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THE HIDDEN MAJORITY

**A study of economic inactivity among blind and partially
sighted people in Sweden, Germany and Romania**

A report to the Board of the European Blind Union

By

Fred Reid and Philippa Simkiss

2008-2009

RNIB



Preface

We wish to acknowledge the support of the European Blind Union in seeking funding to defray the expense of our study visits to Sweden and Germany, which form the basis of this report. We are grateful to the Commission of the European Union for providing a start up grant. Completion of the report would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance of the Royal National Institute of Blind People, which is here gratefully acknowledged.

We are deeply indebted to the staff of the organisations who gave so generously of their time and listened so patiently to our probing questions. The organisations are: the Swedish Public employment Service; the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired; the German Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs; the Office of Integration (Munster, Germany); The Vocational Training Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired at Soest, Germany; the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted; the Royal National Institute of Blind people. We regret that the methodological condition of anonymity prevents us from acknowledging these contributors by name.

For Chapter four on Romania we are grateful to Mr. Sergiu Radu Ruba, President of the Romanian Association of the Blind, and Ms. Monica Stancio, Director of the Romanian National Advisory Council on Disability.

We are especially grateful to Mrs. Anne Rigby for her skilful translations from the German. Dr. Roger DuClaud-Williams of the Department of Politics, Warwick University, England, read early drafts of chapters two and three and offered valuable comments for which we are grateful. Lord Colin Low, Chairman, Royal National Institute of Blind People, read a late draft of the report and we are grateful for his comments. Responsibility for any errors of omission or commission is entirely ours.

As stated in chapter 1, the methodology of this study began to emerge when Fred Reid visited France in 2007 to study the application of sheltered employment to blind people with complex needs. He would like to take this opportunity of thanking M. Philippe Chazal and his

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colleagues for making that visit both informative and pleasurable.

We cannot forbear to express our gratitude to our spouses, who put up with our inconvenient absences from home and family. We could not have done the work without their support.

Finally, note as to terminology: we have used the term 'client' from time to time to refer to blind and partially sighted people engaged in the labour activation process. We are aware that many regard this term as politically incorrect, but feel driven to use it where the available alternatives seem coldly bureaucratic.

Dr. Fred Reid and Dr. Philippa Simkiss
March, 2009



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This report is concerned with the operation of employment services for blind and partially sighted people in Sweden, Germany and Romania, and with their impact on that target population. It is based on three study visits made by the authors in 2008 and 2009. Each visit lasted three working days. In Sweden and Germany, these were occupied in carrying out fairly structured interviews with senior staff managing the services. The results were cross checked, as far as possible, by interviewing well informed observers, including representatives of organisations of blind and partially sighted people. Following each study visit the authors drafted the relevant chapter of this report and showed it to the participant interviewees on a basis of personal anonymity. The interviewees then commented in writing. Chapter two on Sweden and chapter three on Germany are, then, the outcome of applying this methodology.

In Romania the methodology had to be modified, for reasons made apparent in chapter 4. We were unable to interview personnel responsible for the delivery of employment services. Our interviews were confined to the President of the Romanian Association of the Blind and the Director of the National Advisory Council for Disability. Nevertheless these were of value in allowing us to draw out the very unfavourable contrast between the situation of visually impaired people in Romania and those in Sweden and Germany. We were then able to revisit The EU Commission report, *Employment in Europe, 2008* and offer a critique from the point of view of visually impaired and other disabled people in Romania.

As formally stated in the Introduction, the aims of the study visits were:

- (i) To investigate labour activation measures and employment support services in each country.
- (ii) to estimate the rate of economic inactivity prevailing among blind and partially sighted people of working age in Sweden, Germany and Romania.



(iii) to report on these matters to the European Blind Union (ebu), recommending good practice, which might be disseminated throughout the European Union by the activities of EBU and its member organizations.

The study visits were commissioned by the European Blind Union (EBU), funded by research grants from the Commission of the European Union and the Royal National Institute of Blind People, United Kingdom (RNIB, UK).

The authors' conclusions are presented in chapter five. Recommendations made there have been added to the report as a separate list.

Section two of the introduction begins by acknowledging the wide range of occupations carried on by blind and partially sighted people throughout the EU. But this is a sort of 'blind elite'. Between 2001 and 2007, Evidence was accumulated by EBU that high levels of economic inactivity prevail among blind and partially sighted people of working age in member states of the European Union, ranging from about 40 to about 80 percent. Throughout the EU as a whole they are said in this report to constitute a 'hidden majority'.

It is important to distinguish 'economic inactivity' from 'unemployment'. For the purposes of this report, the rate of unemployment is the ratio between the number of people actively seeking employment and the number of people in employment. The rate of economic inactivity is the ratio between the number of people in employment and the number of people not in employment and not seeking work.

The main question for investigation is whether any of this economic inactivity is involuntary, or whether blind and partially sighted individuals are making a rational decision that it is pointless to seek entry to the labour market, since social security benefits are available for those who do not work and jobs are scarce at best - extremely scarce in times of economic recession.



The authors wished to test their hypothesis that some at least of this economic inactivity is involuntary. Evidence from research recently carried out in the UK suggests that it is and this is reviewed in section three. See also appendices to chapter one.

It was in the light of this evidence that the authors proposed study visits to Sweden and Germany with the aims stated above. Sweden was selected because, in 2001, EBU had reported from different sources two rates of unemployment, about 5 percent and about 50 percent. We think this was due to failure to distinguish between 'unemployment' and 'economic inactivity'. Germany was selected because of the very high rate of 'unemployment' reported in 2001. The EU Commission granted partial funding for the study visits on condition that Romania should be included.

The methodology, as explained above, was devised to meet the paucity of evidence for blind and partially sighted people in public domains, such as the worldwide web, specialised literature on visual impairment, etc. The report is not presented as the last word on the subject. The authors hope that it will stimulate further study and, above all, action in the UK, Sweden and Germany, to do even more to reach and incentivise the 'hidden majority' of economically inactive people who are blind and partially sighted.

CHAPTER TWO: SWEDEN

The Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES) is outlined in section one. As described by staff responsible for its delivery, It begins with assessment of the capacity to work of anyone who has been absent from work through illness for more than 180 days. The outcome will be a decision either that the client is capable of work with appropriate support, or that he/she is not. In the latter case income substitution, in the form of disability pension, and disability compensation, in the form of an additional allowance, will be provided.

For those assessed as capable of work a range of impairment specific support services is available, within a matrix of services for disabled

people. Speaking generally, for blind and partially sighted people, there are three main services:

- * Investigating working skills and ability to work.
- * Investigating what adjustments are needed at work and/or in the work place to meet the individual's need.
- * Vocational/study guidance.

Attention is drawn to the fact that people who acquire sight loss at work are protected by retention legislation. This is aimed at ensuring that they cannot be summarily dismissed or encourage to retire on account of sight loss. Its operation is outlined at section 3.19.

In evaluating these services the authors concluded that they have made a very significant contribution to the participation of many blind and partially sighted people in a remarkably wide range of occupations. These are listed in appendix II to the chapter.

Yet concern remained about evidence of a long tail of economic inactivity. Of almost as much concern was that staff of SPES were unable to say what this rate of economic inactivity was.

The Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (SRF) presented written evidence from the website of the Swedish National Office of Statistics that 30,000 people report that sight loss affects their working capacity. Among these the rate of economic inactivity is about 43 percent and the rate of unemployment is about 10 percent.

This indicator of the rate of economic inactivity raises the hypothesis that some of the people concerned would express a propensity to work if SPES were to seek them out and investigate the barriers which they might think exclude them from the labour market. Staff of SPES agreed that such a hypothesis was tenable.

Returning to the employment services for visually impaired people, section five reviews the rehabilitation service offered by thirty-three low vision clinics (LVCs), mainly connected with eye hospitals of the state health service. The authors were told that these clinics provide training in independent living skills for people with serious sight loss and that those who leave the clinics are ready to avail themselves of the



vocational rehabilitation and training services of SPES, to whom they can be referred.

In written evidence SRF criticised this description as too favourable. They stated that LVCs do not always provide in practice such a seamless service of social and vocational rehabilitation. They regret that residential social rehabilitation was abandoned in Sweden in the 1980s and are lobbying for the reintroduction of some residential courses.

In section six the authors commend the impairment specific character of employment services as described in section one. Especially worthy of note are the teams of staff in SPES who specialise in sensory impairment. The list of occupations undertaken by deafblind people is a remarkable outcome of this (see appendix I to the chapter). The dedicated sensory impairment service is an example of good practice to be noted.

Services and employment for visually impaired people with complex needs, such as intellectual disabilities, are not very well developed in Sweden. However progress is beginning to be made through the work of specially trained coaches, known as SIUS coaches. They are hired by SPES to provide counselling, job introduction and training on the job. This service is intended to substitute for sheltered employment, and provide support for inclusion in mainstream employment, through the method of 'place and train' now favoured by such organisations as the European Union of supported Employment.

Section seven presents further evaluation of SPES, based on written comment from SRF. Their job introduction activity, delivered by a not-for-profit company called Iris Bemanning, is noted, as is their concern that recent governmental policy changes may lead to dilution of employment services for visually impaired people. In this connection the authors conclude that 'a robust system of impairment-specific employment support should be maintained in Sweden, alike for blind and partially sighted people and for visually impaired people with complex needs.'



CHAPTER THREE: GERMANY

Section one of this chapter outlines the employment services for blind and partially sighted people delivered by the Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (FMESA) and certain associated bodies, such as the Federal Employment Agency (FEA). As in Sweden they begin with assessment of capacity to work, which is required to be undergone by anyone who has been absent from work for a given period of time. The outcome of assessment is either that the client is occupationally disabled but can be supported in the labour market, or that the client is not able to return to work. In the latter case he/she is supported by income substitution - disability pension – and disability compensation, available only to blind people in the form of blindness allowance (blindengeld).

As in Sweden, people assessed as having an occupational disability are eligible for a range of employment support services. These are listed from paragraph 1.5. a notable difference from Sweden is that social and vocational rehabilitation are delivered on a residential basis. Like other people with disabilities, blind and partially sighted people in Germany are supported in the labour market by a quota system and an associated levy on employers who do not comply with it, known as the 'compensation charge'.

Besides residential rehabilitation, blind and partially sighted people, who are assessed as occupationally disabled, are entitled to impairment specific training, support at work (e.g. by a sighted support worker) and work experience. In Germany there are many sheltered workshops for disabled and other disadvantaged people, but FMESA believes that most visually impaired people can be supported into mainstream employment.

This range of services is evaluated first in section two, where they are judged as 'elaborate and impressive'. As with Sweden, it is recognised that they contribute significantly to the participation of many blind and partially sighted people in a wide range of mainstream occupations.

On the question of economic inactivity, however, the situation was found to be even more obscure than in Sweden. FEA keeps no statistics

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showing the number of blind and partially sighted people in employment, nor even the number who report that sight loss affects them at work. FMESA expressed very great scepticism that any blind person in Germany who really wanted a job could not get one.

Very great doubt was cast upon this judgment by several witnesses consulted. INFAS - Institute of Applied Social Sciences - a commercial research organisation based in Bonn, drew attention to the 'EVASA' survey, published in 1995 (par. 3.2.1 et seq.). It showed a rate of economic activity among blind and partially sighted people of 33 percent. No similar survey has since been made. INFAS expressed the view that the rate is unlikely to have increased since 1995 and that it could have declined, though the situation is 'obscure'.

Even stronger opinions were offered by agencies active on behalf of blind and partially sighted people in North-Rhine Westphalia. Staff consulted at the vocational training centre at Soest offered evidence in depth to argue that the situation has recently grown worse. This is presented in sections two and three. Their argument was supported in general by leading members of the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

Corroboration was also offered by the Office of Integration, an agency which is independent of FMESA and exists to support disabled people in employment. It provides a form of job protection for them which is not as strong as the statutory retention measures provided in Sweden. Its services are described in section five.

The Office of Integration is also responsible for administration of the quota system. The question arose whether the system contributes to a higher rate of economic activity among blind and partially sighted people in Germany, relative to comparable states of the EU. Sweden has no quota system, so evidence comparing Germany and the UK is presented at paragraph 6.3. Discussion of this between the participants proved inconclusive, but reasons are given in chapter five for regarding this inconclusiveness as significant.

Evidence presented at paragraph 6.6 shows that Germany is well ahead of Sweden and indeed the UK in promoting social enterprise as a means



of delivering employment to visually impaired people with complex needs. This should be noted as good practice.

Residential social and vocational rehabilitation for blind and partially sighted people is a striking feature of the German employment service. Provision is reviewed in section 7 on the evidence available at the website of the centre at Dueren.

CHAPTER FOUR: ROMANIA

To turn from employment services for blind and partially sighted people in the UK, Sweden and Germany to those in Romania is to be sharply reminded of uneven economic and social development in the European Union. The EU report, *Employment in Europe, 2008*, highlighted Romania's labour market problems. The national rate of employment was 59 percent. It had not risen since 2000 and was well below the EU's Lisbon target of at least 70 percent throughout the Union by 2010.

Paradoxically the report shows that, between 2000 and 2006, Romania was among the three member states of the EU achieving the highest rates of productivity growth. This combination of high productivity growth accompanied by a high rate of economic inactivity is not inevitable, the report argues. In the long run both should be growing and the challenge is to know how to bring this about. The report recommended that labour market policies should encourage transfer to new jobs rather than protect old ones against productivity growth. The policies recommended were:

- * 'the modernisation of labour laws that allow for sufficiently flexible work arrangements and reduce labour market segmentation and undeclared work;
- * the provision of adequate active labour market policies;
- the promotion of lifelong learning throughout the lifecycle;
- the implementation of modern social security systems that combine the provision of adequate income support with the need to facilitate labour market mobility..



The report was optimistic that such policies could be implemented during a period of recovery from the present economic recession. It drew attention to the implications for women, older people and youth. It was, however, absolutely silent on the problems of people with disabilities, which we critique as contrary to the current EU strategy of 'mainstreaming disability'.

In sections 2-5 we summarise the evidence presented to us by the Romanian Association of the Blind (RAB). It shows how Romania under Communist government developed very small blind elite, mainly in the medical sector of the labour market, and a small blind working class employed in sheltered workshops under state control. With the fall of Communism in 1989 the market for sheltered workshops all but disappeared. Training for blind masseurs in the medical sector underwent overall reorganisation and many blind masseurs went into early retirement, along with manual workers in the workshops.

From about 2000 the productivity growth identified by *Employment in Europe* set in, but blind and partially sighted people benefitted very little from it. Their rate of economic inactivity stood at 86 percent in 2008. Productivity growth permitted expansion of medical services in the private and public sectors and blind physiotherapists have benefitted somewhat from this. But no comparable development has taken place in other professional occupations undertaken by visually impaired people in U.K., Sweden and Germany. This is due, we think, to the almost complete absence of impairment specific employment services of the kind identified in chapters 2 and 3 (See chapter 4, sections 6-8). Section 9 of this chapter sets out the service development which RAB considers essential for progress to be made. Its views are broadly supported by our interview with the Director of the National Advisory Council for Disability (ch. 4, section 11).

In section 12 we try to offer some conclusions. As we write, the evidence presented in this chapter shows that blind and partially sighted people have suffered dramatically and disproportionately from the problem identified in the report *Employment in Europe, 2008* (see *par. 1.1*). The problem was there stated to be that, between 2000 and 2007, high productivity growth was accompanied by low employment growth. Whereas the general rate of economic inactivity in the population as a

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whole was around 40 percent, the corresponding rate for blind and partially sighted people is nearly 90 percent. * There is excessive labour market segmentation of blind and partially sighted people in physiotherapy, as compared to, say, law, financial services social work or public administration, which have all recruited numbers of blind and partially sighted people in countries like the UK, Sweden and Germany. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that The whole range of white collar employment associated with possession of ICT skills in these three countries is *terra incognita in Romania*. Furthermore, young blind and partially sighted people who have acquired such skills are driven to the informal economy to find employment of their knowledge and skills (see sections 4 and 5).

As regards a modern, flexible system of social security, Evidence was presented to us of inflexibility in the arrangements for people with disabilities. Legislation restricts wages paid to workers to 50 percent of the minimum wage (par. 6.3). With disability benefits exceeding the minimum wage, this is a recipe for ensuring a high level of economic inactivity. The abilities of blind and partially sighted people, which have been proven over and over again in other countries, are simply wasted by this kind of inflexibility. In the long run employers carry the burden of such benefit dependency, along with other tax payers.

Again the 2008 report pointed to the need for lifelong learning to promote flexible participation in the labour market. We agree and wish to stress that rehabilitation should be viewed in this light. The onset of a major disability such as sight loss clearly involves a major process of learning to live with it. For this reason it is imperative to develop provision for rehabilitation in Romania and we would urge the EU Commission to look again at the rules of the European Social Fund with a view to forwarding the development of the proposed RAB centre at Bucharest.

A matter not touched upon in the 2008 report remains of very great importance to blind and partially sighted people. This is the accessibility of the built environment. A blind visitor to Bucharest must be shocked to find that all pavements in the city centre are completely covered by parked cars, forcing pedestrians to walk on the carriage way. It is equally shocking to find that the city is infested by feral dogs, which prey upon domesticated animals. For this reason, we were informed, guide



dogs for the blind are unknown in Romania. The accessibility of the environment and systems of transport within it is as necessary to improve the rate of economic activity as the provision of rehabilitation, vocational training and support at work.

Such services are expensive to put in place. Nevertheless we would argue that there is nothing to be gained from delay pending economic recovery. If the task is put aside until the world recession is over it will only be larger and more difficult to address when that time comes. As the 2008 report put it: In these uncertain times we must not lose sight of our overall long-term aim of creating more and better jobs. 'Promoting job quality can rhyme with job creation and productivity.'

In welcoming this positive expression by the EU Commission, we can only regret that the opportunity was missed to address in the same report the needs of people with disabilities, who suffer even higher rates of economic inactivity than the female, older and younger citizens actually mentioned. We hope that this chapter has gone some way to redress the balance and that, in all future reports, disability will be placed where it ought to be – in the mainstream thinking of the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This chapter attempts a general comparison of the employment services in Sweden and Germany, with reference to issues concerning recent UK developments, rose in the introduction. This comparison bears in mind the impact of the services both on blind and partially sighted people who are active in the labour market and on those who are economically inactive. The recommendations of the authors to EBU are presented in the text and again as a list at the end of the report.

The first conclusion (par. 2.1) is that 'Both Sweden and Germany have developed over many decades an impressive array of services which aim to ensure that people of working age who experience serious sight loss may be able either:

- (i) to retain the job which they were in or

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(ii) be assisted to find another job, either in the same firm or in another.

Both member states have achieved a notable level of inclusion of blind and partially sighted people in a wide range of jobs in the mainstream labour market. Crucial to this has been timely intervention to assess the capacity of individuals for such employment, the provision of impairment specific services to move them towards the labour market and to support them in their jobs after they obtain them. Impairment specific programmes of rehabilitation, vocational training and support at work are here dubbed 'the trusted troika' which has successfully conducted many blind and partially sighted people on the journey from sight loss to mainstream employment. EBU is recommended to undertake specific activities aimed at spreading this good practice to every member state of the European Union, and especially the new member states of Eastern Europe like Romania.

In addition to 'the trusted troika', EBU is recommended to promote the enactment of retention legislation in every member state, broadly on Swedish principles.

As to rehabilitation, the Swedish system of relying on low vision clinics is contrasted with the German system of residential rehabilitation. It is too early to form conclusive judgments on their relative advantages or disadvantages and EBU is recommended to promote further study of this question.

A similar view is taken of evidence on the value of a quota system as a measure of labour activation for disabled people. EBU would be advised to respect the historical and other circumstances which have produced quota systems in various member states. It would also be advised to accept that evidence does not exist to justify lobbying for a quota system in every member state of the EU.

Turning again to Romania, The absolute under-development of the 'trusted troika' in that member state is, we think, the chief reason for the 86 percent rate of economic inactivity found among blind and partially sighted people. We very much regret that opportunity was not taken in the EU report Employment in Europe, 2008, to explore this problem and we recommend EBU to take this up with the DG employment and Social

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Affairs to ensure that such an omission does not recur. After all the European Employment Strategy insists on 'mainstreaming disability', a concept which applies as much to policy development as to social formation. EBU should also take up with the Directorate the problem of facilitating the new rehabilitation centre in Bucharest, which is fundamental to the construction of modern, flexible social security.

Dealing finally with economic inactivity and propensity to work we conclude that there is evidence to support the hypothesis of a significant rate of involuntary economic inactivity in every member state of the EU. They recommend EBU to publicise this in every possible way and to lobby for research on the lines of Work Focus UK. Such research should be more than empirical 'bean counting'. It should be designed to establish the level of need for programmes such as 'place and train' and state support for social enterprise, illustrated throughout chapters one to 3 of this report. In doing so, EBU should be careful to maintain the distinction between 'unemployment' and 'economic inactivity' which as used throughout this report. This is necessary because the term 'economic inactivity' does not appear to be well understood by some Swedish or German practitioners. This is probably a problem of translation mainly, and may well appear in other member states.

To sum up, these recommendations aim at promoting participation in the labour market both by people whose impairment is constituted

- (i) by simple sight loss, and
- (ii) by people whose impairments are complex, i.e. whose sight loss is compounded by additional difficulties such as intellectual disability, physical impairment or what is termed 'aging'. In trying to implement them, EBU would be promoting its long adopted 'twin track' solution to economic inactivity.



THE HIDDEN MAJORITY

A study of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in Sweden, Germany and Romania

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report presents the findings of the authors arising from study visits they paid to Sweden, Germany and Romania in 2008-9. During these visits they inquired into the employment services for blind and partially sighted people. Their aim was threefold:

- (i) to investigate labour activation measures and employment support services in each country,
- (ii) to estimate the rate of economic inactivity prevailing among blind and partially sighted people of working age,
- (iii) to report on these matters to the European Blind Union (EBU), recommending good practice found in either country, which might be disseminated throughout the European Union by the activities of EBU and its member organisations.

1.2 The project arose from the Working Group on Rehabilitation, Vocational Training and Employment, set up in 2003 by the European Blind Union. The Working Group met frequently between 2003 and 2007 and the authors of this report participated in these meetings. A main task of the Working Group was to ascertain the extent of 'unemployment' of blind and partially sighted people in the labour markets of the EU.

2 Unemployment and Economic Inactivity

2.1 The Working Group recognised from the outset that blind and partially sighted people have to overcome many barriers to their participation in European labour markets. In the United Kingdom, for example, an RNIB report, *Beyond The Stereotypes*: published in 2004, highlighted the difficulties blind and partially sighted people have in navigating through the recruitment process, often struggling with inaccessible job advertisements, application forms and selection procedures. The same report detailed government research findings, that 9 out of 10 employers rate blind and partially sighted people as either "difficult" or "impossible" to employ.

2.2 Despite these barriers, blind and partially sighted people are to be found in a remarkable range of occupations in every member state of the EU, from security guard to sales assistant, from lawyer to finance manager. The range of occupations is extensively listed and described on the EBU website, www.euroblind.org.

2.3 Throughout the discussions of the Working Group, however, the question arose whether, in any member state, such people are more than a minority of talented people, a sort of 'blind elite' composed of those whose exceptional commitment has enabled them to overcome the daunting barriers which make the labour market so difficult to penetrate for blind and partially sighted people. That this was true was strongly suggested by evidence that, in all European countries, there are a great many blind and partially sighted people who are not in work. 'The Employment of Blind People in Seventeen Countries', a report produced by EBU in 2001 cited the following rates of 'unemployment' in some member states:

France 39%
Italy 40%
Sweden 5%**
Germany 72%
Poland 87%

2.4 A major weakness of the 2001 report was its failure to distinguish between 'unemployment' and 'economic inactivity'. The rate of



unemployment, for the purposes of this report, is the ratio between the number of people actively seeking employment and the number of people in employment. The rate of economic inactivity is the ratio between the number of people in employment and the number of people not in employment, and not actively job seeking.

