



Lifelong Learning Programme

Paid & Unpaid Work

Introduction

The right for employees to receive payment for employment is valued as a fundamental principle within the European model of Supported Employment.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment regarding issues related to paid and unpaid employment within Supported Employment in Europe.

Background

The European Union of Supported Employment was formed in 1993 and has an agreed definition of Supported Employment which states that:

“Providing support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market”

European Union of Supported Employment 2005

Whilst there are slight variations of the definition across the world, there is a general agreement that clients of Supported Employment should be paid the going rate for the job. Despite the universal acknowledgement of paid employment as a fundamental principle, there remain concerns that clients of Supported Employment are not always receiving either the going rate for the job, the national minimum wage (where one exists) or any wages at all.

The Issues

The issues which have arisen around paid and unpaid work stem from the claims by a range of organisations across Europe who state that they are delivering Supported Employment but, because of the lack of a wage payment, may not be fulfilling a basic element of the European Supported Employment model (paid employment in the open labour

market). To clarify this, it is important to state what Supported Employment is generally agreed not to be:

- Work Experience – payment is not received for work carried out
- Voluntary Work – payment is not received for work carried out
- Vocational Training – this is not work

Whilst acknowledging that work experience placements and voluntary work are not in themselves Supported Employment, it is important to note that they may be acceptable methodologies to assist people into employment as a relevant vehicle to build experience, knowledge and the confidence of the individual in a work environment.

Both are also possible ways for employers to get to know future employees and therefore potentially increase their willingness to employ¹.

There is a danger however, that if individuals progress to work experience or voluntary work (i.e. unpaid jobs) they may be seen as 'working' and can be left in that situation without progressing to paid employment. There is evidence that some providers of Supported Employment are not developing job seekers into paid jobs although this may be for valid reasons such as funding, benefit loss or the individual's inability to cope with tasks in a paid capacity.

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The model of Supported Employment revolves around support interventions for individuals when they are in paid work. By paid work we mean that:

- Individuals should receive commensurate pay for work carried out – if a country operates a national minimum wage this is the least that should be paid. Terms and conditions of employment (i.e. annual leave, pension schemes, and expenses) should be the same as other employees

The European Union of Supported Employment recognises the need and the value of a range of interventions in supporting individuals with disability and disadvantage into employment. However, paid employment is the recognised right of every individual and this is a fundamental aspect of the European Supported Employment model that should be adopted as the ultimate goal by all Supported Employment service providers.

Unpaid work such as job tasters, work experience placements and voluntary work are in themselves not Supported Employment. However, it is recognised that they can be used

¹ For further details see also EUSE Position Paper "Work experience placements".

as a progression activity towards securing paid work in the open labour market. These activities should also be strictly time-limited and should only be organised when there is a genuine need and is an agreed requirement of the individual job seeker.

Conclusion

The European Union of Supported Employment unequivocally supports paid work as the right of every person who seeks employment within the Supported Employment model. The European Union of Supported Employment recognises other “unpaid” work options as being used in an individual’s journeys to paid work but believes that they should be of a temporary nature and serve a specific purpose to improve the skills of the individual ensuring progress and access to paid work.

Further reading:

- EUSE Position Paper “Work experience placements”
- EUSE Position Paper “Values, standards and principles”
- EUSE Position Paper “Working with employers”

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

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