



Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment

Summary report 2nd cycle – Belgium (Flanders)



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VDAB – the PES for the Flanders region of Belgium
Summary Report 2nd cycle

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the results of the second Benchlearning (BL) external assessment of the Public Employment Service (PES) of the Flemish region of Belgium (VDAB - Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding), conducted between July 2nd and 4th, 2018. The team of seven external assessors had three peer PES staff (one Belgian from the French-speaking Walloon region of Belgium, one German and one Slovak), three representatives from the European Commission (one of them as an observer who joined the team at the beginning of the second day) and one expert from ICON-Institut (the supporting contractor). The programme of the three-day visit included meetings with senior management from the head office and a visit to the provincial office in Sint-Niklas. The time and resources VDAB put into preparation for the Benchlearning visit, particularly its internal self-assessment, were crucial to the success of the visit.

VDAB employment services offer a wide range of services to jobseekers, employers and employees through various channels (including face-to-face interviews, call centre, websites, video chats, e-mails and various apps). This can range from career guidance and advice on how to apply for a job, to vocational training which is provided in-house and also contracted out. In its self-defined role as 'conductor of the labour market' it works with a wide range of partners to jointly deliver services to jobseekers and employers. It facilitates initial unemployment registration and it monitors jobseekers' availability for work. In this regard, it now has a relatively recent extra task in that it applies 'conditionality' to jobseekers and reports non-compliance with an activation offer to the National Employment Office (RVA), The RVA in turn either pays their benefits or sanctions recipients in certain cases that have been flagged by VDAB. This application of conditionality provides a challenge to PES staff who would have traditionally seen their role as providers of guidance for jobseekers rather than recommending sanctioning. VDAB is also responsible for processing and paying compensation to employers, providing employment for disabled people and distributing allowances to jobseekers who take part in vocational training.

VDAB is an external and autonomous agency under the supervision of the Flanders Secretary for Work, managed by an independent executive board. More than 80% of its funding comes from the government budget with additional funds from the European Social Fund (the ESF) and other sources such as the organisation's own resources.

VDAB belongs to a minority of PES within the EU PES network in that it is also a training agency with a substantial number of training centres. VDAB consists of its Central Office, five provincial offices and roughly 80 local offices. Furthermore, there are also 60 vocational training centres at the local level. VDAB is embedded into a network of agencies, public bodies and non-profit-organisations within the complexity of the Belgian system. A main partner is the National Employment Office (RVA, see above) which is responsible for the payment of unemployment benefits.

Social partners are involved in its activities at all levels. Representatives of trade unions and employer organisations are included on its Board of Directors. Traditionally, there has been close cooperation with social partners and other actors at regional (Flanders), provincial and at the local levels. The social partners are members of several councils which can influence labour market policy at different levels, from the strategic to the operational.

The local level is formed by the municipalities and several local, mainly publicly funded, agencies. For example, 'one-stop job centres' are established at the local level, where VDAB and social assistance centres cooperate.

2. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE CHANGE AGENDA

VDAB has monitored developments in the labour market intensively for a long time. Labour market analyses revealed that the number of vacancies is increasing steadily as the labour market has become more and more demand driven. The currently available workforce in Flanders will not be able to satisfy the needs of employers for skilled employees in future. Simultaneously, a self-critical assessment of the PES's performance supported by the external Benchlearning assessment showed that the organisation is not ready to face the future challenges. Against this background, VDAB developed its so-called VLAM vision which was approved by the Board of Directors in 2016. The VLAM vision has three main ambitions of the PES:

1. Being an *innovative network director*, that basically leads the co-creation of services with partners and stakeholders.
2. Being an *excellent service provider* that helps each client on an individual basis.
3. Being a *leading brand* in the labour market.

Based on the VLAM vision, VDAB has developed a strategic plan translating these three ambitions into several change programmes. The strategic transformation plan also sets out milestones and benchmarks for the organisation. The new strategy requires both for the organisation as a whole to change fundamentally (structural change) and for a change in outlook among the employees (cultural change). Furthermore, a new service model has to be developed. The strategic choices for the future delivery of services are:

- Career security for each citizen. 'Long-term career thinking' is of greater importance than focussing on job security. VDAB participates in a policy that makes citizens work for a longer period of time during their working life and with greater enthusiasm.
- A digital job market that offers fast, effective and efficient services.
- Collaboration with partners to improve its functioning in a transitional labour market.

Concrete objectives underlie VDAB's new role:

- Working together: reaching more customers, not only jobseekers but all the Flemish working population, and those able to work, as a whole. VDAB wants to become a trusted career advisor from school to retirement. Its customer reach should reflect the workforce.
- Available for work: offering effective and efficient services to fill more vacancies, empowering more jobseekers with new skills and getting more customers into training. Higher performance should be achieved with the same resources.
- Top team for work: every contact with VDAB should offer the same, uniform service at any time and in any place.

Furthermore, the strategic decision was taken to offer services in a 'digital first' manner. Based on these principles an adapted contact strategy was developed. The new contact strategy for jobseekers is structured in three stages:

1. 'Digital first' (online registration will be the norm and new digital tools have been developed, such as the digital 'vacancy dashboard' for jobseekers).

2. 'Human digital (a 'Service Line' offered through a network of service centres). If the jobseeker does not contact the 'Service Line' himself or herself, he/she will then be contacted by the 'Service Line' after six weeks to estimate whether the jobseeker is self-reliant or in need for further assistance.
3. Face-to-face service, particularly for vulnerable groups. Jobseekers needing personal support will get an appointment with sectoral teams (see below) as soon as possible.