2.5 Between 2003 and 2007 the Working Group gathered evidence on economic inactivity from the member organisations of EBU. A senior director of the Association Valentin Haüy reported that two thirds of the legally blind people in France are inactive in the labour market. A recent report in Spain found it to be over 62 % among women and 38 % among men. The Pancyprian Organisation of the Blind reported that "more than 56.59% of blind people of working age do not work". In Italy, information supplied in March, 2007 by the Italian Union of the Blind shows that there are about 14,000 blind people in employment out of about 25,000 of working age - a possible rate of economic inactivity of about 40 percent. In the United Kingdom the Network 1000 report (of which more will be said below) discovered a rate of economic inactivity among registered blind and partially sighted people of 66 percent.

2.6 From the foregoing the Working Group concluded that economically inactive individuals constitute a majority of blind and partially sighted people of working age in most member states and no state is without a substantial minority. A further conclusion must be that they constitute a majority of blind and partially sighted people of working age throughout the whole European Union.

3 The Propensity to Work

3.1 The main question addressed in this introductory chapter is whether these rates of economic inactivity are inevitable or whether they could be reduced by appropriate labour activation measures. In the course of our study visit to Germany, for example, it was suggested to us that economic inactivity may be a matter of choice, which seems rational to the individuals concerned in the light of provision of relatively generous social security benefits and relative scarcity of jobs suitable for blind and partially sighted people.

3.2 In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, recent research suggests that a significant amount of economic inactivity is involuntary. The report produced in 2006 by Birmingham University, 'Network 1000', shows that 66 percent of registered blind and partially sighted people of working age are economically inactive. It may be noted that this is a higher rate than that of 45 percent economically inactive indicated in the UK Labour Force Survey (LFS). However the two populations studied are not strictly comparable, since Network 1000 studied 'registered blind and partially sighted people', while the LFS relied on self-reporting by people who acknowledged a 'seeing difficulty'. It should be noted, nevertheless, that of this 45 percent, 33 percent said that they would like to work.

3.3 Network 1000 throws a flood of light on the circumstances of economic inactivity. It is strongly associated with ageing - the highest rate, 79%, exists among those aged 50-64. In addition people who are registered as blind (i.e. with little or no sight) are far more likely to be economically inactive than people registered as partially sighted. Then again, a high percentage of blind and partially sighted people have additional disability or sickness. This is highest within the 50-64 age group, at 45%, but even the age groups 18-29 and 30-49 reported similar percentages.

3.4 The report shows that people who are inactive for up to ten years are mostly resigned to their situation. No fewer than 75% of the sample said they thought it unlikely or very unlikely that they would find work within a year. Their situation is worse than the question suggested. Evidence confirms that virtually none of the long term inactive will ever work again. In these circumstances it is noteworthy that 20 percent of the sample described themselves as 'unemployed' and of these 24 percent said they were actively seeking work.

3.5 There is further evidence of a "hidden" propensity to work among people with visual impairment. In a major survey of blind and partially sighted people in the UK (Bruce and Baker, 2003) only 3% of blind and partially sighted people under 60 years were found to be officially unemployed (defined as looking for work or a place on a government training scheme in the last four weeks). However the survey asked two further questions which revealed a much larger group of potential job

seekers. First a further 22% were not seeking work but would like to have it. Second, Bruce et al constructed a question to try to factor out low expectations, namely, “If you had a magic wand would you like to have a job?” The answer was, “yes” for 60% of respondents.

3.6 Such statements cannot, of course, be taken at face value. Blind and partially sighted people, like others, may say that they want to work as a general aspiration but will prove unwilling to stay the course when they discover what is involved in reality. People who have been out of work for up to ten years often find reskilling is too demanding and, even after reskilling, give up when faced with the long and frustrating search for an employer willing to recruit them. On the other hand, the question must be asked whether employment services in a given country are well designed to seek out and incentivise those people who could be drawn into the labour market by appropriate counselling, training and other forms of support. Even in member states of the EU whose employment support services for blind and partially sighted people are of long standing and of some proven effectiveness, it may be that these services succeed only for those who happen by one means or another to find their way through to them.

3.7 Evidence that this is the actual state of things in at least one member state comes again from the United Kingdom. In 2001 RNIB instituted a programme specifically aimed at blind and partially sighted people who had been out of work for more than a year. This programme runs under the name of ‘The Trainee Grade Scheme’ (TGS). Recruits to TGS are offered a twelve month period of paid work experience, with on the job development and support to assist them into permanent sustainable employment. The precise working of the Trainee Grade Scheme is indicated in Appendix I to this chapter. Here it is relevant to note that, as at end of January, 2009 80 people have left the programme since it started in April 2001. Of these, 54 have progressed into permanent employment, a success rate of 68 percent. This suggests that there is in the UK a significant number of jobless blind and partially sighted people whose wish to work is not being met by the regular employment services available for them through the Department of Work and Pensions.

3.8 Recruits to the Trainee Grade Scheme are mostly people whose loss of sight is uncomplicated by additional problems, such as other physical

impairments or intellectual difficulties. It may be thought that a large proportion of economically inactive people are those with complex needs who, arguably, will never reach the mainstream labour market. The report entitled "The Employment Continuum", published by RNIB in 2003, challenged this assumption as unjustified. It argued that people with complex needs could be employed in a labour market which provided a spectrum of employment arrangements through which people might progress as far as possible towards the mainstream, and it drew attention to the potential role of social firms in providing for this.

3.9 Following this report, in 2006 RNIB established a social firm named CONCEPT. Its aim is to develop the firm into a commercially sustainable, stand alone enterprise offering conferencing and catering services. CONCEPT currently has 6 staff (3 in the kitchen and 3 administrative staff), and of these 4 have sight loss.

CONCEPT also provides work experience and training opportunities for those furthest from the labour market in a wide range of vocational areas including administration, marketing, event management, catering, hospitality and business administration. Trainees have real jobs and receive a real salary and also develop life skills in cooking, budgeting and healthy eating. They receive training and job search support so that at the end of their trainee contract they are supported into a permanent job outside CONCEPT. To date CONCEPT has supported 27 people with sight loss and additional disabilities through its own training initiatives through volunteering and work experience placements or linked to other RNIB employment programmes. Of these, 14 have progressed into permanent employment. Ten of these trainee posts were funded by Birmingham City Council and each was filled by a person with sight loss and additional disabilities. Of these 7 went into employment.

3.10 CONCEPT strives to develop links with mainstream training providers such as Birmingham College of Food and Tourism. Some of the trainees attend courses there and the College has made a commitment to increasing the numbers of blind and partially sighted people into this vocational area.

3.11 Finally, we should note in this connection the recent reorganisation of Remploy in the United Kingdom. Remploy is a state supported company, founded after the Second World War to run sheltered



workshops for people with disabilities. It has recently transformed itself into an agency for promoting its workers into supported mainstream employment. The aim is to close many of the sheltered workshops and devote resources to job introduction and job coaching in the mainstream. In the first year of the project Remploy promoted over 100 blind and partially sighted people into mainstream employment.

4 The Hidden Majority

4.1 There is, then, evidence from the UK that blind and partially sighted people (including many with complex needs) who have been economically inactive for a considerable period of time can be enabled to reach the labour market given support services that are specifically designed with their needs in mind. Even so, there is a major difficulty to be overcome. Such people are, in a very real sense, 'hidden'. Typically, in their isolation, frustration, resignation and pessimism they do not present themselves to the regular employment programmes run by the state. Unless programme providers actively seek them out, most will continue to languish in economic inactivity. It may be that the state employment services, understandably preoccupied with those who come through their doors looking for work, fail many economically inactive people by neglecting to develop proactive measures for seeking them out and incentivising them. Once again, recent evidence from the UK suggests that this is so.

4.2 In 2007 RNIB sent 4,200 questionnaires to registered blind and partially sighted people of working age in selected locations. 670 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 16 percent.

4.3 The questionnaire was designed to meet the following objectives:

- (i) To estimate the level of economic inactivity amongst blind and partially sighted people
- (ii) To estimate the propensity to work of blind and partially sighted people who are not in employment
- (iii) To identify barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people in gaining employment



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- (iv) To identify what services blind and partially sighted people want from RNIB to help them into work
 - (v) To gather contact details from respondents so that follow up support could be provided to job seekers if given the go ahead

4.4 Respondents supplied their contact details and employment status. They also commented on their propensity to work, challenges faced and support required from RNIB.

4.5 The results of this survey were drawn together in an internal RNIB report entitled 'Work Focus'. Its findings confirm the statement in Network 1000 that around one-third of registered blind and partially sighted people of working age are in employment, with two-thirds not in paid work. Of the two-thirds that are out of work, roughly one half would potentially like to return to work. This represents over 22,000 working age blind and partially sighted people across the UK who could potentially join the labour market.

4.6 Appendix II to this chapter presents a fuller account of the findings of 'Work Focus'. The point to be emphasised here is that this confirms the evidence of earlier reports that economic inactivity is extensive among blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Though many of these people indicate a propensity to work, the state employment services which exist to help them either do not reach them at all or have failed to help them if they have. It remains to be seen whether the Employment Support Allowance, introduced in October 2008, which brings mandatory contact with government employment services for new claimants of incapacity benefits, will result in delivery of appropriate support to this group of people.

5 Study of Sweden, Germany and Romania proposed

5.1 The authors of this report wished to know whether a similar state of affairs exists in other member states of the European Union. Extensive investigations of sources in the public domain failed to disclose any data comparable to those presented in Network 1000 and Work Focus. Conference reports shed little light upon it. The websites of national employment agencies were silent about it. A rapid survey of printed



literature concerned with visual impairment also failed to produce relevant data (for countries other than the UK) of the desired depth and scope.

5.2 Accordingly the authors proposed that EBU should seek funding to enable them to carry out a preliminary study of the situation in three member states of the European Union. They suggested two countries in particular, Sweden and Germany. Sweden was chosen because the 2001 EBU report had indicated a rate of 'unemployment' of around 5 percent, while the Swedeish Association of the Visually Impaired had estimated (in an appendix to the same report) that more than half its members were economically inactive. Germany was chosen because of the high rate of 'unemployment' reported by EBU in 2001.

5.3 The Commission of the European Union offered some funding for such study visits and suggested visiting Romania in addition to Sweden and Germany. This was welcome, but it must be added that none of the study visits could have been carried out but for generous additional funding by RNIB.

6 Methodology

6.1 Study visits of three days duration were made to Sweden and Germany in September and October, 2008, and to Romania in January, 2009.

6.2 The three aims of the study visits, as already stated, were:

- (i) To investigate labour activation measures and employment support services in each country.
- (ii) to estimate the rate of economic inactivity prevailing among blind and partially sighted people of working age in Sweden and Germany.
- (iii) to report on these matters to the European Blind Union, recommending good practice found in either country, which might be disseminated throughout the European Union by the activities of EBU and its member organisations.

6.3 The methodology of the investigation can be briefly stated. It was our intention to conduct fairly structured interviews with people



responsible for delivering the state employment service for blind and partially sighted people and to cross check the results as far as possible by interviewing well informed observers as to the way in which the services impact on blind and partially sighted people of working age, both in and out of employment. In this latter category the most important stakeholders are the major organisations representing blind people themselves. In Sweden this is the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired, known by its Swedish initials as 'SRF'. In Germany the corresponding organisation is the German Federation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (Deutscher Blinden und Sehbehindertenverband). We obtained access to leading members of both organisations, who gave valuable oral and written testimony.

6.4 In Germany, we were fortunate to gain access to the Institute of Applied Social Sciences (is INFAS), whose testimony shed a flood of light on the statistical extent of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in that country.

6.5 The interviews were loosely structured around a list of eight written questions, which we submitted in advance to all the interviewees. These questions are reproduced in Appendix III to this chapter. Most of them were very broadly designed and this was intended to give interviewees an opportunity to supply both detailed information and broad reflections. We believe the interviews worked well in this respect.

6.6 The interviews conducted on each visit extended over two and a half working days and each interview lasted between one and three hours. They were conducted in successive sessions before and after lunch. On each day there were less structured conversations over lunch, which often added valuable information, as did informal meetings over dinner in the evenings of the first two days.

6.7 For Sweden and Germany these interviews, added to previously supplied written evidence, provide the basic content of chapters two and three of this report. Under a guarantee of personal anonymity, a first draft of each chapter was shown to all the participants in the interviews and many came back to us with valuable corrections, supplementary evidence and comment. In general we think this process resulted in broad agreement between us and the participants that the chapters give



a balanced account of the employment services and their impact on blind and partially sighted people in each country. Differences of emphasis and occasionally of interpretation remain, however, and we have disclosed them as objectively as we can in the contents of chapters two and three.

6.8 In Romania the process necessarily diverged somewhat from the pattern established in Sweden and Germany. The structure of the labour market for blind and sighted people is very different in Romania from that in the other two countries, and very much harder for blind and partially sighted people to penetrate. For this reason alone direct comparison with Sweden and Germany, though not without validity, is problematic. Furthermore, we were unable to interview any Ministers or civil servants in the relevant government departments, Owing perhaps to the elections which took place in November, 2008. This limitation may be repaired by future studies, since the new government has announced its intention to modify the free market policies of its predecessor.

6.9 In chapter 4, therefore, we have presented the evidence that was supplied to us regarding the history and present situation of visually impaired people in the Romanian labour market. The difference from our inquiries in Sweden and Germany is that we obtain no evidence from state service providers. Since almost no such services exist, this is hardly surprising. Nevertheless the evidence and our conclusions should be of concern to EBU and the EU Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs. Moreover since both evidence providers were fully aware of each other's presentation, the need of personal anonymity did not arise.

6.10 Our confidence in the value of these study visits was founded on work done 2007 by Fred Reid in France. The aim of the investigation was limited to sheltered employment and his conclusions are not readily comparable with the findings here presented for Sweden, Germany and Romania. Nevertheless they have been considered sufficiently interesting in themselves to justify publishing them as an appendix to this report.

6.11 Finally, we do not claim that our report forms anything like the last word on the questions we raised. What we hope is that it will stimulate

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further study and, above all, action at all levels of the EU to reach and incentivise the 'hidden majority' of economically inactive people who are blind and partially sighted. In furtherance of this we have added to our conclusions a list of recommendations for the consideration of EBU.



Appendix I

RNIB's Trainee Grade Scheme

The Trainee Grade Scheme sits neatly within RNIB's strategic direction, supporting the work to campaign for positive change and specifically, increasing employment of blind and partially sighted people.

The aim of the Scheme is to provide a period of paid work experience with on the job development and support to assist blind or partially sighted people into permanent sustainable employment. The Scheme has been running for five years.

As at end of January, 2009, 80 people had left the programme since it started in April 2001. Of these 54 had progressed into permanent employment, a success rate of 68 percent. An additional benefit of the scheme has been the development of a database of applicants to trainee places who were unsuccessful. There are about 100 people on record and RNIB continues to support them through telephone contact.

Structure of the Scheme

The model includes:

- A dedicated officer
- Individual development plans for each trainee tailored to their needs
- Regular reviews
- Job search support
- Salaried positions
- Exit strategy and follow up

Finance

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On average the cost of funding each trainee post is £17000 per year. Income generated from statutory provision is about £5000 per person via the Workstep scheme

Key Lessons

The experience gained over the years has not been without its challenges and we have realised that it is important:

- To have a dedicated officer to drive the initiative forward and provide support.
- To provide a loan stock of equipment for new trainees, to reduce the impact of delays waiting for equipment delivered via the government's Access to Work Scheme
- That training and development must be tailored to the needs of each trainee
- To have real, paid jobs as this encourages people to apply (rarely do we have difficulty recruiting to this programme)
- To have knowledge of statutory provision available to alleviate some of the costs
- To have a proper matching process to ensure that the right trainee is selected for the available positions
- To ensure line managers are committed to the trainees development and allocate appropriate resources to this
- Developing external partnership has been slower than hoped



Appendix II

Paper presented at Vision 2008 conference by John Slade and Philippa Simkiss

Work focus: Creating an employment marketplace for blind and partially sighted people

Abstract

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) undertook research to investigate the employment of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Questionnaires were sent to 4,200 people aged 18 to 64 who were registered as seriously sight impaired. A response rate of 16 per cent was achieved.

Thirty percent of respondents were in paid employment, 17 percent were 'unemployed', and 53 percent were economically inactive. Respondents identified their sight problem, poor health, lack of confidence and a lack of job related skills, as challenges to getting a job. Forms of support highlighted by respondents included information on the range of jobs carried out by people with sight problems, and advice on the support available in work.

More sharing of good practice between organisations in Canada, Australia and USA is required to assess the best approaches to helping blind and partially sighted people into work.

Introduction

In July 2006 Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) hosted a group of Chief Executive Officers and Human Resource Directors from leading private sector companies to discuss the challenge faced by RNIB to increase employment of blind and partially sighted people. The group's recommendation was that RNIB should lead a programme to create an



employment marketplace for blind and partially sighted people and their potential employers. They recommended a three stage project comprising market research, pilot testing of new models to demonstrate a marketplace of supply and demand in a local area and creation of a web based market place. A project team was established to carry out the first stage market research with a view to calculating the level of unemployment of blind and partially sighted people, estimating their propensity to work, identifying barriers to gaining employment and the services that can help. This paper presents the results of the market research.

Methodology

The target group for the questionnaire was anyone of working age who had some degree of sight loss. In order to limit the sample local authority registers of blind and partially sighted were used. This allowed access to registered (seriously sight impaired) people from the age of 18-64. The sample was then refined by geographic area, with a number of areas selected as they were possible locations for future service pilots. Factors influencing this decision were the number of blind and partially sighted people, presence of a number of large employers, a desire to achieve a mixture of urban and regional areas, the quality of links with local service providers and the availability of transport or other support. The areas chosen were London (five boroughs), Leeds, Nottinghamshire and Aberdeenshire.

A total of 4200 questionnaires were distributed in April and May 2007. Of these 3428 were sent to registered blind and partially sighted people, via the register holders, with a covering letter from them enclosed. An additional 772 were sent to RNIB customers selected from customer databases. The questionnaires were sent in N16 point print, along with an accompanying letter. A Braille card was also enclosed, which outlined the purpose of the mailing and a telephone number to either request alternative formats or complete the questionnaire over the phone. A freepost return envelope was also enclosed.

The overall response rate was 16 percent (493 from registered blind and partially sighted people and 177 from RNIB customers). The responses



in the two subgroups highlighted recurring themes and we have combined the data for analysis.

Findings and analysis

When asked to describe their employment status, 30% of respondents stated that they were in paid employment (which includes full-time, part-time and self-employment). 17% of respondents described themselves as 'unemployed', with the remaining 53% indicating various forms of economic inactivity (see Table 1)

Table 1: Employment status of respondents (n=670)

In paid employment	30%
Unemployed	17%
Retired from paid work	17%
Looking after family and home	4%
Student - full or part time	3%
Long term sick or disabled	26%
Other (e.g. complex needs, vol. work, supported employment)	3%

There was little difference between the employment status of respondents who were from the registers or from RNIB databases. Variation between these two samples was at most +/-2%.

Respondents who were not in paid employment were asked if they wanted work (see Table 2). 10% of all respondents were currently job seeking, and this is the figure for 'active jobseekers'. 31% of all respondents were either currently looking for a job, wanted to look for a job or would like to discuss their options. These 'potential job seekers' are people who with varying degrees of support could potentially join the labour market. If this percentage is applied to the number of working age blind and partially sighted people in the England (as indicated by the Register of Blind and Partially Sighted People, Department of Health, 2003) there are approximately 22,000 blind and partially sighted people that could be supported to join the labour market.

The percentage of people not wanting paid employment may appear high, but this figure is in line with other research in this area (Douglas, Corcoran & Pavey, 2006).

Table 2: Propensity to work of all respondents (n=670)

In paid employment	30%
Yes, currently job seeking	10%
Yes, but not currently job seeking	10%
Maybe, would like to discuss options	11%
No, would not like paid employment	39%

Factors effecting propensity to work

When respondents were asked what challenges they faced in getting a job, 54% cited their visual impairment. The other most significant barriers were 'attitudes or lack of awareness of employers' (24%), 'poor health' (23%) and 'unemployed for a long period of time' (22%). These percentages all increased among the active job seekers and potential job seekers with 'lack of job opportunities', 'lack of appropriate skills or experience', 'confidence issues' and 'difficulty finding out about jobs' highlighted as well.

When potential job seekers were asked what five forms of support would help them into a new job, the two most frequently cited responses related to:

- information on the range of jobs carried out by people with sight problems (67%)
- advice on the support available to blind and partially sighted people in work (66%)

The next most sought after support was practical elements of job search such as 'help finding vacancies' (49%), 'help filling out application forms' (39%) followed by 'help finding work experience' (36%) and 'face to face careers advice' (34%). Amongst the active job seekers these practical elements of support were ranked much higher.



Key findings from research with blind and partially sighted people

- 30% in paid employment
- 10% actively job seeking
- 10% would like work but not actively job seeking
- 11% not sure but would like to explore options
- 39% do not want work

Challenges to Securing Work

- Visual Impairment
- Attitudes and lack of awareness of employers
- Poor health

What Would Help Job Seekers

- Info on range of jobs blind and partially sighted people do
- Advice on support available when in work
- Practical help -finding vacancies, filling out forms
- Help finding work experience

The number of respondents selecting 'interactive website for job seekers' in their top 5 choices was low. This could be because of their lack of access to technology, lack of computer skills or low levels of awareness and availability of access technology.

Conclusions

Around one-third of blind and partially sighted people responding to the survey were in employment. Of the remaining two-thirds who are not in work, one half want to be and the other half do not. Respondents identified a variety of challenges to getting a job, including their sight problem, 'poor health', lack of confidence and lack of job related skills. Forms of support that respondents considered would help them into

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employment included information on the range of jobs carried out by people with sight problems, and advice on the support available in work.

Further research needs to investigate what interventions can be made to help people move along the employment spectrum from 'not interested in employment' to 'potential jobseeker' to 'active jobseeker', and moving active jobseekers into employment.

RNIB has established a number of projects to engage blind and partially sighted people of working age and support them into work. Some are funded through government contracts with restrictions on who can participate and the range of services provided; others are funded from charitable donations, with no such restrictions. These pilots will be subject to independent evaluation and the subject of further reports.

This research indicates that the employment status of blind and partially sighted people is similar in the UK to that in the US, Canada and Australia. More and better sharing of good practice should take place between organisations in these countries in order to assess the best approaches to helping more blind and partially sighted people into work.

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Appendix III

List of written questions submitted in advance to interviewees.

1. Legal definition of blindness and partial sight
2. Number of blind and partially sighted people in employment by age, gender and additional impairments. Average annual income
3. Range of occupations held
4. Number actively seeking work by age, gender and additional impairments
5. Number not wanting to work
6. Social security benefits information
7. Labour activation programmes in open employment and special employment
8. Legislation or schemes aimed at employers



CHAPTER TWO

SWEDEN

1 INTRODUCTION: THE SWEDISH SYSTEM OF SOCIAL INSURANCE.

1.1 The social insurance system in Sweden was described to us as 'on the whole comprehensive'. Its general aims are to provide income replacement during unemployment, to promote the health and medical care of unemployed people and to facilitate their return to the labour market. The system includes unemployment insurance schemes run by labour unions.

1.2 GENERAL ENTITLEMENT TO SICKNESS BENEFIT In accordance with these general principles, an employee is legally entitled to sick pay from the employer for the first 14 days of absence from work due to illness, exclusive of the first day (the "waiting period"). Thereafter the employer will notify the Swedish Social Insurance Agency of the illness and the employee may be awarded sickness benefit for up to 90 days. At the end of this period, if the employee is still unable to return to his job, the employer must try to find another suitable job in the firm. If this cannot be achieved within 180 days the employee must undergo assessment as to capacity for work in some other occupation. If this proves unsuccessful the sick worker is transferred to disability pension after one year.

