

ATLAS-conference 6 October 2006, reaction of Jan to the presentation of the 1st copy of the handbook

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to receive the first copy of the ATLAS book from you.

Furthermore, as the Council for Work and Income (RWI) we consider it very important that everyone is involved in the labour market.

This is important with regard to the ageing of the population and the ability to pay social security in the long term.

But perhaps even more importantly from the social point of view.

Everyone who wants to should be able to participate.

Work provides fulfillment and appreciation.

Handicapped people should also be able to profit from this.

In the Netherlands in recent years all efforts were directed at ensuring that as many people as possible with a work-related handicap should be helped with finding employment.

For this purpose considerable legal steps have been taken. The responsibility of employers and employees to prevent absence and unfitness for work has been increased.

Employers should ensure more payment for those who are ill or unfit to work and should do more to help them return to work.

For this reason the period during which employers must continue to pay salary to sick employees has been extended.

Furthermore, via the Gatekeeper Act for the Reintegration of the Occupationally Handicapped (in Dutch known as the Wet Verbetering Poortwachter) tools are provided to both employers and employees to ensure that absent employees return to work as soon as possible.

The industrial disability legislation has also been amended considerably.

The responsibility of employers and employees to ensure that those who are unfit to work within their own company remain active has greatly increased.

From 1 January of this year only those who are fully and in the long term unfit to work will have the right to long term payment of allowance.

People who are less than 35% unfit to work will simply remain in the service of their employer.

Those who are more than 35% unfit to work, but who are not fully and in the long term unfit, will receive a partial allowance.

This allowance is so designed that it is attractive to the individual to partially return to employment.

Finally, those who had already been receiving a disability allowance will have their case reviewed.

This implies that all those declared unfit for work under 50 years of age will have their case reviewed with regard to the possibilities of returning to employment.

This so-called re-evaluation operation is an extensive operation.

It is by no means an easy task for the allowance payment authorities.

The RWI has examined the interim results of this operation.

The RWI has also conducted research into the opportunities for work after re-evaluations in the past.

The effectiveness of reintegration for non-working re-evaluated individuals who are unfit for work in the period 2002-2004 was practically nil.

This group are receiving a long term allowance.

The first results of the present re-evaluation operation indicate a slightly better picture, but there is still little cause for optimism.

Several diverse factors play a role in this.

Clients often rate their own opportunities as being poor, partly due to health problems.

Employers are very hesitant about employing those with an industrial handicap.

Finally, reintegration projects often fail to fulfill specific demands.

Meanwhile one wonders whether the standard form of reintegration programme is suitable for this group of unemployed individuals, or if there is a better, more tailor-made solution.

This is the reason for my involvement in your Atlas project.

To ensure tailor-made solutions it is of prime importance to make a proper diagnosis about the shortcomings.

What skills and competences are needed for the labour market?

What skills and competences do handicapped individuals possess?

And how do we integrate this?

I predict that Atlas will provide us with new insights and will help us to help more people succeed in finding and retaining employment.