



# Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment

Summary report 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle – France



*Written by ICON Institut Public Sector GmbH*

2017



## **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion  
Directorate B — Employment  
Unit B.1— Employment Strategy  
Contact: Renata Häublein  
E-mail: EMPL-PES-SECRETARIAT@ec.europa.eu  
European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels

This publication has received financial support from the European Union programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information, please consult:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

## **LEGAL NOTICE**

This document has been prepared for the European Commission, however it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# **Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment**

Summary report 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle – France



**Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment**  
**PES of France**  
**Summary Report 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle**

**Index**

	<b>Page no.</b>
1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
2. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE CHANGE AGENDA .....	6
3. RELEVANCE, COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE REFORM AGENDA .....	7
4. ASSESSMENT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT .....	8
5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	9

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of the second Benchlearning (BL) external assessment of the French PES (Pôle Emploi) conducted between April 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The team of seven external assessors comprised three PES staff (from the Norwegian, Maltese and Swedish PES), two representatives from the European Commission and two experts from ICON-Institute (the supporting contractor). The programme of the three-day visit included meetings in Pôle Emploi's head office with senior management/directorates and a visit to two local offices (in Nogent-sur-Marne and Vendôme).

The second external assessment of Pôle Emploi was challenging for everyone involved. On the one hand, the 'enabler set' (introduced in 2015) was applied for the first time at Pôle Emploi, while in the first BL visit the old set of enablers was used; on the other hand, the second external assessment followed the agreed focus on changes which took place after the first external assessment. This assessment therefore had two objectives, firstly an initial assessment on the basis of the 29 enablers, and secondly assessing the changes that were introduced after the first BL assessment visit. The visit required a lot of resources in preparation from both Pôle Emploi officials and external assessors. The time and resources that Pôle Emploi invested in the preparation for the Benchlearning visit, particularly the internal self-assessment and various additional documents, were crucial to its success. The external PES BL team gratefully acknowledges Pôle emploi's efforts, even if the delay of reception of documents for two sections of enablers left short time to external assessors for preparation.

Pôle Emploi is a national public institution with a legal statute and financial autonomy. It has autonomy allocating its staff, with its services it offers and in its partnerships. It is administered by a tripartite Board of Directors, whose 19 members include five representatives from the State (of whom one represents the Ministry of Labour), five representatives from trade unions, five representatives from employers' organisations, two representatives from the local authorities and two qualified persons designated by the Minister of Labour.

The overarching objectives of Pôle Emploi are to provide support for jobseekers in their job search and to meet the recruitment needs of companies. In meeting these objectives, Pôle Emploi undertakes a range of tasks, which include labour market searches, improving expertise on the labour market, collecting job offers, guiding and supporting jobseekers, helping and advising companies in their recruitment process, ensuring the link between job offers and applications, and actively participating in the fight against discrimination in the workplace.

Pôle Emploi has a four level structure:

- The national level, at the headquarters in Paris, is mainly responsible for the design and development of national policies, the implementation of some aspects of these policies and evaluation.
- The 17 regional offices are responsible for the development of the regional strategy in line with the national policies while adapting them to regional needs.
- The 90 territorial offices adapt the regional strategy to their specific needs within the territorial level.

- At the local level, currently 905 local agencies are at the heart of the provision of services for clients (jobseekers, people on benefits and employers) – the main activity of Pôle Emploi. In addition, there are 145 specialised agencies and 69 service platforms, whose merger with the network of local offices is ongoing.

## 2. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE CHANGE AGENDA

Even before the first BL cycle, Pôle Emploi had started a vast reform agenda, which affected all levels of the organisation, its processes, structures and products. The reform steps and activities are strongly linked to the strategic objectives approved by Tripartite Agreements. The last one of these was approved for the 2015-2018 period, which has led to Strategic Project 2020 (“Projet stratégique Pôle emploi 2020”). This forms the basis for annual roadmaps (for example the 2017 annual roadmap - “Orientations stratégiques pour l’année 2017”) transforming overarching strategic objectives into operational targets and appropriate activities. Both the Tripartite Agreement and the Strategic Project are monitored on a regular basis to measure the extent to which strategic objectives have been achieved and operational targets have been reached, and the priorities that should be envisaged for the future. The communication of performance results and objectives achieved is driven by the Head Office and it affects all levels of the organisation including the local agencies.

