



# Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment

Summary report - Pôle Emploi France



*Written by ICON Institut Public Sector GmbH*

*2015*



## **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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This publication has received financial support from the European Union programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult:  
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### **PES of France - Pôle Emploi**

#### **Summary Report**

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# **Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment**

## **Pôle Emploi**

### **Summary Report**

#### **1. Introduction.**

This report outlines the results of the Benchlearning external assessment of the Pôle Emploi (PE) conducted on the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> April 2015. The team of seven external assessors comprised two peer PES staff (VDAB and Le Forem), two from the European Commission and three experts from ICON-Institute (the supporting contractor). The programme of the 2.5 day visit included meetings in PE Head Office with senior management/Directorates and a visit to a local PE office (Nogent Sur Marne) in the Paris region (Val de Marne). The assessment was conducted internally and externally using the old set of enablers, with the exception of Section G which was assessed using the newly defined enabler set. PE assessment is thus a combination of the old and new approaches to enabler definition.

An extensive pre-visit briefing document was prepared and distributed among the assessors in sufficient time prior to the visit, which helped to ensure that the questions posed during the assessment were well informed. Much of the material used to prepare the document was supplied by PE. PE also provided their own self-assessment findings prior to the visit. This was extremely helpful and the time and resources invested in the preparation were regarded by the team as crucial. We trust that our preparations have allowed us to produce a meaningful and practically useful external assessment summary report.

PE has emerged from a five year transition period during which the previous ANPE PES was amalgamated with Assédic, the operating network of Unédic, the unemployment benefit disbursement agency. That merger in 2009 coincided with the European economic crisis and concomitant increases in unemployment. The intervening years have therefore been characterised as an initial intensive period of transition followed by consolidation. During the visit it became clear that PE is now a unified singular organisation that is focused on enhancement, innovation, improving its public image, and refocusing its delivery of services. This includes speeding up transitions into work (earlier and more active engagement), working better with job-changers and become the partner of choice for enterprises recruiting staff, increased ICT penetration and services, and in general providing efficient services for both jobseekers and employers.

## 2. Strengths

The main strengths of PE evidenced during the assessment visit, centre around the now solidly consolidated unified organisation, coupled with a high degree of innovation, a clear change management approach and strategy led strongly by senior management, accompanied by a high degree of staff buy-in. This is also underlined by the change of its performance measurement to a more result-oriented approach. This is a significant shift from the previous model where many indicators were resource-oriented. The strategic paper '*Pôle Emploi 2015*', stressed the need to relieve the burden of overly detailed reporting. As a result, the number of indicators has sharply decreased as compared with the previous performance management system (the monthly dashboard now features less than 20 indicators as compared to 70+ previously). The current development of regional management flexibility is designed to provide 'room to manoeuvre' at regional level. Regions may now set their own targets and commit to reaching them. These principles are reinforced in the current '*Projet Strategique*' ("*Pôle emploi 2020*"). In addition, incentives for senior regional managers are available, linked to their performance in the relevant region.

Customer feedback is regarded by PE to be an important driver of change implementation, with input sought from both jobseekers and employers when new processes are being designed. Customer insights are obtained in order to also assess perceptions of ongoing service delivery. Satisfaction measurement results are also made available to the public, thus increasing transparency. In addition, feedback from employees is collected systematically and monitored regularly.

Research and evidence-based analysis of operational policy proposals are an inherent part of the PE organisational approach. In this context particular attention is paid to the evaluation of pilot projects. Evaluations also address performance and process changes on regional and national levels. Many examples are cited by PE of how change initiatives have been subject to rigorous analysis prior to deployment across the organisation. International comparators are also used to inform thinking on strategic change.

Several ongoing innovative projects aim to enhance performance through knowledge-sharing within PE, such as the clustering of local agencies to allow for more relevant performance comparisons, and the implementation of a system dedicated to sharing good practices linked with the innovation process. A central unit is dedicated to the promulgation of innovation at all levels of PE. Regional offices develop and support the innovation process.

