

POSITION PAPER

PROPOSAL FOR A STRUCTURED COOPERATION BETWEEN PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (PES) AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR FOR BETTER SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITIONS

European Network
of Public Employment Services



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¹ DECISION No 573/2014/EU

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RATIONALE

Despite recent progress at European and national level, youth unemployment, underemployment and inactivity remain, and are set to continue to be, one of the most pressing challenges in the European labour market. Of all the contributing factors for these issues, school-to-work transitions for those aged under 25 are the most crucial transitions at the beginning phase of the career path. Moving from school to work for the very first time is a brand new experience for the young person and for their family, and often for their employer.

Education systems provide foundational skills for adulthood, active citizenship and lifelong learning. The importance of these skills for successful and sustainable advancement in life is well established. In vocational and higher education, professional skills for jobs are acquired. Skills, attitudes and values that were developed in the education system need to be practiced and further advanced in workplaces later on.

Individuals also need career management skills¹. Timely acquisition of these skills can lead to fundamental and long-lasting impacts, which can act as a springboard to future career steps. Therefore, effective approaches to support individuals to manage their own career path at the earliest possible opportunity in the education system are essential. Individuals spend a considerable amount of time in the education system, and this is a very important period for the development of career management skills.

The Public Employment Services (PES) in Europe have been working in the fields of career transition management, placement, continuous professional training, upskilling and reskilling for the past six decades. The European Network of PES, which was created in 2014, cumulates this professionalism at the EU level. In this document, we set out our proposal for cooperation with the education systems in the EU, including all type of schools and learning environments where career guidance and career transition management take place.

 1 One outcome of career guidance related activities for an individual is 'career management skills'. These are defined as 'a range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals (and groups) to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions' *European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2010). Lifelong Guidance Policies: Work in Progress. A report on the work of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2008–10).*

Our reasoning behind the proposal is based on our understanding of individuals' needs and our perspective of the best offer that public institutions can provide. It is also meant to nourish a reflection among PES of how we can work better together with education providers to enhance the existing service offers with our own knowledge, expertise and resources. That being said, we have examined the education system from a process perspective and how we as PES can add value to each step of that process.

The PES, based on the results of a questionnaire, offer support in a variety of ways for schools, pupils, students, families, local communities and employers:

- Providing career guidance for students and families;
- Supporting the negotiation process between schools and the demand side of the labour market;
- Supporting teachers and school staff in career guidance and career education;
- Supporting general and institutional aspects, like planning of curricula and training of teachers;
- Providing validated and up to date career information including occupational descriptions, learning pathways for specific jobs etc.;
- Setting up structured cooperation with schools and other partners involved in fostering school-to-work transitions;
- Helping to prevent school dropout as well as second chance education (school leaving certificates or qualifications);
- Providing access to real-time vacancy information across the EU;
- Providing access to apprenticeships and traineeships, and other forms of work-based training across the EU.

This paper is structured around the idea that at each of these steps we, as PES, described what the ideal outcome should be and what offers we can make, considering our knowledge and expertise. We close each section with recommendations for PES and the education sector for progression towards shared outcomes.

1. INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS, COOPERATION WITH THE EDUCATION SECTOR AND OTHER PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

1.1 Description of the current status

Most PES are legally bound to provide career guidance to young people. In most countries, obligatory career guidance takes place mainly at school, usually starting in secondary education (ISCED level 2 or 3²). At primary level (ISCED level 1), very few PES have an obligation to offer career guidance. The majority of PES offer the services themselves. Only a few PES use external providers to deliver services on behalf of the PES. In nearly half of the countries, the education system does it primarily on its own. In some countries, other organisations provide the offers. Many PES cooperate with different stakeholders, such as ministries, universities, chambers, national agencies, research facilities, NGOs or private companies. In many countries, PES cooperate with schools on a local level (for instance, in relation to school visits or career guidance events at the PES).

1.2 What we think should happen

In order to secure smooth school-to-work transitions, there should be all types of cooperation (preferably formalised) between PES, the education sector and other partners at all levels (including non-formal learning settings). Institutional arrangements at various business and political levels are recommended.

