



# Supported Employment in Norway - a National Mainstream Programme

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# Supported Employment in Norway - a National Mainstream Programme

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*Summary:*

This report presents research on the Norwegian labour market measure *Arbeid med bistand* (AB). AB is a national mainstream supported employment programme, which provides supported aimed at the inclusion of vocationally disabled job seekers in the ordinary job market. The report discusses the present situation in Norwegian supported employment in the light of QUIP, a set of criteria for quality-supported employment. A final chapter discusses an external view to Norwegian supported employment and addresses issues in a European context. The aim of the report is to contribute to spread information about supported employment in Norway to other parts of the international system of vocational rehabilitation and to stimulate the ongoing debate concerning supported employment. The Norwegian Directorate of Labour financed the report.

*Keywords:*

- Arbeid med bistand
- Supported employment
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Quality criteria





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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The Norwegian labour market measure/initiative *Arbeid med bistand* (AB) provides support aimed at the inclusion of vocationally disabled job seekers in the ordinary job market, and exists as units with two or more job coaches organised and managed mainly by Labour Market Enterprises and Labour Market Co-operatives (sheltered workshops). *Arbeid med bistand* is a government-funded programme/measure organised and monitored through the Directorate of Labour. The initiative is a mainstream activity and is nationwide.

The AB-initiative was established in 1996 and a formative evaluation of the pilot-period of *Arbeid med bistand* (1992-1995) was performed by Blystad & Spjelkavik (1996). New research on the AB-initiative, ten years after start-up of the pilot project, was conducted in 2002, and was commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Labour. The purpose was to acquire an up to date knowledge concerning the AB-initiative through analyses of involved stakeholders' experiences of the initiative; assessing the AB-initiative in relation to the international supported employment, and identifying areas for development.

This has been done through describing and analysing the current situation of the AB-initiative, mainly by focusing on the experiences of three groups of stakeholders participating in the rehabilitation process; the job seekers, the employers and the job coaches. On an international level a variety of initiatives similar to the AB-initiative exist, basing vocational rehabilitation on a supported employment perspective. There are also several national and international forums for discussion, exchange of experience, and further development of this particular rehabilitation perspective. A set of quality criteria has recently been developed for supported employment through the QUIP-project (Struempel et al. 1992) and we set out to look at how the AB-initiative relates to these criteria, and consequently to supported employment on an international level.

The research project has been based on the following methodological approaches:

- Case studies were performed at four AB-units consisting of group discussions and individual questionnaires among job coaches; interviews and group discussion among job seekers; and interviews with employers. These studies had the explorative purpose of bringing forward qualitatively based knowledge and issues that could be further developed into a national survey.
- A workshop with job coaches from five AB-units was arranged with the purpose of discussing issues and heading from the case studies, as well as the ongoing demands and influence from public authority, i.e. the public regulations of the AB-initiative.
- A national survey among job coaches, job seekers and employers was carried out. Questionnaires were sent to all job coaches working in the AB-initiative. Each job coach involved two of their job seekers and one employer by giving each of them a questionnaire to fill in, following criteria decided by the researchers. Replies were received from 71 %



of job coaches, 59 % of employers and 57 % of job seekers. The questionnaires were anonymous and were returned directly from informant to the researchers. Questions related to target groups, professional vocational rehabilitation approaches performed by the AB-initiative, and present quality and future challenges for the AB-initiative. The data is representative of the AB programme (The questionnaires as well as a detailed account of the methods are presented in Spjelkavik et al. (2003)).

The research was published in 2003 (Spjelkavik et al. 2003). The report has been widely distributed among the AB-units and other parts of the rehabilitation system in Norway, and the responsible researchers have taken part in numerous workshops and conferences throughout the country to present and discuss the content of the report.

This present report is an English version of the whole Norwegian research report from 2003. Some parts of the original report have been updated, while the original report has been condensed and some new parts have been added. Detailed documentation can be found through the original report. Michael Evans who is Vice President of the European Union of Supported Employment and is Manager of the Employment Disability Unit in Dundee, Scotland has added a chapter to discuss an external view to the report and to assist in addressing issues in a European context. It is our hope that in this way the information about the AB-initiative can be spread to other parts of the international system of vocational rehabilitation and to stimulate the ongoing debate concerning supported employment. This has also been the wish of the Norwegian Directorate of Labour, which financed the work of revising and translating the original Norwegian report.

# 2

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

‘Arbeid med bistand’ (AB) started as a three-year pilot project initiated by the Ministry of Local Government and Labour, while the responsibility for running it was placed in the Directorate of Labour. The pilot commenced in September 1992, with thirty-one local projects attached to the national head project. From January 1996, AB was established as an ordinary vocational rehabilitation service organised under the Labour Market administration. This measure is known as the AB-initiative and is now a mainstream nationwide programme. The AB-initiative represented a new approach to the transition to open employment for vocationally disabled persons in Norway. Abroad this approach was known as supported employment:

“Supported employment is now defined as integrated jobs in community settings where persons with disabilities have the opportunity to work alongside people without disabilities and are provided with individualised supports to facilitate long-term success. It emphasises the aim of a real job and regular salary, and it implies a shift away from the ‘train-place’ model of traditional vocational rehabilitation, in which individuals in a day centres and sheltered workshops were trained to ‘get ready’ for competitive employment, to an approach that can be characterised as ‘place-train’ in supported employment” (Jenaro et al. 2002:6).

Supported employment builds on the assumption that anyone can function satisfactorily in working life given the right training and support. This is done by assessing the personal skills of the person with a vocational disability, and by using the available aids and network around the person. Services provided to people with vocational disabilities, their employers and co-workers through supported employment is built on the view that any person – no matter what kind or degree of disability – has the ability and right to possess a job in the ordinary labour market (Wehman et al. 2002).

In a report from the OECD, supported employment is defined as “any form of personal assistance given at a job (on-the-job coaching or training) granted to the employer or the employee”, and sheltered employment is defined as “employment in a segregated environment, be it in a special workshop or a social firm or in a protected job or segment in the open labour market.” (OECD 2002:13). In other words, supported employment is defined as the opposite of sheltered or segregated employment.

Supported employment was developed in the USA and Canada in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Whilst its origin was to help people with learning disabilities to get an ordinary job, supported employment has in later years proved to be significant also to other target groups within vocational rehabilitation. The background for the rise of supported employment is to be found in the fact that vocational rehabilitation was dominated by organisations providing sheltered work, activity centres, and state owned institutions (Rusch 1990). The considerations in this

system of rehabilitation were that the client had to be trained and empowered to be able to participate in normal working life, or as expressed by Rubin & Roessler: “After completing vocational preparation services, the client is ready for appropriate job placement assistance” (1987:251).

Towards the end of the 1970’s it was increasingly recognised that the traditional ‘train then place’ in vocational rehabilitation did not contribute much to integration of vocationally disabled people in ordinary working life (Melvyn 1993). It became clear that good working skills only, were in themselves not enough for a disabled person to find and retain a job. For this reason the idea of a ‘job coach’ was introduced. A ‘job coach’ had the task of offering well-structured support to a vocationally disabled person performing ordinary work. This support could include on-the-job training, social skills training, assistance with travel to and from work, and other support necessary to make the employment successful, both for the vocationally disabled person and the employer. The ‘job coach’ model constituted something else other than ordinary rehabilitation practice, as the job coaches are present at work to assist in adaptation, training and education. The vocational rehabilitation process in supported employment can be described as follows:

“Finding a job in the normal labour market is the first step in the process. After that, keeping the job becomes the main goal of the client and his or her job coach; together they try to find out what kind of adaptations are necessary in the workplace, what kind of training is recommended for the client and how natural support (support by colleagues) can be organised. If necessary, the job coach provides training at the work site” (Lissens & Van Audenhove 2000:30).

The idea was to first place participants in a job and then train in task performance (‘place and train’). The earliest assignments in non-sheltered environments often followed a ‘place and pray’ strategy, and for this reason the ‘place-train-maintain’ strategy was developed. When necessary stability had been achieved the job coach for the adaptation was to withdraw, and leave the job seeker to himself and the new colleagues (natural assistance).

During the 1990’s supported employment was increasingly characterised by the idea of vocationally disabled people as consumers with a corresponding stressing of principles for user involvement. In the practical rehabilitation efforts, methods for promoting natural support and co-operation with local community private businesses were stressed, as confirmed in a report from OECD: “Alongside such more established employment subsidies, recently a variety of supported employment-type programmes have been spreading, such as different kinds of schemes offering extensive on-the-job support through individual job coaches, who can be employed by either the employer or the community.” (OECD 2003:113).

Whilst it certainly holds true that there has been an increase of various integrated approaches to vocational rehabilitation, one should be aware that there is no guarantee that the OECD are comparing like with like (e.g. target groups). Nevertheless, the supported employment perspective has been increasingly emphasised by the principles of inclusion and ordinary work (‘real jobs’). Possibilities for vocational rehabilitation, based on supported employment, have

provided good results and resulted in many vocationally disabled people becoming part of today's working life. Still, many vocationally disabled people who want to work are outside of working life, and thus the potential of supported employment is far from fully exploited. The situation is still that there are far more sheltered than integrated possibilities for vocationally disabled job seekers, and the transition rates are still relatively low:

“Most OECD countries offer special employment in a sheltered environment, be it in sheltered workshops, special businesses or protected segments in ordinary companies. The Netherlands and Poland are the two countries that have gone furthest in developing segregated employment in a protected labour market. Both countries provide such employment for about 1 % of the working-age population (...). Hand in hand with very high disability benefit recipiency rates, this practice results in the particular segregation of people with disabilities in these two countries. Sheltered employment is also widespread, with around 5 per 1,000, in Switzerland, Sweden and Norway, followed by 3 per 1,000 in Austria, Belgium, France and Germany. In most countries, a majority of those in sheltered employment are more severely disabled people with mental illnesses, often involving congenital learning disabilities. While sheltered employment increasingly is considered inappropriate for large numbers of people with disabilities and most countries would prefer to see it replaced by supported employment-type initiatives, empirically there are no signs of any significant cutbacks yet. In several countries there have been attempts to make the sheltered sector more business-like and competitive, in the hope of increasing the chances of transition into the open sector. (...) So far, however, these attempts to raise transition rates have been successful only in a few cases. The Norwegian labour market enterprises with a 30 % transition rate into regular employment seem a real exception” (OECD 2003:114).

In spite of the fact that ordinary and generally available jobs are still not the first choice in vocational rehabilitation in the USA, Wehman et al. (2002) conclude that the development is going in the right direction, and that a number of practical approaches in supported employment have spread over the entire continent. Moreover, Wehman et al. point out that the change from use of sheltered jobs to integrated jobs has contributed to reducing the ‘mystery’ around vocational disablements: When vocationally disabled people increasingly take part in working life they are also more viewed and valued as productive employees.



In Norway the traditional strategies for integrating people with vocational disabilities in the open labour market have traditionally followed a ‘train-place’ approach (Blystad & Spjelkavik 1996, 1997; Helle 1976, 2001; Schafft & Spjelkavik 1999). Rehabilitation services were based upon the view that disabled persons needed job training and adjustment in a segregated arena prior to placement in the ordinary labour market.

### 3.1 The Rehabilitation White Paper

The Rehabilitation White Paper (Report No. 39 (1991-92) to the Parliament) stated that traditional strategies for integrating vocationally disabled persons in ordinary working life had been too concentrated around the use of financial subsidies to the employers. Experience showed that this was not always purposeful. “As a supplement, and in many cases as an alternative, models focusing on job adjustment and close follow-up should be developed” (Report No. 39 (1991-92) to the Parliament, p 93). There was a clear interest and wish to implement the supported employment-approach into the Norwegian labour market system.