Pôle Emploi’s change agenda is clearly structured and well communicated to all levels of the organisation. It is strongly supported by all the relevant stakeholders of Pôle Emploi. Strong leadership means that the change agenda and its core elements are systematically promoted throughout the organisation and they are implemented at every level. This strong, systematic and continuous commitment of the entire organisation can serve as a benchmark for other European PES that intend to implement fundamental reforms.

Based on the experiences and the results obtained within the previous planning period, the main objectives of Pôle Emploi’s Strategic Project 2015-2020 are to increase customer satisfaction and to increase the number of jobseekers returning to employment. Within these two strategic objectives, four action fields have been identified:

- The digitalisation of processes and the improvement of online services.
- An increase of efficiency regarding the payment of benefits.
- A further strengthening and improvement of partnerships at the different regional levels to achieve open and reliable cooperation with partners.
- The development of a trusting relationship with employers to support them when they need to recruit.

Core elements of the change agenda are a truly innovation-based approach and they include -

- (i) in-house consultation, which foresees different platforms for employees to propose, discuss and further develop innovative ideas,
- (ii) a strong link between Pôle Emploi, the environment in which it operates, and the relevant stakeholders, and

- (iii) mechanisms that facilitate cooperation between Pôle Emploi employees within this environment (companies, jobseekers, service-providers, partners etc.) to improve their service and process delivery.

The governance of change management is built upon a genuine 'programme approach', which has several specific change projects in line with the strategic objectives mentioned earlier. Recommendations from the first BL cycle have been taken into consideration when defining these projects. For the time being, the most important of these change projects are -

- the *recruitment and skills* project. The central idea of this project is to improve the matching quality by paying more attention to competences the jobseekers have and those competences requested by the employers. In addition to information related to formal qualifications and to professional experience, the new approach will provide businesses with a candidate search that has more relevance and is better able to support occupational mobility.
- the "*#DigitalPôleEmploi2020*" project. To make full use of the potential of digitalisation, this project focuses on six actions: (i) simplified access to high quality information and services online; (ii) jointly innovating and adding value to Pôle Emploi's data, in order to enrich digital services; (iii) developing new online approaches and services that are more accessible, and taking user experience into account to a greater extent; (iv) developing jobseekers' digital autonomy; (v) developing the physical/digital mix in the provision of services; and (vi) making digital available to serve counsellors.
- the *Career Development Advice* project (*CEP* – Conseil en évolution professionnelle). This project seeks to provide tools that help to activate jobseekers by putting them at the centre of the integration process. All the tools and the additional support from Pôle Emploi's counsellors should help jobseekers to (i) identify their strengths and areas to work on, (ii) have a better understanding of the job market and how it is changing in respect of their own career path, (iii) clarify and construct their career path, (iv) develop their skills and qualifications through training, (v) master job-seeking techniques, and (vi) implement their plan for (re-)integration into the employment system.

The implementation of these (and other) innovation and change projects is constantly monitored. A rigid steering of progress is exercised through steering committees at each regional level of the organisation. Standardised monthly reports help to identify implementation risks and allow immediate action where needed.

In recent years, Pôle Emploi has implemented an impressive and ambitious change agenda which has led to fundamental changes in their attitude to governance and in the culture of the organisation. In section five, the external team of assessors provides some suggestions and ideas to complement the already existing projects and activities, hoping to consolidate the success of this reform process and focus on those elements which currently work well.