1.3 FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR COSTS OF DISABILITY Sweden provides compensation for the extra cost of living with a

disability, including sight loss. This is provided for by two cash benefits. The older is disability allowance (DA). It is a tax free benefit paid to people between 19 and 65 years of age. It is paid at three levels, according to severity of disability, namely 36%, 53%, or 69% of retail price index. Blind people are always assessed at 69%. Visually impaired people are sometimes assessed at one of the two lower rates. There is a system of appeal from the decisions of first instance.

1.4 In addition to DA Sweden has recently introduced a personal assistance allowance (PAA). This benefit is paid to people with severe functional impairment who have to depend on others to provide personal care for more than 20 hours per week. It was introduced to support people with severe impairments who do not go to work. As the administration of PA is not the responsibility of SPES, staff were uncertain whether it could be used to support such people in employment.

1.5 It is sometimes said that generous provision of income replacement plus compensation act as a disincentive to return to work. We sought the views of SPES staff on this question. They acknowledged that return to work sometimes results in reduction of income for visually impaired people, but stated that 'This is not an issue for our clients.' A client, they further observed, can refuse only three job offers, after which benefit is reduced.

1.6 ASSESSMENT the award of sickness benefit automatically triggers an assessment process aimed at identifying what work a person might do compatible with his/her disability and what kind of support might enhance their capacity for remunerative work. This is in conformity with the general principle that work is regarded as desirable from the point of view of health as well as remuneration.

1.7 As far as people with disabilities are concerned, the aim of Swedish labour activation policy is to include them in mainstream employment and to ensure the removal of barriers to participation in the labour market. In trying to deliver these outcomes the focus is on the needs of the individual in his/her environment and current legislation provides 'statutory rights to [labour activation] measures' specifically designed for



the individual concerned.

1.8 The Social Insurance Agency is responsible for the assessment. If it demonstrates that an individual has a capacity to work but needs work orientated rehabilitation, the Swedish Public Employment Service (SPES) will be asked to provide this support.

2 SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

2.1 SPES) is a state funded agency with responsibility for helping unemployed people to find work. It is divided into 68 labour market regions and the labour market regions are in turn brought together in four market areas. Each region has a network of employment offices situated in the municipalities.

2.2 A general service for unemployed people with disabilities is delivered mostly by staff from these offices. It is important to note, however, that there are also specialized employment offices with teams serving people with visual impairment, hearing impairment or deafness located in the four regions – North, West, East and South. For people with visual impairment the specialist service is delivered through 9 ‘offices’. The teams consist of Low Vision Specialists, Employment- and Study Counsellors, Psychologists, SIUS- counsellors (see below par. 3.13) Eye Consultants and Opticians.

2.3 A visually impaired person who has been assessed as capable of work is referred to the local Employment Office in the first instance, and is allocated to an employment officer in the regular placement service. The employment officer can then refer his/her client to one of the nine specialist offices and the client is set up for a meeting and assessment on a consultative basis. If assessed as capable of working with support, the client is then referred back to the local employment officer as a job seeker. The employment officer is responsible for matching such job seekers to vacancies in the area and for filling the vacant post. If necessary, the employment officer can call upon support from staff of the specialist office.



2.4 VISUAL IMPAIRMENT SERVICE AND LEGAL DEFINITIONS The special service for people with Visual Impairment is available to people whose sight loss causes reduced work capacity. A medical certificate describing the visual limitation, diagnosis etc from an eye doctor is needed and within SPES two categories or ‘codes’ are recognized, as follows:

Code 31 implies reduced work capacity as a consequence of useful vision and the person compensates this by using other senses. Visual acuity less than 0,05 (5 % of normal vision) or limitations in the vision field 10 degrees or less from the centre. Code 32 implies reduced work capacity as a consequence of low vision with visual acuity less than 0,3 (30%) of normal vision with best correction. People with sight problems with visual acuity higher than 0,3 can also be included – if the problem affects their ability to work in different ways. For example someone might have difficulties orientating in the dark but not in daylight.

2.5 In general, we were told, SPES tries to meet the needs of everyone with all kinds of serious sight loss, affecting their ability to work, ‘but our priority is with the two groups described above. Dyslexia may be involved with a sight problem, but our services are not for persons with dyslexia without diagnosed visual impairment.’

3 SUPPORT FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE IN EMPLOYMENT

3.1 SPES staff supplied the following list of programmes aimed at supporting people with disabilities in open and special employment.

3.2 FLEXIBLE ADAPTATION MODULES (FAM) is a complementary programme to the ordinary employment training programmes. Besides training, it can also be used to facilitate job introductions and agreements. It targets people with a disability and a reduced work capacity. The modules are delivered by an education/training organizer in a private company, e.g. IrisHadar, linked to SRF. Education/training takes place on their own premises, that is to say, not on the job. A person can be referred to FAM from the employment office for

preparation courses.

3.3 Flexible action modules take two forms. (a) A preparatory and introductory programme offers a wide range of activities, delivered by specialist tutors, who guide and support the client through the programme. This programme can be taken even when there is no particular job in view.

3.4 (b) A second programme supports activities implemented in an ordinary employment training course. It aims to give full access on equal terms as far as possible. The FAM tutors give support to the client, to the regular teachers and, if required, to other participants in the programme. This module can also be taken when there is no particular job in view – but the program's goal is that 70 % of the participants should have found a job within 3 months after the program is ended.

3.5 VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES. Certain courses are directly aimed at people with vision impairment. The client can receive help with technical aids and material if he/she has sight problems. These are specialized courses purchased by the employment service and delivered by a private education/training organizer who can meet the special conditions set by the buyer. They are open to clients within the employment services. Examples include: vocational training to become a masseur; starting up in business; preparatory training leading to further training in a chosen branch of the care field; sound technician; preparatory training before becoming a nurse.

3.6 WAGE SUBSIDIES. An employer hiring a person with a disability and reduced work capacity can receive financial compensation in the form of a wage subsidy. The disabled job seeker can find the work him/herself or can be referred by the Employment Service. The purpose of the wage subsidy is to enable people with occupational disabilities to obtain employment where the competence and skills of the individual are utilized, allowance being made for functional impairment and reduced work capacity. The employee receives the same (or comparable) wages and benefits provided by collective agreements in the economic sector concerned.



3.7 SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT WITH PUBLIC EMPLOYERS. The target group consists of unemployed people who have a socio-medical occupational disability, people with long-term mental illness and unemployed people covered by `The Assistance and Service to People with a Functional Impairment Act`. The aim is to give certain groups of occupationally disabled people the opportunity to have a job which is rehabilitative in nature, and from which, in the long run, the disabled worker can progress to employment in the mainstream labour market.

3.8 THE SAMHALL GROUP. Samhall is a state owned company and its mission is to produce articles and services which are in demand and by so doing create meaningful employment for people with disabilities. It works in a wide range of fields and has factories and plants all over Sweden. 27,000 individuals are employed within Samhall and 93% of these have a disability. Approximately 5% of the workforce leave Samhall annually, progressing to a job, with or without wage subsidy, in the mainstream labour market. A job guarantee scheme operates to enable anyone who leaves Samhall for a job on the open labour market and who then subsequently “fails” at the job to return to work at Samhall within a period of one year.

3.9 SUPPORT FOR ASSISTIVE DEVICES AT THE WORK PLACE. The purpose of support for assistive devices is to enable persons with occupational disabilities to obtain employment, to start up in business on their own, to take part in labour market policy programmes or to take part in courses on practical working life orientation. Support for assistive devices refers both to devices allotted to a client with an occupational disability, and to special devices allotted to the employer.

3.10 support worker. The purpose of a support worker is to enable someone with an occupational disability to obtain and retain employment, or to take part in a labour activation programme, or a course in practical working life orientation. This support is intended to provide an employer with financial compensation for the additional cost entailed in allocating personnel resources to support the disabled employee at work. This financial support can also be paid to another person incurring expenditure through the provision of a support worker.

3.11 SPECIAL ASSISTANCE WHEN STARTING UP A BUSINESS. This refers to the financial contribution given to people with a functional



impairment who start their own business. The financial contribution is to be used for the purchase of machinery, tools and other costs of starting up as self-employed. Assistance is given to someone who is unemployed, who has a business idea judged to be profitable and capable of making a considerable contribution to his or her livelihood. Assistance can also be given to several people who together establish a business.

3.12 SECURED EMPLOYMENT. This is a type of job introduction that can be seen as an alternative to sheltered employment. It is the third and final step in a new model that starts with a comprehensive assessment of the client's capabilities. The second step is the Development of Employment which is the offer of a job, when it is considered that the client's ability can be developed through work experience. The third step is employment with a high wage subsidy and extra allowance for assistance. These supports also last for a longer period of time, up to four years. The employee receives wages and other benefits provided for or comparable to collective agreements in the branch of economic activity concerned.

3.13 SUPPORT INTO MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT – SIUS coaching. SIUS is an individual pre-hiring supportive arrangement for job seekers with severe occupational disabilities, who can work in the mainstream. The coach gives special support, both to the job seeker and to the employer with special knowledge of introductory methodology. Previous to hiring the SIUS consultant can provide special support with job matching. He or she co-operates with the employer in planning the introduction and provides the job seeker with personalised support in accordance with a plan of action. This can mean the SIUS consultant working for a time together with the job seeker at the tasks concerned. Support through a SIUS consultant is generally not expected to continue beyond six months.

3.14 WORK EXPERIENCE. During a period of work experience the job seeker can try out a job, also giving the employer the chance to try things out before making a final decision. The job seeker receives no payment from the employer, but receives 'activity support' from SPES - the same amount of money as when unemployed or under a rehabilitation Programme.



3.15 People with sight loss can benefit from most of these programmes. The 'supported worker' programme, for example, can help to overcome the restrictions of limited vision. For example, sight loss may debar an employee from driving, or may make it difficult to fast read or scan text. Accordingly, an employee may need the help of a chauffeur, someone to read or someone to act as secretary. The Employment Service can grant the employer a small amount of financial support to provide a support worker

3.16 Similarly the equipment programme can provide assistive technologies such as speaking computers, Braille displays, magnification devices, etc. Equipment can be provided before a job is found and it is claimed that there is little delay in providing additional equipment when a job is commenced (but see below, par. 7.9).

3.17 The local employment office funds assessments and assistive technology etc. The support can be given for the first year of employment (without wage subsidy) but continuously for those who have a job that includes a wage subsidy. All equipment is personal and belongs to the vi employee. For those vi employees without wage subsidy, the employer or the social security office is financially responsible for technical aids after one year of employment. The SPES staff is often used as consultant here when it comes to dealing with assessment in the workplace.

3.18 Speaking generally, the three main services for people with a visual impairment are:

- * Investigating working skills and ability to work.
- * Investigating what adjustments are needed at work and/or in the work place to meet the individual's need.
- * Vocational/study guidance.

3.19 RETENTION MEASURES. It should be noted that Sweden has statutory measures to ensure RETENTION Of STAFF WHO Acquire a disability, including sight loss, AT Work. Employers cannot dismiss such a person, but must draw up an action plan for retaining him/her in



the job or transferring them to another appropriate job in the firm. * * 4
EVALUATION

4 EVALUATION

4.1 JOBS UNDERTAKEN BY VISUALLY Impaired PEOPLE. Modern technology and personal support at work have helped greatly to expand the range of occupations which visually impaired people are able to undertake. Appendix II provides an illustrative list.

4.2 This is an impressive list, no doubt due in part at least to the good practice in Sweden of maintaining a strong system of impairment-specific training and support for people with serious sight loss, which helps them to remain in or return to employment.

4.3 RATES OF EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC INACTIVITY. Yet, when all due recognition is accorded to Swedish successes, we remain concerned at evidence of a long tail of economic inactivity persisting among blind and partially sighted people of working age in Sweden. Staff of SPES stated that gaps in the statistics available to them make it very difficult to estimate the size or causes of this phenomenon with a tolerable degree of accuracy.

4.4 A biennially updated survey shows that there are 65,000 people of working age who report that they have problems with their vision. How many of these are currently in employment and how many are economically inactive cannot be ascertained because SPES has data only on vi people who have registered themselves with the Service as job seekers. SPES staff observed that this is common to all job seekers – disabled or not. They supplied the latest survey data dated January 5, 2009. The number of visually impaired people registered is 3323. 1442 of these are working with a wage subsidy. 292 are in 'secure' employment. The number of job ready unemployed is 333 and 35 are registered as part time unemployed. The rest are either in training, on assessment, work placement or taking part in other measures. It was pointed out that people with a wage subsidy are registered because SPES is responsible, without time limitation, for technical aids during their employment.



4.5 In discussion with SPES staff we pointed out that the report on the employment of blind people in 17 countries, published by EBU in 2001, gave an unemployment rate in Sweden of about five percent. We also pointed to the appendix to the report in which a member organization of EBU, the Swedish association of the Visually Impaired (SRF) estimated that more than half of its members were 'unemployed'. We observed that this discrepancy arose from failure to distinguish between 'unemployment' and 'economic inactivity', as discussed in the introduction.

4.6 However, the question of the rate of economic inactivity does not end here. When we showed the first draft of this chapter to staff of SRF, they commented as follows: 'Recent figures show that 65,000 persons in the whole country claim that they have some kind of visual impairment affecting daily life, and around 30,000 say that it affects their working capacity. Among these 30,000 47% are at work, 10% are registered with SPES as unemployed ... The remaining 43% are on disability pension and not seeking work.' The source of these figures was given as the Swedish National Office of Statistics.

4.7 SPES staff made no comment on the significance of these statistics. With reference to the number of job seekers mentioned in par. 4.5, however, they agreed that this falls well short of the number of visually impaired people of working age who are likely to be economically inactive. They agreed that research into economic inactivity in Sweden would be likely to reveal a proportion of people who would like to work, as reported in UK research. They also agreed that research was required to ascertain the existence and size of such a group in Sweden.

4.8 In general, it is our opinion that the percentages from the Office of Statistics seem to confirm SRF's 2001 estimate of the rate of economic inactivity. This suggests that the assessment process in Sweden, as described above (par. 1.6 et seq.), results in many people with serious sight loss being regarded as incapable of work in mainstream, sheltered or supported employment. As in the UK, we think that research into economic inactivity in Sweden is likely to reveal a number of blind and partially sighted people who wish to work and who could be helped to



reach the labour market.

5 REHABILITATION

5.1 Closely related to the question of economic inactivity is the existence or absence of a robust system of impairment-specific rehabilitation for employees and job seekers who have experienced serious sight loss. They need support to acquire mobility skills and skills of personal care such as cooking, etc. This is commonly known as 'social rehabilitation'. Most people who acquire sight loss in adult life need to acquire these skills as well as occupational skills, a process usually known as 'vocational rehabilitation'.

5.2 It is widely recognised that a major problem for disability employment services is timely intervention. It is undesirable that people should leave eye hospital, go onto disability pension and be left to find their way through to those who can help them with social and vocational rehabilitation. A long gap can be demoralising and jeopardise success.

5.3 The Swedish solution to this problem is striking. There is a network of 33 "Syncentraler", low vision clinics (LVCs) situated within the health care system. Visiting a clinic is normally free, but some clinics make a small charge. They are open to people with low vision, defined by standards set by the World Health Organisation: low vision is defined as visual acuity of less than 6/18, but equal to or better than 3/60, or corresponding visual field loss to less than 20 degrees, in the better eye with best possible correction. Blindness is defined as visual acuity of less than 3/60, or corresponding visual field loss to less than 10 degrees, in the better eye with best possible correction. Vision below 0,3 or other difficulties with vision that affects their daily living.

5.4 Patients need a letter of referral from an eye-specialist. After the first referral they are free to contact the clinic at need. None is discharged nor is attendance limited to a fixed period of time.

5.5 As would be expected, most patients are over retirement age. We were told that there are about 16,000 patients of working age attending. The staff of the LVCs form multi-disciplinary teams, able to offer optical



rehabilitation and training in low vision techniques, mobility and daily living skills, emotional counselling etc. The LVCs collaborate with SPES, informing their patients as to the help which this service can offer when advice on returning to, or seeking work is needed. They cannot refer patients directly to SPES, only inform them about the service and how to contact it. It should be noted, however, that, in some parts of Sweden, there are regular collaboration meetings between the SPES and the LVC. Thus Sweden, in contrast to Germany, does not rely on residential rehabilitation services. Everything is done at a fairly local level. Besides the LVCs communities can offer the services of an occupational therapist.

5.6 We are intrigued by this evidence of a 'joined up' rehabilitation service which begins within the health service and offers a continuous pathway through the sight loss experience with support towards independence in personal care and employment. Unfortunately staff of SPES were unable to supply statistics relating to outcomes: how many people go on from the LVC to mainstream or sheltered employment; what proportion of them are male/female; how are these distributed by age; how many of them have complex needs such as additional physical impairments, intellectual difficulties or ageing? We think that any future research into economic inactivity in Sweden should find answers to such questions.

6 LABOUR ACTIVATION PROGRAMMES

6.1 As shown in section 3, labour activation programmes for blind and partially sighted people exist in Sweden and may be shown to have had a relatively high level of success. They are commendably impairment-specific even though they are delivered by an employment service agency whose remit covers all disabled people. We consider this to be a model of good practice.

6.2 DEAFBLIND PEOPLE The provision of a service specializing in 'sensory impairment' should also be noted as good practice. It has yielded striking employment results for deafblind people, as can be seen in the list of jobs they do (appendix I).



6.3 On the other hand, there appears to be much less support for people with complex needs. We were informed that sheltered employment has almost disappeared for visually impaired people. Samhall, the Swedish agency for sheltered employment is said to have refocused its work away from jobs suitable for them. Without doubt mainstreaming is a matter for congratulation as far as many blind and partially sighted people are concerned, but it should be complemented by special support for blind and partially sighted people with complex needs, perhaps along the lines of the social firm, CONCEPT, cited in the introduction.

6.4 Our attention was drawn to some interesting recent developments. The 'place and train' method) advocated by the European Union of Supported Employment) is provided by 'Sius' coaches. Sius coaching started out as support for persons with mental disabilities but is now a service/program delivered by SPES to people with complex needs. Some of the specialized teams within SPES for people with low vision, hard of hearing or deafness have a special Sius counsellor attached to them.

6.5 We would like to see further strategic thinking in all member countries of the EU as regards the creation of an 'employment continuum' in the labour market for disabled people. This should aim at the promotion of economic activities which can support people with complex needs to gain remunerative employment. Such establishments should trade for profit on revenue account and should include able bodied as well as disabled employees in equal proportions. Examples are cited in *The Employment Continuum*, (see chapter one). They include reformed sheltered workshops, social firms and enterprises which employ labour on the 'putting out' system.

6.6 This kind of thinking and good practice derived from it seems to be more advanced in Germany (see Chapter Three) than in Sweden or UK.

7 FURTHER EVALUATION: THE SWEDISH ASSOCIATION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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7.1 the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired (srf) agreed to be interviewed by us and followed up with valuable written evidence, most of which we reproduce below.

7.2 SRF is an association which has existed for the purposes of mutual support and lobbying since 1889.

7.3 From the beginning, employment for blind and partially sighted people was one of its central concerns. During the 20th century SRF set up a number of companies producing services for VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE, which created employment for many of them. These were in industrial production (e.g. brush making) as well as Braille printing, production of talking books, purchase of technical aids and other equipment.

7.4 In recent times these activities have changed and the number of VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE employed has declined. Since the 1980s the focus has shifted to support for job seekers such as training to improve self-esteem and capacity to work in the mainstream.

7.5 2006 saw a new departure with the establishment of IrisBemanning Bemanning. IRISBEMANNING is a company which offers a job matching service for people with disabilities. A data base of job seekers and their CVs is maintained. These are supplied to employers recruiting staff. The aim is to interest them in disabled candidates with good qualifications and capacity for work. By this means IRISBEMANNING has had some success. The process in outline is as follows. Initially IRISBEMANNING is the employer and handles applications on behalf of the client for SPES support at the work place. IRISBEMANNING monitors the client's work situation as it develops, keeping in touch both with the employer and the employees who work alongside the client. //// The aim is for the employer to take over as employer of the disabled recruit.

7.6 IRISBEMANNING has also been able to arrange direct recruitment of people with disabilities by some companies. It also employs visually impaired people directly at the telephone switchboard, running customer services, such as complaints, for other companies. The aim here is partly to create jobs for disabled people and partly to spread knowledge of the

skills of VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE at work.

7.6 SRF considers that IRISBEMANNING has proved its value in overcoming barriers to employment caused by employers' unfamiliarity with disabled people and their real abilities. 'After some time with a VISUALLY IMPAIRED person in the workplace most of this is gone and no one thinks it is big trouble to employ such a person.'

7.7 The fact that some visually impaired people have turned to IRISBEMANNING to obtain employment may be further evidence that SPES is not reaching all those who are capable of employment in mainstream occupations and that this is contributing to the rate of economic inactivity described above (par. 4.2 et seq.)

7.8 SRF Also commented on employment services for blind and partially sighted people as follows.

7.9 EQUIPMENT SUPPORT 'It often works out well. In many cases, however, there are delays in handling which jeopardise the chance of employment. SRF has argued for improved management of the process and for immediate availability of equipment at the workplace when a client finds a job. Similar complaints are heard about the 'access to work' programme in the UK. In Sweden, staff of SPES acknowledge that delays sometimes occur. There may be regional variation, they say, and delivery time may vary depending on how close to the client the supplier is. They would be interested to hear how long the delays are and the reasons why.

7.10 On employment support services, SRF commented: 'A VISUALLY IMPAIRED person, on obtaining a job, may have access to a subsidised taxi service to and from the work place through the municipality.' With regard to the new personal allowance discussed at par. Yyy above, SRF believes that 'This allowance may also be used for support at the workplace. The basic idea is that the recipient alone decides how and when he/she uses it.' On the disincentive effect of benefits SRF disagreed that reduction of income on taking a job was never a question for SPES clients (see 1.5 above).



7.11 On widening the range of jobs undertaken by visually impaired people: ‘Mainstream education and robust vocational training has long been the main focus for both the government and the disability movement in Sweden. In general we do not talk about blind jobs today, as growing knowledge, improving attitudes and technical innovations afford access to most types of job. Obstacles remain and there is still need to remove negative attitudes among employers and even blind people. It remains true that certain jobs are very appropriate for blind people and specific training courses for these jobs still exist e.g.: secretarial and switchboard work, physiotherapy, computer programming and sound technician. But the numbers coming forward have declined in recent years, due to lower demand, and/or more complex work processes that make tasks more difficult for a blind person to carry out. It is worth noting that, in recent years, training courses have been offered in massage. A number of visually impaired people are working as self-employed masseurs and self-employment is increasing in other fields.’

7.12 Summing up, SRF commented: ‘Nevertheless a level of 47% in employment is a remarkably good result and has been achieved by the whole system of legislation for job retention, rehabilitation and support for job seekers and employers.’

7.13 Especially noteworthy, SRF considers, is retention law: ‘Those laws have kept many people who lost sight in their employment, albeit with more or less change in work situation or tasks.’

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 We were told that Sweden, like many other member states, is experiencing many pressures for change. Globalisation has meant that many simple manufacturing processes suitable for disabled people have been transferred off shore. The recent change of government is encouraging the reform of the social insurance system, in part along lines of market approaches similar to those being discussed and implemented in other member states. On the occasion of our study visit it was too early to give a detailed account of this process, but we may



note some concern over contracting out of some employment services to private firms. Recent reorganization of SPES may or may not improve its efficiency in supporting visually impaired people. Downward pressure on public expenditure is said to have meant delay in rolling out the whole programme envisaged for paid personal assistance.