The new organisational model is based upon three principles:

1. Corporate: strong customer-focused coordination between mediation, training and collaboration with partners.
2. Sectoral: services will be provided according to six economic sectors¹ and one overall 'sector' for particularly vulnerable groups (the Intensive Service Cluster). Every counsellor and every team leader will work in one specific sector and they will work for all clients (jobseekers and employers) within their particular sector. Jobseekers that need intensive guidance will be referred to the Intensive Service Cluster. The sectoral approach means that counsellors are grouped into sectoral clusters, or teams, which must deliver all types of services for 'their' sector and must therefore have the expertise specific to all the services in their sector. This includes work and expertise on job vacancies, mediation, workplace learning, advice on Human Relations (HR), competence enhancement and collaboration with partners.
3. Flemish: aiming to ensure that all VDAB services offer a uniform quality service all over Flanders.

The further development and the implementation of the strategy has a timeline and action plans for the different levels. Its implementation is accompanied by a comprehensive communication plan which says in detail how staff and stakeholders should be informed in a transparent way. Members of staff can use different channels to express their opinions, such as through their intranet which includes discussion groups, interaction with their managers and team coaches (an open door policy) and also regular surveys among staff.

As an overview, the major changes in VDAB's reform process can be summed up as follows:

1. The change from an offer-driven to a demand-driven organisation should start from the clients' perspective and needs. This applies to:
 - Business process management (BPM).
 - Assessment and orientation through the service programmes.
 - Digital transformation.
 - Improving competencies.
 - Reinforcing VDAB as a conductor in the labour market.
 - Sectoral approaches.
2. VDAB has to consider externally instigated changes such as the 'sixth Belgian state reform', which affects the federal nature of the Belgian state (it

¹ The six sectors are (1) industry, (2) timber and construction, (3) transport and logistics, (4) health care and education, (5) business support, retail and ICT, and (6) services for people and companies.

includes giving VDAB its new responsibilities for monitoring the availability of jobseekers for the labour market mentioned above).

3. VDAB aims to fully take up its Corporate Social Responsibility duties and to become the Flemish government's most sustainable agency.

The implementation procedure started in the second half of 2016 with roadshows presenting the VLAM strategy to the staff in the provincial and the local offices. In preparation for the implementation of the new service model, new team leaders had to be appointed throughout the whole organisation, and the counsellors had to be assigned to the new sectoral teams. For this purpose, counsellors had three choices for the sector team they wanted to join. VDAB managed to ensure that 85% of counsellors got their first or second choices.

The new service model was implemented throughout the whole organisation in September 2018 and this forms an essential part of the first milestone of the new strategy. VDAB aimed to achieve several objectives through achieving this milestone:

- An increased sense of responsibility felt by the jobseekers.
- More user-friendly online tools to support jobseekers.
- The proactive detection of those jobseekers that are most in need of VDAB's help.
- Faster assessment when jobseekers need new services through the call centre 'Service Line' (with a 6 week maximum wait).
- Monitoring self-reliant jobseekers through the 'Service Line' mediators every 3 months.
- The 'warm transfer'² of the jobseeker to provincial, sectoral operations where necessary (with appointments within 2 weeks).
- The provincial face-to-face service is fully organised on a sectoral basis, it works by appointment and it offers space for services with greater added value for both jobseekers and employers.
- Accompanying measures are in place for jobseekers with limited digital skills and non-native speakers.

VDAB expects the first milestone to have an impact on the entire organisation, at the level of 'bricks, bytes and behaviour':

- Impact on bricks: the provincial and the 'cluster' managements had to determine where the different services will be offered in Flanders in future. This was clarified before the end of summer 2018.
- Impact on bytes: business management and IT units created a common roadmap that on the one hand innovates and on the other hand gradually replaces the outdated systems. Every development passed the 'service design techniques' test.
- Impact on behaviour: everyone in the organisation was confronted with change. By September 2018, each manager and facilitator/instructor in the services sector had taken on responsibility for their sector. Supporting processes were set up by the internal training service ('Spoor 21') and the expert network prepared the mediators/instructors for new tasks and responsibilities in their package.

² This includes, for example, telephone calls between the counsellors to discuss a particular jobseeker's situation.

Further milestones will be prepared dealing with the future focal points of the strategy which are (1) lifelong learning, (2) employer services, and (3), looking outside the employment world, the positioning of VDAB in the overall ecological system.

3. RELEVANCE, COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE REFORM AGENDA

Already the report of the VDAB's first Benchlearning assessment approved VDAB as being a mature organisation open for innovation and further development. VDAB has carefully observed developments in the labour market and it has also monitored its own performance and potentials. This has resulted in two general findings, firstly that the "labour market is on fire" and secondly that a fundamental reform of VDAB will be necessary to face up-coming challenges from the labour market, and further external challenges such as 'the sixth Belgian state reform. Two years ago, a decision on a basic reform of the organisation was taken and the VLAM vision was approved. The developed transformation plan contains milestones and benchmarks for the reform process. It will mean nothing less than a structural change within VDAB.

The external assessors support the way the decision to reform was clearly and strongly evidence-based.³ Labour market analyses, together with internal and external assessments of the performance and discussions with stakeholders, formed the basis for the reform decision. Furthermore, the assessors respect the ability of VDAB's leadership to initialise such a fundamental reform process and to overcome the concerns and the resistance of actors and stakeholders (from trade unions for example). In this context, the paradigm shift from an offer-driven to a demand-driven organisation is noteworthy, especially because this shift is closely connected with a new perspective that very much focuses on the needs and interests of customers, in particular employers' interests.

The reform is absolutely fundamental because it applies to all areas and divisions within VDAB. It applies to the service model, the organisational structure and its processes, and the cultural behaviour and mind-set of managers and staff. Furthermore, the change process takes external factors into account (such as the sixth Belgian state reform) and also its relationship with social partners and other stakeholders. The reform also takes on Corporate Social Responsibility though VDAB aiming to become the most sustainable Flemish government agency. Finally, framework conditions are taken into account by positioning VDAB within the overall ecosystem.

