce the workload for PES counsellors. In particular, some PES offer employers the ability to have an e-account where they have a personalised area that records their activity, provides them with personalised information and may have direct links to a PES counsellor. In addition, some PES are going one step further and use online surveys to gather customer satisfaction rates. Digitalisation and online services are discussed in further detail in a later section of this paper.

- It is worth noting that some PES are adapting their service delivery to reach employers differently and thus offer the largest possible number of vacancies. In some countries, PES are targeting specific 'priority employers.' These are often those who have the greatest recruitment potential and this tends to mean large companies or well-performing small and medium enterprises who have potential for growth¹⁹. However, the recent Dialogue Conference found that differentiation of employer services, based on employer size, is not sufficient on its own. 'Priority employers' can also be defined on a sectoral basis (in the case of Denmark) or geographical. In Sweden, it is important that the PES make the right judgement / call. This is based on whether the company will be expanding in the near future and if the company will be interested in the profiles that the PES can send them.

Formal and informal agreements are increasingly used by PES to secure activities with employers

- PES are keen to secure long-term commitment to work with employers. Since the 2012 Peer Review in France on PES and effective services for employers, there has been a growing interest in the use of informal and formal agreements as a basis for working with employers²⁰. The recent Dialogue Conference on 'Targeted services for employers' explored this issue and found that there are formal and informal agreements in place, usually with employers who have larger capacity to absorb jobseekers and/or deliver on an agreement²¹.
- In particular, written formal agreements vary in their level of detail but findings highlight that the more specific and tailored an agreement is, the higher the potential to maximise the benefits for both parties. Such agreements also usually cover PES services and measures that the employer can access and that can respond to their specific needs.
- It is worth noting that some PES are using agreements with employers to address the needs of certain groups of unemployed jobseekers. For example, a thematic paper for a Peer Review in Austria on Youth Guarantees in 2011 found that the French and Dutch PES had specific agreements in place with companies regarding commitments to employ more low-skilled young people²².

Corporate Social Responsibility can be a valuable 'hook' for PES to engage with employers on the recruitment of hard to place groups

- PES have increasingly started to reach out to employers' corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies in order to **recruit** hard to place target groups, such as disabled workers and young people. It is worth noting that in some countries employers need to meet quotas for the number of hard to reach groups they employ - for example, the number of disabled workers. Elsewhere Governments provide financial support for employers to adapt their premises for disabled workers. This approach does not involve quotas but can include

¹⁸ Ibid. page 13

¹⁹ Ibid, page 7

²⁰ Ibid. page 20 ²¹ Ibid. page 20

²² European Commission (2011), Youth Guarantees: PES Approaches and Measures for Low Skilled Young People, page 18

sanctions for employers who, offered such support, still discriminate against employing disabled people.

- Whilst PES can capitalise on CSR strategies to encourage employers to take on hard to reach groups, employers can greatly benefit as they can use CSR to address other issues such as employment and skills shortages²³. Connecting CSR strategies and PES can, for example, provide employers with the opportunity to recruit a young person who is keen to learn and provide them with the skills they require for that position and organisation.
- Larger companies remain more likely to have a CSR strategy in place. However, some PES are reaching SMEs by working with relevant intermediary organisations. This approach creates a multiplier effect as it promotes CSR to a large number of SMEs, sectorally or geographically depending on the intermediary²⁴. The October 2014 Dialogue Conference found that this is the case in the UK and the Netherlands whilst Denmark are identifying sectors that have a high need for PES engagement in recruitment.

Issues for further discussion

PES can undertake further work to build and extend their partnerships

- Many PES offer employers' financial incentives to engage with hard to reach target groups; however, these approaches are often seen as short-term solutions. **How can PES go beyond offering employers financial incentives to work with them in the area of CSR? What role do non-governmental and civil society organisations have in this and how can PES build links with such organisations?**
- SMEs represent the biggest group of employers in Europe but few PES have formal strategies to work with them. Therefore more PES could explore establishing relationship with intermediary organisations (such as trade associations) to reach out to SMEs. **What are the steps required for PES to develop a formal strategy for SMEs? What are the limitations and opportunities of engaging more widely with SMEs? Which actors would be involved in each stage? What is the added role of working with intermediary organisations?**
- Some PES are using a multi-channel approach to reach employers they may wish to work with more closely in the future, to ensure that services are built around their needs at each stage of cooperation. **What activities are PES undertaking to incorporate employers' needs into the design of multi-channel/ digital strategies? How can working with employers help PES design more effective services? What are the opportunities for, and where are the limits of self-servicing for employers?**

2.3 Building and managing partnerships

The PES 2020 Strategy²⁵ outlines the changes in the role and function of PES that are necessary in view of the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy. PES are changing their focus from being service providers to 'service seekers'²⁶, to ensure that they deliver the most effective and efficient services and meet policy objectives. PES are doing this by working in partnership with different organisations (public or private) who have specialist skills and services to better meet the needs of jobseekers and employers. This

²³ European Commission (2014) PES to PES Dialogue Conference Targeted Services for Employers - Toolkit, page 26

²⁴ Ibid. page 32

²⁵ <http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9690&langId=en>

²⁶ Ibid. page 6

section looks at the role of PES in partnerships, who they work with and why, and how such partnerships can contribute to labour market priorities.

Key findings

Existing initiatives encourage PES to stimulate labour market actors to cooperate and innovate, collaborating closely with public or private partners

- The PES 2020 Strategy views PES as key actors in the labour market who are in a unique position to encourage other actors to work together.

"Public Employment Services (Systems) take up 'conducting functions' and have to acquire a mandate to do so legitimately (both from policy designers and from customers). Conducting is considered to be a catalyst to achieve maximal organisational responsiveness²⁷."
- Specifically, the PES 2020 Strategy defines the 'conducting' role²⁸. This covers different levels and includes areas such as identifying labour market needs and available service offers; matching jobseekers and employers with relevant services; providing evidence to support labour market policy design; and helping other labour market actors to work together and use innovative practices²⁹. Ultimately, PES as conductors can help to increase the efficiency of labour market services and help all actors work towards European and national policy objectives. The extent to which this is possible, and the types of activities undertaken, depends on the political contexts and mandates of each PES.
- European level activities encourage PES to take up the conducting role, highlight best practices examples and encourage EU level discussions on policy implementation and delivery issues. PARES (PARTnership between Employment Services)³⁰ was established in 2010 to bring together PES and other private employment agencies to make publicly-funded services more efficient and improve the quality of services through well-structured partnerships. PARES Strategic Dialogue events have discussed specific aspects of establishing partnerships and have presented recommendations on topics such as establishing a Memoranda of Understanding and how best to evaluate partnerships.
- As part of the PARES initiative, the WEESP tool (Webtool for Evaluated Employment Services Practices)³¹ has been established. This online repository showcases best practices and existing interventions across the EU. It further demonstrates that the European Commission wants to encourage PES to work in partnership with each other and other national and local labour market actors.

