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TOWARDS EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE SYSTEMS AND SERVICES (VOL. I)

CEDEFOP

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Foreword

Cedefop has played an important role in supporting policy cooperation in the field of lifelong guidance during the last two decades. The first EU common reference tools were published by Cedefop (Cedefop, 2005); these resulted from the work of the expert reference group in lifelong guidance, set up by the European Commission in 2002. The tools emphasised a need for regular monitoring and assessment of the quality of interventions in career guidance with reference to their outcomes. The working group planted the seed for the establishment of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), composed of MS official representatives with whom Cedefop cooperated closely. The ELGPN developed an important discussion over its period of activity (2009-15) on the issues of quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation of guidance services in employment, training, and education. This work contributed to the development of monitoring and evaluation approaches in Europe. However, approaches are still short of providing clear methodological indications on the implementation of the suggested indicators and the reality and context of current monitoring and evaluation practices.

This first volume is framed within a larger project that looks into individual support to careers and learning to shed light on the efficacy of current upskilling, reskilling and activation measures by examining career development and guidance systems and services for adults. It aims to explore the potential for an integrated vision of the results of guidance interventions. The volume is the result of a call for papers in which experts in the field were asked to provide insights and critical reviews on the current position, with a focus on the methodological options available for monitoring and evaluation in adult career guidance and career development services. The papers offer a vision for the way forward and provide various proposals at different levels of the system.

This volume presents valuable material in deepening our understanding of the feasibility for establishing minimum standards for comparable monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling services for adults in Europe from a lifelong perspective. It takes a first step in that direction, to be followed up in Volume II.

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Introduction

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1.1. Perspectives on monitoring and evaluating career guidance services

The importance of career guidance and counselling is increasingly emphasised in EU and national skills strategies and policies, along with discussions on better coordinated policy and authentic collaboration. This underlines the relevance of national and regional capacitation in individual career development support at every level. Lifelong guidance is at the heart of career development services, tools, and measures, even if its scope is typically more defined using policy devices such as quality standards for services, for practitioners, and across systems. All these provisions and resources are ultimately directed to guidance users. The 2020 European skills agenda acknowledges the need to support all individuals in their lifelong learning pathways and stresses the importance of career guidance in three of its actions: EU support for strategic national upskilling actions; the initiatives on individual learning accounts (ILA); and the initiative on microcredentials (European Commission, 2020). These have implications at the level of the lifelong guidance systems themselves, and their development, shifting focus on quality and effectiveness according to the particular expectations and aims of the career development measures and services within and across each context.

The 2008 Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies defined guidance in broad terms as 'a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used' (Council of the European Union, 2008). Generally, career guidance involves activities and processes such as information-giving, career counselling, competence and skills assessments, screening and referrals, advice and support, and capacity building (learning) to enable informed decision-making and the development of career management skills and competences. Informed by years of international and European policy and research cooperation, including the efforts of Cedefop, this has paved the way for the further development of lifelong guidance systems and services in Member States, and shaped experiences of guidance users in a new direction. Development of quality assurance mechanisms and approaches in guidance provision, is one of the four priority areas in the resolution.

Both monitoring and evaluation, as two separate but interrelated system features, are considered crucial aspects of assuring the quality of services and programmes offered, but they remain areas for development in EU countries. This does not mean, though, that countries or specific guidance services or providers do not have monitoring systems or data collection routines in place, whether internal or external.

There are diverse methodologies used and data collected across sectors and at different levels in career guidance services and settings. However, as Barnes et al. (2020) indicated in their review of policies in the EU, there is a lack of standardised and/or coordinated monitoring and systematic evaluations of guidance activities in most Member States. Information on whether systematic and established cooperation mechanisms support the development of monitoring systems is lacking. In particular, according to our sources, the outcomes and impacts of career guidance and counselling in Europe are seldom monitored and evaluated, and there is lack of agreement on what are relevant results of the interventions, ranging from variations in employment status or in qualifications earned, career learning outcomes, wellbeing, career progression or satisfaction levels, or a combination of all. In the context of methodological challenges in importing evidence-based practice to career development, Robertson (2021) categorises relevant types of outcomes: economic, educational, psychological and social. Empirical research rarely considers longer term outcomes or economic benefits (Percy and Dodd, 2020). Studies using counterfactual quantitative evidence in findings from large data sets are scarce. Challenges also arise when complementarity with other measures aiming at skills development and employability are not considered.

There is a scattered picture, with data being collected at different levels but not brought together. There are new ways of coordinating evidence gathering to support needed policy development on cooperation among service providers across sectors, potentially with a new division of labour (Vuorinen and Kettunen, in this collection). Although the purposes are not always clear from available information, there is evidence that some data are used for accountability purposes, short-term user feedback, tracking client progress, improving services or delivery, designing policies, improving training for career practitioners, measuring effectiveness of interventions, or improving career guidance tools. There are indications, however, that some potentially useful data as well as innovative methodologies are not being used in a systematic way for continuous monitoring of meaningful changes. Outside of Europe, a situation in Canada led to the development of new systems to support evidence-based career services that engender a transformed culture of evaluation and accountability, stimulate innovation in service delivery, and focus on priority client outcomes (CCDF, 2021).

There is also little evidence that this landscape of data and monitoring and evaluation is feeding into national or regional strategies, or a systemic perspective that can provide indicators or standards for building an evidence base for assessing the effectiveness and impact of lifelong career guidance systems. There is a need to bridge methodologies for standards-setting and large-scale outcome-based evaluations with the realities within which career professionals work and design their interventions for expected effects.

Similarly, we need to gather further evidence on how the data collected through monitoring and evaluation can be appropriately used to support professionalism of career guidance practitioners, especially as it is difficult to compare services within and across countries when initial training, qualifications and continuing professional development, and system development, vary considerably. Developing minimum common quality assurance standards, linked to sets of meaningful indicators and measures across services with their respective user groups, may be hindered. Current practices for evaluating labour market policies also tend to differentiate weakly lifelong career guidance services and measures, preventing understanding of the level of expenditure allocated to them and their relative results on the benefits for individuals and society. The aims of career guidance are often not clear or considered, complicated by the fact that not all clients complete their intended plan or course of action arising from interventions. This makes it difficult to compare outcomes or draw conclusions, or to achieve an informed, integrated vision of results of individual-based career support along the life path.

There are plenty of obstacles to, or arguments against, arriving at common standards, indicators, or measures within lifelong guidance in one sector, country or across Europe. Experts and providers in Canada who recently implemented a new monitoring tool noted that career support staff questioned the validity of tools that do not take into account lack of self-awareness as a key developmental barrier for their clients (CCDF, 2021). Critical reviews discuss various risks, such as predefined, externally developed models and measures of quality that are detached from the career guidance and counselling professional practice (Nilsson and Hertzberg, 2022). However, there is evidence in Europe and internationally that indicates the time has come to examine these issues more closely. Due to decades of development, cooperation, and research, particularly in the context of research in lifelong learning and VET, and policies connecting the different stages and settings for learning, there is growing similarities among the diverse system features. There are some discernible patterns in how monitoring and evaluation have been carried out, even accepting diverging practices within and across sectors and within and across countries. Cooperation has improved our understanding as to how these systems work and plausibly, according to the papers in this study, how to make effective progress on both monitoring and techniques for carefully evaluating the potential outcomes of career guidance processes and the role of the systems for beneficiaries and for institutions, the labour market and society. The involvement of key actors from different policy fields is part of this picture, as well as practitioners themselves, who are positioned to share inputs derived from the internal perspective of responsible professionals.

If we aim to reach a consensus within the EU regarding minimum shared quality standards, evaluation methodologies, data collection methods, quantitative measures – or a combination of all – this may be challenging. And yet there might be ways of agreeing on appropriate monitoring methodologies suited to the field, the guidance profession, and working at different levels (e.g. service level, provider level, public policy level), and on the optimal methods for evaluation systems that capture effectiveness of an intervention and the beneficial impacts for users, and continuous system refinement. Practices can be collected on how different methods can be combined in a complementary manner. Focusing on which approaches or indicators are shared or not among countries at present may prompt and stimulate reflection, learning and development among designers and stakeholders and trigger innovative practices.

The foundation of sustainable approaches to monitoring and evaluation for career guidance, especially at higher national or central levels, may rest in the articulation of a vision for the guidance system and services, and an understanding of what career guidance should entail in each context. Among other things, account should be taken of intervention theories (Bielecki et al., in this collection). This implies multiple steps, involving diverse stakeholders, including at service level and practitioners, or revisiting prior work and structures, to align the eventual standards, indicators or measures selected with the desired outcomes and outputs according to what the systems are expected to provide for the public. Further, these approaches and strategies will always need adjusting in response to monitoring of the evidence and results.

This volume is framed within a larger project launched by Cedefop in 2019 to explore methodologies for monitoring and evaluation in career guidance, with particular focus on career guidance support to adults for careers and learning. The project seeks to explore these practices using a bird's eye view to accumulate knowledge and contribute to the evidence base for improving career guidance policy and practice, and to gain better understanding of existing monitoring systems and approaches in Europe. Although the expert papers are independent contributions to the wider discussions in the field, the content of this volume will feed into the larger study, which sets out initial questions:

(a) what is the current status of monitoring and evaluation in career guidance and counselling services in the EU?
(b) how do the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance services assist the Member States in achieving an integrated vision of results of individual-based career support along the lifepath?
(c) what are the methodological options available to achieve a feasible minimum standard for comparable monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling services for adults from a lifelong perspective?

Experts in this volume were invited to provide insights on the current position in the field, with a focus on the methodological options available for monitoring and evaluating adult career guidance and career development services. More specifically, the call for papers intended to elicit a focus on two questions: the current state of play in monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling systems and services in the EU; and proposals for how to improve existing methodological approaches. This work intends to contribute knowledge for the development of potential elements for a methodological framework proposed in the next volume, containing the final outcomes of the study.

1.2. The contributions in this volume

Six papers are presented in this volume after a call for papers was launched on the topic in January 2021. The papers were reviewed by a panel of three experts, together with Cedefop. The volume is organised into six chapters and a short conclusion drawing out the main lessons across the contributions.

The paper *Exploring the potential of a systemic approach for monitoring and evaluating career guidance systems and services* by Raimo Vuorinen and Jaana Kettunen (Chapter 2), presents the networked guidance service provision (NEGSEP) model. The systemic overarching model focuses separately on three levels of developmental needs: of guidance services visible to clients; service delivery in organisations; and the strategic dimensions relevant to policy-makers. The paper discusses and reflects on the potential of the model for evaluating career guidance systems and services from a lifelong learning perspective, across sectors, and how this monitoring can be implemented. While the model was developed in the context of the Finnish education and labour market system, drawing on years of research, the contribution examines how it can be applied in a wider European context, particularly in the shift toward networked services. The model highlights the interconnectivity of national guidance polices, the service providers and end-users in accordance with underlying principles for lifelong guidance endorsed by the EGLPN (ELGPN, 2015). It introduces a model for the emergence of systemic evaluation and monitoring processes.

Jerzy Bielecki, Tomasz Płachecki and Jędrzej Stasiowski (Chapter 3) show how a theory-based approach could be applied to the systemic evaluation of career counselling services in Poland, and potentially be transferred and adapted to other national contexts. In their paper *Towards a general framework of evaluation of career counselling services: the Polish case* they set out to establish a theoretical model of intervention, with identification of causal links and related assumptions. This can support formulation of evaluation questions and possible hypotheses based on the stated assumptions at each; it informs the selection of data sources and methods and analysis. They present a scheme allowing for the formulation of premises for achieving the assumed short- and long-term career counselling service goals. In turn, the list of assumptions is the basis for formulating universal research questions that will allow for an accurate and reliable evaluation of career counselling provided in various contexts within one interlinked system. The scheme also allows for analysis of the obstacles to coordination and cooperation.

The paper by Petra Elftorp and Mary Stokes (Chapter 4), *Lessons from person-centred adult educational guidance services in Ireland,* offers insights from the current state of play in Ireland for potential improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of adult guidance counselling services. It draws on a combination of policy and research findings from a range of sources. The authors argue that outcome measurements must account for the complexity and contextual nature of career development and lifelong learning, by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data and maintaining a client-oriented focus. This contemporaneous reflection on guidance service practice and developments, strategic planning and the guidance needs of clients provides a unique insight into the development of a national guidance service targeted at the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised community members. The data gathered reflect the impact of economic changes in Ireland on the guidance services themselves and the education, careers, and livelihoods of those clients who did not or could not follow the road of school-to-college-to-work in Ireland. A collaborative and inclusive approach to the development of these systems is also advocated, as it can lead to an efficient system which supports the day-to-day delivery of the guidance services, while simultaneously building up an evidence base for future analysis and to feed into policy.

Peter Weber's contribution (Chapter 5), *Monitoring and evaluating the German lifelong guidance programme: a proposal in the context of the professionalisation of guidance counsellors,* presents the current evaluation and monitoring strategy for the lifelong guidance continuing professional development programme within the German Federal Employment Agency (FEA, Bundesagentur für Arbeit). The paper describes the recently developed strategy within the FEA programme that aims at improving the quality and professionalism of counselling and the effects of counselling interventions on guidance users. A new approach to evaluating the outputs and outcomes of the training programme is developed to complement the existing monitoring system. The evaluation was designed in 2021 and implemented in subsequent years. It proposes three levels of research related to a newly introduced certificate programme for employed practitioners, including effects of the practitioners' acquisition of the qualification on the counsellor (e.g. competences, professional growth), on their counselling practices and results for clients (individual outcomes).

The contribution by Helena Kasurinen and Mika Launikari (Chapter 6), *Towards more effective career guidance processes: the CREAR digital tool improving client-oriented interventions,* outlines the core elements of the newly developed digital service need indicator called CREAR (career, resilience, education/employment, agency, readiness) and how it contributes to assessing adults' life situations holistically in Finland. The study focuses on adults with upskilling/reskilling needs who participate in guidance and counselling interventions in order to access further learning opportunities. It shows what a comprehensive, universally applicable and 'context-free' career guidance process entails and examines the location of critical points in terms of evaluating the quality and the impact of the service delivery. Their findings from a qualitative study conducted in Finland reveal that after each phase of the guidance process there should be feedback and 'feed forward' discussions, where the guidance counsellor and the client together assess the progress of the process. This intervention assists in client-counsellor negotiation, whether they are proceeding towards objectives or agreeing on redefinition of goals.

Chris Percy and Deirdre Hughes (Chapter 7) *Lifelong guidance and welfare to work in Wales: linked return on investment methodology* make the case for a particular approach to return on investment (ROI) analysis, 'linked ROI'. Linked ROI is designed for circumstances when a quantified, monetised understanding of the costs and benefits of a programme is required but a large-scale, long-term programmatic randomised control trial (RCT) or similar research exercise is not feasible, due to cost, complexity, and/ or ethical considerations. The particular added value of the study is in the explicit outlining of the methodological innovation directly applied to career development results analysis, its development in light of previous research, and involvement of stakeholders in the study. The ROI analysis is situated within the context of a new and evolving 5-year careers strategy (2021-26) in UK-Wales for supporting unemployed adults' return to work. The ROI estimate draws on internal monitoring and budget data, internal interviews, and a randomised control trial (RCT) from the United States, being the most comparable programme identified.

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Chapter 2.
Exploring the potential of a systemic approach for monitoring and evaluating career guidance systems and services

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2.1. Introduction

According to a recent study on the lifelong guidance trends and challenges in the European Union (Barnes et al., 2020), in most countries there is a need to improve the monitoring of the inputs, outcomes and impact of lifelong guidance. The Member States vary widely in how lifelong guidance is organised, coordinated, funded, delivered and structured. In most cases, services are delivered through a range of education and training institutions, public and private employment services, and specialist providers and social partners. This leads to the situation where there are tensions between different stakeholder groups (including clients/customers, managers, policy-makers/funders, researchers) as they are interested in different types of outcome (immediate, intermediate and longer-term outcomes).

International reviews of career guidance policy (e.g. Barnes et al., 2020; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2014) have observed that policy-makers expect career guidance to focus on the individuals' goals while also contributing to wider public policy objectives. In order to assess and measure the effectiveness of guidance, it is crucial to understand and take account of the complex inter-relationships and variables that exist. It is also necessary to identify different types and levels of impact.

International reviews (e.g. Barnes et al., 2020; OECD, 2004) commonly distinguish educational, economic and employment as well as social outcomes of guidance services. In developing a coherent evidence base, it is necessary to identify the possible beneficiaries of guidance such as individuals, organisations, communities, countries, and the European Union (EU) (Borbély-Pecze and Watts, 2011; Hooley, 2104). Career guidance plays a vital role in supporting individuals during different transition phases and contributes to the implementation of a flexible education and training system. Within education systems, career guidance plays a central role in supporting lifelong learning (for both the young and adults) and the development of human resources to support national and individual economic growth. Career guidance supports individuals in different transition phases in the labour market, helping them to make effective use of their skills and to remain resilient in the face of change (Hooley, 2014). From a wider social perspective career guidance is seen as contributing to equity goals and greater social inclusion (OECD, 2004). On the one hand, career guidance can be described as an individual right that guarantees access to a good life. On the other hand, it can be viewed as soft policy instrument and as a mechanism for the wider transformation of society as a whole. The outcomes and impacts of lifelong guidance need to be registered on all these levels.

According to Barnes and colleagues (2020), in some countries and contexts, guidance services are becoming more coherent and coordinated. As no single service provider or sector alone can respond to the increased demand for guidance, the development of guidance services now requires a shift towards joint development and learning with other sectors. This implies that, in meeting individual needs, career guidance transcends previous traditional expert services and transforms into transdisciplinary collaboration to established networks with dynamic combination of independent and communal ways of working (Kettunen and Felt, 2020). In order to eliminate overlapping duties and to reduce unnecessary competition over clients and resources, the cooperation between career services needs to be expanded from cooperation to jointly agreed division of labour among the different service providers in education, employment, youth and social sectors. Different professionals from various sectors need to collaborate in a way which produces not only new and preferably more effective practices but also new kinds of understanding and common conceptual tools. This implies new ways of gathering together the existing resources and subsequent evidence to support and reflect the system and policy development.

The new evidence base should illustrate the actions taken by the different level actors, as well as client development in active transitions. At the same time, full stakeholder engagement is fundamental to achieving consistent political support and wide participation, in establishing a systemic view for coherent guidance services and subsequent mechanisms of exchange on system enhancement. Systemic approaches for evaluating career guidance systems and services are rare, partly because of inadequate resources for the complexity of the task or inconsistent use of the evidence that does exist (Barnes et al., 2020; Sampson, 2015). Certain guidance activities might not be monitored, because they are not differentiated or there is no agreement what constitutes an intervention to be monitored or what is a relevant outcome (ILO and ETF, 2021). There is an apparent gap that this paper aims to narrow.

2.2. Networked guidance services model evolution

As in many Member States, in Finland career guidance is distributed across educational, labour market, social and health provision, under different ministries and other jurisdictions (schools, tertiary education, public employment services, social partners, the voluntary sector, the private sector, different projects). The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the organisation and funding of guidance and counselling services in comprehensive and upper secondary schools and in higher education. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for establishing political guidelines and strategic goals for the national labour market policy. Guidance and counselling services provided by the Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE Offices) complement school-based services as they are mainly targeted at clients outside of education and training institutions (Toni and Vuorinen, 2020).

As citizens progress in constructing their life or career, they may look for services from several professional groups or service providers. As individuals and communities differ in their capacities to source information on learning and work opportunities or manage their life path, it is necessary to provide external and customised services to meet individual needs. These activities may be part of outreach and/or specialised training programmes or other forms of support to learning and work. There is, accordingly, a need to develop consistent networked lifelong guidance services in order to assure quality, guarantee access and social equity in accordance with local cultural, economic and social contexts (Nykänen; Saukkonen and Vuorinen, 2012).

In the early 2000's all guidance service providers in Finland started to face demand, while also having to deal with the need to make savings. In order to avoid overlapping services, and to improve the efficiency of existing resources, a new trend emerged towards cross-sectoral networks in guidance services (Nykänen et al., 2012) and flexible development of the totality of guidance services and resources (Spangar; Arnkil and Vuorinen, 2008).

As an outcome of increased policy interest in lifelong guidance, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and employment launched, during 2004-10, extensive national research and development projects on guidance and career education within comprehensive and upper secondary level education, as well as for adult guidance services. The overall aim in the national projects was to develop a new understanding of cooperation within the planning and delivery, contents and methods as well as the implementation of networked guidance services. During the implementation of the projects, collaborative and dialogical creation of knowledge, inclusive collaboration and emergent development of a new type of leadership and management in networks were identified as key features in a well-functioning national lifelong guidance system (Nykänen, 2011).

The implementation of the national projects was supported with a research project which was a combination of staff development and qualitative evaluation, underpinned by an action research approach (e.g. Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000; Senge et al., 2000). The aim was to widen understanding the need for transformation of career guidance services and career education within comprehensive and upper-level secondary education, as well as among the various regional adult guidance service providers. The research focused especially on emerging issues within multi-professional and cross-sectoral cooperation in service delivery. Within the research project, data were collected from five regional guidance networks in nine focus group interviews (Nykänen, 2010). A total of 61 guidance actors participated in the interviews. They represented administration, leadership and management of services and guidance practitioners. The main research questions in the study were:

(a) what regional challenges does the guidance provision network respond to?
(b) what kind of perceptions and concepts of the network do regional actors have?

One outcome of the study was a model for the design and evaluation of cross-sectoral lifelong guidance networks. This networked guidance service provision (NEGSEP) model (Nykänen et al., 2011) presents guidance as a complex process with multiple parallel transformations. Spangar, Arnkil and Vuorinen (2008) note that the overall impact of career services includes impact for individual clients, the systemic impact, and short-term and long-term impact. Short-term impact could include, for example, milestones in personal agency or life management and long- term impact could include further placements in education or in workplaces. It is also necessary to distinguish the collected data as such, the data which are used in the monitoring process and the different joint forums where the monitoring process is discussed.

If the rationale for system evaluation is only to improve the coordination of the services without improved cooperation among the services, the evaluation focuses mainly only on monitoring the implementation of supplier-driven guidance interventions among clients. Based on this kind of data it is possible to compile descriptive reports on the completed actions but not so much on the efficiency of cross-sectoral service delivery.

If the system evaluation aims to act as a catalyst for wider transformation of the services and for more flexible use and effective development of regional jointly available resources, the evaluation process should emphasise the transversal nature of career guidance and its role in bringing together the different sectors responsible for career services. Subsequently, the focus expands beyond one single sector as service provider and career guidance has a more strategic position in responding to challenges in education, employment and social policies. This implies that more attention needs to be paid to the cooperation mechanisms among regional service providers and also between government sectors responsible for career guidance services (Spangar; Arnkil and Vuorinen, 2008).

Table 1. **Two options for evaluation of cross-sectoral guidance services**

	Services for clients	Regional jointly available resources	National guidance policies
Better coordination of the services	Clarification and coordination of gross-resources in client services, division of labour between different service providers	More structured regional cross-sectoral networks and more coordinated cooperation	Better coordination of national cross-sectoral guidance policy development.
Flexible development of the total resources available	Search for synergy in multi-professional networks in the service delivery	Cross-sectoral development of regional entities in the service delivery	Joint development of guidance policies and decision-making

Source: Spangar; Arnkil and Vuorinen, 2008.

In mapping the total resources available, the focus expands to the guidance process for individual clients, regional resources for service provision and national policies for lifelong guidance. This implies that lifelong guidance needs to be defined and examined in three dimensions: as a policy, as an activity of individual organisations or networked services (sometimes in collaborative contracts between the public administration and the private and voluntary sectors), and as an individual interactive process with clients or groups.

Similarly, the NEGSEP model focuses on three levels of guidance services at the same time, beginning with the frontline multi-channelled contact services and moving upwards to the national policy level: guidance services visible to clients; guidance provision within organisations; and guidance policies, including the strategic design of guidance systems and services. The model is developed in the Finnish education and labour market systems context but, as a manual for national system design and evaluation, it is applicable in other contexts (Nykänen et al., 2010). If appropriate, the following three independent subsections of the model can be used independently.

Guidance services visible to clients include those delivered through interaction of multi-professional actors in meeting the needs of individuals in their various stages of learning and career paths. In the model, at this level of the guidance system, the evaluation covers the division of labour, content, and methodological dimensions of guidance.

Guidance services in organisations refers to planning, coordination, and collaboration, which are carried out in organisations providing services in cross-sectoral networks. These services are part of the region's education, youth, welfare, employment and economic policy. At this level, the evaluation focuses on four dimensions of guidance: the contexts, the service providers, their responsibilities, and the division of labour between the service providers.

The evaluation on the level of national lifelong guidance policies focuses on the mechanisms of how the evidence collected at the other two levels is used in policy-making and in establishing preconditions for service delivery. This level also includes mechanisms that are used to reconstruct the services and policies in accordance with evidence generated through the feedback loops from the other two levels. It is necessary to distinguish guidance policy development that takes place at national, regional and organisational levels. McCarthy and Borbely-Pécze (2021) distinguish regulations, economic incentives and information as policy instruments which can be used for CGC policy implementation. Regulation includes directives, guidelines, norms, rules and procedures which support guidance provision to citizens. Economic incentives refer to resources provided by national or international donors to enable the application of the regulations. Information refers to media used by governments to communicate policy messages for stakeholders, providers and citizens.

