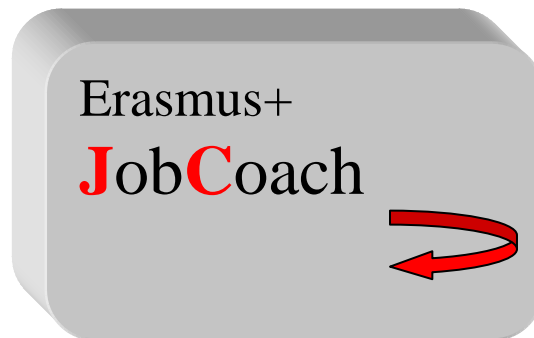
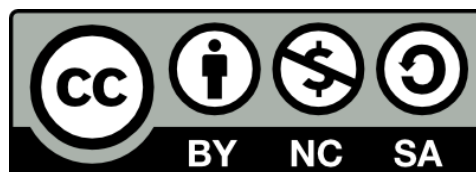


Erasmus+ - project  
„Job coach for persons with disabilities”



European quality standards for the profession  
Job Coach for persons with disabilities  
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## 1. Introduction

“Job Coach“ does not have the status of an established profession, but within the partnership countries there is a more or less common understanding:

A Job Coach (JC) provides personal on-site assistance in employment (rather than therapeutic, technical or educational support) for persons with specific needs.

With regard to the European Skills, Competences Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO system)<sup>1</sup>, a JC could be conceived as new occupation in the 2423 (Personnel and Careers professional) group<sup>2</sup>. In some state-financed programmes, standards as to formal education and professional experience are required; however, in most countries a “self-defined“ access to the function of a JC can also be found. Even within one country, public authorities use different understandings and definitions of a JC.

Organisations such as “Beroepsvereniging“ in the Netherlands have tried to establish professional standards. However, we found major differences as to qualifications, financing, access to JC services and autonomy of clients. One issue was to determine if the JC is only offering services for the employee or also for colleagues and/or the employer. In addition, with regard to the autonomy of clients how far a JC should consider problems like motivational deficits or lacks of workplace-specific qualification issues is a crucial question.

In such a situation, two strategies for a possible European Framework can be applied: one of minimal regulation, which could try to find a common low denominator or refrain from regulations at all - or one of more precise regulation, which could try to define standards by scientific rationale and/or what is necessary for a specific position.

The second solution is common in cases where consumer rights, safety and health require a regulation of job access.

Taking into account the importance of JC for persons with disabilities (JC/D) and the responsibility they bear, a qualification framework seems mandatory.

It was agreed that the first major task was to determine general quality standards every JC/D should have - regardless of the specific nature or range of disabilities they deal with in practice.

Therefore we began collecting information and data describing the status quo. We compiled this information via a standardised questionnaire. We asked:

- Are there already standards in the countries, legal or unwritten?
- Is the term 'job coach' used by authorities, unemployment/pensions/health and social care insurance organisations or employment offices? Are there other common terms?
- Are there other professions in the same or comparable working fields and what are their responsibilities?
- Are there standards defining the formal education of a JC/D?

We also asked our participants how, in their opinion, a JC/D should be qualified.

Our participants will also consider how to integrate the views and opinions of persons with disabilities as well as those of their (potential) employers, their families, and therapists.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/home>

<sup>2</sup> [www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/docs/resol08.doc](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/docs/resol08.doc)

Our international group covers very different approaches to the topic. Some of our partners work as job coaches themselves while others help entrepreneurs establish companies to integrate people with disabilities into workplaces.

They also run projects in which people with disabilities are directly integrated into the primary labour market. Two of our partners are involved in a programme that intends to prepare persons with disabilities for the working world by improving their health as well as their social life. The universities in our group run practical research projects where students learn to help young adults with autism spectrum disorder develop their potential for school and work.

## **2. Relevant conditions, limitations, disabilities and disorders that should be part of a curriculum for a JC/D**

A generalist JC/D qualification programme can never consider every imaginable disability.

A JC/D must have knowledge about the most important disabilities and potential of the target group.

He/she should know how and how far do these disabilities have an influence on the chances of finding employment, (and where nationally relevant, one which carries social insurance cover) in the mainstream job market.

A Job Coach should have knowledge about:

- Pervasive development conditions like autism spectrum disorders
- Intellectual disability
- Psychotic disorders like schizophrenia, major depression and bipolar disorder
- Non-psychotic conditions like anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders, somatoform<sup>3</sup>, eating and personality disorders
- Behavioural conditions like attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder

Additional knowledge could be helpful in these fields:

- Sensory disabilities
- Physical disabilities such as amputation, paralysis
- Physically determined communication problems
- Addiction and substance abuse
- Learning conditions like dyslexia, dyscalculia without cognitive impairments
- Inclusion problems of persons who have been out of work due to severe illnesses or persons who have lost touch with the job market due to long unemployment

For some issues like sensory disabilities and wheelchair dependency, there are already established support pathways.

This is also the case in issues where a primarily technical support is needed. Basic knowledge about those issues is desirable for a JC/D.

