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# WelSlagen

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## Summary

WelSlagen (literally ‘success’, but also meaning ‘second chance to pass’) is a programme for young unemployed people and job seekers on an unemployment benefit who do not have a start qualification yet. It is a powerful instrument to win people with a distance to the labour market for promising occupations in the health care and welfare sector. After a selection process in which the ability and motivation to work (in the health care and welfare sector) is tested, the target group is offered a customized traineeship leading to a start qualification. Who successfully completes this traineeship, can count on a BBL-contract (learning job) which can lead to a degree on MBO (secondary vocational education) level 3.<sup>1</sup> Employers participating in WelSlagen (‘leerbedrijven’, in English: learning companies) guarantee these learning jobs for successful trainees beforehand.

The main aim of the WelSlagen programme to increase the influx of personnel into the health care and welfare sector by a targeted activation of the regional labour reserves. Numerically, the target is that 75% of all participants successfully finish the traineeship and get a start qualification. Furthermore, the aim is to fill in all traineeships made available by the employers.

The selection of participants is fairly strict. Eventually, a relatively large share of interested, potential participants are rejected. As a result, the targets mentioned above are met. Almost all the participant who successfully finish the traineeship, start the learning job afterwards. A side effect of the programme is a ‘bycatch’ of recruited people who could start a learning job directly.

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<sup>1</sup> In the intermediate vocational education (in Dutch: MBO) there are four qualification levels. The lowest is level 1, the highest level 4. The higher the level, the longer the duration of the education. Only a diploma at level 4 gives entrance to higher vocational education.



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WelSlagen is an on-going, project-based programme with a yearly cycle. Currently, employers are less willing to participate because of the reforms/cutbacks taking place in the health care and welfare sector. The WelSlagen concept, however, can also be deployed for external mobility: guiding employees who are (threatened to be) dismissed towards another branch in the sector. The intention, therefore, is to further develop WelSlagen into a (regular rather than project-based) flexible inflow trajectory that moves with the demand of the labour market/ employer.

The programme started with projects in West-Brabant. Besides WelSlagen West-Brabant, at the moment there are also WelSlagen projects running in the region Zuidoost- & Noordoost-Brabant. As far as transferability abroad is concerned, some legal matters call for attention (for instance in the field of labour law, liability insurance and so). Furthermore an important boundary condition is the existence of well-functioning network structure of stakeholders in the region involved.

## 1. Basic information

WelSlagen is developed by Calibris, the Dutch VET expertise centre in the field of health care, welfare and sports, more specifically the (former) department Calibris Advice (see also 2.3). Next to Calibris, the organisations involved are ROC's (regional education centres), health care and welfare institutes, UWV (PES) and local and regional authorities (represented in the RPA, the regional labour market platform). Each WelSlagen project starts with an orientation phase in which Calibris together with potential partners explores the labour market problems in the region. When WelSlagen is expected to offer a suitable solution for these problems, each one's specific contribution is recorded by covenant.

Next to stimulus funds by the central government, the WelSlagen projects are financed by the local and regional partners (the municipalities and the province of Noord-Brabant). The financing is not of a structural nature. Every year, arranging the funding is a challenge.

WelSlagen is an on-going programme with a yearly cycle. It started in 2010 with projects in West-Brabant. Besides WelSlagen West-Brabant<sup>2</sup> (core municipalities Roosendaal, Bergen op Zoom, Breda and Oosterhout), at the moment there are also WelSlagen projects running in the region Zuidoost- & Noordoost-Brabant (core municipality 's Hertogenbosch).

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<sup>2</sup> Including projects in the provinces Zuid-Holland (Drechtsteden) and Zeeland.

Figure 2.1 Location of WelSlagen projects



Source: Calibris (Google Maps)

## 2. Backgrounds and goals

### 2.1. Problem the programme addresses

The main problem the WelSlagen programme addresses is the disadvantaged labour market position/ high unemployment rate of young unemployed people and (older) job seekers (on an unemployment benefit) without a start qualification. At the same time the programme tries to reduce personal shortages of health care and welfare institutes.

### 2.2. Goals and targets

With WelSlagen, Calibris aims to increase the influx of personnel into the health care and welfare sector by a targeted activation of the regional labour reserves.