### 3.2 The pilot-project ‘Arbeid med bistand’

The pilot-project ‘Arbeid med bistand’ (1992 – 1995) was based on the following principles: 1) Work training and ordinary employment should occur at the same time, not one after the other. This meant that the job had to be found first, before the training on the job could start. 2) Financial subsidies should be an exception, not the rule. 3) Services provided support not only to the employee with a disability, but also the co-workers and the employer in order to facilitate the process of integration, i.e. so that the person with the disability would be able to get and keep the job.

These principles were new in the public Norwegian rehabilitation system. The evaluation of the pilot-project (Blystad & Spjelkavik 1996, 1997) concluded that the project had identified some central principles for successful integration of people with disabilities in ordinary working life: 1) that vocational rehabilitation staff base support in the needs of the individual and situation and that they provide enough, but not more than enough, support, 2) that the primary objective for vocational rehabilitation staff is to provide help for self-help, and in so doing, make themselves superfluous. The approaches of the pilot project had proved to be successful, so why then should they be restricted to participants in AB? The evaluation asserted that these principles could be applied in all vocational rehabilitation.

In the new millennium it is more obvious than ever, that further expansion and development of the integrated provisions for persons with a vocational disability is dependent on both the

vocational rehabilitation systems and companies' willingness and ability to focus on and adapt to an inclusive perspective.

### 3.3 Job seekers with mental health problems

Since the pilot project, the AB-initiative has developed and spread nationally. In 1999 Schafft et al. reported from a research project investigation what the Labour Market Authorities had to offer job seekers with mental health problems. The report stated that job seekers with mental health problems were an increasing proportion of the applications for rehabilitation in Norway, and that there was a clear tendency that people with mental health problems either fall out of working life or else have severe problems obtaining entry to it in the first place:

“In our material, supported employment (*Arbeid med bistand*) seems to be the single scheme that is most suitable for rehabilitation of people with mental conditions, because the scheme is individual-oriented, flexible and oriented to ordinary work. Despite the fact that the scheme has been considerably expanded in recent years, capacity is far from sufficient to accommodate all the rehabilitation applicants with mental conditions who can benefit from it” (Schafft et al. 1999:vi).

The report shows that many municipal centres also meet certain needs for employment/activity, and that ‘the methodology used in some places is similar to the professional rehabilitation approach in the Labour Market administration’s scheme supported employment. The success of this approach in municipal ‘low-threshold’ services may indicate that it ought to be used to a greater extent in some of the labour market administration’s sheltered schemes, such as labour market enterprises and work co-operatives” (Schafft et al. 1999:vi). In accordance with the supported employment perspective, the report concludes: “For persons with mental illnesses, schemes with a clearer orientation to ordinary working life may be easier to accept” (ibid).

A Clubhouse or a Fountain House is an international rehabilitation opportunity for people with long-term mental illness (Beard, Propst & Malamud 1982; Meeuwisse 1997). The establishment of the Fountain House in Oslo was carried out as a project that started in 1999 and went into mainstream operation from 2002. An important aspect of the Fountain House is the transitional employment model, which provides part-time and time-limited jobs in ordinary companies or enterprises and where those working in transitional employment receive ordinary salaries from the employer. Transitional employment thus shares perspective with supported employment in terms of the goal to obtain an ordinary job and minimum focus on training and assessment of working ability *before* the job placement (Spjelkavik 2003 Szymanski & Parker 1988). In 2002, as a pilot project, the Directorate of Labour approved Fountain House in Oslo to organise the AB-initiative with two job coaches financed. Results so far indicate that the combination of transitional employment and the AB-initiative offer people with mental health problems better possibilities to find suitable and tailor-made ways to enter the ordinary labour market. There is a danger, however, that job coaches working at the clubhouse, get too much involved in the internal aspects of the clubhouse’s activities, and

consequently pay too little attention to building networks to employers, finding jobs and doing extensive follow-up on the workplaces (Spjelkavik 2003).

### 3.1 Rehabilitation in Labour Market Enterprises

The management of the AB-initiative by Labour Market Enterprises (LME) and Sheltered Workshops has created both problems and opportunities. However, it is probably fair to say that the AB-initiative has influenced other parts of the rehabilitation system, notably the development of the Labour Market Enterprises, which became more focused on progression to the open labour market during the late 1990's.

In the LMEs, the so-called 'Actor Model Project' (1997-1999) aimed to develop practices that emphasised the users' influence on the rehabilitation process. The project moved the actual rehabilitation efforts in the LMEs higher up the agenda: "The advantage of this approach is that it creates commitment in the development of action plans, and thereby improves the ability of actors to make their choices on the basis of their own needs and wishes" (Spjelkavik et al. 1999:iv).

In an evaluation of the Norwegian Labour Market Enterprises from 2000 the main conclusion is that "there has been a positive development during the last five years in the enterprises. A larger proportion of the LMEs are fulfilling or have moved more closely to the rehabilitation objectives set by the government. Contrary to common belief, there are few reasons to define the LMEs as sheltered workshops today" (Widding 2000:xi).

### 3.2 Sheltered Workshops

Development in the direction of supported employment has also occurred in the field of sheltered workshops. Traditionally the purpose of Labour Market Co-operatives has been to establish permanent work places for people with severe disabilities who are unlikely to access the open labour market. A clear objective for the Rehabilitation White Paper No. 39 (1991-92) was to find out to what extent the pilot project 'Arbeid med bistand' could contribute to a better outflow of people from these workshops. Though it became obvious that supported employment can contribute to an increased turnover of workers in sheltered workshops and vocational rehabilitation centres, surprisingly few of the project participants were actually recruited from these workshops or centres. (Blystad & Spjelkavik 1996).

In 2002 the Department of Labour and Administration introduced new regulations for all labour market initiatives. The new regulations for sheltered workshops in Norway (VTA) emphasise the development of the employee for work both within the workshop and by transformation to other initiatives and/or to the open labour market. In short, the new regulations state that the sheltered workshop no longer shall be understood as a definitive end stop. At the same time, several voices have been raised to point out the limited possibilities for vocationally disabled job seekers to access labour market initiatives that focus on inclusion in the open labour market in places within rural areas. In 2000 a five-year pilot project was



started in five sheltered workshops situated in rural places where no supported employment initiatives were available. The aim of the project is for Sheltered Workshops to also develop supported employment (AB) opportunities for vocationally disabled job seekers in rural areas. Intermediate evaluation (Spjelkavik 2003) indicates that although there are several signs of interest and willingness within these sheltered workshops to adapt to principles of supported employment, the sheltered workshops so far lack the necessary competence for offering quality supported employment.

### 3.3 Long-term Wage subsidies

In 2000, the Norwegian Labour Market Authorities launched 'Flexible Job', a five-year pilot project in the form of a new welfare to work initiative aimed at obtaining jobs in the open labour market for people with reduced work capacities. Participating workplaces receive an adjusted wage subsidy for up to five years. Wage subsidies can be given with up to 75 % the first six months and up to 50 % the remaining period of up to 4.5 years. The employment service provides the necessary follow-up for individuals participating in the initiative. The participants are primarily people who have undergone a rehabilitation programme, and who are not receiving disability benefits. A total of 75 % of placements in the initiative are reserved for people with muscular/skeletal disorders or mental disorders. Nationally, about 200 placements have been created, and as of July 2003, 427 people had taken part in the scheme. The project, which runs in six counties, is due to end at the end of 2005. The intermediate reports from the project show that almost half of their participants have obtained a permanent job. The intermediate evaluation, which confirmed the success, nevertheless called into question the quality assurance surrounding these employment contracts and claimed "the use of long-term wage subsidies for people with reduced capacity for work does not automatically guarantee permanent employment. Instead, the success criterion for a permanent job via the long-term wage subsidisation is *the individual follow-up of employee and employer* by employment officers or project managers" (Spjelkavik 2004:xi).

### 4.1 Some key features

In January 1996, after the pilot project (1992–1995), the AB-initiative was officially established as a public labour market initiative. It is a Norwegian particularity that supported employment is institutionalised on a national level by the Labour Market Administration authorities. As an ordinary labour market service, the AB-initiative is regulated by general Norwegian laws and provisions, and by a specific statutory framework that has been established for this service in particular. Rules and regulations for the AB-initiative were formulated under consideration of experiences that were made during the pilot project, and in accordance with general aims and objectives of Norwegian labour market policy. According to regulations, the local AB-services have to be affiliated with other pre-established vocational rehabilitation services. The Directorate of Labour can approve other ways of organising the initiative if necessary, for implementing the measure. The regulations also state that the AB-units should hire their own job coaches, and that the units should be organised as economically and professionally autonomous sections. The organiser of the initiative receives fixed subsidies for salaries of job coaches and running expenses.

After the AB-initiative became an ordinary labour market service, the regulations state that each service must be organised as a team consisting of a minimum of two job coaches working from a regular base, and each job coach is expected to work with a minimum of six participants as an average. The argument for deciding upon a minimum number of job seekers per job coach is that the AB-initiative is not an offer for vocationally disabled persons in general, but is particularly aimed at those that are in greatest need of close follow-up to get a job. Thus, it is argued, the number of job seekers per job coach must always be adjusted according to the needs of each participant at any given stage of the process. Although the Labour Market Administration authorities regulate the AB-initiative, the practical running of the initiative is handled on a local level. Negotiations and agreements are made directly between the local employment service and the local AB-initiative. In Oslo recently, decisions were made at the employment service to increase the number of job seekers per job coach in AB from six to ten. As it is a typical situation that there are waiting lists for entry into an AB unit, it is to be expected that more employment services will follow the example in Oslo and increase the number of job seekers per job coach.

Participants can receive support through the AB-initiative for a maximum period of three years, although in certain cases this period can be extended. According to regulations, the AB-initiative is supposed to provide necessary and sufficient support with the aim of integrating vocationally disabled persons in the open labour market. Support can be given as competence-mapping and assessment, help in finding a job, adjustment on the worksite, training on work tasks and social skills, as well as giving the employer advice and coaching. During the project

period, there were no limitations as to who could refer participants to the project, whereas all referrals now have to go through the local employment services.

According to the specifications of the regulations, the organiser of the AB-units has to answer to certain demands concerning agreement to co-operate, producing annual reports, recruitment, activities of the initiative, ways of reporting and template of follow-up. The purpose is to ensure that the participants are offered a service with qualitatively high standards. These specifications are meant to contribute a higher focus on the service offered by the job coaches towards the participants in the initiative. The specifications also ensure that a quality assurance directed towards the organiser is carried through on a system level. The agreement to co-operate is meant to help adjust the specifications to the local environments, as well as to ensure a good co-operative climate among the stakeholders in each period of agreement.

The AB-initiative has been growing since commencement regarding both the number of AB-units and the number of job coaches. The number of places available in the AB-initiative has been as follows: 750 places in 1996, 900 places in 1997, 1100 places in 1998, 1400 places in 1999, 1500 places in 2000, 1765 places in 2001, and 2460 places in 2002 (The Directorate of Labour (2002)). The total number of vocationally disabled job seekers registered in all Norwegian labour market initiatives has risen from close to 54,000 in 1996 to 72,000 in 2002. Of these near to 2,500 took part in the AB-initiative (The Directorate of Labour 2003).