8.2 In relation to the above we cite the opinion of SRF: 'This process seems to emphasize the individuals own responsibility and in some way limit the responsibilities of government and other authorities given to them by legislation. Provision of training and rehabilitation has grown to be a business market and SPES is now buying these services from private companies on annual or other time schedules. We shoed this comment to staff of SPES, who responded: 'We are not quite there yet. we are certainly changing, so that services – health care, social security, SPES, etc. - are hardening the borders between their responsibilities and at the same time are forced to collaborate more.' SPES did not comment on SRF's statement that 'There is doubt concerning the quality of the services and concern that a low incidence group such as the visually impaired may not be involved in the development of these schemes directed to disabled people in general.' There is doubt concerning the quality of the services and concern that a low incidence group such as the visually impaired may not be involved in the development of these schemes directed to disabled people in general.'

8.3 It is beyond our remit to comment on these matters other than to emphasise the general conclusion of this chapter that a robust system of impairment-specific employment support should be maintained in Sweden, alike for blind and partially sighted people and for visually impaired people with complex needs.

APPENDIX I

Examples of jobs undertaken by deafblind people. 1. Administrative work for an association 2. Market researcher, telemarketing 3. Administrative tasks for the County Administrative Board. 4. Social welfare officer who works with deaf people. 5. CNN-operator who works for The Samhall Group p 6. Person working at the University of Örebro 7. Compulsory school teacher/school for deaf children. 8. Machine constructor 9.

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Computer teacher 10. Administrator (governmental) 11. A self-employed person 12. Sign language teacher 12. Consultant for an association. 13. Network technician/support 14. Assistant in group home 15. Group-leader, the "Activity House for deaf-blind people" 16. Assistant clerk at an association 17. Engine fitter/stockroom worker 18. Assistant clerk/administrator 19. Assistant nurse/geriatric care 20. Film/video producer 21. Space observatory coordinator 22. Computer system developer 23. Network technician [Source: The Swedish Employment Service affischa/rehabsraustryken.indd 1 2007-09-14 10:13:18



APPENDIX II

List of Jobs Undertaken by Visually impaired people In Sweden

1. Orientation & Mobility Instructor 2. Lawyer 3. Administrator 4. Foreman 5. Baker 6. Child minder 7. Librarian 8. Car salesman 9. Farmer 10. Brushmaker 11. Boat builder 12. Boat engine minder 13. Bicycle repairer 14. Computer training - teacher 15. Computer engineer 16. Computer technician 17. Lay (welfare) worker 18. Dietitian 19. Write from someone's dictation 20. Works manager 21. Entrepreneur 22. Economist 23. Office caretaker 24. Caretaker 25. Photo lab assistant 26. Recreation leader 27. Author 28. Storekeeper 29. Preschoolteacher 30. Insurance office employed 31. Salesman 32. Guide 33. Rubber worker 34. Person in charge of matter in office 35. Head of hotel 36. Industrial worker 37. Information officer 38. Informant 39. Journalist 40. Cantor 41. Manufactory keeper 42. Cook 43. Consultant 44. Clerical work 45. Proofreader 46. Cultural worker 47. Curator 48. Social welfare officer 49. Kitchen staff 50. Laboratory assistant 51. Technician (sound) 52. Speech therapist 53. Cleaner 54. Medical secretary 55. Teacher 56. Metal worker 57. Guide museum 58. Keeper of music store 59. Musician 60. Ombudsman 61. Pastor 62. Staff manager 63. Piano-tuner 64. Police 65. Politician 66. Radio man 67. Psychologist 68. Reporter 69. Rehabilitation worker 70. Restaurant owner 71. X-ray assistant 72. Physiotherapist 73. Waiter 74. Nurse 75. Keeper at school 76. Actor 77. Carpenter 78. Low vision therapist 79. Singer 80. Study counselling 81. Telemarketing 82. Translator 83. Interpreter 84. Web designer 85. Web teacher 86. Hostess 87. Switchboard operator 88. Head of old peoples home 89. Messenger 90. Doorman 91. Caretaker



CHAPTER THREE

GERMANY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The German Federal Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs (FMESA) greatly facilitated the work of the study visit by providing in advance a detailed written description of employment services in Germany. This outline, translated into English and slightly abridged, is presented in the remainder of this section.

1.2 Germany is a Federation of sixteen states (Bundesländer). Federal and state agencies each provide services aimed at promoting the participation of disabled people in the labour market. A person whose employment is interrupted or threatened by disability is entitled to social security benefit, arising either from a previously insured employment or other provision. It may be noted here that all legally blind people are entitled to a 'Blindness Allowance' (Blindengeld), a compensation benefit for the additional costs entailed by the impairment. This is paid in addition to salary or income substitution such as unemployment benefit. Depending on the state (land) in which a person lives, it may amount to between 300 and 600_Euros per month. No other disabled people are entitled to a compensation allowance of this kind.

1.3 A person who applies for unemployment benefit on account of disability may be offered assessment of his/her disability and need for support in employment as a severely disabled person.

1.4 Assessment is undertaken by the Federal Employment Agency (FEA), acting on the decisions of specially qualified advisors, usually medical and psychological experts. The assessors must establish, not only that a client has a disability but, more importantly, that the disability is so severe as to have implications for the person's productivity in employment. If a person is assessed as 'severely disabled' his/her specific needs for employment support services will also be assessed.

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Support is based on the basic principles of accuracy and appropriateness, certainty of success and the likelihood of sustainability. The aim is, where possible, sustainable integration of the recipient into open employment.

1.5 A person assessed as severely disabled is entitled to a rehabilitation programme, the costs of which, as well as living costs, will be granted, and help with retaining or obtaining employment, which includes support with advice and placement, training programmes (e.g. training in the work place), help with mobility, and technical aids in the work place.

1.6 There are Specific programmes designed to support blind and partially sighted people. Basic skills training will be provided as part of their initial, and further, rehabilitation into employment. This includes the teaching of skills and abilities which are essential for their independence for training, employment, and their personal lives (e.g. techniques for reading and writing Braille, mobility training and instructions in daily living skills).

1.7 These services are provided on a residential basis at four vocational rehabilitation centres for blind and partially sighted people, situated in Düren, Halle/Saale, Mainz and Würzburg.

1.8 Blind and partially sighted school leavers are entitled to participate in training programmes offered at vocational training centres situated in Chemnitz, Soest, Stuttgart and Nürnberg. They receive careers advice and opportunity to prepare for employment.

1.9 Another employment service for all severely disabled people seeking work is the administration of an employment quota under legislation. Employers of 20 or more staff have a legal duty to allocate at least 5% of their posts to severely disabled people. An employer who does not allocate the obligatory number of posts to severely disabled people must pay a compensation charge for each post not so allocated. The level of this charge is set by law. A severely disabled person can be counted for more than one allocated post, but no more than three posts. This can be applied when their participation in employment proves particularly difficult.

1.10 Employers are legally obliged to check whether any of their vacancies can be filled by severely disabled people, particularly those registered with the Agency for Employment as unemployed or looking for work. For a fuller description see the Appendix to this chapter.

1.11 The following support for the participation of severely disabled people can be given to an employer:

- Training allowances, for the provision of training support from the employer
- Rehabilitation courses, for the integration into open employment of severely disabled people. For people over 55 years of age, up to 70% of the appropriate salary can be granted for up to 96 months
- Support for assistance in work (disability-related, additional costs for the design of the work place for a trainee or professional will be reimbursed)
- Work experience (for disabled people, the costs for a time-limited work experience placement can be reimbursed for up to three months)

1.12 Sheltered workshops provide employment opportunities to those visually impaired people who are unable to manage a professional training course or a professional occupation in the open market. Workshop for disabled people (WfbM) provide individually designed work places and other services to promote skills and abilities of an employment-related nature.

2 EVALUATION

2.1 It will be understood from the foregoing that the range of employment support services for blind and partially sighted people in Germany is elaborate and impressive. This no doubt accounts in some measure for the wide range of occupations pursued by them. (see below par. 3.3.7). We wished to know, however, whether these services contributed to a larger or smaller rate of activity in the German labour market by blind and partially sighted people, relative to comparable member states of the EU, such as the UK or Sweden. Evaluation of this kind is very difficult owing to the fact that the employment statistics of the Federal Employment Agency at Nuernberg (FEA) do not explicitly show the individual types of



disability. It seems that it is therefore impossible for the Agency to state or estimate the current rates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people. In discussions with staff of FMESA we referred to the evidence of involuntary economic inactivity in the UK, as rehearsed in chapter one of this report.

2.2 In response FMESA staff expressed their belief that any blind or partially sighted person in Germany who wanted to work and who was assessed as able to do so would find employment. Almost all people who become disabled apply for social security benefit and such application always results in assessment of disability and employability. People therefore would 'always show up'. It was acknowledged that assessment could have a negative outcome, but it was pointed out that a person so assessed was registered as 'unemployed' and continued to be regarded as a job seeker. We formed the opinion that the concept of 'economic inactivity' was virtually alien to FEA thinking. Staff were unwilling to believe that unemployment could last so long in individual cases as to induce resignation to economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people. In discussion FMESA staff acknowledged that this could not be demonstrated convincingly in the absence of statistical data.

2.3 FMESA staff also pointed out that blind and partially sighted people who rejoin the labour market are never economically disadvantaged. Where the rate for the job falls below the level of benefit paid during preceding unemployment, social security will continue to top up the wage to the previous level of benefit. They also suggested that the German Federation of the Blind organised a very strong lobby in Germany, and if there were a serious problem of economic inactivity, the Federation would certainly have raised the issue. 'You are the first to have raised it', we were told.

2.4 We also raised with FMESA staff the question of provision for blind and partially sighted people who are assessed as unable to obtain employment in the mainstream labour market. They pointed out that sheltered workshops continue to offer employment for blind people in Germany. However, the aim of FMESA was to maximise employment of blind and partially sighted people in the mainstream labour market



wherever possible. Sheltered workshops are provided for disabled people who could not achieve this. Recently research had shown that there were disabled people whose potential was intermediate between mainstream employment and sheltered provision. These were people with intellectual difficulties or mental illness. They preferred mainstream to sheltered employment, but could enter it only with a high level of support. 'Supported employment' in mainstream firms is, therefore, the subject of a new law currently under discussion, which would fund such employment for people with intellectual difficulties or mental illness. In response to our questions FMESA staff stated that no consideration had been given to the use of this law to provide supported employment for blind or partially sighted people with additional impairments. However such an application was not ruled out in principle.

3 FURTHER EVALUATION

3.1 In a study visit scheduled to last three working days it was impossible for us to gather evidence from the whole of Germany, a large territory populated by some eighty million people. We decided, therefore, to focus mainly on services and organisations in North Rhine-Westphalia. This State was chosen partly because we had contact through the European Blind Union with staff of the vocational training centre at Soest and partly because there are, at Soest and Düren, vocational training and vocational rehabilitation centres which service a large number of blind and partially sighted people from North Rhine-Westphalia and other states of the Federation. We were able to hold discussions with staff of two organisations in the region: the Office for Integration at Munster and the Vocational Training Centre at Soest. In addition we met with staff of INFAS at Bonn. INFAS - Institute of Applied Social Sciences - is a commercial organisation. While in Bonn we had lunch with two leading members of the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted, who have long standing experience in that organisation. With all these we took up the issues raised in discussion with FMESA staff and invited comment on the views they had expressed to us.

3.2 Economic Inactivity



3.2.1 INFAS agreed that there is no means of ascertaining current rates of employment, unemployment or economic inactivity of blind and partially sighted people in Germany. This is "a blank box". The most recent statistical survey was published in 1995¹. Known as the EVASA project, it was based on interviews with just over 1000 'legally blind' aged 18 to 60.² Those questioned came mainly from Cologne, Bonn and Dusseldorf and were all in receipt of Blindness Allowance (Blindengeld). It showed that 33 percent of legally blind people of working age were in employment. The percentages vary with age: under 30 years of age, 35 percent; age 30-39, 47 percent; 40-49, 42 percent; 50 and above, 23 percent. Of the others, 7 percent were reported as 'unemployed' (i.e. actively seeking work), and 8 percent in training for employment. 48 percent, therefore were economically active and 52 percent economically inactive. Of the economically inactive, 32 percent were reported as in '(early) retirement', of whom the largest group, 76 percent, were over 50. There was a difference in the employment rate between totally blind people and those reported as 'severely visually impaired': 38 percent of totally blind in employment compared to 29 percent of the latter. This was said to be due to many of the totally blind people having received specialised education/training in childhood and youth that prepared them for employment.

3.2.2 Classification by gender revealed a significant discrepancy. The Percentage of males in employment was 39 and of females 25. 25 percent of the unemployed women were reported as 'in the home'.

3.2.3 Concerning those who were in '(early) retirement', the 1995 survey did not ask questions aimed at distinguishing between those who said they still wanted to work and those who said they accepted or were resigned to permanent economic inactivity. Nor did it disclose the incidence/rate of people with additional impairments, though the study reported 6 percent as 'sick'.

3.2.4 In the light of the foregoing, it is impossible to compare directly the situation of economically inactive people in the UK and in Germany.

¹ H. Schröder, Integration of Blind People into Employment: Final Report [(INFAS: Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Bonn, 1995)

² Legal blindness equals visual acuity of 2 percent or less.

Given the view expressed by FMESA, it would be interesting to know how many of the 52 percent who are economically inactive in Germany would say, like their counterparts in UK, that they wanted to work if appropriate jobs and support were available. Members of the German Federation of the Blind told us that many unemployed blind and partially sighted people in Germany 'want to work', but cannot do so 'because of inactivity of Federal and local Employment Agencies.' A German citizen living in UK said that, in her experience, many blind and partially sighted people in Germany held the same opinion. The validity of these statements cannot be tested in the absence of reliable up-to-date statistics. We think that the German employment service has a responsibility either to confirm or disprove them by the production of reliable evidence.

3.2.5 INFAS did not think that the position of blind and partially sighted people in the labour market was likely to have improved since 1995. Rather it was likely to have worsened. They admitted this is hard to assess but highlighted some developments which were capable of prejudicing the employment and economic activity of disabled people in general and blind people in particular. For example there were legislative changes in 2005, which reformed provision of unemployment benefit. Employment agencies for recipients of basic financial security (Grundsicherungsempfänger) are responsible for long-term unemployed and people without unemployment insurance (for example people without any insurance history, such as students and housewives). Every recipient must be assessed as able to work three hours per day. The employment agencies then try to support these people into employment, but this has proved difficult for many disabled people, including blind and partially sighted people. In the opinion of INFAS, the new employment services, which administer the basic financial security (Grundsicherung), are not well adapted to support them.

3.2.6 Again, in the opinion of INFAS, a second development concerns the cost-oriented culture of the companies. Employers have been shown to be sceptical about employing blind people. Part 2 of the EVASA project asked employers if they would be willing to employ a blind person. Most said they would not because they did not think they would be sufficiently flexible. Most said their attitude would not be affected by availability of wage subsidies as they were looking for well qualified



people. Given all this, in combination with the absence of statistics for blind and partially sighted people, the opinion of INFAS is that the employment needs of disabled minorities such as blind and partially sighted people have been obscured.

3.2.7 It may be noted here that the rate of employment of blind and partially sighted people disclosed by the 1995 survey corresponds exactly to the rate for the UK disclosed by Network 1000 in 2006. It is possible that a new survey of Germany would produce a different result, but the comment of INFAS that the position of blind and partially sighted people is the same, if not worse, as in 1992 should be noted. So should the similar comments made to us by members of the German Federation of the Blind and partially sighted. We conclude that there is a pressing need for at least a pilot study of the position of blind and partially sighted people in the labour market of a given region. Such a pilot study should be designed to establish whether employment services could be augmented or enhanced in such a way as to stimulate economic activity by blind and partially sighted people. The senior official of the German Federation of the Blind queried the value of yet another survey. After discussion of this point we all agreed that it would be valuable only if designed to develop services that can reach economically inactive people and incentivise them.

3.3 Vocational Training Services

3.3.1 As stated above, there are three vocational training centres sponsored by the Federal Employment Agency, at Chemnitz, Soest and Stuttgart. We visited Soest in Westphalia and held discussions with staff. The following description is drawn from an information document issued by the Centre.

3.3.2 The Vocational Training Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired at Soest is an establishment of the Landschaftsverband Westfalen Lippe (LWL). LWL is a municipal association that provides services to the 8.5 million people in the Westphalia-Lippe region. Services provided include social welfare, psychiatry, hospital treatment orders, youth/schooling and culture, and the association has 13,000 staff.



3.3.3 LWL runs 35 special schools for disabled children, including seven special schools for blind and visually impaired children. It also supports blind and partially sighted children in mainstream education.

3.3.4 The special school for the blind and visually impaired in Soest is the only one in Westphalia-Lippe that offers vocational education after school grade 10, as well as highschool education. While the primary school at Soest offers its services only to pupils in its region, vocational education in Soest is offered not only for visually handicapped students from Westphalia-Lippe but also for students from other states of the Federal Republic of Germany.

3.3.5 Vocational education in Germany is organised in the so called dual system, divided between academic and practical. Hence there are two educational institutions responsible for the vocational education of visually impaired persons, which work hand in hand: The LWL-Berufskolleg is a vocational school and is mainly responsible for the academic part of the vocational education. The LWL-Berufsbildungswerk is mainly responsible for the practical part of the vocational education.

3.3.6 LWL-Berufskolleg Soest (Vocational College for Visually Impaired and Blind Persons) has mainly two tasks: It offers full-time-classes for visually impaired adolescents, who want to prepare themselves for a vocational education in the dual system or intend to reach a higher level of education. This might be required, for example, for university entrance. The LWL-Berufskolleg offers classes at all academic levels. In addition to the full-time-classes the LWL-Berufskolleg also offers part-time-classes for vocational students participating in dual system programs. They visit the vocational school either one day per week or twice per year for 6 weeks.

3.3.7 LWL-Berufsbildungswerk Soest - Vocational Training Center for Visually Handicapped Persons prepares visually handicapped young adults (age 18 - 25) for competitive employment. Vocational education is offered in the following programs:

- Commercial occupations including switchboard operator and telemarketers, transcriptionist as well as bookkeeper and sales personnel.

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- Metal working occupations including computerised shaping and lathe operating as well as welding.
 - Housekeeping occupations including cooking, sewing, laundry and room cleaning.
 - Craftsmanship for the blind as basket and chair caning and broom making.

The programs last from 2 to 3.5 years. They are financed by the Federal Employment Agency via the Local Employment Agencies.

3.3.8 The Institute also offers programs for assessment and adjustment to visual impairment. A special unit offers low vision counselling and training for the students and for blind and partially sighted employees. There are courses in orientation and mobility, daily living skills and social skills. Included in the programmes are periods of practical training in companies and administration in the clients' home communities. Participants are also part-time- students of the LWL-Berufskolleg.

3.3.9 Currently the main vocational education of LWL-Berufskolleg and the LWL-Berufsbildungswerk Soest is in the field of business. It is based on electronic data processing. There is a personal computer at every student's workplace and every computer is in a network. The standard software used is the Microsoft Office Package and special business software. In addition to their vocational training students obtain the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

3.3.10 In 1999 the LWL-Berufskolleg and the LWL-Berufsbildungswerk Soest started a research project on the vocational education of visually impaired young adults in their local communities. The project has been funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Berlin (Now FMESA). The findings of the project led to a new program, 'MobiliS' - Support and Counselling for Mainstream Vocational Education for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This program is being offered in addition to those in house and can be combined with them. Now it is regularly funded by the Agency of Labour as the in house programs.

3.3.11 For all students individual education programs are worked out by teams, including the students themselves. Seeking to meet the interests of students and to improve their chances of vocational integration, the



LWL-Berufsbildungswerk Soest increasingly combines elements of special education in the institute with practical experience in administration and companies in the mainstream labour market.

4 DISCUSSIONS AT SOEST

4.1 We asked whether it was considered that the three centres supported by FEA were adequate to meet the need of young blind and partially sighted people for vocational training throughout Germany. Taking into account provision by some additional centres, staff at Soest thought it adequate to deal with the numbers of blind and partially sighted people assessed as 'severely disabled'. "In Germany we cannot complain of lack of support services. It is lack of suitable jobs that is the problem", we were told.

4.2 However, in further discussion it appeared that this remark was not intended to cover assessment and placement services. Given the putatively high rate of economic inactivity discussed above (Par. 3.2), we wished to know whether a blind or partially sighted person who had a negative outcome on first assessment could apply later to be assessed again. We were informed that this was possible in theory, but very unlikely to happen in practice. Administrative practice, it was said, has changed in recent years. Local Employment Agencies are instructed to differentiate between 3 categories of client: (a) 'market' clients, who sell themselves; (b) 'encourage' clients, who are near to the labour market but need some motivation or support; and (c) 'attending' clients, who are too distant from the labour market to be integrated within one year. "Their application," we were told, "has to be put into the lowest drawer. After one year the local employment agency pays 10,000 Euros to the Social-Code-2-Agency, and the unemployed person gets social benefit."

4.3 Elaborating on this, it was said that, under the old system, each visually impaired person had a responsible member of staff in the employment agency, to arrange assessment, vocational training, employment integration and grants to employers. Under the new system, by contrast, responsibility is divided. One member of staff is responsible for vocational counselling in school, assessment and vocational training. After vocational training has been completed,



another member takes responsibility for placing in employment. This responsibility lasts for one year only, a time limitation which applies to all unemployed people. It is considered too short to place many blind and partially sighted people. In practice nothing is done by the employment agency for people who have not obtained employment after one year. At that point responsibility for them transfers to a hybrid organisation, 'the Social 2 agency', responsible for unemployment plus social welfare. Its basic support for unemployed persons is driven by numerical targets. It must place 20 percent of clients in employment per annum. Targets vary for people below 25 years of age and older than 50. Targets also vary according to cost of placement. At most, 930 euros per case are paid upon placement. In the opinion of Soest staff to whom we spoke, this is a very inadequate amount of money for difficult clients. Certain groups cost much more to place in employment. We understood that there is no target or budget for these disabled people, including, of course, blind and partially sighted people.

4.4 The effect of all this, it was said, is that, after the prescribed year, the FEA has no responsibility to tackle the unemployment of disabled people who are difficult to place, such as many blind and partially sighted people are. "There is one year," we were told, "and after that, no one cares because it is too expensive". The solution, it was suggested, would be a special target number/budget for placing unemployed disabled people who are difficult to promote into jobs.

4.5 Staff at Soest believe that the complete lack of statistics concerning the employment situation of blind and partially sighted people makes it impossible to highlight this problem and work for improvement. It was suggested that Eurostat should be made aware of the problem. We understand that Eurostat is currently updating its model for gathering statistical information about disabled people in the European Union. No doubt there is much that could be done in this way, but we reaffirm our view that a pilot study of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in Germany is urgently needed.

4.6 We were given evidence that recent changes in employment policy and administration have adversely affected blind and partially sighted people who graduated from vocational training. A telephone follow up of

graduates since 1988 has tracked their rate of success in obtaining employment. Records show that, over eight years until 2004, the proportion of each annual cohort who obtained employment increased over a three year period from completion of training. 'Success' was defined as obtaining a job on March 1st in a given year and the rate of success was approximately 80 percent. Since 2004 it has dropped below 60 percent. The study reports, with concern, that in 2004 – 2006 the success rate has not increased annually after graduation. It was suggested to us that this decline is mainly the result of the policy and administrative practices outlined above (par. 4.2-4.5).

5 THE OFFICE OF INTEGRATION

5.1 This is the short name for an agency whose full legal name may be rendered in English as Office for the Safeguarding of the Integration of Severely Handicapped Persons in Working Life. It forms part of the administration of the sixteen German states, i.e. it is not an arm of federal government. The Federal Employment Agency and the 'Social-Code-2-Agencies' are together responsible for unemployed people. The Office of Integration is responsible at 'county' level for helping employees (and self-employed people) with disabilities to maintain their jobs.

