

Title: Impression of Supported Employment. A study of some European Supported Employment services and their activities
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English summary

This report explores the practical workings of supported employment in different countries in Europe. The aim of the study is to get an impression of how supported employment is practised, organised and understood in these countries and to use this information to gauge the progress of Norwegian supported employment. It is also intended that this study will stimulate further discussions and research on supported employment in general. The study is based on existing documentation from earlier research and evaluations of Norwegian supported employment (Arbeid med bistand) and interviews in selected supported employment services in Ireland, Finland, Portugal, Scotland, Holland and Spain. The approach has been of a qualitative nature with a strong emphasis on descriptions by people that are directly involved with the support of disabled persons into a job in the open labour market. The intention is to present the workings of supported employment services as seen through the perspectives of involved personnel. As such, there is no intention to present any kind of 'general truth' about supported employment in these countries.

There are a wide variety of ways in which supported employment projects are financed, and supported employment takes on different forms in the various countries. Although the goal is ultimately for supported employment services to find jobs, there are hardly any financial incentives for supported employment services to get a job quickly for a client. Funding does not seem to be dependent on fast results. However, early job contracts for a client may give the supported employment service a better credibility towards funders. There is a significant struggle to access funding in countries without public funding. It is likely that there will be more pressure on services within a national supported employment programme framework to produce and document outcomes and results. While clients are referred to supported employment services from a wide variety of sources, the most common referral route seems to be from public bodies. It is a general picture that clients in supported employment see themselves as too able for sheltered workshops and therefore want a job in the open labour market. There are several limitations for entry to supported employment, both self-imposed by the supported employment service, and those imposed by public referral services. It appears to be common that supported employment services claim that clients must be 'reasonably stable'. There is a great variety in clients' work capabilities and motivation.

Supported employment services receive information about the client from the referring organisation and other relevant organisations. In cases with a public referral system, the referral organisation decides if a particular service is the right one for the individual client. Services must in principle accept clients that are referred to them; however, referring organisations are frequently flexible. Services without a public referral system can select clients, and can make sure that clients are motivated. In general clients of supported employment want to work, however, it appears that often motivation is an issue although this may well depend upon how getting a job will affect their welfare benefits. The alternatives for clients appear to be sheltered workshops, training programmes, welfare benefits and to stay at home. Clients of supported employment services have various degrees of work

history with many having little or no employment experience. Supported employment services themselves rarely provide any kind of pre-job training; if seen as necessary then clients receive pre-job training with other services. Many supported employment services rely upon its network of support organisations to help deliver a holistic service to its clients. It is often seen as a problem that other parts of the rehabilitation system do not recognise employment as part of the client's progress and job coaches sometimes feel that there is a lack of support towards the client from other parts of the support system. It is an impression that job coaches lack training and methods to ensure active participation from job seekers who are not able or used to making decisions on their own behalf.

Whilst all supported employment services have contact with employers, the degree of contact with employers varies considerably. There is an impression that job coaches prefer to work towards small and locally based enterprises. This may be because they find them more personal and therefore more suitable for their clients. Supported employment services operate job-finding activities through informal and to a lesser extent, formal channels although applications for vacancies or available jobs advertised are rarely used. The supported employment services typically find jobs for their clients mainly by job coaches or job finders contacting employers by telephone and follow up a positive response by visits to the company. While 'job carving' is a typical way of getting a job contract, the most common strategy to secure access to a job is by organising work experience placements. There are great differences with regards to the length, content and purpose of work experience placements. Financial incentives such as wage subsidies exist in different formats in all countries, although job coaches tentatively referred to bureaucratic rules as a barrier for not using them. It still appears to be common that some form of compensation is given to the employer for lower productivity of clients, e.g. to make agreement with employers on a combination of wage and benefit pension; or as in some cases that no wage is paid by the employer. It appears to be common that clients of supported employment work part-time. While that may be according to the wishes of the clients, job coaches also pointed to systemic barriers that prevent clients from working more hours. Most of the clients of the supported employment services found jobs in the private sector, typically in jobs that require unskilled labour. Although the ultimate aim is to find permanent jobs for clients, it appears to be common to accept short-term contracts, and clients often do not get a permanent job. Our study discovered that a permanent job contract does not necessarily mean a paid job, as it sometimes happens, especially in the public sector, that the employer does not pay any wage to the clients of supported employment and the clients still receive benefits or pension. To our knowledge there are no statistics available on job retention in any of the countries that we have visited. While it was stated in all supported employment services that some of the clients need support in a job over a long period of time to be able to keep the job, we found very few examples of funding for such long-term support. It is still an impression that after a job contract, there is support available for job retention purposes; even if not funded it takes place as voluntary support, mostly by direct visits and by telephone calls.

Information in actual quantifiable results in terms of job outcomes for clients in the supported employment services is vague, and in general, evaluations of supported employment services appear weak. None of the supported employment services that we visited had any targets in terms of caseload or results for individual job coaches. When referring to results or outcomes, it is often difficult to know if job coaches refer to work experience placements, temporary jobs or permanent jobs. The caseload of job coaches in different countries differs significantly, an issue that may be connected to types of clients, length of support and what kind of support that takes place. Because of differences in funding as well as poor documentation in several services, it is difficult to compare results. It is still an impression that the emphasis concerning a job output appears to be far less weighted in some countries than in others, and that the end result of supported employment need not necessarily be a permanent job contract on the open labour market.

A number of recommendations for further development of supported employment in general are proposed:

- To further develop the EUSE 5 stage process as the European model of supported employment.
- The Values and Principles underpinning Supported Employment as a process to secure and maintain a job on the open labour market should be recognised, developed and more widely used.
- Supported employment providers should give consideration to producing reports on their activities in line with EUSE standards and methodology in an agreed format to ensure consistency in the development of supported employment in Europe.
- Increased recognition by funders of the need for long-term support after a job has been secured.
- Establish what the components of best practice in supported employment are.
- Improve the practical relevance of the diploma.
- Development of short training courses on a range of practical topics.
- Consideration of a Job Club approach as part of the job finding process designed for clients of supported employment.
- Develop methods that increase job coaches' counselling skills to clients as active participants in their own vocational rehabilitation process.
- User participation is achieved before there is a referral to a supported employment service.
- Co-operation between supported employment and other initiatives must be developed in order to avoid clients' unresolved problems becoming obstacles to securing a job.
- Supported employment services develop training of job coaches in job finding techniques and skills, and improve communication with and support to employers.
- Supported employment develops a very clear and acceptable definition of what are a job taster and a work experience placement.
- Develop supported employment national associations as an instrument for policy influence.
- Lobby the EU regarding the introduction and funding of supported employment.