A high level of innovation is also evident in the multi-channelling area. A significant amount of work is ongoing and new achievements are in evidence, such as mail.net (provision of an email address for jobseekers and thus allowing direct mail contact with their designated adviser). It is clear that this high level of future-orientated ICT innovation has the potential to improve services and results on both the demand and supply sides of the labour market. The launch of the 'Employment Store' later this year has the potential to position Pôle Emploi as the web-based jobs platform of choice in France. This shift towards a greater

focus on the demand side builds on the already solid achievements in this area, such as large employer account management and HR clubs.

A great strength in evidence at PE is its linkages with a wide range of partners including Regional and Departmental Councils, Local Authorities, Private organisations, Missions Locales, Large Companies, Associations for PwDs and Jobseekers' Associations (liaison committees at national and local levels). Partnership building between actors is a clearly defined objective of PE at all levels of the organisation. These partnership arrangements are designed to ensure innovative and collaborative policy implementation.

In the area of Human Resources Management, the future orientated Strategic Workforce Planning and training initiative (SWP) links with PE strategic priorities and the changing labour market environment, to ensure that the right mix and level of staff will be available to PE over the coming four years. The coaching system for managers provides additional support to the whole process of SWP. Staff feedback is ensured through an annual social barometer. This coupled with the addition of the 'quality of life' indicator (added to the core performance indicators), underlines the strength of PE focus on staff development, satisfaction and support.

### **3. Contextual influences**

The strengths of PE in evidence during the assessment and outlined above, have been developed within a particular context in which PE operates. This context includes the fact that PE is a national public institution under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Dialogue, with a legal basis and financial autonomy. It therefore has a good degree of operational independence. Five ministries are represented on the Board of PE and contribute to the setting of the PE guidelines and priorities, in collaboration with social partners. PE is autonomous in deciding its own organisational structure, in allocating staff, the services it offers and its partnerships. PE also participates in a number of national, regional and local authorities (National Employment, Guidance and Vocational Training Council, Regional Employment, Guidance and Vocational Training Council, and coordination at local level) that drive the implementation of labour market policies.

Priorities are set out in the current 2015-2020 strategic plan and are linked with a tri-partite agreement which currently provides inter-alia for doubling specific, reinforced counselling for jobseekers most in need, from 230 000 people covered in 2014 to 460 000 at the end of 2017. PE is responsible for the delivery of the main part of all ALMPs in France and in the context of increasing support for jobseekers most in need, the longer-term contextual configuration of ALMP supports may ultimately tend towards the concentration of a higher percentage of ALMP delivery within PE.

Support for employers by PE is also to be improved by prioritising support for companies offering the greatest opportunities for registered jobseekers. Creating stronger links with local communities and greater devolution are also emphasised in the tripartite agreement.

PE is also operating in a fairly static economic environment, with low growth in the French economy and relatively high unemployment. Recent reforms of the labour market have yet to produce significant employment results. The overall unemployment rate has remained high at 10.3 in 2014, compared to 10.3 % in 2013 and 7.4 % in 2008, particularly hitting young people, older workers and the low-qualified. Long-term unemployment has risen (as a percentage of total unemployment), from 40.4 % in 2013 to 43.2 % in the third quarter of 2014. That economic background presents significant challenges to PE in its endeavours to improve the functioning of the labour market and thus getting jobseekers back to work. In that context, the current Strategic Plan continues the ambitions set out in the previous plan and underlines speeding up transitions into work, working better with job changers, becoming the partner of choice for enterprises recruiting staff, increased ICT penetration and services, and in general providing efficient services for both jobseekers and employers.

#### **4. Current and potential Good Practices identified during the assessment.**

PE strengths outlined above are indicative of the highly refined innovative and future orientations of PE and that are supported by a range of potentially good practices. These practices should be of high interest to peer PES. These include the already referenced innovation unit operating the 'Innovation' initiative which encourages staff to propose innovations/improvements through a dedicated web access point.

The establishment of a dedicated employer services unit is a model that is regarded as good practice by many within the worldwide PES community. Its combination with the already innovative HR Clubs is of interest for future best practice evaluation. Regular meetings between supply and demand counsellors reinforce this employers' services approach.