1.3 Offers of the PES

PES know about the regional and national labour market and the demand for current and future labour market needs in regard to occupations, qualifications, skills and competences. PES can offer a role as a conductor because of their typically good contacts with employers, trade unions, governments, municipalities etc. PES have knowledge of:

- The labour market and need for skilled workers;
- The range of vocational training available;
- Entry-level jobs, apprenticeships and traineeships;
- Job requirements;
- Competency requirements;
- Application strategies and related documents;
- Unemployment and employment by profession, education and skills levels;
- Geographic and regional trends;
- Demographic trends such as student population.

1.4 Recommendations for PES and the education sector

- Review and co-create the national, regional and local curricula on career guidance.
- Work towards a formalised agreement for regular cooperation between PES and education.

2 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_\(ISCED\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED))

2. EVIDENCED-BASED AND UP-TO-DATE CAREER INFORMATION AND MATERIALS

2.1 Description of the current status

In most countries, PES play a minor role in career guidance in schools. For most types of career information services, more than half of the PES only cover up to 5% of the overall offers available. PES are more involved in providing information about the diversity of professions and support services connected to career start.

Within obligatory career guidance, most PES prepare material for use in school. Some PES prepare material only for internal use in PES. Some PES offer school visits, and around one-third has offers for school classes or individuals. Only a few PES provide offers for parents, and only half of PES are present at careers fairs. The materials provided are mainly brochures and online information, though some PES also provide films and information on social media.

2.2 What we think should happen

Students, parents, teachers and counsellors/coaches should have easy access to evidenced-based and up-to-date career information and materials. These materials should be developed in cooperation with all partners.

2.3 Offers of the PES

Career information from PES includes standard information about career and study fields, courses of study and occupations (qualification requirements and qualification profiles, tasks and activities, employment opportunities, income, career paths, career and further education opportunities,

development of occupations and labour markets, job opportunities etc.). This also includes information on education and training paths, such as general and vocational schools, universities, vocational training and other lifelong learning opportunities and in-work transitions. PES can offer various tests, such as interest, attitude and aptitude, for self-assessment of professional skills.

The PES are the experts for the regional and national labour market and they are also aware of the forecasted demand for labour and the supply of labour (by qualification and occupation), as well as the predicted supply of training places and demand for training places (some PES). The PES can use this knowledge neutrally when creating quality-checked, free of charge and national materials for career guidance.

2.4 Recommendations for PES and the education sector

- Offer access to career guidance through the internet, social media, print and in film.
- Appear at career fairs and prepare and address the target group in an appropriate way to encourage independent discussion of the topic.
- Provide materials to support counsellors and coaches in career guidance lessons and workshops.
- Offer informational events with parents to raise awareness.
- Jointly develop materials in collaboration with young people and youth organisations.

3. CAREER GUIDANCE AND PERSONAL COUNSELLING

3.1 Description of the current status

Nearly all PES which provide voluntary offers are present at careers fairs and prepare materials (either for use solely in PES or for use in schools). Most PES also offer school visits and provide offers for school classes or for individuals on their own premises. Around a third of PES provide offers for parents. Very few PES provide seminars for teachers and trainers of counselling and guidance.

Most PES offer personal counselling in nearly all fields of career guidance, especially in general information, identification of interest, and aptitude and attitude tests. Many PES also offer online tools and brochures with general information and specific information on diversity of professions or vocational training and tests. Half of the PES supplements its information offer through films and videos. Few PES are engaged in career guidance in tertiary education (ISCED level 5 and above).

In more than half of the PES, specially trained personnel for the provision of these offers exist, but only a few PES provide the services through specialised staff.

3.2 What we think should happen

Learning career management skills is a process; therefore young people in school and their parents should have early and ongoing access to career guidance and counselling to ensure that transitions from education to work are as seamless as possible.

3.3 Offer of PES

PES know about the regional and national labour market and they know the demand for the current and future labour market in regard to occupations, apprenticeships, skills and competences. PES career counsellors are autonomous and have the social and methodological competences that are required for career guidance and advisory tasks.