5.2 In pursuing its general aim, the Office of Integration relies heavily on the policy known as 'Company prevention'. This policy helps to:

- Identify and eliminate any difficulties in employing a severely disabled person at an early stage or to ensure that they never occur in the first place.
- Discuss and apply all means, from counselling to financial support, with which the employment relationship can be secured in the long term.
- In practice the aim is to ensure that employers become active as early as possible when,
 - (a) Personal, behavioural or work-related difficulty becomes noticeable that could jeopardise the working relationship, or
 - (b) Employees - whether disabled or not – are incapable of work for more than six weeks within a year. The statutory regulations make provision for Company Integration Management in such cases.



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- Employers are supported by the Integration Office if the affected parties are severely disabled people as defined by employment law.
 - Besides company prevention, the Office of Integration is responsible for:
 - (a) collection and administration of the compensation charge levied under the quota system
 - (b) supporting employers, for example, by reimbursing costs where a severely disabled employee produces less than the output of the average of the work force, or needs personal assistance from other employees
 - (c) supporting the employer in prevention and Company Integration Management
 - (d) the special termination protection for severely disabled people, which requires the agreement of the Integration Office in the event of termination
 - (e) training the integration team.

6 DISCUSSIONS AT MUNSTER

6.1 We were able to hold discussions with staff of the Integration Office at Munster, which has responsibility for Westphalia-Lippe, concerning its role in employment services.

6.2 We were interested in its task of supervising termination of employment of severely disabled employees. [See 5.2.5(d) above, and Appendix for fuller description]. An employer may not dismiss a person who has been assessed as severely disabled without first referring the question to the Integration Office for ratification. If ratification is denied, the employee is entitled to financial compensation, though not to continuation of employment. Employees and employers can appeal from the decision of the Integration Office to the Court for Administration and also to the Labour Court. It should be emphasised that this does not amount to retention legislation as currently discussed in the UK. The company prevention policy comes into play only if an employer dismisses a person already assessed as severely disabled.



6.3 We sought the views of the Integration Office on the putative advantages and disadvantages of a quota system, referring to written evidence supplied to us in advance by the FMESA (see Appendix to this chapter) We rehearsed with them the arguments for and against a quota system before and after its abolition in the UK in 1995.

6.3.1 Argument for: A quota system boosts the number of disabled people who obtain employment.

Argument against: If this were true one would expect to find a higher rate of employment of disabled people in Germany than in the UK. Such a differential does not exist. According to the Integration Office at Munster There are 2.2 million severely disabled people of working age in Germany, of whom 1.1 million are at work or job seeking, an employment rate of about 50 percent. This is also the employment rate of disabled people in the UK, according to the official Labour Force Survey.

6.3.2 Argument for: A quota combined with a compensation charge as in Germany enables the raising of more revenue to support disabled people in employment with assistive technology, modification of work places, etc.

Argument against: The UK in comparison with Germany can be shown to raise a comparable fund from general taxation. The website of the Department for Work and Pensions shows that, in 2004 UK provision for special disability employment programmes amounted to £277 million. As mentioned in the Appendix to this chapter, the German compensation fund in 2005 amounted to 500 million Euros, about £350 million at the then rate of exchange. Thus the UK raised approximately three quarters of the German fund, which corresponds approximately to the different size of population of each country (UK, 60 million, Germany 80 million).

6.3.3 For: A quota system can protect a disabled employee against unjust dismissal as in Germany.

Against: Such protection can be provided by anti-discrimination legislation, which avoids the complex bureaucracy of administering a quota system.

6.3.4 For: A quota system provides a moral incentive to employers to employ disabled people.



Against: Some employers in Germany (e.g. airline companies) complain that the quota system impacts unfairly upon them, since they have relatively few jobs suitable for disabled employees, yet must pay the compensation charge just the same.

6.3.5 For: A quota system gives moral as well as practical encouragement to disabled people, sending a signal that society is 'on their side'.

Against: Registration under a quota system is seen as stigmatisation by some disabled people in the work place, especially by younger disabled people.

6.4 Staff of the Integration Office acknowledged some of the objections mentioned above, viz: bureaucracy, complaints of German employers, resistance of some disabled people (e.g. those with mental illnesses) to registration. But they were sceptical as to the existence of empirical data to support arguments against quota. They pointed to its existence in other European countries, including France and the Netherlands. They defended the German quota system against the charge that it was merely a way of making employers pay for employment support services. "The clear aim of the law is motivation," we were told. "it creates equality between employers." It was acknowledged that many employers did not attempt to meet their employment duty to recruit five percent of their staff from severely disabled people, but many employers did not have enough suitable posts and paying the compensation charge was a way of sharing the burden with those who could.

6.5 We discussed the complete absence of statistics relating to the employment situation of blind and partially sighted people after 1995 (INFAS' "blank box"). Staff of the Integration Office wished to point out that they were under a legal obligation to present pan-disability statistics only. Similarly employers were under a legal obligation to report the number of disabled employees in their organisation, but not to report details of employees' impairments.

6.5.1 Nevertheless, staff were willing to discuss possible sources that could throw light on the current position. They pointed out that the agencies in the states (Länder) which are responsible for registration of blind people should be able to supply numbers of people between 18



and 65 years of age who are 'legally blind'. They observed that there are restrictions on authorities from disclosing this information imposed by data protection legislation. We pointed out that such legislation exists in the UK but it had proved possible to carry out research with anonymity (Network 1000 and Work Focus) and local authorities, responsible for registration of blind and partially sighted people, had found ways to cooperate.

6.5.2 In this connection it was noted that the Integration Office in Westphalia Lippe knows how many people are in receipt of Blindness Allowance and has a specialised task force to support blind people at their work place. It was suggested that comparison of these two statistics would yield a tolerable estimate of economic inactivity in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. After our return from Germany, the Integration Office supplied the following estimate: around 2000 people between the ages of 20 and 60 are entitled to Blindness Allowance. Approximately 100 of these are thought to be employed in the mainstream labour market.

6.5.3 It was noted in discussion that funds may be obtainable from sources outside government to finance a pilot research project in North Rhine-Westphalia, conducted, for example, by INFAS.

6.6 SHELTERED AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

6.6.1 Staff of the Integration Office informed us that there are 260,000 severely disabled people employed in sheltered workshops throughout Germany and 26,000 in Westphalia-Lippe. As mentioned above (par. 2.4), a new law is under consideration to promote supported employment in mainstream firms for people with intellectual difficulties and mental illnesses. The Integration Office anticipates that it will have responsibility for promoting supported employment under this law in two years time. We pointed out that, until recently in the UK, very little effort had been made to include within supported employment programmes blind and partially sighted people with additional difficulties. This is beginning to change and government is looking to voluntary agencies like RNIB to offer training. However this is expensive, as one or two years are not



enough to establish such people in mainstream jobs. Five years is more realistic. Social firms may also be able to help.

6.6.2 Staff of the Integration Office indicated that they help to promote supported employment projects, including social firms which employ severely disabled people, running hotels, etc. The Office provides funding to help with start up and operational costs.

6.6.3 We were introduced to the member of staff responsible for promoting supported employment from the Integration Office. In discussion he informed us that the agency first introduced services for supported employment in 1988. These were not intended for blind and partially sighted people, but for people with psychiatric disorders. At end of the 1990s the services were extended to people with any disabilities.

6.6.4 Supported employment services now exist in all labour market regions – in every county and city - in Westphalia-Lippe. At present there are 20 services supported by 113 staff. A job counselling qualification for blind people has been introduced. These 113 supporting staff cooperate with 2 specialist staff in the Integration Office. They work with firms to find jobs that severely disabled people can do.

6.6.5 We were informed that there are 70 social firms in Westphalia-Lippe in some of which blind and partially sighted people have obtained employment, but "not many, perhaps 20 altogether."

6.6.6 We drew attention to the social firm, 'CONCEPT', described in the introduction to this report. The vocational training centres in Germany have also been active in this field. About ten years ago the centres at Stuttgart and Chemnitz set up 'integration firms' for their graduates. Until recently the centre at Soest felt no necessity to go down this road". However the declining success rate mentioned above (par. 4.6) had stimulated exploratory discussions with a blind organisation in Westphalia concerning such an enterprise.

6.6.7 We consider that these developments are working, and to a lesser extent they are in Sweden, in the direction advocated by EBU as the 'two pronged' i.e. twin track solution to the inclusion of blind and partially sighted people in the mainstream labour market. This policy argues that



for blind and partially sighted people with additional difficulties mainstreaming must be supported by strong provision of impairment-sensitive support. The work of the Integration Office in Westphalia may be regarded as a case of 'good practice' which should be encouraged in all member states of the EU. In this connection it is very interesting to note that the Integration Office can assist social firms with start up and operational costs, providing finance from the compensation charge fund. We were informed that social firms employing severely disabled people are "increasing steadily" in Germany. Integration Office statistics show that there are 517 social firms all over Germany, employing 13,694 people of whom 6,800 are disabled and of these 5,500 have complex needs. In Westphalia there are approximately 65 social firms, employing approximately 5,500 people, of whom roughly half are severely disabled.

6.7 As already stated, the new law will aim at mainstreaming severely disabled people, "steering them away from sheltered workshops". In future it is expected that employment in a sheltered workshop will more often be considered after attempts have been made to 'place and train' in mainstream occupations.

7 VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND TRAINING FOR ADULTS

7.1 As mentioned above (par. 1.7) there are four centres for residential vocational rehabilitation for the blind and visually impaired in Germany. One of these is situated in North Rhine-Westphalia, at Düren, near Cologne. Lack of time prevented us from visiting it. Its website, which can be found at <http://www.bfw-dueren.de/english>, offers a fairly clear picture of its vision and programmes. The following points may be noted for the sake of completing this impression of employment services for blind and partially sighted people in Germany.

7.2 The Berufsförderungswerk Düren (BFW) was founded in 1975. In addition to its centre at Düren it has two branches at Hamburg and Mainz.

7.3 The main task of BFW is the vocational training of people who are no longer able to continue in their profession because of their visual impairment. It offers vocational rehabilitation and training for



approximately 200 blind and visually impaired adults and has an administrative and training staff with about 114 employees. The hall of residence can take up to 200 participants. Each person has a single bedroom with bathroom and toilet and three meals a day are on offer. There is a wide range of recreational activities in the areas of sports, creativity and social engagements, which are on offer in the evenings and at the weekends.

7.4 BFW Düren offers an all round service for blind and partially sighted people, their relatives and employers. All these services are separated in modules and can be combined according to the needs of individuals.

7.5 The following services are provided:

- daily living skills
- mobility training
- using optical and electronic devices
- job assessment
- advising employers
- vocational training
- training on the job
- customized IT training, on the job
- job placement
- disability management

7.6 Until the year 2000, we are informed, the vocational rehabilitation centres offered a standard residential rehabilitation course lasting one year, followed by in house training programmes. We understand that pressure from government agencies and insurance companies has led to less standardisation and, as stated above, 'services ... separated in modules and ... combined according to the needs of individuals.' In other words the centre has moved to some extent from the older model of 'train and place' to the modern practice of 'place and train'.

7.7 We wish we had had time to meet with staff of BWF Düren to explore these issues in depth. Here we can only note with satisfaction the statement on the website that the training-courses for blind and visually impaired adults are integrational and both customer and process orientated.



7.8 The emphasis on recognised qualifications is also to be commended. Next to functional competence the training for key qualifications is a major feature of the vocational training, including 'working responsibly, spotting problems and developing solutions'. There is a strong interrelation between theoretical and practical training areas. The motto is, to offer vocational training and further qualification which is both individual and labour market orientated. In cooperation with the Labour Office, the Berufsförderungswerk offers active support towards finding a job after the vocational training. This includes the area of technical equipment of the work place.

7.9 Nevertheless its website appears to suggest that BWF Düren still provides its clients with a strong grounding in Basic Rehabilitation. According to the website, the basic rehabilitation course lasts 12 months for severely visually impaired and 13 months for blind adults. Again, in the absence of statistics relating to blind and partially sighted people in the German labour market, it is impossible to say whether these longer courses are more or less successful in promoting blind and partially sighted people into employment.

7.10 The website also suggests that, on completion of basic rehabilitation, clients can still undertake vocational training at BWF Düren. The following courses are advertised on the website under the heading, 'Apprenticeship: Vocational Training'.

- Skilled Office Worker exam with the Chamber of Commerce, vocational re-training 24 months, first time vocational training 36 months
- Office Training for blind or severely visually handicapped; exam with the Chamber of Commerce, vocational re-training 24 months, first time vocational training 36 months
- Basic Office Clerk exam with the Chamber of Commerce, vocational re-training 18 months, first time vocational training 24 months
- Office worker for participants without previous qualifications exam with the Chamber of Commerce 36 months
- Administrative Clerk exam with the study institute for communal administration in Aachen, 36 months
- Telephone Operator exam with the Chamber of Commerce 6

months

- Skilled Industrial Worker, Recycling exam with the Chamber of Commerce and internal exam 18 months
- Industrial Worker with Basic Skills - internal exam 12 months

7.11 It would be interesting to know in detail what degree of work experience and training in the work place accompanies these courses. It would also be interesting to know how clients transfer work experience gained with firms around BWF Düren (assuming this is made available) to employment in the vicinity of their homes to which, presumably, they return fully trained and qualified.

7.12 In this connection we note that BWF Düren offers support with job placement (often called 'integration' in Germany). This includes:-

- Support with job seeking activities
- Applying for financial support for the technical equipment
- Finding new work offers
- Help with the equipment and the organisation at the new work place
- Orientation and mobility training for the future work place
- Initial training at the new work place

7.13 We would have welcomed an opportunity to discuss with staff at BWF Düren the relative merits of training blind and partially sighted people at what seems to amount to a specialist residential college, as opposed to supporting their inclusion in mainstream vocational colleges close to their homes. The latter model is practiced in the UK, where RNIB College, Loughborough, offers such support, as well as providing residential courses.

7.14 We would also have welcomed an opportunity to discuss any provision that is made there for blind and partially sighted people with additional difficulties. The website gives the impression that the centre prides itself on preparing blind and partially sighted people to obtain those high qualifications which mainstream employers said they were looking for (see above 3.2.4). It is to be hoped that such employers would be open to recruit someone like Katrin Bölsche, whose story is highlighted on the website:



'When Katrin Bölsche first began her vocational training as skilled office worker in the Berufsförderungswerk Düren, she would not have imagined to be later working for a computer company which sells software for legal professions. She got convinced during a longer probation time at the company AnNoText. She liked the young company, and the managers liked her uncomplicated and highly motivated work attitude. Katrin Bölsche was born in Hamburg in the North of Germany, and due to a genetic impairment of her eyesight she is visually handicapped by 70%.

'Immediately after she finished her vocational training she was employed as sales assistant. She is responsible for the co-ordination between customers and sales representatives of the company.

'Recently her areas of responsibility have increased: because of her good knowledge of the French language she is now contact person for the French affiliated company of AnNoText.

'Dr. Josef Schaefer, managing director of AnNoText speaks very well of his employee: "Katrin Bölsche is very well integrated in our team, both because of her qualifications and because of her personality. She is highly motivated and we can't imagine to be without her anymore."

7.15 We note with interest that BWF Düren has an R&D section which focuses its work on two main topics:

- (a) Labour market research and developing new strategies for vocational training and job placement
- (b) IT development which includes the development of IT or e-learning training courses and software.

7.16 The website should be consulted for a list of such projects which includes, for example, developing a knowledge management and training system for trainers who educate visually impaired people, elderly people and immigrants.



Appendix

Dr. Peter Mozet

German Federal Ministry for Health and Social Security
Bonn

Training day on social employment quota for disabled people Brussels, 21. November 2005

The situation in Germany

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would now like to explain to you the system of employment duty and compensation charge which is in operation in Germany.

1. Historical background

I will begin at the time when this system was first introduced.

The development of disability legislation in Germany started after the first world war. In 1919, an employment duty for disabled ex servicemen was first introduced, and the "Legislation for Employment of disabled people" came into operation in 1920. This legislation mainly recommended the following rules:

1. Every employer had to allocate 2% of their posts to disabled people. These were disabled ex servicemen whose ability to work had been reduced by at least 50%. People who had had an accident at work which had restricted their ability to work by at least 50% also fell under these rules.
2. Dismissal of a disabled person was dependent on the approval by the authorities.

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The three strands of this legislation – Employment duty, representation of disabled people and special protection from dismissal remain distinct characteristics of the legislation on participation of disabled people in employment.

The compensation charge was introduced in 1953: Any employer who did not fulfil their employment duty had to pay a monthly charge of 50 dm for each post not allocated to a disabled person. This equates to about 25 Euros

In 1974, the area of application of the rules for the protection of disabled people was extended. Until then, the only beneficiaries were victims of war and of accidents at work. From now on, all disabled people whose ability to work was reduced by at least 50% were included, irrespective of the cause of their disability. At the same time, the System of employment duty and compensation charge was re-organised. Every employer in the public and private sector who had at least 16 employees was obliged to allocate at least 6% of their posts to disabled people, or to pay a monthly compensation charge of 100 DM (about 50 Euros) for each post not allocated to a disabled person.

In 1986, the compensation charge was increased from 100 DM to 150 DM for each post not allocated to a disabled person. In **1990, along with German reunification, this charge was increased to 200 DM.** This level was set in-between the 150 DM in the old federal republic of Germany, and the 250 Mark charge which had been operated in the former GDR.

Since 2001, employers with at least 20 staff have been obliged to allocate 5% of their posts to disabled people. At the same time, the compensation charge was graded. I have now arrived in the present, and I will shortly come to the current legislation.

The historical background in summary:

In the beginning, it was all about creating employment opportunities for victims of war. This was based on the knowledge that a person's contentment and satisfaction is significantly dependent on being in employment. Due to the large number of disabled ex servicemen, it was also felt to be the responsibility of the state to support these people. In 1974, This view was extended to all disabled people, irrespective of the

cause of their disability. The system of employment duty and compensation charge now constitutes just one part within the set of measures which aim to achieve equal participation of disabled people in employment and society in general.

2. Current legislation

As promised, I will now come to the current legislation.

We have a quota of 5% in Germany today.

Which employers are affected by the employment duty?

- The employment duty applies to employers with at least 20 staff.
- Trainee posts do not count in this calculation. An employer's willingness to make trainee posts available must not be affected by an increase of posts which the employer is obliged to allocate to disabled people. Part time posts of less than 18 hours per week also do not count in this calculation.
- No difference is made between public and private sector employers.
- No difference is made between different industries.
- This means: All public and private sector employers with at least 20 staff must allocate 5% of their posts to disabled people.

Below are some figures to illustrate this:

- There are approximately 130,000 employers with at least 20 staff in Germany. This means that 7% of German employers have the duty to employ disabled people.
- Among this group of employers, there are approximately 1 million posts affected by the employment duty. This amounts to 5% of all posts in Germany.

Which group of people are we talking about?? In Germany, we distinguish between disabled people and severely disabled people.

- A person who has a disability is considered as disabled, irrespective of the severity of their disability. A person can apply for an assessment of the severity of their disability by the authorities. The statement is based on the "evidence for the medical assessment

process" which is issued by the federal ministry for Health and Social Security, based on decisions made by the advisory board of Medical Experts. The statement of the level of disability is graded in intervals of 10 between 10 and 100.

- Severely disabled people constitute a sub group of the group of disabled people. These have a level of disability of at least 50. Severely disabled people are the target group for the employment duty.
- Under certain circumstances, disabled people with a level of disability of at least 30 can be treated as severely disabled people.

There are a few particularities when counting the group of severely disabled people.

- Disabled people who work Part time for at least 18 hours per week make up for a full place allocated to the disabled person by the employer.
- A severely disabled employer also counts for an allocated post.
- A severely disabled trainee counts for two allocated posts.
- Severely disabled people whose participation in employment proves particularly difficult can be counted for up to three allocated posts. This might be the case for a disabled person who is over 50 years of age, or who has not completed any professional training. Such decisions are made by the local agency for employment (equivalent to Jobcentre Plus).

The employer fulfils their employment duty by employing severely disabled people and exchanging contracts of employment with them. The decision on the post allocated to the disabled person is up to the employer. No post is specially allocated to a disabled person. Employment contracts are mainly covered by Employment legislation, as well as some special rules for severely disabled people.

This particularly includes the rules designed to protect severely disabled employees from discrimination in employment.

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- Every employee is obliged to assess whether vacancies can be filled by severely disabled people. There are some special obligations which apply to public sector employers.
 - The disabled people's representative must be involved in applications from severely disabled people.
 - The employer must not discriminate against a disabled person with regard to their employment, promotion, order or dismissal on grounds of their disability.
 - In case of a breach, the person concerned is entitled to claim adequate financial compensation of up to three months' earnings. However, there is no entitlement to a contract of employment.

I would also like to talk about the termination of an employment contract. Within the legal framework, the employer can also terminate their employment contract with the severely disabled person. However, they need to consider two points:

- Firstly, the legislation for the protection against dismissal, which contains the general protection against dismissal which applies to all employees.
- Secondly, the particular protection against dismissal for severely disabled people. This means that, prior to dismissal, approval from the Office for Integration has to be sought. The primary task of the Office for Integration is to support severely disabled people in employment. If the Office for Integration is advised of an impending dismissal, it can, in collaboration with the employer, explore ways to retain the job of the severely disabled person. Naturally, this can only be considered if there is a job for the person. In cases of company closures, the Office for Integration can therefore do very little. However, nearly a quarter of all proceedings end in the retention of the job.

the compensation charge, which the employer must pay for each post not allocated to a severely disabled person, corresponds with the employment duty. This charge is graded as follows:

- 105 Euros where 3 – 5% of the employees are severely disabled;
- 180 Euros where 2 – 3% of the employees are severely disabled,

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- 260 Euros where the proportion of severely disabled employees is below 2%.

the closer an employer is to their required quota of 5%, the less they are charged. Conversely, the further away an employer gets from the required 5% quota, the more they must pay.

The compensation charge fulfils two functions, that of a motivator and that of a compensator.

- "Motivator function" means that the employer can save money by employing severely disabled people. This prospect is meant to encourage the employer to employ severely disabled people.
- "The compensator function" is based on the thinking that, by employing a severely disabled person, the employer may incur some extra costs. For example, a severely disabled person is entitled to five additional days annual leave. This charge is therefore designed to create a balance between those employers who fulfil their employment duty with any resulting extra costs, and those employers who don't fulfil their duty and avoid betterment.

We could come to the conclusion that employers can buy their way out of their employment duty. However, the law expressly disagrees with this: Payment of the compensation charge does not relieve the employer of their employment duty. Breaches of the employment duty can be treated as an administrative offence which can carry a penalty of up to 10,000 Euros, even if the compensation charge has been paid. However, the purpose of the compensation charge is not to raise money, but to support severely disabled people into work – motivator function and compensator function. When supporting severely disabled people into employment, the Agency for Employment relies on employers' responsiveness with regard to the issues affecting this group of people. In achieving this, fines tend to be seen as counterproductive. In considering this, many cases do not result in an administrative offence, and this is seen to be more beneficial to longer term co-operation.

An employer who has to pay the compensation charge can reduce this by commissioning work to workshopartially sighted for disabled people. These kinds of workshopartially sighted employ people who cannot function in open employment, due to the type or severity of their



disability. The commissioning of work to such a workshop also promotes the employment of severely disabled people. Because of this, part of the invoiced amount from such a workshop can be counted towards the compensation charge.

3. Operation of the system

The system of employment duty and compensation charge operates as follows:

- By 31 March of every year, each employee who falls under the employment duty must provide all the information for the previous year which is relevant to this duty.
- A web based system is available to the employers for this purpose. Each employer can enter their entire number of posts, the number of severely disabled employees, any multiple allowances, etc. This system then informs the employer as to whether they have fulfilled their employment duty, or how much compensation charge they must pay.
- This information is then sent to two offices: the Agency for Employment and the Office for Integration.
- The Agency for Employment monitors compliance with the employment duty.
- The Office for Integration monitors the receipt of payments, if necessary, up to their enforcement.