### **3. RELEVANCE, COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE REFORM AGENDA**

As shown above, over recent years Pôle Emploi has implemented a fundamental reform process. Since the first benchlearning assessment in 2015, assessors have

seen substantial change and concrete progress in introducing reforms. The variety and the depth of changes affect all levels of the organisation and involve all of Pôle Emploi's employees, partners, and customers. The pace of introducing the reform agenda has been impressively high.

All reforms have the objective of establishing a results-oriented, customer-focused, efficient organisation, which seeks to improve its image among jobseekers and employers by offering them high value services with competent and committed counsellors. This change programme, however, is happening at a critical time for the labour market, which is still characterised by a high degree of unemployment, specifically youth unemployment, and by obvious barriers for specific target groups wanting to reintegrate into the labour market. It seems therefore logical that Pôle Emploi should concentrate its services on these most vulnerable target groups. However, this may cause some problems regarding the other very important objective of Pôle Emploi of improving its services to employers with suitable candidates for the announced vacancies.

It is worth highlighting the top-down approach, which Pôle Emploi applies in order to channel the variety of reform projects. This has clearly facilitated the dynamic implementation of reforms within the organisation. The price, however, seems to be a relatively low involvement of local agencies as initiators of change processes. Naturally, the successful implementation of change is unthinkable without the broad engagement of local agencies and their staff, but the reforms were "invented" at the head offices. Innovative ideas coming from the local level are possible, but they will only be taken into further consideration for nationwide rolling-out if they are strategically relevant. It would be useful to improve innovative ideas to be developed in a bottom up-approach.

In addition, it is important to note that progress of changes and reforms is monitored constantly. In terms of hierarchical governance, more attention is paid to the reform projects with a higher importance at a strategic level. Results are critically assessed on various platforms, different exchange formats between the different regional and hierarchical levels as well as between employees exist, and appropriate steps are taken if adjustments are necessary. The external assessment visit also made clear that different elements of the reforms come from experiences made in other PES, notably the German Bundesagentur für Arbeit and VDAB in Flanders. The willingness of Pôle Emploi to exchange experiences with other PES in Europe and to refer to successful strategies coming from the outside makes Pôle Emploi a reference model for other PES that wish to improve their performance as learning organisations.

Given the speed of the reforms and the number of the reform projects, the risks identified by external assessors refer firstly to a potential overload for counsellors in local agencies and secondly to interfaces between the different reform projects not always being clear. On the first issue, counsellors should get enough time to get used to changes without becoming overwhelmed, so they feel secure with the established changes, gain full ownership, and are well prepared for any new changes. On the second issue, a better integration of single change projects could be helpful in arranging the single reform steps in a more consistent way. An example of this refers to a better linkage between profiling and digitalised services, and the way these services relate to tools for counsellors, matching and segmentation.

#### **4. ASSESSMENT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

The change process in Pôle Emploi is particularly convincing at a strategic and planning level. Furthermore, the change agenda has been driven in a very clear, concise, systematic, and top-down way. The heart of the process is a strong leadership, which is supported by very committed employees at all levels of the organisation. In addition, the implementation of the change agenda is often



based on the results of preceding pilot projects, which are rigidly monitored and assessed properly. Another supporting factor is the network of partners on which Pôle Emploi can rely at all levels of the organisation. All these factors are important to secure a systematically managed reform and change process.

An important issue in this context is the high number and the variety of change projects which are implemented or planned by Pôle Emploi. Staff at the local level reported that time for consolidation is needed to achieve full functionality of the renewed operational processes. From the perspective of external assessors, this seems necessary to allow front-desk staff in the local offices the breathing time to get used to the changes before introducing reforms in other operational contexts. External assessors therefore suggest a more concentrated approach for the upcoming reforms, and a focus on the employer strategy by strengthening the employers officers knowledge of employers' needs as a first step. In this context, Pôle Emploi should intensify its efforts to structure its vacancies showing levels of required competences. If digitalisation can be regarded as the hull of Pôle Emploi's ship, employers' needs should become the anchor of the next change projects. This would also include Pôle Emploi actively promoting its services as support to employers in recruitment and human resources development. The Dutch and the Flanders PES are relevant partners for information exchange on this.

