



Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion

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Norway 2009

Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people

Minutes



On behalf of the
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people, Norway

The Peer Review was hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion

Day 1

Welcome address

Director-General Ulf Pedersen, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, welcomed the participants, describing the importance of active inclusion as an instrument to address poverty and create a link between the employment and the social services.

Norway's social protection and inclusion policies are similar in many ways to those of the European Commission, he said, as they share the priority of reaching people excluded from the labour market. Having a job is the best safeguard against social exclusion so the financial crisis makes it more important than ever to bring as many people as possible into the labour market.

Norway's Qualification Programme, set up in 2007 as part of the Action Against Poverty programme, is designed to support people with reduced working capacity, many of whom have multiple problems, and find it difficult to reach the labour market. As many have been on social benefits for a long time they have fallen into a 'dependency' culture, but it is possible to help them change their situation by improving coordination between the different public bodies with which they come in contact with and offering them "personalised pathways to employment".

Peter Lelie, Directorate-General, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission, described how the Peer Reviews were set up in 2004 as part of the European Union Social Exclusion Programme (SEP). The present Peer Review is taking place in the context of the sixth annual Peer Review programme. The reviews have been designed as a method of mutual learning in which a host country describes a good practice or a policy problem, and obtains feed-back from peer countries and stakeholders. At the same time countries learn from each others' best practices in order to adapt relevant aspects of these into their own policies and programmes. The process is supported by a thematic expert and Commission officials.

Together with the Social Protection Committee and ÖSB Consulting, the Peer Review organiser, the European Commission is constantly trying to further improve mutual learning and the Peer Review methodology. For next year it has been proposed that three new seminar formats would be developed:

- OMC workshops: larger seminars (up to 70/80 participants) in which results of Peer Reviews on a particular issue could be discussed at the European level with a broader audience (SPC delegates, experts, stakeholders...). Two such workshops could be organised each year;
- Follow-up Peer Reviews: seminars that would be organised some time after a Peer Review has taken place, in which a follow up could be done of the issue under discussion (Peer Reviews are often about pilot projects, the follow up could be organised after more evaluation data have become available). Such a follow up seminar could involve more

stakeholders from the national, but also from the regional and local level (people involved in policy implementation);

- Flexible mutual learning exchanges: in 2010 two Peer Reviews will be reserved for quick exchanges in a flexible format on a policy problem of immediate concern.

Mr Lelie said that, also on the basis of the likely work programme of the Social Protection Committee for next year, the European Commission has suggested that the 2010 Peer Review Programme could focus on three themes:

- social inclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities;
- achieving active, healthy, dignified and secure ageing; and
- assessing the social impact of the economic and financial crisis and measures to tackle it (governance issue).

The subject of Norway's Peer Review: active inclusion, is very timely, he said, as in October 2008 a Commission Recommendation on active inclusion, later endorsed by the European Council and European Parliament, argues for a more integrated approach to support people that are far from the labour market in getting access to it by combining adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and quality supporting services. The publication of the recommendation and its subsequent endorsement is an important breakthrough but it is still to be seen to what extent and how the recommendation can be put in practice. In the coming months and years the Social Protection Committee will develop a monitoring framework. In this context a study on minimum income schemes in the EU Member States had just been produced by the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion¹. In the report it is argued that in many of the Member States there is a lot of room for improving minimum income schemes and although it seems that increasingly active labour market policies are accessible for people on social assistance benefits, supporting services often leave a lot to be desired. It is to be hoped that the current crisis will not lead to the weakening of active inclusion policies as priority attention may shift away from people far from the labour market to those that have just become unemployed.

The Norwegian Qualification Programme (QuP) seems to incorporate several characteristics of the active inclusion approach that is advocated in the Commission recommendation. This Peer Review is an excellent occasion for in depth analysis and discussion of the programme.

Mr Lelie warmly thanked the Peer Review host, the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion for organising the Peer Review.

¹ For more information see: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/2009/minimum-income-schemes>

Presentation of the Norwegian background for the implementation of the individual Qualification Programme

Heidi Rusten Lohrmann, Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion gave the socio-economic background to the QuP. The Norwegian labour market has:

- high labour-force participation of 80% of those aged 15 to 64;
- low unemployment, with only 2.8% registered unemployed in 2009, although more people 'at the margins' rely on 'top-ups' from social assistance;
- approximately 7.9% of the population with an after-tax income below 60% of median income (considered the poverty line) (2004-2006 figures).

The QuP is part of a general strategy to move people into work and work-related activities, reduce the numbers on benefits, and provide income security and a decent life for those who cannot work.

The strategy came into being as part of the new Employment and Welfare Administration Reform: 'NAV Reform'. Its main elements are to create more policy instruments in the field of labour market and welfare policy and produce an action plan to combat poverty.

There are many challenges at the margins of the labour market, said Ms Lohrmann, as 40% of social assistance recipients have been on benefit for over six months and have multiple problems ranging from drug abuse and mental problems, housing needs, or chronic ill-health; and over 50% fall below the poverty level. Given the fragmented nature of the benefit and employment services, clients have to visit, or are passed from, one agency to another for help.

The Ministry has piloted several schemes, including those to reach immigrants and the socially vulnerable, as well as various labour market activation programmes for social assistance recipients. The preliminary results show that the success of these measures depends on working closely with recipients right through the programmes and giving them useful training in social and coping skills. Using the information gained, the government unveiled its Qualification Programme in 2007.

The QuP links up all the different services from social assistance, health and employment, and targets individuals on long-term benefits or with reduced earning capacities, to help them enter employment. Participants who sign up to the QuP are given an activity plan comprised of a range of confidence-building and work-oriented activities, and receive a regular, minimum income for participating.

Since the QUP began 7,000 people have participated and 6100 are currently participating.

The aim is to run the QuP out of all the local NAV offices by 2010, administered alongside other employment and benefits programmes. The QuP staff maintain close cooperation with the health services, employers, NGOs and other stakeholders. When needed private agencies are contracted to carry out specialised work, such as working closely with employers.

As the QuP is still in its infancy, work is ongoing to ensure that all programmes are based around individual needs to and for all offices to adopt a standardised Work-ability Assessment test to be completed by all individuals before they enter the Programme.

The Individual Qualification Programme

Astrid Moldestad, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, said the QuP was included in the new Social Services Act passed in Norway in October 2007. It is administered by the Labour and Welfare administration (NAV) office at the municipal level.

It is designed to fight poverty, increase employment through closer assistance and follow-up by the labour and welfare administrations and is a job-oriented programme with a low entry threshold for those who are able to find work. Participants must be between 19 and 67 years, have a significantly-reduced ability to work, or earn a living wage and be receiving limited National Insurance benefits. Before entering the QuP they complete a Work-ability assessment so a programme can be drawn up to suit their needs.

