

Effective Interventions Unit Evaluation Guide 9 Evaluating employability programmes

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE? This is the ninth evaluation guide in the EIU evaluation series. It explains the aims and objectives of employability projects and associated evaluations. It focuses on “soft” employability outcomes, indicators and tools for measuring them.

WHO SHOULD READ IT? Anyone involved in commissioning, planning, developing, delivering and evaluating services which aim to support recovering drug users into employment, training and education.

THE EIU WOULD LIKE TO THANK HARIS MARTINOS AND HELEN JUDGE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (LRDP) FOR THEIR HELP AND EXPERTISE IN PREPARING THIS GUIDE.

WHAT IS AN EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMME?

Employability programmes are projects or interventions to help drug users and other disadvantaged groups to become more “employable” and **to progress towards the labour market and ultimately a job**. As the EIU review “Moving On” has shown, the vast majority of the clients are unlikely to be ready for open market employment at the end of active in-programme support. Therefore, employability programmes aim to support clients to progress along a **pathway to employment**.

There is a wide range of programmes offering support towards employability. They provide counselling, training and other one-to-one and group activities mainly aimed at personal and basic skills development. Referrals and after care support are important aspects. In the wide spectrum of services and projects supporting drug users and recovering drug users, specialist **employability projects** occupy a place between **treatment and rehabilitation services** and **mainstream education, training and employment services**, as illustrated below. There are however many links and overlaps between employability and other types of support. There are stand alone employability projects as well as cases where employability support is combined with other services, representing an extension of treatment/rehabilitation or an add-on to formal training or education.

Types of support services and projects for drug users		
Treatment and Rehabilitation Services	Employability Programmes	Mainstream Education, Training and Employment Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community rehabilitation services Social Work Services Harm reduction services Community Pharmacy Residential rehabilitation Prison based services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Futures Fund projects SIP projects Progress & Progress2work Beattie Inclusiveness Pilots Supported employment Intermediate labour market Post-release programmes for prisoners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Deal Enterprise Network Training Programmes Further & Higher Education Institutions Community Education

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF EVALUATIONS OF EMPLOYABILITY PROGRAMMES?

The main aim of the evaluation of an employability programme or project is to establish whether it has achieved its objectives, i.e. whether (and how far) its clients have progressed towards greater employability and ultimately employment.

To be able to establish progress made in terms of employability, the programme and the evaluation exercise must have a clear concept of **“pathways to employment”** for the client. A key aspect of the evaluation of employability projects is the measurement of **“distance travelled”**, i.e. the progress that the clients have made in terms of greater employability on their pathway towards the labour market and employment, as a result of the intervention. In order to measure “distance travelled” we need to establish the types of **outcomes** that clients are expected to achieve and to define **indicators** suitable for measuring these outcomes.

Effective Interventions Unit

“HARD” OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

Some clients may achieve **hard outcomes**, such as moving into training or further education or even getting a job. In this case, the use of indicators is relatively straightforward – the numbers and proportions of people moving into education or getting a job are typical **hard indicators**.

“SOFT” OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

Many more clients are likely to achieve **soft outcomes**, such as improved motivation/confidence, personal or work skills. Soft outcomes tend to be subjective and a matter of degree rather than absolute, and therefore much more difficult to measure. However, gradually a number of **soft indicators** (both qualitative and quantitative) have been used in employability projects. Although unlikely to measure with precision the progress made, they can provide firm indications regarding the achievement of, and progress towards, an outcome. For example, improved levels of attendance and improved communication skills can suggest strongly that motivation has increased.

There is no standardisation or generally used typology of outcomes and indicators. The following summarise the different types of soft outcomes that are found in employability projects which support a variety of client groups and can be treated as **“core” outcomes**.

Examples of core outcomes and indicators	
Types of core outcomes	Examples of indicators
Personal Development Social Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence, self esteem Motivation, increased feelings of responsibility Higher personal and career aspirations Relationships with peers and authority (Basic) interpersonal and communication skills Team working
Basic Work Skills and Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic literacy (reading, writing) Basic numerical skills, including ability to manage money Timekeeping, reliability Ability to complete forms, CV writing Presentation
Core Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Numeracy ICT Problem solving Interpersonal
Personal Effectiveness and Aptitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Prioritising Verbal reasoning Numerical reasoning

Intermediate steps (**milestones**) should be defined for achieving certain levels of outcome. Attainment of such levels should allow the client to move on to a new stage of support within the project, targeting a higher level of employability outcomes, or to his or her next destination outside the project. For example, people who made substantial progress in terms of personal development and basic skills should be able to progress to a higher level of skills and aptitudes (represented by Core Skills etc) and become “labour market ready” or “New Deal ready”.

Some of the soft outcomes are particularly relevant or apply specifically to certain client groups. In the case of clients with substance misuse problems there are some **group-specific outcomes**, which are desirable and will assist the individual in moving on in terms of employability. These are likely to include:

- Gradual reduction in drug use
- Improved physical and psychological health
- Improved personal and family relationships
- Reduction in impact of negative peer pressure

Evaluation Guide 9: Evaluating employability programmes

TOOLS FOR MEASURING OUTCOMES AND DISTANCED TRAVELLED

In order to measure (or otherwise assess) an outcome and the overall distance travelled by clients towards the labour market and employment, we need to:

- define appropriate **indicators and outcomes**; and
- **obtain and analyse data** measuring the value of these indicators at different stages of the intervention.

