



WORKABILITY EUROPE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Employment Solutions through Innovation

20 - 23 May 2008

Miramar Palace Conference Centre, San Sebastian, Spain

Summary Conference Report

The Workability Europe (WE) Annual Conference 2008 took place between 20 - 23 May 2008 in the City of San Sebastian in the North of Spain. This year's guiding theme was "*Employment Solutions through Innovation*" and the event was hosted by EHLABE in the framework of the *Year of Innovation* declared by the Basque Government. The Conference was a huge success attracting over 110 participants from all over Europe and offering an exciting mix of high level speeches, academic inputs, exchanges and social activities. WEB BV, e-ISOTIS



and WE displayed exhibition stands promoting various products and services. The Conference programme unfolded according to the familiar and appreciated pattern of having one national political day, one day dedicated to visits of services and discussions and one internal day focusing on WE matters. Several business meetings and Seminars were held in the margins of the event too. The Conference was covered by local media too.

Day I – 20 May

Following two Board meetings of WEB BV and WE, this first day gathered delegates for a Welcome Reception hosted by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa. Pablo Nuñez and Hans Vrind, Presidents of EHLABE and WE respectively, gave words of welcome and shared their vision for employment of people with disabilities in the Basque Country and in an increasingly globalised Europe. Emphasising the importance of Innovation in creating inclusive working environments, Pablo Nuñez and Hans Vrind looked forward to three busy days of activities. They were joined in their address by two local politicians who expressed their delight that San Sebastian hosts an event with a social perspective. The desire to face together common challenges, to learn from each and to build new partnerships was evident already from the outset of this event.

Day II – 21 May



Day II was essentially a national day complemented by some inputs from a European perspective. Kizkitza Zabaleta from EHLABE acted as Chair. A short summary of all contributions follows.

“Social policies are for the whole society not only for those directly affected by them.”

Pedro Ustarroz

Pedro Ustarroz gave an opening keynote speech addressing Innovation and the future of employment policies from macro-economic point of view making the link to the integration of people with disabilities in society. He also referred to the UN Convention recently ratified by Spain and to the need to amend all relevant national laws accordingly.

“Employment policies should be focused on providing good jobs not just on job-creation.”

Pablo Angulo

Pablo Angulo described the objectives and activities of the Year of Innovation in the Basque Region. He argued that it is not only possible but also necessary

to innovate in social policies too and gave some examples how this could be done. He congratulated EHLABE as true pioneers of Innovation in the Basque Country and stressed the need to build partnerships on all levels.

“Innovation is the field of ignorance.”

Juan Mari Uzkudun

Juan Mari Uzkudun defined Innovation as “an implemented novelty accepted by the market to which it is offered.” In his view, experimentation and entrepreneurship in the world of

Innovation were indispensable. He challenged companies to “walk on Innovation”, to listen to their workers but warned them that process of Innovation requires a change of one’s mentality and its paradigm is not necessarily linear.

“Stimulating Interaction in organisations increase their innovation capability”

Carlos Fernandez

Carlos Fernandez gave an insight into innovative management and organisational models. He spoke about embracing a clear mission and values, formulating objectives, evaluating

results and the need for real internal consultative practices to be embedded in companies.

“ Our job as managers is to manage a mix of different abilities to an end result. ”

Jaap Strating

Jaap Strating’s speech presentation was about the development of sheltered workshops via the *Investors in People* system which provides a model of good practice to improve

organisations through improving its people. He described the essentials of the system, how it was employed in one particular project, the results it achieved for managers and the impact it had on service users.

“ Quality of Life was once an idea, today it is an action-oriented change agent. ”

Miguel Angel Verdugo

Miguel Angel Verdugo explained the Quality of Life concept which integrates various indicators and individual values across a broad range of life domains which he described one by one. The

concept has become a social construct that guides programme practices and quality improvement strategies. He also spoke about the UN Convention on the Rights of people with Disabilities and about the ICF model on disability.

“For people with high or complex dependency needs, the mainstream approach may be either an inadequate response or only a partial response to their needs”

Evelyne Friedel

Evelyne Friedel, reflected about the Lifestreaming concept under a right based approach. Through her presentation, she outlined the Lifestreaming concept as a fundamental right including the individual project of life for people with disabilities. In addition, she commented the right of early

diagnosis, the right to receive adapted care all life long, lifelong education and the right to work.

“The Article on Habilitation & Rehabilitation in the UN Convention is a landmark achievement for service providers. ”

Martin Ohridski

Martin Ohridski presented the Pillars of the EU’s long-term disability strategy and the priorities of the current Disability Action Plan. He highlighted the two red lines running through the document -

fostering accessibility in its widest sense and supporting the implementation of the UN Convention. He explained the relevance of the Plan for social service providers and suggested how they can engage in the implementation of EU disability policies.



