



Report lunch discussion: City-internal employment for Persons with a Disability.

This lunch discussion fits in the Interreg IVA project, Tackling Social Exclusion. The subvention programme "Interreg IV A – 2 Seas" of the European Union is a trans-border co-operation project for the period 2007-2013 between France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Flanders. In the framework of this programme, the Ghent Municipality is co-operating with the cities of Southampton (United Kingdom) and Rotterdam (the Netherlands). This project is entitled Tackling Social Exclusion. We will be working together for the period of January 1st 2009 up to December 31st 2011. The province of East Flanders is also supporting this project with a subvention.

With the project, we are pursuing the living quality of all inhabitants. We are striving towards an integrated accessibility of the services (including for people with a temporary or permanent disability).

Introductory address by Mr. Tapmaz, Deputy Mayor

Deputy Mayor Tapmaz states that quite some topics may be addressed as regards the diversity policy of the Municipality. Some highlights:

- The Equal Opportunities Officer
- The label diversity and equal opportunities
- Various elements such as selections-examinations, training, the current exhibition "Schuun Volk" (Beautiful People), etc

Certainly at a time when there is a lot of commotion, also in the media, with respect of harassment, the Deputy Mayor points out the importance of sensitisation of the executive staff and staff members as regards diversity.

The Ghent Municipality employs a quota that 2% of their staff members need to be people with a disability. There are currently no readily available exact data, but action is being undertaken with this respect.

In 2010, the study group Persons with a Disability was initiated.

From 2011 onwards, all employed Persons with a Disability were being registered.

In conclusion of his speech, the Deputy Mayor wishes to thank the speakers and the large audience.

Introduction by the Cell Persons with a Disability

It is especially the obvious, visible disabilities which are being mentioned if the question is raised which disabilities are known.



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These are all the more reasons to pay attention to non-visual disabilities. It is followed by a PowerPoint presentation about persons with a disability and their employment within the City of Ghent with a series of data. Take a look at this PowerPoint at the website of the Tackling Social Exclusion Project - <http://tse.two-seas.eu/nl-NL/gent/>

Interview with 2 staff members with a disability

Item 1. Offer of recruitment and selection, adjustments of examinations, etc.

Question: What was your experience during you job application within the City of Ghent?

Nathalie ('hands-on' expert with a wheelchair) did not experience any difficulties whatsoever. She registered herself during a job event by means of a standard form, which also enquired about possible disabilities. This procedure was followed by an invitation for a first selection test. During this test, there was a reserved spot in front of the room, which was within easy reach of Nathalie, without expressly having to ask for this amenity. During the job interview, she spontaneously mentioned her disability, but this seemed to pose no problem.

Question: Did you already participate in examinations and what was your personal experience?

Jean Claude ('hands-on' expert who suffers from a severe visual and hearing impairment) has already been working at the Ghent Municipality for 25 years. He was employed following a job test and a succinct interview. Back then, he did not have a visual impairment. Afterwards, he did participate in an equal treatment test. This was a negative experience: there were no necessary supporting measures present.

Jean Claude points at the importance of a dialogue between employers and persons with a disability. Open communication is essential. The person with a disability should be able to take personal responsibility and express his specific needs. There is no need for a patronizing attitude: only reasonable adjustments would most certainly be appreciated.

Question: What is the offer, what efforts have been undertaken by the Recruitment and Selection Office as regards persons with a disability?

Stefan Vanbroeckhoven (manager of the Recruitment and Selection Office) answers that reasonable adjustments are available during selection procedures. At the invitation for a job selection, candidates are requested to establish contacts to discuss the necessary adjustments. An individual approach is necessary since various sorts of disabilities can not be generalized. Every person has different needs.



Frequent adjustments are: Braille lines, zoom text, amplified letter type, offer of separate rooms, additional time for identical tests, the presence of a personal coach during the test.

There still needs a lot to be done. The Recruitment and Selection Office has to keep learning by trial and error. The difficulty of an ad hoc approach is the time sequence of the available vacancy. The need for a swift filling of the vacancy ensues in a narrow timing for the required adjustments.

Even following prior benchmarking, this individual approach still seems to be the best possible solution.

Item 2: Offer of logistical adjustments.

Question: What were your needs with respect to logistical adjustments? To whom could you turn to? What have your personal experience been like? How long did it take before effective adjustments were implemented?

Nathalie works for the mobile team: it is therefore not possible to adapt all services and buildings to her specific needs. Not all services where she needs to come can be systematically adjusted.

It is important that the building is accessible, boasting a broad door passage and a modified toilet. For the rest, she is self-sustained and she adapts herself to the service and the environment.

Paul Claeys of the Facility Management Office states that this logistical support is customised Op macro-economic level, the working station needs to be accessible. Furthermore, the arrangement of the working station can be modified. Also the furniture can be adapted: worktop, office chair, etc

One can also intervene in environmental elements: more or less natural or artificial light, a sun shade, etc. We are pursuing buildings with a 'Design for All' principle.

For more information, please visit the website <http://www.ianua.be/bdfan/nl/dfa.html>.

All designs are being tested by the independent accessibility bureau ATO. Also signposts with contrasts are necessary. Digipolis is in charge of the modifications with respect to information technology.

Question: Jean Claude, what is your personal experience as regards specific adjustments?

Jean Claude is increasingly visually impaired. He has tried to remain self-sustained for as long as possible. He is photophobic: light has a negative effect on the quality of his sight. In order to be independent, he turned out the TL-bulbs above his desk, he relocated cupboards. These personal



initiatives were followed by technical support in the form of a loupe. In 2003, he was given magnifying software to keep working. Recently, a procedure was initiated for financial intervention in view of new adjustments to working stations since the measures taken in 2003 are insufficient. Moreover, he had an internal meeting at his service to examine what future measures could be taken within his team.