As an outcome of the research, the NEGSEP model made more transparent and visible the premises, principles, impressions, and attitudes concerning lifelong guidance system and policy development needed in monitoring and evaluation, in addition to the background theories, values, and practices of guidance. For example, how are evaluation and monitoring data taken into consideration and how they are used in re-envisioning activities, decision-making and continuous development of the services? Second, how is career guidance evaluated and monitored as part of educational, employment, welfare, and economic policies nationally and regionally? Third, which service providers and stakeholders are involved in generating and processing the data needed for the evaluation and monitoring? Fourth, how can different service providers and user groups be engaged in creating vision, strategies and action plans to improve career guidance services. Hence, guidance services are evaluated and developed with a systemic approach as a whole including the structures, processes, functionality, and responsibilities of the entire national guidance services.

One of the aims of the NEGSEP model was to deepen the interface between sectors responsible for guidance services and shift the focus from retrospective evaluation of the services into lifelong guidance policy development and implementation. Also, the ELGPN encouraged countries to apply cyclical policy development processes to get best use of evidence available and to ensure that the evidence base continues to grow and to support continuous improvement of the services. The cyclical features in the NEGSEP model are presented with a consistent set of questions in different sections of the model in accordance with a four-step strategic learning loop: analysing and evaluating the current status of activities; setting the visions, strategies and development needs for guidance service provision; supporting communications and commitment; and ensuring activity and continuous learning (Senge et al., 2000). Table 2 distinguishes the proposed common transversal targets for evaluation at the three different levels and also the stages for the evaluation cycles as phases for strategic development of the services.

Table 2. **Summary of the evaluation targets and phases of strategic improvement of the services at three system levels**

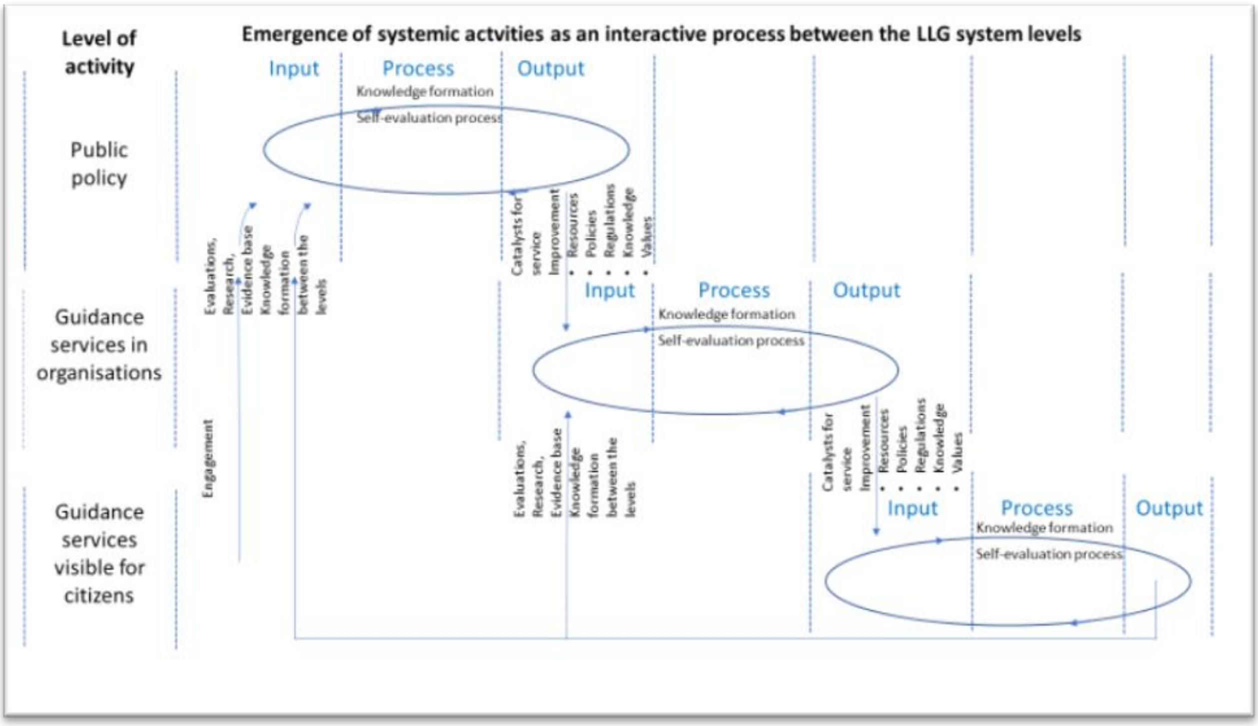
Level of activity	Targets for evaluation and monitoring	Stages of the evaluation cycle	Examples of expected outcomes (e.g. Hooley, 2014)
National lifelong guidance policies			
1.1 National guidance policies	Connections between guidance policy and national-level educational, welfare, employment and economic policies	1.1.1 Evaluation of national guidance policy 1.1.2 Visions, strategies and developmental goals of national guidance policy 1.1.3 Communication and commitment of national guidance policy 1.1.4 Construction of national guidance policy and continuous improvement	Sustainable economic growth Deficit reduction Reduced benefit costs Improved health More flexible labour market Better skills match Increased labour market participation Reduced unemployment
1.2 Regional cross-sectoral guidance policies	Connections between guidance policy and regional educational, welfare, employment and economic strategies	1.2.1 Evaluation of regional guidance policy 1.2.2 Visions, strategies and developmental goals of regional guidance policy 1.2.3 Communication and commitment of regional guidance policy 1.2.4 Construction of regional guidance policy and continuous improvement	
1.3 Guidance policy at institutional level	Education, welfare, employment and economic policy principles of organisations	1.3.1 Evaluation of policy for guidance provision in the organisation 1.3.2 Visions, strategies and development goals of policy for guidance provision in the organisation 1.3.3 Communication and commitment of policy for guidance provision in the organisation 1.3.4 Construction of policy for guidance provision in the organisation and continuous improvement	

Level of activity	Targets for evaluation and monitoring	Stages of the evaluation cycle	Examples of expected outcomes (e.g. Hooley, 2014)
Guidance services in organisations			
2.1 Multi-administrative inter-organisational regional networks and cooperation	Cooperation among regional guidance services	2.1.1 Evaluation of inter-organisational regional multi-administrative cooperation 2.1.2 Action plan for inter-organisational regional multi-administrative guidance services 2.1.3 Communication and commitment for inter-organisational regional multi-administrative guidance services 2.1.4 Inter-organisational regional multi-administrative guidance cooperation and continuous improvement	Wider access to career services Users are better informed of the content of the service provisions Meeting better the needs of different user groups More flexible transitions of users More permeable service processes Cost-effectiveness of the service delivery
2.2 Guidance in organisations	Guidance in education- and employment- and economy-related organisations, in other organisations and enterprises	2.2.1 Evaluation of cooperation in guidance provision in the organisation 2.2.2 Operative plan for guidance provision in the organisation 2.2.3 Communication and commitment of the implementation of the organisation's operative guidance plan 2.2.4 Cooperation in guidance and continuous improvement within the organisation	
Guidance services visible to clients			
3.1 Services visible to the client in organisations both on-site and online services	Services visible to the client in all organisations providing guidance, such as schools, colleges, PES, cross-sectoral one-stop-centres, services provided by other organisations and enterprises	3.1.1 Evaluation of guidance services in the organisation 3.1.2 Communication and commitment of staff in guidance services in the organisation 3.1.3 Functionality of guidance services in the organisation and continuous improvement of service providers	Improved wellbeing, self-esteem, motivation Changes in personal life, employment, employment equivalency, training, education Changes in intrapersonal variables, attitudes, self-esteem, motivation More sustainable employment Changes in the knowledge of the potential added value of career services.
3.2 Inter-organisational guidance services visible to clients		3.2.1 Evaluation of client guidance services through inter-organisational cooperation 3.2.2 Communication and commitment of staff in guidance services through inter-organisational cooperation 3.2.3 Functionality of guidance services through inter-organisational cooperation and continuous improvement	

Source: Authors.

Each of the three systemic levels of guidance includes impartial and authentic expertise, decision-making processes and activities which are specific for that level and independent from other levels (Rantamäki et al., 2010). All the activities in the three levels are interconnected with knowledge and resources (Figure 1). The decisions made at the policy level through input/process/output processes (see e.g. Redekopp, Bezanson and Dugas, 2015) act as inputs for the preconditions for the service delivery in different organisations. The data collected from clients during the guidance processes should inform both the design of services among the service providers and national policy-making. In order to have a consistent evidence base for policy-making it is necessary to carry out consistent self-evaluation of the organisations on each of the three system levels. It is necessary to agree on the main themes for evaluation and monitoring on each level and have an evaluation cycle which can be scaled for organisations of different sizes. A bottom-up/top-down information flow, joint construction of knowledge and a common understanding of leadership and management are crucial throughout the system (Nykänen, 2011).

Figure 1. **The emergence of systemic evaluation and monitoring processes**



Source: Authors.

Within the national development project on adult guidance in Finland in 2007, the NEGSEP model questions were further elaborated and compiled into an online learning environment (Rantamäki et al., 2010). The regional pilot project used the collected data for mutual learning and for identifying more detailed goals for their development projects, such as what kind of new leadership is needed for cross-sectoral guidance service provision. Later, the model was used for monitoring the evolution and strategic development of regional lifelong guidance forums in Finland 2014-18 (Kettunen and Vuorinen, 2018). In the first cycle, the forums identified common objectives for regional cooperation and existing regional service providers from different sectors. In the second phase, the forums created a vision of how to integrate lifelong guidance into their regional employment and education strategies. In the third phase, the participants analysed how to communicate the vision to key stakeholders and engage them in more sustainable cooperation. By 2021, there were 18 sustainable regional lifelong guidance forums in Finland.

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre applied this systemic model as a background framework in a national level evaluation of the study paths and counselling of people in the transition phase between basic and upper secondary level education in 2019-20 (Goman et al., 2020). The evaluation process explored the functionality of guidance and counselling towards further studies and career choices in basic education and the functionality of guidance in the introductory phase of studies in upper secondary education and transition-phase education. The NEGSEP model provided additional perspectives in evaluating the cooperation between education providers the different levels of education as well as with youth work and Employment and Economic Development Services (PES).

2.3. Applying the NEGSEP model in a European context

According to Barnes et al. (2020), due to the absence of standardised monitoring of inputs, processes and outcomes in most EU Member States, there is rarely a solid policy rationale for the sustainability and improvement of services. National accountability of services remains an equally fuzzy matter. Consequently, governments tend to support guidance services based on ideology or personal beliefs of government officials, not providing the basis for stable development. In many countries there is space for monitoring based on short term perceptions of services by clients but rarely on an understanding of the results of the process. There is a need to develop new methods for data collection to evidence the added value of lifelong guidance. The NEGSEP model is both an empirically and theoretically sound description of the transformative nature of networked guidance services in which construction of evidence related to key features of a guidance system (access, coverage of the services, competences of practitioners, cooperation between government sectors) is composed of bottom-up and top-down processes. It allows emergent, flexible and actor-driven innovations (Kettunen, 2021) among service providers in meeting the increased demand for guidance services.

The German BeQu Concept – a guiding framework for career guidance and counselling – has adopted a similar systemic approach in describing career guidance in a wider organisational and societal context. The BeQu Concept distinguishes monitoring and evaluation needs for the interaction between clients and practitioners, and to all actors responsible for guidance provision across society, including policy-makers and legislation (National Guidance Forum in Education, Career and Employment, 2016). The NEGSEP model was developed and applied in the Finnish context to support the implementation of the goals of national lifelong guidance strategies (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2011). Providing a more solid evidence base for lifelong guidance systems and policy development has remained a priority of the latest national strategy for lifelong guidance in Finland 2020-23 (Valtioneuvosto, 2020). The development of a systemic approach has been included as one option in developing a more sustainable national-level evidence base.

In developing a national framework for evaluation of lifelong guidance services in other European Union Member States, one option is to apply the ELGPN guidelines (2015) for lifelong guidance systems and policy development. These guidelines were developed through Member State collaboration and with the advice of the European Commission (DG EAC and DG EMPL) and its agencies Cedefop and the ETF, Policy Unit A of the European Parliament and other stakeholders. The guidelines respect the diversity of national policies and contexts for the development of the services as well as the autonomy of the member states in their systems and policy development.

The ELGPN guidelines include common reference points for self-review, self-improvement, for peer review or other external review. They distinguish transversal guidelines on issues that are common to lifelong guidance in the education and labour market sectors. More specific aspects cover policies for the provision of lifelong guidance to participants in the education and training sector, in employment and the third age sector, and for groups at risk. Each guideline has four parts: definition of the content, rationale, elements of good policies and systems, and additional resources for policy-makers (ELGPN, 2015).

The set of guidelines is not a systemic description of a national lifelong guidance system; it rather identifies dimensions of policy to be taken into account when deciding on lifelong guidance services and products in a variety of settings across education and employment sectors. One option to use the content of the guidelines with a systemic approach is to connect the elements of good policies and systems with operational principles which underpin the ELGPN guidelines at the three levels of a national guidance system. The guidelines present the following operational principles for lifelong guidance provision:

(a) citizen-centred, holistic and inclusive approach;
(b) ease and equity of access;
(c) stakeholder participation and openness;
(d) professionalisation of services and tools;
(e) integrated policy approach;
(f) efficiency and effectiveness;
(g) evidence-based practice and policy development.

The following table presents an option to establish a systemic evidence base for national guidance policy development. The underlying principles and rationale for evaluation have been derived from the ELGPN operational principles of lifelong guidance and the ELGPN quality assurance and evidence base (QAE) framework (ELGPN, 2016). The proposals for metacriteria for evaluations are elaborated from good practices identified in the ELGPN guidelines (2015). The good practices in policies and systems are based on a shared consensus of all members of ELGPN, both education and labour ministry representatives, and on the findings of international reviews and comparative studies undertaken by Cedefop, the ETF, the OECD and World Bank (ELGPN, 2015). In the table, the good practices are presented as metacriteria for quality and grouped in accordance with the underlying principles.

Table 3. **Establishing a systemic evidence base for national guidance systems and policy development**

Level of activity	Underlying principle and rationale for evaluation	Indicative proposal for metacriteria for evaluation
National lifelong guidance policies	Citizen-centred and holistic inclusive approach	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • equal access to guidance services for all citizen groups • strategic links of guidance to welfare policies • unobstructed access to services
	Access, equity and equality	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • sufficient level of investment for access, equity and equality • strengthening measures for access, equity and equality
	Stakeholder participation and openness	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • strengthening transparent and impartial policy development through communication, co-construction of knowledge and continuous improvement • collaborative innovation to address common challenges in different sectors at country level • open access and publicly available principles for guidance service delivery • common underlying principles for service improvement and quality assurance • sustainable cross-sectoral representative structures (forum) for practice and policy development • participation of users in planning and programming of service's activities and action plan
	Professionalisation of services and tools	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • a national framework of core competences for all career practitioners and specialised competences for career professionals working in different settings • recognised qualifications relevant to career sectors
	Integrated policy approach	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • strategic links with wider societal values and goals • strategic links with skills policies • strategic links with employment policies • strategic links with lifelong learning and upskilling • strategic links with innovation policies • strategic links to national e-governance and the use of technology in e-services • links to cross-sectoral lifelong guidance policy development • sustainable funding base

Level of activity	Underlying principle and rationale for evaluation	Indicative proposal for metacriteria for evaluation
	Efficiency and effectiveness	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • agile steering mechanisms that are adaptive to enable to respond to the rapidly changing situations • common principles for defining the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of lifelong guidance services • the level of services that meet appropriately the different levels of needs among different user groups • demonstration of added value and return of investments to government and taxpayers
	Evidence-based practice and policy development	The national, regional and organisational lifelong guidance policies ensure • sufficient level of investment for generating consistent evidence base • national coordination and support for local service providers • the use of technology in the design and evaluation of the services • common principles and criteria for comparable and consistent data collection among service providers • reliable tools for data collection and documentation of guidance services • that collected data are used as evidence for continuous improvement of the services and policies
Guidance services in organisations	Citizen-centred and holistic inclusive approach	National, regional and local guidance services • are available for all user groups • are produced unobstructed • are integrated in local education, employment, youth, social, health and rehabilitation services • are integrated in other e-services for citizens • include an up-to-date customer charter or entitlement statement
	Access, equity and equality	National, regional and local guidance services • consist of self-help services, brief staff-assisted services and individual case-managed services • are multi-channelled • are need based • include evaluation whether they meet the assessed needs and readiness of different user groups • are cost-effective and resource-effective • include options for appeal
	Stakeholder participation and openness	National, regional and local guidance services • apply joint principles and measures for quality assurance and quality development • are evaluated in jointly agreed cycles • engage users, stakeholders and relevant service providers in designing the service's activities and quality frameworks • integrate evaluation in continuous improvement of the services

Level of activity	Underlying principle and rationale for evaluation	Indicative proposal for metacriteria for evaluation
	Professionalisation of services and tools	National, regional and local guidance services • are provided by qualified and competent career practitioners • allocate sufficient resources for continuous professional development for career practitioners • cooperate and share good practices among colleagues
	Integrated policy approach	National, regional and local guidance services • are managed both in the organisation and in the interfaces between the organisations • are based on a joint contract on funding, responsibilities for services, and division of labour • are co-funded • jointly enhance employability, local community capacity building in accordance with jointly agreed principles and responsibilities • enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination of the guidance services in local networks • share labour market information and anticipation data • apply jointly agreed principles for evaluation of the efficacy, efficiency and impact of the services
	Efficiency and effectiveness	National, regional and local guidance services • take into account and apply jointly agreed principles for defining the efficacy, efficiency and impact of the guidance services • meet appropriately the different level of needs among different user groups • are adaptive to respond to emerging needs and the changing situations
	Evidence-based practice and policy development	National, regional and local guidance services • are based on consistent evidence • include reflective practice • are committed to document their daily work as evidence for local, regional and national practice and policy development • use evidence for better targeting and continuous improvement of the services
Guidance services visible to clients	Citizen-centred and holistic inclusive approach	National, regional and local guidance services • include description of the citizen entitlements for the guidance services • jointly agree with the users on the nature, phases, content and activities of the individual guidance process • include training for self-help and online tools and resources • are targeted, marketed and provided for all prospective user groups • include an up-to-date customer charter

Level of activity	Underlying principle and rationale for evaluation	Indicative proposal for metacriteria for evaluation
	Access, equity and equality	National, regional and local guidance services • take into account the readiness of different user groups in the use of self-help and online tools and resources • include self-help, brief staff-assisted and individual case-managed services in accordance to individual readiness and needs • signpost users to services which best meet their needs • are targeted, accessible and unobstructed
	Stakeholder participation and openness	National, regional and local guidance services • engage users in the design of the services and the quality framework for the services
	Professionalisation of services and tools	National, regional and local guidance services • are provided by career professionals who have core professional competences for guidance processes, interaction with users and organisation of guidance services • are based on cross-sectoral and multi-professional cooperation • share good practices among colleagues • allocate sufficient resources for continuous professional development for career practitioners
	Integrated policy approach	National, regional and local guidance services • are based on multi-professional teams and networks • include jointly agreed area and scope of guidance activities across sectors • are based on jointly agreed underlying principles across sectors which are engaged in the service delivery
	Efficiency and effectiveness	National, regional and local guidance services • consist of appropriate tools and resources for different user groups • ensure that the tools and resources are relevant and meet the needs of different user groups • ensure that the resources are sufficient in meeting the needs of the different user groups • agree on the key client outcomes in indicating the impact of the guidance services (e.g. perceived change in employability and career management skills, upskilling, job-searching skill and maintenance of employment).
	Evidence-based practice and policy development	National, regional and local guidance services • engage their staff members to document their activities as evidence for practice and policy development • use evidence for consistent service improvement

Source: Authors.

2.4. Conclusions

Having a reliable evidence base on the coverage and effectiveness of career guidance interventions is a prerequisite for justification of public investments on career guidance services. An evidence base is also an essential underpinning for good practices and continuous development of service delivery. Among international organisations there is a consensus that individual, economic and social outcomes of career guidance occur as a result of interconnected measures from service providers from different government sectors. The resulting guidance practices bring substantial benefits to individuals and the public good (Barnes et al., 2020). An emerging trend in many countries in promoting continuity between sectors is to provide career services within dynamic cross-administrative and multi-professional networks (Nykänen et al., 2011). Subsequently, sustainable monitoring can be developed through similar collaborative partnerships among end-users of the services, researchers, practitioners delivering services and career guidance services developers. A robust and coherent evidence base requires both quantitative and qualitative data from both individuals and organisations.

A typical challenge in establishing evidence-based coordinated career guidance services is an overall lack of shared understanding among policy-makers and stakeholders of the primary purpose of these services, their operation and their desirable outcomes (Barnes et al., 2020). Challenges can be connected to differences in the operating cultures between different sectors responsible for career guidance: education, employment, youth, social and health.

During the last two decades, international cooperation in career guidance practice and policy development has encouraged countries to develop their national systems with a lifelong learning approach, improved citizens' access to services, enhanced quality of services and strengthened national strategic leadership, through cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial representative structures. The cooperation has widened understanding of how guidance practices are connected, what are the key features of a well-functioning national guidance system, and how to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the inputs and outcomes.

International reviews have also generated comprehensive methodology and criteria for benchmarking and assessing CGC policy implementation (McCarthy and Borbely-Pecze, 2021). The same criteria can be used as reference points for mutual policy learning among service providers at regional and organisational levels. However, as career guidance is often an embedded feature in wider policy cycles, it is necessary to think more broadly and examine career guidance as a feature of a wider ecosystem of lifelong learning, upskilling and employment. The potential of the existing, internationally generated reference points can be increased if they are compiled with a systemic approach to a three-level structure which examines the interconnectivity of national guidance policies, the service providers in different sectors and the interaction with the practitioners and end users, with the same underlying principles for each level. Instead of conventionally interpreting guidance activities as sectorally or hierarchically organised, the systemic approach identifies the interdependency of relatively equal actors where there is no straightforward top-down power and influence relationship; the construction of the common understanding of the networked service requires a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes.

This paper is intended to be a catalyst to make guidance services more visible and outline how to promote evidence that enables a more constructive dialogue between the individuals, practitioners and policy-makers. As the EU Member States vary widely as to how career guidance services are organised and are in different stages in developing the evidence base for lifelong guidance practice and policies, this systemic approach can be applied in smaller parts or in sequences. For example, in a decentralised administration the collected data can focus both on each administration level and on interfaces between the levels. In combinations of public, contracted or private services, emphasis can be placed on the interoperability of the services. Building on previous European cooperation in lifelong guidance practice policy development, the use of a systemic approach can act to illustrate the transformative nature of career guidance services and to point out the critical locations where transformations in career guidance services are taking place or should take place. As a whole, the systemic approach can help collect and analyse sound evidence for cross-sectoral career guidance systems and policy development.

An important starting point and success factor in applying the systemic approach is to widen the understanding of the transversal nature of career guidance services among practitioners, service providers, researchers, developers of career guidance services, key stakeholders and policy-makers. It is also important to shift the focus from a supplier perspective to user needs as well, as to outcomes for different beneficiaries. As different sectors and stakeholder groups might be interested in different types of outcomes in accordance with their sectoral service provision, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of learning and expertise within organisations and in their interfaces. Similarly, in promoting cooperation among different sectors, a jointly agreed representative structure with a sufficient mandate is needed to oversee the strategic development process beyond the sectors and to coordinate the establishment of a joint evidence base. Due to the complexity of the task, it is necessary to allocate sufficient funding to allow the integration of feedback mechanisms into wider national governance structures.

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Chapter 3.
Towards a general framework of evaluation of career counselling services: the Polish case

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3.1. Introduction

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, in Article 65, Section 5, imposes certain obligations on public authorities to conduct policies aimed at full, productive employment, particularly by implementing programmes to combat unemployment and support vocational guidance and training. The Constitution also states in Article 65, Section 1 that everyone is guaranteed the freedom to choose and practise a profession and choose a workplace ([1]).

Compared to other European Union countries, Poland is characterised by a relatively low level of adult competences and weak involvement of adults and enterprises in investing in human capital (by acquiring new competences after completing education at school or university ([2]). Although, in 2020, the rate of early leavers from education and training was much lower than in the EU-27 (5.4% compared to 9.9%) ([3]), individuals rarely invest in developing their skills. Poland's adult education and training participation rate in 2020 was 3.7%, while the EU-27 average was 9.2% ([4]). According to key strategic documents, strengthening career counselling is becoming one of the main challenges in equalising access to lifelong learning for adults ([5]).

In recent years, career counselling in Poland has been changing. The tasks of career counsellors have been redefined, and compulsory career counselling classes have been introduced in the education sector. The curriculum of career counselling classes for each educational stage has been defined and schools must establish an in-school career guidance system and annual action plans based on learners' needs. We are convinced that further

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([1]) Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej/Constitution of the Republic of Poland. https://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/polski/kon1.htm [accessed 2.8.2021].

([2]) Informacje o Strategii na rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju/Information about the strategy for responsible development. https://www.gov.pl/web/fundusze-regiony/informacje-o-strategii-na-rzecz-odpowiedzialnego-rozwoju [accessed 2.8.2021]

([3]) Eurostat. Early leavers from education and training by sex. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_10/default/table?lang=en [accessed 4.8.2021].

([4]) Eurostat. Participation rate in education and training (last 4 weeks) by sex and age. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/trng_lfse_01/default/table?lang=en [accessed 4.8.21].

