

Activation guidance programme for people with severe mental health problems

THE ACTIVATION GUIDANCE PROGRAMME SUPPORTS JOBSEEKERS WITH SEVERE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR UP TO 18 MONTHS IN OVERCOMING SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO FINDING AND SUSTAINING EMPLOYMENT

Publication date: January 2017

BELGIUM

The activation guidance programme aims to support the re-integration of jobseekers with severe medical, mental, psychological or psychiatric problems (i.e. the so-called *MMPP*-group). In co-operation with external partners, the VDAB (PES Flanders) provides intensive activation, combining care and employment support.

Name of the PES

VDAB (PES Flanders)

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

The programme started as a pilot in the Flemish region of Belgium in 2009. A legal framework was adopted in 2014. It will be fully implemented in 2018.

When was the practice implemented?

The pilot project of activation guidance for people with severe mental health problems (*MMPP*-group) was introduced in 2009. The Flemish government adopted a legal framework in 2014 (Decree on Work and Care trajectories). The legal framework will be implemented in 2018.

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

The Flemish agency for people with disability (VAPH) transferred responsibility for employment policy directed to disabled people to VDAB (PES Flanders). Therefore, PES Flanders' awareness of clients with mental disorders rose, revealing a group of clients with serious non labour-market-related problems which are hindering their re-integration into the labour market.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

PES Flanders (the contractor).
GTB (*Gespecialiseerde Traject Bepalings- en Begeleidingsdienst*), an independent guidance service created in 1996 to coordinate job search for people with disabilities (the executing agency).
Regional health care and welfare service providers (cooperating partners).

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

The programme targets jobseekers with severe medical, mental, psychological or psychiatric problems (*MMPP*-group). The majority of participants have been long term unemployed (52 % are unemployed for more than 2 years and 24 % for more than 5 years in the year 2015-2016).

What were the practice's main objectives?

To identify jobseekers with mental health problems at an early stage, and to support and address their needs to prevent labour market detachment and ensure sustainable labour market integration.

What activities were carried out?¹

Jobseekers in Flanders are systematically assessed for issues which may affect their re-employment. Besides employment specific competences and qualifications, caseworkers assess jobseekers on the basis of their job search behaviour, social and communication skills, disabilities, as well as socioeconomic factors and mental health problems. If a caseworker believes that a client requires a more in-depth assessment, the client can be referred to a VDAB psychologist or an external employment research centre specialised in multidisciplinary screening.

Jobseekers with an indication of a disability affecting their ability to work, in particular those diagnosed with severe mental health problems, can be referred to the specialised activation guidance programme offered by the PES. Participation in this programme is voluntary.

Three main partners are involved in this programme:

- a GTB job coach who acts as the main case manager;
- a health coach, typically a psychologist working in a psychiatric hospital or a centre for mental health; and
- an empowerment coach, typically from a non-profit organisation with experience in sheltered employment or employment care.

These partners are appointed by the VDAB through a public procurement process.

1 This section has been compiled using the OECD study *OECD (2013), Mental Health and Work: Belgium, OECD Publishing*.

	<p>After a jobseeker has been selected by the VDAB for the activation guidance programme, the GTB job coach sets up an individual action plan for the jobseeker, in cooperation with a health and empowerment coach. The latter are responsible for identifying the right health and welfare services needed for the jobseeker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The health coach focuses on the medical, psychological or psychiatric problems and provides rehabilitation and training in, for instance, self-confidence, stress handling etc. Individual or group therapies are provided in-house or by partner providers. The health coach has to strike a balance between the provision of counselling and coaching services. ▶ The empowerment coach focuses on the psycho-economical, psychosocial or social impediments of the jobseeker by addressing issues such as mobility, personal budget, housing, etc. <p>Each jobseeker is required to undergo a mandatory internship as part of the programme. The internship is limited to a maximum of 520 hours.</p>
What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?	The VDAB contracts with GTB on an annual basis. Every year, the minimum number of participants in the programme (total and new participants) is set again, as well as target outputs into the labour market for GTB (each individual case is weighted by degree of difficulty). GTB cooperates closely with regional health care and welfare service providers.
What were the source(s) of funding?	The programme is financed by the Flemish Government.
What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?	Each year 1 100 to 1 300 jobseekers with multiple mental health problems participate in this activation programme. A multidisciplinary report is produced for each participant at the end of the programme by the health coach, the empowerment coach and the job coach. The report assesses the mental health status of each jobseeker and their opportunities for re-entering the labour market. In addition, yearly evaluations are conducted to quality assure the services being provided by each coach, in order to develop and sustain the coaches who are delivering these services.
What outcomes have been identified?	The programme has helped to increase awareness of mental disorders in the Flemish PES, stressing the importance of developing programmes that target difficult-to- place jobseekers with severe mental health problems in close cooperation with the health and welfare sectors. Such close cooperation is particularly beneficial to jobseekers requiring tailored-made support.
What are the lessons learnt and success factors?	<p>The activation programme has shown that, while inter-sectoral collaboration can be successful, establishing such collaboration takes time. All actors involved need to work closely together in order to ensure the successful re-integration of the jobseeker into the labour market. Sharing success stories of jobseekers that have been successfully employed through a newsletter helps to enhance communication and cooperation between the actors involved.</p> <p>The mandatory internship, which helps jobseekers to regain their confidence and build basic employability skills, is an important component of the activation programme. The continued support provided to participants by the empowerment and health coaches forms a crucial element of this internship. The internship helps to re-integrate jobseekers as quickly as possible into the labour market – even if not all of their problems have been successfully addressed. Usually, one (PES) case manager takes the lead in guiding the jobseeker through the programme while facilitating cooperation between other actors involved.</p>



Contact details for further information

Name: GAILLY, Lut

Email: Lut.gailly@vdab.be

Telephone: +32 (0)2 506 2946