



Early and intensified counselling – implementation at the Jobcentre of Brønderslev

PEOPLE AT RISK OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT RECEIVE MORE FREQUENT AND SPECIALISED SUPPORT FROM JOB COUNSELLORS

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National employment reforms in 2014 introduced early and intensified contact for unemployed in every local PES office in Denmark. The model aims to shorten unemployment periods and prevent long-term unemployment. All local PES offices have introduced this model. In addition, local PES offices have implemented specific projects to prevent long-term unemployment.

Name of the PES

The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (national PES), Denmark
Jobcentre Brønderslev (local PES office), Denmark

Scope of measure (a pilot project or a national reform)

The national employment reform in 2014 introduced early and intensified meetings between job counsellors and insured unemployed. The approach of early and intensified contact is based on evidence from pilot projects carried out in Denmark in 2008. The practice is carried out by local PES offices (named 'municipal jobcentres'), which are responsible for active labour market policies in cooperation with unemployment insurance funds (responsible for providing unemployment benefits).

When was the practice implemented?

The implementation of the national employment reform began in the summer of 2014. Most measures were implemented by 1 July 2015 across all the local PES offices.

What was the driver for introducing the practice? Was it internal or external?

The driver for this practice was the 2014 employment reform. In light of growing welfare spending and a decreasing workforce in Denmark, the aim of the reform was to support jobseekers in finding a suitable job in an effective way. The practice of early and intensified contact is based on several years of research, through randomised social experiments, that provided evidence of the effectiveness of this approach.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

The model is implemented in local PES offices which operate as the single point of contact for the unemployed on all active labour market policies. Moreover, around 26 unemployment insurance funds are responsible for activating jobseekers by providing unemployment benefits to unemployed individuals who are insured (for a maximum period of two years).

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

The approach targets all insured unemployed who are able to take up a job in a short period of time. Around 70% of the workforce in Denmark is covered by unemployment insurance, which is a voluntary scheme administered by 26 unemployment insurance funds. The approach of early and intensified counselling does not cover people receiving social benefits (those not covered by an unemployment insurance) and people on sick leave who receive other intensified support.

What were the practice's main objectives?

Early and intensified contact aims to shorten the period of unemployment and prevent long-term unemployment. This is done in two ways:

- 1) Jobseekers are empowered: they are made responsible for their job-search by arranging meetings with job counsellors themselves. Local PES, like the Jobcentre Brønderslev, focus on the quality of the meetings between the unemployed and the job counsellor. Job counsellors are trained in conversational and questioning methods, which are job-focused and aim to motivate the jobseeker.
- 2) Coherent support is provided through close cooperation between local PES offices and unemployment insurance funds, as described in the section below.

What activities were carried out?

The local PES office and the unemployment insurance fund both have individual and joint meetings with the unemployed person at the beginning of the unemployment period. While the meetings with the local PES focus on employment services, the meetings with the unemployment insurance fund focus on availability of the unemployed person to work.

The first meeting with the unemployment insurance fund takes place no later than two weeks after unemployment registration, and it is focused on improving the CV of the jobseeker. The unemployment insurance fund then decides on the extent to which they need to be involved in future meetings with the local PES.

The first meeting at the local PES office takes place in the first six weeks of the unemployment period. This is followed by monthly meetings with a personal job counsellor. The unemployment insurance fund can be involved in some of these meetings. After six months of unemployment, meetings happen every three months (unless the jobseeker wishes to meet more often). After 16 months of unemployment, the jobseeker has the opportunity to meet a personal job counsellor every week to decide jointly on intensified support.

In line with the national framework, local PES offices can introduce additional projects to complement the practice. For example, Jobcentre Brønderslev uses profiling tools and conversational methods to prevent long-term unemployment. During the meetings, the job counsellor uses the following profiling tools to identify people at risk of becoming long-term unemployed:

- ▶ An online questionnaire that jobseekers are encouraged to fill in, through which they assess their chances and barriers of finding a job within six months.
- ▶ A Spider Web Diagram that helps to identify personal barriers to employment. The jobseeker assesses nine areas that are important for employment on a scale of 0-10.
- ▶ An assessment tool from the World Health Organisation, asking five simple questions (for example: 'during the last two weeks, how often have you been happy?'); this is to assess well-being.