([5]) Strategia na Rzecz Odpowiedzialnego Rozwoju do roku 2020 (z perspektywą do 2030 r.)/ Strategy for responsible development until 2020 (with a prospect until 2030). https://www.gov.pl/documents/33377/436740/SOR.pdf [accessed 4.8.2021].

development depends on appropriate evaluation. Evaluation gives an opportunity to go beyond the measurement of changes consistent with the objectives of public policies: for this, monitoring is enough. We expect the evaluation to determine whether the observed changes resulted from the intervention and what factors influenced the obtained results.

The current analysis investigates possibilities of employing theory-based evaluation (TBE) to build standards in monitoring career guidance and counselling services in Poland. TBE is a well-established methodological framework, widely used in evaluation research (Donaldson, 2003; Pawson and Tilley, 1997) which offers an in-depth understanding of intervention's mechanisms affecting policy effectiveness (Weiss and Connell, 1995; Chen, 2005). Thanks to the careful reconstruction of the intervention logic, evaluators can pose the right research questions and tailor the study's design in a way that best meets the information needs of policy-makers.

The paper takes a holistic point of view, beginning with an analysis of the key public sectors of career guidance and counselling services in Poland. A sectoral comparison is provided, paying particular attention to existing approaches to monitoring and evaluation within each sector. This strategy highlights the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to evaluation or monitoring of career guidance and counselling services. In the next step, a short introduction to TBE is presented, emphasising its advantages over standard evaluation approaches. The exemplary application of theory-based evaluation in the context of Polish career guidance and counselling services provides a comprehensive introduction to this approach. The TBE approach aids an initial stage of research design. It helps with identification of accurate research questions and supports the research conceptualisation stage. A general evaluation model developed for Poland might be helpful in designing evaluation frameworks for career counselling services in other countries.

3.2. Career counselling in Poland

3.2.1. Key sectors of career counselling provision

The following chapter provides a description of the main types of career guidance and counselling providers in Poland. Our analysis revealed that the provision of career guidance services takes place in four separated sectors corresponding to different policy areas: school-based education (corresponding to ISCED 1 to 4): higher education (corresponding to ISCED 5 to 8); labour market services; and social care services. The following table summarises key differences between career counselling services delivered within indicated sectors.

Table 1. **Key sectors of career guidance in Poland**

Sector	School-based education sector	Higher education sector	Public labour market services sector	Social care services sector
Strategic governance and decision-making power	Selected departments of the Ministry of Education and Science responsible for education and upbringing	Selected departments of the Ministry of Education and Science responsible for higher education and science	Selected departments of Ministry of Social Policy and Family	Selected departments of Ministry of Social Policy and Family
Key goals of career guidance	Support pupils/learners in making conscious decisions about their education and career	Student and graduate professional activation	Promotion of employment, mitigating the effects of unemployment, and professional activation	Social and professional reintegration
Regulations for the sector	Act of 14 December 2016 Education Law and Regulation of the Minister for National Education of 12 February 2019 on career guidance	University regulations; the Law on Higher Education and Science does not impose any obligations in this field	Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions	Act of 13 June 2003 on social employment
Target groups	Pupils/learners and occasionally their parents: career counselling classes are organised in grades 7 and 8 of primary school for a minimum of 10 hours in each grade. In upper-secondary schools a minimum of 10 hours throughout the entire education period	Students and graduates	Unemployed people (registered) and employed jobseekers	Homeless, persons with addictions, mental or physical impairments or disabilities, long-term unemployed, refugees, former inmates
Services provided by	Career counsellors/teachers with required qualifications hired by schools, or career counsellors visiting schools	Career counsellors/other specialists based at academic career offices operating at public or private universities	Career counsellors/other specialists hired by district employment offices or in institutions operating under the Voluntary Labour Corps	Profession instructors, social workers

Sector	School-based education sector	Higher education sector	Public labour market services sector	Social care services sector
Careers counsellor qualifications	Strictly regulated by the law	Not specified	Not strictly regulated by the law, but certain conditions must be met	Not specified
Sources of funding	Education subsidy and LGU own income; highly dependent on the commune's or district finances	University budget	The Labour Fund and *poviat* funds	LGU/EU funds/the Labour Fund/own income
Monitoring and evaluation	Conducted as an optional part of the quality assurance system in education, as a part of internal or external evaluations.	Ad hoc research, usually conducted as a part of graduate tracking research	Systematic monitoring of labour market related indicators and ad hoc in-depth evaluations	Annual activity report

Source: Authors.

Each of the indicated sectors is governed by the designated unit of central administration, which imposes sector-specific laws and regulations regarding career counselling services. The substantial decision-making power for the labour market services and social care services is placed within the responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Policy and Family. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for implementing career guidance in the school-based education system and in higher education. For many years Poland had two separate ministries covering these sectors. Nowadays it is one institution, but its activity covers two departments of government administration: education and upbringing; and higher education and science. Due to this division, career counselling activities in the school education system and higher education are carried out separately.

Career counselling providers are subordinate to various levels of local government (communes, *poviats*) or central administration. The financing of career counselling services depends on numerous sources, both national and European. Grants and subsidies are delivered to LGUs or directly to carer counselling providers according to sector-specific regulations.

Financing of career counselling within the school-based sector is highly decentralised: primary schools are usually managed by communes, while upper-secondary schools and VET schools are typically managed by *poviats*. The labour market services sector is organised mainly on the *poviat* and *voivodeship* levels, while the social care system is organised mainly at the commune level. Polish higher education institutions enjoy significant financial autonomy, although one of their primary sources is the subsidy provided by the central government.

Sectoral decision-making powers at the central level and various management levels of service provision make the coordination of career counselling services particularly challenging. The few career counselling evaluation studies available highlight these problems. Their authors indicate a low level of coordination of activities related to career counselling and write about an ‘inconsistent model’ of providing career counselling services. Cooperation between the institutions from the labour-market services sector and the school-based education sector is particularly chaotic: there is no coordination and planning for such cooperation at the regional level and no clear guidelines and regulations on the scope of cooperation (Openfield, 2014). Authors of another study point to limitations in career counsellor cooperation with training institutions (GHK Polska, 2014). Meanwhile, the cross-sectoral cooperation of career counsellors and the coordination of their activities seem particularly important if we consider that the key goals of career counselling and target group definitions vary across sectors, leading to substantial differences in the models of career guidance provision.

The school-based sector covers 4.9 million learners (6) and includes both primary schools (ISCED 244, combining primary and lower secondary education) and upper secondary schools, which might offer a general education programme (general secondary programme, ISCED 344) or vocational-oriented programmes. The latter might end with a *matura* exam, which gives access to higher education (vocational upper secondary programme, ISCED 354, Second stage sectoral vocational programme, ISCED 354) or provides graduates with vocational qualifications that lead directly to the labour market (I stage sectoral vocational programme, including on-the-job training of juvenile workers, ISCED 353) (Cedefop and ReferNet, 2019). From 2018, elements of career counselling are obligatory at all the above stages of education. According to the assumptions of the Ministry of Education, those elements are to form a coherent system of career counselling, which should provide students with support at the school in making informed education and career choices (7). Schools are obliged to establish an in-school career guidance system embedded in the school statute. The system should define the role and tasks of the school as part of the annual action plan, time, and place of task implementation, expected results and working methods. All types of schools and educational institutions must develop annual career guidance programmes based on the in-school career guidance system. After consultation with the school's teaching council, the school director should approve the programme by 30 September for each school year. If there is no career counsellor in the school, the responsibilities are taken on by a teacher or a class tutor, pedagogue, or psychologist, appointed by the school director. Career counselling classes are organised in grades 7 and 8 of primary school for a minimum of 10 hours in each grade. In the general secondary programme, vocational upper secondary programme and first stage sectoral vocational

(6) In the 2019/20 school year there were 4.9 million learners (children, adolescents and adults) in 23 816 schools. Source: *Education in 2019/20 school year*, Statistic Poland. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/oswiata-i-wychowanie-w-roku-szkolnym-20192020,1,15.html [accessed 5.8.2021].

(7) Doradztwo zawodowe [Vocational counselling]. https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/doradztwo-zawodowe [accessed 9.8.2021].

programme, career guidance is offered for a minimum of 10 hours throughout the entire education period. In the remaining classes and classes beyond the limit specified in the regulation on framework teaching plans, vocational counselling classes are organised within the framework of psycho-pedagogical assistance. Information about learners' participation in career counselling classes is not placed on the school leaving certificate. Guidance services could be supported by psychological and pedagogical centres.

The higher education sector covers 349 higher education institutions (HEIs) with more than 1.2 million enrolled students ([8]). The Law on Higher Education and Science does not cover the rules for the counselling and guidance system provided in Polish HEIs. The Law on Higher Education and Science allows for establishing the academic career offices (ACO) at universities but does not impose such an obligation. However, the Act on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions specifies the scope of duties of ACOs: conducting individual and group career counselling; providing students and graduates with information about the labour market and opportunities to develop qualifications; and cooperation with partners. The Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (Konferencja Rektorów Akademickich Szkół Polskich, KRASP) established The Committee for university careers offices, which provides recommendations regarding the organisation and provision of career guidance in HEIs ([9]). The recommendations specified – among others – that HEIs should employ at least one specialist or career guidance counsellor, provide a separate room for discreet conversations, and an office sub-website at the university website. Most ACOs act as autonomous units of universities, established by the decision of the university. ACOs are financed mainly from university funds or State/EU funds. Statistics on their activities (e.g. the number of ACOs, number of employees) are not kept.

Career counselling is an essential part of the labour market services sector governed by The Ministry of Social Policy and Family. The labour market services system is based mainly on the countrywide network of labour market institutions: 340 *poviat* employment offices which are supported by the 16 regional employment offices. Career counselling services are available and free of charge ([10]) for all unemployed and jobseekers who are registered with the *poviat* offices. Any adult can also take advantage of the career guidance services available at the information and career planning centres, specialised units placed within structures of the regional offices. Career counsellors employed by the labour market institutions are responsible both for individual career guidance and group counselling

([8]) In the 2020/21 academic year there were 1 215 307 students in 349 HEIs (130 public and 219 non-public). Source: *Higher education in the 2020/2021 academic year*, Statistics Poland. https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/szkolnictwo-wyzsze-w-roku-akademickim-20202021-wyniki-wstepne,8,7.html [accessed 9.8.2021].

([9]) Standardy działalności Akademickich Biur Karier [Standards of operation of the academic career offices]. https://dobrepraktykiabkblog.wordpress.com/standardy-dzialalnosci-abk/ [accessed 10.8.2021]

([10]) Career counselling within the labour market sector might be also delivered as a paid service, by NGOs or companies, but the commercial sector is out of the scope of the following analysis. However, certain commercial employment agencies or NGOs, usually subscribed under the non-public sector, might play an important role within the public sector, while delivering services on behalf of public policy implementation. In such cases, as they act under the governance of the public sector, their services should be treated as a part of the relevant education, higher education, social policy or labour market sector.

services. In 2020, *poviat* and regional offices together employed 1 719 job counsellors, of which the vast majority (88%) work at the *poviat* level. In 2020, over a million people were registered in employment offices: on average, there were 691 unemployed per one career counsellor working in each *poviat* employment office, with the actual number ranging from 111 to 5574 ([11]).

Career counselling services provided within the labour market services sector partly overlap with activities carried out within the school-based sector. This is particularly visible in the case of The Voluntary Labour Corps (Polish: Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP), a State-run organisational unit fighting against the social exclusion of young people. OHP follows the legacy of the youth labour brigades established in Poland in the mid-1930s. OHP units, supervised by The Ministry of Social Policy and Family, operate in the hierarchical structure managed by the National Headquarters of Voluntary Labour Corps and 16 regional headquarters, with their 505 specialised organisational units. Annually, about 31 000 people aged 15-25 take on-the-job training in one of the 60 occupations available for OHP participants ([12]). OHP provides an integrated 3-year professional development programme, which includes not only vocational training but also career counselling and help in finding a job. If necessary, OHP participants can take advantage of free accommodation and social support. OHP units also provide career counselling services to a broader group of recipients, including young jobseekers, school graduates and students. About 700 000 young people use their services during the year, of which about 38% benefit from career guidance offered by mobile vocational information centres and youth career centres ([13]).

In comparison, the social care sector is the least regulated when it comes to career guidance provision. Entities from the social care sector are obliged to carry out tasks related to career counselling only to a limited degree. However, they can carry out such activities as a part of comprehensive projects aiming for social and professional reintegration.

The tasks of communes in social welfare are performed mainly by social welfare centres (OPS, Ośrodki Pomocy Społecznej) established in all 2477 Polish communes. The Act on Social Assistance (Ustawa o Pomocy Społecznej) ([14]) obliges communes to cooperate with *poviat* employment offices in distributing information on career counselling services. However, social welfare centres are involved in a broader range, mainly as part of projects financed from EU funds, carried out jointly with employment offices (Ślusarczyk, 2017).

Communes may establish social integration centres (CIS, Centrum Integracji Społecznej) and social integration clubs (KIS, Klub Integracji Społecznej). According to the

([11]) Funkcjonowanie wojewódzkich i powiatowych urzędów pracy [Functioning of regional and *poviat* employment offices]. https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/funkcjonowanie-wojewodzkich-i-powiatowych-urzedow-pracy [accessed 30.9.2021].

([12]) Data obtained directly from OHP HQ.

([13]) Voluntary Labour Corps https://ohp.pl/o-nas/voluntary-labour-corps [accessed 30.9.2021].

([14]) Ustawa o Pomocy Społecznej/Act on Social Assistance. https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20040640593/U/D20040593Lj.pdf [accessed 10.9.2021].

data from 2017, 166 CIS and 219 KIS were operating in Poland ([15]). The tasks of the CIS include teaching clients to plan their lives and meet their own needs thanks to income from paid work. The tasks of KIS include assisting in finding a job. Career counselling, although not directly indicated among the statutory tasks of CIS and KIS, may fall within their scope; for example, it might be a part of *Supported employment*, a programme available to people who have undergone social or professional reintegration in KIS or CIS. The functioning of social welfare centres in communes is supported and, to some extent, coordinated by the regional centres of social policy (ROPS, Regionalne Ośrodki Polityki Społecznej). ROPS operate at the *voivodeship* level and are responsible for strategic documents on social welfare, supporting OPS with competences and participating in EU grants to municipalities.

3.2.2. Monitoring and evaluation of career counselling provision

Various models of career guidance services provision across sectors are reflected in differences in approaches toward evaluation and monitoring. This section briefly describes these differences and summarises the results of the review of evaluation studies regarding career counselling services in Poland.

The school-based sector used to have well-developed external and internal quality assurance mechanisms delivered through pedagogical supervision. The key actors in external quality assurance were pedagogical supervision bodies: the relevant ministries and the Heads of the regional education authorities (REAs) (*kuratoria oświaty*). Their main tasks were to support education institutions, contribute to improving the quality of education and equalising educational opportunities, and enable the comprehensive development of learners, teachers and other specialists. Evaluation of career guidance services could be conducted under the pedagogical supervision system, but it was not a compulsory part of it. In addition to external quality assurance mechanisms, career guidance in schools could benefit from the internal evaluation conducted by the headmaster and senior teachers in close cooperation with the school's pedagogical council (*rada pedagogiczna*). The plan for internal evaluation used to determine its objectives, extent, subject and schedule. Internal evaluations covered specific needs of a given school, but the legislation did not specify the procedure. Thus, the quality assessment of career guidance in schools was not a compulsory element of external or internal evaluation. At the beginning of the 2021/22 school year, significant changes were introduced in the pedagogical supervision system. Evaluation in schools was abandoned entirely, while the scope of control exercised by pedagogical supervision authorities was extended ([16]).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, HEIs have a great deal of freedom in defining the tasks of their ACOs. Therefore, unlike the extensive reporting of the labour market services sector, there is no requirement to collect specific career counselling statistics in the higher

([15]) Such entities are also created – although less frequently – by non-governmental organisations, but in this paper we only deal with entities from the public administration sector. Source: *Informacja o KIS i CIS/Information about KIS and CIS.* https://www.ekonomiaspoleczna.gov.pl/Informacja,o,KIS,i,CIS,4107.html [accessed 11.9.2021].

([16]) https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/zmiany-w-nadzorze-pedagogicznym--rozporzadzenie-podpisane [accessed 18.9.2021].

education sector. The ACOs are also under no obligation to conduct evaluations. In the case of HEIs, external quality assurance is the responsibility of the Polish Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna, PKA), which sets detailed criteria for the programme and institutional evaluation of the university. One of the criteria can be related to the activities of ACOs: 'Supporting students in learning, social, scientific or professional development and entering the labour market (...)' ([17]). However, the report on the activities of ACOs, prepared in 2015 at the request of the Ombudsman for Graduates ([18]), indicated 'the need to standardise PKA expectations towards academic career offices.' According to the same report, the most popular element of the internal quality assurance evaluation (indicated by 73% of the units surveyed) was reporting to the university authorities on the activities of the ACO. The most common forms of ACO self-assessment turned out to be evaluation questionnaires concerning the training conducted (42%) and ACO website traffic analysis (40%) ([19]). To check whether the ACO evaluations and monitoring also apply to career counselling, we randomly selected a sample of 10 out of 91 HEI and analysed the materials available on their websites. The research sample represented various types of HEIs: universities, technical universities, pedagogical universities, agricultural/natural science universities, State higher vocational schools. All of them ran ACOs, but none of them published detailed statistics or evaluation results regarding career counselling.

The monitoring and evaluation of career guidance services in the labour market sector relies on quantitative administrative data. *Poviat* employment offices are required to collect statistics on the activities carried out using predefined forms. They are based on the mandatory monthly Report on the labour market (form MRPiPS-01) ([20]). The report includes detailed statistics on the unemployed registered in the office and on the forms of assistance provided to them. Among the latter, career counselling is not distinguished as a separate reporting category. However, Annex 6 to MRPiPS-01, collected annually, includes Forms of support for clients of employment offices. This annex includes a summary of statistics on career counselling services provided by the employment offices. The collected data cover the number of advisors and the number of clients using various types of advisory services. Labour offices are also obliged to collect information on the effectiveness of activities described in Annex 6. In the case of career counselling, it is operationalised as the share of people who started work among those who benefited from the counselling. This indicator is described as 'the number of people who started work as a result of individual counselling' and it is accompanied by the note: 'career advice is only one of the factors that may lead to

([17]) Statut Polskiej Komisji Akredytacyjnej [The Status of the Polish Accreditation Committee]. https://pka.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Statut_PKA_2018.pdf [accessed 20.9.2021].

([18]) Ombudsman for Graduates – a one-man body existing in 2011-18 appointed by the Minister for Science and Higher Education.
https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rzecznik_Praw_Absolwenta [accessed 20.9.2021].

([19]) Działalność akademickich biur karier w roku akademickim 2014/2015 [Activities of ACOs in the academic year 2014/15].
https://wupwarszawa.praca.gov.pl/documents/47726/1690386/Raport_RPA_ABK_2014-2015.pdf/b7ce022b-8c55-4f2d-a042-ec2b75904ed9 [accessed 20.9.2021].

([20]) https://bydgoszcz.stat.gov.pl/osrodki/osrodek-badan-i-analiz-rynku-pracy/sprawozdania/formularze-i-objasnienia/mrpips-01/ [accessed 25.9.2021].

employment' ([21]). Data collected in this way are the basis for reports on career counselling services provided by employment offices, so information on the counselling provided within the labour market services sector focuses on the description of activities undertaken (output indicators) and their presumed influence (short-term effects). In the published reports, however, there are no attempts at in-depth evaluation, assessments of the quality of the career counselling services provided, their long-term effects or the effectiveness of cooperation between career counsellors and external institutions.

Evaluation research on public interventions has developed thanks to projects financed from EU funds. Among such studies, commissioned since 2014 by institutions implementing EU programmes, 121 were devoted to interventions in education, entrepreneurship, or the labour market. We identified 36 studies on career guidance, three of which had career guidance as to the main topic. Most studies include career counselling as one of the many forms of support for the unemployed or for students or teachers.

Analysis of the available evaluation reports made it possible to distinguish five approaches to assessing the effects of career guidance. In the first approach, the analysis was based only on the objective information regarding the professional or education situation of people who benefited from counselling sometime after using these services (usually after 6 months). Three further approaches were based around the opinions of career counsellors' clients but related to the assessment of selected aspects of the support obtained: the impact of career counselling on the professional situation of clients; the usefulness or adequacy of services to their (unspecified) needs; and usefulness in the context of making career or further education decisions. Only the fifth and last of the approaches distinguished is an attempt at a more comprehensive assessment of the general usefulness of career counselling for clients. Among the areas analysed there were such as whether career counselling helped clients choose a school, provided information about their functioning on the labour market, helped to learn about their own predispositions, or increased their motivation to improve their qualifications.

A significant disadvantage of the first approach is absence of detail on the relationship between career guidance and its alleged effect: people who benefited from the counselling were not compared with the control group. This is also an issue with regard to the statistics collected in the labour market services sector. Both the first and the second approach narrow down the effects of counselling to starting work or continuing education. Such changes may also depend on many other factors. At the same time, as pointed out in two studies, such a perspective may lead to the erroneous recognition of counselling as ineffective (IBS; IMAPP and IQS 2015; Grupa BST 2018). This applies both to people using the counselling and representatives of institutions providing support. The main problem of the third of the distinguished approaches is the fact that it is imprecise. The fourth is limited to only one of the potential career outcomes of counselling, while its scope and goals may be much broader.

([21]) Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej/Ministry Of Family, Labour and Social Policy – Informacja o realizacji usługi poradnictwo zawodowe w publicznych służbach zatrudnienia w 2020 roku [Information on the implementation of the career counselling service in public employment services in 2020]. https://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10828/167955/Raport%20Poradnictwo%202020%20rok.pdf/32bb62b1-9fd9-4a68-a40d-c4eaca297249?t=1631517796000 [accessed 25.9.2021].

Only the fifth approach captures the effects comprehensively. Unfortunately, this has only been used in four out of 36 studies analysed. In one of the reports, summarizing the results of meta-evaluation of EU co-funded interventions in Poland, career counselling was mentioned as an element of the ‘theory of change’ of labour market policies. However, studies included in the meta-analysis did not provide the information that would allow for a comprehensive verification of this theory (Evalu, 2016).

Among the significant shortcomings of the studies analysed, it is necessary to point out not only problems with accurate identification of the results of career counselling but also the lack of a systematic analysis of factors conditioning their effectiveness. Such attempts were made in only a few studies, which indicated that the effectiveness of career counselling depends on the numerous factors: the form of counselling, the influence of the student's parents, competences of teachers (school-based sector), lack of standards for counselling, the structure of positions in employment offices (labour market services sector) and the starting point (Openfield, 2014; Evalu, 2018; Openfield and IPC Instytut Badawczy, 2019; Re-Source, 2020). The lack of coordination between entities from various sectors providing counselling (Openfield, 2014), as well as limitations in cooperation with training institutions (GHK Polska, 2014) was indicated as key barriers to improving the quality and effectiveness of career counselling.

3.3. Theory-based evaluation premises and promises

Theory-based evaluation was developed in the last decade of the 20th century, in opposition to an approach that its proponents criticised as ‘using the black box’. The earlier approach oversimplified evaluation of public policies. It was limited to determining what activities were carried out and to what extent there was a change that they were supposed to achieve. The mechanism of causal relationships between the intervention and the observed changes remained beyond the scope of the analysis: it was ‘hidden in the black box’ (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

The earlier approach was not able to link the observed changes with the activities carried out under the policy intervention. The lack of understanding of the intervention mechanism made it difficult to conclude that the observed changes were caused by the policy evaluated. It could also be argued that these changes took place due to factors independent of the intervention. Theory-based evaluation creates opportunities to identify intervention design or guidance processes flaws and to locate potential shortcomings in their implementation (Weiss, 1997). Due to its usefulness, theory-based evaluation is recommended in the guidelines for the evaluation of cohesion policy 2014-20 ([22]).

There are differences between the approaches collectively called theory-based evaluation. However, their common feature is to focus on understanding the mechanism of

([22]) Wytyczne w zakresie ewaluacji polityki spójności 2014-2020 [Guidelines for the evaluation of cohesion policy 2014-20]. https://www.funduszeeuropejskie.gov.pl/media/64971/Wytyczne_w_zakresie_ewaluacji_final_2018.pdf [accessed 30.9.2021].

change: how and why the intervention brings the expected results, or why it does not bring them (Hermann-Pawłowska and Skórska, 2017).

The use of theory-based evaluation requires following a few basic research steps (Donaldson and Scriven, 2003):

(a) establishing a theoretical model of intervention (with identification of possible causal links and related assumptions);
(b) formulating evaluation questions and possible hypotheses based on the stated assumptions;
(c) selection of data sources and methods;
(d) data collection and analysis;
(e) providing answers to evaluation questions.

The 'theory' on which an evaluation is to be based does not mean a scientific theory. A 'theory' is a set of assumptions describing what will be the impact of an intervention on achieving the intended change (Donaldson and Scriven, 2003). Usually, the impact of the intervention is indirect: the intervention affects the resources or activities of the entities, which in turn lead to the expected changes. The theory of intervention presents these dependencies and possible external conditions on which their occurrence depends. Schemas are often used to visualise the theory of intervention synthetically.