Participants must be sufficiently motivated to make the transition to working life, and must agree to participate in work-directed measures and job searches. Usually the QuP begins with training activities focused on acquiring social and coping skills.

It runs full-time (37 hours a week) for a year, during which time participants will be helped to move from a lifestyle dependent on welfare, towards one aimed at entering into the world of work or taking a formal training course. The Programme is tightly organised within a rigid framework, but is adapted to each participant's needs, for example to include time for medical treatment or rehabilitation, where appropriate.

Ms Moldestad described how participants appreciate receiving a predictable income every month, as the overall 'salary' is 145,762 NOK (€17,362) per annum, with those under 25 receiving two-thirds this amount. All participants are eligible for additional welfare benefits, such as child benefit, and this 'salary' is both pensionable and taxable.

If necessary individual programmes can be extended for a second year, or even a further year, and participants who drop out of the QuP can return by renewing their application.

Discussion

In the discussion and question-and-answer session, participants discussed the approach of offering participants an annual 'salary'; and **Aase Lunde from the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion** said this was intended to offer them an incentive.

Asked whether individual wishes are taken into account in drawing up programmes, **Elisabeth Munch-Ellingsen, Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration** said the QuP offers a general range of measures. The participants' needs are assessed during the Work-ability Assessment. All participants can have an Individual Plan if they ask for it.

Zaneta Mecych, Labour Market Department, Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was concerned about whether it could be assumed that the Programme's aim was to include all the long-term unemployed, as she explained in Poland this group of people suffer critical problems and need support. She also wondered whether the level of benefit was higher than unemployment benefit, which would encourage all unemployed people to participate.

Trude Eliassen, Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, said the Programme is aimed at people who could work but are far from the labour market, rather than those who have only been unemployed for a short time, as they can participate in ordinary labour market programmes.

Neil McIvor, Disability and Work Division, Department for Work and Pensions, UK, asked whether any pressure was put on people to participate.

Ms Munch-Ellingsen responded that in some ways it was an offer people “could not refuse”, as it could sometimes be a condition for continuing to receive social benefits. But, she stressed, the great benefit of the Programme was that in giving people a fixed salary, it gave them dignity.

Asked whether this programme was intended as a substitute for social assistance, **Odd-Helge Askevold, Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion**, clarified that at present not everyone on social assistance benefit could participate.

Asked about adapting the QuP to other groups **Ms Rustren Lohrmann** said other programmes targeted at people on disability benefits also exist. **Ms Eliassen** added that there are many other programmes dealing with vocational rehabilitation, which aim to prevent people having to draw long-term disability benefit and developing a ‘dependency culture’. She said an important element of the QuP is the ‘Work-ability assessment’ tool.

Katherine Duffy, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) asked whether the income participants receive is above the poverty level, and for details of participants’ histories before entering the Programme.

Ms Eliassen said the ‘salary’ was below the poverty level of €18,900. Those in the target group usually had a history of living in poverty, with all its associated problems. The types of people chosen to participate may vary from one municipality to another, but because of pressure on reaching targets NAV offices may be tempted to choose people who are most likely to succeed. **Ms Munch-Ellingsen** added that some participants had been sporadically involved in other programmes.

Responding to a question about local NAV offices, **Mr Askevold** said after reorganisation, the social insurance and labour market policies, which are state responsibilities, were brought together under one roof with the social assistance agency which falls under local jurisdiction. The QuP is run jointly by these two bodies within the NAV office, and as municipalities vary in size from 500,000 inhabitants to just over 1000 each office is responsible for developing its own QuP, and receives a budget tailored to its needs.

Dianna Roxana Capata, Directorate for Social Inclusion, Romanian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, wondered about criteria to participate and **Ms Mecych** wondered whether training courses are tailored to local labour market needs.

Ms Eliassen reported that some local offices try to match training to local labour market needs.

First evaluation results of the Individual Qualification Programme

Angelika Schafft, Work Research Institute (WRI), Norway, said WRI conducts a formative evaluation and collaborates with the Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research, who will conduct an effect evaluation through comparing participants to a control group based on a database of the Norwegian population since 1992. The effect evaluation will mainly take place in the period 2012-2013. The first evaluation report is based mainly on qualitative case studies in 12 municipalities, focusing on experiences with the programme in the first 1 ½ years, an early stage of implementation. Participants are also interviewed to get a clearer picture.

The evaluation has thrown up differing views about the aim of the QuP. Some believe the aim is to get people *into* the labour market, whereas others believe the aim is to move them *closer* to the labour market.

Implementation of the Qualification Programme

When the QuP began in 2007/08, as there was a delay in drawing up a standardised Work-ability Assessment, staff at the local NAV offices had considerable discretion in granting participation. However, given the fact that potential participants are from such a heterogeneous group, a standardised tool might not always be useful.

The QuP experienced some 'teething problems', said Ms Schafft, as staff often lacked clear guidelines about implementation. Offices were set targets for the total number of participants for each year, but as during the early stages there were difficulties in reaching these, some were inclined to lower the conditions for entry and to take not only people who were likely to succeed. Some participants felt they had a limited choice about whether to participate.

Each local NAV office is supposed to tailor programmes to the participants' needs. Some municipalities lacked suitable schemes for particular target groups and they 'bused' people to other municipalities.

Ms Schafft said the majority of participants were satisfied with the QuP as they appreciated receiving a fixed monthly salary and this was the first time many had been consulted about their needs. About 90% believed the results would be positive and expected get a job, although they may have been over-optimistic about their chances.

Staff in the QuP could draw on a range of measures, and they frequently used schemes that provided motivation, counselling, social skills (dressing properly, organising their day, etc.) and those which improved participants' work-capacity. To date the QuP has had a stronger social and health perspective than a labour market perspective, probably reflecting that the task of working directly with participants has been given mainly to NAV employees who come from care-oriented backgrounds. This also determined their beliefs about the QuP's aims, as social welfare staff viewed the QuP as "social work at its best" in terms of client follow-up.

Coming from this social-work background meant that staff were not familiar with labour market and employment schemes and lacked experience in dealing with employers and in following up participants in work placements. One way round this was for NAV offices to contract external service providers to provide sheltered training, as well as work-experience placements for

participants. One shortcoming was that NAV-office staff often were too busy to monitor these agencies' operations to assure they actually offered the service and the quality that was ordered, said Ms Schafft.

Turning to areas for improvement, Ms Schafft said more effort was needed to reach the right target group. The focus on meeting target numbers and the broad definition of the target group may in some cases have resulted in the inclusion of persons who have poor chances of benefiting from work oriented measures within the two year period that they can stay in the programme. It is also important to secure user involvement with regard to participation as such, as well as the choice of measures and the design of individual programs. Another challenge is to develop the types and combinations of measures that are suited to individual needs and qualifications. NAV offices have to organize the collective social work and labour market competencies so that they are combined and drawn on in the best possible way in order to enhance labour market attachment for the target group.