From this it is clear that the AB-initiative is still very small in the big picture. Still, the AB-initiative exists in most of Norway's larger towns and urban areas. Due to greater geographical distances the initiative is less available in smaller towns and rural areas with scattered population. Furthermore, the AB-initiative is not extensive enough in the towns given the number of disabled individuals who require the initiative.

## 4.2 Job seekers and their experiences

The regulations define the target group of AB as those vocationally disabled that are in the greatest need of follow-up in order to get a job on the open labour market. In 1996 there were 750 job seekers in the AB-initiative. In 2002 the initiative involved 129 AB units, 410 job coaches and 2460 job seekers. According to statistics provided by the Directorate of Labour (2003), of the job seekers who completed the initiative in 2001-2002, 35 % of them found full-time or part-time work, while 25 % of them were granted disability or retirement pensions.

Throughout the pilot project there was a majority of male participants (63,5 %). Today 43 % are women, which indicates that the proportion of female participants in the initiative has risen. During the pilot project there was a majority of participants aged 20 – 30 years and the situation is still the same as almost half of the AB-participants today are under 30 years old.

As was the case in the pilot project, few participants of the AB-initiative possess higher education and few have not completed their compulsory education. Most participants have work experience from ordinary jobs. Only 13 % have no work experience, while 45 % have held a job position for more than a year. This means that more AB-participants today have work experience than was the case in the pilot project. Very few of the AB-participants have work experience from jobs demanding higher education,

During the pilot project almost two thirds of the participants had not previously participated in training courses or other employment measures organised by the employment services. The evaluation noted that there was no indication that such activities could increase the chances of a job for this group. In fact, those that had participated in many training courses or employment measures seemed to have slightly reduced chances of getting work. Still, today a larger percentage of the AB-participants have participated in job market initiatives before. For almost two-thirds of them the AB-initiative is actually the second or third initiative they have participated in.

We find the same diagnosis groups in the AB-initiative today as in the pilot project, but the distribution among the groups has changed. During the pilot project, participants with learning disabilities were the largest group. Now people with mental health problems represent the largest diagnosis group (30 %) in the AB-initiative, though people with learning disabilities still represent a large group of participants (12 %).

The job seekers often have complex needs and require a broad range of support measures in order to find and keep a job. Both the job seekers and the job coaches regard mental health problems, physical impairments and lack of education as the most important barriers when it comes to obtaining a job. The job coaches also emphasise general social occupational disabilities and a lack of motivation among job seekers as being common key barriers.

The support job seekers receive corresponds to what they themselves state that they need. Job seekers place a great deal of weight on the good contact they have with their job coaches – the fact that they are understood, the trust between them and the security they feel. The job coaches are the people who primarily help them find a job. Once job seekers are established in a job they mainly receive the training they need from their co-workers. Job seekers regard the amount of support they receive in their places of work as being adequate. Only a few job seekers report negative experiences in connection with their participation in AB; however, too much control, a lack of follow-up, availability and waiting times have been mentioned. A total of 71 % are of the opinion that they have improved their chances in the job market through their participation in the AB-initiative and 80 % could imagine themselves recommending the AB-initiative to others.

The ultimate goal of almost all of AB-participants is to obtain a job in the ordinary job market and their experience has largely been positive and that they are progressing toward achieving their goal. Those who have yet to achieve their goal most frequently cite difficulties finding an appropriate job and other unresolved problems in their personal lives as the reasons for this.

According to statistics from the Directorate of Labour, the end result of the AB-initiative is that approximately 35 % of the participants obtain a job. At the time our survey was conducted, 80 % of the AB-participants had experienced some form of employment activity within the ordinary job market. This shows that the AB-initiative in its methodological approach to a large extent is integrated, i.e. that the vocational rehabilitation takes place on the open labour market, not in segregated settings. The most common activities in the ordinary labour market are job tasters, work experience placement, trial period, temporary employment and permanent employment.

There were 72 % of AB-participants who have work experience with the ordinary job market in the private sector. We find that these persons have ten times the chance of obtaining permanent employment than those who are in the public sector.

There were 43 % of AB-participants employed working in companies with 1-10 employees. A total of 38 % of the companies have previously provided places for AB-participants. There is a correlation between the work AB-participants want to do and the jobs they find. Their work tasks are clearly set out, practical and limited, with an emphasis on tasks related to tidying, cleaning, odd jobs, and various commercial services. Their employers, sometimes in consultation with a job coach, normally define their tasks. Moreover, our research showed that 93 % of the AB-participants enjoyed their experience with the open labour market.

Issues associated with pay, employment contracts and employment conditions are viewed as complicated and unclear by job seekers, employers and job coaches alike. Compared with the general Norwegian labour base, twice as many AB-participants are dissatisfied with their pay. Written plans regarding AB-participants' careers and development within companies seldom exist, and we also found many examples of uncertainty concerning the work contracts. It is therefore claimed in the evaluation report that there is a great need to improve the formal employment conditions for the AB-participants at work.

### 4.3 Employers' experiences

According to the regulations, the purpose of AB is that the job seeker shall get and obtain a job on the open labour market. Almost all employers (96 %) in our representative study are of the opinion that AB-participants do a very good or satisfactory job. The most common reasons for hiring AB-participants are that the employers want to help and that they need manpower. Employers who both need manpower and want to help are also more willing to take them on permanently. Employers most often cite financial reasons for not giving disabled workers permanent positions. In the public sector, administration practices, lack of control over budget resources, and a lack of employment contracts for disabled workers represent barriers to gaining a permanent position.

A total of 92 % of employers have not experienced any problems, or have experienced only minor problems in connection with the employment of an AB-participant. Moreover, 8 % of employers report significant problems such as behavioural problems, the employee being

unstable and inflexible, and the employee not sticking to working hours. On average, employers assess AB-participants' ability to work as being 63 % in relation to other employees. There is little correlation between the employers' assessment of employees' productivity and their chances of being taken on permanently. Four out of five employers have experienced no increase in costs due to their employment of a disabled worker in the company. Nevertheless, employers still believe that financial support schemes do influence the chances of them hiring an AB-participant in their company. This can be understood as a desire for compensation for the assumed or genuine costs associated with hiring disabled workers. With respect to how employers define their need for support, the job coaches' activities should be aimed more at counselling than organising the work. Personal contact with the job coach is important. What employers regard as quality factors regarding the AB-initiative are that job coaches contribute to reducing the uncertainty and risk associated with hiring disabled workers in the companies. The employers regard job coaches as well qualified professionals and many say that they would not have offered AB-participants jobs without the services provided by AB. Only 3 out of 218 employers could not imagine recommending the AB-initiative to other employers, and many said that they would probably use the AB-initiative again.

#### 4.4 The AB process

According to regulations, the maximum period for a person to participate in AB is 3 years. The AB-process thus lasts from the time when a job seeker enters AB until he or she no longer participates in the initiative.

Our study shows that in the AB-process, it takes on average about three months before job seekers gain their first experience of working in the ordinary job market while they are participants of AB. Some get a job very quickly, be it a permanent or an temporary job; however most often participants of AB get their first work experience through job tasters or trial periods. Job coaches primarily use the telephone and their own networks when searching for appropriate jobs, while securing work through advertised jobs is rare. Companies seldom contact the AB-initiative themselves to get employees.

According to regulations, AB must cooperate with other important stakeholders in the job seeker's life. Job coaches view the co-operation with public bodies as mainly good. The difficulties they experience relate to getting other bodies to act as active participants in the collaboration. In some instances the job coaches experience that they are solving job seekers' problems in areas for which other bodies are responsible.

A total of 43 % of employers are of the opinion that they do not require support from a job coach when they employ a job seeker from AB. Nevertheless, the survey shows that there is still a need for the job coaches' support and follow-up of AB-participants and the workplace.

How active a role job seekers have had in shaping their work tasks varies, as does the extent to which job seekers consciously relate to the initiative's planning phase of the vocational

rehabilitation process. Nevertheless, job seekers make few critical remarks concerning their opportunities to influence the process. They define user involvement as participating in discussions, giving their own opinions and participating in decision-making processes.

The job coaches' tasks, according to job coaches themselves, include guiding job seekers towards acting as players in their own lives, and to involve the appropriate public bodies to help with respect to other problems in job seekers' lives that must be solved. The challenge in this process lies in developing methods for contribution and user involvement at levels that ensure all AB-participants' influence and control over choices being made.

## 4.5 Job coaches

According to regulations, each job coach must work with a minimum of 6 job seekers at any given time. There are slightly more female job coaches than male ones. Most of the job coaches are aged in their thirties, have qualifications from social work, economics, administration or teaching and have previously worked in the health and social services sector. Most have chosen this career on the basis of their interest in the field or because they want to work with people. According to job coaches, their aim is to find as many job seekers employment in stable, permanent jobs in the ordinary job market as possible.

Most of the job coaches of AB have a job description with their employment contract, but we have found that the content of these job descriptions often appear to be very general, and seldom specifically aimed at supported employment tasks. Job coaches have argued that this is due to the fact that many managers of the AB-initiative prefer to keep it that way in order to use the job coach for other tasks of the organisation, e.g. in other initiatives or schemes managed by the same organisation. Thus it has become more usual than in the pilot period that job coaches in the AB-initiative also work for shorter or longer periods with other forms of vocational rehabilitation, e.g. in sheltered workshops or with pre-vocational training.

Our research shows that job coaches spend only a small percentage of their time maintaining contact with AB-participants' employers and colleagues, while they spend a lot of time maintaining contact with clients. Meetings and internal matters take up much of their time, while relatively little time is spent in contact with the clients' networks and on their own professional development. The job coaches state that they want to spend more time on developing their own expertise, training and counselling, selling and marketing, surveying workplaces and networking. They wish to spend less time on meetings and conflict resolution with initiative organisers. They want training and guidance concerning laws, regulations, rights, and marketing and counselling methods. The relationship between AB and the initiative organisers is viewed as predominantly good, though experience has shown that the climate of cooperation can change quickly. Also relationships with the local employment services are reported as predominantly good, but there are instances of lack of communication and mutual understanding.

# 5

## QUALITY CRITERIA ON SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

In this chapter we will discuss our findings from our research on the Norwegian labour market measure/initiative *Arbeid med bistand* (AB) in the light of a set of international quality criteria on supported employment. While several quality criteria for supported employment have been written in recent years, we have chosen to relate to the ones developed in a transnational project (QUIP) where also Norwegian job coaches, job seekers, employers, policy makers and researchers took part. The advantage of these quality criteria is primarily that they were drawn up by practitioners that were actively involved in the supported employment process. Additionally, a practical manual for self-evaluation applying these quality criteria was developed ([www.quip.at](http://www.quip.at)).

### 5.1 QUIP

The QUIP-project was originally an initiative of two organisations working in the field of supported employment, *Lebenshilfe Ennstal* in Austria and *Salva Vita* in Hungary. They had a wish to improve their work by getting to know perspectives of stakeholders in their organisations. They also wanted to work more closely with transnational contacts. In cooperation with the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna they made a successful application for funding to the Leonardo programme, which is an EU programme that supports vocational training and which supports innovative transnational initiatives.

Initiatives from countries with different levels of development of supported employment were invited to participate in the project. Two European Union member countries (United Kingdom and Austria), two Accession-countries (Hungary and the Czech Republic) as well as Norway were partners in the project. Spain participated as a loose partner and a German representative participated as an outside evaluator. Each country formed a national project team consisting of a practical partner (a supported employment-initiative) and a research unit, in addition to representatives of employers and policy makers.