Concrete goals of the Welslagen programme are amongst others the following:

- Deployment of the still un(der)used labour potential in the region
- Extra influx of adequately educated and qualified personnel in health care and welfare
- Less risk of drop-out in the guidance and education trajectory
- Start qualification for poorly educated job seekers
- Sustainable cooperation between employers, education and government.



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- Providing sufficient learning jobs (Calibris 2012).

Target is that 75% of all participants successfully finish the WelSlagen trajectory and get a start qualification. Furthermore, the aim is to fill in all traineeships made available by the employers.

### 2.3. Relation with other programmes

Initiator of WelSlagen is Calibris, the Dutch expertise centre in the field of practical training in health care, welfare and sports.

Calibris is a non-profit organisation (financed by public as well as private parties). Mandated by the Dutch government, Calibris aims at a smooth connection between vocational training and professional practice, amongst others by developing, facilitating and implementing effective instruments. On the board of Calibris are representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions and educational organisations in the field of health care, welfare and sports.

Calibris has both legal tasks (qualifying examination and certifying learning companies) and extra statutory tasks. Responsible for the extra statutory tasks is the (former) department Calibris Advice. The focus of Calibris Advice is on three areas of interest:

1. Addressing traineeship/learning job and labour market issues;
2. Supporting ROC's in the field of organisation, quantity and quality of traineeships and learning jobs;
3. Guiding learning companies in teaching on the work floor.

The WelSlagen programme is part of the first mentioned area of interest. Examples of other innovative programmes in this area are WijkLeerbedrijf en GildeLeren (see box below).<sup>3</sup>

The '**WijkLeerbedrijf**' (WLB, District Practical Training Company) is an VET- instrument to help underprivileged people get a job in health care and welfare. It is a new concept of community-based practical training in health care and welfare which guides trainees in acquiring work experience related to their education (health care and welfare, qualification level 1 and 2) in their own residential district. Trainees do odd jobs which residents themselves can no longer do but for which they don't receive care via the municipality.

'**GildeLeren**' (Guild Learning) is an innovative VET-concept (qualification level 1 and 2) in the health care and welfare sector. It is set up according to the successful traditional 'gilde-systeem' (guild system) of 'meester-gezel-leerling' (master-journeyman-pupil). Pupils are trained on the work floor following to the proven concept of 'demonstrate and imitate'. GildeLeren is characterised by a very close cooperation between health care and welfare institutes (the learning companies) and education institutes. As a result, the training programme is optimally tuned to (the needs of) the learning company.

<sup>3</sup> As from 1 August 2015, Calibris has become one of the eight sector chambers of the reorganised SBB (<http://www.s-bb.nl/>), the umbrella organisation for knowledge centres in the field of practical training in the Netherlands. However, the extra statutory tasks remains with Calibris Advice (<http://www.calibrisadvies.nl>). As from 1 february 2015, Calibris Advice already is an independent foundation.



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### 3. Target groups

#### 3.1. Selection criteria

Target groups are young unemployed people and (older) job seekers on an unemployment benefit without a start qualification. Sometimes more specific target groups are involved because of specific funding (for instance funding earmarked for youth unemployment).

After the financing of a project is arranged, the recruitment and selection of participants starts. A participants profile is drawn up and sent to the so called referrers (UWV, municipal social services, recruitment agencies, volunteer work/aid organisations etc.). For the current WelSlagen 5 project in Zuidoost/Noordoost Brabant, which started in March 2015, the selection criteria were the following:

1. *Approval of benefits agency/referrer and willingness to pay the trajectory costs.*
2. *Personal characteristics:* at least 18 years old; willingness to undergo a ability-/language test; no physical and/mental impediments; well-kept appearance; sufficient motivation and affinity with health care and welfare; positive attitude towards the different types of guidance.
3. *Skills/competences and behavior:* sufficient Dutch language skills; polite and respectful attitude; ability to work together in groups; social attitude; keeping appointments; being able to manage (the combination of) both the home situation and the work situation.
4. *Development potential:* being able to flow into a trajectory at a level 2 and, within a reasonable period of time, to move up to education at level 3; willingness to learn.
5. *Employers Requirements:* willingness to work irregularly and/or split shifts; willingness to work on weekends and during holidays; being able to reach the work location independently on all days and times; willingness to adhere to the dress code within the organization (Calibris 2015).