The external assessors confirm that the single elements of the reform strategy complement each other and form a concise whole. For instance, the "digital first" strategy requires all clients and staff to have adequate digital skills at their disposal. There are several precautionary measures for jobseekers with limited digital skills, or limited access to the internet, including free access to the 'Service Line', offices keeping their current 'registration phones', the availability of self-service desktop computers, and VDAB's staff offering assistance for using digital tools. The strategic approach shows almost no weaknesses with the exception of the transition from school to working life. The assessors fully understand that while the legal mandate of VDAB starts with the beginning of working life, choosing the right occupation is a difficult challenge for young people. The assessors are convinced that support in the choice of career is decisive in ensuring a successful transition from school to vocational training or employment. Support and assistance should already be offered during schools visit to prepare students for

³ For further details see the tables in section 7.

their working lives. Although VDAB is already active in this field, the assessors see some room for improvement. This would be an excellent area where VDAB could play the conductor role, and orchestrate the relevant partners to contribute to the common objective of a smooth transition from school to further education, work etc.

As VDAB aims to be a lifelong career counsellor, it should have an early intervention approach aiming at seamless transitions from one job to the next job. The external assessors think that the service model could attach more importance to early intervention and job-to-job transitions.

In regard to the single elements of the reform, the assessors can see a few 'intersections' and they see a risk of gaps in the reform. For example, the new service model with its sectoral approach risks creating silos, where an individual jobseeker may get locked in. This particularly applies to the Intensive Service Cluster for vulnerable groups. Mobility and the opportunities to change between sectors should be clearly defined and ensured. A further example is the transfer of data between the three types of service delivery. Information on jobseekers (and in principle also information on vacancies) gained by digital services, telephone calls and face-to-face appointments should be structured such that this data is always completely available in particular during personal contacts. This requires the processing of mass data, including the identification and preparation of the relevant information for users (clients and counsellors). During their visit, the assessors saw that VDAB had already recognized these issues and that it is working on them. However, the assessors would like to stress the importance of these topics.

In the context of organisational change, it has to be mentioned that VDAB tries to establish a slim organisational structure with only few hierarchical levels and short communication lines between teams and services. This should help foster a transparent overview of the organisation and help to clarify people's roles and functions.

The change agenda is not only comprehensive but it is also well-structured and thoroughly planned in a timely way. A long period is foreseen for the development and the roll-out of the implementation plans. For the core elements of the reform, a period of about two years has been used to test and modify the components in three regions, including the provincial office of Sint Niklas which was visited by the assessors. Staff are recognized as the crucial factor in the success of the reform. A detailed communication plan has been developed and several assistance tools and sources for information and exchange are therefore available for staff.

4. ASSESSMENT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Only a few PES in Europe have started their change management process in such a concise and systematic way as VDAB. The external assessors saw a thorough and high level of commitment to change and innovation among managers and staff at all levels. Despite the large number of changes and their fundamental importance, the openness and the will for improvement form a characteristic feature of the organisation. The top management has encouraged staff and managers to take on more responsibility not just for their individual working area but also for the organisation as a whole, and to develop more 'entrepreneurship' in their working places. The latter forms a part of the 'C-MOL' approach which demands that managers take on different roles: coach, manager, entrepreneur, and leader.

At the beginning of the change process, VDAB had already recognized the need for effective management of the reform process and change management was established in the first stage of the reform. Various internal procedures were in-

stalled for the continuous identification and improvement of internal needs. The regulated flow of change follows a clearly defined procedure starting with the ideas for improvement coming from the political sphere, or from external partners, or from within the organisation. The phase from ideas to business needs has several stages such as the validation of its necessity, developing it into a business case for change, and the assessment of its impact on IT systems, on staff and on the budget. Afterwards, the idea and business case are transformed into a change project which follows the requirements of the project management cycle. Furthermore, fitting it into the overall strategy forms an important part of the assessment.

VDAB decided to place the responsibility for the planning and implementation processes of change within management. A separate department O&O ('Organisatie and Ondersteuning' – organisation and support/development) offers support and expertise on change management. As part of its work supporting the changes, the O&O department regularly considers the impact on five fields: organisational structure, organisational processes and systems, competences, resources, and culture. The O&O department is also involved in the development and carrying out of pilot projects and innovation projects which always include the assessment of the relevance of the project. Some evaluations of reform projects are carried out by external experts, or with their assistance.

The reform process is accompanied by a detailed communication plan. For members of staff, there are clear communication formats available for informing them about the progress of the reform. In return, there are also means available for staff to express or discuss their opinions and experiences. For transparent communication, the most important internal channels are the newsletter for members of staff, the intranet, FAQs and a chatroom on Google+. Despite all the different communication formats and the various channels to express their opinion, the external assessors got the impression that front-line staff could be involved in the reform process in a more pro-active and systematic manner.

Further important elements of change management are the support of staff, the management tools, information sources and coaching. As mentioned above, all team leaders were recently appointed. Although the majority of the selected team leaders are experienced as leaders or managers because of their former positions, their tasks and responsibilities have fundamentally changed. Furthermore, there is a considerable number of "new" team leaders with no experience of managerial responsibilities. Several assisting tools and instruments are available such as the adjusted 'start to lead' programme and the so-called Teambox for team leaders.

VDAB offers a wide range of training and of coaching for its staff. Furthermore, various forms of assistance are available including internally or externally provided help, where the reform process causes individual problems such as psychosocial problems. The individual development of staff is supported and guided by personal development plans (Persoonlijke Ontwikkelingsplannen - 'POPs') set up by the managers. A POP is a tool to stimulate and shape individual development.