The effects of an intervention can be divided into short-term and long-term outcomes or results and outcomes. The further along a given effect is in the chain of cause-effect relationships triggered by the intervention, the greater the probability that its occurrence was also caused by factors external to the intervention. The theory-based evaluation (especially in the version known as realistic evaluation) aims to take this context into account as well.

It often turns out that the goals of the theory of intervention are not precisely described (Górniak and Keller, 2007). In such a situation, it is necessary for the evaluators to reconstruct it, which means the cooperation with entities involved in planning or implementing interventions may be helpful. It is not uncommon for different stakeholders to have different theories of intervention. The evaluator then must integrate these theories (preferably by reaching a consensus amongst stakeholders on this issue) or test hypotheses resulting from more than one of them (Chen, 2005).

The initial list of evaluation questions, formulated based on the intervention theory, might be too broad to be realistic to answer each of them, given the available sources of information and resources. It may also be too early to answer some of the evaluation questions (which can be assumed from the intervention theory). Among the questions that are not premature and for which relevant data are available or obtainable, it is reasonable to prioritise those questions that seemed to be crucial for intervention improvement. The list of research questions is the basis for deciding what methods to use to collect and analyse data and their scope.

Conducting a theory-based evaluation does not prejudge which methods should be used to conduct the study ([23]) (Hermann-Pawłowska and Skórska, 2017). A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is recommended (Chen, 2005).

([23]) In this sense, theory-based evaluation is 'methodologically neutral'.

Document analysis and interviews often help evaluators understand causal relationships and identify determinants significant from the perspective of the course and effects of intervention; that is, to reconstruct or formulate the intervention theory. In turn, quantitative data analysis is helpful to estimate the scale of effects or – if they are conducted in quasi-experimental design, where clients are compared with the control group – to assess whether there are dependencies between the assumed conditions and the intervention.

3.4. TBE in an evaluation of career guidance services

3.4.1. Career guidance: developing the intervention theory

Depending on the sector (labour market, school-based education, higher education, social care), career counselling in Poland is conducted based on various regulations and in different ways (Section 3). Therefore, the proposed scheme of the intervention theory (Figure 1) needs to be universal: it covers various models of career counselling provision within different sectors of Polish career guidance services (Section 3.2). The proposed model is general enough to be used when designing the evaluation of career counselling services in other countries.

Creating a possibly universal theory of intervention turns out to be particularly useful when we pose questions regarding the expected effects of counselling. These effects should be defined broadly enough to cover approaches that fit into different sectors of the provision of career counselling services and not lose sight of relationships between sectors. We responded to this challenge by distinguishing between the short-term (Figure 1, box 9) and the long-term effects of career counselling (Figure 1, box 12). From the short-term perspective, career counselling focuses on developing competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (Figure 1, relationship A1). Making such decisions should result in the client's satisfactory professional and educational activity (Figure 1, relationship A2), which is considered a long-term effect.

Depending on the sector in which career counselling services are provided, the counsellor focus might be more on short-term or long-term effects. Career counsellors working in schools or universities focus more on building clients' awareness and equipping them with the competences ([24]) needed to manage their careers. Career counsellors employed in labour market institutions focus more on achieving measurable effects, usually related to their client's return to the labour market. However, a broader range of possible short-term or long-term effects might be possible as, within certain models of career guidance provision, their scope is negotiated with a client.

Career-counselling providers are responsible for supporting their clients in creating and implementing educational and professional development plans. They shape attitudes and develop the knowledge and skills that clients need to make informed educational and professional decisions. However, achieving this effect depends on the activities of several

([24]) By competences we mean the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to manage one's own educational and professional life skilfully.

categories of institutions: education and training services providers (Figure 1, box 5), job placement services providers (Figure 1, box 6), other career counselling providers (Figure 1, box 7) and supporting institutions (Figure 1, box 3). All the institutions engaged in the provision of career counselling services are functionally related but might act under different authorities or governing bodies (Figure 1, box 4).

Educational service providers (Figure 1, box 5) develop the professional competences of clients receiving career counselling (Figure 1, relation D2). Educational service providers can also develop career counsellors' competences, particularly by organising studies/courses in this field (Figure 1, relation D1).

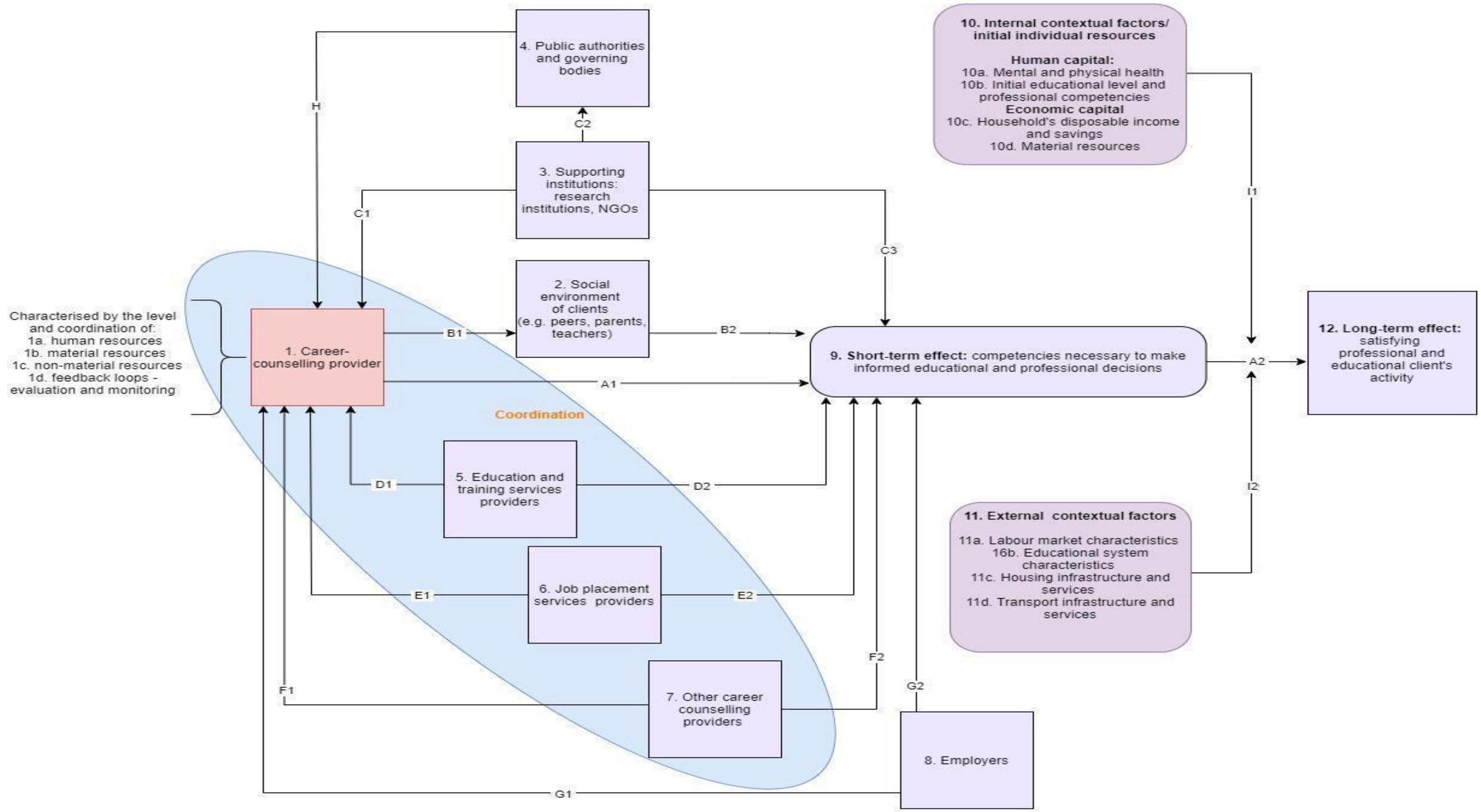
The role of job placement service providers (Figure 1, box 6) is matching job offers and people benefiting from career counselling (Figure 1, relation E2). Job placement services providers can share information regarding job vacancies with career-counselling providers (Figure 1, relation E1).

Employers (Figure 1, box 8) can also make a significant contribution, as they provide information regarding their current job offers, provide job vacancies available for career counselling clients and support educational/professional development for their employees (Figure 1, relationship G2).

A career counselling provider may operate among other career counselling providers (Figure 1, box 7). Cooperation between various counselling services providers includes sharing resources (particularly information) and making it easier for other providers of such services to contact potential clients (Figure 1, relationship F1). However, cooperation and competition between providers can be helpful if it improves the quality or scope of services or expands the group of people who use them. Unfortunately, competition may also lead to negative consequences, such as deterioration in the quality of services. This effect might be present if the career counselling services are outsourced to external entities, and the main criterion for selecting suppliers is the lowest price offered.

The diagram focuses on the institutions which are crucial for the effective functioning of the whole system and who can be recipients of the recommendations formulated by the evaluators. Taking this perspective, career counsellors' clients were represented in the diagram by short-term (box 9) and long-term effects (box 12) and characterised by their initial human and economic resources (box 10).

Figure 1. **Career counselling's TBE diagram (reconstruction the intervention theory)**



Source: Authors.

Both the short-term and long-term results of career counselling are also influenced by the social environment of clients, consisting of their peers, parents, and teachers (Figure 1, box 2). The social environment (Figure 1, box 2) is a source of knowledge about available professional options and educational opportunities (Figure 1, relationship B2). Also, non-formal learning happens in clients' social environments and social relationships translate into norms and values that might affect attitudes toward career or self-development. Such attitudes mediate educational and professional decisions and moderate the implementation of a career plan. Hence, a client’s social environment is also considered the target area of career counselling (Figure 1, relation B1). This is evident at schools where career counsellors work with teachers or parents.

The results of career counselling depend on numerous contextual factors beyond the influence of the intervention evaluated. Not taking this into account in the evaluation could lead to erroneous conclusions and negatively affect the intervention itself, such as the ‘creaming effect’ ([25]). We divided contextual factors into client characteristics (internal: Figure 1, box 10) and features of their environment (external: Figure 1, box 11). Critical internal factors are mental and physical health, initial education level and professional competences, household disposable income and savings and material resources. External contextual factors include labour market characteristics, education system characteristics, housing infrastructure and services, and transport infrastructure and services.

Supporting institutions (Figure 1, box 3) might help career counselling providers in various ways (Figure 1, relation C1). They collect and share information on available career or learning options, demand for skills or professions, feedback from monitoring or evaluation studies. They can also provide training and courses for career counsellors, deliver essential methodological materials, or organise meetings, conferences, discussion, and knowledge exchange forums. Supporting institutions play an essential role by providing expertise for public authorities and managing bodies (Figure 1, relationship C2). They might share valuable knowledge, evaluation research and monitoring results for setting policy goals and introducing career counselling instruments.

Public authorities and managing bodies (Figure 1, box 4) are responsible for setting policy goals and standards, and launching interventions supporting career counselling providers. They introduce a legal framework for career counselling services. Those regulations have great importance as they define the goals and standards of career counselling and related services. Public authorities and managing bodies are also responsible for coordinating career counselling services delivered in different sectors. They must meet the challenge of inter-sectoral coordination of career counselling services.

However, bottom-up coordination mechanisms are also needed, as they increase the chances of tailoring the advice to the local context and providing agency for the different actors. It encourages their involvement in service delivery. An example of such a mechanism

([25]) This applies to situations in which the intervention focuses on clients in the most favourable situation and for whom it is easiest to achieve the desired target effect and leads to the exclusion of people in the most in need of help. See, for example: Anderson; Burkhauser and Raymond (1993), pp. 613-624.

is the school system of career counselling. In addition to the formal institutions specified in the law, cooperation also depends on previous experience in this area and personal contacts.

3.4.2. Career guidance: from intervention theory to research questions

The idea of theory-based evaluation is to reconstruct the causal chain beyond the intervention evaluated. It might be presented on the scheme as it was shown in the previous section. The next step involves careful examination of the proposed causal paths: the evaluator's task is to formulate assumptions, both explicit and implicit, the fulfilment of which has an impact on the course of the assumed processes. This task is reflected in the second column of the following table (see Table 2). The formulation of assumptions guides the processes of formulating research questions.

The scheme presented (Figure 1) allows for the formulation of premises for achieving the assumed short- and long-term career counselling services goals. In turn, the list of assumptions is the basis for formulating a complete list of universal research questions that will allow for an accurate and reliable evaluation of career counselling provided in various contexts.

Arrow A1 represents the relationship between the career counselling provider (Figure 1, box 1) and short-term effect of its activities: building client competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (Figure 1, box 9). Career counselling shapes attitudes and develops the knowledge or skills that clients need to make appropriate career decisions. However, achieving these short-term effects depends on meeting several assumptions, which are listed in the second column of the table. For example, clients should be motivated to take part in career counselling services; otherwise, the effectiveness of such services might be questioned. We might assume that career counselling brings better results when clients search for this kind of help on their own. In other cases, if they are obligated to meet with a career counsellor to fulfil legal requirements, their motivation might be lower, and career counselling effects might be unsatisfactory. Our research questions should help with the identification of main categories of career counselling clients and the mechanisms of their selection. Another important assumption reflects the fact that good career counselling services should be tailored to individual client needs. An evaluator should investigate if the available career counselling offer is flexible and rich enough to cover the diversified needs of career counselling clients. The short-term effects of career counselling obviously depend also on the quality of services. The measurement of the quality of career counselling might be challenging but a good place to start is investigating the quality assurance mechanisms embedded in career counselling services.

Each scheme's path presented in Figure 1 should be analysed in a similar manner. As the evaluator goes through the scheme, he or she discovers indirect or direct premises conditioning the cause-and-effect relationships analysed. The revealed assumptions guide the further research process.

Table 2. **Examination of causal paths proposed in career counselling TBE diagram**

Relationship from the diagram	Assumptions	Key research questions
Career-counselling provider → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (A1) Other career-counselling providers → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (F2)	Clients have the minimal competences/resources to participate fully and benefit from career counselling services. Clients are motivated to participate in the career counselling process. Career counselling services reflect the needs of clients. Counselling services are conducted comprehensively (by one entity or by several cooperating entities providing services in this area). Counselling services are of high quality / professionally conducted/carried out following the quality standards.	What are the main categories of career counselling clients? Why are they interested in career counselling services? What are the mechanisms of career counselling services client selection? Are there any barriers to the client participation in career counselling (also considering deficits on the client side)? How are career guidance services tailored to the individual needs of their users? What are the quality assurance mechanisms for the career guidance services? How do they work? How are career guidance services conducted comprehensively?
Career-counselling provider → Social environment → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (B1 - B2)	The influence of the social environment does not eliminate the influence of career counselling, or it strengthens this influence.	How do factors related to the social environment moderate the effectiveness of career counselling? How do career counsellors try to influence the social environment of their clients? To what extent does the clients' social environment respond to different activities of career counsellors? What is the effectiveness of different ways of communication?
Education and training services provider → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (D2)	There is a wide range of education services available to everyone Available education services might help with developing the professional competences of clients receiving career counselling.	To what extent are clients of career counselling services interested in improving their skills? Do the clients of career counsellors have access to the educational services they need?

Relationship from the diagram	Assumptions	Key research questions
Education and training services provider → Career-counselling provider (D1)	Career counsellors (or applicants for that function) are interested in using educational services. Educational services for career counsellors (or for candidates for this role) are of high quality / professionally conducted/conducted following the quality standards.	To what extent are career counsellors interested in improving their skills? Do career counsellors have access to the educational services they need? How can career counsellors improve or build their qualifications?
Job placement services provider → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (E2)	Job placement services providers effectively support the work of career counsellors.	To what extent are job placement services providers able to match job offers and people benefiting from career counselling? Why?
Job placement services provider → Career-counselling provider (E1)	Job placement services providers have access to reliable information on job vacancies. There are no considerable barriers to smooth cooperation between job placement services providers and career-counselling providers.	How do job placement services providers cooperate with career-counselling providers? How do the career guidance services providers consider job placement offers available for their clients? Are career guidance and job placement services mutually complementary? Are they planned and implemented in a logical sequence?
Employers → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (G2)	Employers take potential employees through working conditions and career opportunities. Employers support educational/professional development for their employees.	Does the current job market offer clients of career counsellors the potential to find a satisfactory and stable job? To what extent do employers create opportunities for the professional development of their employees?
Employers → Career-counselling provider (G1)	Employers share the knowledge regarding job vacancies, skill demands and working conditions with career counsellors.	What are the forms of collaboration between career-counselling providers and employers? To what extent do employers collaborate with career counsellors? Why?

Relationship from the diagram	Assumptions	Key research questions
Other career-counselling providers → Career-counselling provider (F1)	There are formal or informal institutions facilitating cooperation between entities and persons providing career counselling services. The existing mechanisms of competition between career counsellors increase the quality of the services provided.	How do career counselling services providers coordinate their activities? What are the intra-sectoral and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms? How do mechanisms of cooperation and competition between career counsellors translate into the quality of their services? How does the cooperation between career counselling services providers contribute to quality assurance mechanisms in their field?
Supporting institutions: research institutions, NGOs → Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions (C3)	Supporting institutions provide clients using career counselling with information about available career options and the demand for qualifications (current demand/ occupational forecasts)	What are the available sources of valuable information for career counsellors? To what extent are career counselling clients familiar with sources of information about available career options and demand for skills? Why?
Supporting institutions: research institutions, NGOs → Career-counselling provider (C1)	Supporting institutions provide career counsellors with: information on available career options and demand for skills, methodical materials, forums for discussion and knowledge exchange.	To what extent are career counsellors interested in using information, materials and forums made available by supporting institutions? Why? What are the barriers to the access to resources provided by supporting institutions?
Supporting institutions: research institutions, NGOs → Public authorities and governing bodies (C2)	Public authorities and governing bodies have access to reliable information regarding the situation in the labour market and the results of activities carried out so far in career counselling.	To what extent are public authorities and governing bodies using the information provided by supporting institutions to improve their policies? Why?

Relationship from the diagram	Assumptions	Key research questions
Public authorities and governing bodies → Career-counselling provider (H)	The legal framework of career counselling allows for the effective coordination of activities in this field. The principles of conducting career counselling impose adequate quality standards for the services. The funding of career counselling enables it to be sufficiently conducted and of adequate quality.	How do public authorities and governing bodies coordinate career guidance activities? How do public authorities and governing bodies enforce quality assurance mechanisms?
Client's competences necessary to make informed educational and professional decisions; internal contextual factors (client's human and economic capital); external contextual factors (labour market, education system, housing infrastructure, transport infrastructure) → Satisfying professional and educational client activity (A2, I1, I2)	Clients have the resources necessary to execute their educational and professional decisions (I1). External factors favour the achievement of the educational and professional goals set in the career counselling process (I2).	To what extent do the competences built during the career counselling process actually support a satisfactory client career course? How do characteristics of the education system and labour market affect the impact of short-term effects of career counselling on further client career? How do transport and housing infrastructure affect clients' educational and professional mobility?

Source: Authors.

3.5. Summary

Globalisation and rapidly advancing technological changes shape modern economies and lead to increased demand for flexibility in the labour market. Our professional and educational paths have become more complex and less predictable. Consequently, career counselling faces new challenges as it tries to respond to the changing environment. Polish career counselling has undergone major reforms in the last decade. The tasks and the role of career counsellors hired in schools or labour market institutions were redefined and career guidance has become a compulsory element of primary and upper-secondary school curricula.

However, as our analysis showed, the national career guidance system is still strongly sectoral and fragmented. Various career counselling providers operate under different regulations and authorities rooted in four public sectors: school-based education, higher education, social policy, and labour market services.

Institutions representing all four sectors make attempts to monitor or evaluate their career counselling efforts. The sectoral character of career counselling provision goes hand in hand with the dispersion of its monitoring and research. The labour market sector has developed the most extensive system for collecting data on career counselling activities. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of career guidance is perceived primarily from the perspective of short-term changes in the labour market situation of unemployed counselling clients. Overreliance on simple output indicators, such as the number of unemployed and jobseekers who started work during or within 3 months of consulting, says little about the actual outcomes of the counselling and how to improve.

More in-depth evaluations in career counselling appear in Poland as part of research jointly financed from EU funds. A meta-analysis of available reports from such studies has revealed their several shortcomings. Most of the studies analysed struggle with the problems of accurate identification of the actual short- and long-term effects of career counselling and their determinants. These difficulties result from an overly narrow (or incorrect) definition of potential career counselling effects and an absence of illustrated relationship between career guidance and its expected effect. Research to date rarely attempts to understand the mechanisms that determine the effectiveness, efficiency or quality of counselling services and the broader context in which these mechanisms operate.

In such situations, the theory-based evaluation, which was developed to overcome so-called ‘black box’ failure, may be helpful. This failure comes from ignoring mechanisms of causal relationships between the intervention and the changes observed. Lack of understanding of the intervention mechanism impoverishes the utility of evaluation results. TBE promotes a comprehensive reflection on the counselling process and its conditions. TBE also avoids erroneous conclusions about the effectiveness of counselling, resulting from relying solely on simple monitoring indicators. As a result, it can foster the knowledge-based development of career counselling.

We have developed (in the form of a diagram and its description) a general theory of intervention regarding the provision of career counselling services. The intervention theory explains what determines the achievement of short-term and long-term effects of career counselling. It allowed us to propose a list of universal research questions that define the scope of research on such counselling. This initial framework might be used to develop a methodology of evaluation studies in various national and institutional settings.

There are many benefits of using theory-based evaluation in career guidance research. We see this approach as a remedy on several levels: inaccurate identification of the actual effects of counselling (in particular, unjustified identification of the client's success or failure on the labour market with the support of a career counsellor); considering the short- or long-term effects of counselling without taking into account the wide range of its conditioning factors (moderators, mediators); difficulties resulting from the above two limitations in formulating comprehensive recommendations which could lead to the improvement of counselling.

We also believe that the proposed holistic approach increases the chances of strengthening the coordination between counselling provided by entities from different sectors and directing support to different target groups. This, in turn, is a condition for creating a coherent offer of career counselling services, enabling its use at all stages of a client's life.

We propose the sketched diagram of the intervention theory for use primarily in large-scale intersectoral evaluations. However, we believe that it may also be helpful for entities providing counselling, conducting evaluations, because it focuses attention on the important issue of cooperation with other entities and the dependence of the counselling effects on various conditions.

Acronyms

ACO	academic career offices
CIS	Centrum Integracji Społecznej (Social Integration Centre)
EU	European Union
HEIs	higher education institutions
KIS	Klub Integracji Społecznej (Social Integration Club)
LGU	local government units
NGO	Non-government organisation
OHP	Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy (Voluntary Labour Corps)
PES	public employment services
PKA	Polish Accreditation Committee (Polska Komisja Akredytacyjna)
ROPS	Regionalne Ośrodki Polityki Społecznej (regional Centres of social policy)
TBE	theory-based evaluation
VET	vocational education and training

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Chapter 4.
Lessons from person-centred adult educational guidance services in Ireland ([26])

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4.1. Introduction

This paper offers insights into the current state of play in Ireland and potential improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of adult guidance counselling systems. It draws on a combination of policy and research findings from a range of sources, including the comprehensive review of the Irish adult educational guidance services (AEGS) adult guidance management system (AGMS), which was published in December 2020 by the NCGE: *Overarching research on data gathered from the adult educational guidance services, 2004-18* (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

In introducing the development of the AGMS it is important to acknowledge the policy and practice context and evolution of that system. It is important also to note that adult guidance counselling in Ireland is not limited to the AEGS. Different forms of guidance services are offered by other agencies and organisations: FET colleges and youth services, prison services and public employment services are examples.

The Irish Education Act 1998 requires schools to provide students with 'access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices' (Section 9c). The implications of the Department of Education's white paper *Learning for life* in 2000 are that guidance provision and adult guidance services in Ireland are embedded in and delivered through education provision and under the remit of the Department of Education. Nonetheless, guidance related activities and services exist outside of the education sectors

([26]) We would like to acknowledge all the staff in the adult education guidance services (AEGS) in Ireland who deliver adult guidance counselling and information services. Through the pilot phases and establishment of the AEGS, the energy and commitment shown by the AEGS staff, (current and past) in the development of dynamic and useful models of adult guidance provision and data gathering, supporting equitable, professional and client-centred guidance for all adults has been unquestionably the most important asset in the development of the AGMS described in this paper.

This continued commitment and willingness to embrace innovation in the collection of data in adult guidance could only happen through collaboration and with leadership. It is vital to note and acknowledge the supportive role of the Irish Department of Education throughout these years and NCGE as the DoE agency appointed to lead as the adult educational guidance initiative (AEGI) pilot national coordinator. Through that leadership, and informed by ESF reporting requirements, emerging technological responses were harnessed and, with the cooperation of the AEGS service teams, an adaptive, local, regional, and national reporting system was developed. The vital cooperation, patience, and willing support by adult educational managers and stakeholders was fundamental to the development of this system. All of these elements, working with the IT company, Salespulse, and through willing application of 'trial and error' the existing system could be designed. The understanding and support provided throughout the FET management continues to be invaluable.

also, but with some significant and noteworthy differences. For example, engagement with public employment services is typically compulsory and can have financial implications for jobseekers, whereby the jobseeker is at risk of penalty for failure to engage. In contrast, the education embedded guidance services have no such conditions and engagement is entirely voluntary.