#### 3.2. Promotion

Amongst others, the WelSlagen programme is promoted through a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/WelSlagen](http://www.facebook.com/WelSlagen)), website ([www.welslagendiversiteit.nl](http://www.welslagendiversiteit.nl)), information leaflets, a newsletter and a film.

#### 3.3. Motivation to participate

Participant 1, interviewed in the framework of this study, had already worked in the health care and welfare sector (housekeeping). After her and her husband's company went bankrupt, she searched for a job in the sector again and told UWV so. UWV brought the WelSlagen project to her attention. Participant 2 did not succeed in finding a job in line with her economics education at level 4. Therefore, she thought it a good idea to go into a completely different direction.

#### 3.4. Number and types of participants

The selection of participants is fairly strict. Eventually, a relatively large share of interested, potential participants are rejected. In the WelSlagen West Brabant projects, in the period until 2013 in total 733 potential participants were recruited. Of them, 164 were offered an



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guaranteed learning job by a health care or welfare institute of which 148 participants actually started a WelSlagen trajectory (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013<sup>4</sup>). An impression of the range of participants is given by the evaluation of the project WelSlagen West-Brabant Alliantiemangement & Diversiteit (2012-2013), which was specifically focused on diversity. Besides 9 Dutch participants there were participants coming from Surinam (2), Morocco (2), Poland (1), Brazil (1) and Serbia (1). Nearly all the participants were female. The youngest participant was 21 years, the eldest 51 years of age (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013).

In the WelSlagen Zuidoost Brabant projects, in the period 2011-2014 in total 70 participants started a WelSlagen trajectory. Most participants had a WWB (social security) benefit or WW (unemployment) benefit. Besides, there were some participants with a disability insurance benefit and some people not entitled to benefits (Calibris 2014b<sup>5</sup>).

According to the implementer, interviewed in the framework of this case study, because of the focus on the health care and welfare sector it is only logical that WelSlagen participants are mainly women. Mostly, it concerns women with children who – after a period of absence - want to return to the labour market. Often they already know the sector through volunteer work or volunteer aid. The specific background of the participants is very diverse.

## 4. Course of the programme

### 4.1. Concept

The main idea of the WelSlagen programme is guiding young unemployed people and job seekers (on an unemployment benefit) without a start qualification to the labour market by an tailor made and individual approach.

A WelSlagen project starts with a careful screening of interested potential participants, followed by interviews by the employers who made traineeships available. The employer decides who is admitted to the project and who is not. Next, during an agreed number of weeks (in general 20) the participants are placed on a tailor made traineeship in a health care or welfare institute. During this traineeship, on the work floor they are intensively and individually supported by a personal coach. In addition to their activities on the work floor, follow some lessons at a regional education centre. In this period, participants develop key start skills and competences and get used to the combination of training and work. The emphasis is more on the development of a professional attitude (the so-called soft-skills) than on 'hard' professional skills. Who successfully completes the traineeship, gets a start qualification and can count on a BBL-contract (learning job) which can lead to a qualification at level 3. In this learning job, they work 20-24 hours a week at a health care or welfare institute and go to school one day a week. Employers participating in the WelSlagen programme guarantee these learning jobs for successful trainees beforehand.

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<sup>4</sup> This report concerns the following 9 WelSlagen West-Brabant projects/trajectories: Drechtsteden 1 and 2; West-Brabant Diversiteit (diversity) 1 and 2, Regulier (regular), Thebe 1 and 2; Zeeland 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> This report concerns the WelSlagen Zuidoost Brabant projects/cohorts 1, 2, 3 and 4. In the WelSlagen Zuidoost-Brabant 4 project, there were also participants from Noordoost-Brabant.



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## 4.2. Activities per phase

Basically, in a WelSlagen project the following four phases can be distinguished:

1. *Preliminary phase*: recruitment and selection, intake and placement in traineeship, monitoring.
2. *Trainee phase*: tailor-made traineeships/lessons and individual guidance aimed at attaining a start qualification
3. *Learning job phase*: learning jobs (BBL, qualification level 3) guaranteed by the employers
4. *Evaluation phase*: assessment of process and results.