Who PES decide to partner is a function of capacity, objectives and ability

- PES work in partnership with a range of actors for different reasons and for specific activities. The 2011 Mobility Lab report³² argues that PES have limited budgets and resources. For that reason, they may choose to work with specialist providers to improve efficiency on specific activities, and choose to gain labour market intelligence from actors who have more knowledge than themselves.
- Partnerships may involve working with private employment services, NGOs and social partners in relation to delivering a specific aspect of PES activity (for

²⁷ <http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9690&langId=en> page 5

²⁸ <http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=9690&langId=en> page 1

²⁹ Ibid. page 6

³⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=991&langId=en>

³¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1030>

³² European Commission (2011) Partnerships Among Employment Services, page 10

example, training activities for hard to place jobseekers). In addition, some PES may work with employer-related organisations. This was mentioned at the PARES 'Work in Partnership at the Local and Regional Level' Strategic Dialogue event in 2012. A recommendation from the event was for partnerships to 'recognise the need to maximise employer engagement and take appropriate steps to...ensure their involvement³³.' At the October 2014 Dialogue Conference, it was also highlighted that the success of partnerships often depends on the dynamics around the table and personal connections do play an important part in facilitating successful partnerships.

- Partnerships are not 'one-size-fits all' as the length, scope and structure varies depending on the activities, and the willingness and on the capacities of those involved. The type and breadth of partnerships in Member States is different as partnership-based delivery of employment services is a relatively new concept in some Member States³⁴.
- In addition, existing PES structures may not allow for some types of partnership to take place. This particularly concerns the cooperation between PES and private employment services as some countries may not have the necessary conditions for this to take place. The PARES Strategic Dialogue event on 'Drafting a Memorandum of Understanding on a national level' in 2013 called on politicians in those countries to consider whether action is needed to create the right settings for PES and private employment services to work together³⁵.

How PES manage relationships determines how well partnerships contribute to labour market priorities

- The management of partnerships varies and is affected by the mandate of the PES and the political and social landscape in each country. As such, each partnership and its management is customised to suit the objectives and the local situation³⁶. Indeed, it was further emphasised at the Dialogue Conference that partnerships sometimes fail due to inflexible national rules that may not allow certain information to be shared between partners. Therefore, it is important that national structures are shaped in a way to allow networks to exist at a local level.
- The formality of partnerships may differ according to each activity and each country. Partnerships should be founded on clear objectives and targets that all partners buy into, and any strategy should align with the parties' own interests³⁷. While activities should have clearly defined outcomes, timescales, targets and how these are documented and agreed to differs.
- The formality may also depend on the activities, monetary value and the location. Following on from the trend of engaging employers through agreements, some partnerships with other partners are formalised through signed agreements or a Memorandum of Understanding.
- Whilst there is a tendency to have formal signed agreements in place in some countries, there are still many partnerships that rest on informal agreements. The 'Partnerships Among Employment Services' report³⁸ states that informal agreements are most common between PES and non-profit organisations, particularly at the local level. They are suitable for partnerships that have no

³³ European Commission (2012) PARES Strategic Dialogue 2012 29th March 2012, Brussels

Local and regional partnerships: Recommendations to employment services, page 5 ³⁴
European Commission (2011) Partnerships Among Employment Services, page 24

³⁵ European Commission (2013) PARES Strategic Dialogue 2013 Drafting a Memorandum of Understanding on a national level, page 3

³⁶ European Commission (2012) PARES Strategic Dialogue 2012 29th March 2012, Brussels
Local and regional partnerships, page 4

³⁷ Ibid. page 4

³⁸ European Commission (2011) Partnerships Among Employment Services, page 16

monetary value and for actions that are a response to immediate coordination and efficiency needs.

- In contrast, Memoranda of Understanding can outline coordination, activities and areas of joint working for a specified timeframe. This has been the topic of recent discussion in PARES Strategic Dialogue events in relation to the cooperation between public and private employment sectors. The 'Drafting a Memorandum of Understanding on a National Level' event in 2013 found that Memoranda of Understanding are rarely used between private and public employment services due to a lack of mutual trust, cultural, political and institutional structures³⁹.
- Lastly, it is worth mentioning that some countries have developed management arrangements that include performance-related payments. It is argued that this type of arrangement can better exploit the flexibility of providers and transfer organisational costs onto them⁴⁰. One example of performance-related pay mechanisms is the partnerships the UK PES has in place for outsourced counselling and re-integration services for the hardest to place clients. This approach is heavily orientated to outcome based payments to service suppliers who have significant autonomy in the design of the programmes which they deliver. This minimum service specification by the purchaser is described as a Black Box approach.

Issues for further discussion

- Partnerships are not 'one-size-fits all'. ***How do PES adapt their partnering approaches, contractual specifications and/or commissioning processes to differing partnership requirements? How flexible can PES be in partnership design and development, and what drives such flexibility?***
- Softer forms of agreements can exist and work well between PES and certain types of partner. ***In what cases is there value in using Memoranda of Understanding or informal agreements? Are specific organisations and / or specific services better suited to more informal agreements?***
- Few PES currently use performance-related payment systems and the added-value of such systems can be explored in the future. ***What are the advantages and challenges of using performance-related payment systems?***

³⁹ European Commission (2013) PARES Strategic Dialogue 2013 Drafting a Memorandum of Understanding on a national level, page 2

⁴⁰ European Commission (2011) Partnerships Among Employment Services, page 13

3 Decentralisation, digitalisation and performance management in PES: fostering new ways of developing, delivering and measuring services

In 2014, discussions have partly focused on how PES can deliver and develop effective and efficient services that meet user needs under increasingly tight budgetary constraints.

Digitalisation of services has increased in recent years as PES strive to meet increased demands for such services and deliver services more effectively and efficiently. Online services can provide jobseekers and employers with a more personalised approach and greater ownership of their own re-integration programme; however, this is not suitable for all client groups. Indeed, PES must carefully balance online services and multi-channel approaches to ensure they can deliver appropriate levels of service to all client groups. A Peer Review held in the Netherlands in 2014 specifically discussed blended service delivery for jobseekers and the Dialogue Conference in 2014 reflected on these issues further.

Developing performance management systems is also central for PES who seek to provide better and more effective services to jobseekers and employers. Data collection systems and mechanisms to monitor performance are used to compare performance on a country-by-country basis, within individual countries and between individual staff. This can include quantitative and qualitative data. Strong performance management systems can help to make the business case for specific services, or teams, and can allow senior management to see where savings can be made.

The latter topic is linked to the theme of **decentralisation** and **benchmarking performance**, which was the subject of an Analytical Paper this year. Previous PES to PES Dialogue activities have highlighted two different approaches - managerial decentralisation and political decentralisation. The former often involves the reorganisation of centrally coordinated PES services, management by objectives and some decision making powers to be devolved to the local level, whilst the latter may involve devolution of PES functions to regional or municipality level. Different approaches across PES in central steering and local autonomy mean varying degrees of power are given to local agencies. Coupled with each country's political context, these approaches provide PES with variable levels of flexibility and autonomy.