Discussion

Paul Gregg, Bristol University, UK said UK programmes also focused more on social and health needs than on labour-market needs. As many benefits claimants have health problems, related to being long-term unemployed, one possibility would be to place employment advisors in general practitioners' surgeries. He wondered whether the high satisfaction rate among participants was a 'placebo effect' in that people appreciate being helped and he suggested it would be useful to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of the QuP.

Ms Schafft said cost-benefit analyses have been carried out earlier on the "Functional Assistant"-scheme,, where employees with disabilities are accompanied by a functional assistant on the job. so in fact two individuals are being employed, who both pay tax, thus adding to government revenues. A recent study on Norwegian immigrants in the 'New Chance' programme found that if just 15% of them found long-term employment this resulted in considerable savings in government funds.

However, financial benefit is not the only criteria for government spending, she emphasised, as an important aspect of the QuP for Norway is that it raises the quality of life for individuals and is part of the state's role in providing a decent life for its citizens.

Asked about participants' control over the data collected on them, **Mr Askevold** said there are strict controls on how the labour and welfare offices use this data, and any data collected at the municipal level can only be amalgamated with national data under special circumstances.

Responding to a remark about the very high satisfaction levels, **Ms Schafft** believed people appreciated the individual attention they received, and receiving a regular income, without having to continually beg for it.

Ms Mecych was concerned that staffing levels at the NAV offices could make it difficult for each participant to have an individualised programme and action plan. She asked whether high staff changeovers at NAV offices meant accrued experience was lost, and wondered whether the Ministry was taking steps to improve the operation of the QuP.

Ms Schafft explained that the financial crisis and increased unemployment had increased staff workloads at the local NAV offices, but new staff had now been recruited to remedy this.

Mr Lelie suggested that it could be a good idea to develop a benchmarking tool: a set of indicators that allows one to compare the performance of municipalities. Such tools have been developed in several EU Member States. On the one hand they make it possible for the national government to keep an overview of policy outputs and outcomes in countries that are characterized by strong decentralisation of competencies to the local level. On the other hand they allow municipalities to compare their own performance with that of similar municipalities. Of course, the selection of performance indicators will always be a difficult exercise and municipalities will never be fully comparable.

Asked about the lessons from the QuP, **Ms Schafft** said it addressed issues in a more comprehensive way and has helped to build staff awareness of the difficulties individuals in the programme faced – for example how many of them had health problems.

Mr Askevold said that in the newly-established NAV offices, staff in the QuP were under considerable stress about organising their work schedule to fit in with their other work responsibilities and after the initial level of chaos in NAV offices, they are now more adjusted to their new roles. Although user satisfaction of NAV offices has fallen over the last year, this reflects the financial crisis and reorganisation within NAV, but is still higher than in 2006.

Site visits and feedback

There were site visits to two local NAV-offices in Oslo: NAV Grorud which serves a population of about 26,000 people and NAV Østensjø serves a population of around 45,000, to learn different aspects of the Qualification Programme. These were discussed at a feed-back meeting.

Ms Duffy said she had learned how the QuP had re-energised staff and brought the social assistance and labour market services together to provide a quicker service. Its success had been helped by the fact that there was a high staff-participant ratio, which allowed for follow-up.

She praised the QuP's ability to provide better access to services, and the discretion of offices to buy-in services if necessary, showing what can be done with adequate resources. However, she was concerned that while Norway was a more equal society than many European countries, as people on QuP paid the normal 25% tax level, they were only left with €12,000 per annum, and as child benefit is only €800, this was a low income to live on.

She felt that as Norway does not have a national minimum income, staff could pressurise people to participate, so it was not a "fair contract on both sides", which is at odds with EAPN's rights-based approach.

Mr Gregg commented that NAV staff said budget constraints meant that they chose participants who were most likely to succeed in the Programme and he was concerned about the emphasis on conditionality. However he was impressed by the way staff at the NAV office had worked to build up a relationship with employers to ensure good follow-up.

Eithne Fitzgerald, National Disability Authority, Ireland, suggested that the different programmes running within the NAV offices should be better coordinated to avoid competition between staff for outside resources, for example, for work-placements.

Ms Mecych commented on what she had learned about the daily level of cooperation between state and municipal workers; she said that QuP is a positive example that central and local administration can effectively work together given a mutual target. On a different topic, she noted that it was obviously fundamental for participants that they received a regular income from the state, and this also encouraged employers to take them on work placements as it did not entail them in any additional costs. She wanted to learn more about the Work-ability assessment carried out before a person enters the QuP. Is it a series of interviews or does it involve completing a form?

Rienk Prins (Thematic expert) Astri Research and Consultancy Group, the Netherlands, said the assessment took the form of completing a written form, accompanied by interviews. These enable NAV staff to assess participants' abilities and decide what to include in their programme. However, he was unclear about how many people receive an individualised plan and whether it was only used in exceptional cases.

Mr Gregg understood that the QuP staff drew up an activity plan and then decided whether each individual needed additional, specialised elements.

Ms Schafft said QuP participants are entitled to get an "Individual Plan"(IP), a central, legislated tool to increase coordinated help for people who need coordinated services from several agencies over time. Such plan outlines the duties of all the agencies involved, to ensure that everyone understands their responsibilities. It is, however, used only to a small extent within the QuP. The Work-ability assessment consists of a self-assessment form that the client fills in, with the help of the QuP staff if requested. There is a 'clarification' measure which can be used as part of the QuP, for example, specifying that a person can stay with a service provider to try out different things.

Ms Moldestad said that there are two plans drawn up in connection with the QuP. The activity plan for all participants and an individual plan for some individuals – for example those who need special treatment, such as medical treatment.

Ms Mecych was still unclear whether participation in the QuP was compulsory or completely voluntary. Did participants have to sign a legally-binding document that specified they had agreed to participate? If they had an individual plan, she felt this implied rights and obligations on the part of the participant and the service provider. If the activity plan includes an individual plan – do participants have the right to refuse to take part in the individual plan? She felt if individuals signed the individual plan this would empower them and strengthen the activation power of this policy instrument.

Ms Moldestad clarified that participants have to apply to take part in the QuP. While they do not have to sign a legal contract, it is important that they are motivated, but they continue to receive social benefits, even if they refuse to participate. The only participants who have to sign an agreement are those who have an individual action plan, as in this case they have to agree that confidential information about them, which can include medical records, can be shared between the different agencies.

At the beginning of the implementation of the QuP there had been discussions about signing a legal contract as participants received 'a salary', but the Minister had ruled that it was not a legal contract, as participants did not receive a salary *per se*.