The practical partner from Norway was *AB Romerike* with their mother organisation *Norasonde AS*, while the Work Research Institute was the responsible research partner in cooperation with *Akershus University College*. Employers' representative came from *Skeidar Oslo AS*, and the Directorate of Labour represented Norwegian policy makers.

The aim of the QUIP-project was to define relevant quality criteria in supported employment from the perspective of the most important stakeholders: Project managers, job coaches, job seekers/supported employees, employers and policy makers. It was also an aim to develop a manual for the ongoing evaluation of supported employment -initiatives.



In each country one supported employment-initiative was the focus of research carried out by a national research institute. A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was tailored to fit the needs of the involved stakeholders. Group discussions, interviews as well as informal conversations were used to elicit the views of people with vocational disabilities, staff of supported employment-initiatives, employers as well as public authorities. The international project meetings enabled participants to learn from each other and to analyse results from a comparative perspective. A conference in Budapest with stakeholders from all involved countries allowed for feedback of the results.

The main findings of the QUIP-project has been summed up as follows (Struempel et al. 1992):

- Stakeholders share a general understanding of the important elements of quality of supported employment over countries
- Each stakeholder group focuses on different aspects of supported employment
- Different challenges in countries with a good framework in supported employment and those like accession countries that are at the beginning.

In the following the supported employment quality criteria developed by QUIP are presented in the relevant boxes and our discussion regarding how AB relates to this criteria follows after each of these boxes.

## 5.2 Quality criteria on outcomes of Supported Employment

### *Paid job on the ordinary labour market*

- Valid contract of employment
- Adequate wage
- Stable job

### AB performance

The job seekers of the AB-initiative participate to a large extent in ordinary working life, while being a part of the initiative. Actually, most of the AB-participants are connected to ordinary working life in some way. In 78 % of the cases where an AB-participant is connected to a job, we find the existence of job contracts. In 43 % of the cases these contracts were especially tailored to the individual AB-participant. The rest were standard contracts.

As the end result, based on statistics from the Directorate of Labour, 35 % of the AB-participants who left the initiative got a full-time or part-time job in ordinary working life. We do, however, know little about the degree to which AB-participants keep their jobs on a longer time basis.

Approximately half of the AB-participants, who have a job while in the initiative, do not receive wages, 26 % receive ordinary wages, while 23 % receive wages up to the minimum

allowance for salary level for a person on pension in Norway. We find that compared to the ordinary Norwegian labour force twice as many paid AB-participants are dissatisfied with their wages. It must be pointed out, though, that this is the situation while they are participants of the AB-initiative and as such this does not necessarily tell anything about wage conditions after finishing the participation in the initiative.

More importantly, we find that issues connected to wages appear to be complicated and unclear for job seekers, employers, and job coaches alike.

Not surprisingly, we find that those AB-participants who, according to employers, have the future possibility to get steady employment in the current job, to a greater extent receive ordinary wages than those who are not seen to have the possibility for a steady job.

*Job that matches employees' preferences, skills and abilities*

- Positive atmosphere at the workplace
- Satisfied employer
- Employee feels in control
- Valued jobs with clear tasks

### AB performance

We find that participants in the AB-initiative are generally very satisfied with the jobs they get. Some AB-participants are dissatisfied with the work tasks, but our data indicates that the jobs held in most cases fit with the jobseekers' preferences, skills and abilities.

The AB-participants experience to a great extent that their goal of obtaining a job in the ordinary job market is being achieved. Those who are still in the initiative and who still have not reached their goal, most frequently explain this by referring to difficulties with finding a suitable job as well as to other unsolved problems in their lives.

Almost all AB-participants that have a job feel happy in their jobs. They are content with the amount of work and value social and work environment aspects at the workplace. Three out of four AB-participants wish to continue in their job and only 8 % wish to quit the present job.

The tasks performed by the AB-participants in the jobs appear to be clear and distinct. A total of 96 % of the employers are of the opinion that the AB-participants do a very good or satisfactory job and 63 % of the employers have no negative experiences with vocationally disabled employees from the AB-initiative. Employers find employees from the AB-initiative to be loyal labour doing their best. However, our research indicates that the employers' evaluation of the AB-participants as labour is tending to be relative, i.e. they take into consideration the vocational disablement of the AB-participants. The fact that employers are satisfied with AB-participants as labour does not necessarily mean that employers are willing to employ AB-participants in a steady job.

The significant satisfaction among job seekers participating in the AB-initiative indicates that they mainly manage the performance of their jobs, and this fact in itself may represent an important individual development. Feedback from employers also points in that direction. Employees from the AB-initiative are generally of the opinion that they receive a suitable amount of support in their jobs.

However, we also find that some AB-participants do not manage the work when work pace becomes too high, tasks too complicated, or when they have to work alone. Such situations can be avoided through quality assurance consisting of job coaches being more present at the workplace or through systematic natural support.

*Employee is a valued colleague and a full member of the team*

- Natural support
- Incorporation into the work team
- Good relationship with co-workers
- Opportunity to get involved in out-of-work activities

#### AB performance

Our research indicates that it is mainly colleagues and/or the employer who give training and guidance to the AB-participants in the job. This is an indication that the employee receives natural support.

Furthermore, our data indicates that employees from the AB-initiative, just as others, have access to the firm's benefits, and have possibilities to participate in the workplace's social activities. Our case studies showed, however, that employees from the AB-initiative often choose not to participate in such social events. Still, our impression is that in most cases the AB-participants are valued colleagues, but we have limited knowledge to judge if AB-participants are viewed as full members of the firm's work organisation. Such judgement would require more thorough field-studies in the firms.

- Employee has opportunities for career development
- Alternative choices to develop quality of (working) life

#### AB performance

According to our findings, the AB-units have in most cases worked out action and vocational rehabilitation plans for their participants. We find, however, that these plans rarely stretch further than obtaining a steady job. Still, this does not necessarily mean that the opportunities for personal development are absent. According to our data, 40 % of the employers indicate that AB-participants do not have opportunities for promotion in the firm, but the enthusiasm for the job and the participation in a work environment still indicate personal development.

Our research indicates that specific career plans for the AB-participants are rarely being developed. In a supported employment perspective, and in a life-long learning perspective, this is a side of the AB-initiative in need of further development, especially by developing natural support methodology.

Some job seekers in our research have obtained assistance from the AB-initiative to find other possibilities than a job in the ordinary work market. From our research it is clear, however, that the AB-initiative is often used for clarification of suitability for employment by some local employment services and that such clarification appears to be more important than the job perspective. We do not have enough information to conclude that job seekers who do not seek a job after being deemed unsuitable at the AB-initiative systematically get support to find alternatives to a job. We have knowledge of cases where organisers of the initiative and the AB-units, in conjunction with the local employment service, perform such clarification issues. Our research points towards the fact that some of these clarification tasks that take place in some of the AB-units are not in line with the quality criteria for supported employment – nor with the definition of the AB-initiative, as described in the public regulations for the initiative.

### 5.3 Quality criteria on the Supported Employment process

#### *Characteristics of the SE process*

- Involvement of the job seeker/employee from the beginning to the end, decisions are only made by him/her
- Involvement of family, friends and professionals of the job seeker, if the person wants this
- Focus on partnerships
- Good information, communication and collaboration for/with all partners
- Clarity and reliability for all partners
- Confidentiality
- Flexible and person-centred approach; SE agency quickly responds to partners' needs
- Continuity of support

#### AB performance

Several of these quality criteria are found in the AB national regulations regarding for example *confidentiality* and *continuity of support*.

In general, the high degree of satisfaction of stakeholders in the process of vocational rehabilitation indicates the AB-initiative lives up to these quality criteria in most cases. But as the job seeker's situation varies, the rehabilitation process also varies. Very few employers have experienced that they have not received the service they were promised from the AB-initiative. Job coaches, employers and jobseekers welcome professional standards and ideals in the process of vocational rehabilitation that correspond to these quality criteria.

Job seekers experience to a great extent that they are heard and that they have possibilities to contribute in the AB-initiative. The quality criteria of supported employment require that the job seeker is responsible for his or her own career development, and to take all decisions with support from the job coach. This is in line with principles found in the ‘actor model’. We should be aware, that although many of the job seekers say that they actually participate, near to half of them do not admit that they do. Our research indicates that the job seeker often does not actively participate in all decisions that may be seen as part of the supported employment process. One example often referred to by both job seekers and job coaches alike has to do with the fact that job seekers entering the AB-initiative from the local employment Aetat service often do not actively choose themselves to enter the initiative. We often find that the participation of the job seeker in the AB-initiative has more to do with the local employment service’s need for clarification, and more so than the job seeker’s own active decision to enter the initiative because he or she wants to explore the possibilities for finding a job on the ordinary labour market. Another example is that job coaches in the initiative often lack methods as to how to ensure active participation from job seekers who are not able or used to making decisions on their own behalf. Job coaches in general admit that user participation is an important aspect of supported employment, but in respect to carrying out the supported employment process in practical life, they are often wary about how to actually do it.

The AB-units co-operate with a number of public authorities and organisations, and the job coaches evaluate the co-operation with different external actors as generally good. The challenges described by the job coaches are often linked to difficulties in mobilising other public authorities to become active participants in the co-operation. It often happens that job coaches become ‘problem solvers’ on behalf of job seekers in areas where other public authorities are responsible.

Job seekers value the good personal contact, that of being understood, the confidence and safety when they describe what they are most satisfied with in the co-operation with the job coach. Of the job seekers participating in the AB-initiative, we find that 80 % express that they can imagine recommending the initiative to others.

Issues like too much control; shortages of personal follow-up, accessibility and waiting time are still mentioned by some job seekers. We see these issues as traits that indicate a need for improved competence in guidance methodology and user involvement in the AB-initiative.

Employers view the job coaches as qualified professionals. Both employers and job seekers experience the involvement with the AB-initiative as safe. Some employers express that they ought to have received better information about the job seekers. Nonetheless, exchange of information, communication and co-operation with the AB-initiative are generally evaluated as very satisfactory. Many employers say they would not have offered the AB-participants a job without the follow-up from the AB-initiative.

Employers experience that the job coaches offer individually adapted and flexible approaches and that they usually respond quickly when there is a need. The personal contact between the

job coaches and employers/employees is stressed. According to employers, an important quality of vocational rehabilitation is that the job coach contributes to reducing the risk and uncertainty in connection with employing a vocationally disabled job worker.

The support job seekers receive corresponds to a great degree with the support they themselves say that they need. The support they receive is described as comprehensive and good, and that it is given to job related and not directly job related needs simultaneously.

*Making contact and exchanging information*

- Welcome in an open and inviting atmosphere
- Appropriate information
- Job seeker is willing to become involved in the SE process
- SE services are well described and clearly defined
- SE process is designed individually for each job seeker

### AB performance

It is clear from our research that most participants in the AB-initiative participate because they want an ordinary job. We also find that, according to both job seekers and employers the process of vocational rehabilitation within the AB-initiative is individually designed.

Both job seekers and employers have experienced that they are received in the AB-initiative in a welcoming way, and they view the initiative's information in most cases as appropriate. Some employers wish to obtain more information about the job seeker's background and problems.

Our research does not give cause to believe that job seekers generally have the possibility themselves to choose their job coach, but to a certain degree they can influence the scale and form of the assistance given by a job coach. We do not know if the services offered by the different AB-units are described and defined in a service agreement, but there is a clear potential for local development within the parameters of the existing public requirement specifications for the initiative to contribute to the fulfillment of such quality criteria.