The improvement of existing tools and methods, and also the development of new tools and products, follows an evidence-based approach with a strong focus on the customers' perspective. For instance, the co-creation of new tools and products through working together with users (staff and customers) forms a noteworthy feature of the reform process which may serve as good practice for other PES. Furthermore, VDAB has developed several tools to visualise elements of this complex reform and its progress. For instance, the 'Strategic House' is a clear and well-structured tool to present single strategies or processes in a transparent way.

A complex and basic reform produces an enormous amount of data and information. Therefore, VDAB is also faced with the risk of information overflow so it has implemented several steps for data-processing and the distribution of information. However, the assessors got the impression that some of the expertise required – in particular external expertise – is not always easily available.

In regard to data processing, VDAB has gained a lot of experience processing the mass data which is needed for the digitalisation of services. The advanced IT-matching system is based on 'semantic searches' and matching processes using sophisticated data mining tools. Test cases for counsellors show a 80% rate of correct predictions.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, the assessors would like to stress that the change process is very well organised. The change plan follows a clear vision, it is well-structured on the different tiers and it contains clearly defined procedures. Its comprehensive approach is completed by a detailed communication plan. Against this background, the assessors would therefore like to encourage the entire organisation to go forward sticking to its reform path. Although VDAB has already recognized the main risks arising from the complex transformation process, the assessors would like to point out some topics which are relevant to the success of the reform process: firstly, the sectoral approach should not lead to silos for customers, in particular, the long-term unemployed should not be 'locked into' the Intensive Service Cluster. Secondly, the ambitious reform process carries the risk of a "too much, too fast" overload for staff. Thirdly, staff should have easy and quick access to any internal or external expertise they need at any time. For these reasons, careful change management is the key to the success of the reform process. Assessors are, however, confident that VDAB is already aware of these challenges.

In the following paragraphs some ideas with references to other PES are presented which could improve service delivery which would support the reform process. The assessor team has only provided suggestions rather than recommendations in this case.

Transition from school to the labour market

Most Member States offer a wide range of support and assistance to young people. Austria, Estonia, Germany, and Malta may serve as useful examples for VDAB. The following suggestions are relatively extensive because the assessors believe that transition from school to the workplace is of special relevance for VDAB.⁴ The listing does not aim to provide a full picture, instead it is simply a source for ideas and further considerations.

The Austrian and the German approach is similar. The following offers to students and measures can therefore be described together:

- The Austrian and the German PES both run career information centres (Berufsinformationszentren) with several channels for information and further assistance such as the use of the different (digital) channels. Both PES offer online tools for students and other persons for information on occupations, careers, and job applications. Their online services also offer tools for self-profiling to ease the search for a suitable career. Although VDAB is already offering similar services, Austria and Germany may serve

⁴ As already mentioned, VDAB is already active in this field. But the assessors think, that the services in this area could be extended in particular for getting hold of the NEETs.

as an inspiration for completing the services and for promoting them to the Youth.

- In both countries, PES counsellors visit schools and inform the students of the demands for a successful transition into the labour market (and also further education). Furthermore, specific counselling is offered in regard to the choice of a career or a particular occupation.

These services are completed through specific preparation and training schemes. For example, the following schemes in Germany may be of interest to VDAB:

- Vocational orientation measures (Berufsorientierungsmaßnahmen) are activities and events that provide secondary school students with vocational orientation and they help students choose a career. For four weeks during school holidays, students can get a detailed insight into various jobs, what those jobs require, and their prospects in their chosen career.
- Career entry mentoring (Berufseinstiegsbegleitung) is directed at weaker-performing school students who are at risk of not being able to gain a foothold in working life. The assistance aims to enable those students successful transition into vocational training, while students in general education schools are provided with career entry mentoring during their last two years before leaving school, and afterwards for up to six months into their vocational training.
- Young people who are unable to enter into vocational training for whatever reason can take part in vocational preparation schemes (Berufsvorbereitende Bildungsmaßnahmen). These serve the purposes of vocational orientation, career choice and targeted preparation for vocational training.

In Estonia, the PES offers career counselling and mediation of career information either individually or in groups. Using various channels all pupils of the relevant age groups respectively their parents are reached. The Estonian service model for career services may therefore offer some elements which are of interest for the Flemish PES.

In Malta, as part of the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which is the education-related and employment-related initiative for young people aged 15 to 25, the PES has set up the following activities, the first of which may be of special interest for VDAB:

- The NEET Activation Scheme provides young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) with personal and professional training, mentoring and constant support, thereby facilitating their transition from education to gainful employment. The programme consists of two main phases: training and then work exposure or further education.
- 'Preventive' (revision) classes for exams: students receive assistance preparing themselves for their 'O level' exams which they usually sit aged 16. Students who fail the exams in 'core subjects' (such as maths and science) are then offered five weeks of free 'preventive' classes in preparation for their next exams.
- MCAST (Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology) offers Preventive Classes: students who fail one of the exams at MCAST are offered free revision classes in a variety of key skills and vocational subjects in preparation for their final assessments.
- ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Summer Courses: students are provided with an additional educational opportunity to acquire new and valuable ICT skills and knowledge.

Furthermore, the Job Bridge Training Centre delivers various information sessions to local educational institutes (both secondary and post-secondary) and various NGOs.

Job-to-job transition and early intervention

The assessors are convinced that the improvement of early intervention, and also job-to-job transition, should both receive more attention in VDAB's new service model. In this regard, the German system may be of interest to VDAB. In Germany, an employee is required to register at the employment agency as soon as he or she is informed that their current employment will come to an end, or at least three months before the employment is due to end. If the time between receiving the notice and the last day of work is less than three months, the individual must report to the employment agency not later than three days after receiving the notice. In consequence, the search for a new job in Germany starts during their current employment, and mediation services (and training measures, if needed) can start very early in order to avoid, or at least to shorten, periods of unemployment.