Hans Vrind summarised the main points raised during Day II and together with the hosts introduced the visits and workshops of the next day. The Services Development Group held one of its regular meetings after the Conference activities.¹ In the evening, a guided bus tour showed delegates the highlights of the City.

¹ Minutes from this event will be made available separately.

Day III – 22 May

During this day, delegates visited four different enterprises and services in area of San Sebastian. They had the chance to learn about the Basque employment sector for people with disabilities, see activities on the workfloor and in the mainstream, talk to professionals and discuss topical issues. There was ample time for questions and answers and for sharing of views and experiences on the spot.

Back at the Conference Centre smaller breakout groups debated more in detail issues around the services seen in the morning and reported their findings in plenary. The challenges and recommendations emerging from these sessions will feed into future activities of WE. The interactive approach of the whole day was much appreciated and everyone was actively engaged. The Day was chaired by Nigel Hopkins, one of the leaders of the Services Development Group.



In a keynote speech of this day, **Brendan Sinnott** gave the European Commission's viewpoint on Innovation in a changing social sector. He illustrated why the social economy in which WE enterprises operate is a catalyst for economic development and social cohesion and reviewed how methods of public support can be improved. He explored five scenarios to 2020 and beyond: globalisation, climate change, health trends, governance and demography. He concluded by stating that these challenges will necessarily provoke all actors to innovate further as the problems are not just financial - they are societal.

“ Workability Europe is a precious partner with the Commission. We expect that it will continue to strive for the maximisation of our citizens' human capital and continue to innovate in the area of service provision. ”

Brendan Sinnott

In the evening EHLABE hosted a Gala Dinner in a stylish restaurant on the Atlantic seaside. Several speeches were given during dinner with the co-organisers exchanging kind words of thanks and pledges for future cooperation. Two presentations were given during dinner. First, Cristian Ispas proposed Bucharest, Romania as host to the 2009 Workability Europe Annual Conference. The Conference is to be co-organised by Motivation in collaboration with Shaw Trust. This invitation was warmly welcomed by delegates. Then, Angela Kerins and Michael Horgan presented the awarded organisations by the International *Disability Employment Development Fund for Developing Economies*. The Fund is administered by the Rehab Group in association with Workability International. It will continue to fund Innovative projects on a pilot basis for another two years at least.

Day IV – 23 May

As usual, the final Day of the Conference was dedicated to WE internal meetings and to dissemination of information about European projects. Proceedings were chaired by Bertie Hunt, General Secretary of WE. Two Seminars took place after a meeting of the Network Development Group – one on *Mentoring for Employability* and one on *Transitions to New Job Environments and Sectors* (coordinated by the Services Development Group).²

“ Some years back it would have been unthinkable to discuss mainstreaming into the open labour whereas today it is a major item on the agenda. Addressing issues such as mainstreaming and transition must be considered a very positive development. It shows WE is moving forward and moving fast. ”
Kristjan Valdimarsson

Martin Ohridski from the WE secretariat facilitated the Seminar on Mentoring. He presented the *Validating Mentoring 2 (VM2)* project funded under EU’s Leonardo da Vinci Programme and led by the Marie Curie Association in Bulgaria. Workability Europe is one of the six partners in the consortium. Dr Val Chapman from the Centre for Inclusive Learning Support (University of Worcester) – another partner in the VM2 project – also made a contribution at the Seminar.³

Following these Seminars, Pablo Nuñez and Hans Vrind closed officially the event at noon time. An artistic culinary performance put marked the closure of the Conference. The day concluded with the Annual General meeting (AGM) of WE.⁴

Speaking shortly after the closure of activities, WE President **Hans Vrind** stated: "Our sincere thanks to EHLABE once again for the splendid organisation of our Annual Conference in San Sebastian! During one whole week EHLABE and everyone associated with the event really did their utmost to make us feel welcome and comfortable in this wonderful City. The location, the magnificent Palace on the seaside of the Atlantic and the catering were superb, the speakers were engaging, the visits were insightful and the social activities were great. In fact, the whole programme from start to finish proved well thought out. The practical organisation in terms of registration, meeting rooms, transportation, signposting, etc was excellent and much appreciated. It was really a pleasure to cooperate with our Spanish partners on this event."



Hans Vrind continued, “Overall we witnessed a really positive atmosphere of hard work, learning and sharing, fruitful networking and new friendships all in a spirit of togetherness

² The minutes from the NDG and the Seminar Report on Transitions will be made available separately by the respective groups.

³ The full Report from this Seminar will be made available separately.

⁴ Minutes from this event will be made available separately.

and a sense of common direction. We were very pleased that we saw quite a few new faces and that everyone was actively engaged. We are sure that the many contacts initiated will be pursued and will lead to concrete initiatives in the near future. This renewed enthusiasm augurs well for the future of Workability Europe as a network and for our cooperation at pan-European level to service those people who need us the most."