*Vocational profiling and planning*

- Relevant information on the job seeker is collected with him/her
- Work experience options for the job seeker
- Profiling and planning is based on job seeker's interests and abilities
- Individual, flexible plan is developed with each job seeker

### AB performance

In most cases, collection and treatment of information about the job seeker is done in co-operation with the job seeker, even though much of this information 'follows' the individual from other public authorities. Several job coaches are of the opinion that this information is of

little value, and prefer a mapping where different forms of connection to ordinary working life are included.

However, as the mapping of a job seeker in a supported employment perspective is best done in ordinary, integrated settings, it is somewhat disturbing that the average time it takes before a job seeker gets a first ‘taste of a job’ after being registered as a participant of the AB-initiative is three months. In a strict supported employment perspective, it would be less disturbing if during this waiting period job seekers had some connection to ordinary working life settings, e.g. for clarification/suitability purposes or to ascertain where interests concerning job choice lie.

In recent years there has been and still is a clear demand from the Norwegian government that as many persons as possible with vocational disabilities or health problems are supposed to try a work related solution before disability pension is granted. This puts strong pressure on the labour market authorities and the local employment services to offer various employment related measures that satisfy the disability pension authorities. In this situation it is our opinion that AB should be reserved for actual job seekers, and that the local employment services chose other available measures to carry out the clarification tasks to decide whether a person actually is a real job seeker or not. Only when a vocationally disabled person is defined as a job seeker, and with their agreement should AB be the ultimate choice.

According to the job coaches, mapping includes the job seeker’s interests and skills. The job coaches stress that action plans should be made individually, adapted to the single individual, and that the goals should be realistic and made with the job seeker. Even though such plans usually exist in the AB-initiative, our research shows that several job seekers are not aware of them and also do not participate when they are formulated.

On the other hand, the job seekers have few critical remarks with regard to the possibility for their own influence in the AB-initiative. Job seekers define their own (user) participation in the initiative as participating in discussions, being able to express opinions, and participating in decision-making processes.

There may still be reason to believe that the job seekers’ positive attitude is a reflection of the satisfaction derived from the personal contact with the job coach – something that they are not accustomed to from other parts of the system of vocational rehabilitation or public authorities – as the actual user participation in the initiative.

*Job search*

- Support to find the best possible job
- Information about different kinds of work
- Appropriate support and training to find a job
- Analysis and assessment of possible work sites
- Employer is supported in finding an employee matching his/her requirements

### AB performance

Participants often have a mixed need of assistance, and require support to find a suitable job, to apply for jobs, to train for and get help with job interviews, handle difficulties at the workplace, and get the work adapted. Many also need follow-up after having secured a job. Our research shows that job seekers do get help to find a job through the initiative, and it is mainly the job coach that helps them to find a job. When the job seekers are established in a job it is mostly colleagues who give them training and support. Close to 90 % of the job seekers view the amount of assistance they receive at the workplace as appropriate.

The job coaches mainly use telephone and their own contacts and networks in the search for suitable jobs. It is only seldom that firms themselves make contact with the AB-initiative searching for labour.

Generally we find coherence between the AB-participant's wishes and the particular line of business in which they get a job. In most cases, AB-participants get tasks that are relatively simple. We have documented that most employees from the AB-initiative feel comfortable in their jobs and with the tasks that they perform. However, we also find examples that indicate that job coaches should be more aware of the need for a systematic follow-up at workplaces.

From our study we have reason to believe that most job seekers are offered suitable assistance to find a job. A total of 71 % of the job seekers are of the opinion that they have better possibilities in the job market through their participation in AB. According to job seekers and employees in the AB-initiative, assistance is given both when it comes to applying for jobs, job interviews and negotiations with the employers. According to employers, the AB-initiative gives adequate information about available public support connected to vocational rehabilitation.

*Training on the job and further education*

- Training on the job
- Opportunities for training and further education off the job
- Training and education needs are identified and regularly reviewed

### AB performance

Much of the training connected to task-performance takes place in the workplace and under the employer's leadership and control. During the early pilot period of the AB-initiative the job coaches were involved in training of employees in more than half the jobs (Blystad &



Spjelkavik 1996). We now find that job coaches give more support to employers and colleagues of the AB-participants than to the actual AB-participants. On the other hand, we find that almost half of the employers are of the opinion that they do not need support from the job coaches, and that many employees from the AB-initiative want more assistance from the job coach at the workplace. The relatively low degree of job coach presence at the workplace may be due to the lower proportion of participants with a learning disability diagnosis in the AB-initiative compared to what was the case in the pilot period in the early 1990's. Since that time, the proportion of participants with mental illnesses has increased, and it appears that the need for assistance at the workplaces is smaller for job seekers with mental illness. It is also said, according to job coaches, that persons with mental illness are not so much in favour of a visible job coach following them at the workplace.

There may be reason to warn against the practice of allowing the employers to decide the degree of job coach-support to the AB-participants. We have documented a need for assistance and follow-up when it comes to the participants' task performance. A further development of natural support, as a more systematic and precise method in professional vocational rehabilitation, may cover several of these needs, but we warn against replacing the follow-up from the job coaches with natural forms of support too early in the process.

We are not familiar with AB-participants' possibilities for training and guidance outside the work situation, and we do not know if there is much need for that. We also do not have sufficient knowledge about practices in the AB-initiative concerning routines for evaluation of the job seekers' need for training, instruction and further education. As we have stated earlier, however, action plans made in the AB-initiative rarely go beyond the job situation, and as such there is a need to strengthen the perspective within the initiative on participants' career development.

*Support and co-operation at the workplace*

- Appropriate and flexible support at the workplace for employee, co-workers and employer
  - a) Personal support
  - b) Active involvement of co-workers and employer
  - c) Focus on risk sharing
- Job modification and supportive technology
- Regular feedback to all involved partners
- Useful information and help with the paperwork
- Mediation between employee, co-workers and employer
- Good personal relationship between job coach and partners
- Support is provided as long as necessary
  - a) Systematically planned reduction of support
  - b) Employee and co-workers are actively involved to organize natural support
  - c) Ongoing support is possible
- Follow-up system for employer and employee
- Career development is supported
  - a) Risk assessments are up-to-date
  - b) Vocational profile is up-to-date
  - c) Employee's changing preferences are noted regularly

## AB performance

We have documented that AB-participants get individually adapted support, and that colleagues and employers to a large extent participate in training and guidance. The responsibility for the process appears to be somewhat divided between the actors involved, although it is clear that most of the responsibility rests with the AB-initiative.

According to AB-participants and employers, the job coaches are, as a rule, accessible and respond quickly when problems arise. The support is of a flexible nature. We find that there are good relations between job coaches, job seekers and employers, but both job seekers and employers report in some cases about problems in connection with sick leave and turnover among job coaches.

We have documented that both job seekers and employers are mainly satisfied with the follow-up from the AB-initiative, and that they view the job coach as readily available.

Although we have also shown that actors within the firms actually give much of the support to the AB-participants, we have little knowledge about how systematic and planned the reduction of support from job coaches really is. Our research indicates that support to the participant is usually given as long as necessary, but the regulations of the AB-initiative restrict the participation to a maximum of three years. This means that the AB-initiative does not satisfy the quality criteria of supported employment, given the recommendation by QUIP that support should be available as long as necessary in all cases.

We find, however, that there is rarely a need for follow-up from the initiative for a longer period than the three-year limit. However, we have pointed out that there are some

fundamental aspects connected to this. After the integration of a job seeker in an ordinary job, the job seeker has by definition changed his or her status to employee. With this new status, it ought to follow that it is the firm's or the employer's responsibility to provide for adequate follow-up, in line with the employer's responsibility defined in valid rules and regulations for working life in general. There are of course those participants who will need lifelong support even though they have a job, however it is our opinion that it need not necessarily be the AB-initiative that should provide for this. It is, however, the AB-initiative's responsibility to make sure that such support is in place.

According to a great proportion of employers, the possibilities for career development seem to be small or non-existent in the firms. However, if we define 'career development' as 'personal development' in general, the employees from the AB-initiative seem to be very satisfied. Nonetheless, it appears that the AB-initiative has a challenge to perform to quality criteria on career development for the participants.

## 5.4 Supported Employment structure

### *Job coaches' characteristics and qualifications*

- Professional knowledge
- Professional experience
- Combination of key skills

### AB performance

Most job coaches from the AB-initiative have university college education. The dominant subjects of their studies are social studies, economics, administration, educational psychology, and occupational studies. Most job coaches have previously worked in health and social care, and most see their role to provide employment opportunities for disabled people in the open labour market. Most of them have one or another form of course or education in AB, and a considerable proportion have specific education connected to supported employment.

According to both job seekers and employers, the job coaches have skills and qualities that to a large extent correspond to those mentioned in the quality criterion, e.g. professional knowledge and communicative skills.

Our research shows that there is a need for a more continuous and comprehensive education in methods for vocational rehabilitation for the job coaches of the AB-initiative. This applies to training in tools for cross-professional and multi-authority co-operation, training and guidance in laws, rules, rights, marketing, coaching and more basic education and further education in supported employment in general.

The job coaches themselves want to receive more guidance in their job performance, and have a wish to develop their own professional competence – in areas such as training and guidance,

selling and marketing, job matching and developing working relations. They want to spend less time on internal meetings and on conflicts with the initiative's mother organisation.

*SE agency's organisational framework*

- Mission Statement
- Clear and effective organisational framework
  - a) Working standards
  - b) Clear competence and responsibilities
  - c) Efficient administrative work
- Good working conditions for job coaches
- Effective internal communication and informal exchange
- Opportunities for professional development and training of job coaches
- Clear guidelines for defining target groups
- Good accessibility for job seekers
- Regular quality monitoring and development
  - a) Regular collection of data and feedback
  - b) Regular strategic review
  - c) Complaints procedure
  - d) Increasing the services of the SE agency
- Effective co-operation with parent organization

### AB performance

The AB-initiative is regulated by public regulations, but the organisational framework is restricted by the fact that the Labour market authorities outsource the management of the initiative to mainly Labour Market Enterprises and Sheltered Workshops.

This organisational framework can be perceived to have some dysfunctional and conflict of interest aspects to it. The Labour Market Enterprises and Sheltered Workshops who are funded to deliver AB are also funded to deliver training and assessment services. This in itself is not a problem, but concerns arise when the funding for training and assessment services are the main income sources for Labour Market Enterprises and Sheltered Workshops. The inference therefore is that AB takes a back seat or comes second to such vocational assessment and training. There may not be the same incentive for the management of Labour Market Enterprises or Sheltered Workshops to allocate resources to the development of AB services; the more attractive incentive is to develop vocational training and assessment, as it is a common belief that this is where the money is.

During the pilot project of AB, rules and regulations were kept to a minimum and job coaches had a lot of autonomy. It has been argued that when AB became established more standardised and formal instructions were introduced, reducing the autonomy of the job coaches. The concern raised is that a successful approach to AB is to an extent to rely upon a flexible approach to AB activities and there is a risk that rules and routines, no matter how general and necessary they are, may jeopardise this approach. It could be argued that the autonomy to individual AB-units and job coaches still exists but there was evidence during the research to

suggest that the job coaches felt that they were bound by fixed regulations. Some examples of this can be found in the fact that some participants may require long term support but regulations limit participants to three years support. Additionally, some employment service offices take up their right to decide how many participants should be on the caseload of each job coach despite the possibility that job coaches and their managers could be best placed to make this decision. Moreover, AB-units have little or no say in who is referred to their services by employment service offices.