People identified as 'at risk' of becoming long-term unemployed are supported by a specialised job counsellor. They meet more frequently, once a week, for individual conversations. The job counsellor is trained in different conversational techniques. The aim is to encourage people to speak for themselves, to motivate them and to single out risks to employment, without marginalising them. Depending on the outcomes of these conversations, certain tools can be used to address specific needs. For example, further psychological support can be provided.

What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?

In order to implement reforms in 2014, the national PES supported local offices with specific projects that aimed to prevent long-term unemployment. However, staff capacity and development remains the responsibility of the local level. For example in Jobcentre Brønderslev, two additional job counsellors were employed, one of them specialised in supporting people who are identified as at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. In addition, a temporary staff member was employed to introduce an online appointment system. As a consequence of that recruitment, the caseload per job counsellor decreased compared to the previous year. Depending on the season, the caseload dropped from around 160 people per counsellor to 120 people. The specialised job counsellor who supports people 'at risk' of becoming long term unemployed has a case load of around 40 people.

In the Jobcentre of Brønderslev, all job counsellors received initial training from external trainers at first, and now continue to receive bi-weekly training from an internal trainer in job-oriented conversational techniques. In order to cooperate effectively with the unemployment insurance funds, joint training for counsellors from both organisations was introduced.

What were the source(s) of funding?

The model of early and intensified contact is funded by the local PES offices. Local projects, such as specialised support with methods like the Spider Web Diagram used in Brønderslev, are funded by the national PES.

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

At Jobcentre Brønderslev, since the introduction of the reform last year, 108 people who were unemployed for longer than 16 months had frequent contact with a specialised job counsellor. In July 2016, 62 were actively engaged in a work place, of which:

- ▶ 29 are in employment;
- ▶ four are in job-rotation;
- ▶ three are in part time jobs/ jobs with a fixed time period;
- ▶ seven are in wage subsidy jobs; and
- ▶ 19 in are in internships;

In addition, job counsellors were supported with specific tools such as a handbook containing methods like the Spider Web Diagram or the ABC method. The ABC job plan describes a conversation path to identify preferred jobs according to the jobseeker's interests and qualifications.

What outcomes have been identified?

The 2014 national employment reform was based on evidence from earlier pilot projects, some of which showed that early and frequent meetings increase employment rates by over 10 per cent¹, and others indicating that intensified contact is effective in dealing with the long-term unemployed².

A national evaluation of the early and intensified contact approach is currently taking place, and results will be available in early 2017.

In Brønderslev, since the introduction of the reform, long-term unemployment has decreased. Between June 2015 and June 2016, long-term unemployment of insured jobseekers decreased by 26 per cent in Brønderslev, compared to 14 per cent in the region (Nordjylland). However, it is difficult to justify causality because other factors come to influence long-term unemployment.

Moreover, jobseekers at the local PES in Brønderslev reported an increase in the quality of their meetings with job counsellors. Job counsellors witnessed that methods, such as the Spider Web Diagram, engage, motivate and boost the self-esteem of jobseekers. Due to the fact that the Spider Web Diagram is based on a scale, people are more encouraged to assess their own situation. In addition, it provides a visual assessment of areas that might hinder their employment.

What are the lessons learnt and success factors?

Success factors:

- ▶ It is important that the contact between the job counsellor and the recipient is based on open discussions that take into account the personal situation of the jobseeker and not a tick-box. In order to provide personalised support, job counsellors need ongoing training on conversational methods and a capacity to concentrate on individual cases.
- ▶ The model sits alongside a wider focus on active citizenship, empowerment and responsibility. The constant contact and the application of conversational methods aim to support people to look for alternative ways to find work and to master different situations in their life.

Lessons learnt:

- ▶ There is a risk that the categorisation of people into risk groups becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is always an uncertainty at the beginning whether a person is really at risk, and job counsellors need to be trained to stay aware and avoid unnecessary marginalisation.
- ▶ There are still some coordination issues between the jobcentre and the unemployment insurance funds, as there are around 26 different funds. A way to improve cooperation is personal contact, such as joint training with counsellors from the insurance funds.
- ▶ There is a need to focus on quality rather than on the number of meetings. It is important to maintain quality in every meeting by focusing on their importance and regulating their frequency.

1 Pedersen, Rosholm, Svarer (2012), Experimental Evidence on the Effects of Early Meetings and Activation.

2 Breuning et al. (2003), Assisting the Long-Term Unemployed: Results from a Randomised Trial. Häggglund (2009), Experimental evidence from intensified placement efforts among unemployed in Sweden.



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