So, while it is recognised that guidance services and activities are provided across the education and labour market sectors, this paper focuses exclusively on the monitoring and evaluation system in place within the 39 adult educational guidance services (AEGS) across the Republic of Ireland. The system is referred to as the adult guidance and management system (AGMS), and while a number of guidance tools and online portals have been developed in the wider arena ([27]), currently no other national monitoring and evaluation system of adult guidance systems and services exists in Ireland.

This paper will reflect the potential and value of such a data gathering system, acknowledging the need for it to be continuously reviewed and adapted, and to be nationally and regionally coordinated while remaining locally engaged. The AGMS has reinforced policy considerations that data gathering in guidance should remain strategic, collaborative and dynamic, with principles of system design reflective of national policy and practice standards. Degrees of local adaptability are also considered important in terms of ensuring a user-friendly approach within the AEGS.

The AGMS outlined in this paper details the development and significant characteristics of the system generating both quantitative and qualitative reports and aiding recording of case studies to reflect the emerging practice in the adult educational guidance initiative in Ireland. The system was developed to capture data, and to allow emerging service priorities to be recorded while maintaining the client-centred principles of the AEGS service delivery. The gathering of data gives evidence of an impartial, professional, inclusive, and adaptable delivery of lifelong guidance since the pilot phase of the adult educational initiatives in 2000.

The potential, capacity and value of capturing these data developed over time, and now there is acknowledged need for improvement. This paper outlines the existing system and its proposed future development while reflecting on the broader context of monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance systems and services in the Republic of Ireland.

The background and context will offer insight into developments which have taken place over the past two decades and which informed the development of the AGMS.

4.2. Background and context

This section provides the background to the adult educational guidance service and its monitoring and evaluation system as a means to contextualise the subsequent sections of this paper.

([27]) Examples of tools include the Further education and training course hub, the MyFuture+ programme which was piloted in 2018-19 and the Government of Ireland information portal The Right Course.

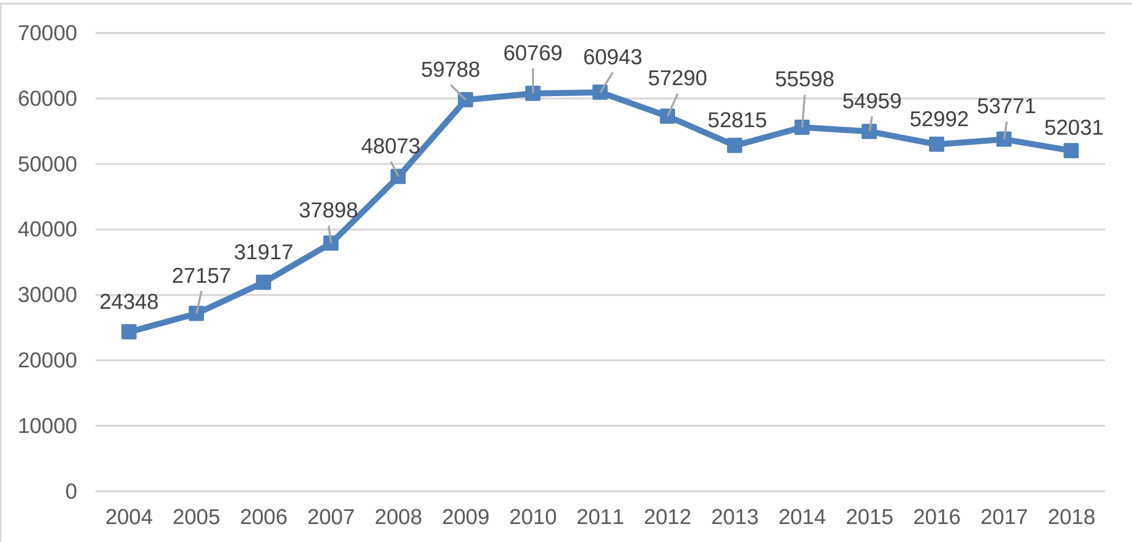
4.2.1. Adult educational guidance services

The adult educational guidance initiative (AEGI) was established on a pilot basis in 2000 in response to *Learning for life: white paper on adult education* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) which describes guidance as 'a range of activities designed to assist people to make choices about their lives and to make transitions consequent upon those choices'. The aim of this pilot was to develop quality adult educational guidance services for adults who were attending or wished to attend adult and community education.

The development of the AEGI services was coordinated, managed and monitored by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) on behalf of the Department of Education. The AEGI had particular national coordination support from NCGE through the 'pilot phases' and developed an adaptive, professional and quality assured model of adult guidance counselling and information provision. In 2009 the role of NCGE as national coordinator was ended and the AEGS became an expected part of the Irish adult and community education landscape. However, NCGE has maintained a significant role in supporting the AEGS, not least in relation to the data gathering and reports generated through the AGMS, and by facilitating professional development for guidance counsellors.

The number of services expanded greatly during the initial years to 39 individual services ([28]), referred to as adult educational guidance services (AEGS). Simultaneously, the number of clients accessing the services has increased significantly, particularly during the initial years, as evident in Figure 1.

Figure 1. **Total number of clients in the AEGI during the years 2004-18**



Source: Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.13.

While the services have developed over time, the overall aim of the AEGI has remained the same: to offer an impartial and person-centred guidance service to adults which supports them to make informed education, career and life choices through the provision of information, one-to-one guidance and group guidance.

([28]) See list of services here.

The Operational guidelines for the AEGI (Department of Education and Skills, 2012) establish that guidance counsellors employed in the AEGI must have a professional guidance counselling qualification at postgraduate level. The guidelines also outline three distinct AEGI staff roles: Guidance coordinator-counsellor, Guidance counsellor and Guidance information officer. Each role has specific responsibilities while all are expected to work as a team, collaborating appropriately within AEGI service provision and across the service network, within the organisation and with relevant local networks.

Individual AEGS provide personal, educational and vocational guidance which supports adults and learners to make informed decisions. The AEGI model of adult guidance is founded on principles developed through the 'pilot phases' of the adult educational guidance initiative. EU reporting requirements included collection of data and reporting on the developments of the pilot phases; the reports reflected the need for professional practitioner competences, practical service design and coordination. Significantly, they provided clarity regarding ways that services needed to engage andragogic design and considerations in the planning and delivery of adult guidance. For instance, the development of career readiness or maturity with the client, and strong links with education services, referral agencies and managers.

During the pilot phases of the AEGI, it became evident that voluntary and unconditional engagement of the adult was essential. Similarly, the importance of a service not being limited by, or focused on, outcome measurements was also confirmed through external evaluation reports and client feedback. One of the external evaluations (Philips and Eustace, 2010) recommended that data should be analysed in relation to the broader objectives of the services so that trends can be identified and action taken if necessary. For example, services have reviewed uptake amongst different target groups and subsequently adapted and focused efforts where needed (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

The fundamental principle of the Irish model of adult guidance provision involves the delivery of impartial guidance on a wide range of issues: skills development, funding, decision-making and goal setting, learner motivation, retention and progression on, and from, a programme, especially where previous educational experiences may have been negative (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The model is also described as 'integrated' as it is:

(a) inclusive of the pre-entry, entry, continuing and pre-exit stages;
(b) inclusive of personal, educational, and vocational guidance;
(c) working in partnership at local level, meeting a spectrum of target group guidance needs;
(d) employing a range of methodologies including information provision, one-to-one guidance, group;
(e) offering guidance and outreach provision (Department of Education and Skills, 2012).

The AEGS are now positioned within the further education and training (FET) sector in Ireland which includes both vocational education and training and adult education, but not tertiary level. FET has been an emerging, evolving sector since 2011 with the announcement and establishment of a new further education and training authority called SOLAS. Since the establishment of SOLAS and the 16 regional education and training boards (ETBs), the AEGS are managed as part of integrated FET provision and support services in the ETBs.

4.2.2. Development of the online adult guidance management system

The online adult guidance management system (AGMS) was developed in collaboration between policy-makers and guidance practitioners from 2004. During the pilot phases of the AEGI, the purpose of the data gathering was to inform a national advisory group, including key stakeholders and the Department of Education in Ireland, about regional and national planning of the AEGS. The AGMS is coordinated, managed, and monitored by NCGE on behalf of DES, and this supports the provision of regular reporting of both quantitative and qualitative data ([29]). As a result, practitioners have, through their data entries in the AGMS, aided the planning of professional development programmes for guidance service staff.

At the outset, the data gathering was paper-based and somewhat ad-hoc, but, with significant effort and collaboration, a national and online data management system was developed and has been in operation for all services since 2004. A bottom-up approach was used as it involved primarily practitioners but was also supported and informed by the NCGE and an external software and consultancy company. One of the funding requirements during the AEGI Pilot phase was the generation of quarterly reports from each service. In the context of emerging technologies in the early 2000s, options to aid such reporting through technological support appealed to practitioners, NCGE and to the Department of Education. The willing commitment and engagement of the staff in the AEGI was vital. Collaborative engagement ensured that the practitioner could see the development of an exceptionally useful tool, designed to meet different local and national reporting needs. The staff's continued use and positive attitude toward the AGMS is encouraged through NCGE's provision of induction and in-service training in the use of the online system.

Essentially, the AGMS offers a standardised system which is used across all 39 services. Nonetheless, over the years, there have been a numerous developments and amendments to the system, driven primarily by practitioner needs and with the aim to improve its usability. Some changes have also been informed by policy developments, with the objective to capture the type of data seen as essential by policy-makers at a particular time. For example, in 2008 until 2010, services were prompted to 'give details of the activities of your service which address the theme of Gender Equality' and the inclusion of this section was influenced by a National women's strategy (Department for Justice and Equality, 2007).

A key consideration in the development of the AGMS was to protect client confidentiality and follow data protection regulations at all times. The information recorded on the AGMS is the client's data, which they can request at any time. Locally, the AEGS staff in each service has password-protected access to the records collected by that service only. Policy and management stakeholders have access only to the anonymised, top level, non-personal data and statistical reports. Meanwhile, the qualitative aspects of the reporting include anonymised case study examples provided by the services and are available to managers and staff in local services, and to national policy and practice stakeholders.

([29]) See published reports here.

The quantitative and qualitative data offer insights into the age, gender, nationality, target groups, etc., of the AEGS clients (see Annex 1 for the full list of target groups). The practitioners can also record information about a client's qualifications or levels of education attained, while noting potential gaps or the need to engage in a process of recognition and/or validation of prior learning. Good practice guidelines suggest that staff in each service input such client and group data continuously, while the qualitative data typically are provided annually. These qualitative reports provide increased and contextualised information about the work that goes on in all services, such as the development of resources, of new and innovative approaches, challenges, training needs and any other initiatives within the services.

This AGMS evolved in parallel with the development and publication of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network guidelines (ELGPN, 2015) which had the aim of assisting its member countries and the European Commission in developing European cooperation on lifelong guidance in both the education and the employment sectors. The development of data collection in guidance services was noted as key to the establishment of quality assurance in the *EU guidelines for lifelong guidance policies and systems: a reference framework for the EU and for the Commission* (ELGPN, 2015). This recognition of the importance of data collection and evidence-based practice continues to be a driver of public practice and policy development.

4.3. Existing monitoring and evaluation

This section provides an overview of the existing system for both monitoring and evaluating the adult guidance services in Ireland.

4.3.1. How Ireland's AEGS are monitored and evaluated

Continuous monitoring and evaluation has been central to the AEGS since they were first established over two decades ago, in 2000. One of the key principles of the services is quality standards which involve the mandatory completion of quantitative and qualitative reports and the sharing of information and ideas across the services (National Guidance Forum, 2007).

On a practical and day-to-day level, quantitative data are entered in the AGMS by practitioners as a means of keeping accurate records of interactions with clients, group work, research, networking activities, inter-agency work, and recording time spent in preparation for such interactions. On a more strategic level, more comprehensive and primarily qualitative data are also gathered for the following purposes:

(a) reporting and accountability: the AGMS provides a structure for services, allowing them to produce evidence of quality client work, collaborative practice, research and preparatory work as well as peer learning and sharing. Thus, services can be accountable and highlight best practice guidance provision for adults;

(b) self-evaluation: guidance practitioners draw on their education, skills, and continuing practice experiences to inform their work; documenting effective and innovative practice provides an opportunity to reflect further. This also allows for peer sharing and peer learning, as the NCGE publish executive summaries of the qualitative reports annually;

(c) a team approach: by asking each service to reflect on and report on their work qualitatively, it is bringing together the 'voices' of the whole guidance team – adult educational guidance coordinator, adult educational guidance counsellor(s) and adult guidance information officer – as well as the client voice through client feedback reports (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

In 2020, a comprehensive review of the Irish adult educational guidance services (AEGS) adult guidance management system (AGMS) was published (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020). The review involved secondary analysis of 14 years of data in the AGMS, from 2004 to 2018, from all 39 adult guidance services in the Republic of Ireland. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis and interpreted against the context of policy changes throughout the relevant years. The qualitative data, which included case studies, self-evaluations and some aspects of client feedback, were subject to content and thematic analysis methods, revealing patterns and recurring themes. The following section outlines how outcomes are measured, with reference to this recent review.

4.3.2. Outcomes, impact and cost-effectiveness of adult guidance services

Measuring the impact and outcomes of guidance counselling provision is incredibly challenging due to the nature of adult guidance and the unpredictability of life. The challenge marks a distinction between, for example, public employment services, which are characterised by hard outcomes such as 'activation' or employment, and the person-centred, holistic guidance provision in AEGS in Ireland which often involves less tangible and more long-term and 'softer' outcomes, such as personal development, decision-making skills and self-confidence (reported in qualitative terms in the AGMS, see Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

AEGS practitioners recognise that clients often have complex needs and that a linear, upwards progression is not always the most appropriate or desirable outcome. It is worth reminding ourselves of these challenges and asking critical questions. For example, how does one accurately measure the outcomes of an adult having been appropriately and impartially supported to return to education to improve their literacy levels? Is it simply a measure of 'engagement', or 'progression' or should outcomes reflect promotion of human capital and encourage lifelong learning and upskilling as has recently been acknowledged in Irish and EU policy papers (Condon and Burke, 2020)? The sense of wellbeing and improved quality of life will most likely be felt by the individual, their family, friends, and community, and is likely to contribute to improved employment prospects in the long-term, possibly also for the following generation. Similarly, essential career management skills, such as job searching and interviewing skills, which are often developed through group guidance interventions, can have long-term benefits for the client and family.

While these are significant challenges that may need a variety of solutions depending on the context of provision, gathering data continuously and nationally contributes to quality guidance provision on several levels. This section addresses measuring outcomes of guidance provision on individual, organisational and societal levels.

Table 1. **Outcomes on different levels**

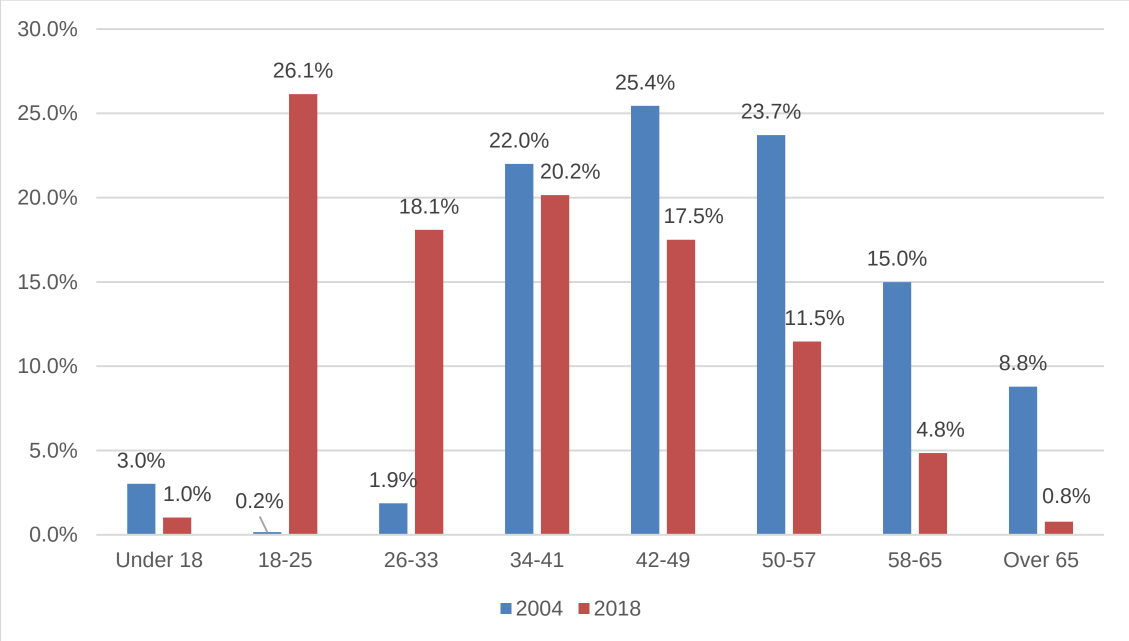
Level	How outcomes are recorded and reported
Individual	Client feedback Tracking client progression Case studies
Organisational	Client feedback Case studies Referral data Qualitative returns
Societal	Trends in client data, including demographics (as reported annually by the NCGE and in overarching secondary data analysis, most recently by Elftorp and NCGE 2020 for example) Case studies

Source: Authors.

On an individual client level, the systematic reporting of client feedback suggests that nearly 80% of clients had taken some action as a result of the guidance session(s) and just over 80% had either made some progress or felt sure of direction and goal in relation to their education and career development. This is based on clients' self-reporting, but the AGMS also allows practitioners to track their clients' initial status in terms of employment and educational attainment, as well as their progression. When practitioners meet the same clients at a later stage, they can also record their 'actual progression'. The recording of interactions, including research, referrals and activities throughout the guidance process is significant. However, only a small proportion of clients, where 'Intended progression' was recorded (i.e. the intended learning path at the start of their engagement with a guidance service), also have 'actual progression' data (22.9%) (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020). This may be due to the limited resources available in the services and the challenges of gathering such client progression data; as such, it requires further consideration in future developments.

Being able to track client progression was a feature of the AGMS which practitioners were keen to include to aid them in supporting clients across the lifespan. The Irish adult guidance services have adopted a lifelong approach to guidance as part of the lifelong learning paradigm which has been dominant in Europe for some time (Cedefop, 2008). The age profiles (from 16 to 65+) of the clients also provide solid evidence of a lifelong approach, see Figure 2.

Figure 2. **AEGI clients' age profiles 2004 vs 2018**



Source: Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.34.

However, while the client progression feature is useful for practitioners in their work with individual clients, as it allows them to keep accurate and up-to-date records, we cannot confidently evaluate the effectiveness of guidance interventions based on these data. Further, we cannot assume that a lack of correlation between intended and actual progression is positive or not, as such conclusions require significantly more contextual data. It is important to recognise the value to the client and the guidance service of the narrative provided by the client notes and recording of activities, referrals, research and case studies. Such contextual data offers 'explanations' of the client's decisions to continue engagement or otherwise. The 'narrative' was recognised in the development of the AGMS and has been noted by SOLAS Data Analytics for the significant and unique depth that it offers to national policy development in FET. For example, the reporting mechanisms in the AEGI were identified as part of the 'building blocks' for adult guidance in the FET strategy in Ireland (SOLAS, 2014).

The data show that the number of guidance sessions a client needs and receives varies: just over half (52.9%) of all clients have only one session, while 20.8% have two meetings, 9.9% three meetings, and 16.4% have four meetings or more (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020). This is also testament to the individualised support provided, as there is no prescribed number of sessions offered to clients.

On an organisational level, which includes both the guidance services and the further education and training sector in which they operate, the AGMS provides rich data which reveal how different services contribute to improved correlation between courses offered by local providers and the needs of both individuals and local employers. Some services have informed local management of prevalent barriers for adults in accessing courses and they have utilised client feedback to support the development of appropriately 'adapted' courses. The following is an example from the recent research report: 'Over a period of time, the staff of one AEGS noted a prevalent interest for clients in the area of training in personal counselling. However, travel, transport and finance were identified as major barriers, so the staff liaised and negotiated with a course provider. The result of the collaboration led to a course in counselling at NFQ level 6 being introduced locally by the VEC for the first time. Many of the clients who pursued this course subsequently expressed an interest in progressing to diploma or degree level. The staff also collaborated with the Adult Education Officer as well as FÁS at that time, who agreed to part-fund the course, thus removing several significant barriers for clients' (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.77)

Another type of data which provide valuable insights into the outcomes on the organisational level, is referral data. Just over 40% of all clients have been referred to an adult guidance service, and just under 50% of clients have been referred to another service after their engagement with the guidance service. The most frequent types of referrals are to local course providers and employment support services, which also provides some evidence in relation to the extensive collaboration between relevant services.

A number of significant wider societal outcomes of guidance provision can also be discerned through the data captured in the AGMS; for example, we can identify increased participation by specific target groups. The most significant trends identified in the demographic data since the early 2000s, reveal that the age profile is increasingly younger and that there is an increased focus on 'activation' and unemployment, corresponding with policy developments in Ireland.

It is also important to note the barriers which clients experience in terms of participating in education or employment as recorded in the AGMS. The analysis of the data indicates that the complexity of clients' needs has increased in recent years. This relates to clients who face a multitude of significant barriers such as mental health issues, addiction, as well as financial and social disadvantage. As many of qualitative client feedback comments alluded to, the AEGS has had an important role in facilitating access to suitable programmes for adults who would otherwise struggle to do so (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

In the recent overarching report (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020), additional data were drawn upon to interpret and contextualise initial data. For example, the significant change in the age profile of clients (18-25 represented 0.2% of all clients in 2004, but 26% in 2018) could be linked to the 'activation agenda' which has permeated policy developments in recent years and has likely driven this change; this includes the Youth Guarantee (Ireland, DSFA, 2014), a scheme supported by the European Commission. While the AEGS was not formally included in this process, it is possible that referrals from other agencies may have been influenced by such policies.

4.3.3. Competence development

One of the core aims of the monitoring and data gathering is to identify and increase the quality and efficacy of the adult guidance services. As guidance provision is primarily a service which is dependent on practitioner competences and skills, the AGMS asks practitioners to identify key areas for competence development to inform the NCGE and local management of continuous professional development (CPD) needs. The reporting of the data also informs the provision and development of initial and continued professional training programmes for guidance counsellors (ELGPN, 2015).

The uptake and engagement with continuous training and upskilling amongst adult guidance practitioners in Ireland supports the identified 'demand for professionalism' internationally (Cedefop et al., 2020, p.68; Cedefop et al., 2021). There are also several national frameworks supporting this professionalisation of adult guidance provision in Ireland, such as the Programme recognition framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2016), the National Guidance Forum (2007) and the Operational guidelines (Department of Education and Skills, 2012), as well as representatives professional organisations such as the Adult Guidance Association and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

4.3.4. Evaluation of adult guidance services

One key benefit of monitoring such services is that it allows for regular evaluation of them. With the Irish AEGS, this is primarily through service self-evaluation, client feedback and external evaluation and research reports.

Self-evaluation is evident in the qualitative returns submitted regularly by all services, where services respond to prompts and questions: how they have responded to challenges and client feedback; providing case studies; and identifying key priority areas and CPD needs for the staff in the service. In most services, the local AEGS advisory groups were involved in evaluating the service and plan how best to support it in the future, and to find possible alternative ways of delivering the service (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

In addition to the standardised reporting, some services have developed local innovative ways of evaluating their service. For example, one AEGS organised a focus group with representatives from target groups, after they had received creative facilitation training funded by the NCGE. The findings provided them with insights into the adults' experiences of returning to education, their guidance and information needs, and their experience of, and recommendations to, the service. As a welcome side effect, the focus group participants enjoyed meeting adult learners from other projects, sharing experiences, and they appreciated being asked for their opinions and recommendations.

This type of client feedback is a key aspect of how services are evaluated; as described by one of the services, this is 'the cornerstone of our informed reflective practice' (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.58). Recording and listening to the voice of the clients, in the shape of feedback on the service provided, is a key component of quality assurance in both national and international guidance counselling policy (OECD, 2004; National Guidance Forum, 2007; ELGPN, 2015). The ELGPN outlines that citizen involvement is essential to ensure improved user experience, develop effective and efficient services, strengthen accountability, and contribute to social justice.

However, it is important to recognise that there are significant challenges in gathering client feedback due to the dispersed delivery of guidance across the FET sector. Further, guidance is available to clients post-completion of FET and to the general public, though as clients move on to different sectors, feedback may prove more difficult to collect. As evidenced through several qualitative reports from services, the pressures of working within a service with limited resources and a reduction in staffing, have had a negative effect on a coherent and regular gathering of client feedback as the AEGS staff had to prioritise other activities, primarily seeing clients in larger volumes. This is evident as the client per guidance counsellor ratio has increased significantly (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

Nonetheless, many services regularly report client feedback; when the data were analysed (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020), the professional qualities in the guidance counsellor was emphasised as key to client satisfaction with the services. These are typical statements which illustrate the nature of the positive client feedback:

> 'I felt listened to and I was taken seriously, within a safe space.'
> 'My autonomy was encouraged.'

Many also reported on the outcomes for them personally, such as:

> 'My knowledge of suitable and local options was increased.'
> 'It helped me get onto a suitable course and also employment.'

In contrast, client feedback concerning areas for improvement focused nearly exclusively on the accessibility of services, including the physical premises and the visibility and availability of services. For example:

> 'Offices were small.'
> 'It should be advertised more, I found it by accident.'