Mr Askevold said motivation, not a legal contract was the most important element.

Ms Mecych said Poland had introduced an individual plan of action as a labour market instrument which beneficiaries sign and which defines their rights and obligations.

Mr Prins wondered whether a signed contract might provide an additional stimulus to participants.

Ewa Chylek, Department of Social Assistance and Integration, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Poland, believed that a contract could help to motivate clients, but pointed out that the user also has a legal right for a safety net of benefits. She asked whether there was a legal basis for reducing the amount of social assistance benefits if clients did not want to participate in the QuP.

Ms Moldestad clarified that benefits could be reduced, but not stopped, for a period of time.

Mr Gregg said the UK uses action plans which the participant has to sign to show s/he understand its contents in case of a dispute or sanctions. At present these action plans are not mandatory, but there are proposals to make them so, in which case participants will be subject to sanctions if they do not follow them.

Ms Schafft felt this would not work in Norway, as the Programme deals with clients who have had to go from one agency to another in search of support, often having to deal with a different member of staff each time, who was not aware of their case. Norwegian society is built on mutual trust, so establishing confidence and trust is the most important element in this process. Presenting a contract might scare people off.

Ms Duffy pointed out that the QuP deals with vulnerable groups, who have often had to sell all their assets to survive. Sanctioning them would leave them in poverty, while forcing them to sign a contract would turn them into criminals if they refused. She was concerned that signing a contract implied that people are only motivated by financial incentives, not by the desire to improve their situation. There are moral questions, she said.

Vigdis von Ely, the Welfare Alliance, European Anti-Poverty Network, Norway (VFA), said people have no legal right to social benefits in Norway. As there is no legal minimum income, there could be a danger that QuP staff could tell potential participants that if they refuse to participate they would be refused benefits.

Ms Moldestad disputed this, saying everyone is entitled to social benefits in Norway. Although there is no legal minimum income, the law specifies that everyone has a right to a reasonable standard of living. If claimants are not satisfied with the level of benefits they receive, they have a right to appeal to the county governor, who will then decide, and they can go to court to claim social benefits.

Ms von Ely replied that this process takes nine months, as Norway does not have a rights-based approach to social services. In practice, the NAV staff can determine who will receive welfare benefits.

Mr Askevold said one should not mix the question of a *right to* benefits, with the *level of* benefit they had a right to. People have a right to social assistance benefits if they are deemed unable to provide for themselves, whereas the level of benefits is discretionary.

Ms Duffy was concerned that this approach could lead people further into debt.

Neil McIvor, Department for Work and Pensions asked whether, as the QuP is an intensive, costly, personal approach, is its aim to get more people into work, to move people off social assistance, or to improve people's well-being? How can we ensure it meets these aims?

Mr Askevold clarified that the programme goes through several different stages. The first is to raise people's level of motivation and get them off the dependency syndrome. Once they reach that stage, it teaches them skills and approaches which prepare them for work, and finally it tries to move them into employment. At the same time it aims to improve their well-being and give them a better life, while helping to reduce the numbers of those on social assistance.

For **Aase Lunde, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Norway**, the main political aim is to get more people into work, while improving their well-being.

Day 2

European NGO statement

Katherine Duffy, EAPN Europe: Chair Social Inclusion Working Group, said EAPN Europe was launched in 1990 and is based on a network of NGOs in 25 EU Member States. It takes a right-based approach to combating poverty and exclusion, and works for active inclusion. Its current concern is the weakening of the principle of universality in welfare systems.

Turning to EAPN's perspective on the QuP, Ms Duffy said it was attractive in helping people to get back into employment, reducing their isolation and raising their confidence "on the journey to employment", within an efficient welfare system.

It takes an active inclusion approach, focusing on adequate income, access to the labour market and to welfare services, and has a better balance between support and conditionality than programmes in most EU Member States. It has a long-term perspective, and is supported by a wide range of flanking services. It has a sizeable operating budget and offers a 'one-stop shop'.

A full assessment of the QuP is also given in the EAPN paper for this Peer Review, but a summary is given below:

Using the '4As' approach to benchmarking the quality of policies to combat poverty and exclusion, for:

- *Accessibility*: it offers a wide range of services and helps overcome isolation and exclusion, but it is unclear whether the 'Work-ability test', is non-discriminatory and gives fair access.
- *Affordability*: the access and services are free at the point of need for beneficiaries, but are very resource intensive.
- *Adequacy*: it offers a stable, secure income with child elements and additional supplements, compared to social assistance which is discretionary and must be repeatedly applied for. However, after tax, the income falls below the 60% threshold, and child benefit in Norway is relatively low, so in the absence of a national minimum income, sanctions could be applied for non-participation, which would severely impact on income, possibly leading to poverty.
- *Accountability*: access is voluntary, but is linked to laws on social assistance, so could affect the participant's entitlement to social assistance. In addition it seems that sanctions could be applied if the participant does not agree with the activity plan, and the NAV staff seem to hold the balance of power over participants, which risks the user losing autonomy and dignity.

On transferability, Ms Duffy said she would like to see elements of the QuP transferred elsewhere, but as poorer countries are now restructuring their social services, it would be difficult to bring in these innovations, particularly as there is a growing prejudice against the poor and rising unemployment.

She was concerned that the QuP started from the premise that sanctions are needed to ensure people stay until the end, which conflicts with its rationale that the best way to help people return to the workforce is to improve their well-being and self-image. In addition, said Ms Duffy, while policy-makers stress the need to give people choices, the QuP does not appear to allow people to choose whether to remain in it, if it does not suit their needs.

Turning to the question of employment – Ms Duffy suggested more could be done to raise employers' awareness about employing people with disadvantages and more study is needed about the relationship between conditionality, employment and the labour market.

Presentation of the Discussion paper

Rienk Prins, AStri Research and Consultancy Group, Leiden, the Netherlands, presented the Discussion Paper.

- The Qualification Programme is a new programme implemented within the context of the new NAV programme, using lessons learned from earlier pilot schemes.
- It is designed to target those on low incomes, who are a long distance from the labour market and have complex problems.
- Pressure on resources and the need to reach the targets mean that NAV staff are tempted to select clients who are nearer to the labour market, so more likely to succeed.

Mr Prins described the main features of the plan (described in detail above) and added the following observations:

- The QuP is congruent with EU social inclusion policy as it provides a 'one-stop shop', and a holistic approach that gives training in social skills, and coping strategies for everyday life and then moves on to work-focused activities.
- It offers income support, although this is below the 60% poverty threshold.
- It coordinates different levels of local and national government actions, but could be improved by situating it inside a legal framework that determines how it should work.