Payment of compensation charges in 2004 amounted to approximately 530 million Euros. These funds are exclusively allocated to special grants for the promotion of the participation of severely disabled people in employment. All the details on this are set down in a decree from the German Federal government.

The funds are distributed as follows:

- 70% remain with the Offices for Integration. These funds are used to finance support in employment. This includes support to the employer for an accessible work place, Technical equipment or a Support Worker for the disabled employee. Organisations for disabled people can also be supported. This includes workshop partially sighted for

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- disabled people who employ those people who, due to their disabilities, are unable to operate in open employment.
- 26% go to the federal Agency for Employment who utilise the funds for rehabilitation grants for employers. Employers can reclaim up to 70% of the salary paid to a severely disabled person, and they can do this for up to eight years, depending on the age and severity of the disability of their employee. These types of grants can be made available to any employer, not just those who fall under the employment duty.
 - 4% go to the compensation fund in the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs. These funds can pay for such things as time-limited, national programmes for the reduction of unemployment of severely disabled people and national pilot projects for the participation of severely disabled people.

A project called "Job – Jobs without Barriers", is such an initiative established by the Ministry for Social Affairs. It is an initiative to promote more training and employment for severely disabled people as well as prevention on the part of the employers. Half of the funds for this is provided by the compensation fund, while the other half comes from the European Social Fund. In order for you to get an impression of this initiative, I would like to mention the project of so-called "Geared Training". This is about young people who cannot undertake training with an employer because of their disability, but who require a vocational rehabilitation centre. In these vocational rehabilitation centres, these young people are trained to a high standard. However, even after a successfully completed training course, they often find it hard to gain employment because they have no contact with potential employees. An employer tends to take on their own trainees before considering anyone who has trained elsewhere. This is where this project comes in: The last year of the training course is not carried out in the rehabilitation centre but with a partnering employer. This helpartially sighted reduce prejudice against disabled people and increase their chances of being taken on by these employers after completing their training course. At the end of the project, a brochure is produced for the employers in order to encourage other employees to follow this good example.



4. Views of the social partners and the employers' organisations

The employers' organisations consider the compensation charge to be an additional burden, and they would be in favour of the charges being more voluntary. The views of individual employers, however, are very varied. I have just mentioned the initiative "Jobs without barriers" for more training and employment for severely disabled people. With the help of projects, events and the Internet, examples of employers' positive experiences of employing severely disabled people are to be publicised. Such employers are proud of their social involvement and are therefore happy to talk to the public about their commitment to severely disabled people. These employers who usually fulfil their employment duty don't mind the fact that other employers in breach of this duty have to pay the compensation charge.

I mentioned earlier that the compensation charge applies equally to all industries. In the past, this was also discussed widely among employer representatives. Employers in the aviation industry argued, for example, that they could not employ disabled people due to international security regulations. They therefore requested to be exempt. However, this has since been resolved through two decisions by the Federal Constitutional courts from 1981 and 2004. According to these decisions, even employers, who cannot fully employ severely disabled people because of the nature of their work, may be covered by the employment duty. The reason for this is that this argument only applies to the motivator function, which is only one of the functions of the compensation charge. Even if this is practically non-existent, the compensator function is still effective. It is therefore considered to be constitutional to also apply the employment duty to those employers who have to apply stringent health criteria to some of their posts.

The organisations of disabled people and the trade unions are in favour of the System of employment duty and compensation charge. However, last year, the quota of allocated posts was discussed again. Some organisations demanded for the quota to be returned to the pre 2001 level of 6% instead of the current 5%. This was debated as part of a legislative procedure. However, the government did not adopt this. By cutting the quota and therefore easing the burden of the duty to the employer, these were supposed to be motivated to employ more

severely disabled people. By 30 June 2007, the Federal government has to produce a report which, among other things, reviews the quota for the employment duty. Then, this issue will again be discussed. In this discussion, the successes of the above initiative "job – Jobs without Barriers" will be an important factor.

5. Evaluation

To conclude, please let me say a few words about the evaluation of our system.

The employment duty of 5% for the employers concerned has to date not been achieved.

- Only 20% of the 130,000 employers covered by the employment duty fulfil this duty, i.e. at least 5% of their staff are severely disabled people.
- 50% of employers partially comply with their employment duty.
- 30% do not fulfil their employment duty at all, i.e. they do not employ any severely disabled person at all.

However, a steady increase of the employment quota is noticeable. In 2000, it was at 3.7%, 2001 and 2002 3.8% respectively and in 2003, it reached 4.0%. The number of employers who do not employ any severely disabled people has also come down. This is partly due to the introduction of graded compensation charges in 2001. Let me remind you: Proportional to the employment quota achieved by an employer, an employer has to pay between 105 Euros and 260 Euros per month for each post not allocated to a severely disabled person. This means that the grading of the charge presents an effective incentive to the employers to employ a higher number of severely disabled people.

Over the same period of time, the rate of unemployment among severely disabled people (the proportion of severely disabled people among all unemployed people) has come down from 4.7% in 2000 to 3.8% in 2003. The campaign for "50,000 jobs for severely disabled people" which was carried out from October 1999 to October 2002, has also contributed to this downward trend. This campaign was partly paid for by the

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compensation fund, which means that it received funds from the compensation charges paid by employers.

Overall, the system of employment duty and compensation charge has proved itself in the opinion of the federal government.

However, this system is quite complex, as is often the case with systems which have been developing over a considerable period of time. New components have been introduced over time, which, by themselves, are very sensible but which contribute to the complexity of the whole system.

In this context, the multiple allowances ought to be mentioned. Depending on the type or severity of the disability, a disabled person can count for up to three allocated posts. Trainees generally count for two allocated posts. This makes sense because the vocational training of disabled people is particularly important. However, this means that the employers cannot simply report the number of severely disabled employees but that they have to distinguish between the different cases.

Even though the grading of the compensation charge is sensible and effective, it does not contribute to a simplification of the administration.

I have not yet mentioned the financial balancing process between the Offices for Integration. The aim of this is to have a similar level of funding for each supported disabled person in all the Offices for Integration, irrespective of the level of compensation charge which the employers in a particular area have had to pay. This balancing process is carried out by the Ministry for Social Affairs. The calculation of this is based on the general population in the catchment area of an Office for Integration, the number of severely disabled people, the number of severely disabled people in employment and the level of unemployment among severely disabled people. This formula resulted from a political compromise, and because it is about money, it cannot be changed all that easily. However, this financial balancing process has resulted in some more employment opportunities over the last few years.

At the end of the day, we will have to put up with these difficulties which have developed over time, in the interest of the whole system. At least information technology has eased some of the burdens over the last few

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years. The new Federal Government has no intention to change the system.

Thank you for your attention.



CHAPTER FOUR

ROMANIA

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 To turn from employment services for blind and partially sighted people in the UK, Sweden and Germany to those in Romania is to be sharply reminded of uneven economic and social development in the European Union. The report, *Employment in Europe, 2008*, presented³ to the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the EU Commission, highlighted the country's labour market problems. The national rate of employment was 59 percent. It had not risen since 2000 and was well below the EU's Lisbon target of at least 70 percent throughout the Union by 2010. At the time of accession to the EU (2007) income per capita was less than one third of the EU average and in 2008 average gross hourly wages/salaries were only 10 percent of the EU average.

1.2 Paradoxically the report shows that, between 2000 and 2006, Romania was among the three member states of the EU achieving the highest rates of productivity growth. This combination of high productivity growth accompanied by a high rate of economic inactivity is not inevitable, the report argues. In the long run both should be growing and the challenge is to know how to bring this about. The report recommended that labour market policies should encourage transfer to new jobs rather than protect old ones against productivity growth. The policies recommended were:

* 'the modernisation of labour laws that allow for sufficiently flexible work arrangements and reduce labour market segmentation and undeclared work

³ **European Commission**, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit D.1, Manuscript completed in October 2008. This important report is frequently cited in the text as 'the 2008 report'.



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- * the provision of adequate active labour market policies
 - * the promotion of lifelong learning throughout the lifecycle
 - * the implementation of modern social security systems that combine the provision of adequate income support with the need to facilitate labour market mobility.'

1.3 Such policies should aim, the reports suggested, at increasing economic inactivity among women, older people and youth. It is striking that the report is silent about people with disabilities, though the policy of creating an inclusive society by 'mainstreaming disability' is also an established aim of the Lisbon strategy. It is a major purpose of this chapter to relate evidence concerning economic inactivity of blind and partially sighted people in Romania to the analysis of *Employment in Europe, 2008*.

2 BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE IN THE ROMANIAN LABOUR MARKET

2.1 Sources we consulted before visiting Romania suggested that the rate of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people could be as high as 90 percent. This was confirmed [see below par. 11.1) in our discussions with the President of the Romanian Association of the Blind (RAB), Mr. Sergiu Radu Ruba, and the Director of the National Advisory Council for Disability (NACD), Mrs. Monica Stancio.

3 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

3.1 The President of RAB set the history of the association in the general context of Romanian history in a way which we found most illuminating. What follows is our own understanding.

3.2 Romania had an predominantly agricultural economy in 1878, when the country was guaranteed independence by a Congress of the European 'great powers'. Around that time the West was embarking on its second industrial revolution, the age of oil, electricity and assembly



line manufacturing. In Romania this kind of industrial development began around 1910, based on the country's mineral resources, including oil. A modern urban economy burgeoned between the two world wars and Romania gained a high reputation as a centre of European culture.

3.3 The second world war - invasion by Nazi Germany, followed by Soviet occupation - cut Romania off from the west. Communist rule lasted until 1989, when the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceauşescu was overthrown.

3.4 A decade of turmoil and economic recession ensued. Stability was not achieved until 2000 when a period of growth began, which lasted until the beginning of the current world financial crisis in 2007. This economic diversification was built on the resource of a highly educated population, a positive legacy of the Communist period. Romania opened up to tourism, international finance, air transport and internet communication. In 2007 accession to the EU was accompanied by high hopes of continuous development, including much needed renewal of the internal transport infra-structure. Then the global financial crisis struck. The report *Employment in Europe*, considers that this will present a major setback to development in Eastern Europe generally and Romania in particular, but also considers that, in the long run, high productivity growth should return.

4 THE ROMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE BLIND (RAB)

4.1 RAB today is an organisation controlled by visually impaired people. It has thirty-three branches situated in most of Romania's 41 counties and aims to support all blind and partially sighted people in Romania, of whom there are approximately 80,000

4.2 Its foundation dates from the beginning of Romania's modernisation. Queen Elizabeth of Romania established it under her patronage in 1906. From the first she was interested in the employment of blind people. Advised by U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt, she bought 26 hectares of land to develop services for blind people on the outskirts of Bucharest. President Roosevelt assisted personally with the funding. The site had



Accommodation for families, a primary school for the blind, and a sheltered workshop, whose products were sold in Bucharest.

4.3 The direction of the Queen's marketing strategy, at least in part, towards luxury consumption is indicated by her attempt to develop silk production. She planted mulberry trees on the site for the cultivation of silk worms. Between the 2 world wars blind people worked at silk production in co-operation with sighted people.

4.4 After 1945 the new Communist state took a different tack. In 1949 a programme of vocational training was introduced for the whole country. This was an attempt to diversify an economy that was still over-dependent on agriculture. Eighty % of the population lived in the countryside, but land Reform before and after the war left too many poor peasants on very small farms. Under the new policy industrial training was provided for young people from rural districts. Severe loss of manpower during the war ensured that blind people were included in this programme. Silk production was abandoned and sheltered workshops were set up to train blind people in the making of brushes, cardboard boxes, etc. Such goods were in demand from sheltered workshops at a time when modern methods of factory production were scarcely in existence.

4.5 The expansion of sheltered workshops led to blind workers demanding trade union organisation and a say in their conditions of employment. The Communist regime had to take account of this pressure, since many of the workers were war blinded ex-servicemen, influential in left-wing organisations and in the state apparatus. It was necessary to make concessions without surrendering too much control. This took the form of reviving RAB. The constitution of the new RAB was copied from the old Association, but with fewer branches and a system of administration that allowed for Communist party control.

4.6 For some years blind workers were satisfied to have employment in these special workshops. But Romania could not be wholly insulated from the growth of assembly line production. Some modernisation of the economy went ahead and, by the 1960s, the need to adapt vocational training to the new systems of production was clear. But appropriate changes were not made in the sheltered workshops for the



blind. For years the state subsidised their backwardness, even as the economic recession of the 1980s undermined their viability. This was exposed by the overthrow of Communism in 1989. Romania was opened up to market competition. Post-Communist government did not attempt to maintain or modernise the workshops for blind people. Instead they were privatised. Most succumbed quickly to the icy wind of competition.

4.7 In the mainstream economy economic modernisation was left to private firms. These were made responsible for training their own workforce in the application of new technologies. Access to such training depended on high educational attainments. For many Romanians this had been available under Communism, but few blind people were in this state of job readiness. Since the 1950s some had benefited from high (secondary) school education but professional employment outlets were very scarce. Most high school students who were blind went on to train as masseurs.

4.88 On the collapse of Communism, the President of RAB was an inspector of special schools for the blind. Mr. Ruba advocated a policy of upgrading education in the high schools for the blind. Physiotherapy was then emerging as a profession based on a post-secondary qualification. He wanted blind students to be able to qualify for this new profession. This was achieved and blind students were able to graduate through a three year course beginning at age nineteen.

4.10 In the difficult 1990s, however, this progress was countered by the collapse of medical massage as a profession for blind people. In 1989 there were 1100 blind masseurs and physiotherapists. By 2000 there were about 400 physiotherapists. Many masseurs were forced out of employment onto retirement pension. Often they continued to eke out a living by practising massage in the informal economy.

4.11 Matters fared even worse with blind people who did not possess, or could not acquire, higher secondary education and training. As sheltered workshops for the blind disappeared, RAB lobbied successfully for legislation to grant such workers full pension rights after 15 years of employment. The unintended outcome has been the creation among blind people of a large pool of economic inactivity. Today the number of



blind people of working age who are in employment is estimated by RAB at around 3000. Most of the others, perhaps 27,000 (see below, par. 11.1) are economically inactive and languish in isolation and benefit dependency. Only a tiny elite of highly educated blind people work, mostly in physiotherapy. A very few work in other professions such as university teaching and research.

5 THE BEGINNINGS OF RECOVERY

5.1 The Romanian economy began to recover in 2000 and saw a period of sustained high productivity growth from that year until the onset of the current global financial crisis in mid-2007. The blind elite benefited from this. The number of blind physiotherapists in employment doubled, from about 400 in 2000 to about 800 today. Sighted people employed in the new modern sector needed and could pay for treatment. Many blind physiotherapists work for the private sector or in their own businesses. Others work part time, supplementing their retirement pensions. RAB now receives regular requests from private companies seeking to recruit physiotherapists. Other opportunities for employment have been found in tourist resorts or health centres in spa towns with mineral springs.

5.2 Employment in professions requiring high levels of ICT skills also grew during this period. So far very few blind people have benefited. There are about 20 blind people employed in this kind of work, mainly by RAB, producing talking books recorded on CDs. However, employment in the private sector is severely restricted, because employers, in Mr. Ruba's words, "cannot imagine how blind people can use computers." Recently staff of RAB took part in a television show to demonstrate how a blind person uses the computer with adaptive software. One company in the town of Cluj, capitol of Transylvania, turned to RAB to recruit a blind person to work on computers. RAB was able to nominate one who had lost his sight in an accident but who had been well trained in computing before that event.

5.3 Nevertheless progress here is an uphill struggle. The Queen Elizabeth School for the Blind in Bucharest offers a two-year post-graduate course in computer technology, which this year has no students because their prospects of employment are so poor.



5.4 In an effort to move on, The Queen Elizabeth School for the blind, which is run by RAB in Bucharest, has introduced new types of vocational training, supported by the Ministry of Education. They include training for jobs in the growing tourism sector. Inclusion of blind people in this industry requires assisted access to the specialised computer networks which it uses. RAB is investigating the specialist software for this purpose which has been developed in France and elsewhere. Again, the school has started to work with a company in Bucharest to employ blind people in call centres. Four people with low vision have been trained and will start work in March, 2009.

5.5 The evidence reviewed in this and the previous section reveals an alarming degree of labour market segmentation of blind and partially sighted professionals. Almost to a man (and we found no evidence regarding women) they are crowded into one profession, physiotherapy. While this must be a satisfying outcome for some, the extreme lack of alternative professional outlets must mean that there are many square pegs in these round holes. There is then, an urgent need to diversify professional and white collar employment for well qualified blind and partially sighted people.

6 LABOUR ACTIVATION PROGRAMMES

6.1 RAB is doing what it can in difficult circumstances. At the same time it is very dissatisfied with existing labour activation policies of the state. We discussed the following:

6.2 SUPPORT FOR DISABLED PEOPLE AT WORK. There is a law which requires employers to adapt the work place and providing for government to compensate for the cost. This is not working well, as the Director of NACD confirmed (see below, par.10.5)

6.3 QUOTA SYSTEM. A law was passed that employers should employ a quota of disabled people in the work force at the national minimum wage. An amendment in parliament reduced this to 50% of the minimum wage.



6.4 Before 2000 this had little effect, as there were practically no jobs. After 2000, the supply of jobs expanded and RAB would like visually impaired people to take advantage of this legislation, but blind people will not come forward. There is more than one reason for this. In the first place there is a lack of impairment specific vocational training. In the second, companies resist employing blind people.

6.5 RAB has lobbied along with the organisation of deaf people for government investment in sensory specific training, but so far unsuccessfully.

6.6 We asked RAB to say what prevented blind people from taking advantage of quota legislation, applying for jobs even at 50% of minimum wage. The reply was that disability benefits, though low by comparison with the EU average, are high enough to act as a disincentive to participate in the labour market on such poor terms. Disability allowance is not means tested and is higher than the minimum wage. We consider this reveals a need for modernisation of the benefit system, accompanied by opportunities for training and support to find and maintain employment. The benefit system should be flexible. As in other countries, benefits could be linked to wages in such a way that blind people need suffer no loss of income by going to work. (See Ch. 3, par. 2.3)

6.7 RAB was at pains to stress that there is evidence of propensity to work, especially among young blind people in the urban sector. In the countryside the disability allowance of a young person who is blind tends to be added to the family income and the recipient remains at home to work in whatever way the family may require. By contrast, students in the Queen Elizabeth School in Bucharest aim at physiotherapy as a first option. Training for other jobs is now under consideration, e.g. radio journalism, computer operations. This is related to the perception that well qualified blind students have found work in the Informal economy, e.g. trading software for access technology. In this way blind people can support each other in obtaining and maintaining work.

7 EDUCATION AS PREPARATION FOR WORK



7.1 At fourteen all pupils in Romania must leave school unless they qualify to go on to higher secondary school. 65% of all visually impaired children in education are in special schools. 35% are educated in mainstream schools. It is official policy that children with 30% of normal sight are orientated towards special schools.

7.2 There are six special schools for primary education of blind children, and one for children with partial sight.

7.3 Theoretically, then, there is a system of universal education for visually impaired children to age fourteen. RAB considers that this must be qualified, however, in regard to the countryside. The law allows a parent to teach/care for a disabled child, supported by a wage from the local authority. Government is said to be determined to change this provision – withdrawing the wage for the parent - so that all will go to special school. But there is also provision that parents who live in the countryside, very distant from a special school, may send a blind child to the local village school. RAB considers that the standard of education there may be compromised by lack of expertise in teaching blind children.

7.4 We were informed that there is no educational provision for Children with multiple disabilities. “They are kept at home with their parents”. There appear to be no statistics to show the prevalence of ‘complex needs’ among visually impaired people in Romania. We consider that this is a question which should be researched, to create an evidence base for development of appropriate education and care of such children. Beyond that lies the question of developing social enterprise to meet their employment needs, as discussed in our chapters on Sweden (par. 6.4 and seq.) and Germany (par. 2.4 and 6.6 et seq.)

7.5 RAB estimates that 30% of blind children go to high school at age fourteen. The Queen Elizabeth School in Bucharest, run by RAB, has 300 pupils aged 15-26 yrs. Students can take the International Bacalauriat and go on to training in physiotherapy. At present the latter is not considered higher education, but the government has issued a decree to raise physiotherapy training to university level. RAB considers that this will increase the chances of blind students finding employment.



7.6 In the opinion of Mr. Ruba, mainstream education in Romania is not always the best solution for a blind student aiming at professional employment. He stressed the value of education by visually impaired teachers, who are to be found in special, but rarely in mainstream schools. He also pointed out that assistive equipment is not subsidised by the state. Even low tech equipment may be out of reach of students from poorer families. RAB imports equipment that people need, e.g. white canes, Braille slates, and subsidises their sale. Some equipment is even provided free of charge, e.g. slates and stylus for children at school. Once again RAB struggles to take the strain, but provision of equipment necessary for education should, in our opinion, be a right for all blind and partially sighted children.

7.7 The question of opening mainstream education to visually impaired children is not one we can go into here, beyond pointing to the comment of the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired that it has been one factor among others in raising the rate of economic activity of visually impaired people to the current rate of 47 percent (ch. 2, par. 7.1).

8 REHABILITATION

8.1 The Queen Elizabeth school also functions as a rehabilitation centre for young people. Rehabilitation is available at only one other centre in the city of Arad.

8.2 PLANNING FOR AN ADULT REHABILITATION CENTRE

8.3 Since the 1990s RAB has aimed to provide rehabilitation for adults who lose their sight after school leaving age. It hoped to build a new rehabilitation centre for this purpose on land owned by the Association before 1945. However it failed to establish legal title to this land.

8.4 In 2008 the Bucharest City Council made over another site to RAB. Building work began immediately, even though no financial support was forthcoming from the state, and the work had to be funded by the resources of RAB and donations from the public. This was done in order to comply with a time limit for commencement laid down by the Council. Funds ran out, however, before the foundations could be completed, because the site [proved to be in an earthquake zone, which involved costly reinforcements.



8.5 RAB considers that further work on the new centre depends greatly on financial support from government, which has not been forthcoming so far. Every legal means is being explored to see if government can be required to provide this.

8.6 Blind people's Organisations in some other European countries have come to the assistance of RAB. In Spain, for example, the National Association of the Blind (ONCE) has offered printing equipment for the Queen Elizabeth School, but there is no money for the construction of a printing shop.⁴

8.7 Another potential source of finance is the European Social Fund (ESF). Under the current rules, however, it cannot be of help for the rehabilitation centre. Its grants are not available for construction of new buildings, only for renovation of existing ones.

8.8 RAB is aware that ESF money has supported renovation of old military facilities for disabled people elsewhere in Eastern Europe that ESF money could be made available in Romania to adapt former Soviet military installations. RAB refused to go down this road, however, on the grounds that it would create "a new ghetto". Rehabilitation, in RAB's view, must take place near to mainstream life. We think this is realistic and is supported by practice in Sweden and Germany. (See Ch. 2, par. 5.1 et seq. and ch. 3, par. 1.6, 7.1 et seq.)

8.9 Meanwhile RAB works on to raise voluntary funds, using the television contacts of Mr. Ruba, who is a frequent broadcaster, to appeal for funds, with the support of celebrity musicians.

⁴ Another example of assistance to Romania is described in Annelies Feelders, 'Development of the international co-operation between the Netherlands and Romania in a Computer Project', European ICEVI conference Krakow 9 – 13 July 2000. Cf. [Henk de Jong](#), 'Employment strategies for the blind in Eastern Europe', Vision 2005 – International Congress series 1282 (2006) 1134–1138.