Benchmarking performance *within* country and *across* countries is important in the process of identifying good practice, learning from each other and improving overall standards and practices. However, any comparative approach needs to assess the comparability of indicators and variables across PES offices and Member States before any benchmarking can take place. Some countries are more advanced on that aspect than others, while benchmarking is a key aspect of the new PES network⁴¹. Indeed, the PES network will support benchmarking activities, helping to develop and use an enhanced set of agreed indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, combined with mutual learning opportunities to further explore specific issues through benchlearning.

The remainder of this section outlines key findings and issues for further reflection in relation to each of these three themes.

3.1 Growing digitalisation and blended service delivery

Integrated multi-channel management is the effective and efficient deployment of multiple service channels within one public service delivery process or the use of different channels for different service delivery processes, whereby the different channels relate to each other, for the communication, interaction, transaction with

⁴¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32014D0573&from=EN>

and/or distribution of products/services to the client⁴². Multi-channel management strategies differ between different countries as they can take different forms and include different types of channels (face-to-face, telephone, and online - including website, social media etc.).

In 2011, the PES to PES Dialogue considered two main reasons why PES implement multi-channel management strategies. Firstly, the main focus of multi-channel management strategies is to optimise the channels the organisation has to interact with clients⁴³. This makes communication channels to potential clients more diverse and thus makes the PES and its services more accessible through offering the optimal approach for a client's individual situation. This can also encourage self-reliance amongst jobseekers.

Secondly, adopting a multi-channel management strategy contributes to efficiency savings and budget reductions. Balancing cost-efficiency and service quality is a difficult task. An overly strong focus on service quality may lead to high levels of satisfaction, but also to (overly high) costs in the service delivery process. On the other hand, a strong focus on cost efficiency may undermine the service effectiveness as a whole⁴⁴.

The PES to PES Dialogue activities have observed that an increased number of PES have adopted integrated channel strategies since 2011. In 2011 many PES had similar goals but they differed in terms of the strategies they used⁴⁵.

Today, several resource-intensive activities have been transferred online, which require less frequent face-to-face communication between PES and its clients. The Comparative Paper for the Peer Review on Blended Service Delivery for Jobseekers, which took place in the Netherlands in 2014, noted that some countries now have electronic channels as their main delivery tool, whilst others have chosen a 'softer', more blended approach⁴⁶. For example, the Netherlands has embraced digital services and has transferred the delivery of a number of its core services to online.

In addition, the 2014 Dialogue Conference found that discussion has moved from the infrastructure requirements to the leaders of digital innovation now considering how to evaluate such services and introducing new methods of interaction.

PES' choices of delivery channels are effected by external factors. These include political, economic or managerial decisions, the level of internet penetration in different countries, concerns and strategies relating to the digital divide and different legal constraints⁴⁷.

Key findings

Introducing digitalised services for jobseekers requires time, planning and well-functioning technology with suitable back-up systems in place

- Investing in technological solutions requires time to ensure that a high-quality solution can be continuously delivered. Thorough in-house testing and rolling out helps to ensure that systems are suitable and that PES staff are able to use these. The 2014 Dialogue Conference discussed how PES can work with partners to reach specific target groups to test and develop tools, highlighting in particular that PES can work with youth organisations to reach young people who may have excellent-to-mixed IT skills.

⁴² European Commission (2012) PES to PES Dialogue Report Dissemination Conference: from the second year of the PES to PES Dialogue programme, page 3

⁴³ European Commission (2011) Multi-channel Management: Recent Developments in PES and E-Government, page 24

⁴⁴ Ibid. page 9

⁴⁵ European Commission (2012) PES to PES Dialogue Report Dissemination Conference: from the second year of the PES to PES Dialogue programme, page 3

⁴⁶ European Commission (2014) Peer Review 'Blended service delivery for jobseekers', page 5

⁴⁷ European Commission (2011) Integrated Multi-Channelling in PES Services: Finding the Right Mix, page 10

- Whilst digital solutions may need fewer frontline staff they do have significant consequences for 'back office' functions. It is likely that PES will require more IT- related resources in order to provide technical support and telephone functions⁴⁸. Telephone functions can act as back-up in case of technology failing and support to those who may experience difficulties using online systems.
- There has been a shift in IT concerns by PES from what channels to use and what strategies to have in place to questions around measuring their performance. This difference was noted at the recent Peer Review in the Netherlands on Blended Service Delivery for Jobseekers⁴⁹.
- Technology and online delivery is evolving and the latest developments potentially offer PES a number of advantages. Firstly, smart phones and tablets are widely used in Western countries and they are increasingly used for job searches. This suggests that PES should ensure that their websites and online tools are accessible and compatible with mobile devices⁵⁰. The growing importance of mobile applications to jobseekers and the need for PES to develop high-quality, user-friendly applications was noted at the 2014 Dialogue Conference. Secondly, the possibility of using 'cloud computing' for storage offers PES the ability to outsource parts (if not all of) their IT infrastructure. It can lead to lower costs, more scalable solutions and fewer IT problems⁵¹. The Blended Service Delivery for Jobseekers Comparative Paper provided the example of VDAB, the Flemish PES, who use a number of cloud applications including the Google suite that all staff use including email, hangouts and sharing documents.

PES must consider the accessibility of online channels and the digital literacy of jobseekers and staff, including training and support required for target groups

- Online service delivery for jobseekers is not suitable for all groups of jobseekers. Some groups may struggle with understanding web forms and even navigating websites. For example, those who have low IT-skills, literacy or numeracy problems may need additional support to use such services. The 2014 Dialogue Conference discussed how online services can be personalised to the needs of the jobseeker. For example, for those with low level literacy (or language skills, in the case of migrants), skills information can be conveyed in a more visual way and a more informal tone can be used within the text. In addition, PES can work with partners to develop training for online literacy for specific target groups. In the Netherlands, where 90% of jobseekers register online, intensive services are offered to those who are unable to use online services. This includes face-to-face services and workshops at local offices.
- Online services require jobseekers to have a certain level of soft skills, such as independent learning, working on their own initiative and time management, in addition to literacy and IT skills. This is amplified in situations where jobseekers are no longer required to go to the PES office. The PES to PES Dialogue Report in 2012⁵² stressed that the shift to online services 'needs to be carefully moderated' to ensure that 'jobseekers do not feel abandoned by the PES.'
- Positively, some PES have identified that particular groups of jobseekers require support to use, or access, IT services and they have set up fall-back mechanisms. These mechanisms, such as a support telephone helpline or one-to-one support in the jobcentre, are targeted towards those who are not sufficiently IT-literate

⁴⁸ European Commission (2011) Integrated Multi-Channelling in PES Services: Finding the Right Mix, page

18-19

⁴⁹ European Commission (2014) Peer Review 'Blended service delivery for jobseekers', page 20

⁵⁰ Ibid. page 29 ⁵¹

Ibid. page 30

⁵² European Commission (2012) PES to PES Dialogue Report Dissemination Conference: from the second year of the PES to PES Dialogue programme, page 35

and, more widely, for services that are more difficult to digitalise (for example, counselling⁵³).