Mr Prins raised issues to be discussed in the next session:

- How far have the NAV offices managed to maintain an adequate balance between the welfare and employment-focused activities of the QuP? At times it is unclear whether its aim is to raise participants' well-being to lead them out of the path of dependency and towards employment, or to actually get them into employment?
- How far does the QuP cooperate with other service providers, such as health services? This could be useful as many people in the target group have multiple problems, which requires many different services to solve.
- Are the criteria set by the central office to reach the most vulnerable people – consistent with the targets NAV offices are given? If the NAV office can only find 80 suitable participants, whereas their target is for 150 participants, does the office have to change the criteria in order to ensure they have enough participants?
- As this is intended to be an intensive programme, how much time are NAV staff able to spend with each participant, and how can they show their manager they are working effectively to get the 'correct results'?
- In order to build up a participant's commitment to the QuP, should s/he decide on the contents of his/her plan, or should the NAV staff take sole responsibility for the participant's programme?
- Should participants sign a contract when they enter into the QuP, in order to clarify the mutual obligations and rights, and to make them feel more committed?

Mr Prins felt the contents of the Work-ability test needed clarification and possibly to be made more flexible to reflect the way that participants' needs change during the QuP. He described a similar programme in the Netherlands where during its early stages the programme focused on acquiring social and communications skills. At a later stage clients took a workability test to assess what skills they would need to get back into the labour market. He suggested the QuP might adopt this two-step assessment.

Turning to the organisational context, Mr Prins said that NAV staff should be given more support when they undertake new tasks and possibility offered training. He felt that, given the level of staff commitment to making a success of the QuP and the number of contact hours they spent with

each participant, their managers should consider adapting their workloads.

The criteria for success in the QuP needs to be clarified, as NAV staff had conflicting expectations depending on which government or local office they had come from. Those from a social-work background felt the aim was to make participants more self-sufficient, whereas those from a labour market background thought it was to get participants back into the labour market.

He felt the QuP would benefit from having more outcome and performance indicators, such as the number of placements, or the number of drop-outs. He also suggested having milestones to measure progress during the QuP, for example about how participants felt about themselves and whether it had improved their ability to organise their own lives.

Peer country contributions

Peer countries were asked to describe similar measures in their own countries.

United Kingdom

Mr McIvor described four programmes that focus on giving support to benefits' claimants and making services more accessible.

- The ACE Programme focuses on improving the provision of services by giving more targeted local support to benefits claimants and facilitating their access to services, with pilots run in 12 offices in 2007. Provisional results show systems need to be adapted to the fact that claimants usually have a number of needs such as for health benefits, legal services, etc, and that those seeking support need practical help to access social services provision.
Services should cater to those who need help at transitional stages in their lives, such as moving on from caring full-time for a family member or leaving prison.
- A new project to help drug-users overcome the barriers to work is in its pilot stage. It aims to help some of the 350,000 registered drug users drawing benefits, to get off drug dependence and take control of their own lives.
- A condition of participating in the programme is that participants have to sign to a rehabilitation plan and take treatment, but do not need to show they are 'signing on' for unemployment benefit or are actively seeking work
- A third project, this time for ex-offenders, begins by offering them specialist health, employment and benefit advice while they are still in prison. On leaving prison they sign up for the Fresh Start Programme at their local job centre to ensure that someone is in charge of helping them find work as soon as they are released.
- If they have claimed benefits within the previous 26 weeks, then they will be fast-tracked claim benefits, without having to start the whole procedure again.
- The Flexible New Deal is a programme that deals with the long-term unemployed, by offering them personalised support, Under FND, after 12 months of unemployment, claimants will be referred to private or third sector contractors, which will be paid by results to find them work. and employers will be given financial support for taking on

Poland

Ms Chylek described the Polish programmes for the vulnerable groups like ex-offenders or those with severe disabilities. The public employment services deal with the ordinary unemployed, most of whom are likely to find work eventually, but the social assistance services are responsible for those who have been unemployed for a long time, and are furthest from the labour market.

The government aims to integrate the labour and social assistance programmes by establishing 'integration centres' to provide both services at the same centre and are also planning a more radical reform to fully integrate the two institutions in order to offer focused services for those furthest from the labour market.

Ms Mecych said Polish labour offices were unable to deal with those with the most complex problems as the measures at their disposal were not sufficiently flexible to deal with comprehensive individual needs. However on 1 February 2009, the government amended the law on labour market institutions, so that those who are covered by insurance schemes, but are furthest from the labour market are now eligible to receive support from labour market offices. The amended law entitles new groups of people: the working over 45, spouses of farmers covered by an agricultural insurance system (not general insurance system) who intend to undertake employment or economic activity outside agricultural sector as well as gainful emigrants returning to Poland. Ms. Mecych also mentioned that one of most unprivileged group in Polish labour market are ex-agricultural workers who lost their work when state-owned farms were dissolved after the change of regime, are mostly unskilled and often have remained unemployed for many years generating the phenomena of unemployment and poverty inheritance. Among vulnerable groups in Poland defined by law there are also: the unemployed under 25 years old, long term unemployed or persons after the period of social contract or women who have not undertaken employment after giving birth, the unemployed over 50 years old, the unemployed without vocational qualifications, professional experience or secondary education, the unemployed bringing-up as a single parent at least one child up to 18 years old, the unemployed who have not taken up employment after imprisonment, the disabled. They are entitled to additional labour market instruments.

The new cooperation between the labour and social assistance offices and their staff means that a client who approaches the labour office who has a set of problems which make it extremely difficult to re-enter the labour market is then passed to the social assistance centre which has wider scope to address the raft of problems related to health, family difficulties, psychological problems, etc. It is obligatory for the people in the two services to share information about the clients.

One of the main reasons that people find it difficult to find a job is that they lack the relevant skills or qualifications for the jobs on offer. The new law opened up the possibility for job seekers to get vocational training at their place of work and thus has succeeded in giving people a chance to acquire certified skills and educational qualifications while undertaking work. Having more relevant qualifications certified according to requirements of educational system - greatly enhances their chances of returning to the labour market full-time.

The government has recently opened a budget line so the heads of the local labour office can set up special targeted programmes for vulnerable groups.

Cyprus

Marie Andreou, Economic Research Centre, Cyprus, said those in Cyprus on social assistance usually have a set of problems, such as the lack of relevant work experience or skills, drug addiction, family or housing problems, etc.

Since 2005 those claiming social assistance have been able to voluntarily participate in a vocational programme which offers training in one of three areas: communication skills and self-development; computer/information technology; English language or training in working in a shop or as a clerk. When people complete their training they are given work placements with employers, for which the government subsidises 40% of their salaries.

As participation is voluntary, and participants continue to receive their social assistance benefits while taking up the course, they are often not sufficiently motivated to complete the course, she said.