8.10 It should be noted that all this takes place against the background of the current global financial crisis. There is real anxiety that government may reduce its contribution to RAB's annual budget. So far 25% of this budget has been contributed by government and the maintenance of this in 2009 was announced during our visit.

9 CALL FOR NEW LEGISLATION

9.1 We ASKED Mr. Ruba to sum up on behalf of RAB the legislative innovations which would do most to improve the rate of economic inactivity in Romania. He offered the following list:

- * Public subsidy to provide assistive technology.
- * State finance for building the Rehabilitation centre.
- * Full access for all blind and partially sighted people to mainstream AND specialist services
- * Mainstreaming of policy for people with disabilities
- * More opportunities for blind and partially sighted people to take high profile jobs, e.g. in journalism or teaching, to act as encouraging role models.

9.2 Mr. Ruba stressed that the government should invariably consult with RAB before introducing legislation concerning blind and partially sighted people. "Unfortunately", he said, "the principal 'nothing about us without us' is often forgotten by our authorities."

10 THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON DISABILITY (NACD)

10.1 We were fortunate to obtain a four hour interview with the Director of NACD, Mrs. Monica Stancio. NACD was formed to promote measures for the social inclusion of people with disabilities; to monitor their implementation; and to develop general co-ordination across all services for people with disabilities. It is an autonomous division of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

10.2 Mrs Stancio outlined existing legislation for the support of people with disabilities. It distinguishes between four levels of disability:

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- (a) Severe -
 - (b) Pronounced
 - (c) Average
 - (d) Light.

Totally blind people are included in the 'severe' category. Partially sighted people count as 'average'.

10.3 NACD considers that people in the 'average' category of disability can work in many types of employment. Despite this, her office had noted that the percentage of such people who are economically active has not increased very much. They had tried to identify the reasons for this and had arrived at the following answers:

- * lack of impairment specific vocational training;
- * lack of social rehabilitation to improve social skills where required
- * unadapted work premises.

10.4 We consider that this list points in the right directions, but would add that many totally blind people, although rightly considered to be in the 'severe' category, could be enabled by such supportive measures to overcome the barriers to employment.

10.5 In respect to these shortcomings, NACD has devised and published a strategy which proposes the following improvements:

- * Thorough enforcement of laws on accessibility of public spaces and buildings. There are many anomalies here, including inaccessibility of pavements, which are unavailable to pedestrians because they are completely covered by parked cars.
- * The law on accessibility should be improved to discriminate between the needs of people with different disabilities, e.g. needs of blind people are not the same as those with locomotors disabilities. NACD is working on this with the Ministry of Transport.
- * A campaign to inform employers as to the real impact of the 'reasonable accommodation' required by disability discrimination legislation. Many do not know what it involves. They think it will be very expensive to apply. They should be informed that reasonable accommodation is often tax deductible. They should also know that it may simply involve changes in work patterns rather than costly reconstruction. Too few employers are aware of this.



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- * Provision of re-training programmes to enable people to change their jobs if required by onset of disability.
 - * Provision of support services to enable people with disabilities to acquire essential skills of daily living, e.g. Mobility
 - * Personal support at work where required by people with disabilities.
 - * Information campaigns to educate the public about disability, e.g. 'disability is not contagious'
 - * Measures to enable people with disabilities to participate in the community. Their own activities for mutual support should be stimulated
 - * Modern vocational training should begin in schools and care homes
 - * Confidence raising courses should be available for disabled people who have lost their jobs.

10.6 Mrs. Stancio said that NACD had been lobbying the Romanian government to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She was please to say during the course of our interview that the new government had announced that it was ready to do so.

10.7 Mrs. Stancio added that, when the new president is in office, NACD will start a project, with support from the ministry of education to provide training for those who need basic training.

10.8 We raised the problem of the adult rehabilitation centre with Mrs. Stancio. She said she was in complete agreement with RAB that it ought to be situated in Bucharest. She thought it mighte be possible to get funding for it by including it in a programme run by the national authority. This was being explored.

11 STATISTICS

11.1 During our discussions staff of NACD produced the following statistics (to which some reference has already been made) regarding people with disabilities in Romania:

Registered disabled persons in Romania - 600,000 of all ages.

Disabled persons age 25-60 - 200,730

Visually impaired persons aged 25-60 yrs - 36,500

Visually impaired and economically active - 3,155



We calculate that this yields 86 percent as an approximate rate of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people.

11.2 EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

26 percent have gymnasium level.

11 percent Vocational training

31 percent High secondary school

17 percent Post high secondary school

12 CONCLUSION

12.1 The evidence presented in this chapter shows that blind and partially sighted people have suffered dramatically and disproportionately from the problem identified in the report *Employment in Europe, 2008* (see par. 1.1 above). The problem was there stated to be that, between 2000 and 2007, high productivity growth was accompanied by low employment growth. Whereas the general rate of economic inactivity in the population as a whole was around 40 percent, the corresponding rate for blind and partially sighted people is nearly 90 percent.

12.2 We consider that the causes of this disproportionality are rooted more in social policy than in economic factors. The disappearance of sheltered employment was perhaps inevitable. The failure to put in place robust services to support visually impaired people in the labour market was not.

12.3 Again and again our evidence has highlighted instances of such failure. Thus the good intentions of laws to protect people with disabilities have been frustrated by failure to put in place impairment specific measures of support. Evidence presented to us by RAB and NACD highlighted this. It may be summed up as follows:

* There is excessive labour market segmentation of blind and partially sighted people. The evidence of this is the overwhelming preponderance of visually impaired people in physiotherapy, as compared to, say, law, financial services social work or public administration, which have all recruited numbers of blind and partially sighted people in countries like the UK, Sweden and Germany. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the whole range of white collar



employment associated with possession of ICT skills in these three countries is *terra incognita in Romania*. Furthermore, young blind and partially sighted people who have acquired such skills are driven to the informal economy to find employment of their knowledge and skills (see sections 4 and 5 above).

12.4 Looking away from the professions to the wider labour market, *Employment in Europe, 2008*, called for 'the implementation of modern social security systems that combine the provision of adequate income support with the need to facilitate labour market mobility.' Evidence was presented to us of inflexibility in the arrangements for people with disabilities. Legislation restricts wages paid to workers to 50 percent of the minimum wage (par. 6.3 above). With disability benefits exceeding the minimum wage, this is a recipe for ensuring a high level of economic inactivity. The abilities of blind and partially sighted people, which have been proven over and over again in other countries, are simply wasted by this kind of inflexibility. In the long run employers carry the burden of such benefit dependency, along with other tax payers.

12.5 Again the 2008 report pointed to the need for lifelong learning to promote flexible participation in the labour market. We agree and wish to stress that rehabilitation should be viewed in this light. The onset of a major disability such as sight loss clearly involves a major process of learning to live with it. New daily living skills such as use of guidance devices must be acquired. New methods of access to information, by Braille, audio or digital methods are essential and require impairment specific training. Emotional challenges have to be faced, requiring both expert counselling and peer support. For such reasons it is imperative to develop provision for rehabilitation in Romania and we would urge the EU Commission to look again at the rules of the European Social Fund with a view to forwarding the development of the proposed RAB centre at Bucharest.

12.6 A matter not touched upon in the 2008 report remains of very great importance to blind and partially sighted people. This is the accessibility of the built environment. We were glad to learn that NACD is taking this up in its new strategy (see par. 5.6 above). A blind visitor to Bucharest must be shocked to find that all pavements in the city centre are completely covered by parked cars, forcing pedestrians to walk on the



carriage way. It is equally shocking to find that the city is infested by feral dogs, which prey upon domesticated dogs. For this reason, we were informed, guide dogs for the blind are unknown in Romania. The accessibility of the environment and systems of transport within it is as necessary to improve the rate of economic activity as the provision of rehabilitation, vocational training and support at work.

12.7. In chapter 5 of this report we have pointed to rehabilitation, vocational training and support at work as the 'trusted troika' of services which do most to assist blind and partially sighted people on their journey to the labour market. We were deeply saddened by their virtual absence in Romania. We understand the complex historical causation that underlies this. A century of uneven development, interrupted by war and distorted by ideologies, presents Romania, like other countries in Eastern Europe, with a daunting challenge to make adequate provision for its disabled citizens. The present global financial crisis only adds another dimension to the enormity of the task. Nevertheless we would argue that there is nothing to be gained from delay in building the required employment services for visually impaired people. If the task is put aside until the world recession is over it will only be larger and more difficult to address when that time comes. As the 2008 report put it: In these uncertain times we must not lose sight of our overall long-term aim of creating more and better jobs. ... Promoting job quality can rhyme with job creation and productivity.'

12.8 In welcoming this positive expression by the EU Commission, we can only regret that the opportunity was missed to address in the same report the needs of people with disabilities, who suffer even higher rates of economic inactivity than the female, older and younger citizens actually mentioned. We hope that this chapter has gone some way to redress the balance and that, in all future reports, disability will be placed where it ought to be – in the mainstream thinking of the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 As stated in Chapter one (pars. 1.1 and 6.2) the study visits were carried out with three aims in view:

- (i) to investigate labour activation measures and employment support services in each country
- (ii) to estimate the rate of economic inactivity prevailing among blind and partially sighted people of working age in Sweden and Germany
- (iii) to report on these matters to the European Blind Union (EBU), recommending good practice found in either country, which might be disseminated throughout the European Union by the activities of EBU and its member organisations.

1.2 Accordingly in this concluding chapter we attempt first to compare the services as they were described to us in each country. We then try to form an impression of their impact on blind and partially sighted people in Sweden and Germany, with particular reference to the scope of involuntary economic inactivity. Next we turn to Romania to suggest that the extreme gap between provision there from that in Sweden and Germany should be a matter of urgent concern to EBU and the Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs of the EU. Finally we offer some recommendations for the consideration of EBU which, in our opinion, would help to disseminate the good practice we found in



Sweden and Germany throughout the member states of the European Union, and thus help to bring down the rate of economic inactivity.

2 EMPLOYMENT SERVICES IN SWEDEN And GERMANY: 'THE TRUSTED TROIKA'

2.1 Both Sweden and Germany have developed over many decades an impressive array of services which aim to ensure that people of working age who experience serious sight loss may be able to:

- (i) retain the job which they were in, or
- (ii) be assisted to find another job, either in the same firm or in another.

2.2 These services in Sweden are listed in chapter 2, 1.6 et seq. and for Germany in chapter 3, 1.11 et seq. It will be seen that there are many differences of detail relating to each service. Here we wish to offer a general comparison, bringing out some major points of similarity and difference.

2.3 Dealing first with similarities, both countries ground their services on the principle that most blind and partially sighted people should be included in the mainstream labour market. Both recognise as crucial to this outcome the need to intervene as early as possible in the sight loss process and the need to provide services that are designed specifically with the needs of people with serious sight loss.



2.4 It is worth noting the way in which each system seeks to ensure early intervention. Under the rules of the social insurance system in each country, award of an income substitution benefit or 'pension' leads automatically to an assessment of the client's capacity to work. This assessment is carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, able to draw up an individualised programme of rehabilitation, vocational training and support in finding and maintaining a job.

2.5 Both systems recognise that such services should be impairment specific, i.e. designed with the needs of blind and partially sighted people in mind. People with serious sight loss have needs that are not shared by disabled people who are sighted. They need to acquire skills of independent personal care, such as cooking meals, and skills of independent mobility, such as handling a guide dog or a long white cane. They must be trained to use appropriate assistive technology at work, such as a speaking computer or a magnification device. They may also require the support of a sighted assistant to carry out parts of the job for which eyesight is essential.

2.6 To assess the appropriateness of these means of support to any given individual and to deliver the related training, the intervention of experts is required. Both systems provide such expertise, employing multi-disciplinary teams at all stages of the journey to the labour market, from initial assessment through social and vocational rehabilitation to training and job introduction.

2.7 For people who complete that journey successfully, the systems in both Sweden and Germany fund a range of support services at work. This includes the provision of assistive devices, sighted support workers and modification of the environment. Support is also given to people who set up their own businesses.



2.8 None of these measures will come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the needs of blind and partially sighted people in the labour market. Impairment specific programmes of rehabilitation, vocational training and support at work are familiar to everyone concerned as the trusted troika that has carried blind and partially sighted people through to the wide range of mainstream occupations revealed in this report and on the website of EBU. The point which must be emphasised here is that the troika is not universally available throughout the European Union. Even the most advanced countries reveal surprising deficiencies. The United Kingdom, for example, has no national vocational rehabilitation service for blind and partially sighted people, or indeed for disabled people in general.

2.9 Recommendation: EBU should seek to ensure that the EU Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs exerts its full influence to promote the universalisation of the troika throughout the Union. To this end it should utilise its powers of monitoring national action plans, targeting finance from the European Social Fund, funding conferences of experts and service users for the dissemination of good practice.

2.10 Recommendation: We further recommend EBU to publicise this report vigorously among its member organisations. These will then have an opportunity to lobby in their own member states for universalisation of services. It hardly needs saying that EBU and its member organisations should press for urgent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 27, which recognises the rights of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others. EBU should also lobby the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs of the EU



Commission to utilise its powers to spread good practice equally among member states. Among these powers are the monitoring of National Action Plans, which should be scrutinised with the needs of blind and partially sighted people in mind.

3 RETENTION LEGISLATION

3.1 Besides the 'trusted troika', there is one measure of employment protection for people with disabilities which exists in Sweden and should, in our opinion, be universally provided. We refer to Sweden's 'retention' legislation. Its aim is to ensure that someone who experiences serious sight loss while in employment will be able to retain their job or if necessary transfer to another job in the same firm. Employers may not dismiss such a person, but must draw up an action plan for retaining him/her in the job or transferring them to another appropriate job in the firm. In drawing up the plan employers may call upon the Swedish Public Employment Service. (Ch. 2, 3.18)

3.2 A lesser degree of protection is offered in Germany by the 'company prevention' work of the Office of Integration (Ch. 3, 5.2.1 to 5.2.4). The main difference from Sweden is that protection from dismissal applies to employees only after they have been assessed by the Federal Employment Agency as severely disabled in relation to employment. There seems to be nothing to prevent a German employer dismissing (or encouraging the early retirement of) an employee threatened by serious sight loss. Nor is there any law requiring the employer, as in Sweden, to prepare a plan for retaining such an employee if at all possible, either in the same or another job.

3.3 Retention legislation is by no means universal in the European Union. In the United Kingdom organisations of blind people have long campaigned for it, so far without success. We think a retention law affords a robust means of bringing to the attention of employers the abilities, and achievements at work, of blind and partially sighted people. There is evidence at several places in this report (e.g. Ch. 3, 3.2.5) that most employers have an unrealistically low estimate of these abilities and achievements and it is right that they should have to turn to experts, such as the specialised staff of the Swedish Public Employment Service to learn what can be done, before dismissing someone threatened with serious sight loss, or easing such a person out of their employment.

3.4 Recommendation: We recommend that EBU and its member organisations seize every opportunity to press for retention legislation in every member state of the EU.

4 METHODS OF DELIVERING REHABILITATION SERVICES COMPARED

4.1 A striking difference between Sweden and Germany is the way in which social and vocational rehabilitation is delivered to blind and partially sighted people. As chapter three shows, these services are delivered in Germany mainly on a residential basis at four state funded centres. Each centre delivers its services to blind and partially sighted people recruited from groups of states (lander) around it (Ch. 3, 1.5, 1.7, and 7.1 et seq.). As the website of the Düren rehabilitation centre seems to show, Germany still relies heavily on a one-year course of basic rehabilitation. This seems a long time for people to be absent from their homes, families and communities. It is also expensive and we were informed that it has drawn criticism on this ground from insurance companies and others. In oral and written communication with staff of the Düren Centre we gathered that measures have been taken to



customise vocational training courses for individuals, but the 'basic' course in social rehabilitation still seems to be recommended (Ch. 3, 7.4).

4.2 By contrast the Swedish employment system offers no residential courses in this field.⁵ For someone threatened with serious sight loss the journey to the labour market begins in the low vision clinics (ch. 2, 5-3 to 5.6). These appear to be sufficiently numerous for a significant proportion of patients in eye hospitals to be referred to them. They offer specialised counseling and training in social rehabilitation, with the hope that a patient of working age will emerge from the clinic equipped with the basic skills of independent living, ready to proceed on the journey by utilising the services of the Swedish Public Employment Service. Although the LVCs have no power of referring patients to SPES, it is noteworthy that liaison committees have been formed between the two agencies in some regions.

4.3 We are aware that, in the United Kingdom, there has been some development of LVC's, as yet on a much smaller scale. The principle of 'joining up' the health and rehabilitation services has been strongly advocated by a government backed report in Scotland. In the 'UK Vision Strategy' recently adopted by Vision 2020, a coalition of eye health professionals and voluntary organisations has called for a similar approach.

4.4 We wish to emphasise our understanding that rehabilitation services in Sweden and Germany have developed under different historical, political, geographical and cultural conditions. It is too early to form a view as to which is the better approach. The Swedish reliance on LVCs

⁵ Some of the 'People's High Schools' offer short courses of social rehabilitation to visually impaired people over 18 years of age. Their clients, we were told, come mainly from the older age range.



seems to offer the benefit of delivery in the client's locality. The German model of one year basic residential rehabilitation seems to allow for the slow development that some people evince, e.g. in Braille reading.

4.5 We were very interested in a late comment from SRF in Sweden: "First I would like to say that this picture of a tight and fluent collaboration between LVCs and SPES is not rightly true. It varies very much, and many LVCs pay way to little attention to job preparation. In addition, the provision for mobility, Braille and other training varies very greatly between LVCs and is often insufficient for the needs of working life today."

4.6 "Furthermore," SRF continue, "it is really difficult to find answers to questions about throughput, costs, etc. The LVCs are based in the county health authority and they often do not keep adequate statistics on their own clients. Consequently nothing is available on the national level. Strange but true."

4.7 All in all, it seems to us too early to take a view as between these two models of delivering social rehabilitation. The Swedish system seems to need further development. The German system may be undergoing change. It may be that an effective system requires both components, local LVCs delivering basic rehabilitation in the client's locality, boosted by short residential courses.

4.8 Recommendation: We recommend both agencies to endorse the principle that the journey from diagnosis of serious sight loss to the labour market should be made as seamless as possible. As we have already said, early intervention of impairment specific services is crucial to successful outcomes. The advantages and disadvantages of the



Swedish model, beginning in the health service and proceeding through courses of personal development that are non-residential, should be a matter for further comparative study. The results of such study would be of great value to a country like Romania, where rehabilitation services urgently await development.

5 THE GERMAN QUOTA SYSTEM

5.1 Another striking difference between Sweden and Germany is the existence in the latter country of a quota system, backed by a compensation charge or levy on all employers who do not achieve the stipulated proportion of people with disabilities in their work force. The working of the German quota system was fairly fully described in the appendix to chapter three. In discussions with FMESA, INFAS and the Office of Integration, we pointed out that the United Kingdom had abolished its own quota system in 1995 and we canvassed some of the main arguments for an against quota which had then been advanced (Ch. 3, 6.3.1-6.4). As has been seen the discussion with German colleagues was inconclusive. This fact is not without significance, however. Many people in EBU member organisations argue for the adoption of a quota system for employment of disabled people, backed by a levy on employers, in their own countries. The evidence we presented in chapter three, though it failed to win full assent from German colleagues, seems to suggest that the existence of a quota system in Germany does not in itself raise the number of blind and partially sighted people employed to a level any higher than that achieved in the United Kingdom since its quota system was abolished. Moreover the rate of employment in Sweden is probably higher (see below, 6.1) with no quota system in existence there. Nor does the German compensation charge seem to yield more funds to support people with disabilities into work than the United Kingdom method of applying funds granted by the ministry of finance out of general taxation.



5.2 Once again it is important to stress that the quota systems which exist in Germany and some other member states of the EU are the outcome of their own historical, political and cultural conditions. As a means of raising finance to support disabled people in employment the German compensation charge seems to work as well as the general taxation method employed in the United Kingdom, whatever its alleged disadvantages may be. We would not recommend that EBU tries, under present circumstances, to seek the abolition of quota systems in any member state. On the basis of the evidence we have presented, however, we are personally skeptical of arguments for the introduction of a quota system in every country that does not have it at present. We think this would be politically very contentious. Certainly the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs would be barred by the principle of subsidiarity from doing anything beyond exhortation to spread the use of the quota and even exhortation is unlikely to come from that quarter, where there is strong opposition to anything that smacks of setting targets for the employment of people with disabilities. Of course there is nothing to prevent a member state without a quota system from introducing one, and it may be that a quota system would have value in the new and candidate member states, where economic inactivity is very high, as a standard for employers to aim at. Nevertheless we conclude that the building up of impairment specific services for rehabilitation, vocational training and support in employment is the key strategy in trying to increase the rate of economic activity among blind and partially sighted people. As we have already stated, the main task of EBU, its member organisations and the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs is to work in every practical way to universalise best practice in these services, rather than any particular method of funding or of coercing or exhorting employers.

6 ECONOMIC INACTIVITY AND PROPENSITY TO WORK



6.1 We thus come, by way of comparing employment activation measures in Sweden and Germany, to the question of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in these member states. We were rather surprised to find how little attention is paid to this issue by the state employment services of either. We were puzzled at first by the silence of staff of the Swedish Public Employment Service concerning the evidence available from the National Office of Statistics, which seems to reveal a rate of economic inactivity of about 43 percent (ch. 2, 4.6). Some light on their silence appears to be afforded by a very late comment which reached us from SRF. "The lack of data from SPES on economic inactivity is because we have not used the term. I wonder a little what is meant by it. Is it unemployment or what? In Sweden the pensions aim to keep people in a reasonable level of economic activity, in the sense of consumers and so on."

6.2 This SRF comment leads us to think that we have here a problem of translation between different languages and discursive practices. As in Germany (Ch. 3, 2.2) there seems to be some difficulty in grasping the term 'economic inactivity'. The state employment services in Sweden and Germany tend to regard every one who is not in work as 'unemployed'. This seems logical to them, since their system regards everyone not in work as potentially employable. It has the disadvantage, in our opinion, of ignoring the possibility that the assessment system rules out people as incapable of work at the time of the assessment, and then fails to keep them in sight by reaching out at appropriate times and trying to incentivise them. We think it is important to do this because their general outlook often changes over time, their propensity to work grows and new programmes such as supported employment develop.



6.3 We were encouraged that SPES staff acknowledged the likelihood that careful investigation on the lines of Work Focus (Ch. 1, Appendix II) would be likely to reveal a degree of involuntary economic inactivity in Sweden (Ch. 2, 4.7). Correspondingly we were rather staggered by the profound skepticism among staff of FMESA as to the existence of any significant degree of involuntary economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in Germany Ch. 3, 3.2-3). Staff of INFAS, of the Office of Integration and senior members of the German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted all expressed a contrary view. Given the close correspondence between the findings of the EVASA project in 1995 and the findings of Network 1000 in 2006, that is, an employment rate in Germany and the United Kingdom of 33 percent, a similar pattern of propensity to work among blind and partially sighted people in both countries is surely to be expected (Ch. 3, 3.2.7). It will be recalled that Work Focus reveals a propensity to work among economically inactive people of 50 percent.

6.4 In chapter one, we discussed the possible unreliability of subjective expressions of propensity to work. It is likely that not all those who express such propensity would stay the course of training and job seeking, which is arduous at best, and extremely arduous in conditions of economic recession. Nevertheless there seems to us no justification for a state employment service under-estimating the value of such expressions without providing some means of putting them to the test. We consider that involuntary economic inactivity is much more likely to be caused by social barriers than by any concealed commitment to idleness.

6.5 It was interesting to note that both Sweden and Germany are already moving some way in acknowledging this. The evidence for this is to be seen in the introduction of measures to support blind and partially sighted people who are less productive than workers who can meet the

normal demands of employment in their firms. Sweden not only has a system of wage subsidy to support such people in mainstream employment, but is applying the methods of 'place and train' through the intervention of 'SIUS' coaches to support blind and partially sighted people with complex needs to work in mainstream employment (Ch. 2, 3.1.3).