Bart Stichelmans elucidates the efforts undertaken by Digipolis.

On generic level, all applications need to be accessible. In case of specific needs, the suitable hardware and software needs to be individually selected. Some adjustments may be required with respect to the monitor, the keyboard, etc. to come to a customised working station. Also modified telephone operating systems are possible.

Sandra De Clercq highlights the efforts undertaken by the Internal Office for Prevention and Work Protection (IDPBW).

Every employee can appeal to their assistance. Individual support is genuinely necessary. Together, they examine the demands and requirements and co-operate in concert with the company medical officer. They constitute a significant bridge towards this medical officer and the executive staff members. They could become a contact for executive staff members to discuss requirements and adjustments. Recently recruited staff members may apply for the necessary means. There is a financial contribution for hearing aids and spectacles. They can also establish contact with specialized services or refer to organisations that are specialised in assistance to disabled people in case of requirement to very specific support.

Item 3: Offer Job Counselling and Training

Hilde Sturtewagen of the **Office for Job Counselling and Training** states that it is important for people with a disability that prejudices are being thrown overboard and that the dialogue is initiated. Within the Office for Training, there are tailor-made job counselling opportunities. One can establish contact with the Office for adjustments of the given courses, modifications to an accessible location, etc.

These demands should be introduced individually. The initiative always rests upon the employee and his application should be introduced in time. Examples are support given by an interpreter for the deaf, taking along a personal laptop.

Moreover, the training as regards accessibility is primarily aimed towards people who survey the public domain. We are trying to give them basic skills as regards accessibility.



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Item 4: Attitude of the executive staff as regards colleagues with a disability

Question: why did you select Nathalie? Which ideas did you previously have and to which extent did they match with your current experience?

Tom Van Dijck (executive staff member who recruited Nathalie).

Based on a decade of experience with the mobile team, he is perfectly aware of the significant competences for staff members who are part of the mobile team.

Only at the very end of the screening, the issue that Nathalie used a wheelchair was raised. She possessed all competences and had the correct mentality. The question was raised whether the wheelchair would cause any difficulties. This was absolutely no threshold if prior arrangements could be made as regards task assignments.

Did any difficulties arise once Nathalie was effectively employed?

No, but you obviously need to take into account the basic accessibility. She is very enthusiastic, dynamic and boasts quite some knowledge. Those are the skills that do matter. The disability is only a secondary matter.

Stefaan van Broeckhoven (manager of the Recruitment and Selection Office) answers: indeed, competences are the basis for employment, not the disability.

Remark formulated by Rieke Jacobs (Cell Persons with a Disability):

We can notice that Persons with a Disability are often quite enthusiast, amongst other things because they have to undertake considerable efforts in coping with the difficulties that may arise.

Moreover, Nathalie was raised in a family where she was treated no different after having incurred her disability. For instance, she kept going to the same school following her accident.

Question: Why do you undertake so many efforts for Jean Claude in looking for a different job contents which better matches his profile?

Elke De Dekker (executive staff member of Jean-Claude):

Jean Claude is an enthusiast, very ambitious. The adjustments we are able to make, are only a small favour in return for his engagement.

Six months ago, there were still some doubts about a possible positive outcome.

Following an open discussion about the evolution of his disability, and the opportunities of Jean-Claude, both parties strongly believe in a positive outcome.



Since the joint research of a suitable job contents, there is a mutual understanding that solutions will be found. By engaging in a dialogue and actively looking for solutions, both parties will come to feasible solutions.

Presentation of 'Toeleidingstraject'

By Mrs. Myriam Carlier, Co-ordinator Training at the University Centre for Counselling and Training (UCBO)

We refer to the PowerPoint presentation which is readily available at the website of the Tackling Social Exclusion Project: <http://tse.two-seas.eu/nl-NL/gent/>

Subsequent discussion:

Question: What do you do if someone does not communicate his/her disability? This impedes understanding and support.

Joost Mussche (Study Group Persons with a Disability) points out that the study group puts a registration form and an invitation letter to the disposal of candidates, encouraging staff members with a disability to register themselves.

The specialised office for route determination and route counselling of persons with a job disability (GTB) is also actively involved. This office stimulates people with a disability to put their disability as a discussion topic. Openness is essential.

Admitting that you have to cope with a disability is a major step. When the handicap is unknown to the executive staff members, then support is impossible

For persons with a psychological disability, this is not self-evident.

With this specific group, openness is problematic because of the nature of the disability.

Question: Who co-ordinates all projects within the Municipality, since there are so many different partners involved?

Joost Mussche answers that various services are responsible for several elements, which generates a fragmented approach. The Study Group Persons with a Disability is trying to deal with this situation. A possible solution lies in a central contact point.

The Internal Office for Prevention and Work Prevention (IDPBW) answers that they are the first contact point for Persons with a Disability. Together, they are examining what the employer can achieve for these persons. IDPBW announces this support within the Municipality (for instance during welcoming sessions and circular letters). They are aware that this announcement does not imply that the availability of their services is widespread. Evidently, this service is only destined for people who are



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already employed within the municipality, and not for people who still need to be recruited.

In conclusion, Jean Claude stresses that it is fantastic that the Municipality is taking such initiatives in this respect. A lot still needs to be done, but the most essential achievement is acquired: communication. We will also require attention for the coming Duo Day, during which persons with a job disability will form a duo with another employee during one day. This unique form of sensitisation is a must. For more information about this initiative, please contact Mrs. Tonia Van Quickenborne.