- In-house, PES must consider the abilities and attitudes of their own staff in order to make IT provision successful. The 2014 Dialogue Conference discussed how the attitudes and perceptions of their staff can be as much as a barrier to digitalisation as jobseekers and employers. Providing specific training and involving client-facing staff in developing, testing and rolling out new delivery mechanisms can increase staff buy-in and better equip them to help clients with more detailed queries⁵⁴. In the case of the UK, for example, an IT-related objective is written into each PES counsellor's annual performance review so that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to help employers and jobseekers with digital self-service.

Change management, evaluating channel performance and how PES keep up with technology

- Firstly, one of the biggest challenges that face PES in the area of digitalisation is managing change, communication with staff and developing their IT skills and expertise. Some PES staff have seen changes to their job descriptions, their tools and the workflows and how they manage and adapt to this is important. Whilst some PES have undertaken staff training to help them cope with this change, few have good experiences of change management to help their staff deal with the new context⁵⁵.
- Secondly, many PES have not established ways to evaluate and monitor the performance of different channels. It is important for PES to have clear evaluation strategies in place to look at the added value of specific channels and to see if they are efficient, effective and value for money. The Blended Service Delivery Comparative Paper⁵⁶ noted that PES can improve their understanding of what performance means and what do measure in terms of operational issues (e.g. what to measure, why and when).
- Thirdly, while many PES measure customer satisfaction of some of their services, very few PES use customer satisfaction metrics from digital channels to find out about client behaviour. Data produced from digital channels can help PES to increase the knowledge of client satisfaction and thus the success of a particular strategy. Customer satisfaction metrics can be incorporated into management information approaches to ensure a fully comprehensive approach.
- Lastly, digital technology has rapidly changed over the last 10 years and it will continue to change. Developments such as mobile technology will change the way that jobseekers and employers access PES services as they will access PES resources on different devices and they will increase the speed of finding information on-the-go wherever they are. On a larger scale, concepts such as 'big data' and cloud computing offer advantages to PES' internal IT infrastructure.

Issues for further discussion

- Despite the spread of digitalisation, the monitoring and activation elements of PES roles are still delivered face-to-face in the large majority of PES. ***How can PES overcome barriers to digitalise a greater share of their monitoring and activation activities? What are the different barriers in different PES?***
- More efforts are needed cooperating with government actors to remove external barriers for better data-sharing and usage, sharing tools (software) across PES,

⁵³ Ibid. page 32

⁵⁴ European Commission (2011) Integrated Multi-Channelling in PES Services: finding the right mix, page 19

⁵⁵ European Commission (2014) Peer Review 'Blended service delivery for jobseekers', page 32

⁵⁶ Ibid. page 33

incentivising jobseekers to move online and engaging staff in more regular, innovative training methods that reflect how services are delivered and evolving. **How can PES capitalise on technological developments, ensuring that services are user-friendly and accessible to all? What are the opportunities and limitations of moving all jobseekers to online services? What is the role of staff?**

- A crucial, although relatively less addressed, issue is how to define and monitor performance across alternative channels of service delivery. While large amounts of data generated in the process of digitalisation are used to improve client experience with online services, it has seldom served as a tool to measure the relative effectiveness of different channels. **What can PES do to improve measurements of effectiveness and efficiency of different channels? What are the greatest limitations today? How can PES ensure that future developments of blended services go hand-in-hand with robust evaluation practices?**

3.2 Developing performance management systems

Performance management systems are essential to enable PES to evaluate all aspects of their business, including in-house processes and external services. The outcomes highlight what works, what does not work and may indicate why, on a local, regional and national level. They are a key part of the modernisation process PES are undertaking across Europe⁵⁷.

Performance management can produce a business case for PES activities and thus demonstrate a contribution to national and European employment goals. In particular, performance management systems can contribute to the effective delivery of personalised services that are required by the European Employment Guidelines⁵⁸. This is in line with the PES 2020 Strategy Output Paper.

Within a European context, performance management and benchmarking activities create the possibility of comparison across borders. Benchmarking has become important in recent years and a PES benchmarking group has been established to develop a set of agreed and defined indicators and good practice advice⁵⁹. The importance of such activities is echoed in 'benchlearning' priorities included in the legal text of the PES co-operation decision which established the new PES Network.

Amongst other benefits, performance management and benchmarking activities can enable staff at different levels and in different geographical areas to become involved in target-setting and reviewing, with individual staff performance assessment linked to the contribution to higher level targets. This can encourage widespread ownership of goals and targets⁶⁰ as staff are more aware of how their actions contribute to the effectiveness of their PES in their locality, region, nationally and across Europe.

Key findings

Tightening budgets and rising unemployment levels are exerting increasing pressure on PES to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their services

- PES operate in difficult economic contexts with stricter budgetary constraints but increasing demands for their services. The PES to PES Dialogue Report in 2013 noted that PES are increasingly required to demonstrate the added value of their services by providing evidence of effectiveness and efficiency⁶¹. For example,

⁵⁷ European Commission (2013) PES to PES Dialogue Report, page 4

⁵⁸ European Commission (2013) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 1

⁵⁹ Ibid. page 9

⁶⁰ European Commission (2013) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 7

⁶¹ European Commission (2013) PES to PES Dialogue Report 2013, page 8

PES may need to demonstrate to policy makers whether a specific active labour market policy (ALMP) provides value for money.

- It is worth noting that the performance of PES measures are scrutinised, as well as the value of their services relative to cost⁶². This applies to all aspects of PES services - from measures they deliver (alone or with partners) to core services and internal procedures and systems. Ultimately, policy makers are becoming more interested in the impact of PES interventions and value for money and PES are using performance management evidence in their strategic decision making⁶³. The discussion at the 2014 Dialogue Conference reflected that it is difficult to find the right performance management indicators that really show impact.
- Importantly, performance management can help PES to demonstrate which services do not adequately fulfil client needs and requirements. The results can be used to support the business case for the PES and to convince policy makers to maintain or even increase their funding⁶⁴. The Dialogue Conference discussed how performance management is being used in some countries to monitor PES counsellors' workload. For example, in Slovakia workload levels across offices are being compared and ranked, to assist in allocating staffing resources more effectively. This can support PES to quickly adapt their organisation and delivery methods to meet the changing needs of society and the labour market⁶⁵.