6.6 At all levels of the German employment service there is interest in this kind of advance. Recent legislation has provided for it and FMESA told us that consideration is actively being given to the participation in its programmes of visually impaired people with complex needs (Ch. 3, 2.4). In North-Rhine Westfalia the Office of Integration has a section specifically devoted to supported employment of this kind and seems very alive to the inclusion of visually impaired people with complex needs (Ch. 3, 6.6.1-7).

6.7 By contrast with Sweden, Germany seems much farther ahead in the development of social firms as a means of labour activation for people with complex needs. It is encouraging, however, that both countries have moved away from traditional sheltered employment (though neither completely rules it out as an employment outlet for blind and partially sighted people).

6.8 Summing up, we think that propensity to work among blind and partially sighted people (including those with complex needs) is likely to be just as prevalent as research now suggests it is in the United Kingdom. We are encouraged by the interest we encountered in Sweden and Germany (albeit outside FMESA) in investigation of economic inactivity and the propensity to work. We agree with those who expressed skepticism about the value of repeated national surveys which demonstrate what most experts believe, that involuntary economic



inactivity is prevalent. What is needed is something more like the market research that a business undertakes before deciding to develop a new product. The first step is to scope the possible causes of economic inactivity and the extent of propensity to work. The second step is for employment services to reach out to those who express a wish to work and ascertain the kinds of services that would further incentivise them and enhance their potential for employment. A third step is to design and set up such services. Finally (using the expression in a logical rather than a necessarily chronological sense) efforts should be made to build an 'employment continuum' in the labour market (Ch. 1, 3.8), as exemplified by the development of social firms in Germany, by SIUS coaching in Sweden, and by the reorganisation of sheltered employment for people with disabilities recently undertaken by REMPLOY in the United Kingdom.

6.9 Recommendation: We recommend EBU to do everything possible to publicise the extent of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in member states of the EU. It has already done valuable work in publicising the remarkable range of jobs undertaken by the 'blind elite'. The time has come to recognise fully that such people have had to win their way to the labour market by dint of arduous effort and endurance of barriers that would discourage most sighted people. The existence of these barriers, and lack of appropriate support to overcome them, has, we believe, resulted in an unacceptable rate of economic inactivity, as exemplified in two advanced member states, Sweden and Germany. Evidence from the United Kingdom shows that there is a propensity to work among such people and that they can be incentivised by employment services specially designed to reach them and meet their needs. Work on supported employment and social firms, especially (though not exclusively) in Germany is beginning to yield results even for blind and partially sighted people with complex needs.



6.10 Recommendation: We recommend EBU and its member organisations to campaign for public resources devoted to rapid development of an employment continuum that extends from rehabilitation, through special provision to supported employment in mainstream labour markets. The development of such a continuum in every member state of the EU would go a long way to fulfilling the ‘two pronged’ or ‘twin track’ solution to economic inactivity long advocated by EBU.

7 ROMANIA

7.1 As stated in chapter four (par. 1.1): ‘To turn from employment services for blind and partially sighted people in the UK, Sweden and Germany to those in Romania is to be sharply reminded of uneven economic and social development in the European Union.’ The ‘trusted troika’ of rehabilitation, vocational training and support services in the labour market, which has done so much to raise economic activity in Sweden and Germany, is all but non-existent in Romania. If blind and partially sighted people in the member states of northern Europe are right to insist that more could be done, those in Romania are right to insist that virtually nothing is being done.

7.2 In these circumstances it was very depressing to find that the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs, in its own annual report, *Employment in Europe, 2008*, paid no attention to the 86 percent rate of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people, despite a well established commitment to ‘mainstream’ policy development for people with disabilities.



7.3 Recommendation: EBU should take this omission up at the earliest possible date with the Directorate, with a view to ensuring that it will not occur in future annual reports and similar policy documents.

7.4 We consider this correction to be more than a matter of form. It is absolutely necessary if the Directorate is to address for people with disabilities the problems which its report identified for female, older and younger workers in Romania particularly, and more generally in member states of eastern Europe. If inflexible 'work arrangements', 'labour market segmentation' and 'undeclared work' exclude so many in these disadvantaged groups; if they need the promotion of learning opportunities 'throughout the life cycle'; if they would benefit from 'social security systems that combine the provision of adequate income support with the need to facilitate labour market mobility'; (par. 1.2); the evidence presented to us shows that people with disabilities (including visual impairments) need them much more, and in forms which are designed with their specific impairments in mind.

7.5 What can EBU do to promote these much needed developments in Romania, apart from pressing for the 'mainstreaming' of disability policy in the sense indicated above? We consider that there is one urgent project, the new rehabilitation centre, where our evidence suggests that the rules of ESF funding militate against the correct solution in Romania. We were told (par. 8.8] that ESF funding is only available for adapting very unsuitable premises for this service. This amounts, in our opinion, to a case of institutional discrimination, practiced at the heart of the EU itself. As shown in chapter two and three, Sweden and Germany are alike aware of the need to provide rehabilitation services near the client's own home and, where such services are best delivered on a residential basis, the residential centres are situated in or near to major urban populations. We agree with the Romanian Association of the Blind that

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the present rules of ESF would produce “another ghetto” in Romania and so

7.6 Recommendation: we recommend EBU to explore with the Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs an early solution which delivers appropriate financial support for the type of centre recommended by RAB.



List of Recommendations in Chapter Five

1 (2.9) Recommendation: EBU should seek to ensure that the EU Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs exerts its full influence to promote the universalisation of the troika throughout the Union. To this end it should utilise its powers of monitoring national action plans, targeting finance from the European Social Fund, funding conferences of experts and service users for the dissemination of good practice.

2 (2.10) Recommendation: We further recommend EBU to publicise this report vigorously among its member organisations. These will then have an opportunity to lobby in their own member states for universalisation of services. It hardly needs saying that EBU and its member organisations should press for urgent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 27, which recognises the rights of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others. EBU should also lobby the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs of the EU

Commission to utilise its powers to spread good practice equally among member states. Among these powers are the monitoring of National Action Plans, which should be scrutinised with the needs of blind and partially sighted people in mind.

3 (3.4) Recommendation: We recommend that EBU and its member organisations seize every opportunity to press for retention legislation in every member state of the EU.

4 (4.8) Recommendation: We recommend both agencies to endorse the principle that the journey from diagnosis of serious sight loss to the labour market should be made as seamless as possible. As we have already said, early intervention of impairment specific services is crucial to successful outcomes. The advantages and disadvantages of the Swedish model, beginning in the health service and proceeding through courses of personal development that are non-residential, should be a matter for further comparative study. The results of such study would be of great value to a country like Romania, where rehabilitation services urgently await development.

5 (6.9) Recommendation: We recommend EBU to do everything possible to publicise the extent of economic inactivity among blind and partially sighted people in member states of the EU. It has already done valuable work in publicising the remarkable range of jobs undertaken by the 'blind elite'. The time has come to recognise fully that such people have had to win their way to the labour market by dint of arduous effort and endurance of barriers that would discourage most sighted people. The existence of these barriers, and lack of appropriate support to overcome them, has, we believe, resulted in an unacceptable rate of economic inactivity, as exemplified in two advanced member states, Sweden and Germany. Evidence from the United Kingdom shows that there is a propensity to work among such people and that they can be incentivised by employment services specially designed to reach them and meet their needs. Work on supported employment and social firms, especially (though not exclusively) in Germany is beginning to yield results even for blind and partially sighted people with complex needs.

9 (6.10) Recommendation: We recommend EBU and its member organisations to campaign for public resources devoted to rapid development of an employment continuum that extends from rehabilitation, through special provision to supported employment in mainstream labour markets. The development of such a continuum in every member state of the EU would go a long way to fulfilling the 'two pronged' or 'twin track' solution to economic inactivity long advocated by EBU.

10 (7.3) Recommendation: EBU should take up with the Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs, at the earliest possible date, the omission of disability from the 2008 report, *Employment in Europe*, with a view to ensuring that it will not occur in future annual reports and similar policy documents.

11 (7.6) Recommendation: we recommend EBU to explore with the Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs an early solution which delivers appropriate financial support for the type of rehabilitation centre recommended by RAB.



APPENDIX

THE SYSTEM OF SHELTERED EMPLOYMENT IN FRANCE IN RELATION TO BLIND PEOPLE WITH ADDITIONAL DISABILITIES

REPORT OF A VISIT

TO

SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

15-16 March, 2007

1 BACKGROUND.

1.1 In March, 2006, the working group on rehabilitation, vocational training and employment, set up by the European Blind Union (EBU) discussed the practicability of supported mainstream employment for blind people with additional disabilities. Some members were sceptical about its appropriateness for 'very slow' workers and urged the model of the sheltered workshop, citing France as a case of good practice. Others thought that mainstreaming might be possible for at least some, if impairment-sensitive training and job experience could be provided. Noting that the programmes of supported employment had delivered jobs for only a tiny number of visually impaired people, the working group agreed that experiments should be promoted within the European Union (EU). These experiments should take account of different models of supported employment, including the establishment of 'centres' in an intermediate labour market, where blind workers with additional disabilities could gain job experience and training and so have a chance to progress into mainstream employment.

1.2 In this context M. Chazal, Director of Rehabilitation and Training of the Association Valentin Haouy (AVH), Paris, invited me to visit some 'good practice' examples of sheltered employment in France.



2 THE ECONOMIC SITUATION OF BLIND PEOPLE IN FRANCE.

2.1 Before visiting the workshops, M. Chazal informed me that there are about 60'000 'legally blind' people in France, of whom about 18,000 are of working age. Of these 18,000, 7'000 are in employment. Some 700 of them are employed in sheltered workshops. These workshops cater for two categories of worker. Level 1, run under a government programme known as ESAT (Enterprises or Services of Help by Work caters for workers whose productivity has been assessed at 5 to 30 percent of normal. The main aim of the activity is therapeutic rather than economic. Level 2 is called Adapted Enterprises (E.A), formerly Ateliers Protégés. The productivity of workers here has been assessed at 30-80 percent of normal and there is no therapeutic element involved. Of those employed in the mainstream, the largest groups are: telephonists about 2000; physiotherapists about 1500; Numbers in other professions/ occupations range from a few hundred each in teaching, office work, piano tuning to about 50 in the 'higher professions'. It should be noted that people registered as 'legally blind' are totally blind or possess very little practicable sight. There are no comparable statistics for 'partially sighted' people, but France is more transparent than, say, the United Kingdom, in revealing the rate of employment for what the UK knows as 'registered blind' people.

2.2 M. Chazal informed me that French law provides employment for disabled people on the basis of an assessment of their productive capacity. Those assessed at 100 percent are regarded as suitable for training for mainstream employment. Those assessed as having between 5 percent and 30 percent of productivity are eligible for a form of sheltered employment which is therapeutic as well as economic in aim. Those assessed between 30 and 100 percent are eligible for more productive sheltered employment.

2.3 Legally blind people unable to work are paid a state benefit of some 700 Euros per month. In addition, they receive a 'compensation' for the additional 'human' costs of disability. This amounts to some 550 Euros per month. There are also additional compensations payable on assessment, eg for the cost of keeping a guide dog or providing information technology. In the view of some authorities, there is thus a strong financial disincentive to seek employment.



3 TWO SHELTERED FIRMS

3.1 M. Chazel suggested that I visit workshops run by two organisations: 1 those of Handi Aide, established at St. Just, in the department of Oise, and 2 another run by AVH at Lyons. On 15 March I visited Handi Aide along with M. Chazal and Mlle. Natalie Harar (acting as interpreter and sighted assistant). St. Just is 70 km. north of Paris, in the region of the river Somme. The name Handi Aide is said to be a play on 'handicap', implying support for people with very severe difficulties and very low productivity. The three workshops run by this firm are all in a very rural setting, surrounded by fields and some distance from Mondidier, the nearest large town. I will refer to them as workshops 1, 2 and 3.

3.2 workshop 1 is funded mainly from the government programme ESAT already mentioned. Some 78 workers are employed in a bright, modern factory measuring about 2'000 sq. metres. On the occasion of our visit they were making bags, metal support parts for ping-pong tables,, and elementary metal work such as stamping out small parts from sheet metal, and assembling parts for electrical transmission systems. Most of the workers were said to have 'mental problems'. We were told that 4 or 5 are 'legally blind' and 12-15 are partially sighted (amblyopes). Able-bodied people are employed in support roles: technical, sales, etc. The workers in this workshop are said to be assessed as the most 'handicapped', productive capacity 5-30 percent. The sex balance of the work force looked about 50-50.

3.3 workshop 2 is accommodated in older, rented premises, soon to be replaced by a new building, which is under construction alongside. Production here appeared to concentrate on packaging. No blind people are employed in this workshop because it is said to be unsuitable for them. We were told that blind people will be employed in the new building, but it was also said that the firm has few blind people on its waiting list. The recruitment manager was said to be giving attention to this problem. Once again, workshop 2 seemed dedicated to employment of workers with severe disabilities. In accordance with its therapeutic aims, a psychologist is employed. A swimming pool, archery, gardening, and computer training are available.



3.4 Workshop 3 offers employment to disabled people with the higher levels of productive capacity. In the packing department, most of the workers are blind and envelopes were being packed for the mail. In another packaging department the work was mechanised to some extent. We were informed that production here was arranged in two shifts, 06,00-13,00 and 13,00-18,00.

3.5 In workshop 3 there was also a wood work department. We observed mechanised sawing, producing standardised wooden parts which were then assembled into basic furniture, eg bed bases. This workshop had a factory atmosphere, mechanised, noisy and bustling, in contrast to the other workshops, which were quiet - Perhaps even somewhat subdued. There were no blind people on view in the mechanised departments.

3.6 Under the leadership of its President, M. Pierre Martin, Handi Aide has developed over the last fifteen years from a small occupational centre into a dynamic 'not for profit' business. M. Martin has an ambitious plan for expansion. At the town of Mondidier we were shown a newly purchased factory of some 3000 sq. metres. A plan for its development as a workshop is in draft. Meanwhile Handi Aide recruits disabled workers from every part of France, though most come from the Oise. All of them are said to need support with daily living. Some can live in the local community, but the firm provides residential accommodation on site in 70 apartments for single people. These are located in a small chateau which was the premises of the original society. Accommodation is in single bedrooms, and groups of six residents share a kitchen and dining facility. Some residents are able to prepare their own meals and Bus transport is arranged for them to go shopping. The median age of residents is 35. It is the policy of the firm to recruit young people, and it claims to be doing this with some success. Some of the current residents are said to have been here 'a long time' and it is a planning assumption that new residents will stay for up to twenty years.

3.7 Handi Aide evidently receives a great deal of government subsidy. Though the system of funding was difficult to follow in detail, the outline

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seems to be as follows. The construction of the workshops has been financed by bank loans, which have been amortised over 12 years. It seems that government provides for repayment. Each worker is paid according to his or her output, which in most cases is said to be very low. Government augments their wages, probably to the level of the state disability pension. It also pays the full salaries of supervisory and managerial staff. In the case of disabled workers it is said that there would be no point in raising their wages, since this would only diminish their disability pension entitlement.

3.8 There is, we were told, very little progression. Eight workers were cited as employed in a mainstream factory under 'monitoring' by a member of Handi Aide staff. The employer pays the wages of the workers and the salary of the 'monitor'. Mainstream employers, it was said, prefer this arrangement to inclusion. Providing business for Handi Aide reduces their liability to levy which they have to pay under French quota legislation.

3.9 It would seem, then, that the firm has to bring in enough business to pay for a modest total of wages, cost of raw materials and no doubt other running costs. It was not clear how surplus is generated. The firm claims to have a turn over of 3 million euros per annum. Any surplus is dedicated to expansion. Allowance for expansion seems to be built into the arrangements for government's contribution to wages.

3.10 As to residence costs, all French departments pay a housing allowance to disabled people. At St. Just each department pays this allowance for its disabled people in residence. The occupant must pay up to 70 per cent of wages to defray this allowance

4 THE WORKSHOPS At Lyons.

4.1 On 16 March, we visited the workshop run at Lyons by AVH under the name of the Centre Odette Witkowska. It seems that, in 1961, Mme. Witkowska began a small centre in her own house, providing services to blind people. Employment was on a modest scale. In 1982 AVH took



over the Centre and employment has expanded under a dynamic director, M. Michel Brals. Today it has become a modern sheltered workshop, employing 85 workers of whom about 40 are blind. Workers are employed at both levels of productivity already described.

4.2 The Centre differs strikingly from the workshops of Handi Aide in the character of its situation. It stands in its own grounds, ten minutes drive from Lyons TGV terminal. No doubt because of its origin and present association with AVH, it seems to be organised with the needs of blind people more obviously in mind. It was observed, for example, that Handi Aide provided no 'ergotherapist', mobility training, Braille lessons etc., which are to be found at Lyons.

4.3 In regard to industrial output, the Centre does not differ markedly from the workshops of Handi Aide. Production is organised in departments, which cater for a range of productive capacities. Thus the least productive workers, as at St. Just, perform very simple, repetitive operations such as assembly, packing, and construction. Contracts are sought, as at St. Just, from mainstream industrial and commercial firms, including the French postal service. Much of the industrial work is obtained from the truck-making sector of the automobile industry, where volumes are low enough to make this kind of out-sourcing economical. As at St. Just management devotes a great deal of effort to pursuit of such contracts. Orders come irregularly and sometimes there is no work for particular sections to do, while at other times contracts have to be delivered in a rush.

4.4 Another problem is that blind people are difficult to include in certain lines of production. Eg it was said that they could not work at sorting and packing printed texts for mailing. Nor can they operate some of the machinery. On the other hand they played a prominent part in the braille transcription department.



4.5 Contract arrangements with mainstream firms are similar to those at St. Just and employers who place orders with the Centre also reduce their liability to quota levy. Here also management understands that prices can be kept competitive because government augments very low wages.

4.6 there are broadly two kinds of work at Lyons: (i) metal work and (ii) paper work. It was said that people prefer the 'paper' to the 'metal' work because it is cleaner and nicer to touch. Management tries to explain to them that the metal work is crucial for bringing in a lot of money to sustain the business and operates a policy of rotating all teams through the departments of the workshop.

4.7 As at St. Just, progression at Lyons appeared to be minimal. It is in the mission of the organisation, but these workers are thought to be 'too slow, too handicapped' to work in mainstream firms. As at St. Just, a few have been placed with mainstream employers under supervision by Centre staff.

4.8 Finally, it may be noted that avh has 3 workshops: at Lyons, Paris and in central France. This at Lyons is said to be the most go-ahead. Applicants wait up to two years after assessment to obtain a place in the work force. The lack of places is attributed to inadequate state funding of sheltered employment.

5 GENERAL COMMENTS.

5.1 As stated above, these visits arose from discussions in a working group appointed by EBU. The discussants had in mind the argument of the 'mainstreaming' movement that all disabled people can and should be supported at work in mainstream firms. EBU has argued that for many, including blind people with additional disabilities, 'mainstreaming' and 'special provision' are complementary. This is because they need impairment-sensitive training in relevant skills and it has not yet been shown that this can be practically provided for all of them in mainstream settings. It may be that 'Centres for supported employment' in every region would be a more practical way of delivering skills training and job experience. From such centres people would progress into mainstream



employment, as is said to be the practice at 'Blindcraft' Glasgow. It may also be that such centres would be able to provide permanent employment for very slow workers who are unable to progress.

5.2 EBU suggested that such centres might be organised as social firms, co-operatives or reformed sheltered workshops. It was with this last model in mind that I wished to become closely acquainted with the practice in France. During the visit I took the opportunity of discussing these issues with our French colleagues.

5.3 Though not hostile to 'progression' in principle, they were very sceptical about its possibility for most of the disabled people they recruit. 'They are too slow' was the reason given for their scepticism. As shown above, a small number have progressed, but they did not think this was likely to be common.

5.4 Advocates of supported mainstream employment have offered many reasons why this view is held so tenaciously by those who run sheltered workshops. The protection they offer from the insecurities of the mainstream labour market encourages the more disabled workers to cling to it. Again, abler workers are not encouraged to progress because the workshop management regards them as key to boosting the workshop's production and so diminishing dependence on subsidy.

5.5 I encountered no direct evidence of such attitudes at St. Just or Lyons, but it would be naive to think that they could not exist. In the case of St. JUST, its very rural setting must, in itself, act as a barrier to progression. At Lyons it was obvious that the two blind finger proof readers were key to Braille production and, at both firms, one sensed that the 'faster' workers were key to the mechanised production which attracted lucrative contracts from mainstream firms. The very irregularity of orders, requiring contracts to be carried out 'in a rush' is likely to reinforce such attitudes.

5.6 It also seemed clear that the very committed and dynamic chiefs of these firms looked for their success to the French system of sheltered employment, which is generous with subsidy and penalises, through the sanction of the quota levy, mainstream employers who do not recruit disabled workers or contract out to sheltered workshops. As is widely



acknowledged, the system is powerfully entrenched in French culture. M. Chazal, at least, is confident it is not under threat from any foreseeable change of government. On the other hand, it is obviously not producing a dynamic expansion of sheltered employment in France, as far as blind people are concerned. With only 700 employed in the sheltered sector and just over 6000 out of 18,000 'legally blind' of working age employed in the mainstream, France has a long way to go in reducing the rate of economic inactivity.

5.7 However, this can be shown to be true of practically every member-state in the European Union. Neither sheltered employment nor reserved occupations nor supported employment in mainstream, has made significant in-roads into rates of economic inactivity that range upwards from 40 percent.

5.8 In Britain, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) has persuasively argued that this is because employers and employment services fail to provide adequate resources for impairment-specific training of blind people who are disadvantaged by additional impairments, long-term unemployment, advancing age or low skills. The centres at St. Just and at Lyons have shown that they can take such blind people and turn them into productive workers. Each admit that blind people present special difficulties in relation to certain lines of production, eg sorting and packing printed text, but each acknowledges the need to make special provision for blind people. This is the positive effect produced by these two firms.

5.9 Are they, on the other hand, reinforcing the 'ghetto' effect of traditional sheltered workshops. There was a lot of evidence to suggest that they were, especially at St. Just, with its rural setting and 70-apartment residential bloc. Neither firm seemed to have gone out of its way to recruit able-bodied people to work alongside disabled on the basis of equal value, a major principle advocated by social firms in the UK. On the other hand, each could argue that it had taken some countervailing measures to mitigate this effect, such as the arrangement for progression (albeit very limited) seeking an urban location for the new workshop at Mondidier, and the fact that employees at Lyons live out. M. Chazal is of opinion that these 'inclusive' practises could be extended.

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5.10 My own general conclusion is that EBU would be very unwise to turn its back on the French system on the grounds of 'mainstreaming' ideology. Advocates of supported employment in the mainstream have achieved very little for blind people. Until they can point to blind workers with additional/complex needs working in the mainstream, they are in no position to be dismissive of a system which actually provides employment for such people. In so providing, these workshops positively demonstrate that it is not unwillingness to work that keeps the economically inactive at home. Nor is it the unfavourable ratio of wages to benefits. The workers at St. Just and Lyons appear to value employment for its non-economic benefits and this may be not unrelated to the level of 'protection' which France offers them. On the other hand, sheltered employment can be made more inclusive. One way to demonstrate this is to move closer to mainstream supported employment by bringing able-bodied workers into the firm and making every opportunity for disabled workers to progress out of it. This is why Ebu is insisting that special provision is complementary to mainstreaming. That is the challenge for every member state of the EU to confront in relation to blind people with additional difficulties.

Dr. Fred Reid,
25 March 2007.



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Article 27. www.un.org/disabilities

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Vision 2020 www.vision2020uk.org.uk (esp. for text of *Network 1000 and UK Vision Strategy*)

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