In this respect, it could be useful to better integrate the different reform and change projects that have been launched (and others which may come in future). External assessors gained the impression that the mechanisms for coordinating change are well developed at strategic and central levels, but lack integration on local level. This may lead to unclear interfaces and inefficiencies when implementing the reform agenda in the employment agencies.

The high importance that Pôle Emploi gives to reviewing the implementation of reforms in all areas and at all stages of processes and step changes is particularly important within its change process. The effects of changes are assessed on a regular basis and the results are constantly communicated through the entire organisation. For this reason, steering groups have been created at the different regional levels, and additional project-related working groups have been established. In addition, employees have the possibility of discussing operational issues in internal social networks. Around a quarter of all staff-members use these platforms for exchanging their ideas, asking questions and getting answers. In addition, staff satisfaction with their working conditions (including the consequences of changes on operational processes) is systematically collected via regular surveys (the "baromètre social").

## 5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The information provided by Pôle Emploi and the results of the assessment visit show a very intense, fast reform process that Pôle Emploi has implemented. The external assessors noted a strong commitment at all levels of the organisation, a consequent orientation of top management to changing the organisation's culture, and a clear focus on user needs. Pôle Emploi is on the way to gradually evolving into a modern, user-oriented and innovative organisation after having been, for many years, a PES that was more focussed on administrative issues related to unemployment.

Imagining Pôle Emploi as a ship which has not yet reached its final port, the external assessors would like to highlight elements which can support Pôle Emploi on its voyage. It is seeking to become an effective employment broker on the French labour market, the first partner for employers in the field of recruitment and placements, and a reliable and competent coach for jobseekers on their way (back) to employment. In this context, its IT system is essential for its stability and for it to achieve a highly efficient performance. As hull of the Pôle Emploi

ship, it seems vital to make full use of the existing potential for digitalisation, especially in the framework of the "Recruitment and Skills Project". The external assessors therefore encourage the management to systematically develop and implement digital tools such that

- (i) employers get easy access to jobseekers' profiles, they can post and easily describe vacancies with the concrete competences required, and they are informed about relevant changes in active labour market policies;
- (ii) jobseekers are activated and supported in promoting their skills and competences in a comprehensive way and in finding the most suitable job;
- (iii) and counsellors can perform their tasks and deliver services to jobseekers, employers, and partners in a more successful and efficient way.

In order to ensure a successful implementation of the "#DigitalPôleEmploi2020" project, we suggest a further reinforcement of promoting digital services to employers, jobseekers, and especially to counsellors as means of support. The perception, especially of counsellors, that digital services are a threat to their jobs or that they only lead to a greater administrative burden has to be taken into account seriously. Additionally, systematic and regular training, in which counsellors learn about the practical advantages of using digital services – e.g. time-efficiency, the reduction of errors in standardised processes etc. – may therefore help lessen their reservations about digitalisation. Moreover, information campaigns for employers and jobseekers as well as individualised support, especially for specific target groups will help to use digital services effectively. Furthermore, communicating the positive effects of digitalisation within all levels of Pôle Emploi, its strategic partners, and the general public are suggested.

As an example for the potentials of digitalisation which have not been fully utilized so far, the team of assessors would like to refer to the holistic profiling. Being one of the most advanced among European PES since it takes into consideration not only formal qualifications and work experience but also (informal) competences, it is only used for digital matching purposes, whereas segmentation, which should be strongly linked to holistic profiling, is not directly connected to it. Counsellors simply work out the segment where the jobseekers belong, and this results in the jobseekers receiving different forms of support and active labour market measures. Connecting profiling results with algorithm-based results for segmentation would help to make full use of digitalisation potential. This should help counsellors make sound decisions based on evidence, and therefore create a more efficient service provision. There are a couple of interesting examples in European PES that may serve as inspiration for Pôle Emploi. In Italy for example, ANPAL has introduced a digital matching and segmentation system within the Youth Guarantee and for a new ALMP measure (its 'reallocation scheme'). Based on profiling criteria, the relative distance of the jobseeker from the labour market is calculated which then leads to more appropriate forms of support. A comparable system is currently being piloted in Croatia and one has also been developed by the Austrian PES.