However the fact that Norway has established rules and regulations does place AB at the leading edge in comparison with other European countries, the majority of which do not even have mainstream supported employment service provision.

The situation could be viewed as one of misunderstanding; on one side the Directorate of Labour consider that a sufficient degree of flexibility and autonomy is available to AB-units, but perhaps the AB-units do not exercise it. On the other side AB-units feel obliged to carry out their duties within the letter of the law as opposed to the intended spirit of the rules and regulations and they consider that they do not have sufficient autonomy. It could be that improved communication and clarification between stakeholders involved in the AB-process could resolve these concerns.

The job coaches evaluate their general working conditions as satisfactory, but it is also a part of the picture that several job coaches report about lack of economic freedom of action, and conflicts with managers of the AB-initiative. The relationship between the AB-initiative and the managers is evaluated by job coaches as mainly good, but the experiences show that the climate of co-operation may change quickly. A number of managers of the AB-units represent the sheltered form of job rehabilitation, which supported employment is in itself a reaction against, and it is likely that this organisational situation implies a certain potential for conflict. The specification of the public requirements to the AB-initiative may contribute to improved clarity in the relationship between initiative and managers, although some job coaches doubt this. This doubt is probably grounded in cases where managers of the AB-initiative have not shown sufficient professional understanding for the kind of vocational rehabilitation carried out within the supported employment perspective. Instances have been reported, where managers have complained that job coaches are away from their offices too much, while it is easy to understand that – from a supported employment perspective – the most important arena for a job coach is not the office. However, instances have also been reported where managers complain that job coaches spend too much time in the office and too little time developing networks with existing and future employers of the AB-participants.

It is common for managers of the AB-initiative to provide training when a new person starts as job coach. We have, however, pointed out that training can be improved, especially when it comes to training and education in Supported employment. We have also pointed out that we have found that the job coaches want better possibilities for guidance in their job performance.

We do not know enough about the AB-units' routines and strategies for evaluation of quality and efficiency of the professional work, how they treat complaints etc. There is reason to believe that the work with the specification of requirements of the AB-initiative may result in some form of quality assurance for such factors.

*Networking*

- Relationship with employers
- Networking with other SE agencies and other services
- Public relations work
- Co-operation with policy makers
- Local, regional, national and international working

### AB performance

Our research points to the significance of developing relations and networks among actors connected to the AB-initiative. We find that it is mainly the job coaches that participate in this kind of development. We also have clear indications of a rather close relationship between for example local employment services (Aetat offices), the Directorate of Labour, and the AB-initiatives. We have also noticed an increasing tendency for the traditionally strong actors in the field, such as the Labour Market Enterprises and the Sheltered Workshops, to move in the direction of supported employment. At the same time, it is still the case that the institutions offering sheltered rehabilitation are the most dominant, also towards the decision-making authorities.

The Norwegian Association for supported employment (NFSE) and Forum for AB (FAB) frequently organise professional conferences, usually with representation from political authorities, country and local employment services. Both NSFE and FAB were consulted in connection with changes in legislation dealing with the situation of vocationally disabled job seekers. In 2004 these two organisations merged to form one organisation.

The AB-units themselves frequently organise regional professional workshops where representatives of employment services and other organisations are invited to lecture. The Association for the Labour Market Enterprises annually organises an AB-conference, and the National Association for the Work Co-operatives organises seminars concerning the AB-initiative.

NFSE has international contacts through its network with the European Union of Supported Employment, and several job coaches and others working in local AB-units have participated in different international partnerships both formally and informally. We do not have enough information to establish if these are stable enough contacts to be mentioned as networks, as claimed in the quality criteria above.

Our research shows that several job coaches want to spend more working time building relations with employers, and on marketing, mapping of workplaces, and to do follow-up on firms through visiting them.

*National and regional framework for SE*

- Adequate legal framework and community inclusion
- Long-term and stable funding
- Professional recognition of SE principles and practice
- Good accessibility for job seekers (e.g. no long periods of waiting)
- Education system for SE at national level

### AB performance

The framework for work and contents of the Norwegian AB-initiative is found in public regulations, and in the specification of requirements for purchase of services in the AB-initiative.

Our research shows that the job coaches' goal is to contribute to vocationally disabled job seekers, who have a weak position in the competition for jobs, to obtain increased integration and normalisation in working life, and that this is done by supporting as many job seekers as possible to be employed in stable and steady jobs in ordinary working life.

The AB-initiative exists in most of the major cities in Norway, but the initiative is not as easily available as indicated in the quality criteria for supported employment. The AB-initiative is still too small compared to the number of vocationally disabled job seekers with a need for support to obtain and keep an ordinary job. There are often reports about waiting lists in several cities, and due to long geographical distances, availability to the AB-initiative is difficult for job seekers in rural areas. However, new forms have emerged with traits of supported employment, e.g. Flexible job, Service groups within the Labour Market Enterprises, job coaches with the Fountain House, the AB-initiative connected to New Deal programs for ex-offenders (Schafft & Spjelkavik 2001); job coaching in connection to methadone-assisted vocational rehabilitation for drug addicts, the AB-initiative connected to Sheltered Workshops in rural areas, job coaching specially designed for deaf job seekers, job coaches as part of established firms on the open labour market (e.g. Telenor, the country's largest telephone operator) and more attention paid to perspective and methods used in the AB-initiative among other parts of the system of rehabilitation.

Most job coaches of the AB-initiative have had access to education in AB, but we have to point out that there is no national educational system for learning supported employment. In 2003 the University College of Akershus started a course in further education in vocational rehabilitation, with special emphasis on supported employment ([www.hiak.no/av/evu/vyr.shtml](http://www.hiak.no/av/evu/vyr.shtml)).

The following proposals for improving Norwegian supported employment and the AB-initiative are based on our research, the discussion of our findings among relevant stakeholders and the quality criteria for supported employment as suggested by QUIP.

### 6.1 Improving possibilities for a steady job

Attempts should be made to minimise existing barriers preventing those vocationally disabled persons who want a steady job from reaching this goal. Our research shows that in Norway it is particularly difficult for a disabled person to get a steady job in national and local public workplaces. We therefore suggest that greater efforts are made to ensure that national and local public workplaces can be made more easily accessible to disabled workers.

The job coaches in the AB-initiative contribute to reducing the risks and uncertainty often connected with hiring a vocationally disabled person. It is not well known among employers that the AB-initiative provides this service, and building networks with new and existing employers that have experience of co-operation with the AB-initiative could be one way of spreading this information.

Furthermore, we recommend that the support provided by job coaches should be directed towards keeping a job. This could mean increasing job coaches' knowledge about methods for natural support in workplaces. Our investigation shows that job seekers need job adjustment, assistance and follow-up in order to perform their work tasks. Developing natural support as a more systematic and accurate rehabilitation method can cover several of these needs for adjustment and follow-up. Natural support should not replace the job coach model, but rather be seen as a tool the job coach should make use of.

There is a tendency among job coaches in AB to handle issues that in many cases belong to other public services' field of responsibility (particularly the social services). Our data also suggests that job seekers who are not motivated to start a process aiming at open employment are referred to the job coaches. These job seekers, according to the job coaches, often have other problems that have to be solved prior to job search. In these cases job coaches often develop a 'holistic' approach and serve the job seekers also on issues not belonging within AB's field of responsibility, instead of involving the relevant body. Co-operation between AB and other initiatives must be developed and institutionalised in order to avoid job seekers' unsolved problems becoming obstacles to getting an ordinary job.



## 6.2 The long-term effect of the AB-Initiative

We know little about the long-term effects of vocational rehabilitation through the AB-initiative. Do they change jobs? Do they make a career? Do they start education? Do they leave open employment?

When an AB-participant is hired on ordinary conditions and thus ends his or her relation to the AB-initiative, the person's status changes from that of a job seeker to that of an employee. This implies that the employer is now responsible for further job maintenance, not the AB-initiative. It might nevertheless be relevant to ask whether persons having achieved jobs through the AB-initiative are more vulnerable to mechanisms of exclusion compared to other employees. To judge the long-term effects, however, it is important to focus on internal inclusive and exclusive mechanisms in companies and not see the AB-initiative as an isolated actor or determinant.

On the other hand, long-term effect assessments must also incorporate analyses of the AB-initiative's ability to develop natural support in the form of bringing in appropriate actors from relevant parts of the support system. Furthermore, it is a fact that some job seekers will need lifelong support in order to be able to participate on the open labour market. Lifelong support might involve personal assistants or actions to establish a supportive working environment to handle periods of crisis. For this group of vocationally disabled persons, an inclusive work-life means finding permanent models of support not necessarily consisting of the AB-initiative, the employer or colleagues.

Participants in AB are not ordinary job seekers as such, but are participants in a rehabilitation process and have certain needs for job adjustment and follow-up. The lack of focus among job coaches on individual career and development may therefore be an area for improvement in AB that will influence the long-term effect.

## 6.3 Reducing the potential of inappropriate use of the AB-initiative

Even though responses from job seekers and employers concerning the service of AB are good, we nevertheless have cause to ask if the results are good enough. There is no doubt that AB works well as an integrated service, but there is reason to question whether 35 % of job seekers ending up with jobs and 25 % of job seekers leaving the initiative for disability or retirement pension are indeed satisfactory results. Furthermore, there is reason to question the average of three months waiting time within the initiative before the participants' first 'job taster' is provided. This period of time seems rather long considering that the AB-initiative is supposed to offer an integrated service.

The research found that in some instances vocationally disabled people were being referred to AB-units by local employment services with a view to the AB-unit providing a work potential assessment. Primarily the purpose of AB is to support vocationally disabled job seekers into open employment and therefore the use of AB for assessment purposes deflects and dilutes AB from its main role. There are in existence programmes that are specifically designed for

assessment activities and of course these programmes should be used and not AB. However one can see the advantage of AB being used by employment service offices as AB can provide assessment/work experience in integrated settings whereas assessment programmes usually take place in segregated/sheltered workshop settings.

#### 6.4 Improving the use of job coaches' working hours

Our data shows that job coaches rarely experience that working with six job seekers is too heavy a workload. We also find that the limit of providing follow-up for three years seems ample in most cases, although some job seekers need follow-up for longer periods. These limits, provided by the Norwegian authorities, nevertheless are not meant to be fixed, but are rather to be understood as minimum (number of participants) and maximum (length of participation) rules.

Our data also indicates that there is room for improvement concerning the use of working hours among job coaches. Job coaches are of the opinion that they should actually spend more time at worksites. Job seekers do not report too high a presence of their job coach at their workplace. Furthermore, several employers call for a higher presence of job coaches in their businesses, although some employers themselves want to provide the necessary training and follow-up of their disabled employees. This could mean that job coaches should consider spending more time in the job seekers' workplace, among their colleagues and the employers.

Consideration should be given to reassess the possibility of changing minimum and maximum rules regarding the number of participants per job coach and the length of participation in the initiative. This should be performed in such a manner that the initiative's internal self-regulation is associated with forms of quality assurance. It should be noted however, that the rules regarding the length of participation in a labour market measure is stated in the statutory regulations of labour market measures, whereas the rules regarding number of participants per job coach is stated in Directorate of Labour's specifications of the regulations for AB, and is as such a much more flexible matter.

