



# Client Engagement

## Introduction

Like many models of employment intervention, Supported Employment values the initial client engagement process. This process is essential to ensure understanding by all parties (i.e. the job seeker and the Supported Employment organisation) before progressing on to the next stage of the Supported Employment model.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment with regards to the issues and Supported Employment activities within the stage of Client Engagement.

## Background

Client Engagement is the first key stage of the 5 stage Supported Employment process<sup>1</sup>. It is essential that the core principles of respect, self-determination, informed choice, empowerment, confidentiality, flexibility, accessibility and individuality are embedded in this initial stage<sup>2</sup>.

The outcome of client engagement is to ensure that the individual makes an informed choice as to whether they wish to use the Supported Employment model to find a job and which Supported Employment organisation can assist them to achieve employment.

Activities during this stage are wide and varied and require to be designed to ensure the individual is equipped with the correct information and knowledge before making an informed decision to move onto a Supported Employment programme. Activities must also be relevant and person centred if a positive outcome is to be achieved.

Moreover, the value base of zero rejection is embedded in the Supported Employment model under the ethos of "anyone who wishes to work can work, provided the correct level of support is available".

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the 5 stage Supported Employment process see EUSE (2005): European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards

<sup>2</sup> For further details see also EUSE Position Paper „Values, Standards and Principles of Supported Employment“

## Issues

The principle of zero rejection remains a contentious issue across Europe. Many mainstream local and national Government funded programmes are called “Supported Employment” and meet the individual country’s criteria or understanding of economic employment rather than the value base of Supported Employment as described above. This can result in job seekers requiring to meet certain criteria to be eligible to access the project; for example, a job seeker may have to agree to work a minimum number of hours. This rejects and places restrictions on many potential job seekers with complex needs. The model of Supported Employment was originally developed to assist people with significant disabilities to access and maintain paid employment. This must always be at the forefront of any Supported Employment development.

The issue of “job readiness” is another factor that many countries impose in current government mainstream programmes; this again is against the principle of Supported Employment of placing the individual in the job – training them on the job – and maintaining and progressing them. The terminology of job readiness has resulted in many disabled people engaging in training to become job ready for most or all of their lives. Professionals working in the field have to signpost individuals seeking work to other alternative programmes of training and/or education when in fact it is work they are seeking. This once again goes against the fundamental principles of Supported Employment.

These programmes by their restraints of “economic employment” terminology often preclude those most in need of the model of Supported Employment. However, it is important to maintain the values and principles of the model and organisations should strive to achieve this.

Due to the above constraints which many Supported Employment professionals work within, key areas of partnership working have been developed and; communication to establish an understanding of Supported Employment within Europe continues.

Apart from these two fundamental issues (zero rejection and job readiness) the main aim of Client Engagement stage is to ensure the individual is well informed of the Supported Employment process and to identify a suitable support organisation.

Supported Employment organisations, when engaging with an individual, should ensure that the information they provide is clear, accurate, easily understood and available in accessible formats (such as large print, Braille, audio, plain language etc). Supported

Employment organisations need to explore alternative methods of engaging with people with disabilities and people from other disadvantaged groups. It is not sufficient to only produce information on services (such as information leaflets) but they also need to follow this up with face to face meetings, meetings with other stakeholders which have been suggested by the individual (such as a family member, health professional, teacher, careers adviser etc) and using new technology. Client engagement should also be held over a period of time.

However, there are often restrictions on the length of time an Employment Support Worker can spend on this stage of the process. Supported Employment organisations need to invest time and energy within the Client Engagement stage which will benefit future stages of the Supported Employment process.

A Person centred approach should be adopted by the Supported Employment organisation to achieve this. This approach will ensure that the individual is involved and in control of the Client Engagement stage and that they are making informed choices and decisions.

Individuals, in deciding which Supported Employment organisation to use, should have a choice of a number of providers. However, in certain geographical areas and in particular rural areas, there may be only one provider which the individual can use. Even if this is the case, the Supported Employment organisation should ensure good practice by adopting a person centred approach and ensuring that information and communication is provided is accessible.

## Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

Whilst recognising and welcoming the mainstreaming (Government funded programmes) of Supported Employment across countries in Europe, EUSE has concerns that there is not a unified European approach to the delivery of the model. The European Union of Supported Employment maintains that the model of Supported Employment has the five stages of Engagement, Vocational Profiling, Job Finding, Employer Engagement and On/ Off Job Support. Programmes which do not have all of these components or indeed have additional components are not Supported Employment. The naming therefore of many programmes as Supported Employment leads to confusion for all key stakeholders from Government agencies to people with disabilities.

EUSE will strive to ensure that the core values of Supported Employment are maintained. Engagement is the first stage of an important process for an individual and as such should lead to employment.

EUSE recommends a person centred approach to be adopted throughout the 5 Stage

Supported Employment model and that it is particularly important during the Client Engagement stage. Furthermore, Supported Employment organisations need to ensure that information and methods of communication are fully accessible and appropriate for all individuals.

EUSE advocates that individuals should have a choice of Supported Employment organisations to select, however they do recognise that this is not always possible or viable in certain areas. EUSE would recommend that all Supported Employment organisations regardless if they are the only providers should strive towards best practice.

## Conclusion

The European Union of Supported Employment believes that there are difficulties within the current “models” of Supported Employment across Europe and as a result will continue to engage and inform key policy makers of the “model”. Whilst taking this view EUSE also recognises the need for economic employment to be core to many country’s employment action plans. The area for debate and exploration for the foreseeable future lies with EUSE working across Europe to ensure that we balance the need for both economic employment and the rights of the individuals wishing to work, who can work with the correct support.

## Further Reading

- EUSE Position Paper “Values, Standards and Principles of Supported Employment”

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

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