Nevertheless, the assessment of these courses is quite positive: Of those taking communications and self-development courses, 67% said the course was satisfactory, 30% were pleased with the way it was organised and 48% felt it helped them substantially to find a job. Of those taking the computer/information technology course, 44% rated it very highly but only 30% said it helped them finding a job. Of those who took the third strand of courses, 61% thought highly of the course and 60% said they had acquired knowledge that would help them get a job in a relevant field.

Of all the participants, 40% said the training courses had substantially helped their professional development, 41% that it improved their self-esteem and 35% that their financial situation had improved as a result.

After completing the courses, public assistance recipients received help in finding a subsidized job and entering the labour market. Unfortunately the recipients who found a job had a high drop-out rate as some participants found it difficult to adapt to the job requirements, some cited poor health or family obligations, but some moved on to a better job.

Public assistance recipients' motivation for completing the work placement was often strongly dictated by their financial circumstances: some left the work placement as they were afraid they would lose their eligibility for public assistance benefit and as the level of pay on the work placement was often no higher than that for public assistance, they had no financial motivation for staying in work placements.

Georgia Antoniou, Social Welfare Services, Cyprus said some groups, like lone parents or those with large families, continue to receive welfare benefits, in addition to their wages from the work placement. Other special groups continue to receive public assistance for four months while on work placement, after which benefits are gradually reduced.

She said that one possible explanation for the high drop-out rate is that courses are aimed at people on long-term benefits, who often have a range of problems together with having lost all self-confidence in their ability to find work. To overcome this the government is designing programmes for this group which take a more holistic approach, bringing in the social assistance, public employment and other services to offer vocational training.

Ms Antoniou stressed that courses are designed to help people gain self-confidence, increase their awareness about their rights and make them more active. This is a much longer-term process than providing vocational training for the recently unemployed which can be a swift path to return to work. She added that at times it is necessary to convince both staff dealing with the claimants and the claimants themselves that these courses will work.

Many participants with disabilities or psychological problems drop out of the courses for medical reasons, so the health services follow up the person concerned to ascertain what treatment s/he needs, and will provide them with financial support until their health improves.

In order to enhance the take-up of courses and services the authorities organise home visits to assess potential participants' ability to participate. Those with disabilities were given the choice to follow vocational training with Social Welfare Services (SWS) or other specialized service provider (such as the programmes implemented by the Service for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled of the Department of Labour). Those who wished to continue with SWS were helped / encouraged to complete the training and then take up employment in the open market. It was noted that some persons with mental disabilities who couldn't be accommodated in the open market were encouraged to take-up voluntary work.

The social work services work closely with local NGOs which provide care services, or are self-help organisations so are often in closer contact with the individuals concerned.

Participants were eligible to public assistance (for one person is €452 based on a means-test approach) and free medical care plus any housing benefits (rent and house improvements).

Spain

Elvira Gonzalez Gago, Centre de Estudios Economicos Tomillo, Spain, said it was not possible to provide the type of coordinated service offered in Norway, in Spain because services were divided between national and local levels: social protection (unemployment benefits and pensions) is centralised, while social and labour services are localised. However, regional administrations are taking measures to improve the coordination of labour and social services.

The authorities fund NGOs to provide support services for vulnerable people, such as for those with mental illness, or from immigrant groups as they find them sufficiently flexible to overcome the administrative difficulties and to address the complexity of problems people face.

Ireland

Ms Fitzgerald said in the 1990s some Irish regions suffered from chronic long-term unemployment, with many people on long-term benefit. To change this the government funded partnerships in twelve areas to bring together the social partners (employers and trade unions) and the local community to develop programmes for people with long-term problems. This successfully reduced unemployment from 9% to 1%, and these partnerships are now being extended to other areas.

Ms Fitzgerald praised the Norwegian concept of the 'one-stop-shop', with its integration of social assistance and employment support. However, **Mairin Haran, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Employment Support Services**, thought it might be difficult to apply this type of programme in Ireland as the social assistance/unemployment benefit offices and labour offices work separately. In addition, because of the contingency based nature of the Irish social assistance/ benefit system unemployment offices may move those with long-term medical problems (which could result from long-term unemployment) onto an incapacity payment as this removes them from their files. This is often counter-productive as creates a vicious circle by rendering them unlikely to participate in active labour market programmes and thus makes them more likely to retain health problems which are associated with long-term unemployment.

Ms Schafft said that in Norway people who receive 100 percent disability benefit are allowed to undertake part-time paid work and to receive a salary of up to € 8,500 annually without any reduction of benefits, and those who receive public assistance are also eligible for secondary benefits such as rent subsidies.

Ms Duffy pointed out that some benefits in Ireland have been withdrawn because of the financial crisis, and she was concerned that some of the innovative measures introduced might not survive the recession.

Ms Haran said the government was planning to draw up profiles of people at the point of entry to social or labour market services so that in future they would be able to identify and help people at an early stage in order to prevent them moving on to long-term benefits, as when they reach this stage they find it more difficult to return to the labour market.

Work-ability assessment

Peer countries then discussed the work-ability assessment.

United Kingdom

Mr Gregg said the value of assessments at the point of entry to programmes is to evaluate people's capacities rather than their incapacities, which could result in their moving from disability to unemployment benefits. However, he added, the weakness of this type of assessment is that it gives a static definition of someone as either "capable of working" or as "disabled", and therefore moving on to disability benefit. Assessment should be more continual, which could be achieved by bringing all the benefits within a single framework.

Ms Duffy agreed it was positive to focus on what people could, rather than on what they couldn't do, but if they moved from disability to unemployment benefit, this would reduce their benefit from £87 to £64 a week. **Mr McIvor** clarified that the main change in the assessment is to measure people's capabilities, in order to give them more appropriate support.

Ms Schafft believed that one needed to look at what jobs would be suitable for a person with disabilities, as there are possible jobs even for those with severe disabilities, and such people should not be defined as "unable to work".

Dag Westerheim, the Welfare Alliance (Norway), said the assessment process should be more flexible, and individuals should have the opportunity to propose or veto measures in their individual plans, which would also balance out the power between the individual and the public system.

Mr Gregg said the Norwegian system has a pooled budget, so the NAV office has the discretion to decide how much to allocate for each individual in the QuP. In other settings it might be possible to develop the concept of personal budgets and increase NAV office funding, so the more successful offices would receive increased budgets.

Mr Askevold said a proposal will be submitted to the Norwegian Parliament in Spring 2010 specifying that all participants about to enter the Qualification Programme should receive a written assessment about the possibility of their finding employment, indicating the type of work they are capable of doing and the programmes they need to achieve this.

While this might lack flexibility and be seen as dividing people into different categories at an early stage, the assessment process could then be repeated later during the QuP. For example, an early assessment could examine a participant's social abilities, while a later one could focus on his/her ability to re-enter the labour market.