The actual WelSlagen trajectories consist of the first two phases. During the trainee phase, the participants are individually and intensively coached. This personal coach also supports the participants in the first year of the learning job phase. In this year, a 'warm' transfer of the participant to the 'studieloopbaanbegeleider' (study career supervisor) takes place.

Besides regular WelSlagen projects, there are also WelSlagen Diversiteit (diversity) projects, specifically aimed at ethnic minorities. These projects include a specific labour- and education-oriented language training for ethnic minorities with literacy problems, fitting in with their traineeship activities in a health care or welfare institute. This language training is provided by the 'Taalvakwerk' (language craftsmanship) organisation (Taalvakwerk 2015).

## 5. Problems in implementation

### 5.1. Recruitment

Participants are recruited by the benefit agencies (UWV and municipal social services) and other referrers (such as recruitment agencies and volunteer work/aid organisations). After an intake interview, potential candidates have to undergo an AMN test (ability test) and a language and math test in order to determine their learning level. Potential candidates who pass the test can apply for a traineeship with one of the participating employers. Next, an interview with the employer is arranged. The employer has the final say. As there are more potential candidates than traineeships, also in this stage a part of them drops out

In the WelSlagen Zuidoost/Noordoost-Brabant 4 project (2014) – specifically aimed at youngsters in the age of 18-27 and job seekers over 55 - 16 employers made 27 internships available. Despite the high youth unemployment, finding candidates for these places was a difficult process. Many youngsters do not have a benefit and therefore are not registered with the municipality or UWV. They are sitting at home on the couch and have mostly short temporary jobs. Therefore, several additional actions were undertaken to reach this group (such as addressing a large number of potential referrers, information meetings, recruitment during open days, flyers etc). In total, 102 intake interviews could be held. Eventually 21 candidates started a WelSlagen trajectory (Calibris 2014a).

The implementer, interviewed in the framework of this case study, also points at the abovementioned problems with recruiting youngsters. According to her, also the recruitment of employers has become more of a challenge because of the reforms/cutbacks in the health care and welfare sector.



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Participant 1, interviewed in the framework of this case study, was recruited by UWV and participant 2 by the municipal social service. Both participants easily passed the selection and intake process. However, according to them many others fail this process (for various reasons such as wrong interests, failing the tests, no click with employer et cetera).

## 5.2. Implementing the activities

The evaluation of the WelSlagen Zuidoost/Noordoost-Brabant 4 project (2014) points at the following problems in the organisation and implementation:

- There have been some problems in organising the finances of the project (delayed decision making on financing the trajectory costs and the lack of clarity on the possibilities for employers subsidies) which – according to the employers - negatively influenced the progress and the imaging of the project.
- The WelSlagen trajectories usually start in March/April. In general the duration is 20 weeks. This means that the final assessment and the handing out of the start qualifications fall in the summer holiday period. This is inconvenient.
- The flexibility in inflow date influences the group process and calls for adaptations by the teachers and supervisors. However, the parties involved pick this up very well and it is not at the expense of the learning development of the individual participants.
- Because the various ROC's involved in this project have different start dates of their level 3 education programmes, the WelSlagen trajectory is not always directly followed by a learning job. In some cases a period of two months had to be (financially) bridged (Calibris 2014b).

Participant 1, interviewed in the framework of this case study, was placed on a learning job at level 3 already after 10 weeks (instead of the regular period of 20 weeks). Because she had not been to school for a long while, at the start of the WelSlagen trajectory she dreaded the lessons. She had to get used to the idea of 'going to school'. Eventually, it turned out to be relatively easy. The coach played a positive role in the trajectory. The coach was available at any time and the support was adequate. At the moment, in the learning job the participant finds it is harder to combine work, school and private life. However, she is determined to get the level 3 diploma.

Because she was originally educated in another direction (economics, level 4), participant 2 had to get used to (the work in) the health care and welfare sector. Also, at the start of the WelSlagen trajectory the coordination between school and employer took a lot of time and effort and the communication was not always good. Thankfully, there was support by the coach. The participant is very positive about the role of the coach played in the trajectory. Sometimes, the work was heavy: the sector is changing and lately there is less time for a chat with the patients. At the moment, in the learning job the combination of work, school and private life is more difficult. She expects to complete the level 3 education, though.