The promotion of evidence-based information

The systematic use and the internal and external dissemination of tailored and appropriate information could be further developed by seeking inspiration from other PES. Knowledge about research studies and pilot projects, newly developed or adapted instruments and methods, and other evidence-based findings might also be further developed through 'picking the brains' of other PES. Denmark, which publishes its research results on the internet, France and Germany, both providing fact-sheets for their staff, and also Sweden, may have expertise to share with VDAB. The methods and procedures used in these countries may help to ensure that the expertise acquired by VDAB is made available at any time and any place, both internally and externally (with VDAB acting as a sort of "knowledge-broker" for its partners).

The empowerment of staff

For the staff, the new service model requires new competencies and their mindsets need to be adapted. On this point, Sweden may be an interesting example, as the Swedish PES is also now undergoing a basic reform process and the empowerment of its staff forms an essential part of the Swedish reform strategy.

6. SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL SCORING (2018)

External Enabler Scores			
Section A: Strategic performance management	Levels of Evidence	Section B: Design of operational processes	Levels of Evidence
Performance management by target-setting	P=6 D=5 C=5 A=5	Process definition and standardisation	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5
Targets into (key) performance indicators	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5	Implementation of support structure	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Following up performance measurement	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5	Quality management	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5
Use of the results of performance management	P=4 D=3 C=3 A=4	Channel management and blended services	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Section C: Sustainable activation and management of transitions			
	Levels of Evidence	Section D: Relations with Employers	Levels of Evidence
Holistic Profiling	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5	Employer strategy and management	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Segmentation	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=4	Specialised unit for employer services	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Individual action plan and ALMP measures	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5	Matching vacancies and jobseekers	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Early intervention to avoid unemployment, and implementation of the Youth Guarantee	P=5 D=4 C=5 A=5		
Early engagement to reduce the duration of unemployment	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5		
Implementation of service and activation strategy	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5		

Section E: Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services	Levels of Evidence	Section F: Management of partnerships and stakeholders	Levels of Evidence
Ex-ante and ex-post evaluation	P=4 D=5 C=5 A=5	Identification and structuring of relevant stakeholders	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Pilot projects	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=4	Partnership building	P=6 D=6 C=6 A=5
Communication of evaluation results	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5	Management of partnerships with supervising authorities	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Management of change and innovation	P=6 D=5 C=5 A=5	Management of partnerships with social partners	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=4
		Management of partnerships with service providers	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
		Management of partnerships with institutions involved in the Youth Guarantee	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=4
Section G: Allocation of PES Resources	Levels of Evidence	Section H: Identification and implementation of a reform agenda	Levels of Evidence
Human Resources	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=4	Initialisation and design	P=6 D=6 C=5 A=5
Budget	P=5 D=4 C=5 A=4	Mobilisation and implementation	P=5 D=6 C=5 A=5
		Reinforcement	P=5 D=5 C=5 A=5

7. DETAILED EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT, COMMENTARY AND SCORING

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
A1 Establishing the fundamentals of performance management by target-setting	P	6	In principle the clear path and strategy to set the targets for VDAB was consequently followed on.		Strong conductor role Strategy House
	D	5	VDAB tries to maximise the scope for action allowed by the institutional context.		
	C	5	VDAB successfully plays a conductor role for all questions related to the labour market and their partners.		
	A	5	The “strategy house” visualizes in an easy to understand format the key elements to help develop, understand, and explain strategic target setting.		
A2 Translation of targets into (key) performance indicators and measurement	P	5	The model was further developed, the scorecard KPI’s follow the SMART rule and are adjusted annually. The operational results as well as the indicators themselves are discussed with the board of directors.	Monitor the performance development linked to the implementation of the new organisational structure.	
	D	5	However, no clustering of local agencies according to labour market conditions with subsequent adjustment of indicator-levels is established to date.		
	C	5	The newly developed dashboard for operational management helps the staff to focus.		
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
A3 Following up performance measurement	P	5	Maintaining the high level already achieved. Top down and bottom up processes are fully functional. Communication is open and fair, trying to transport meaning and insight. Staff is well involved in reflections on improvements to the services for the customers. Staff is aware of performance, due to visits of deputy DG to regional management teams.		Regional management teams are encouraged to create measures to enhance performance.
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			
A4 Making use of the results of performance management	P	4	Stable situation with minor changes since last visit. No real benchmarking established as result levels are not made directly comparable.	Reflect on intensifying the non-monetary incentives like celebrations of specific achievements. Further develop the performance management system by introducing an expectation level on all levels of the organisation	
	D	3			
	C	3			
	A	4			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
B1 Process definition and standardisation	P	5	The fundamental change of the service model and of the organisational structure caused changes in the processes. Responsibilities were also redistributed. The new business model implicates some new challenges such as the link between the Call Centre and the regional offices. Process definition and standardization are still of high quality and effectively support the change process.		Adaption of processes and standardisation activities within a fundamental reform process.
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			
B2 Implementation of support structure	P	6	A high level data management is considered to be crucial for the success of the reform of the organisation. Therefore, the alignment of IT and service strategy is very important in the reform process. The IT was developed and is currently able to handle big data. The improved matching system is based on semantical search and matching processes using advanced data mining tools. Test-cases for counsellors showed a 80% rate of correct predictions.		Experiences in data mining in the field of labour market and labour market policies. Responsible use of big data. Tools to support staff and in particular team leaders (boxes).
	D	6	Specific data management and monitoring teams have been deployed. Furthermore, data protection is of high priority and big data are used in a very responsible manner.		
	C	5	The support structure is clearly defined and structured. The necessary information is (quickly) available for the staff. For instance, the team leaders who are of crucial importance in the reform process, have access to a specific information tool, the so-called team leader boxes. These boxes contain all the necessary information (including examples of good practice) for team leaders to roll-out the new service model and to implement the sectoral organisational structure.		
	A	5	A challenge for the change management is the risk of information overload.		