From a more general perspective, the Dutch PES (UWV WERKBedrijf) has had promising experiences implementing digital services at all steps of the service provision chain, covering all levels of the PES and referring to all client groups. It could therefore serve as a general reference point for future activities and projects of Pôle Emploi in the area of digitalisation.

Other suggestions for ensuring a safe and successful voyage for the Pôle Emploi ship, as it innovates and modernises, would include coping with increased expectations at the political level and from the general public. It is essential that Pôle Emploi gets strong support from their partners to successfully implement the

change agenda vis-à-vis the political, economic, and labour market related uncertainties. In this context, Pôle Emploi can build on strong partnerships at all the different regional and functional levels. As a next step, the definition of clear strategic objectives for each partnership is recommended. This would allow an assessment of the effectiveness of the partnerships and the role of the relevant partners. As a consequence, Pôle Emploi would be able to actively develop and reshape, if necessary, the regional networks and its relationship to single partners. Interesting approaches towards partnership building and management can be found in the Austrian PES and in the Flemish PES in Belgium.

It goes without saying that the reform agenda should always aim to increase the efficiency of service provision and processes. The clearer the advantages of innovations, reforms and changes are – for example in digitalisation, the higher its acceptance by customers, counsellors, and the general public. A strict orientation towards results and efficiency can therefore be regarded as guiding the ship's wheel, steering Pôle Emploi's reform agenda. In this context, the Austrian PES's example could be a worthwhile reference point.

In addition, we also suggest a critical reflection of the fourteen indicators that currently form Pôle Emploi's dashboard: some of the indicators are output-oriented, while the number of result indicators is limited. Currently, customer satisfaction plays a very prominent role within the dashboard. To better focus on efficiency and results, greater use should be made of result indicators. In addition, process-related indicators should be added but the weight of result indicators should be increased and rebalanced in comparison to the customer satisfaction indicators. Models of strategic performance management with a focus on result-oriented indicators can be found in the Estonian PES and the German PES.

Finally, one of the driving factors for the achievements of Pôle Emploi in modernising the organisation is the high level of commitment and the engagement of its staff in local offices. At the same time, the visits to local offices showed that the creativity and the potential of the local level can be activated to a far larger extent than it currently is, if more bottom-up elements are added to the strong top-down governance approach. This is characteristic of heavily centralised PES organisations like Pôle Emploi. Within the framework of strategic indicators, assessors would suggest various measures to unchain the hidden potential of local agencies - more freedom for manoeuvre, and a reward system for local managers and staff. More local autonomy in defining the priorities for action, the right mix of active labour market policies, and/or the target groups to focus on, would also help empower local offices.

The role of territorial and regional offices will have to change from the supervisory model, which is currently in force, to a moderating and coaching approach, in which active support, know-how and expertise is offered to the local agencies. In this context, it may be worth considering positive experiences in Sweden and Denmark where the central and regional offices are seen as helpful partners for local offices, not only when problems occur but also when local offices need to prepare strategic decisions.

Another way to increase a sense of ownership in the local offices, that would better exploit their ideas for improving service quality, is the strengthening of horizontal cooperation between local agencies. The existing social networks where counsellors can discuss and develop solutions for operational problems, and the clusters of similar local agencies, already offer excellent opportunities for an exchange of information between Pôle Emploi's employees. In addition, the team of external assessors suggests a further reinforcement of the benchlearning approach within the clusters which could be supported and moderated by the territorial and the regional offices. The Austrian, Estonian and Flanders PES can offer inspiration here.

