



Lifelong Learning Programme

Working with Employers

Introduction

In order for Supported Employment to be effective, it is essential that Supported Employment service providers work with both job seekers (clients) and employers. Service providers focus on identifying the skills and abilities of job seekers, and matching these capabilities with the needs of employers.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment on the Supported Employment aspects of Working with Employers.

Background

Supported Employment was developed in the 1970/80's to assist people with learning disabilities to access paid jobs in the open labour market. Since the establishment of the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) in 1993, the Supported Employment sector has grown quickly throughout Europe. The target client groups have expanded to encompass all forms of disability and other disadvantaged groups and therefore so must our awareness of working with employers.

From its origins, Supported Employment has focused mainly on the support needs of the job seekers, however more recently it has been recognised that an awareness of the support needs of employers is essential for securing employment outcomes. It is recognised and acknowledged by Supported Employment service providers that they must continue to develop and improve their skills and methodologies in engaging with employers.

The Issues

Supported Employment mainly engages with employers at stage 3 (Job Finding), stage 4 (Employer Engagement) and stage 5 (On/Off Job Support) of the Supported Employment process¹. There is evidence to indicate that Supported Employment providers spend considerable time during Vocational Profiling (stage 2) to identify the needs of the job

¹ For more information on the 5 stages of the Supported Employment process see also EUSE (2005): European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards

seeker; however there is little evidence to suggest that the same energy and time is applied to understanding and addressing the needs of the employer. Given that the employer has the right to decide on recruitment and selection, then recognition that the employer should be seen as an equal customer is justified. Moreover, there is a need for the service providers, and indeed the job seekers, to develop their awareness of labour market needs, both now and in relation to predicting the future trends.

Supported Employment services mainly contact employers with a view to job finding and identifying suitable work placements. However, service providers should be aware that employers may have additional needs other than simply the recruitment of labour resources. From a Supported Employment point of view those needs could include disability awareness training, knowledge of government support/funding programmes and practical solutions to health, safety and disability employment issues.

Moreover, employers often require assistance with developing and introducing good practice and employment policies concerning employees and applicants with disabilities. Through using the vehicle of a Supported Employment service, employers can acknowledge and demonstrate their Corporate Social Responsibility and this in turn can lead to a more inclusive society.

There is evidence to indicate that throughout Europe there is a wide disparity in the levels of training being provided to staff in relation to Supported Employment as a whole². Some European countries have training and diplomas in Supported Employment whilst other countries have very little on offer to new and existing Supported Employment staff. In particular, there is a fragmented approach to training in relation to job finding, marketing techniques, employment and disability legislation and general employment engagement skills. The lack of available training in these specific areas is likely to have an adverse effect on contact with employers in both the public and private sectors. A critical aspect of Supported Employment and the key to a successful outcome is the ability to match the needs of the employer with the skills of the potential employee. When the match is done correctly it leads to a “win-win” situation where both the employer and the new employee achieve their objectives.

Working with employers is not always about face to face meetings. Marketing materials can play an influential role in promoting Supported Employment services in a professional manner. Experience has shown that there is a wide range of materials currently being used, and that the standard of this material varies considerably. Marketing and promotional materials can be expensive to produce but they can also create a positive impact with prospective employers if produced professionally.

² Evans, M./ Spjelkavik, O. (2007): Impression of Supported Employment – A study of some European Supported Employment Services and their activities. Work Research Institute, Oslo.

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The European Union of Supported Employment recognises and acknowledges that employers play a crucial role in Supported Employment. It is therefore essential that employers are treated in a professional and efficient manner throughout the Supported Employment process. A structured approach can lead to more success in terms of matching the abilities of people with disabilities to the needs of employers. As a service provider, Supported Employment personnel must have a good knowledge of the local labour market and employment related issues that face employers and be able to demonstrate this knowledge as an indication of the expertise available to employers from service providers. Additionally, Supported Employment personnel need to take an interest in the business of the employers, understanding their sometimes unique needs in terms of staffing and training. This will lead to the establishment of strong relationships, mutual trust and respect, and will allow for the opportunity to demonstrate the many benefits for employers of engaging with service providers.

When we are dealing with employers we must recognise that they are in business primarily to make a profit. We should at all times demonstrate that we can help them to achieve this goal through the recruitment of people from our services. It is not sufficient for Supported Employment to rely on the fact that 'it is the right thing to do' from a social viewpoint, and providers should also be able to demonstrate that it is the right thing to do from a business case viewpoint.

The materials that are used to communicate the benefits of Supported Employment need to reflect the fact that we are dealing with two distinct customers – clients and employers. Marketing and promotional materials should be of a high standard that demonstrates the professionalism of the service being provided.

The use of informal and formal job finding techniques are strongly advised by the European Union of Supported Employment as this allows the service provider to select the most appropriate approaches to use in each situation.

Conclusion

There is a general recognition and acceptance within Supported Employment in Europe that service providers need to do more to recognise the needs of employers and develop closer working links with employers. Without employers there are no employment outcomes and we must be aware that approaches to employers should be tailored to match the situation and circumstances (one size does not fit all). It is through training, research and continuous development that success can be achieved for all stakeholders through working effectively and efficiently with employers.

Further Reading

- EUSE Position Paper “Supported Employment for Employers”
- EUSE Position Paper “Job Finding”
- EUSE Position Paper “On and Off Job Support”

This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, Audiotape or Electronically on request.

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