



ONLINE GUIDANCE SERVICES AND ADVICE FOR HIGHLY EDUCATED YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES WITH ACCESSING THE LABOUR MARKET

Online guidance for highly qualified young jobseekers

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The practice aims to offer customised online services to young jobseekers, within four months after their enrolment in the PES.

This practice was developed in a participatory process based on feedback gathered from young PES customers. PES carried out three panel discussions with around 120 young people, identifying their needs regarding PES online guidance services. The process showed that participants wanted to receive individualised and tailored online guidance services, not automated systems.

An evaluation of the pilot phase showed that the practice was positively assessed since it is able to provide flexible and easily accessible advice and guidance to PES users.

Name of the PES

VDAB (Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding) – Flemish Employment and Vocational Training services (Belgian-Flanders PES (VDAB))

When was the practice implemented?

October 2013 – on-going

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

Belgian-Flanders PES (VDAB)

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

The main target group is young highly educated jobseekers – i.e. people holding a Bachelor's or Master's degree – under 25 years old. In West Flanders, the practice was extended to highly educated jobseekers up to 30 years old.

What were the practice's main objectives?

The aim is to provide early and rapid job guidance and advice to highly educated young people who are encountering difficulties with accessing the labour market. Alternative online channels allow the PES to reach out to a large number of people with a relatively small team. Feedback shows that these alternative channels are very appropriate to the target group of higher education graduates, who are technology-savvy and very keen to use online services.

What activities were carried out?

The practice started as a pilot project in the Flemish Brabant region. An evaluation of the pilot phase was carried out in June 2014. In autumn 2014 there was a preparation phase for its expansion to other locations. In April 2015 the practice was launched in Antwerp, East Flanders and West Flanders. The services are offered as an alternative to traditional face-to-face advice and guidance. In order to access the services the user has to register with the Belgian-Flanders PES (VDAB), in person or online. Four steps are then followed:

1. an email, explaining the online guidance process is sent to the young person;
2. the first appointment is scheduled;
3. the first conversation is held; and
4. the personalised guidance on job seeking is provided.

The channel used for the guidance is selected individually by the jobseeker who can choose between email, phone, video call or a physical meeting.

What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?

A small team of online counsellors (around 15) are involved in implementing the practice. The online counsellors are PES employees, who volunteered to specialise in this type of service (called 'e-coaches'). Each 'e-coach' is responsible for jobseekers from a specific geographical area. Belgian-Flanders PES (VDAB) provides training to the online counsellors on the use of IT tools and on the labour market characteristics of the region in which the online counsellor is operating.

What were the source(s) of funding?

Other (Flemish region)

What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?

People reached

The total number of clients to whom the online services were provided to until October 2015 was 1 868:

- ▶ Antwerp – 367
- ▶ East Flanders – 182
- ▶ Flemish Brabant – 542
- ▶ West Flanders – 777
- ▶ Limburg – 0 (the practice hasn't started in this province yet)

Products

As regards training for the counsellors; training sessions and guidelines were developed to prepare them for delivering this new type of service. A common email inbox was created in order to coordinate the work of the different employees, as well as an internal website. The internal website contains the online counsellors' contact information, the guidelines, FAQs, instructions on how to use the online tools, and feedback from customers.

What outcomes have been identified?

An assessment of customer satisfaction of the practice showed that customers were very satisfied with the services received; 84 % would recommend the online services to their peers. PES users positively assessed the following aspects:

- ▶ client-focused services,
- ▶ rapid guidance service,
- ▶ individualised coaching, and
- ▶ flexible service which is provided practically, at anytime and anywhere.

The coverage of the requests from registered users (for a maximum period of four months) by the online counsellors was 95 %; while the coverage through traditional counselling in Belgian-Flanders PES (VDAB) agencies was 94 %. These results suggest the online advice and guidance services are equally – or even slightly more – effective than traditional services.

The evaluation showed that the online advice and guidance services had similar effects to the traditional services carried out in the agencies. Indeed, the jobseekers were able to find a job within the same period of time.

Additionally, the evaluation of the practice revealed that the PES also benefited by:

- ▶ reducing the time needed to provide the service,
- ▶ providing a more efficient service,
- ▶ incorporating modern HR policies to the PES services, and
- ▶ reaching young people with a more accurate service that meets their needs.

What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

Before the actual implementation of the practice, a pilot phase was developed. Several lessons were learnt and success factors identified and analysed by the evaluation of the pilot project in 2014, such as:

- ▶ Offering jobseekers different channels to communicate has facilitated reaching the target group of higher education graduates;
- ▶ The main challenge of the practice is having enough staff to respond to demand, particularly in high demand periods. It is important to train back-up online counsellors who can support permanent staff in these periods;
- ▶ A proper monitoring of online counsellors' activities should be put in place. This could have an impact on improving the quality of the service;
- ▶ It is important to ensure good coordination and guidance of online counsellors in order to provide a timely and targeted service to young jobseekers; and
- ▶ An increased capacity and more flexibility would be needed in order to respond to all requests and their fluctuations over time.



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