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
B3 Quality management	P	5	In the last years the organisation could further integrate the Quality Management into the overall management processes.		Integration of the Quality Management into overall management processes. Use of Quality Management in (fundamental) reform processes.
	D	5	VDAB has been recently reviewed by assessors of the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) and retained a high overall scoring (627 of 1,000).		
	C	5	The Quality Management focuses on end-to-end processes. In case that the end in the change process is reached, the process was new defined.		
	A	5	All steps of the QMS from the design of processes up to the permanent review and adaption are integrated in the reform process.		
B4 Channel management and blended services	P	6	The new service strategy required the development of a new service model based on the strategic choice to offer services in a digital first manner. This will replace the approach of "choose any channel – multichannel".		Clearly defined and staged contact strategy with a strong customer orientation.
	D	6	The new contact strategy for jobseekers will be structured on three stages with clearly defined conditions and interfaces between the stages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Digital first (e.g. online registration will be the norm). 2. Human digital (a 'Service Line' is offered by service centres). 3. Face-to-face service in particular for vulnerable groups. 		
	C	5			
	A	5	For the implementation of the new service strategy new digital tools and products are developed in co-creation with users (members of staff and clients – see section E). Staff is trained in the use of these new tools and products.		

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
C1 Holistic Profiling	P	6	The new organisational structure is closely linked to the service provision to the customers. The model is under development since 2015 and has already been the basis for the last assessment.		Experimenting with advanced analytics to develop a new proactive profiling.
	D	6	The evaluation of the new organisation was accompanied by the design of a modified profiling process.		
	C	5	Use of a self-assessment (with a limited number of questions) to support the profiling. This new approach does not follow typical disadvantaged groups of jobseekers, but rather individually assess distance of each client from labour market.		
	A	5	Depth of profiling adjusted to the different stages of service provision.		
C2 Segmentation	P	5	The segmentation process follows a threefold logic. The first segmentation is according to the reliability of the customer. Those who are considered self-reliant can follow the online strategy on their own until they either found a new job or they lose their status. Once they have lost the status "self-reliant" activities and progress are closer monitored and followed by the counsellors.	Closely monitor the progress for jobseekers far from the labour market in sector 7	Combination of different services in sectors, unifying the expertise on jobseekers, employers and training. Segmenting clients according to economic area brings more precise and faster response in matching process to employers' needs.
	D	5	The second segmentation is according to the distance to the labour market (sector 7).		
	C	5	The third segmentation is according to the assumed economic area. (sectors 1 to 6).		
	A	4	Full implementation of the new model in all regions in September 2018.		

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
C3 Individual action plan and ALMP-measures	P	5	In principle no major change.		
	D	5	Experimenting with big data analysis for the suggestion of job alternatives based on individual biography and experience comparable to the Amazon model. Automatically offering jobs not only according to formal certificates of the job seeker but following a more holistic approach.		
	C	5	Individualized actions (although not formulated in a formalized IAP) start immediately after registration, where based upon self-assessment client receives to his or her online account individualized hint and tips on how and where to search for a job, accordingly with individualized actual job offers tailored to client's profile and preferences.		
	A	5			
C4 Early intervention to avoid unemployment and implementation of Youth Guarantee	P	5	No changes	Some PES do have a legal basis to register employees as soon as they receive a licensing information and thus can use the time prior to effective unemployment to support them in finding a new job. This might also be a way ahead for VDAB to prevent unemployment and save benefits. Consider to invest more into the early phase of transition from school into (vocational) training or academic studies to help the next generation to lay a good foundation for their career by professional counselling at school and after they left school.	
	D	4			
	C	5			
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
C5 Early intervention to reduce the duration of unemployment	P	5	Development of an “Acceleration Plan” to speed up the integration process especially for LTU. The new model has the potential to support jobseekers depending on their segmentation at individual speed without losing time.	It might be helpful to closely monitor for a potential loss of time when a self-reliant job seeker does not follow the expected pass until he or she is phased into a stricter scheme by a counsellor. VDAB could consider if its trustful relationship with policy makers would allow VDAB's advise to be heard even more, e.g. on initiating reforms concerning unemployment prevention so that VDAB could pro-actively work with workers at risk of becoming unemployed.	
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			
C6 Implementation of service and activation strategy	P	5	No change		
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice		
D1 Employer strategy and management	P	6	It is very clear that employers as a target group lie in a centre of VDAB's service strategy: VDAB defines one of its three core missions as being "filling in vacancies".		Yearly VSOP sectorial plans developed by TOP BOTTOM and also BOTTOM UP approach reflecting provincial sectorial needs		
	D	6	VDAB has since 2015 clearly stepped up its effort to approach employers more effectively and efficiently. Strategic objectives are defined clearly at VSOP sectorial plans developed at central level and elaborated comprehensively at provincial level for each sector.				
	C	5	New service model is offering better employer targeted services, more intensive cooperation, faster response to employers' needs, and better and more precise matching.				
	A	5	Wide range of supporting activities aimed at employers such as sectorial days, do days, inspirational sessions and perception evaluations are providing higher added value to employers' service delivery.				
D2 Specialised unit for employer services	P	6	Creation of sectorial units involving job mediation, counselling, account managers dedicated to employers and job coaches created a unique platform very close to employers as a prime target group. This offers better coordination between job mediation and trainings.	Keep a close look at good balance of workload between sectorial teams.	Matrix organisation is stepped up with new model proposed and provides even higher potential for achieving significant results – continues to be an example of good practice		
	D	6					
	C	5				Through more in depth knowledge on employers' needs based at sectorial approach, better knowledge of employers within a given sector and more personal approach, employers are served more swiftly and more accurately.	Focus at improving of employers' feedback on matching results.
	A	5					

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
D3 Matching vacancies and jobseekers	P	6	Matching of vacancies and jobseekers has improved through closer collaboration with employers organized at sectorial level. Better knowledge of employers' needs and faster response time is advantage of this approach.		Using of innovative ICT such as A.I., advanced analytics and data mining in process of more precise profiling of jobseekers and provision of enhanced and more precise matching opportunities.
	D	6	Organizing sectorial days and do days contribute to better understanding of employers' requirements, therefore helping to more precise matching.		
	C	5	Clear focus on competences and matching based upon competences is clear as in Digital First strategy (with its filling vacancies priority) as at all levels in VDAB.		
	A	5	Using of A.I. and development of new "My career" platform broadens opportunities to offer best corresponding matches, increasing so efficiency of whole matching process.		