Some PES are using increasingly sophisticated performance management techniques

- PES to PES Dialogue activities (a Peer Review in Denmark in 2013 on performance management in PES, the 2012 Analytical Paper on PES performance management, the 2013 Dissemination Conference papers and the 2013 Analytical Paper on cost-benefit analysis, along with the 2014 Dialogue Conference) have shown that PES are using a range of methods to look at performance management.
- Firstly, some PES are undertaking ex-post evaluation to look at the value of specific activities. PES use existing administrative data to look at the outcomes of a specific action or set of activities. One example of such data is information from the unemployment register. Using this data helps to reduce costs and is an efficient use of time. However, much of this data originates from PES staff (e.g. counsellors) inputting information as part of their daily activities. Therefore the challenge is to ensure that frontline staff update jobseekers' records in a consistent, accurate and timely manner⁶⁶
- Secondly, most PES are undertaking some form of performance benchmarking. This is often used to look at ALMPs. The outcomes of which are used to support evidence-based design and implementation.
- Thirdly, despite the increased interest in the use of cost benefit analysis by PES, its use remains largely aspirational. Cost benefit analysis looks at different actions in terms of their 'efficiency as regards the realisation of social objectives⁶⁷.' The added value of using cost benefit analysis is that it can quantify the impact of PES services in monetary terms. This is particularly attractive and useful for policy makers, but also for PES management, staff and stakeholders⁶⁸. The few PES who do use this approach do so to support the assessment of ALMPs⁶⁹ and not to review core services. With advances in the development of

⁶² European Commission (2013) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 18

⁶³ Ibid. page 1

⁶⁴ Ibid. page 18

⁶⁵ European Commission (2013) Making the business case for Public Employment Services, page 1

⁶⁶ European Commission (2013) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 12

⁶⁷ European Commission (2013) Making the business case for Public Employment Services, page 1

⁶⁸ European Commission (2013) PES to PES Dialogue Report, page 8

⁶⁹ Ibid. page 9

suitable assessment systems and methodology this could in turn be used to guide decision-making in each PES and, more widely, across the EU⁷⁰.

- However, using cost benefit analysis is much more difficult in a public sector setting as the outcomes are difficult to monetise and the goals can be harder to accurately define⁷¹. The PES to PES Dialogue Report 2013⁷² outlined constraints to the roll out of this approach. Practically, cost benefit analysis can involve additional tasks and time and thus additional expenditure. It also requires sophisticated statistical or economic-based skills internal to the PES, which may not be available, and there are limits to what can be ascertained using existing models.

Decentralised PES structures are of particular interest in the context of performance management

- Performance management can be applied to centralised and decentralised PES structures. Dialogue and input from local actors (stakeholders and social partners) is important to ensure that the outcomes can reflect the differing needs of the local labour market and ensure that PES activities are responding to local needs⁷³.
- Where PES have a decentralised structure, or in countries that have a regionalised or strongly localised PES, they are using a range of tools to encourage performance management. These include a unified national performance management system, and financial incentives within budgets allocated by central government to regions.
- Operational procedures and data management are often centralised. Shared central databases for data management is in place, or soon will be, in Slovenia and the Czech Republic. The new analytical portal introduced in Slovenia in 2014 allows PES managers to follow their progress in reaching targets. It is intended that the database in the Czech Republic will allow for better information collation and content on performance. By establishing and agreeing on procedures to deal with customers, jobseekers' rights and responsibilities and the profiling of jobseekers, national standards can be established. This is not considered to impact on local flexibility⁷⁴.
- Currently, it is rare for performance management targets, quantified operational and outcome targets, to be set for each local PES office. However, having such targets in place along with high levels of transparency and benchmarking can bring a degree of local autonomy. This in turn can create conditions for budgets to be handed over to the local level⁷⁵. The 2014 Dialogue Conference heard that in Germany, the PES has adapted a bottom-up approach. This means that whatever is proposed from the regional and local level will be accepted by the central level. Trust is central to this method.

Issues for further discussion

- Benchmarking is used in several countries and those that are not using it are, in the main, considering adopting a formal benchmarking system⁷⁶. However, when adopting new systems (including transferring best practice approaches), PES must carefully consider their own contexts to ensure that they are sufficiently tailored. The recent Council Decision on enhanced co-operation between PES will also reinforce this practice at the EU level over the coming years. **What are**

⁷⁰ European Commission (2013) Making the business case for Public Employment Services, page 14

⁷¹ Ibid. page 7

⁷² European Commission (2013) PES to PES Dialogue Report, page 10-11

⁷³ European Commission (2012) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 36

⁷⁴ European Commission (2014) Analytical Paper: Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 28

⁷⁵ Ibid. page 29

⁷⁶ European Commission (2013) Performance Management in Public Employment Services, page 20

current barriers for PES in developing robust benchmarking and/or performance management systems? Which PES are currently developing new benchmarking systems and which PES are making use of existing systems?

- With regards to outcomes, indicators and targets used in performance management systems, PES should acknowledge outside influencing factors. The 2013 PES to PES Dialogue Report⁷⁷ highlighted the need for agreement within the PES on indicators for local or contextual factors that are outside of the control of PES, but which may influence performance and call benchmarking results into question. **What outside factors have the possibility of influencing PES performance and why? How can PES take these into account when looking at benchmarking results?**
- Lastly, the aforementioned report highlights how the implementation of cost benefit analysis varies across Member States and the considerable potential for further development of this work. In particular, work on productivity efficiency could be further developed if common ideas or a model approach is agreed across Member States. To aid the adoption of cost benefit analysis, practical guidance for PES could be produced. **Is it possible to develop a common approach, or model, on productivity efficiency? If so, what would be the key elements? What would PES like to see in a guidance document on cost-benefit analysis?**

3.3 Decentralisation and benchmarking performance

Decentralisation refers to the transfer of responsibility for public policies from the national to the regional, sub-regional or local levels⁷⁸. This often involves transferring programme management and administration to local levels while the central PES remains responsible for overall budgets, funding, setting policy and evaluation⁷⁹.

There are two types of decentralisation that have been highlighted in previous PES to PES Dialogue activities. Firstly, managerial decentralisation most often involves the reorganisation of the centrally coordinated PES services along the lines of management by objectives with (some) decision making powers devolved to the local level. Secondly, political decentralisation often takes the form of devolving some PES functions to regions or municipalities. In this form of decentralisation, lower tiers of government play a central role in implementation and in some cases policy⁸⁰.

Decentralisation can create the conditions for social partners and labour market stakeholders to provide input into PES activities. This can make labour market policy more responsive to changing economic requirements and, if combined with an outcome orientated approach, it can help to generate operational accountability for performance management⁸¹. Importantly, having the input from social partners and local labour market stakeholders can help PES to adjust their services to the differing needs of local labour markets⁸².

Key findings

The balance between flexibility and accountability will depend on the PES institutional setting and underlying political mandate

- Decentralising particular activities can provide more flexibility in day-to-day working for PES. The main issue is finding the right mix between flexibility and

⁷⁷ European Commission (2013) PES to PES Dialogue Report, page 7

⁷⁸ European Commission (2011) Decentralisation of Public Employment Services, page 1

⁷⁹ European Commission (2012) Organisational development, improvement and innovation management in public employment services, page 1

⁸⁰ European Commission (2011) Decentralisation of Public Employment Services, page 4

⁸¹ European Commission (2012) Performance management in public employment services, page 33

⁸² Ibid. page 36

accountability and what is decentralised, and how, depends on each country context⁸³.