## 5.3. Drop-out

In the WelSlagen West-Brabant projects, in the period until 2013 36 of the 148 participants (24%) dropped out during the traineeship. Causes of/reasons for dropout in the project WelSlagen West-Brabant Alliantiemangement & Diversiteit (2012-2013, 5 out of 17 participants) were: private circumstances (seriously ill son); pregnancy; no click between institute and participant; work with demented elderly too confrontational related to personal



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circumstances (demented mother); work physically too demanding (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013).

In the WelSlagen Zuidoost projects, in the period 2011-2014 21 of the 70 participants (30%) dropped out during the traineeship. Most participants dropped out because of personal problems, often psychosocial problems hindering them in their performance. Other causes of/reasons for dropout were:

- Physical causes
- Insufficient level (including inadequate language skills)
- Insufficient motivation
- Occupation perception (imaging and expectations of working in health care and welfare)
- Personal circumstances, often the combination of learning, working and private life (Calibris 2014b).

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Effectiveness

In the WelSlagen West-Brabant projects, in the period until 2013 116 of the 148 participants (76%) successfully finished their traineeship and started the guaranteed learning job. In addition, there was a substantial 'bycatch': 54 recruited persons were able to start a learning job directly (i.e. without a traineeship prior thereto) (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013).

To be mentioned is also the fact that WelSlagen Diversiteit West-Brabant won the 'Nationale Alfabetiseringsprijs 2012' (National Literacy Award) in the category 'Durven' (Daring) van de 'Stichting Lezen en Schrijven' (Reading and Writing Foundation). These prizes are awarded yearly to organizations committed to a literate society.

In the WelSlagen Zuidoost-Brabant projects, in the period 2011-2014 49 of the 70 participants (70%) successfully finished their traineeship. 48 of them started the guaranteed learning job (Calibris 2014b).

### 6.2. Side effects

As mentioned above, in the WelSlagen West-Brabant projects there was a substantial 'bycatch' of recruited people who could start a learning job directly.

### 6.3. Participants' satisfaction

All participants of the WelSlagen West-Brabant Alliantiemangement & Diversiteit project (2012-2013) consider the traineeship a good way to get used to the combination of learning, working in practice and the private situation. They are unanimously very positive about the support by the personal coach and the language training offered. There are also areas for improvement. Especially the communication concerning the trajectory to go through during the phase of recruitment and selection could be improved. Other points of attention are the tuning between the work in the health care or welfare institute and the lessons at the regional education centre. Some participants state that at their work they are already advanced further than what is dealt with in the lessons (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013).



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Participants of the WelSlagen Zuidoost/Noordoost-Brabant 4 project (2014) are very satisfied with the trajectory, the traineeship and the personal coaching in the framework of the project. Points of improvement are more practical lessons at the ROC and better tuning of the language and math lessons with the starting level of the individual participants Calibris 2014b).

Both participants, interviewed in the framework of this case study, are satisfied with the WelSlagen project. Participant 2 experiences a lead over other students starting a learning job at level 3. The trajectory of 20 weeks at level 2 makes it possible to determine whether or not one will successfully complete a learning job at level 3 in the health care and welfare sector.

## 6.4. Success and failure factors

(Potential) success factors according to publications of Calibris are among others:

- Taking the labour market demands as starting point
- Presence of sufficient labour potential
- Commitment of employers, regional education centres, UWV, local/regional authorities and other parties involved
- Availability of the necessary regional financing
- (Room for) intensive and individual support of participants (Calibris 2012)
- Further professionalization of personal coaches, through peer meetings and expert meetings (AO Consult BV/Calibris 2013).

The implementer, interviewed in the framework of this case study, points at two (potential) failure factors:

- As already mentioned, arranging the funding is sometimes difficult. The readiness of employers to cooperate in a WelSlagen project is of utmost importance. If enough employers are prepared to cooperate, it is easier to arrange the financing by the other parties.
- Sometimes, 'changing of the guards' within one of the organisations involved can be a bottleneck. Usually, it takes some time to get used to each other.