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
E1 Ex-ante and ex-post evaluation	P	4	<p>VDAB clearly has an innovative culture and an entrepreneurship spirit, empowering staff at all level of the organisation.</p> <p>Many evidences are collected (from focus groups, clients, staff...) and are used to improve performance.</p>	<p>Pole Emploi start-up approach could help taking the most of the Workout Lab initiative.</p> <p>VDAB could get inspired by the Swedish PES "jobtech platform" regarding ecosystem building for technological innovation (see also F2).</p> <p>Some more attention/innovation should have been brought at LTUs in the design of the Intensive Support Services.</p>	<p>The Workout Lab.</p> <p>The Strategy House document.</p> <p>The setting up of a cross-functional team responsible to tactically translating high level strategies and making these happening.</p> <p>Strong collaboration between the cross-functional team, the evaluation team and the VIONA network.</p>
	D	5	<p>A cross functional team was set up late 2017. Its role is to translate high level strategies into concrete tactics; it develops methodological tools (like the strategy house which gives a A4 overview of any strategy), as well as strategic planning.</p> <p>SWOT analyses and evaluations are regularly carried out i.e. by the cross functional and the evaluation teams; they are complemented by external studies made by the VIONA university research network.</p>		
	C	5	<p>A new approach for quantitative evaluation has taken place.</p> <p>The Intensive Support Services approach is interesting which deserves to be closely looked at.</p>		
	A	5	<p>Besides the steered innovation, innovative ideas from staff, partners, customers and citizens could be grasped and developed via Hackhatons and the future Workout Lab.</p> <p>Initial plans to design and develop new services do not seem to be very elaborate but seem to quickly improve once actions start being carried out, being reviewed and being optimized.</p>		

Enabler	Phase	External Score1 to 6	Comments(observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
E2 Pilot projects	P	5	Big strategic projects currently on going are the digital first and the sectoral organisation ones. Two multidisciplinary and agile innovation teams are responsible for these 2 projects, drawing and updating workplans. Three local pilot projects have taken place in East Flanders for 3 years to test these initiatives.	It might have been interesting to take the opportunity of the 3-year period to run some more pilots, in addition to the East Flanders ones.	
	D	5	The Autumn 2018 roll out has been carefully planned, taking into account the pilots experience.		
	C	5	Pilots and proof-of-concepts have been added to the innovation management process. Interreg projects are being carried out as pilots for future-oriented projects.		
	A	4	The big strategic projects benefit from fine-tuned pilots whereas for smaller IT projects, pilots planning is less detailed.		
E3 Communication of evaluation results	P	5	Communication throughout of the organisation is one of VDAB strong points. A lot of learning material has been made available for the Autumn 2018 roll-out (information days, newsletters, intranet, interaction with managers, FAQ, Google+ ...)	Communication of results of evidence-based research studies to staff and partners could be improved e.g. by publicizing them on the internet site (like the Danish PES) or via 4-pages fact sheets like French or German PES (see also F5).	Top and middle management have been deeply involved in the communication of results.
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score1 to 6	Comments(observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
E4 Management of change and innovation	P	6	Change management is one of VDAB's strengths. Changes have become part of the VDAB's daily life. VDAB is a process-based organisation which is constantly re-engineering its business and working processes. More details about change management are given in section H1.		Inspirational sessions open to staff, customers, partners and citizens are regularly organized.
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
F1 Identification and structuring of relevant stakeholders	P	6	Very active and strategic approach to a variety of stakeholders on sectoral level, seems to be the basis for the conductor role of VDAB on the labour market. The governance model is complex but it ensures the full support of all stakeholders for VDAB's approach. The creation of a new partner platform justified the higher scoring in the "Do" dimension.		Partnership platform that includes all projects and all partnership agreements
	D	6			
	C	5			
	A	5			
F2 Partnership building	P	6	Partnerships are at the core of the mission and strategy of VDAB. There is also the understanding that everyone in the organisation is a conductor. Application of the PDCA-cycle in the management of partnerships. Partnership building follows a clear plan with priorities set according to the overall strategy. As compared to the 1 st BL cycle, the structure of VDAB was reviewed and units for partnerships management were reunited with the mediation and training services within sectoral units that decide together on making, buying or co-creating. Partners' strategy is decided at top level and is translated, tailor-made by sectors who can look for and establish synergies with sectoral partners. This justifies the higher score in the "plan" dimension.	As mentioned in E1, VDAB could get inspiration from Swedish PES "jobtech platform" regarding ecosystem building.	
	D	6			
	C	6			
	A	5			
F3 Management of partnerships with supervising authorities	P	6	There seems to be a successful tradition of involvement of the supervising authorities in the annual policy cycle and business plans inclusive of reporting on results.	VDAB could consider if its trustful relationship with policy makers would allow VDAB's advise to be heard even more, e.g. on initiating reforms concerning unemployment prevention (see section C.5 and German PES)	
	D	6			
	C	5			
	A	5			