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<sup>3</sup> A category of psychiatric disorders which are characterized by the presence of physical symptoms that suggest a medical condition but are not fully explained by any known medical reasons<sup>4</sup>: ICD-10 diagnosis code F45, see <http://www.icd10data.com/ICD10CM/Codes/F01-F99/F40-F48/F45->

### **3. Legal situation concerning the defined term “Job Coach”**

“Job Coach”, in the sense of a fully defined legal term does not exist in any of the countries taking part in the project (France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom), and that is true even more for the “subspecialisation” for persons with disabilities. However, in the Netherlands the term “Job Coach” is used in the content of laws and sublegal regulations without reference to a standard.

In Poland the term “Trener Pracy” is part of several legal acts, resolutions and programmes. But neither defines qualification standards, and the scope is restricted to projects.

In Germany, there are various initiatives and regional public sector projects referring to a “Job Coach UB” where

“UB” means “supported employment”. There are also “JC” positions focusing on persons with ASD, one example is the company "auticon"<sup>4</sup>, which has recently also opened an office in the United Kingdom.

In three of the five countries the term “Job Coach” is used by both private and public institutions.

This is not the case in France and the United Kingdom. The Netherlands are comparatively more advanced as they have a nationwide professional organization and Poland also shows advanced developments. However, even in these countries legal definitions have yet to be established

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. <http://auticon.co.uk/>

#### 4. Professions that are not called “Job Coach” but deal with the same or similar issues

There is a large variety of professional employment support for individuals with disabilities in the public and private job market.

This kind of support requires

- general and specific information and counselling services
- financial and legal support
- reintegration services
- occupational psychology and science.

Therefore, some aspects of the scope of a job coach may already be covered.

However, we found no other profession covering all the issues relevant for a JC/D as defined in the introduction.

#### 5. Funding for the work of a JC/D

All partner states have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006), so they all are committed to the principles that grant Job Coach support and training.

All the partner organisations indicated state funding was available for job support positions. Less commonly, individuals with disabilities were expected to meet all or some of the costs, and more rarely again, employers provided funding.

Four organisations indicated that some **persons with disabilities** funded their JC/D individually, at least in part. However, if as in some regions of Germany individuals use a so-called personal budget, this can be regarded as an indirect form of state funding. The personal budget is covered by state social security agencies instead of direct funding of services.

This funding mechanism has a longer tradition in the UK: Individuals who receive Direct Payments to fund health and social care needs can use these to employ for example a ‘personal assistant’ to help with employment support. Many individuals and advocacy groups say this offers maximum autonomy in the choice of services and the possibility of “topping up” if there are preferences not covered by public funding. The downside however is that the person with disabilities (or their carer) has to take on the responsibilities of an employer, make tax returns and submit detailed accounts to the funder.

In the North Holland province of the Netherlands (reported by Cordaan), people with disabilities can pay for a counsellor. Job Coach NL reported that in other regions people with disabilities did not have to pay for employment support.

A similar situation exists in Poland, which has 16 provincial administrative regions. EKON (based in the region around Warsaw) confirmed that token payments from individuals – topped up by Local Authorities – contributed to Job Coach funding, whereas in the Lodz region, Ja-Ty-My indicated that individuals with disabilities did not pay for such support.

Only two organisations reported that **employers** met some or all of the costs involved in providing a Job Coach, and both were situated within the Netherlands.

However, some companies in fact do cover JC/D-equivalent services. The German software company Systemanalyse und Programmentwicklung (System Analysis and Program

Development/SAP) offers an example of this in practice. When recruiting and employing individuals with Aspergers' syndrome as IT specialists, SAP offers company-funded personal support by qualified colleagues.

All partners reported that **public funding** was available for Job Coach positions, firstly from central and/or local government, and secondly from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are receiving government or European funding.

The funding situation therefore is diverse, both in comparisons between the partner states and within each nation, as a result of regional legislation and practice. It is possible that a European wide Job Coach qualification could help effectively target such wide-ranging funding if adopted as a 'quality standard' by service providers.



## **6. Present Qualification requirements of a Job Coach**

With regards to the requirements of working as a JC/D, we found some widespread standards or common practices.

A higher school education appears to be necessary. Five of our partners stated that a job coach would need a school leaving certificate corresponding to the German "abitur", English "A-levels" or French "baccalauréat", that is, a qualification that would qualify the person to get accepted at a university. Three participants stated that a secondary school education would also do.

Non-academic professional qualification profiles were not as common as a basis for working as a JC/D.

However, in the Netherlands, someone who has served a craftsman or technical apprenticeship could be a JC/D for someone who works in the same or another non-academic working field.

People with an educational or healthcare profile apprenticeship are widespread as JC/D. One of our Dutch partners said that this is preferred and common practice in the Netherlands, one of our German partners added that these persons needed an additional qualification in order to fill a JC position.

As for academic professional qualifications, it is rare but not impossible that a person who has studied any optional subject works as a JC/D for someone with the same or another working field. It is also possible that someone can study an educational or healthcare subject at the university and then works as a JC/D.