Another essential aspect of the AGMS is the recognition by NCGE and guidance practitioners of the need to evaluate the system continuously in order to maintain the currency of the reporting, and to avoid a 'tick box' exercise. As an example, in 2013 it was decided to increase the emphasis on responding to client feedback by requesting that practitioners identify how it has informed their work. As part of the qualitative reporting within the AGMS, each year services describe how client feedback has informed practice and service provision, with recurring themes identified:

(a) positive feedback provided a mandate and justification to continue specific practices;
(b) services have described how they adjust the types of workshops and information sessions they organise based on trends they notice in client requests;
(c) client feedback has allowed practitioners to advocate on behalf of clients, in relation to both FET courses on offer and AEGS resources;
(d) client interaction and communication;
(e) barriers to acting on client feedback.

In relation to how client feedback has informed how they interact and communicate with clients and the public, many services outline having increased their presence on social media and some have increased their outreach provision or collaborated with local providers to tailor courses to students' skills needs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, services have been compelled to reflect further and develop service delivery through innovation and the use of social media and technology. This will be important to consider in forthcoming AGMS reports (Cedefop et al., 2020).

Workload is undoubtedly also an important factor in terms of the quality of provision; the data management system has allowed us to identify the client-practitioner ratio across the years. The data are rather stark in indicating that one-to-one and group guidance clients increased by 66% from 2006 to 2016. However, as the staffing levels had fallen in the same time period (-7.5%), the increase in one-to-one and group guidance per guidance counsellor/coordinator was 81%. While such data should arguably have informed the resourcing of services, this has also coincided with significant restructuring of Government departments, a moratorium whereby staff were not replaced, and delay in key strategies being developed and published.

External consultants have conducted both evaluations and secondary data analysis over the years, including:

(a) 2000-07: evaluation reports on AEGI pilot phases 1-4: by Open Campus Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University ([30]);

(b) 2009: AEGI evaluation report on the expansion of AEGI services, by Bissell ([31]);

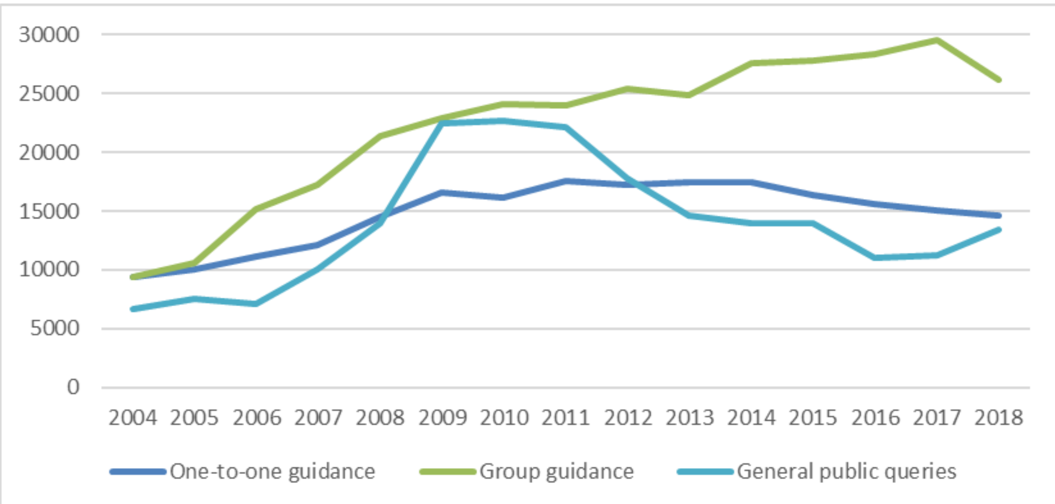
(c) 2010: mixed methods research focused on the years 2000-06 (Philips and Eustace, 2010);

(d) 2020: secondary data analysis of AGMS data from 2004-18 (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

Recommendations from the above evaluations and research reports have informed the continuing development of the services in several ways. Some key examples of this include: an emphasis on group guidance provision (which has increased steadily through the years, see Figure 3); increased use of technology in the delivery of guidance (also evidenced by AGMS data in Elftorp and NCGE, 2020); and the development of a national data gathering system, which resulted in the AGMS.

The continual internal and external evaluations and research illustrate a significant commitment to quality which is, arguably, one of the strengths of the current system.

Figure 3. **Modes of guidance counselling (*n*)**



Source: Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.19

([30]) Unpublished external evaluation for internal use in informing the continuing development.

([31]) Unpublished external evaluation for internal use in informing the continuing development.

4.4. Improving on existing approaches

This section of the paper considers how the existing approach can be improved, first by considering some of its strengths, then by outlining key challenges and, finally, by outlining the plans made for imminent system developments.

4.4.1. Strengths of the existing system

The AGMS gives an excellent example and template for a system that can effectively and efficiently capture the value of professional, impartial adult guidance service provision. In 2018, the Irish Department of Education and Skills and the FET authority, SOLAS, agreed with NCGE that the system had remarkable capacity and continued value, while recognising the urgent need for redevelopment of the system to address identified limitations.

The online system was developed during 2004-09 in response to a range of important factors. As a 'pilot', the generation of an innovative AEGS data gathering system was not only appropriate, but it also coincided with the ongoing evolution of IT systems, and the emergence of EU policy guidelines for lifelong guidance. One particular quality highlighted in the development phase of the AGMS is that the system embraced a dynamic and 'bottom-up' approach which allowed practice to inform the development of the system. This approach still has value in today's ever-changing landscape of service provision as it implies exploration of solutions, the evaluation and critical reflection on such solutions, and changes in practice to meet the challenges of data gathering. It is now obvious that guidance data gathering demands flexibility and adaptability, whether imposed through locations, populations or myriad other factors requiring oversight, locally, regionally, and nationally.

The practicality and value of the AGMS to the AEGS was immediately evident: for example, as many AEGS were not necessarily 'centre' based, this still allowed collation and 'centralisation' of data gathered for each staff member of the AEGS, thereby facilitating local, regional, and national coordination, collaboration, and planning. The significance of having a robust monitoring and evaluation system in place is also supported by the ELGPN (2015) policy guidelines and toolkits in terms of justifying public expenditure on lifelong guidance.

Also very significant was the development of a system which was as user- friendly as possible, while generating data that could be collated regionally and nationally. In developing the system, it was vital to ensure communication, oversight, review and collaboration between the emerging guidance policy developments (national and European), local practice and technological design developments. It became clear that any data collection system needed to incorporate continuous review and amendments. Not only did that responsibility inform the roles and responsibilities attached to the AEGS Staff as outlined in the 2012 Operational guidelines, it has also informed the role assumed by the various Government departments and agencies, and the roles in a regional and local management context. The need for national coordination has also informed NCGE proposals for the redevelopment of this system to extend the collection of guidance data from the many and varied delivery systems across FET within the education and training boards.

4.4.2. Limitations and areas for improvement

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of guidance counselling is particularly challenging in a service with a strong emphasis on impartiality and a person-centred approach. Further, the area of adult guidance counselling caters for clients with complex and multifaceted needs who may face significant barriers to participation in education and the labour market.

Additionally, in terms of the reliability of the data, there are no control groups for which we can compare the results. Reliability is further challenged by the fact that the system is ‘live’, so practitioners can change and update client data. While this type of system provides the required flexibility for practitioners in their day-to-day work, reporting on the data retrospectively is compromised. However, as one of the key objectives of the AGMS has been to support practitioners in their work with clients, it was considered important to have a system in place where the data were not ‘locked’ at the end of the year.

As quantitative data by nature is reductionist, some nuances and context are inevitably lost. For example, the purpose of a guidance session with a client is recorded as either careers/vocational guidance; educational guidance; information/advice; or personal counselling. However, it is not always possible to distinguish between these types of guidance counselling as they overlap and interlink, or may start out in one domain only to diverge to another. However, this limitation is mitigated by the significant collection of qualitative data by each service.

Another challenge relates to the reduced response rate in the more recent years, which has been an effect of changes in relation to the management of the services and the restructuring of the adult education sector in Ireland, instigated in 2013. Staffing shortages are also notable from the findings of the recent report (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020).

Additionally, although the data can inform us of the current, and historical, state of affairs, the data do not guarantee that the relevant stakeholders are informed or that they act on that information. The NCGE has produced and published bi-annual and annual reports of key data, but there is no obligation on a particular body to act on recommendations or issues identified in the reports. Further, the data have not been linked to the learner database in the further education sector, referred to as the Programme and learner support system (PLSS), and the following section explores, amongst other things, the potential for establishing and integrating the adult guidance system with the wider further education system.

4.4.3. Current and planned developments of the system

NCGE established the further education and training guidance management system (FET GMS) working group in 2019. Its aim was to address limitations of the current AGMS and to prepare a proposal for funding of the new data gathering system, to support FET wide guidance planning and service provision within the ETBs into the future. The working group was chaired, hosted and facilitated by the NCGE and included representatives of relevant Government departments and agencies, the Adult Guidance Association and practitioners. The group met on several occasions and a subgroup focused on identifying the revisions required for the data entry categories. As part of a rigorous approach, it is envisaged that the new system will be piloted in the coming year, with the subsequent aim to roll it out to all services.

Drawing on the strengths of the current system, the FET GMS data gathering will continue to include a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, and an integrated reporting of client-feedback. And in order to increase the transferability, data categories will be standardised while reflecting Irish policy priorities and guidance quality assurance requirements.

The goal for the forthcoming FET GMS is that it will develop as an increasingly accessible and user-friendly system providing a record of outcomes and progression, as well as regional and national reports which will deliver a clear outline of the role and frontline services of FET-wide guidance provision. It is also vital to consider the GDPR legislation of 2018 and any developments in this which may have implications for the data gathering.

The agreed structure of the FET GMS will also ensure a national system for use of all AEGS, with facility for flexible variations due to regional and local data requirements. A flexible ICT infrastructure will be essential, and a central aspect will be to facilitate integrated and interoperable communication with the wider FET learner database (the Programme and learner support system, PLSS) to include an exploration of links with the referral system of the Department of Social Protection, as appropriate. An interagency advisory group will be required in this process as the aim is to embed and integrate the adult guidance service system further into overall FET provision in Ireland.

4.5. Conclusion

To conclude, we outline a number of key considerations and implications for policy and practice, based on the lessons learned over the past two decades of monitoring and evaluating in the Irish AEGS.

The strengths of the current system for monitoring and evaluation of the AEGS in Ireland are undoubtedly associated with the fact that practitioners, as well as other stakeholders, have played a central role in the development. This bottom-up approach will continue to inform the developments in the system. However, we also propose that broadening the scope by including the clients' voices is integral to further system development.

Although we maintain that it is important to have a critical perspective with regards to monitoring outcomes of adult guidance counselling, we also propose that it is possible to design a system which accounts for the complexity and non-linear nature of career development in the 21st century. Although data categories should be standardised in order to increase transferability, it is essential also to gather contextual data to provide a nuanced understanding of the guidance service. Thus, any monitoring and evaluation system of a guidance service should involve a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering, which also includes client-feedback. We argue that the temptation to employ a reductionist approach should be resisted, as it would contradict the strong emphasis on impartiality and a person-centred approach, which are at the core of the Irish model of guidance counselling.

It is essential that the mechanism for gathering the data is efficient and not overly onerous on resources, particularly in relation to gathering client feedback. For example, automatically generated emails with links to online surveys would offer a more efficient gathering of client feedback compared to old practices of seeking out individual clients via telephone.

In light of the identified strengths and limitations of the Irish system, we put forward that there should be a particular focus on ensuring that relevant stakeholders are informed and briefed on the key data and that such data regularly inform policy and practice. Following on from this, it should also be clear who has the responsibility to act on any recommendations emanating from the data.

Acronyms

AEGI	adult educational guidance initiative
AEGS	adult educational guidance services
AGMS	adult guidance management system
DES / DE	Department of Education (referred to as Department of Education and Science 1997-2010; Department of Education and Skill' 2010-20; Department of Education and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science since 2020)
FET	further education and training (referring to the adult and vocational education sector in Ireland)
FET GMS	further education and training guidance management system
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education (Department of Education agency with responsibility to inform policy and lead guidance practice)
SOLAS	the FET authority in Ireland

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Annex

Target groups

The AEGI targets individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. A list of these groups (which are the same target groups listed in the BTEI and ALCES operational guidelines and should be understood to include VTOS participants) is set out below:

(a) adults and young people aged over 16 ([32]) who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels;
(b) the unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government's activation agenda;
(c) the long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those in the older age groups;
(d) those not in work but not eligible to be on the live register;
(e) those in the workplace with basic skills needs;
(f) disadvantaged women who have particular experience of barriers to participation;
(g) disadvantaged men, including those experiencing rural isolation;
(h) lone parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses;
(i) travellers;
(j) homeless people;
(k) substance misusers;
(l) ex-offenders;
(m) people with disabilities;
(n) people for whom English is not the mother tongue, who require language and literacy supports;
(o) former residents of designated education institutions and eligible family members.

Source: DES 2012, pp.6-7.

([32]) Young people aged over 16 years of age are eligible to participate in BTEI and adult literacy programmes. Community Education programmes are open to those over 18 years of age and VTOS for unemployed people over 21 years of age. Where a young person aged between 16-18 years of age presents, AEGS staff should deal with them appropriately and in line with VEC child protection guidelines.

Chapter 5.
Monitoring and evaluating the German lifelong guidance programme: a proposal in the context of the professionalisation of guidance counsellors

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5.1. Context of the strategy

Since the year 2000, the guidance discussion has developed toward a lifelong guidance (LLG) perspective. In Germany it intensified following the OECD (2004) and World Bank studies (Watts and Fretwell, 2003), the EU Council Resolutions (2004, 2008) and the establishment of the European lifelong guidance policy network (ELGPN) in 2007 (Weber, 2013). Building on early developments in regional contexts, pilot projects and increasingly developed guidance and counselling services for adults were established. primarily by the Federal State and through projects at national level (Schiersmann and Weber, 2013). In parallel, a discussion about quality standards, evaluation and monitoring of guidance developed. However, monitoring based on standards is only in the early stages of implementation (NFB et al., 2017). The main reasons for this include the complexity of the political system and lack of resources. There is also a debate involving numerous national experts who advise caution in applying appropriate methods and careful use of the results of monitoring and evaluation of outcomes (Section 5.1.1).

In 2019, the Bundesagentur für Arbeit, the German Federal Employment Agency (FEA), introduced a new inclusive lifelong guidance service (Lebensbegleitende berufliche Beratung, LBB) for all individuals, including employees. This reform is a strategic shift toward guidance as an important means of supporting people of all ages and in all kinds of employment and life situations throughout life (Kraatz; Rübner and Weber, 2021; Rübner and Weber, 2021) (Section 5.2). With the establishment of this service in 2020, the training of about 6 000 counsellors employed by FEA began (Weber, 2020a) (Section 5.3.1). For the evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of this training programme, a new approach is being developed to complement the existing monitoring system. The evaluation was designed in 2021 and implementation will take place in stages starting in 2022. The monitoring activities of the 'guidance index' described in Section 5.3.1 shall be linked to the evaluation activities described here (Section 5.3.2).

5.1.1. The development of lifelong guidance structures in Germany

Since about 2005, a number of federal states in Germany began establishing public lifelong guidance services for adults. These activities are mainly initiated and financed by ministries of economy and/or education and aim to support adults taking part in lifelong learning and those in need of maintaining their employability. There is considerable variation in the development of the guidance systems within the federal states. While some have established a stable system for financing career guidance services, others have launched projects without an established and sustainable structure. Some federal states have not established services for adults, as Schiersmann and Weber (2013) showed in their overview of the developments across Germany. The Federal Employment Agency started to test a new service for employed adults in 2015 and established a LLG structure for adults in 2020 (Section 5.2).

In the last few years new legislation established support for employees to adjust to the skills, competences and qualification needs of the digitalised world of work. A legal framework *Qualifizierungs Chancen Gesetz* (Qualification Opportunities Act) ([33]) enables employees and companies to obtain financial support and career guidance to identify individual training needs. As context, the local labour market and technical development in companies are seen as important aspects for the identification of training needs and individual career development. The FEA has the duty to provide LLG to realise these ambitious goals (Cedefop, 2020).

5.1.2. Quality standards and monitoring in Germany

Activities related to quality assurance, quality development or quality management have been widely established in Germany since the 1990s and have become a part of everyday practice. For vocational education and training and vocational guidance, a central driver of development has been the funding of measures, which in turn has been linked to the existence of quality management (QM) models (Zollondz, 2011; Weber 2013, p. 134ff.) (e.g. through the FEA or the European Social Fund). In the course of the international discussion on LLG since 2000, the question of content-related standards has also been focused on more strongly, e.g. by the Ministry of Education and Research and the National Fora for Guidance and Counselling (NFB). Such standards were intended to complement the more management and process-oriented QM models and are understood, since their beginning, as the base for monitoring and evaluation (NFB and University of Heidelberg, 2014; Schiersmann and Weber, 2013). Such a multi-perspective approach is also consistent with internationally established models that build on content-based quality standards rather than administrative QM (Weber, 2013). Standards developed so far in this context should be understood as quality standards without underlying quantitative benchmarks.

Existing models of quality standards encompass various aspects that are to be described and safeguarded via these standards (Weber 2013, p. 247f.). Possible categories are the professional framework for LLG, the qualification and further training of counsellors (e.g. minimum requirements), and the description of the core services or processes of LLG (e.g. characteristics of the counselling processes and services).

However, standards across the different (federal) states have so far been used very differently and so vary in their impact; it has also not been possible to achieve a high level of binding commitment. The model projects and coordination processes carried out to date, such as the national coordination process for quality and professionalism (NFB and Universität Heidelberg, 2014), have shown that the extremely heterogeneous field of providers and professional policy tend to rely on voluntarism rather than regulation (Weber and Katsarov, 2013). As long as the formulated standards are not regarded as regulations to be

([33]) Ministry of Labour [accessed 30.9.2021].

implemented, it is the actors themselves, the counsellors as well as the institutions, who take up, interpret, negotiate and define such standards as more or less binding within a framework to be agreed upon (Weber, 2021).

It is argued here that without binding quality standards, monitoring is extremely difficult to establish in an even and consistent manner, which may have implications for systems development and customer expectations. More research is needed to understand this, however, including which type of standards (qualifications, CPD, of professionals, for example) are critical. An overview study on the effectiveness of LLG (such as the Shanne and Weyh (2017) evaluation of the direct and medium-term economic outcomes of guidance for adults in a certain programme) has shown that evaluation activities established so far in Germany are selective and on the level of individual evaluation projects (NFB, Schober and Langer, 2017). Various studies on guidance research have not been able to identify comprehensive approaches to quality, outcome, or monitoring (Käpplinger and Maier-Gutheil, 2015; Schiersmann, Maier-Gutheil and Weber, 2016). Some federal states have established monitoring for their counselling services, including the State of Berlin ([34]). The items monitored include the demand for guidance, the access to guidance, the characteristics of target groups reached and the demographic data of individuals, the individual career-situation when the service was approached and, to a certain extent, the outputs and outcomes of guidance. The monitoring is based on follow-up surveys (e.g. satisfaction and activities after participation in counselling) as well as on data from counselling (e.g. occasions for counselling). These activities are identified as monitoring but not as outcome or impact-oriented evaluation.

5.2. Lifelong guidance in the Federal Employment Agency (FEA)

This section provides background on the establishment of lifelong guidance in the FEA in Germany and the qualification developed to enhance the professionalism of the career counsellors. After various pilot phases, the FEA now offers a wide range of lifelong guidance services ([35]):

([34]) See here and here [accessed 30.9.2021].

([35]) Base for the establishment of the LLG service are the technical instructions (Fachliche Weisung) from 2019 and 2018 [accessed 30.9.2021].

> 'With lifelong career guidance, the [...] (FEA) offer career orientation and guidance along the entire educational and employment biography. Lifelong career counselling is preventive, easily accessible, diverse, stereotype-free, gender-sensitive, procedural, and professionally sound. In this way, the Federal Employment Agency [...] fulfills its legal mandate to provide career counselling (Section 29 (1) SGB III) and career guidance (Section 33 SGB III) to young people and adults who are participating or want to participate in working life' (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019, p. 8).

This offer must be seen in the context of the legal regulations in the Social Code III as well as the Qualification Opportunities Act (see above). The offer is organisationally divided into an offer for persons 'before working life' (usually the young and young adults who have not yet completed vocational training and studies and who are not employed) and an offer for persons 'in working life'. These individuals, who have completed initial vocational training or higher education studies or have work experience, have access to lifelong career counselling for adults (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019, p. 11). While services 'before working life' mainly focus on career orientation, career education and career choice, adults have access to guidance on, among other things, their occupational situation in the context of developments in the labour market, on expanding their professional qualifications and skills, on career reorientation and change, on re-entering the workforce (e.g. after taking family leave or raising children), and generally on career planning (ibid; Cedefop, 2020). This service for adults has been established throughout Germany since 2020, and approximately 800 counsellors are available to advise adult customers.

5.3. FEA evaluation and monitoring strategy

Following the strong emphasis on preparation and continuous training of guidance counsellors who are employed at FEA, and the connection of professional competences to the quality and outcomes of guidance interventions, this section outlines the recently developed FEA evaluation and monitoring strategy for LLG. First, the recently created indicators of the 'guidance index' are outlined and related to counselling standards (Rübner and Höft, 2017; Schiersmann, Petersen and Weber, 2017; Schiersmann et al., 2016; European Commission, 2014; Kraatz, 2011) and then the newly developed evaluation and monitoring strategy for the LLG guidance service in Germany is discussed.

5.3.1. FEA monitoring indicators

In 2018, the German FEA established a new monitoring strategy ('guidance index') for all career guidance and counselling services. The instrument(s) used build on a previous one (customer satisfaction index) launched in 2005, which focuses on the satisfaction of customers regarding service delivery. The Centre for Customer and Employee Surveys (Zentrum für Kunden- und Mitarbeiterbefragung, ZKM) is responsible for the guidance index within the FEA. The index aims to help monitor quality and effectiveness of the service through a sample of customers contacted by an external survey service. For the approximately 150 local employment agencies, a minimum 100 calls are made per year and per customer group.

This procedure began in 2019 (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019, p. 4). The customer groups interviewed are employees, young people in transition from school to training, rehabilitants, and employer customers. The aim is to achieve regular monitoring of the quality of guidance and to measure the individual outcome (ibid. p. 4).

The guidance index strategy is based on three separate telephone surveys at specified time-points. At ‘t1’, 14 days after the first customer contact, the perception of certain quality aspects and the situation of the customer are asked. At the second time point, 6 months after the first contact, customers are asked about the perception of the counselling process as well as its effect on any reported change in competence and decision-making. The survey at ‘t3’, 3 months after finishing the customer contact (in case of guidance for young people or adults) and 6 months after a rehabilitation measure (in case of vocational rehabilitation), the follow-up is focused on the perceived effect of the counselling (outputs) in terms of realised changes (integration into the labour market, entry into education or training) (ibid., p. 6f.).

All monitoring activities are based on a set of indicators grouped in two categories: the ‘quality’ category comprises input- and process-items; the ‘effects’ category comprises output factors. The indicators of the survey focus on quality and the monitoring of these outputs based on a subjective rating on a scale from 1 to 4. The index for time-point 1 consists of 17 items, the index for time-point 2 of 34 items and for time-point 3 of 12 items.

Examples of items related to quality category (input and process) include:

(a) the counsellor answered all the questions that were important to me;
(b) the counsellor showed me how he could support me;
(c) the contents of the consulting were comprehensible for me;
(d) how do you rate the counsellor's expertise?

Examples of items related to outcome include:

(a) as a result of counselling, I am more open to change;
(b) after counselling, I am clear about what the next steps are;
(c) after the counselling I can better assess my chances on the job market;
(d) I can implement the goals resulting from the counselling session;
(e) the counselling helped me to make professional decisions;
(f) the counselling has helped to find solutions to overcome professional obstacles (ibid. p. 8).

The questionnaire at time-point 2 also includes questions that specify the aim and the expectations of the customer. The guidance index as a measurement derives from the quality related to the measured data about process, output and outcome data for each of the target groups along the three time-points. The index is made available on the FEA database for other agencies or teams and service managers. The data are used internally for quality assurance and development locally (within the 150 agencies), regionally (in 10 regional clusters) and nationally. Data are not published or shared with the users.

If the items in the guidance index questionnaire are compared with existing quality standards and developed outside the FEA (NFB and Universität Heidelberg, 2014) or questionnaires for recording the outcome of vocational guidance (Rübner and Höft, 2017; 2020), some common areas can initially be identified. However, the guidance index instrument cannot be used for properly evaluating the individual outputs or outcomes of guidance interventions. The main reasons are the missing measures to estimate objective outcomes (e.g. using administrative data or similar data collection or tracking systems) and the lack of data before time-point 1. The guidance index does not provide a statistical calculation on the development of the output from time-point 1 to time-point 3. While the practical use as a monitoring instrument might be valid, the index is not considered to be a survey instrument for assessing the effectiveness of guidance interventions (in comparison, for example, to Rübner and Höft, 2017). The index is based on customers' subjectively perceived differences between their expectations and experiences with the service (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019, p. 23).

5.3.2. Professional counselling certificate programme evaluation and monitoring

The necessary qualifications, skills and competences of career counsellors providing LLG services is described as field of activities and competences in a model by the FEA. The entry qualification for counsellors in this position is EQF 6 (bachelor or comparable qualifications and 2 years of work experience in FEA) or EQF 4 (vocational training with several years of work experience and further training). When entering this position, all FEA counsellors undergo training to develop fundamental counselling competence and knowledge related to a counselling concept (Rübner and Weber, 2021). The basic qualifications for counsellors also include training on aspects such as use of labour market information or knowledge on occupations.