They can support young people and their parents to consider the choice of offers for future employment prospects. The offers of the PES are free of charge, universal and, ideally, open to all.

PES have knowledge about the challenges facing certain groups in the labour market (e.g. based on gender, disability or ethnicity), and this knowledge can be mobilised for the further development of career guidance.

Many PES can offer specialist knowledge on trends in the labour market, such as digitalisation of the working world and the required digital skills of employees.

Some PES can offer expertise to the design of initial teacher training or continuous professional development in relation to career guidance.

3.4 Recommendations for PES and the education sector

- Support school classes in the form of career guidance sessions at PES.
- Provide individual counselling for young people in the course of their career guidance, including vulnerable youth.
- Provide specialised experts on career guidance and personal counselling.
- Include parents in the whole career guidance process.

4. PLACEMENT OF, AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR, YOUNG PEOPLE

4.1 Description of the current status

Most PES are not engaged intensively in initial school or work-based vocational training and tertiary education. In the provision of entry-level jobs, nearly all PES are involved, and in a few countries their share is even 75 % of the overall placement services. Furthermore, in a few PES the coverage of placements in apprenticeship training and traineeships is 50 % or more of the overall available services. The main channel used for these services is personal counselling. In regard to entry-level jobs and apprenticeship training, more than two-thirds of PES use this channel.

In regard to young people at risk of dropping out from secondary education or training (or those who already have dropped out), only a few countries have a systematic data exchange at their disposal that ensures that every young person is recorded and supported. In some countries the school system reports those at risk of dropping out to the PES, while in all other countries young people have to present themselves voluntarily.

Two-thirds of PES explicitly have a 'train first' approach rather than a 'work first' approach for dealing with those at risk of dropping out of school. In most PES, the success of these approaches is monitored continuously on an empirical basis. It is evenly split between PES that do monitoring themselves and those that use data provided by another authority.

4.2 What we think should happen

There should be an effective system that supports young people in school-to-work transitions. Core data should be exchanged between partners to prevent dropout from school, apprenticeship or higher education. Special attention should be paid to young people who need a second chance to complete upper secondary education (ISCED level 4).

Support may include:

- Counselling for reengagement in education or work;
- Placement in work based learning including apprenticeships and traineeships at companies or at training providers;
- Support for admission and application procedures;
- Support and guidance during training for individual stability in order to avoid dropout of apprenticeship and studies;
- Placement of entry-level jobs after the completion of an apprenticeship or studies;
- Support for geographic mobility;
- Needs-based support services before and after placement.

Ideally, this should be offered in a one-stop-shop model.

4.3 Offers of the PES

Nearly all PES can offer the services outlined above. PES have long-standing experience in supporting individuals who have dropped out of the education system. They can support and assist young people during periods of individual turmoil. They have experience placing young people into entry-level jobs, traineeships and apprenticeships.

4.4 Recommendations for PES and the education sector

- Jointly develop an inter-institutional tracking and reporting system.
- Jointly organise careers and jobs fairs with social partners.
- Coach and support young people at the risk of dropout.
- Collaborate to reach out to and support vulnerable youth.
- Provide easily-accessible offers for young people.
- Provide information about available apprenticeship places and placement in such places.
- Provide placement of entry-level jobs and traineeships.
- Jointly review the services outlined above in collaboration with young people and youth organisations.

5. SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL PLANNING WITH RELEVANT LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

5.1 Description of the current status

Generally, PES have the capacity to provide relevant labour market information at a national and regional level. Some PES provide forecasts on economic development in general as well as on employment, unemployment and occupational changes. However, PES are currently rarely involved in educational planning.

5.2 What we think should happen

Relevant information about current and future labour market developments should be included in educational planning, especially the capacity planning and location of educational institutions.

5.3 Offers of the PES

PES know about the regional and national labour market and the current and future labour market needs in regard to occupations, qualifications, skills and competences. See also 1.3 for the other offers of PES regarding labour market data.

5.4 Recommendations for PES and the education sector

- Make available and publicise detailed labour market data, forecasts and research results on labour market trends.
- Participate in the regional and national dialogue about the demand for skilled workers.
- Participate in the debate of the shape of the education and training provider's network.

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