- It is argued that there are two types of decentralisation. Firstly, administrative decentralisation is where regional and local PES offices have increased flexibility to implement national policy objectives. Secondly, political decentralisation usually involves more far-reaching delegation of responsibility from the national PES to sub-national levels (regional, state or municipal).⁸⁴

Some PES have decentralised functions such as budget-setting, programmes, target groups, organisation of service delivery, personnel management systems, outsourcing methods, and performance target and goal setting⁸⁵.

Balancing the demands of the local labour market with the agenda set by the central PES can be challenging

- In the latest PES to PES Analytical Paper (2014),⁸⁶ it is argued that decentralised strategies must be part of larger governance reforms to minimise any 'unintended consequences' to make sure that stakeholders support the activities. Indeed, the paper further mentions that for decentralisation of some administrative or political aspects to take place other components may need to be recentralised.
- Generally, decentralisation offers the opportunity for better information flows, tailor-made policies to specific areas, greater freedom to develop innovative practices, overcoming policy silos and developing local accountability⁸⁷. Developing in-country benchmarking and knowledge management systems can complement this by sharing best practices and enhancing the sense of accountability. The 2014 Dialogue Conference noted that a new benchmarking system has been introduced in Poland, to assess how local PES work. The benchmarking is based on sets of indicators, which include measures of the net effectiveness of ALMPs (having taken account of the diversity of local labour markets).
- However, the first PES to PES Dialogue conference in 2011⁸⁸ argued that some aspects of PES activity should remain centralised. Which activities and the extent to which they remain centralised is determined by the political goals of senior management or government officials, in cases where PES are closely managed by government.
- Some PES have centralised outsourcing and contracting. Centralising bidding processes, either at central or regional level, offer certain advantages such as standardised systems and ensuring that outsourced provision is of a high standard. However, the latest PES paper⁸⁹ suggests that local managers should be involved in the selection process to avoid contracts being awarded to those who are far from local contexts and the delivery process.

⁸³ European Commission (2011) New Developments, Good practices and lessons learnt - one year of the

PES to PES Dialogue: Discussions at the Dissemination Conference, page 1

⁸⁴ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 7

⁸⁵ European Commission (2011) Decentralisation of Public Employment Services, pages 10 - 11

⁸⁶ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 4

⁸⁷ European Commission (2011) Decentralisation of Public Employment Services, page 6

⁸⁸ European Commission (2011) New Developments, Good practices and lessons learnt - one year of the PES to PES Dialogue: Discussions at the Dissemination Conference, page 1

⁸⁹ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 17

Decentralisation is shaped by the capabilities and capacities of each regional, sub-regional and local office⁹⁰

- Whilst staffing levels are usually set by central offices, the delivery of activities is undertaken at local level and can only be delivered if enough staff are provided and their qualifications are sufficient⁹¹.
- A potential unequal allocation of resources and service delivery is interlinked with the issue of capacity and capabilities. It may be that different regional, sub-regional and local offices deliver activities to slightly different standards thus meaning that clients within one country may receive the same services on the surface but the quality of the services may be vastly different. This was discussed at the first PES to PES Dissemination Conference in 2011⁹².
- In addition, the paper on 'Central Steering and Local Autonomy⁹³' noted that when priorities and certain groups are decided at the local level the abilities of the PES may not be sufficient and they may choose to work in local partnerships. However, the operational flexibility depends on what is available locally by the PES, employers or training providers. Therefore those in rural areas, or those with high levels of economic deprivation, may have fewer (or lower quality) services available to them.

To combat this issue, some PES have developed 'service charters' that outline the range and quality of core PES services that can be accessed across the country⁹⁴

- At a management level, effective performance management systems can provide opportunities to share learning and good practice and help to ensure that clients can access services of a certain minimum quality. Performance management can also have positive implications for budget flexibility⁹⁵.
- It is argued that local 'ownership' of activities can promote better performance as policy makers, and those in more central positions, need to make a business case to local communities or central PES⁹⁶. Activities designed around local needs are more likely to address the needs of local people.
- In situations where PES are less centralised and more localised, it often means that data can be generated more easily and it is increasingly possible to look at activities at a granular level. This creates a situation where it is possible to measure performance against locally relevant indicators, to take into account local contexts and compare performance to other offices⁹⁷.
- Some PES have already embraced a local approach. For example, in Germany, a bottom-up approach for target setting has been used since 2013. Local managers work with team managers to define targets. Once these have been agreed, benchmarking exercises take place between offices. Performance is monitored on a monthly basis and assessed on a quarterly basis⁹⁸.

Issues for further discussion

- Decentralisation is an area where there is limited research, particularly regarding the relationship between performance management and decentralisation. Further work could be undertaken on the association between decentralisation,

⁹⁰ European Commission (2011) Decentralisation of Public Employment Services, page 17

⁹¹ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 17

⁹² European Commission (2011) New Developments, Good practices and lessons learnt - one year of the PES to PES Dialogue: Discussions at the Dissemination Conference, page 1

⁹³ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 17

⁹⁴ European Commission (2011) New Developments, Good practices and lessons learnt - one year of the PES to PES Dialogue: Discussions at the Dissemination Conference, page 1

⁹⁵ European Commission (2012) Performance management in public employment services, page 31

⁹⁶ European Commission (2014) Central Steering and Local Autonomy, page 8

⁹⁷ Ibid. page 8

⁹⁸ Ibid. page 18

connections between the PES and local labour market objectives, and whether this helps to improve PES performance⁹⁹. **What influence do the local labour market objectives have on PES? How does this effect PES performance? How can this be accounted for in benchmarking exercises? What alternative performance management approaches are used in PES?**

- PES have extensive networks and, in many cases, are using these networks to deliver effective services targeted to specific groups or areas and thus increasing their flexibility. **How can PES best work with local actors in specific (deprived) areas? Who are the most important actors to work with, why and on what areas can these partnerships focus? How do PES formalise these partnerships and monitor their performance?**
- There is space for future discussion on how to increase budget flexibility between PES offices and how this could impact on the efficiency of service delivery. **What drives greater budget flexibility between PES offices? To what extent is service delivery supported or hindered by budget (in)flexibility?**

⁹⁹ European Commission (2012) Performance management in public employment services, page 31

4 Impact of PES to PES Dialogue

4.1 Summary and overview of changes recorded

The European Commission recently surveyed PES who participated in the PES to PES Dialogue events in 2013 and 2014 to find out whether the programme had influenced a change in practice within their PES.

Thirty-one responses were obtained from 27 PES in 25 participating countries in the PES to PES Dialogue (Belgium have three PES and some countries submitted more than one response), representing an 84% per cent response rate overall.

In total, 136 instances of change were reported by the PES in 2013 and 2014, of which, 72 were apparent in 2014 alone. Of these 72, 22 took place where change had already been implemented and could therefore be the continuation of activities reported in the 2013 survey. Positively, there are 27 instances where change started during the last year and 23 cases where change is planned for the future.