#### 6.5 Increased awareness concerning employees' employment conditions

Our research indicates that AB is vague and unclear regarding payment and contract issues. This can partly be explained by the fact that job coaches' fear rejection if they present the issue of payment and contract too early during the liaison with employers. They therefore prioritise uncertainty higher than refusal. We suggest that better quality systems be developed regarding the documentation of job seekers' pay and employment conditions and that these are made simple enough to preserve the principles regarding participation that are involved. Job seekers, employers and job coaches alike should know who pays the wages, how much is paid and the employment conditions that apply. In principle, solutions should be found that involve

the employer paying the wages and benefits from the public sector being channelled through employers.

## 6.6 Enhanced user participation

The AB-initiative faces challenges with respect to counselling job seekers as active players in their own vocational rehabilitation process. Methods of user participation are lacking in AB. It is a problem that job coaches do not have the necessary knowledge to professionally guide the job seeker in the making of his or her own choices. Even though user participation in relation to this target group is sometimes said to be difficult, we nevertheless regard this issue as a challenge and wish to maintain that the main reason is the lack of methods for supervision among job coaches. The use of group-based methods and sharing of experiences among job seekers seems rare. These are methods often used to enhance user participation, and in no way are in conflict with developing individualised and tailor-made support. We therefore suggest a stronger effort in AB to increase knowledge and competence among job coaches regarding supervision and guidance of job seekers in order to improve their ability to behave as active, responsible and conscious actors in their own rehabilitation process.

## 6.7 Developing training and education in supported employment

We have already mentioned that the development of follow-up methods that include job seekers' careers and development represents an area for possible improvement. Development of natural support into more of a systematic and precise professional vocational rehabilitation method could meet much of the need for support concerning AB-participants who are in work, though we would caution against replacing the skilled job coach with the more incidental support provided by colleagues in the workplace.

Everyone should be wary of the 'holistic therapist's' perspective taking over the AB-initiative and consequently reducing its focus on integrating job seekers into the ordinary job market. The training of job coaches appears to be unplanned and the survey shows that there is a need for more continuous and well-rounded training when it comes to methods, training related to means of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental co-operation, and more basic training and education from a supported employment perspective. It must be noted, however, that training of job coaches in the Norwegian system is primarily a responsibility of their employer.

We recommend the development of educational systems on three levels:

I Training on job coaching. This should be the responsibility of the organisation that organises AB (normally a labour market enterprise or a sheltered workshop). This kind of training should not be formed as a generalised introduction to all kinds of programmes provided by the organiser, but instead needs to be closely focused on skills relevant to AB.

II A programme for the education of new job coaches is provided once or twice a year. Such training or at least the development and financing of proper training tools, should be the

responsibility of the Norwegian Labour Market Administration authorities (Aetat) because AB is a public labour market initiative provided by Aetat itself. Training issues should be recorded in *the Specification for purchase of services from Arbeid med bistand*, which is the employment service's tool to maintain and develop AB.

III Further training in supported employment, an even more focused educational offer than the more general educational offers already in existence. The purpose of such an offer should be to provide opportunities for further studies as well as contributing to diffusion of the supported employment approach to other parts of the rehabilitation services. This kind of education has recently been developed at the University College Akershus.

## 6.8 Further expansion of the AB-initiative

More places for vocationally disabled persons in AB will contribute to reducing the need for sheltered employment. There is in particular a continued need for further expansion of the initiative in towns. Moreover, disabled persons in rural districts should have better access to AB, either through the expansion of the initiative in connection with sheltered schemes or by establishing separate AB-initiatives. The initiative is still too small in towns when related to the actual number of vocationally disabled persons needing the service AB provides.

The aim of establishing an inclusive work life, as put forward by the tri-partite agreement between the Norwegian government, the Employers Organisation (NHO) and the Trade Union Association (LO), assumes a perspective as well as methods that provide a safe process of inclusion both in relation to job seekers and employers in the best way possible. This, in fact, represents the essence of the AB-initiative. Further expansion of integrated services is dependent on the willingness and ability to prioritise inclusion, both in the rehabilitation institutions and in the businesses. The perspective and methods represented and carried out by AB to a larger extent are involved in and give the possibility to influence the processes of developing programmes and services with the aim of inclusion of vocationally disabled persons in the ordinary labour market.



## 7.1 Introduction

Mike Evans is a Chartered Fellow and Graduate of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Mike is currently Vice President of the European Union of Supported Employment, which is an umbrella organisation for sixteen European countries concerning employment and disability issues. Moreover, he was a founder member and Chairman of the Scottish Union of Supported Employment.

He is Manager of the Employment Disability Unit in Tayside, Scotland that has piloted many Government programmes and has won several national awards for the quality of its activities. The Employment Disability Unit has assisted more than 900 disabled people to secure employment over the past ten years. He is author of *Employing People with Disabilities (2001)*, which was published as a best practice guide by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In recent years Mike has delivered workshops in Trondheim and Oslo regarding supported employment in Europe and job finding and marketing techniques in supported employment. He has spent considerable time analysing and investigating the AB system and has also organised and accompanied the UK Minister for Employment and Department of Work and Pensions staff on official visits to view Norwegian disability employment services.

This chapter, written by Mike, represents his views, observations and comments concerning the English version of the Work Research Institute report into Arbeid med bistand.

## 7.2 The Benefits of ‘Arbeid med bistand’

The Norwegian vocational rehabilitation measures and in particular the AB-initiative have provided me with ideas and motivation. Our work in Dundee, Scotland has benefited considerably from analysing and replicating many of the concepts from Norway.

During the early to mid 1990’s we decided that we needed to provide new, additional employment services for people with disabilities. We viewed the supported employment models of the time from North America and whilst we were impressed, we quickly realised that some of these models were primarily for people with learning disabilities; were a bit too holistic and slightly patronising and would not be appropriate for all types of disability.

During 1995 I heard about a 3-year project in Norway (‘Arbeid med bistand’) and was immediately curious because of the practical nature and scale of the initiative. Early study visits to Norway during the mid to late 1990’s confirmed to us that this was a very good programme that would rank, in my opinion, as the best example of mainstreaming of supported employment.

The AB-initiative was based on a well-organised pilot that was properly researched and the results were truly understood by the Directorate of Labour. The key players in the development of the pilot were knowledgeable, well-motivated and forward thinking.

As this report assesses the AB-initiative ten years on, I consider that it may be beneficial to key stakeholders in Norway to hear the views of an outsider regarding the results of the programme.

It was a good idea to trial AB with a three-year national pilot, it was a great idea to research the pilot and introduce a mainstream AB programme. The long-term funding of this initiative should also be viewed from the standpoint of “what would it cost not to do this?” For example, mainstreaming AB ensures that duplication is minimised, it ensures that there is a high degree of consistency and that there is adequate control.

The current AB-initiative can always be improved and I have made constructive observations and comments later on in this chapter that may be worthy of consideration. Moreover, the recommendations at Chapter 6 of this report may also provide the opportunity to develop and improve the service.

What is important, however, is that a nationwide funded measure has provided a real opportunity for vocationally disabled people in Norway to get a chance to work. The State has provided a service to offer equality of opportunity to Norway’s most disadvantaged group.

I feel that the AB-initiative should not be underestimated; there has been clear leadership and direction for the programme and the participants. The introduction of specifications and regulations has provided the AB-initiative with a high degree of consistency and standards. Whilst there is much debate within the report regarding Quality Standards and flexibility, the use of regulations is to be commended. However, there is a need to build upon the current regulations and comments from this report could easily be incorporated into existing regulations.

Norway has also played an active part in the development of supported employment in Europe through its active participation in the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE). Norway hosted the third EUSE in Oslo 1997, although since the new millennium Norway’s role and influence have all but disappeared due to non-participation at EUSE Board level.

It should also be borne in mind that the comparisons with other countries probably does not give an accurate picture of where the Norwegian AB services are in relation to other European programmes. There is a danger that the quoted examples are not comparing ‘like with like’. For example, the United Kingdom Supported Employment Programme (Workstep) is predominantly still a wage subsidy programme for 26,000 disabled people, half of whom are in Sheltered Workshops, with a progression rate of less than 5 %. Additionally, legislation varies from country to country, many have quota systems but it is not always clear in determining precisely what is happening in other parts of Europe. Moreover, definitions of sheltered and supported employment may differ within Europe.

### 7.3 Proactive or Reactive

There could be an issue for discussion as to whether the AB-initiative is proactive or authoritative enough. There is much positive feedback from participants, with 71 % saying that AB has improved their chances of getting a job and 80 % of participants stating they would recommend AB and yet only 1 in 3 participants have secured jobs. Perhaps there needs to be consideration given to AB job coaches being less holistic and more emphasis placed on creating sustainable job outcomes. This may mean that AB are required to take a more 'aggressive' standpoint regarding working with employers and encouraging participants to seek/secure employment.

There are a number of areas within the current AB-initiative where AB can be more proactive and endeavour to influence the process to improve results, maintain the motivation of job coaches and increase the overall effectiveness of the programme.

#### Referral Sources

One can understand that a Government funded mainstream employment programme would want to be the main referral source to the AB-initiative. However, this stifles the proactivity of the AB Units and also increases the potential misuse of AB for assessment and suitability purposes.

There is a need for AB Units to develop local partnerships and networks not only with employers but other potential stakeholders with common interests concerning employment and disability. Upon development of such networks/partnerships there will be the potential to attract many motivated vocationally disabled people – thought needs to be given to how this could be developed. Potential referring agencies such as hospitals, social services, colleges and day centres need to be encouraged.

#### Inappropriate Referrals

A major problem we encountered in Dundee when we began delivering employment and support services to disabled people was the high number of inappropriate referrals. Many disabled people would be referred to us who did not really want to work or could not work due to their welfare benefit situation, illness/disability, poor motivation or their personal domestic situation. A problem for us at that time was not being confident enough to say 'No' and we would spend a significant level of resources on people who did not want to or could not work. This may also be the case with the AB-initiative, where they may be obliged to accept referrals from local employment services, which are also their paymasters.

To resolve this problem in Dundee we became stricter in the referral process and focused early discussions with our participants on their employment objectives, welfare benefit situation and work motivation. This enabled us to discover at an early stage whether the participant involved was genuinely prepared and able to work. Should there be any uncertainty, the participant would always be given the benefit of the doubt. Additionally, we held discussions



with the relevant referral source and advised them as to what we considered to be an appropriate referral for our service. Whilst this problem has not been completely eliminated, there has been a significant reduction in inappropriate referrals over the past few years.

This could be a key area for the AB-initiative to address as any vocationally disabled person can secure some form of work provided that they are willing, motivated and able. Such measures could increase the percentage of participants who secure employment as well as addressing the holistic issues and misuse of AB.

### Place – Train Issue

Referring to the origins of supported employment, the report discusses issues regarding ‘train then place’ which ultimately developed into ‘place then train’. However, to coin a phrase in common use in supported employment “one size does not fit all” and we must reconsider the merits of ‘place then train’. Of course this is a basic perspective but in practice may not be appropriate for everyone, especially since supported employment has now been broadened to cover a wide range of disabled and disadvantaged people. It is not possible to be too prescriptive concerning this topic but we must remember that ‘place and train’ may not be such a good idea if participants have poor social skills/behavioural problems which may be better addressed *before* they are exposed to the workplace, employers and co-workers.

### To be or not to be ‘job ready’ – that is the question

Over the past few years the simple comment of “are participants job ready?” has stimulated a great deal of debate. The main cause of this contentious issue is rooted in the supported employment ideology that everyone can work and that supported employment is aligned to a ‘place then train’ ethos. There are three key reasons to embrace this; it prevents vocationally disabled people undertaking unnecessary training; it provides immediate integration in the open labour market and it ensures that the focus of the job coach is on securing open employment.