With the introduction of LLG at FEA in 2019, a mandatory qualification was established for the counsellors: the certificate programme Professional counselling (*Zertifikatsprogramm Professionelle Beratung*) (Weber, 2020b). This programme builds on basic training and was developed and managed by the University of Applied Labour Studies (FEA University) in cooperation with the FEA local directorates (Weber, 2020b). The academic training was launched in 2020 for up to 6 000 guidance practitioners based on an agreed competence framework (Weber, 2020a). All participants are employees of the FEA and career practitioners, working either with young people (approximately 3 500 practitioners), adults (approximately 800 practitioners) or with people with disabilities (approximately 1 500 practitioners). Counsellors participate in 60 groups of 15 people each. Twenty lecturers run the programme, five researchers and specialists accompany its design and development. Each year, 2 000 practitioners take part in the basic and mandatory learning module (Extended counselling competence) which is the first part of the Certification programme professional guidance. Additional study modules will be launched from 2022 (Weber, 2020b). After more modules are launched, counsellors can choose from a broader catalogue of topics.

The contents of the first module include knowledge on changes in the world of work (such as digitalisation, recruitment, skills-shortage), individual and customised guidance and counselling, resource-orientation, networking, knowledge management and self-reflection. In order to obtain the certificate, participants must complete at least three modules within the following years (15 ECTS).

The learning modules are embedded in and related to daily work situations. The didactic frame includes strong elements of self-directed learning, the use of technology in a blended-learning process and professional supervision. Learning is tailored to practitioners' individual needs, starting with self-assessment of existing competences and setting goals for the individual learning process (Weber, 2020b). Digital competences are part of the curriculum and will also be trained through intensive use of digital elements across all learning modules (Kraatz; Rübner and Weber, 2021).

Participants usually have a first degree, and about half have a degree in career counselling or job placement. Further participants have another related degree or relevant vocational training and several years in practice. During the continuing education programme, participants are given the opportunity to combine and deepen their individual, practice-oriented background of experience with scientifically based findings on methods of career counselling as well as developments in occupations and the world of work. This content is supplemented by opportunities for increased self-reflection and case reflection, including through supervision, peer coaching and through learning support (Weber, 2020b).

The introduction of this programme aims to improve the quality and professionalism of counselling. The extent to which these goals are achieved will be examined through a multilevel evaluation (see next section).

5.3.3. Evaluation levels

What is outlined in this section is developed to evaluate the effects of the certification programme (Section 5.3.2). The evaluation goes beyond a review of students' learning achievements: this is done directly after the module and feeds into a normal quality assurance process. For a deeper evaluation, three levels of research related to the outcome of the programme on both counsellor and customers have been defined:

(a) level 1: effect of the acquired qualification on the counsellor. Professional counselling, which the learning translates into competence growth (professional attitude) that can be observed. In particular: has the counsellor become more professional as a result of completing the EB module? The criteria for this can be derived from the overall concept and the competence model of the certification programme and the first module;

(b) level 2: effect of the qualification on the counselling. Has the interaction between counsellor and customer changed, and how? Observations of interactions based on professional counselling criteria and counselling competence. Here, the observation of the interaction by researchers, the perception of the counsellors and the perception of the customer are of interest and data are collected to assess these aspects. If possible, the data of the guidance index will be included as an additional point of external observation;

(c) level 3: outcome for customers. Does the customer change and how: intra-individual, learning or behavioural outcomes. Or is there an effect on training or labour market situation (longer-term outcomes, economic outcomes)? The criteria for this are derived from the overall concept/the competence model of the certification programme and particularly the first module.

The three levels mentioned can be classified using the logic of input, process, and output/outcome as in the guidance index categories (Section 5.3.1). Level 1 is designed to investigate the input in terms of the professionalism and competence of the professionals.

Level 2 investigates the process in terms of the interaction, and level 3 the individual, social and economic outcome. We assumed that outputs and outcomes are influenced by the quality of service (level 1 and 2). At the same time, we need to reflect other factors outside the intervention influencing longer-term outcomes, especially the labour market situation (Schiersmann and Weber, 2017). Multifactorial influences must be assumed here, which methodologically complicates an outcome measurement, especially for medium-term social and economic outcomes and, especially in the case of sampling, entails high demands and should be tested in advance with power analysis (Kähler, 2010) to investigate the statistical power of a study-design and to estimate the size of a sample needed for reaching significant effects. The aim is to investigate all three levels, and for stage 3 careful design of the requirements for the sample as well as meaningful indicators for the outcome of the LLG services (Section 5.3.4.3) will be needed.

5.3.4. Indicators and methods within the levels

5.3.4.1. *Aims of research for level 1*

The aim of the investigation at level 1 is to identify a sustainable change in the counsellors in terms of their professionalism (Schiersmann; Weber and Petersen, 2013; Bender and Brandl, 2017; Mieg, 2006 and 2016; Maier-Gutheil, 2013; Pfadenhauer and Brosziewski, 2008; Dewe and Ferchhoff, 1995). For this, the concept of professionalism (*Professionalität'*) needs to be operationalised. Professionalism is based on an understanding of profession (*Profession*) defined according to the following criteria:

(a) the existence of recognised expert knowledge (Pfadenhauer and Brosziewski, 2008) or domain-specific cognitive adaptation by the expert to a problem area (Mieg, 2006);
(b) existing qualifications, training, and special competences (Mieg, 2006);
(c) the establishment of a professional identity and connection to an established professional group (Mieg, 2006);
(d) the attribution of an expert role by third parties (Mieg, 2006);
(e) autonomous, self-responsible action (Mieg, 2006).

For the understanding of professionalism, professional action is of particular importance. The following criteria concretises the understanding of competent counselling interventions as a professional action:

(a) competent action exhibits the connection of three reference points: the individual case-related problem analysis or diagnosis, the derivation of measures (inference), and the implementation of measures (Mieg, 2016, with reference to Abbott, 1988);
(b) simultaneity of theory understanding and case understanding, specifically the linking of scientific knowledge and experiential knowledge as well as a sensitivity to the concrete case (Dewe et al., 1995);
(c) understanding that action is not standardisable and the importance of the dialogical approach (interaction with the customer) (Dewe et al., 1995);
(d) self-restraint in relation to the ability to control and to understand (Dewe et al., 1995);
(e) reflective completion of integration processes (Dewe et al., 1995).

Professionalism in this sense is understood as the basis for competent and reflected, independent and dynamically adapted action in dealing with customers. There is also a stabilisation of one's own professionalisation through exchange, networking, self-directed acquisition of knowledge and appropriate self-care in order to be able to fulfil one's own task in the long term.

Within the framework of the accompanying research on the certification programme, there is an interest in examining the development of such a professional attitude. In the chain of effects, it is assumed that this attitude (both) when acting with the individual customer, (as well as in overarching settings with the team / networks / the agency) counselling processes can be designed more appropriately (level 2) and be more successful in their outcomes (level 3).

The evaluation question is*:* are counsellors who have participated in the module EB able to design their actions professionally (or more professionally in comparison to other counsellors)?

In the following, observation points are proposed. These should fulfil three requirements: they operationalise the concept of professionalism; it is assumed that participation in the module has contained learning opportunities for the development of the described aspects; and they are observable.

Observation points for the evaluation of professionalism:

(a) counsellors possess professional knowledge from different domains (including vocational training, labour market research, pedagogy, counselling research) and counselling approaches. They can name criteria from this or derive them for the observation and evaluation of their own work;

(b) counsellors update their knowledge. They can describe procedures that help them to keep their professional knowledge up to date or to secure and share it through knowledge management;

(c) counsellors observe and reflect on their counselling actions. They can derive consequences from their self-reflection and assess and influence their actions (self-control);

(d) counsellors have a determined attitude towards their task and customers. They can name and justify their attitudes;

(e) counsellors design their counselling activities in a way that is appropriate to the situation. They can differentiate between the design of the relationship, the design of the process and the design of the content of a counselling session and set appropriate priorities;

(f) counsellors exchange ideas with colleagues. They participate in collegial counselling and other appropriate forms of collegial exchange.

The observation points are theoretically based on the literature presented above. The concrete selection is developed from the aims of the certification programme, such as that counsellors acquire knowledge and reflect upon their practice using this knowledge. The more careful design of interventions fitting to the situation of the customer is another relevant learning goal, as is team supervision and collegial exchange.

For the methodological implementation, the design can include participant observation as well as interviews with counsellors. Category-guided instruments need to be developed for the aspects to be observed. A quantifying survey, such as via questionnaires, seems less suitable due to the complexity of the career guidance processes and the resulting competences required of practitioners.

5.3.4.2. *Aims of research for level 2*

The aim of the investigation at level 2 is to identify a sustainable change with regard to the interaction between counsellor and customer. It is process-related and its design by the counsellor relates to the defined competences of the certificate programme, which are differentiated into knowledge, skills and attitudes (Weber, 2020a). Studies or survey methods for the investigation of counsellor-customer interaction in the field of career guidance are available (for an overview: Schiersmann, Maier-Gutheil and Weber, 2016). From such studies (e.g. Weinhardt and Kelava, 2016; Schiersmann, Petersen and Weber, 2017), criteria for observing and recording the interaction can be obtained. In the chain of effects, it is assumed that the competent design of counselling processes (level 2) promotes an effect in the output or outcome (level 3). The actual achievement of outcomes depends on other factors, such as the complexity of the customer's situation or problem, the customer's willingness to change, and the labour market situation.

Collection of relevant customer data, such as the customer’s current situation, aims or motivation (when the intervention is compulsory) is of value to the guidance intervention. An intersection to the guidance index (3.1) can be seen: in the index, different items investigate the perception of the interaction in the guidance process as well as on the direct output of the intervention. Such overlapping might enable an integration of the qualitative and quantitative data (level 2 and 3).

The evaluation question is: are the counsellors who participated in the module able to carry out the counselling process, and specifically the interaction with the customer, competently? This involves the use of knowledge, skills and attitudes for a situational and customer-oriented implementation of the interaction.

Observation points for the evaluation of the counsellors/customer interaction are that counsellors:

(a) provide a stable and pleasant environment;
(b) design the counselling process appropriately/tailored to the customer(s) situation (design session);
(c) create a sustainable counselling relationship and emotional security (show interest and appreciation);
(d) clarify the issue and agree on a contract (design session);
(e) clarify the customer's situation and goals (promote exploration);
(f) identify strengths and resources of the customer (deepening the counselling);
(g) develop solution and action perspectives with the customer;
(h) bring knowledge/information (e.g. about the job market, requirements) into the conversation to develop perspectives for solutions and action (cf. Schiersmann; Petersen and Weber, 2013, pp. 287-295; Weinhardt and Kelava, 2016, Table 3).

While the formulation of the observation points is created from the perspective of the counsellor, the observation (methodically) needs to include both sides, and especially how the interaction is explored by the customer. Research for the methodological implementation can be conducted via participant observation or video analysis. Interviews with customers, as well as survey data on the interaction of counsellors and customer are to be regarded as a useful supplement. Interviews or surveys for customers and counsellors is therefore planned as a supplement. For the aspects to be observed, category-guided instruments must be developed or used as published in the literature.

5.3.4.3. *Aims of research for level 3*

A combination of the qualitative investigation of levels one and two with a quantitative investigation is desired. This can be accomplished by linking to existing monitoring data.

The research aim in stage three is to investigate the outcome on customers (direct outputs and longer-term outcomes) (cf. Schiersmann and Weber, 2017). In particular, the following questions will be investigated:

(a) intra-individual outcomes and learning/behavioural outcomes that can be identified (individual level);
(b) outcomes that can be determined in relation to the training or labour market situation (longer-term outcomes, economic outcomes) (economic or social level).

Methodologically, the implementation by questioning (pre-post) or the evaluation of statistical data on the changes after the completion of counselling is necessary, including control groups. For this, different criteria and methodological requirements should be applied from different disciplines (cf. Schiersmann and Weber, 2017; Hooley, 2014). While pedagogical- and psychological-oriented outcome research primarily examines customers' internal changes (especially the change in competences relevant to career choices) (cf. Rübner and Höft, 2017; 2020; Whiston et al., 2017), studies using econometric models and research methods, such as those conducted by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), examine medium- and long-term outcomes like educational outcomes: participation in continuing education after counselling and its costs and disbursements; acquisition, as in faster transition to training or employment; or social outcomes, such as reduction of transfer payments (Schanne and Weyh, 2014; Fitzenberger; Hillerich-Sigg and Sprietsma, 2020; on methodological challenges also Albrecht; Geerdes and Sander, 2012).

For research conducted at level three, a quasi-experimental design will be chosen. This will include a random selection of a representative number of local agencies, and for each of a defined number of counselling professionals. For each professional, a relevant number of customer cases will be examined. With each customer, a survey is conducted at the beginning of the counselling process (t1), in the course of the process, e.g. after 6 weeks (t2), and subsequently, e.g. after 3 months (t3). Data on the counselling professionals regarding participation in qualification and further training are recorded so that this information can be considered in the statistical evaluation. From the electronic customer tracking data (IT system for collecting customer and process data), information can be derived on the customer's whereabouts (training, employment), among other details. The customer survey instrument is intended to collect intra-individual outcomes (learning or behavioural outcomes) and data that can be used to investigate outcomes related to the training or labour market situation.

On the individual level we have proposed the use of a German version of the career readiness (Berufswahlreife) scale named BET ([36]) (Rübner and Höft, 2017; 2019). The concept for early career transitions is tested in pre-post studies; a validated 16-item scale and a 40-item scale are available. The existing studies in the literature show significant outcomes of guidance interventions on the individual career readiness of customers. The scale focuses on six fields: problem awareness, readiness for action, vocational self-assessment, vocational information level, decision-making behaviour, and realisation activities (Rübner and Höft, 2017). For further career development, a complementary scale has been developed and tested. This scale has 17 items, including career development in job transitions of adults with focus on labour market confidence, career-related readiness for action, and subjective stress experience (Rübner and Höft, 2020, p. 285f.) Additional scales might be integrated, for instance the outcomes on self-efficacy and goal attainment could be an interesting measure to investigate the effect of the intervention (Whiston et al., 2017).

To investigate the outcomes on the training or labour market situation of the customer (longer-term outcomes like engagement in learning, sustainable employment or level of income) in the different questionnaires, relevant data will be collected including customers education level, current situation, career aims, agreed activities and realised steps. Changes in the training or labour market status can be extracted in addition from the documentation in the IT system.

For the further methodological design to evaluate guidance outcomes, it is proposed to carry out the development of the survey design and instruments in cooperation with other research entities. If possible, in cooperation with the Centre for Customer and Employee Surveys, the existing monitoring data (guidance index) should be integrated. In cooperation with the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), a power analysis will be conducted to determine the necessary sample size. Whether quantitative evaluation of the net effect of the qualification of the module EB on the customers is possible conditional and depends on many factors, including randomness of participation and/or formation of statistical twins. Whether this is feasible will also be examined in cooperation with the IAB.

5.4. Next steps

Lifelong guidance for adults has gained considerable importance in Germany over the past 15 years. After the services were initially established regionally, FEA is now also active as an important provider of career guidance throughout the country. For the next steps and the further discussion, some key points can be highlighted.

(a) The development of quality management procedures and standards for counselling has not yet led to systematic evaluation and monitoring of career guidance activities in

([36]) The BET (*Berufliche Erstwähler unter25* / Vocational choosers under 25) instrument was initially developed to investigate individual outcomes in the first transition from school to work; in recent years versions for other targets has been developed and tested, included adults.

Germany. The FEA's 'guidance index' is a relevant step in this direction, especially because it provides continuous data on the LLG services. Other activities in the federal states could be developed further from monitoring of services to evaluation.

(b) With the increased professionalisation of counsellors in FEA, we propose to develop and use a holistic evaluation procedure. For this purpose, qualitative procedures will first be developed at levels 1 and 2 to survey the quality, competence and professionalism of counsellors and counselling interaction. Both perspectives are a relevant base for outcomes in a professional context.

(c) Four methodological approaches to investigate professional development and counselling interaction have been developed and can be used in this context. Results might offer feedback on the qualification and continuing training, as well as on the human resource strategies of the providers.

(d) We propose to take this perspective into account also in the international discussion. There might be a danger in focusing mostly on economic outcomes like faster integration into the labour market or sustainable employment without showing evidence on the relevance (inputs) of highly qualified practitioners and good quality interventions (process) as prerequisites to reaching such outcomes.

(e) The further aim is to establish a quantitative procedure at level 3 that also records the outputs and outcomes of counselling and makes them verifiable both at the individual level of learning and on the social level with measures based on econometric models.

(f) For the investigation of output on the individual level, such as career readiness, relevant instruments are available and tested. Research has shown to a wide extent that individual outputs relate to the outcomes on the social and economic level.

(g) In the German context the discussion on the methodological requirements – especially on economic measurable outcomes – is highly elaborated and uses carefully considered procedures. Methodological issues need to be clarified for this purpose. In addition to the question of the sample and the survey design, the link with the existing guidance index and with existing controlling data in the FEA must be examined and implemented in cooperation with the relevant actors.

(h) Aside from this, other limitations for the research presented might be the difficulties in data collection and data protection. The LLG services investigated are provided as part of public services with highest standards regarding data and ethics. The use of existing data or the collection of new data need to be in line with those and limits the scope of the research.

(i) If the design presented can be realised, the monitoring and evaluation practice in Germany can be developed to a new level and other fields of action may benefit from the experience, methodology and results.

Acronyms

BET	*Berufliche Erstwähler unter25* - Vocational choosers under 25
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ELGPN	European lifelong guidance policy network
EQF	European qualification framework
FEA	Federal Employment Agency
IAB	Institut für Arbeits- und Berufsforschung - Institute for Employment Research
IT	information technology
LLG	lifelong guidance
NFB	Nationales Forum für Beratung in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung – National Fora for Guidance (education, vocation and employment)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ZKM	Zentrum für Kunden- und Mitarbeiterbefragung – Center for Customer and Employee Surveys

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Chapter 6.
Towards more effective career guidance processes: the CREAR digital tool improving client-oriented interventions ([37])

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6.1. Introduction

The importance of making career guidance services easily and effectively accessible to adults has been underlined by the pandemic (Cedefop et al., 2020). The OECD report (2021) specifically addresses the critical need to improve the quality of career guidance provision through establishing quality standards, monitoring outcomes, and professionalising guidance practitioners. Lifelong learning and upskilling supported by career guidance are a widely endorsed strategy to tackle the match between the supply of skills and labour market demands, and to develop competence at different stages of people's lives and careers (Finnish Government, 2019; Council of the European Union, 2020). More personalised career guidance, with information, advice and support on career and learning options, will help adults to navigate successfully an ever-evolving labour market (OECD, 2021).

Finland has established a coherent and holistic lifelong guidance system that is easily accessible to all citizens, young and adults, and helps them to discover their strengths and interests, develop their skills, and meet their goals in learning and career. Lifelong guidance services in Finland are provided mainly by the education and employment sectors led by the authorities responsible, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Guidance and counselling offered by schools and education institutions are available to all pupils and students along their learning path in comprehensive, upper secondary general and vocational, as well as higher and adult education. The guidance services at the Employment and Economic Development Offices are targeted at adult clients, unemployed or employed, who are looking for new job, career or up-/reskilling opportunities. A nationwide network of locally operating cross-sectoral and multi-professional one-stop guidance shops (Ohjaamo in Finnish) provide young people with information, advice and guidance on a walk-in and easy-access basis. Across all sectors, guidance service provision largely relies on a blended approach and professionally qualified guidance personnel.

([37]) We wish to thank all those guidance practitioners in Finland who were interviewed and who so willingly contributed their valuable insights to the qualitative study conducted for this article. Their professional expertise, as well as dedicated, participative and collaborative effort, are highly appreciated. For obvious reasons their anonymity must be respected, and thus their names cannot be revealed here. Our best thanks go also to all the project partners who represented several Finnish vocational education and training as well as higher education institutions in the project *Resilience and future belief* (ESF, 2018-20), coordinated by the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland. Their contribution to the development, testing and piloting of the CREAR digital service need indicator deserves to be recognised and truly valued.

The national guidance system in Finland is constantly being developed. Ideally such development work should be based on competent and reliable evidence. In recent years, however, no comprehensive evaluations have been carried out nationwide of the quality or the impact of guidance services provided by different sectors. Over time, though, several studies of more focused or sectoral nature addressing career guidance from multiple perspectives have been conducted by different institutions (e.g. National Audit Office of Finland, 2015; Mayer et al., 2020). They mainly offer a partial or more narrow view into certain aspects of guidance and counselling but fail at providing a holistic overview of the effectiveness of the nationwide guidance provision.

Against this background, the new Finnish national lifelong guidance strategy 2020-23 (Finnish Government, 2020) outlines actions such as:

(a) establishing a national structure to coordinate the development of evidence-based quality and impact of lifelong guidance services;
(b) creating a digital service for lifelong learning that relies on shared information on education, labour market and skills;
(c) evaluating training programmes of career practitioners to promote the overall quality of the guidance services.

This national strategy views lifelong guidance as a continuum of the whole lifespan, and sets out to improve access to multichannel guidance, skills assessment, and up- and reskilling opportunities to advance career development, as well as to strengthen career management skills in working life (Finnish Government, 2020). In Finland and beyond, the role of career guidance should increasingly be to support inclusive education and employment of the already marginalised/disadvantaged groups and those at risk of falling behind, such as long-term unemployed and immigrants (OECD, 2021).

6.1.1. Assessment of career guidance process: impact and quality

The focus of this paper is on adults with career development and upskilling/reskilling needs. This target audience may sometimes experience problems in acknowledging the need to upgrade their skills, or have difficulties in identifying where their actual learning need is. These adults are not necessarily always aware of all the possibilities there are for competence development, nor where to find information and guidance that support their decision-making on learning and personal development. Setting learning goals, looking for learning opportunities, and dealing with motivational or time management issues are only some of the challenges that adults may face when they start to consider professional development. Creating a routine of learning and reinventing their learning-to-learn capabilities may require additional attention. With targeted and timely career guidance services, adults' access to education and training, and their continuing personal and professional development, can best be supported.

This paper concentrates on the effectuality and quality assurance of career guidance processes. However, it is not possible to separate the assessment of the guidance counsellor-client process from the provision of guidance services and competences of guidance practitioners (ELGPN, 2015; Hooley and Rice, 2018). Effectuality ([38]) of a guidance process refers to its capability to bring about change and produce the intended results (Eby et al., 2008), and quality that the process meets the predefined standards (Plant, 2001).

Careers and career development of an individual are dependent on the context, social systems, and economic environment (Schiersmann et al., 2016). Thus, the societal structures, stakeholders and institutions comprise the frame for career guidance services. The management of guidance provision and service delivery requires a holistic understanding of both education and career service sectors and other stakeholders; how the quality and effectiveness are measured and how to provide targeted, customised, and timely services for clients (ELGPN, 2015; Schiersmann et al., 2016).

Hiebert, Schober and Oakes (2014) introduce two trends in the assessment of guidance services: outcome-focused intervention and evidence-based practice that are to be explored adequately and concurrently. Outcome-focused intervention refers to changes following from the guidance process; the evidence-based approach focuses on the assessment of interventions in a given context with different clients (Hiebert et al., 2014). The assessment of a career guidance process is complicated. Qualitative and quantitative measures should be used in parallel. If there is no change as expected in a client's career readiness, the chosen interventions should be reflected on. This should always be done if the guidance process has comprised multiple sessions and there have been several professionals involved. The quality of the client and guidance counsellor relationship, and the need for professional development and upskilling of competences of the personnel should also be considered.

Figure 1 presents the basic elements of a guidance process (McLeod, 2009; Niles, 2011; Niles et al., 2021). The process follows certain phases identified by many researchers in the career guidance field (e. g. Rogers, 1962; Pietrofesa; Hoffman and Splete, 1984; Peavy, 2000; Amundson, 2009; Niles, 2011; Niles et al., 2021). First, the guidance relationship is established; the goals and interventions for the guidance process should be discussed thoroughly together with the client. There is a growing need for personalisation of guidance services (ELGPN, 2015) and the voice and perspective of a client should be heard from the beginning of the process (Hooley and Rice, 2018; NVL, 2011). We suggest that after each phase of the guidance process there should be feedback and feed forward discussions where the guidance counsellor and the client together assess progress made and anticipate the next steps. This intervention helps the guidance counsellor and the client to negotiate whether they are proceeding towards the jointly defined objectives or whether the goals should be redefined.