4.2 Areas of change

The remainder of this analysis focuses on new changes recorded in 2014.

With the exception of three respondents, all PES reported at least one impact following attendance at one or more event in the programme. In terms of fields of practice, participants mostly reported changes to PES activities in quality management and professionalism of employment counsellors, services for employers and blended service delivery for jobseekers.

4.2.1 Quality management and professionalism

There were 14 examples of change reported following participation in the Dialogue Conference on Quality Management and Professionalism of PES Counsellors. These changes included the development, strategic thinking and implementation of related activities across PES countries.

Methodologies and models have been developed for the professionalism of counsellors in three countries (Bulgaria, Estonia and Belgium - Le Forem). In particular, Estonia have developed 'Action Learning Sets' where small groups of counsellors can discuss work issues in detail. The refinement of training provision for PES counsellors provides the opportunity to develop new skills and competences. In one example (ACTIRIS, Belgium), the PES is analysing core competences and skills of PES counsellors and the results will be used to assess future training needs. In contrast, Lithuania have implemented training programmes tailored to each PES counsellors' individual needs and combine a mixture of self-learning, external and internal training provision. Assessing the required skills and competences for PES counsellors has also led to the improvement of recruitment processes. Slovenia have improved the criteria used in the recruitment process and developed a new tool for use in profiling, selecting and interviewing potential PES counsellors. This is an area where PES are able to maximise current resources and improve service delivery with small costs.

4.2.2 Services for employers

Sixteen PES from 15 countries noted that the Dialogue Conference on Targeted Services to Employers had some impact on their activities, of which ten PES from eight countries provided examples of change. These included structural changes, cooperation arrangements, approaches to different employers and e-services. Two PES (ACTIRIS and VDAB, Belgium) have restructured services for employers so that PES staff are able to develop more in-depth knowledge of employer issues. Both had already started the change process, hence we expect that PES to PES discussions reassured them in their direction. In the case of ACTIRIS, they have improved their key accounts for employers and VDAB staff are now focused on local areas. In addition, Luxembourg has created 28

employer advisors across different sectors and created a central hotline for employers. In terms of cooperation, three PES noted that they use agreements with employers or employer associations (Croatia, Estonia and Sweden) and are continuing to improve this aspect. In particular, Sweden are continuing their one-entry-point-access for employers and are looking to increase the number of agreements with large national companies. The activities under PES to PES Dialogue in 2014 have also cemented the approach to employers for Estonia. Interestingly, Estonia and Sweden already noted such developments in the 2013 survey and it is positive that they continue to build upon this. Furthermore, Slovenia are reviewing their segmentation approach for employers, while Lithuania are improving services for SMEs, including providing recruitment and employee selection for employers who don't have the resources for such activities. Ireland are also creating a strategy for employer services. Finally, Bulgaria are improving their e-services for employers, including making improvements to their job vacancy database and vacancy notification systems.

4.2.3 Blended service delivery

Thirteen respondents indicated that there had been some changes following participation in the Peer Review on Blended Service Delivery for Jobseekers, seven of which were described in detail in the country responses. Four responses focused on further online services to be developed (Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) and two responses noted how their PES are exploring and updating their interactive services (Austria and Estonia). One PES noted that they are looking at further developing multiple channel delivery (the Netherlands).

There is a distinction between those PES who are advanced in their digital delivery and those who are looking to explore and enhance this area further. Those who are tending to turn towards digitalisation are looking at online services, such as improving automated matching services and e-registration tools. In contrast, PES who have well established digital agendas and delivery are now turning their attention to innovative technology and new channels. This includes the JobApp that Austria has developed for jobseekers to use and the co-browsing and webinars that Estonia are exploring. More advanced PES are also looking at how to fully integrate the customers' offline and online journey to improve all-round service delivery (as seen in the Netherlands).

4.2.4 Other examples of interest across fields of practice

Ten PES indicated that the Peer Review on PES approaches for sustainable integration of long-term unemployed linked to their current areas of change. Two notable examples are Croatia and ACTIRIS (Belgium). Croatia are intensifying the support that the long term unemployed and hard to reach groups, such as the disabled, are receiving in the hope that they will be better equipped to enter the labour market. In addition, ACTIRIS (Belgium) are establishing a working group to devise a strategy aimed at the reintegration of the long-term unemployed back into the labour market. The findings and recommendations from the Peer Review will be fed back to the working group.

Eight PES have undertaken, planned or delivered change in the area of performance management. The Peer Review on Performance Management in Public Employment Services reinforced the approach Slovenia have taken. They have recently introduced a new analytical portal, which allows all management levels to follow-up performance indicators and quantitative performance targets. Data is also available on sub-performance indicators and the data can be converted into charts and graphs. It is updated once a month. In addition, Bulgaria are looking to work on their performance indicators and develop a methodology to look at the performance of local offices. Lastly, the Netherlands report that they have greater awareness of performance management issues as a result of PES to PES Dialogue activities and will use this when they plan their 2015 key performance indicators during the autumn of 2014.

Seven instances of change were reported on the topic of low skilled adults and older workers following the Peer Review on Public Employment Service approaches for low-

skilled adults and young people. This has been an area of development for two PES in particular who provided detailed examples. Firstly, Le Forem (the PES for the Wallonia region in Belgium) have improved their profiling of jobseekers and have established a working group to look at the issues and reintegration of jobseekers aged over 45 years old. The PES have also produced factsheets to support advisors on best practices for older workers. Secondly, Lithuania have developed a new methodology for working with this target group as well. The PES have enhanced their vocational guidance through their expanded network of social partners and local communities. In addition, they have established a Structural Funds project on 'Improving Competences for Unskilled Persons', which aims to improve the personal skills and motivation for low skilled adults.

4.2.5 Success factors in facilitating change

As in 2013, it is difficult to judge how directly PES events and outputs have impacted, triggered or shaped changes to PES activities, but it is certainly the case that PES events and outputs have influenced, validated and confirmed choices made by national PES in a context of change, at least we can record this in 58% of cases. Continuing the trend from 2013, several PES welcomed the opportunity to exchange good practice, receive feedback on their own practice and commented on the quality and usefulness of the papers for the PES to PES Dialogue events. Nineteen respondents from 18 PES representing 17 countries provided information on critical success factors.

Firstly, two areas that were highlighted in the 2013 survey remain important in the 2014 survey:

- The PES events took place in a period of change for many PES, indicating that change was already underway and/or planned (topics were on PES' agenda), and that chosen subjects were relatively timely for participants. This was mentioned by Austria, ACTIRIS (Belgium) and Lithuania.
- A number of PES commented that the creation of specific working groups to address particular areas of activity were important in making change happen and that involvement of senior management is highly beneficial. This was highlighted by the Netherlands, Finland and Slovenia.

Secondly, two other areas emerged from the 2014 survey:

- Many PES are working in difficult economic conditions and several have commented that having sufficient financial and human resources is an important factor. This includes highly skilled and motivated PES counsellors, technical skills with regards to IT developments and sufficient financial resources and flexibility to implement ideas.
- Finally, the PES in Sweden and Poland reported that extensive networks and improved cooperation is important to the success of implementing change.