Ms Mecych said in Poland people registered at the labour offices in order to be eligible for health insurance, and are often not motivated to enter the courses offered. This prompted discussions about coordinating health and welfare benefits and introducing unemployment insurance.

Mr Prins said in the United States poor people on Medicare feared that if they got a job, they would be moved off this medical insurance onto their employers' health insurance scheme, so if they subsequently lost their job, would lose any form of health insurance.

Karin Zetiltz, Department of Welfare Policy, Social Policy Division, Ministry of Labour and Inclusion, said the Norwegian authorities organised a Liaison committee with the Government and representatives and organisations from people experiencing poverty (economically and socially vulnerable). Based on self-organisation the Government can draw benefit from the experience of the people themselves as a tool for better policy making. During discussions about NAV reform some NGOs are engaged by the municipalities by using their contacts with employers to help people find work and their specific qualifications as representatives from the vulnerable groups themselves, based on peer-counselling.

Ms Schafft mentioned a scheme called 'Youth Helping Youth' in Hamburg, Germany, which offers support to drug addicts. Some get work experience training at ordinary work places. The project has demonstrated that people can be trusted to know what they want and are capable of doing.

Employers and how to cooperate with them

Peer countries agreed that an important element of the QuP was to develop good relations with employers to encourage them to offer job placements, and the first issue was whether they should be offered subsidies to do so.

Mr Gregg felt that employees might feel stigmatised if their wages were subsidized as they preferred to be treated as ordinary employees. In addition, he said, experience shows that in large companies the subsidy does not 'follow' the person concerned, so subsidies have not been very successful in generating placements.

Norwegian employers take on people with disabilities as part of their commitment to corporate social responsibility, so the authorities are working to build up employers' long-term commitment and asking them to discuss this with other employers to persuade them to follow suit.

Mr Askevold believed it was possible to use both strategies – to take advantage of the close contact and cooperation with the employers to change their attitudes, and to back this up with wage subsidies.

Mr Gregg felt subsidies might work in a smaller firm where the financial benefits are clearer. He mentioned that in the UK a successful measure had been to subsidise employers to employ vulnerable people on a three-month trial.

Ms Duffy said some UK job centres employ a staff member whose function is to build up links with employers to offer 'taster schemes' to people with disabilities.

Ms Fitzgerald agreed it was important to expand the pool of employers who will take people with disabilities. At the same time 'line managers' of vulnerable people on work placement, should be trained so they know what to do and who to call on if a problem arises, she said.

Austria

Ulrike Rebhandl, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, said in Austria the social partnership between unions and employers plays a strong role in the labour market and social assistance departments. The social partners are included in regional employment agreements that help build relations with employers and encourages them to be involved.

Marcel Fink, Department of Government, University of Vienna, added that as the social partners are brought in at the planning stage they can put pressure on employers' organisations to be involved in these programmes and offer job placements for vulnerable people.

Ms Mecych said Poland has a similar system, using 'Employment Councils' to bring together authorities, employers and unions on local, regional and central levels, who provide input into employment strategies on respective levels.

Employers who take on, and train, vulnerable workers referred by the labour market offices, or who are prepared to adjust job specifications to take account of their special needs, are refunded all costs relating to wages and social insurance, provided this does not exceed 300% of the minimum wage.

Employers are consulted by the labour market authorities about their needs, and about the content of training programmes. Where employers provide training schemes these are refunded up to 80% of the cost.

Ms Duffy then turned to the issue of sheltered workshops for disabled people, and said she was concerned about declining numbers. However, **Ms Schafft** felt closing sheltered workshops had forced employers to make more effort to integrate vulnerable people into ordinary workplaces, as hiding them away in sheltered workshops did not build solidarity nor understanding.

Mr Westerheim, The Welfare Alliance, Norway, mentioned that Stormberg, the Norwegian sportswear company had successfully integrated people far from the labour market.

Mr Prins said the Netherlands had been committed to reducing sheltered employment firms, because of their poor record in moving people back to the labour market. However a recent policy is to give those working in a sheltered workplace who want to move into the labour market vouchers to give to employers who employ them.

Ms Fitzgerald said a successful measure in Ireland has been to train volunteer 'peer mentors' in companies to support the 'vulnerable' new employees who are on a six-month extended trial. Peer support is valuable in helping any new employee integrate but is particularly important for people who are vulnerable or have been distant from the labour market.

Ms Zetlitz said the policy of 'peer-mentoring' people with disabilities at work had been successful, and **Jose-Manual Morales, Ministry of Health and Social Policy, Spain**, said the Spanish authorities hire private companies for these types of services.

Transferability of aspects of the Qualification Programme

Mr Fink said one needed to look at the *institutional context* of the QuP. In Austria employment policies are pursued at national level and social assistance schemes at local level. There has been discussion about reforming the system to introduce a 'one-desk' approach for social assistance and employment, but resistance from both agencies has prevented this, so institutional fragmentation continues.

He was impressed about the variety of services Norway offered, which must require considerable resources. Austria has a number of proposals for transferring services and participatory planning, but these need financial resources to implement, so the first step will be to present the examples of Norway's specific use of resources and institutional changes to persuade the authorities to put Austrian proposals into effect.

Ms Chylek said the message of this Peer Review is that it is possible for the welfare and employment services to cooperate, even if they operate at two different levels – national and municipal level. She compared Norway's system of making it obligatory for the three services to cooperate through the NAV reform to the DELTA system in Sweden, where cooperation between four services is voluntary; she thought Poland could learn from Norwegian practice.

Mr Gregg said he had been asked by the British government to draw up a plan to bring those distant from the labour market, including those with disability and health problems, nearer to the employment market. He had warned that this would be a slow process and would need the involvement of several different agencies as a long-term approach that involves rebuilding self-confidence and removing the underlying barriers before vulnerable people are ready to seek work.

Given the diverse groups of people involved, any programmes must be sufficiently flexible and the individual must be involved in designing his/her own programme. It needs a 'soft conditionality' such as low-level requirements to engage and continue with the programme.

He thought that as well as merging employment and social services, health services might need to be brought in to deal with specific needs of vulnerable people: in the UK private agencies provide this support, whereas in Norway this is carried out by the state. The advantage of purchasing services from outside agencies is that this gives more flexibility, provided agencies can work together; the Norwegian approach shows it is possible to bring all these different services together.

He said long-term benefits payments constitute a large element of welfare budgets, so if one can move more benefits claimants into work, they would contribute to the social protection and tax system instead.

Ms Gonzalez Gago said the site visits demonstrated how the NAV offices work, as it was the staff from the different agencies in the QuP who had decided they should be physically close to each other in the building itself. However, this would be difficult in Spain as those working in the employment services work at present separated to those in the social services. She thought it might be easier to bring different department together in smaller countries, like Norway, or at regional level in Spain.