We then asked if there are any specific postgraduate qualifications for the JC position even if not required by law. Four partners reported this training, mainly non-academic. Mandatory education in methodological, didactic, health-related, disability-related or in general occupation and employment related questions did not exist in any of the partner countries.

As to be expected, we found no mandatory pursued supervision, professional intervention or ethical counselling either nor are there (with the exception of the Netherlands) countrywide professional organizations, societies or boards. However, public funding for JC/D services in some cases requires qualifications on the sublegal level described above.

## **7. Future qualification requirements for a JC/D**

To secure professional qualifications and consumer protection, it is necessary to develop a mandatory curriculum and a legal framework for a JC/D.

Taking into regard the necessary skills and knowledge, an academic qualification should be mandatory in the longer perspective. We regard a Bachelors' degree (EQF 6) as adequate, not excluding that for scientific and training activities, a Masters' degree might be helpful. An academic qualification could be based on a dedicated JC course of studies in future. A JC qualification might also be based on a Bachelor's degree in social work, ergotherapy, occupational or therapeutic subjects with a mandatory postgraduate training. Here, different national curricula will be designed.

For those already working as JC in an informal sense, transitional solutions are needed. Here, different national traditions of a non-academic approach exist: Experienced craftsmen and technicians are known to work with persons with disabilities in a manner comparable to a JC/D, some of them with psychological or educational training.

“New standard” academic JC staff will not be available in sufficient number in the years to come, so there should be a transitional time period in which a non-academic approach to JC should be kept open. This transitional period should be taken into account in the national curricula.

Additionally, an EQF 5 option (SCHE/“short cycle higher education”) should remain available in those countries where such solutions exist. Here, the contents of the SCHE modules can be derived from our curricular propositions; this option should be integrated in the national curricula where applicable.

We also deem a mandatory supervision and continuous postgraduate qualification necessary, regardless of the formal access to a JC position; here, a parallel to health care professionals may be drawn.

As the national legal framework as to labour market regulations, funding, social security systems etc. varies widely, we endorse the development of national curricula for these aspects.

However, we regard a common European standard for the necessary professional knowledge as highly desirable.

## **8. The degree of specialisation a JC/D curriculum should provide**

We discussed the following alternatives for a JC/D curriculum:

- a) Generalist training as Job Coach with non-mandatory specialisation
- b) “Medium-specific” training as Job Coach for all persons with disabilities
- c) “Specialist” training as Job Coach exclusively for persons with specific (groups of) disabilities
- d) “Tree model” specialist training as Job Coach for persons with disabilities in general and mandatory additional specialised qualification for specific (groups of) disabilities, e.g. physical, sensory, psychiatric, cognitive disabilities

In conclusion, we support model d):

- JC/D training should comprise competencies for persons with disabilities in general.
- In our model, they will be partially covered by the national curricula.
- The general programme will be followed by a mandatory additional particularised qualification for specific disabilities.

## **9. Integration of ideas and views of persons with disabilities**

Supported employment is an effective way for persons with disabilities to get and keep a job in the general labour market. However, ethical issues have to be kept in mind in addition to efficiency and effectiveness considerations.

Historically, support programmes often chose a so-called paternalistic approach: “experts” identifying “deficits”, organizing “supportive measures” and telling people what to do and how to do it. This “paternalistic” approach is based on good intentions, but tends to overlook individual preferences.

Nowadays, an autonomy-centred approach is generally accepted: this has led to the codification of comprehensive rights of every person without regard of existing disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 has been ratified by all EU member states and has been integrated in European and national constitutions, laws and sublegal instruments.

- An autonomy-centred approach is one of the core values of job coaching for people with disabilities
- A JC can only work successfully in close cooperation and on an equal footing with his/her client.
- Any activity of a JC is the result of an autonomous decision of the client or his/her legal representative.
- Every working relationship with a JC requires the possibility of an opt-out.

We agreed on the participation of persons with disabilities in all development stages of the job coach project. We want to include the perspective of the target group in the curricular contents. This can be achieved by various measures. Among these are:

- The participation of groups or individuals with the respective condition in teaching and practical training
- The use of relevant autobiographic literature
- The cooperation of advocacy groups in quality control and evaluation
- Participative research designs

## **10. Outlook**

Whereas the general standards should be applicable to Job Coaches working for persons with various conditions, we decided to focus on three clinical pictures: autism spectrum disorder, psychiatric disorders and intellectual disabilities.

Here, we regard the skills of a specialized JC/D as crucial for integration and success in the labour market. Of course, this is not to underestimate or negate the importance of Job Coaching in other situations. Research and elaboration focusing on other conditions would be appreciated by all partners.

With regard to the three conditions, we will design the competence profile a JC/D should have. The resulting manuals and curricular contents can also serve as an orientation for other conditions, especially because given disabilities can cause or promote secondary issues; for instance, a person dependent on a wheelchair might also suffer from depression. Hence the guidelines may also serve as an additional instrument for persons with other conditions.