4.2.6 Main proposals for improvements to the Dialogue Programme

Overall, proposals suggest working in smaller groups, greater dissemination of best practices, undertaking smaller follow-up activities and using shared online platforms to facilitate discussion. Echoing the findings of the 2013 survey, respondents highlighted the following areas for improvement in 2014:

- Smaller working groups at events (ranging from 5 for a Peer Review to 15 - 20 for a Dialogue Conference), using video conferencing or webinars as alternatives.
- Undertaking follow-up activities after an event to go into further detail about practicalities, follow-up studies, temporary twinning of PES, work shadowing or secondments to other PES, an online platform to allow discussion between events.
- Showcasing best practices in a more accessible way, such as including presentations from events as part of event reports; having a dedicated web page

for best practices; a comparative study of best practices or publications in academic publications.

- Continuation of two annual dissemination conferences.

The following areas for improvement were also highlighted in the 2014 survey:

- Ensuring that two people from each PES participate in each event - one technical and one from a strategic point of view.
- More room for debate at events - which could allow for greater discussion of daily PES activities and deeper feedback and assessment on the lessons learnt from PES activities.

5 Key messages: PES in transition for more effective service delivery in a changing environment

The topics covered during the fourth year of the PES to PES Dialogue programme have raised a number of issues, in particular on digitalisation, decentralisation, performance management and activation. These issues build upon the topics raised in the previous years of the programme and help PES practitioners to learn more about the challenges for employment services across Europe.

5.1 Digitalisation

- **Digitalisation of services is an important vehicle to increase efficiency of PES services.** PES highlight three main strategies for online services: i) online as a primary channel; ii) online channels supplementing other channels; iii) all channels open and used by jobseekers and employers. Since 2011, the digitalisation debate has moved from discussing basic elements (such as IT infrastructures) to discussing how best to evaluate the effectiveness of online channels and how to introduce innovative, interactive elements to PES service delivery. In most cases, PES stress that *digital* is the preferred channel for their clients. However, this is not the case in some countries with low internet penetration and where other cultural preferences for face-to-face prevail. For digital services to become the norm, it is important for PES staff to receive on-going training and buy into the digital agenda themselves. In addition, there must be robust IT support in place at the PES to tackle technical problems. In relation to client-facing, some PES see the need to improve job-matching facilities through automatic, or custom selection, of jobseekers and previewing entries before they are published. Indeed, some PES feel that there is a need to better tailor and personalise online tools or dedicated spaces for specific target groups (in particular young people). Finally, involving users in designing, testing and piloting new tools can improve their usability and ensure that they are 'fit for purpose'. This is true for PES staff, jobseekers and employers alike.

5.2 Decentralisation

- **How PES are structured and restructure themselves can enhance their ability to design and delivery services and policies more effectively.** Different models prevail across the EU based on different historic, contextual, managerial and political preferences and decisions. Earlier work identified two types of decentralisation: (1) administrative decentralisation and (2) political decentralisation or devolution. More recent work highlights that well managed decentralisation in PES best takes place when some conditions are met, such as (for example): the need to include capacity-building elements to equip local staff with the skills they need; the need to accompany decentralisation with modern performance management systems that monitor performance through quantified objectives and indicators, and allow for systematic evaluations; the need for clearly, nationally defined minimum standards to reduce fragmentation; the need for information to cascade through all layers of PES staff. PES testimonies further highlight differences in approaches and structures across European PES, however most operate in a context of efficiency savings when making re-structuring decisions. Other common trends highlighted by PES and recent research point towards centrally defined procedural standards and routines, improving the availability of and access to robust labour market data (at all levels), enhancing performance management systems (especially to facilitate better benchmarking of performance across local / regional levels) and greater cooperation with private placement agencies to increase local level capacity of PES.

5.3 Performance management

- **Performance management systems are central to PES's understanding of their services**, and the degree to which these are efficient and effective. To that effect, it is important to ensure that incentive-based systems, aimed at improving performance, do not have the unintended effect of encouraging a focus on 'quick wins'. In order to achieve this, there is likely to be benefit in keeping performance management systems relatively simple, focussed on their primary aims that are shared, clearly communicated and understood across all layers in the PES. In that context, it is possible that some systems are therefore too complex, based on potentially too many indicators. This is an important reflection for PES who are reviewing (or re-focusing) their performance management systems, *and* for PES who are currently developing more robust systems for the first time. Generally, PES highlight the value in ensuring a balance between quantitative (e.g. output indicators) and qualitative measures (such as customer satisfaction) of performance. Both play a role in understanding PES performance in a holistic way, while qualitative measures also help PES to keep abreast of changing customer needs and demands (which can help the design of future services). Linking the qualitative to better understand the quantitative is in the mind of some PES today. Linking back to the question of decentralisation, while national standards prevail, PES highlight the benefit of designing performance management systems that are also sensitive to local contexts and offer some flexibility in target-setting and reporting. Offering local PES staff some visibility over their achievement relative to others, can help staff buy- in so long as management controls for 'positive competitive behaviours'. Finally, digital tools offer new ways for PES to design, capture, collect and work with data.

5.4 Activation of specific target groups in PES

- **Partnerships are central to the activation of specific target groups for PES, notably in the context of young people and the long-term unemployed.** PES use a range of partners to address the needs of particular target groups, including the long-term unemployed, young people and the disabled. These groups are often more challenging for PES and they require more intensive support as they are likely to be lower skilled and have motivational issues that need to be addressed. In addition, the long-term unemployed may have developed less positive views of the PES and may not always see the benefits of being employed. For harder to place jobseekers, PES partners include NGOs, youth organisations, training providers, the education sector and trade associations, among others. Working with partners, often for outreach and/or training support, adds value to existing PES provision as they can offer specialist knowledge and complementary skillsets. Ultimately, partnerships can help the PES to reduce their caseloads providing these partners can move jobseekers more rapidly into employment. To that effect, some PES are deploying tools to monitor the quality of their partners' outputs and ensure that they are getting value for money. These tools include signing short-term, time- specific agreements with partners, PES staff undertaking random and planned inspections, having clear tendering specifications in place, staggered payments based on results and client satisfaction surveys.

5.5 Looking ahead

The fourth year of the PES to PES Dialogue has continued to focus on key issues for the effective modernisation of PES in the context of Europe 2020 and it continues to be an

important source of information on the latest developments in PES practice. The PES to PES Dialogue has also continued to demonstrate practical added value as an information source on implementation and facilitation of change in national PES.

Going forward, the PES to PES Dialogue under the new PES Network will look to strengthen its contribution to peer learning. It will continue to provide a vehicle for analysis and discussion, and will look to enhance the capacity for co-operation between PES. The PES to PES Dialogue programme for 2015 will reflect the priority topics identified by the PES Network, such youth employment, improving performance management and looking at the role of and practices in profiling - all informed by evidence-based intelligence on good practice.

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