As stated earlier, in the case of **hard outcomes and indicators** it is easy to do so by using quantitative information on jobs, qualifications, and training / further education places. A major concern among staff about **soft outcomes and indicators** is that many are difficult, if not impossible, to measure, as they are often not quantifiable. Soft outcomes are largely intangible and they cannot be measured with the same ease as numbers of jobs and qualifications.

Tools for measuring soft outcomes, therefore, are not standardised and vary considerably from project to project. There is a substantial number of tools which can be used by employability programmes or projects either as already developed or after adaptation to suit the particular requirements of projects. For example, the Rickter Scale has been used by projects supported by the New Futures Fund (see EIU Evaluation Guide 7).

Such tools have been presented systematically in a digest prepared for the Scottish Executive by the University of Strathclyde (see *Further Resources*, below) and some examples are summarised in the table below. Many of these tools are “assessment” tools whilst others cover both “assessment” and “development”. Some are comprehensive frameworks whilst others cover only particular aspects of employability. Most of them have features that can be used, with or without further adaptation, for the evaluation of employability outcomes.

Examples of tools with features suitable for measuring employability outcomes		
Type of outcome	Tool	Features
Basic Skills	Wordpower & Numberpower <i>Further information:</i> enquirv@city-and-guilds.co.uk	Two complementary tools to assess ability level, and enhance basic skills development, and measure progress in basic literacy and basic numerical skills (every day application of numbers including money and time). Three different levels are available.
	BeST (2) <i>Further information:</i> be-consult@btinternet.com	Screening toolkit for Assessing basic skills, i.e. reading, writing, speaking English, numbers. Designed to test people using the Basic Skills Standards as exemplified in Wordpower and Numberpower. (Interactive multi media CD ROM).
Personal Development and Social Competence	The Rickter Scale (3) <i>Further information:</i> rickter@blakestevenson.demon.co.uk	A non-paper based assessment and evaluation tool (a colourful plastic board) that allows clients to explore their circumstances, identify priority areas for support and assess progress across time. Aspects covered include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life Board • Personal Social Development • Drug/Alcohol Issues • Preparation for Work
	Social Skills Training <i>Further information:</i> edu&hsc@nfer-nelson.co.uk	Assesses social competence and helps develop intervention programmes to raise levels of interpersonal skills for young people.
Multi-faceted Frameworks	Bridges to Progress <i>Further information:</i> bridgesproject@compuserve.com	A model for measuring individual progress towards self-reliance and employability, focused on soft measurement and on progress, not deficit. Aspects covered include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for self-reliance • Indicators of vulnerability
	The Connexions Framework <i>Further information:</i> dfes@prologistics.co.uk	A framework for coordinating a range of assessment information on a client, covering a comprehensive range of factors, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life, Basic and Key skills • Emotional well-being; Physical health • Income; Housing • Identity and self-image; Attitudes and motivation

For information on other tools see the Digest, under **Further Resources at the end of this Guide**

PROCESS EVALUATION

It is often not sufficient to evaluate the outcomes of a programme. **Process evaluation is also important.** It seeks to find out **how** an intervention works and **why** something worked well. The definition of 'process evaluation' and techniques commonly used for evaluating these aspects are discussed in EIU Evaluation Guides 1 and 2. This part of the evaluation should cover aspects such as:

- Publicity, promotion, client recruitment (did we get the right clients?)
- Project activities and method of support, including client-centred action plans (did we address their main needs and did we help them acquire/develop skills and aptitudes suitable for moving on towards employment?)
- Project management and resources (did the project have sufficient and appropriate financial and human resources and systems?)

USING FINDINGS / DRAWING LESSONS

In general terms, the evaluation of a programme should be able to establish **the extent to which its objectives have been achieved** (and the reasons that contributed to success or otherwise). Once the **outcomes** of the employability project have been identified, the evaluation should attempt to interpret these findings, by looking at the **process evaluation** and other **contextual factors**. Key issues to consider in interpreting findings, include:

- To arrive at **project-wide** (and **programme-wide**) outcome measures it is essential to **aggregate** (present data as totals) and analyse information collected on the progress achieved / distance travelled by individual clients. In the case of soft indicators, projects should define **common milestones** for all their clients along their pathway to employment.
- The **sustainability** of the outcomes should be taken into account in drawing conclusions. Evidence of sustainability could take the form of clients staying in education or volunteering, or moving on to harder outcomes, such as obtaining qualifications or getting a job.
- It is important to look beyond the project or intervention itself, to form a view as to the **extent to which the outcomes are a direct result of the intervention**. The following could be useful (1) make a **comparative analysis** of its outcomes with those of other similar interventions (2) compare its outcomes with a **control group** of people similar to the clients of the project, who did not receive employability support; (3) take account of **contextual factors**, such as changes in the local employment situation and the skills and aptitudes required by employers.

SUMMARY

- Evaluations of employability programmes or projects examine the extent to which their clients have progressed ("distance travelled") towards greater employability, and ultimately employment.
- There are core outcomes and indicators which are commonly used in evaluating employability projects. Many of these are "soft" outcomes, such as improved motivation/confidence.
- There are a number of tools that can be used, with or without adaptation, for measuring soft outcomes.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Centre for Guidance, Careers and Personal and Social Development, University of Strathclyde (2001), [Identifying Learning and Support Needs: a digest of assessment tools](#), prepared for the Scottish Executive (Beattie: Implementing Inclusiveness)
- Dewson S, Eccles J, Tackey N D, Jackson A (2000) [Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: A Review of Current Practice](#), Research Report RR219 DfEE
- Effective Interventions Unit, Scottish Executive (2001) [Moving On: Education, training and employment for recovering drug users](#)