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## Section 6

# Evaluation

This sections focuses on the outcomes of employment guidance and its impact at individual, community and societal levels. Guidance has social and economic outcomes. It can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education, training and the labour market through its contribution to reducing drop-out, preventing skill mismatches, increasing job sustainability and boosting productivity; it also addresses social equity and social inclusion (ELGPN, 2012).



Hooley (2014), while reviewing the evidence for lifelong guidance more generally concludes that:

*“There is an extensive research base on lifelong guidance....It recognises that there are many beneficiaries of such guidance including individuals, their families and communities, and the organisations where they study and work, as well as society as a whole. Lifelong guidance impacts on: educational outcomes, economic and employment outcomes; and social outcomes” (p.7)*

The provision of publicly-funded employment guidance is connected with labour market policies. Therefore, it is important that there is clear evidence of its effectiveness and usefulness, along with established ways of measuring its impact and outcomes.

The purpose and expected outcomes from employment guidance can change depending on the policy in place, the broader labour market context, and changing economic conditions. For example, in a work-first model, success is measured in terms of job placement, returns to unsubsidised employment, and off-benefits exit rates. In a Human Capital model, outcomes are measured by progressions to education, training and employment.

Importantly, the duration of time over which these outcomes are measured lead to different interpretations of success. For example, measuring outcomes over 1-2 years favours a work-first model whereas measuring outcomes over 3 to 5 years tends to show larger benefits of human capital type approaches.

In the next section we explore how employment guidance could be measured in a work-life model. We identify the outcomes considered important for progression towards the labour market, the timing of measurements and collective methods which could help build an evidence base around what works.

## 6.1 Value what matters

The effectiveness of employment guidance has traditionally been evaluated in terms of the number of ‘hard outcomes’ such as progressions into employment or into education and training. However, significant progress in the form of sub-steps towards employment and employability are often made by individuals throughout the guidance process but are rarely measured. As this ‘distance travelled’ is seldom captured in a systematic way, it makes measurement of





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these ‘softer outcomes’ more complex. In addition, these individual changes are often internal and therefore more difficult to measure.

Using only one type of measure does not provide the ‘full picture’ of the impact or effectiveness of employment guidance. Distance travelled is a way of measuring the progress made by a person in achieving ‘soft outcomes’ that may lead to sustained employment in the future (Barnes & Wright, 2019). These valuable outcomes are often lost or not recorded, and distance travelled gives us a way of capturing them.

Dewson and colleagues (2000), in their guide to measuring distance travelled, define distance travelled as “the progress that a beneficiary makes towards employability or harder outcomes, as a result of the project intervention” (pg. 2). They define soft outcomes as “outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes... cannot be measured directly or tangibly” (pg. 2). These may include problem solving abilities, self-confidence or time keeping. The terms ‘soft outcomes’ and ‘distance travelled’ are often used interchangeably.

## Shared measurement

In addition to the measurement of hard outcomes, many organisations use in-house metrics to evaluate the work they do and the progress made by the people engaged in their services. However, collectively, there is no common approach to assessing this progress, making it more difficult to demonstrate value, to understand what works and for whom and to improve employment guidance practice.

A shared approach to capturing distance travelled can help build an evidence base around what works. It requires organisations to have an agreed understanding of outcomes and how to measure them.

## Designing a shared measurement tool

Next, we present a model to enable services and people engaged in an employment guidance process to measure and track incremental and meaningful changes. It collects and analyses rich and important information on outcomes related to employability and career development. These outcomes have been identified and agreed by practitioners, people accessing the services, employability experts, and through in-depth academic literature reviews.

Our methodology follows a standard process for developing validated tools (Barnes and Wright, 2019; Dewson, 2000) and involves an exploration of the literature, consultation with employment guidance practitioners, and analysis of existing tools (e.g. PRIME tool (Canada), My Journey Distance Travelled Tool (SICAP) to generate concepts, outcomes, and items. The following five factors, each defined by a number of concepts, were identified as important to a person's progress towards the labour market:

- a. **Personal:** Well-being, Quality of Life, Sense of Meaning, Accomplishment
- b. **Attitudinal (emotional capabilities):** Confidence, Resilience, Self-esteem, Motivation, Self-Efficacy & Planning, Hopefulness, Career clarity, Aspirations
- c. **Structural (personal circumstances):** Pre-employment, Transport, Care, Housing
- d. **Practical employability:** Relevant and up to date key Work Skills, Job Search
- e. **Future employment (employability):** Job Maintenance, Career vision, Responsibilities and expectations of employment, Acting on feedback, Getting advice and support

Next, a consultative process, as recommended by Barnes and Wright (2019), of co-creation with practitioners, service managers, and key stakeholders was undertaken to reduce a long list of items, to appraise the language and tool content, to assess the usability and make recommendations on its use within services.

At the time of writing the MEEG tool is in the development stage with ongoing testing and psychometric analysis of the items, and improvements to the design and layout for usability. For more details on the MEEG tool please see Appendix 4 (for most recent updates).