However, problems arise when a participant is considered not to be job ready. The reasons must be documented and valid. There must be agreement by the participant and the referral source must also be consulted with. It is, of course, not possible to fully define ‘job ready’ as each participant will have weaknesses, abilities, strengths, habits and personal issues that are individual and complex. When we attempt to define ‘job ready’ we must take into account the qualities sought in an employee – trustworthy, positive, flexible, effective and motivated. These are the traits that employers look for and if a participant has none of these qualities then their job readiness must be questioned by AB and perhaps AB is not the most appropriate measure for such participants.

### Misuse of AB

The AB-initiative is one of Europe’s best examples of a nationwide government funded programme. Like all good programmes there is a temptation to over use it or indeed misuse it.

The research indicates that in some instances the AB process is being used to clarify and assess job seekers' employment status. This must be kept as a separate measure and should not dilute the resources of individual AB Units. Improved communications between Aetat, APS and AB could help resolve or address this issue.

### Holistic Approach

There is of course considerable merit in employing a 'holistic approach' to some of the AB participants, for some life skills and work are inextricably linked. The problem is twofold:

- 1) How can the Directorate of Labour measure the value of holistic services? Public money has to be used effectively and it is difficult to include in a regulated government funded programme holistic type activities and measures.
- 2) If the AB Unit needs holistic services to ensure stability in the workplace, then of course they should liaise with the appropriate body (health, social services). However, such liaisons are not always easy to establish and it is understandable that individual job coaches may take on this role themselves – especially given that many of them come from care-orientated backgrounds. There is not a quick fix solution but the current situation can and does appear to affect AB's performance. A recommendation may be to consider developing a support network for each AB Unit consisting of appropriate specialists – this is also mentioned earlier in this chapter under *Referral Sources*.

### Supported Employment and Sheltered Workshop Conflict

In the report the concept of supported employment is referred to as the opposite of segregated or sheltered employment. The conflict between sheltered workshops and supported employment is common in many countries, even where supported employment is not a mainstream activity. There could be a perceived conflict in situations where AB Units are managed by sheltered workshops or LMEs. The report comments that job coaches can and are allocated other non-AB duties where the AB Unit management is provided by Labour Market Enterprises. This situation will always pose a dilemma because of the priorities faced by the management under which the AB Units are organised.

Such conflicts can be addressed by giving more autonomy to the AB-initiative; by introducing more stringent regulations governing AB activities; and by improving the knowledge about supported employment in Sheltered Workshops and the LMEs.

### User Participation

There could and should be increased user participation in the job search process, especially where participants do not have an intellectual impairment or disability, there need not be a requirement for the job coach to do all the job finding. Moreover, it is essential that all participants are involved in all process activities. Additionally, user participation should be achieved before there is a referral to AB, the research indicates that local employment services

are referring vocationally disabled people to AB Units for suitability/clarification purposes. This procedure is unfair to both the participant and the AB-initiative.

### Flexibility/Number of Participants

It would appear inevitable that the minimum number of participants per job coach and the maximum length of time of participation in the programme should be re-appraised. One of the strengths of the programme in comparison with other European countries is the fact that it is nationwide and mainstream funded. From a Directorate of Labour point of view, I would be concerned that too much flexibility may mean a loss of control and does not guarantee improved results. Where I would consider that 'fine tuning' should take place would be on the number of participants, which could be increased, especially if support can be defined. For example, if a participant is in employment when is it unacceptable for AB to be claiming for them as a participant with regard to how much support they receive? In other words, a minimum level of support should be defined to ensure that participants in the AB programme are genuinely still an active participant receiving needed AB services.

## 7.4 Employer Engagement

It would appear that there are some strategies and activities in AB that need to be brought up to date, especially since the AB client group currently comprises many types of vocationally disabled people. Particularly, I consider that there is a need for a review of the job finding strategies and the AB engagement of the labour market. The research indicates that the job finding emphasis appears to be on telephone/informal contact with employers by AB staff. There should be consideration given to allowing/enabling participants to be active in their own job search and extending job finding activities to incorporate fully the more formal methods. After ten years of existence, I would have expected the AB Units to have a healthy database of employers where they could access vacancies, work experience placements or job tasters. However, this does not appear to be the case or I assume it would have been mentioned in the report. Moreover, there are several issues that could be considered to improve employer engagement.

### Barriers faced by employers

There is much debate regarding the barriers in supported employment and yet there appears to be little recognition of what the key barriers actually are. The main participants in the AB-initiative are:

- AB personnel
- AB participants
- Employers

Each has different barriers, some minor, some major. There are barriers that can be addressed at local level and there are barriers that can only be addressed at national/government level.

This is a vital area of work because if we do not understand or appreciate all the problems then the solutions are harder to find.

The barriers encountered by AB personnel and participants are often debated and addressed – however, employers are usually overlooked. Employers have their own unique problems and concerns and these areas offer potential opportunities for AB Units to work with employers to address and solve these problems. The problems that employers face are usually regarding apprehension, fear, lack of awareness, limited knowledge, etc. These could be addressed by specialist AB staff or training seminars for employers.

### Employers not perceived as customers

It does not appear that the employer is perceived as a customer within the AB-initiative. There is little or no mention of the employer's needs in general, what barriers employers encounter and what problems employers face in running their business. This is quite common in supported employment projects in most countries where the emphasis is on the process, the holistic approach, service user involvement and the support of the participant. And yet I firmly believe that the employer is the key stakeholder, who ultimately decides on employment, terms and conditions and salary levels. Employers' demands should not be ignored but perceived as an opportunity by AB.

Whilst there is a definite need to improve both formal and informal relations with employers, care must be taken that AB Units are aware of the problems and needs of employers. It is not sufficient to approach employers and offer only unemployed disabled people. The AB personnel must look at the bigger picture and accept that employers are also customers of the AB-initiative and as such the needs of these customers must be established. The employment of vocationally disabled people will never be a priority for employers – however, addressing sickness absence, legislative matters, identifying funding support and improving equal opportunities may have a higher priority, especially with larger employers. The needs and problems of employers can become opportunities for AB Units. The research indicates high levels of employer satisfaction but what is it employers are actually satisfied with? Yes, it is excellent that they rate the AB-initiative so highly and this reflects well on the whole programme. However, it is my experience that employers can be very 'politically correct' and give good news and positive responses to avoid confrontation. We must be careful when analysing these figures to note that although employers are extremely happy with the AB-initiative, this is not reflected by how many participants secure paid work with these employers.

### Job creation or job finding

The report highlights that the primary method of job finding by job coaches is "using the telephone and their own networks". This is acceptable but not as the primary method. There are implications of using this method which would include the fact that the type of jobs secured by telephone are not usually established positions and therefore not likely to be

budgeted for by an employer. Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that 'specially created' posts are less sustainable than established posts. Moreover, there is no mention of active use of formal job finding methods and I am of the opinion that job finding strategies have not developed as the AB programme has expanded.

### Job finding methods

My concern in this area is the apparent lack of formal job finding techniques such as compiling CV's, sending speculative letters, submitting application forms, responding to advertised vacancies and developing links with employer networks. There is the potential to be over-influenced by supported employment traditions, which involve the often-misconstrued concept of 'selling' and 'marketing'. I would contend that we are not salesmen or saleswomen and that to get too preoccupied with marketing jargon could be to remove the focus from the real issue – job finding. I would also question the availability of training of job coaches in job finding skills and techniques. A good job coach should not be gauged by their academic achievements or their commitment to disabled people but should be judged by the number of vocationally disabled people they support into jobs. It should be taken into account that there is no 'one best way' to secure employment and that a wide range of methods should be constantly considered and used.

### Promotion of 'something for nothing' to employers

The seemingly extended use of job tasters and work experience placements by AB can be both a good and a bad thing. It can be good because vocationally disabled people are exposed to the open labour market and get an opportunity to develop skills and determine their own strengths, weaknesses and job preferences. However, by continually offering employers this option it can create a 'something for nothing' culture. This may be reflected in the fact that whilst 80 % of participants receive work experience/tasters, only 35 % receive paid jobs according to Directorate of Labour statistics. Moreover, the high satisfaction rates amongst employers with the AB services are not reflected in the number of vocationally disabled people they ultimately employ.

Contact with employers could appear to be appealing to their 'social conscience' or requesting charity by telephoning looking for work. Indeed, employers may now perceive that their role is to provide job tasters or work experience placements rather than to employ disabled people on a normal wage. There is a high satisfaction rate of the AB service among employers (96 %) - this figure reflects well on AB and its activities - and yet only 35 % of participants have secured a job. Interestingly, there appears to be a lack of knowledge of how long these participants remain in employment, supported or otherwise.

### Difficulties in 'creating' jobs in the Public Sector

It is common throughout Europe that the Public Sector involves more bureaucracy than the private sector and that the Public Sector has less flexibility regarding employment terms and

conditions. Moreover, there is constant reference to the fact that not enough vocationally disabled people secure jobs with the Public Sector and yet by the admission of AB job finders they are using the telephone or informal contacts – neither of which is normally conducive to securing long-term jobs in the Public Sector. This could be addressed by issuing codes of good practice to the public sector; by creating legislation regarding positive employment opportunities for vocationally disabled people in the public sector and by encouraging positive action in the recruitment of vocationally disabled people within the public sector.

### Relationship with employers

Job finding and marketing for vocationally disabled people would be enhanced and improved if AB Units were to improve their relationship with employers. There is little evidence in the report that indicates that there are strong links with the employers. Indeed, the report highlights that employers seldom contact the AB-initiative when looking for labour and the job coaches have expressed a wish to spend more time working with employers. There are possibilities to establish local/national employer networks and consideration should be given to hosting local/national employer events. Additionally, good practice case studies could be disseminated among AB Units and existing employer networks could be accessed.

## 7.5 An Outsider's Summary

The AB-initiative remains an excellent programme that is still one of the leaders in the field of addressing disability and employment and delivering a national supported employment service. However, elements of the AFI report should act as a trigger to consider some changes.

The AB-initiative needs to be far more proactive in not just delivery of services but how it interacts with stakeholders and how it engages with employers.

There is a need to develop the skills of the AB Units and individual job coaches, especially in relation to working with employers, job finding and developing partnerships. According to the report, the job coaches themselves “want to spend more time on developing their own expertise”. This need not involve long-term training programmes but could be delivered by one and two-day training events. These events could be at advanced and basic levels. The training and development needs of job coaches is especially important given that their qualifications (social work, economics, pedagogics/teaching) and background (health and social services sector) may indicate that they are suitably skilled to work with disabled people but where is the training skills they require to engage with employers and deliver the full AB package?

There does appear to be some on-going developments or small-scale pilots such as The Fountain House Transitional Model, the developments of AB in rural areas and I note that some AB Units are to increase their participants to a minimum of ten people. I also note with interest that the University College Akershus has introduced a study on supported employment.

The report reflects that the AB Initiative is an excellent concept that is a leader in the European field. However, some fine-tuning is required and implementation of the recommendations/proposals of the report would improve the effectiveness and delivery of the programme.

I would also suggest that consideration be given to developing a small team of AB experts that can deliver a wide range of support service to benefit AB Units and the overall AB programme. There is an identified training need for AB providers at all levels, not just the job coaches. There is a recognised need to develop the activities of the AB Units and to maintain the progress of results and outcomes. Moreover, there appears to be a growing need to assist Units to develop support and employer networks and to generally motivate and encourage the programme delivery. It could be possible that a small team could provide this service, as well as ensuring that quality standards and values such as those highlighted in the report are introduced and maintained.



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