Ms Haran wondered whether, because getting vulnerable people back into employment is so time and resource consuming, QuP staff might be tempted to focus on people who were most likely to succeed and would not have sufficient time to carry out the follow-up.

Ms Antoniou said the message of this Peer Review is that it is possible to get the different services to work together for a common purpose. She was also interested in the possibility of each participant having a personal plan, which she felt might increase their motivation for participating in courses in Cyprus.

Statement from Norwegian stakeholder

Dag Westerheim, The Welfare Alliance, Norway, said that EAPN was critical of Norway's anti-poverty programme as the level of benefits, even when coupled with child support and housing, still fell below the country's poverty threshold.

He said the Workability Assessment in the QuP showed that as well as being an 'activation tool' to help people enter the labour market, it also clarified who was capable of doing so, as 40% of those in the Programme return to benefits, and 15% move to temporary disability benefits.

He added that benefits claimants need to know the level of support they will receive as this helps them plan their lives. Between 30% and 40% need further assistance, but knowing in advance helps them to plan.

Wrap-up of the findings and key lessons learned

Rienk Prins, AStri Research, summarised the main lessons of the Peer Review:

Institutional framework

A country's ability to organise tools to help vulnerable groups partly depends on:

- the availability of resources;
- whether it is possible to reform the institutional structure, and whether this will happen as a result of pressure by staff working 'on the ground'.

The method of introducing institutional change will vary between countries and involves a different number of partners:

- Norway uses three different partners;
- Sweden uses four partners.
- The Irish and Dutch models use a local or 'neighbourhood approach' to bring together the authorities, the social partners and the local community, or bring in different agencies that provide education, housing, public health, youth care, etc.

NGOs already provide a shadow support structure for programmes as well as providing expertise on the target groups, so could be used more.

At times QuP played conflicting roles: they gave participants counseling support, while also had the power to decide on their benefit levels.

Target Group

He outlined the basic features of the target group:

- long-term unemployed people, who are excluded from many institutional structures;
- possess long-term negative experiences of government bureaucracies;
- need to build up trust in the system and their own self-esteem, which requires a long, gradual process to change their perspective of society and themselves.

It is unclear whether staff working with this group should be generalists (programme- or case-managers), or specialists, e.g. with experience of working with drug addicts or ex-prisoners.

At times NAV staff called in agencies, with expertise in specialised fields to help them.

Actors in the Programme

There were two main actors:

a) Case managers

- their main tools were assessment and counseling;
- their very high level of motivation and commitment ensured the QuP was a success;
- it was unclear how much power they had vis-à-vis other agencies, for example medical services, and what affect this had on the programme.

b) Employers

- The QuP's success depended on building good relations with employers, so NAV offices built up contacts with them, NGOS and the social partners;
- employers need support and advice during any work placements, so NAV offices must ensure they maintain a good relationship;

- during work placements, NAV offices must work with the participant's line manager and work colleagues;
- there was heated debate among peer countries about whether employers should be given financial incentives: some peer countries felt it was useful, others were concerned it would stigmatise the participant, who wanted to be treated as an ordinary worker;
- work to build networks of employers and to encourage them to contact each other as this encourages 'new' employers to take on work placements.

Outcomes

At present less is known on an EU-wide level about the impact of programmes for multi-problem groups than for programmes for the disabled or long term employed, so the Qualification Programme will expand EU-wide understanding.

While the QuP has been successful, 40% of participants remain on benefits, and supportive measures are expensive and time-consuming and take a long period to have an effect.

The QuP will add to the understanding about measures needed to support vulnerable people to stay in employment, and avoid the 'revolving door' phenomenon (where participants enter programmes, find their way back to work and then drop out and return to benefits).

Peter Lelie, Directorate-General, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission, said the Norwegian qualification programme shares many characteristics with the approach that is advocated in the EU Commission's Recommendation on active inclusion.

First, when developing policies and programmes for integrating people far from the labour market one must focus on the 'whole' person. People are often confronted with a range of different problems related not only to unemployment but also to low income, ill health, housing problems, low educational attainment, overindebtedness etc. Hence, support can only be effective if it is multidimensional and integrated. The qualification programme clearly starts from this assumption.

Secondly, active inclusion programmes will only be successful if a very committed staff is there to make them work. The site visits showed that such committed staff is in fact in place. Case officers spoke passionately about the programme and seemed very reluctant to compromise on the quality of the support offered, even if this meant that the QuP targets regarding the numbers of people participating in the programme would not be met.

Thirdly, a very positive aspect of the QuP is that it organises services according to the needs of the people that are to benefit from them. Service provision has been adapted to the clients rather than the other way around. Different services have been brought together under one roof (see the NAV reform). The reorganisation is still in the early stages and it appears that it is not without transition problems. It could be a good idea to organise a follow up Peer Review within a year or two to examine how things will have developed by then.

Of course, not all aspects of the QuP have been examined and several topics would need further discussion:

- Only people that are far, but not too far from the labour market are selected for participation in the programme. This raises the question of what the prospects are for people that do not

make it into the programme. The active inclusion initiative suggests that also for people for whom the regular labour market is not an option active, social integration and participation should be the aim.

- **Transferability:** The QuP demonstrates the need for better 'joined-up' government, but is it possible to implement these active inclusion principles in the same way across Europe, given the fragmented nature of policymaking and service delivery in many EU Member States (the challenge of vertical and horizontal coordination of policies)? And how can a range of quality supporting services be provided in less wealthy countries? The pressure on public finances in several European countries as a result of the crisis will probably add to the challenge.
- **Active inclusion policies** come with a significant cost in the short term (investment in services, active labour market policies, adequate minimum income). Benefits will often only become visible in the longer term and it isn't easy to quantify them. Recently, some academics have done interesting work, trying to measure both costs and benefits of active inclusion policies (one of these studies was recently presented at the Round Table on Social Exclusion and Poverty in Stockholm). The European Commission has commissioned a study on ex ante social impact assessment in the EU Member States.

Mr Lelie said that the conclusions of this Peer Review would feed into the active inclusion process. This process will develop further in the coming years. In the short term a section on minimum income schemes in Europe will be included in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion that will be submitted to the Spring European Council in March 2010. Later on there will be specific input from Member States on active inclusion (reporting). In the longer term the Commission is planning a communication on 'in work poverty'.

He finished by saying that Norway's ability to keep an open mind about the Qualification Programme had been much appreciated. No mutual learning can take place if there is no room for constructive criticism. The presentation of early evaluation data had also been very helpful. He again thanked the Peer Review hosts for a very well organised seminar.

Mr Askevold said Norway had learned that, despite the seemingly insurmountable institutional arrangements and fragmentation, one should never give up. The questions and challenges Norway had received from so many skilled experts at the Peer Review will inspire them to move forward with the QuP.