The innovations of 'Mail.net' and '100% web' (including video/webchat and appointment booking service) which were piloted, have the potential to develop into a transferable model of innovative good practice. These innovations are reportedly producing very good results thus far, with a high level of user satisfaction. (In this context it is worth noting that unlike many other PES, touch-screen kiosks were not available in the local office that we visited-such computer kiosks are of particular benefit for jobseekers with low levels of IT skills and/or literacy issues). The change-strategy communication campaign to staff could also be usefully emulated by other PES.

Many PES contract out placement services for LTU and those most distant from the labour market, as a way inter-alia of managing the jobseeker flows and services, particularly in times of high unemployment. PE has taken a contrary approach and is contracting out services for job-ready jobseekers, in order to focus on jobseekers requiring in-depth assistance and mobilisation. This has the potential to develop into an interesting best practice model, subject to future evaluation. Of particular interest to peer PES will also be the simulation of workplaces and modelling of on-the-job experiences in a training environment, for targeted jobseekers requiring motivational and placement support.



The future implementation of more on-line staff training modules in the context of an agreed personal training plan, which may encourage inter-alia a better life-work balance is of particular note, as is the availability of on-line staff profiles. Linking the latter to competence based training for staff in the context of future labour market demands, is a model of potential good practice in Human Resources management.

The approach to the management of change, particularly the way of encouraging its ownership by all PE employees is worthy of being considered best practice. This could serve as a model for other PES about to launch a major change strategy.

It is also worth noting that the strengths and potential good practices already outlined above have been partly achieved in the context of an increased availability of financial and human resources within the PE. This availability of increased resources may be a caveat to the transfer of some good practices to other PES.

## **5. Areas where improvements may further enhance PES operations and outcomes**

It is clear that PE has itself identified the areas where improvement is warranted. Indeed there is so much change and innovations ongoing and newly introduced, that it is difficult to identify areas where the application of more attention may currently be applied. A tentative line of adjustment identification, may be to intensify the link between anticipated labour market developments and the definition of objectives, along with weighted target setting at regional and local levels.

There may also be scope to further develop the model of performance dialogue within PE and to promote the further development of an increased climate of ambition amongst all staff. Establishing a link between performance and remuneration at all levels (not just senior) may be worth exploring. At counsellor/placement officer team level, team success oriented incentives could be considered. The danger is that incentives can produce perverse effects and this risk has to be taken into account in their design. Team incentives can reduce this risk. Incentives might cover both monetary and non-monetary benefits. This could also be coupled with a more accelerated increase of local autonomy (e.g. related to staffing) depending on progress in performance covering areas such as HR, ICT, AMLP, Partnerships and local labour market activities.

From an operational perspective there may be room for improving in-depth holistic profiling of jobseekers, coupled with an increased career guidance offer both prior to placement but also the provision of post-placement guidance support of some jobseekers into the workplace. Positioning PE to be the 'career partner' of choice for jobseekers during their working life, could be a future goal. While the methodology for follow-up of referrals of jobseekers to external contractors and agencies is being improved, there is scope for further monitoring of training outcomes and placements in that context, in accordance with the new procurement guidelines. In relation to operational processes, increasingly sophisticated multiple service channels are provided by PE to jobseekers and employers but

the actual direction of jobseekers to a specific and particular appropriate channel may need to be more focused. A review of current employer services guidelines and further staff development in that regard may also help to reinforce the increased PE offering to the demand-side.

## **6. Recommendations**

The main and primary recommendation must be for PE to continue down the current path of change and innovation. A clearer elaboration of risk management analysis, including financial risks, would further strengthen the change management process and provide extra change quality assurance prior to roll out of new initiatives. In relation to pilot projects, new multi-channelling and digital services, it is important that these initiatives do not lead 'separate lives' but are delivered within and are part of a total integrated PE offer.

With regard to future development of PE services, an improved linkage with data sets and research from other government agencies could assist labour market research and thus development of new service responses to future labour market challenges. Consideration could also be given to further integration of more elements of information into the overall PE performance dashboard shared at all levels thus providing more front-line operational feedback into the performance management processes.

The continual enhancement of the new employer strategy by adding new additional services would usefully build on successes to date. In that regard it would also be important to ensure that the increased concentration on jobseekers most distant from the labour market does not negatively impact upon the general overall quality of candidates referred to job vacancies posted by employers to PE for mediation.