Enabler	Phase	External Score1 to 6	Comments(observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
F4 Management of partnerships with social partners	P	6	There seems to be a continuously successful tradition of involvement of the social partners on the central level regarding developing and approval of business plan and resource planning, regular reporting on effects. At regional and local levels the traditional cooperation with social partners and in particular with their sub-organisations is continued.		
	D	6			
	C	5			
	A	4			
F5 Management of partnerships with service providers	P	6	The partnerships continue to follow a clear and comprehensive strategy including an openness to every actor which is a potential partner. Very good and up to excellent management of partnerships can be found at all levels of the organisation.	As mentioned in E3, VDAB could better promote its evidence and findings and share these with its operational and strategic partners, acting somehow as "knowledge broker" (see Danish, German or French PES).	
	D	6			
	C	5			
	A	5			
F6 Management of partnerships with institutions involved in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee	P	5	Well-structured strategic co-operation with all concerned partners. The checking and action, i.e. the completion of the cycle, could be more developed. The "Act" dimension received a slightly lower score as there is room for improvement in partnership building for preventing young people becoming NEETs in the first place, especially establishing systematic partnerships for career advice with school students. Some pilot projects such as the "excellent partnerships" networks exist at local level that address drop-out and school-to-work-transitions (e.g. "talentenhuisen" which are offices set up with partners to help bridging the gap between education and job market in specific sectors such as care, logistics, education ...) (see also section C.4).	VDAB could consider how resources put so far in NEETs prevention/career guidance for school students could be made more systematic (see also section C.4)	Talentenhuisen could provide a means to help bridging the education/job market at a sectoral level, with a sectoral specificity.
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	4			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
G1 Human Resource Management	P	5	<p>VDAB has established a high level HR-forum to coordinate the resource management. Key activities of the forum are about staffing und – indirectly – with training.</p> <p>Most of the activities in the HRM are dealing with reform of the organisational structure in view of the new service delivery model. Against this background the following measures have been taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaption of the job profiles for team leaders and managers. In the meantime, all new team-leaders are selected and they will now form their new teams. • Implementation of the personal development plan for all team leaders and managers based on the C-MOL leadership model. • Formation of the teams. Each counsellor had three options for selecting the new team. About 85% of the first and second choices could be realized. <p>The change is accompanied by risk analyses for the employees of VDAB including psychosocial risks and burdens. Risk analyses are carried out by internal and external preventive services.</p>		Personal development plans (based on C-MOL leadership model)
	D	5			
	C	5			
	A	4			
G2 Budget allocation and use	P	5	<p>In times of fundamental changes in the organisational structure and in the service delivery model, the budgeting faces some challenges like trying to keep the overview. The managers are busy to manage all the changes and take little attention to the links to the budget.</p> <p>Up to now, no serious problems appeared.</p> <p>The use of cost-effectiveness accounting shows some room for improvement (which might be caused by the current fundamental changes).</p> <p>The recommendation from the last visit to improve the linkage between budgeting and ALMP-planning is still under construction.</p>		
	D	4			
	C	5			
	A	4			

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
H1 Initialisation & Design	P	6	At VDAB the need for changes is identified systematically and regularly, based on various pieces of evidence and on an in-depth analysis of future trends and challenges. Pilots are used frequently to test and evaluate particular change projects before launching them.	Consider a structured method to enhance the involvement of front line staff in early stages of change design.	Development and continuous communication of long term strategy
	D	6	A long-term strategy gives clear orientation on the direction of the change agenda, manifesting the reasons for reform and the expected benefits. In terms of execution, processes are well defined and responsibilities clearly set. Clear impact expectations are defined in terms of performance results and flanked by corresponding indicators. There is some room for developing a more systematic "bottom-up" process, involving front-line staff in the regional agencies in a more structured manner to the early identification of aspects of change.		
	C	5	The participation of stakeholders is ensured and internal expertise is taken into account.		
	A	5	VDAB lives the PDCA cycle and takes the lead in modernisation of public services. Change is considered positive and essential to keep up with the transformation of society and labour market. Strong effort to create an agile organisation to act on the labour market not only at top level but also within operational units.		

Enabler	Phase	External Score 1 to 6	Comments (observations, arguments for re-scoring the internal score, etc.)	Suggestions/ recommendations	Aspects of good practice
H2 Mobilisation & Implementation	P	5	All changes are implemented by projects with clearly defined steps, milestones and responsibilities. The change projects are communicated in a very structured manner to the regional agencies, using different channels and methods. Still, lots of room for manoeuvre is left to the local level in defining operational details, thus creating a strong impact to the "doing".	Stimulate the discussion on change implementation between the different levels of the organisation, e.g. by using the method of the "learning table".	"Learning tables" on defined topics for collegial advice between staff members.
	D	6	Stakeholders and the general public gain overall transparency on the change projects through publications on the process of "getting ready for the future of work".		
	C	5	Altogether, a strong communication process internally as with partners and stakeholders to explain the why, what and how of the change agenda.		
	A	5	However, there is still potential for a more refined dialogue on how the change projects are perceived by employees which are directly affected by the planned changes. The good practice of "learning tables" could be transferred to a discussion-format for reflection and advice on the implementation-process between <i>all</i> levels of the organisation, thus avoiding information losses that the classical "cascade"-communication involuntarily always implies.		
H3 Reinforcement	P	5	The anchoring of all projects is regularly and systematically monitored. All projects are evaluated, some of them by external experts. Staff's feedback is collected and taken into account systematically for further improvement. Good practices are shared.	Consider implementing a structured process for making success stories visible and also for your "celebration" of success.	Staff-Questionnaire on reorganisation 3 months, and 9 months after reform-implementation
	D	5	The new organisational model together with the online strategy were tested and modifies for more than three years before full implementation in all units of VDAB.		
	C	5	Still, there is potential for defined feedback loops for a more systematic transfer of good practices between the local job agencies. Establishing regular dialogue formats (not only "upwards", but also horizontally) could foster a continuous discourse on changes, improvements and results through the entire organisation.		
	A	5			