## 7. Sustainability and transferability

### 7.1. Sustainability

The aim of Calibris is transforming the project-based approach of WelSlagen in a regular one, solidly secured in a sustainable cooperation between the chain partners in West-Brabant respectively Zuidoost/Noordoost-Brabant. In general, UWV and local/regional authorities are willing to cooperate. At the moment, employers are less enthusiastic, especially because of the reforms/cutbacks that take place in the health care and welfare sector. Another problem can be changes in aldermanship and therefore in policies and priorities of municipalities. According to the implementer, interviewed in the framework of this case study, the coming two years – because of the reforms/cutbacks – the continuity of the WelSlagen programme will be somewhat under pressure. After that, the prospects of the programme probably are expected to be more positive.



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In 2014 a consultative group advised to further develop WelSlagen into a flexible inflow trajectory that moves with the demand of the labour market/ employer. Given the current labour market developments (i.e. staff shrinkage in health care and welfare branches), the coming years the focus will be on mobility, both sectoral and intersectoral. The WelSlagen concept can also be deployed for external mobility. Employees who are (threatened to be) dismissed can be guided towards another branch within the health care and welfare sector. Despite the current staff shrinkage, it remains important to keep investing in education and to keep offering chances to candidates with distance to the labour market to flow into the health care and welfare sector. In the future, when the labour market is expected to tilt again, the sector desperately needs these employees (Klankbordgroep WelSlagen Zuidoost-Brabant 2014).

## 7.2. Actions for dissemination and mainstreaming

Beside the promotion instruments already mentioned in section 3.2, instruments for dissemination and mainstreaming used are:

- Twitter accounts
- ‘Zorgcafé’ (health care café): presentation of best practices by participating organisations and exchange of knowledge and experience between directors, managers, executives, employees and training officials in the health care and welfare sector
- Promotion by ambassadors of WelSlagen (among others aldermen of the municipalities involved).

## 7.3. Transferability abroad

The implementer, interviewed in the framework of this case study, finds it hard to assess the transferability of the concept of the WelSlagen programme to other countries. Connected to the programme are some legal matters which call for attention (for instance in the field of labour law, liability insurance and so on). Laws and regulations differ from country to country. Furthermore, a success factor of the programme is the existing network structure – Calibris, ROC's, health care and welfare institutes, UWV and local and regional authorities represented in the RPA (regional labour market platform) - in the region involved (the province of Noord-Brabant). Such a structure may be missing in other countries. At the same time, a too tight structure may stand in the way of new initiatives. ‘You have to flow with the environment and go to where there is space. Bring people together’, said the implementer.

## Appendix 1: Sources

‘Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven’, Available from: <<http://www.s-bb.nl> />, [14 September 2015].

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EVROPSKÁ UNIE



OPERAČNÍ PROGRAM  
LIDSKÉ ZDROJE  
A ZAMĚSTNANOST



Fond  
Dalšího  
Vzdělávání  
příspěvková organizace MPSV

PODPORUJEME  
VAŠI BUDOUCNOST  
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## Appendix 2: Information in interviewees

### Representative of implementing organisation

- Name, gender: Thea van Rijbroek, female
- Organisation: Calibris Advice
- Function: Project manager
- Role in programme: Project manager WelSlagen

### Participants

Participant 1:

- Gender, age: female, over 50
- Professional and socio-economic background (education, work experience and labour market position prior to the programme): Together with her husband, the participant ran a store. Before that, she already had several years of experience in the health care and welfare sector (housekeeping). The store went bankrupt, so she had to find a new job. She was just looking for a job, when she could start the WelSlagen trajectory.
- Labour market position during the programme: Unemployed
- Labour market position after the programme (if applicable): Health care and welfare student ('Verzorgende IG', learning job, level 3)

Participant 2:

- Gender, age: female, 24
- Professional and socio-economic background (education, work experience and labour market position prior to the programme): The participant had successfully finished economic vocational training (level 4). She did not manage to find work in line with her education. Before she started the WelSlagen trajectory, she had been unemployed for a period of two years.
- Labour market position during the programme: Unemployed
- Labour market position after the programme (if applicable): Health care and welfare student ('Verzorgende IG', learning job, level 3)