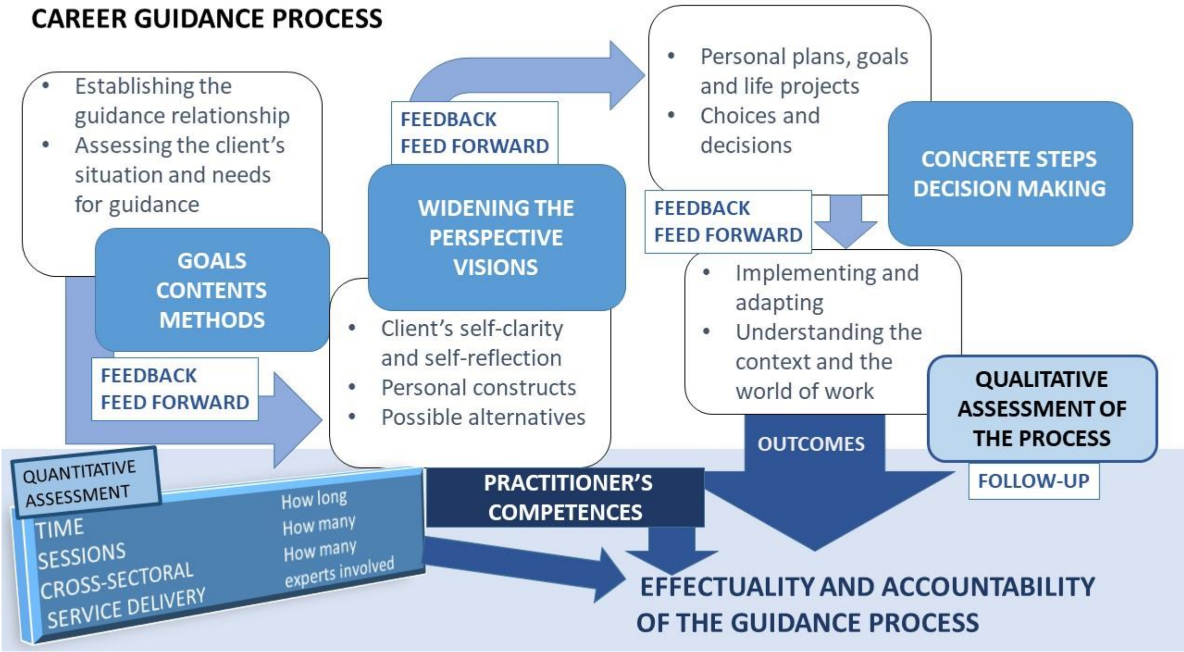
([38]) We have used the terms 'effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'capability' in the paper for highlighting specific aspects/dimensions of 'impact':

- effectiveness (effective) is linked to the guidance service provision and how impactful it is on the whole;
- efficiency (efficient) is about the ability to produce guidance services with an optimal expenditure or with minimum waste of time and effort;
- capability (effectual) refers to the guidance process and its ability to bring about change and produce the intended results.

In the first phase of the process, the foundational competences and skills of the client should be explored. These are self-reflection and living circumstances, self-assessment, and self-clarity (see Niles et al., 2021). Too often, guidance practitioners disregard this phase, although these are the main factors influencing the capacity to make decisions for the future career and life (Niles et al., 2021).

To provide appropriate services for the clients, their education, and work history should be taken into account. Not only the background of the client (e.g. age, employment, education, skills and competences, ethnicity) but also their life situation, resilience, agency and learning skills that influence counselling and learning needs, are to be mapped (ELGPN, 2015; Hooley and Rice, 2018; Kasurinen, 2019). Guidance practitioners help their clients to understand who they are and what they want for their future.

Figure 1. **Effectuality and accountability of the career guidance process**



Source: Authors; see also Niles, 2011; Niles et al., 2021; Rogers, 1962.

Once self-clarity is attained, it is important to help clients to widen their conceptions of their future options (Amundson; Harris-Bowlsbey and Niles, 2009; Niles et al., 2021). Individuals often have a narrow understanding about the possibility structure of their training and employment alternatives. Building an understanding of different career opportunities is based on life experience and work history, human and cultural capital (see Fugate; Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). These refer to learning outcomes, competences, and skills, and the social background of the individuals (Fugate et al., 2004). The guidance process helps the client to explore training- and work-related information in relation to their skills and competences and hopes and interests for their own career (Sultana, 2012).

The next phase deals with career choice and planning for the next steps. Alongside the career choice, the adaptability of the client and non-linearity of the career path should be dealt with (Niles et al., 2021; Savickas, 2005). Definitions of career management skills (Sultana, 2012) and career theories stress agency, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience of an individual to navigate in an unsecure and changing labour market and society (Savickas, 2005).

The effectuality of a career guidance process can be described using relevant learning outcomes, such as skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Killeen and Kid, 1991). The four changes that facilitate individuals' career planning, decision-making, and implementation are self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision-making and transition skills (Killeen and Kid, 1991). The focus is on measuring client progress: assessing the implementation of planned objectives (e.g. career choice), learning outcomes (e.g. career management skills), personal attribute outcomes (e.g. self-clarity) and impact outcomes (e.g. employment) (Hiebert et al., 2014; Plant, 2001; Redekopp; Bezanson and Dugas, 2015).

To provide targeted and effective services, guidance counsellor competences should cover several elements. The interventions that counsellors choose during the process should be appropriate and timely for their clients (Hiebert et al., 2014). They should also recognise the special needs of individuals, for example, either learning difficulties or lack of agency or self-regulation. Anxiety and depression are on the increase (Kasurinen, 2019; OECD, 2020) and personal indisposition can prevent individuals not only from planning their future but also managing their everyday life (Kasurinen, 2019). One of the core competences of guidance counsellors should be the ability to recognise problems in wellbeing and life management and find the interventions that best help their clients, often in cooperation with other professionals.

Other core competences for different contexts and working with diverse clients include knowledge of career development and counselling theories, labour market information, communication and interpersonal skills, and knowledge of ethical standards, technology, information and resources and ability to evaluate the services provided for clients and conduct needs assessment (CICA, 2019; Schiersmann et al., 2016). Guidance counsellors should also recognise and respect diversity and be culturally sensitive when choosing interventions for the guidance process (CICA, 2019).

To improve the effectiveness of career guidance services, tools that help provide a holistic overview of a client's career readiness are needed. These tools help career guidance practitioners to use timely, and targeted interventions, and prevent them from disregarding clients' needs and lack of skills to make applicable career choices. In the following section we will present one solution for mapping of the client's service needs and the assessment of achieved outcomes.

6.1.2. CREAR digital service need indicator

Forming a trusting relationship with clients is crucial for guidance to be helpful and effectual. Not only do guidance practitioners need a strong set of interpersonal and professional skills to establish rapport quickly with clients, but also tools designed for early identification of client needs. Sometimes practitioners may not use or have such tools and so may miss out on fully seeing and understanding their client situations. Instead, they may assume that their clients are better at managing their life, learning and career than they in real terms are. This situation potentially creates a mismatch between what is offered and what should be offered. The guidance process may be negatively affected should the practitioner not have a clear overview of the client's needs, and the client not have sufficient insight into their own present life situation and future aspirations.

As a response to this, a research-based early-detection tool for career guidance practitioners, teachers and student welfare professionals has recently been developed and piloted in Finland. The CREAR ([39]) digital service need indicator helps these groups of professionals to strengthen the wellbeing, agency and resilience of adult learners. Based on the results that clients receive from CREAR, guidance practitioners can make interventions on issues that may influence an individual's learning and/or career progress, and offer timely, targeted and need-based guidance and counselling services (Kasurinen et al., 2020.)

CREAR is a self-assessment tool for clients to map out their life situation. What makes CREAR special compared to some other guidance tools is that it takes a holistic approach to human life. Many other tools provide a narrower view of a person's life and focus on abilities, strengths, inclinations, values, attitudes or interests; most do not bring different life areas together in a comprehensive way. CREAR produces information about issues linked to study progress (learning ability, resilience and agency) as well as to transition to further education or working life (career management and employability skills). It enables simultaneously to identify the factors that affect the five different areas shown in Figure 2:

(a) studying;
(b) time management and planning skills (agency);
(c) wellbeing and resilience;
(d) career management;
(e) employment.

([39]) CREAR has been developed by the ESF-funded project *Resilience and future belief* (2018-20) that was coordinated by the Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland. For guidance practitioners and other experts, a handbook on how to use CREAR has been published in Finnish, Swedish and English (for the English language version see the bibliography of this article).

Figure 2. **The five different areas of the CREAR indicator**

Source: Kasurinen, et al., 2020..

These five areas with underlying factors emerged from the quantitative research project Toteemi (Totem) that was carried out in Finland during 2017-19. The Toteemi study investigated the wellbeing and future belief of students in higher education in relation to studying, agentic functioning, career management and employment. The statistical data analyses resulted in a set of criteria that can be used to assess the guidance and other support needs of adult learners, now the foundation of the CREAR tool. The Toteemi study also revealed that these five areas are strongly correlated, which must be kept in mind when using CREAR and analysing the results from it (Kasurinen, 2019).

Building on the results of the Toteemi study, CREAR has been developed to a conceptually culture- and context-free ([40]), universally applicable tool that is well-suited to adult users in Finland and in other countries. The tool has been demonstrated to professional audiences abroad, where it has been well received, tested on a small scale, and assessed as flexible and practical in use. CREAR is currently available in Finnish and Finnish plain language, Swedish and English, and could easily be translated into other languages.

Anonymity of the user is protected, and no registration or identification is required for the CREAR indicator. The responses given to the around 40 statements in the above five areas, and the results received, are not stored in any database. The users can save their personal result (reported in pie charts and text descriptions) for themselves and then share it with their guidance counsellor. When using CREAR (options for use are mobile, tablet and laptop), certain ethical principles must be acknowledged, especially respecting the individual and their right to self-determination and confidentiality. Only with the explicit consent of the client may

([40]) By ‘context free’ we mean that action can be taken irrespective of the context. This includes any country/society and its characteristics, such as education, training, employment, volunteering, youth work, and social work. The guidance process model illustrated in this article can be operationalised in any of these contexts.

their results or the measures taken on basis of the results be given to other experts (Kasurinen et al., 2020).

The result that CREAR generates can be used to assess the need for guidance or any other type of support. The analysis allows the guidance counsellor to identify which factors have a positive impact on the individual's career development and which may have a critical impact (Kasurinen et al., 2020.). CREAR is optimally suited to getting a quick, reliable and holistic overview of an individual's current situation. If the tool is integrated in a systematic manner in the guidance process, from inception to completion, an individual's progression across different areas over time can be monitored as a guidance practitioner states in the citation below:

> 'CREAR is included in our toolbox for the initial assessment phase as well as interim and final assessments. Our clients are individuals with major difficulties to get employed. CREAR is well suited to speedy assessments of a person's situation as part of the ongoing coaching process.' (Career guidance counsellor, Eastern Finland.)

Clients can be asked to use CREAR in the initial assessment phase to find out what the critical issues might be, then be helped accordingly, and, at the end of the guidance process, they can fill out the indicator again to see if a (positive) change has taken place. This way guidance practitioners will be able to see the perceived impact of the guidance process and offer timely support that helps the client to choose what they need and value most. If CREAR is used by organisations (such as education institutions and employment offices) in a systematic manner, they can better monitor their overall progress and performance; from this they can develop their service provision and guidance personnel competences as time goes on.

6.2. Qualitative study

A qualitative study was conducted for this paper. It was interested in three main research tasks:

(a) how are guidance processes evaluated in practice?
(b) can CREAR be utilised in assessing the effectuality of guidance processes?
(c) how guidance practitioners assess their own competences?

The research process of collecting, transcribing, analysing and extracting data, and reporting the results of the study are presented below.

6.2.1. Data and methodology

Initially an invitation to be interviewed was sent to a group of 43 potential respondents, who had been piloting CREAR in their own organisation in Finland in 2020-21. Of these, 25 volunteered for participation and were interviewed. These were semi-structured thematic individual interviews with staff members of VET institutions, adult and higher education, and public employment services to collect in-depth qualitative data about the use of the CREAR tool. In structure and flexibility, semi-structured interviews are well suited to exploring respondents' views, perceptions and thoughts (Nunan, 1992). Due to the pandemic, these interviews, with an average duration of 1 hour, were conducted using Teams in 2020-21.

Among the interviewees there were career guidance counsellors, VET group advisers, special education teachers, adult educators, and public employment officers. All were providing career guidance to their adult clients and they were experienced in using CREAR. Before getting started with the interviews, the respondents were explained the purpose of the research, clarifications were given if any questions arose, and anonymity and confidentiality of all data provided were highlighted. Each interviewee filled out an informed consent form.

To investigate a more effectual and targeted career guidance process, a conversational guide with three themes grouped into multiple questions was used at the interviews.

Part 1: Experience in using the CREAR tool with clients.

Part 2: Guidance and counselling skills and professional development needs.

Part 3: Organisation of guidance and support services, including monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. A four-stage process of description, categorisation, combination and interpretation of data followed (Hirsijärvi and Hurme, 2011). The following questions guided the empirical data analysis: how did the respondents:

(a) experience the use of CREAR and aspects that are linked to it as to recognising individuals' guidance needs?
(b) assess the impact and effectuality of guidance processes from the perspective of their own professional role?
(c) view their own skills and competences in relation to the five thematic areas of the self-reflective CREAR tool?

6.2.2. Results and conclusions

The analysis process was cyclical rather than linear, with repeated moves back and forth so that the qualitative data, non-numerical in nature, could be approached and comprehended from different perspectives (Ruusuvuori; Nikander and Hyvärinen, 2010). Three major themes as critical elements in the guidance process emerged from the analysis of the interview materials. Their summarised presentation below approximates and characterises the analysed data as interpreted by the authors.

6.2.2.1. *User voice not necessarily audible or present enough to be heard and acknowledged appropriately*

All the interviewees mentioned that different clients have different life situations and therefore diverse needs. Yet the respondents were not able to elaborate fully on how exactly they dealt with this aspect in the guidance process. An important finding from across the interviews was that guidance practitioners tend to give too little attention to the initial stage of the process. Multiple explanations were given to justify the urge to move on fast from the outset of the process, such as knowing the client from previous occasions, not having enough time, being professionally highly experienced and aware of what certain types of clients need, or not feeling fully competent to enter a more profound discussion with the client. If the importance of the initial stage is ignored or not fully acknowledged, the whole guidance process may lack focus and goal orientation, contain digressions and therefore last longer; in the end this will not be helpful for the client.

This study also revealed that individuals using guidance services do not always necessarily have a full understanding of what career guidance is and how it can support their learning and career paths. They are rarely given a clear overview of the guidance process that they are supposed to go through, and the process appears fragmented and unstructured to them. For most of the time, 'what comes first, what follows and how the process ends' is not sufficiently described by guidance practitioners working with clients. Even if guidance practitioners emphasise the importance of good interaction with clients, they themselves tend to forget to inform and encourage their clients to be active, engaged agents in the process. Clients easily rely on the expertise of guidance practitioners and view them as authority figures in charge of the process. They decide how things proceed without giving enough space to the individual to influence the flow of the process and be well heard therein.

The following quotations highlight the dialogue challenges that some of the interviewed guidance practitioners had experienced with their clients:

> '[…] the client may not necessarily be able to put everything into words … (guidance counsellor) must know to ask the right questions […] By taking the discussion forward you usually get at least some answers, but on their own clients seldom start pondering things from multiple perspectives. That is extremely rare.' (Guidance counsellor, Southern Finland.)
>
> '[…] often the problem is that there are too few possibilities to discuss with students. When you discuss their personal competence development plan (PCDP), the student is often so shy that s/he does not share much about his/her personal things. But the CREAR indicator is very good in the sense that in a way it takes you closer to where the difficulties are …' (Developer of guidance practice, Eastern Finland.)

All interviewees had had several clients with whom they had used CREAR. Based on their experience, they regarded CREAR as a tool with high potential for improving the quality and impact of their guidance provision and for smoothening the interaction between the guidance counsellor and the client.

6.2.2.2. *Lack of systematic evaluation and poorly defined multi-professional cooperation challenge the quality of individual guidance processes*

Systematic evaluation is interested in finding out what individuals gain from customised guidance processes. The aim of such evaluation is to collect and analyse data over time to ensure that guidance providers (such as education institutions, employment offices and guidance centres) offer quality services to their clientele. This way it is possible to see what is changing from year to year and how the evidence base best can support guidance process effectuality and quality (Hooley and Rice, 2018).

None of the interviewees were able to describe convincingly that there would have been any systematic and comprehensive evaluation mechanisms in place at the institutions where they were working. Rather, fragments of evaluation scattered into different directions combining somewhat irregular cycles of collecting qualitative and/or quantitative data for various purposes and from diverse sources were the case. This non-systematic and poorly coordinated approach to collecting, analysing and using data resulted in a lack of ability to utilise information efficiently. Practitioners relying on their 'gut feeling' and 'this is how things always have been done' instead of employing up-to-date data was the logical consequence of not having established proper systematic evaluation procedures.

> 'We do not have a system or data collection to know, if guidance targets what it should target. […] All this is certainly a little bit obscure, but if monitoring and reporting would work, it would improve things.' (Guidance counsellor, Western Finland.)
>
> 'A quality expert runs these questionnaires and puts all the data together. The management will be informed about the results and they will keep the staff posted on the findings. There are colleagues who are cynical and say that nothing ever happens after staff consultations. There is information around, and you report about things, but sometimes I feel that nothing ever goes into practice.' (Guidance counsellor, Southern Finland.)

With more complex client cases, guidance practitioners need to cooperate with other professionals (including psychologists, social and health care personnel). This study showed that the parameters of multi-professional and cross-sectoral cooperation are often vaguely defined, and that cooperation happens more ad hoc and case-by-case than following certain clearly laid out protocols to keep guidance processes well organised and coordinated. Clients may be adversely affected when the roles and responsibilities of different professionals involved in the individual guidance process are not transparent and well-known. The worst-case scenario is that clients get a low-quality service that does not meet their needs, or they get the wrong type of a service that may not be valued by the client.

> 'I try to avoid getting stuck with one and the same partner with whom I cooperate in all situations as it may not be the best or the right one for the client. My employer expects me to keep up with our network partners in the region to intensify this cooperation at the organisational level.' (Career guidance counsellor, Eastern Finland.)

6.2.2.3. *Guidance practitioners lack critical self-reflection on their professional performance*

Monitoring professional performance that complies with the highest standards of practice calls for engaging guidance practitioners in critical self-reflection. In the light of this study, the professional self-understanding of guidance practitioners seems largely to rely on their well-established and knowledgeable guidance practice, but much less thought and attention are given to the actual quality and impact of their work.

This study made it evident that it is important to apply indicators of quality as one of the analytical tools to evaluate the professional performance of guidance practitioners. Such tools and indicators are currently either missing or not systematically used according to this study. Based on the data, weak monitoring of professional performance seems to be a reality across institutions. This is mainly a consequence of the lack of institutional capacity and resources, and overly formal, even deficient supervision, evaluation and reporting procedures that stem from inadequate and sometimes obsolete structures and frameworks.

Guidance practitioners regularly referred to their administratively heavy and constantly growing workload (e.g. number of clients on the rise) that did not allow them to reflect properly on their performance and keep up with their own professional development. This resulted in routine-based service delivery models where quantity of clients was overriding the quality of the actual guidance process. Due to lack of time and other resources, assumptions and hastiness, rather than facts and the actual client situation, seemed to guide the work of practitioners.

> 'If you are responsible for providing guidance to some 700 students, you cannot talk about individual guidance. You have no time for authentic encounters, but you allocate your time to those who need it the most.' (Guidance counsellor, Eastern Finland.)

Around two thirds of the interviewees felt competent and confident with all the five areas of the CREAR tool, whereas the rest expressed concern about their ability to promote individuals' agency and wellbeing. It was not always clear to them what constitutes agency and wellbeing, and how exactly they, as guidance practitioners, could contribute to strengthening those capacities. For some practitioners the idea of understanding career management as a lifelong continuum was something new, and thus they needed to refresh their professional mindset accordingly. In summary, from the study we can say that efficient use of any guidance tool, method or technique for the good of the client always requires adequate knowledge of the underlying theories and frameworks.

> '[…] there are areas that I should know more about. I probably have quite some competences in career management and employment skills … perhaps I should be more knowledgeable about agency. I have participated in further education to learn about something that is linked to psychology and how to utilise your strengths. I consider myself as being fully professional at giving tips to students about networking and things like that.' (Teacher-guidance counsellor, Northern Finland.)

6.3. Discussion

At the end of the guidance process, the individual service user may be (un)satisfied with the experience and (un)grateful for the support provided. Yet, there is no way of knowing what happens after this experience, nor how it influences the person's life situation, ability to progress in studies or to find employment. In the Finnish context, after a completed guidance process no instruments are currently used to assess how a person's skills and competences develop in such a direction that his/her future employability becomes stronger and chances of finding a fulfilling and meaningful job get better.

The main task of guidance practitioners working in education, training and employment has traditionally been to help an individual's personal growth, educational attainment and professional development. Accordingly, their skills, competences and expertise are directed towards serving these goals. These days, however, this may no longer be enough. We notice a paradigm shift whereby guidance practitioners ought to move from putting their focus solely on learning and careers to viewing an individual's life situation as holistically as possible. We human beings are complex, yet adaptable, creatures with elusive characteristics, embedded in dynamic social and economic environments; a human life should not be 'sliced and diced', but seen as an entity, where different areas of life are closely interconnected and in a constant interplay, tension and even conflict with each other.

In consequence, the initial education and in-service training of guidance practitioners should put more emphasis on this more holistic approach to understanding individuals. It is not enough to capture an individual's skills and competences only, but to understand their diversity and the complexity of their lives and the underlying attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive patterns together with their worldview, values, ideals, beliefs and norms. What motivates a person, how they construct their preferences and priorities or take choices and decisions are important aspects in supporting their agentic functioning, self-efficacy and resilience. This study made it visible that guidance practitioners too readily want to stick to providing advice, mainly on learning opportunities and career transitions. Not willingly going beyond this point implies seeing individuals as partial subjects/agents and assigning worth merely to their learning and career progress, but nothing else.

Finally, a shared understanding of what a guidance process entails in different contexts is a prerequisite to defining quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure and evaluate its effectuality and quality. Currently there are no such agreed indicators to be applied within and across countries. This is essentially an area that requires further development at national and international levels. Only through introducing a framework of consistent user measurements will guidance service providers be able to understand the overall service level delivered and make targeted modifications to improve the quality of the service experience for clients.

6.4. Policy recommendations

Reflecting on the findings and conclusions above, we see an evident need for formulating and implementing European and national policies that outline the key strategies required to support better efficiency and higher quality of lifelong/career guidance provision across the European Union Member States. The following critical aspects that influence the monitoring and evaluation of the career guidance provision of adults should be addressed in future education, training, employment and labour market policies:

(a) an agreement should be reached across the international community of guidance policy, practice, research and training about what the process-like nature of guidance entails, and how a comprehensive, universally applicable and context-free guidance process effectually works and what steps/phases it consists of;
(b) stronger client-orientation is required for more effectual high-quality guidance processes: only by properly acknowledging the actual situation of the client can timely and need-based guidance interventions be used effectively;
(c) a more in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to an individual's career readiness, as well as how these factors influence the client's situation (including agency, resilience and wellbeing) is expected from guidance practitioners;
(d) a more systematic approach to multi-professional and cross-sectoral guidance cooperation should be taken, as it is a key prerequisite for improving the quality and

efficiency of career guidance, as well as for combining the expertise of different professionals and service providers to help clients in a holistic way;

(e) a Pan-European online guidance toolbox should be developed for guidance practitioners to increase the effectivity and quality of their client work: multiple tools (such as CREAR) in all the official EU languages for different types of guidance interventions should be at their disposal.

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Chapter 7.
Lifelong guidance and welfare to work in Wales: linked return on investment methodology ([41])

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7.1. Introduction

This article makes the case for a particular approach to return on investment (ROI) analysis, termed 'linked ROI', as a pragmatic component for the monitoring and evaluation of lifelong guidance programmes. It provides a worked example focused on publicly funded career guidance provision in Wales.

Guidance, as defined in this collection of papers, covers 'a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills' to help individuals 'identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions, and to manage their individual life paths' ([42]). In the context of this paper, we focus on understanding the costs and benefits of career guidance as applied to supporting adults in navigating a transition from unemployment (typically claiming State welfare benefits or unemployment insurance) into work. In this, career guidance practices are often embedded into broader programmes incorporating activities like job preparation and job search assistance. We term these 'career development programmes'.

'Linked ROI' is designed for circumstances when a quantified, monetised understanding of the costs and benefits of a programme is required but a large-scale, long-term programmatic randomised control trial (RCT) or similar research exercise is not feasible, due perhaps to cost, complexity, and/ or ethical considerations. Such an outcomes-driven approach complements other evaluation philosophies, such as theory-based evaluations. For instance, the focus in realist evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) – a type of theory-based evaluation – is understanding specific mechanisms for behavioural change at an individual level and the contexts within which change is likely to happen. This can build confidence in the generalisability of outcomes evidence drawn in an ROI model.

The objective in 'linked ROI' is to connect internal programme data to appropriately evaluated academic evidence on third party programmes, preserving a reasonable level of robustness to important requirements such as attribution and counterfactual considerations.

([41]) Our thanks go to the team and board of Careers Wales for supporting this work, in particular to Nikki Lawrence, the CEO of Gyrfa Cymru | Careers Wales, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government.

([42]) Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning Strategies: 2905th Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting, Brussels, 21 November 2008. www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/educ/104236.pdf

By applying conservative choices in key areas of uncertainty and addressing only a partial set of the anticipated benefits (but including the full cost), the method generates an initial estimate that stakeholders ([43]), such as funders and policymakers, can recognise as a minimum ROI. As a floor estimate, such calculations can usefully inform go/no-go investment decisions. With a transparent calculation chain and acknowledgement of uncertainty, a framework now exists within which to target research activity and to address questions from any key stakeholders requiring further precision or confidence in the estimate.

This ROI methodology is presented through a worked example within the context of Wales (Cymru). The national careers service Gyrfa Cymru/Careers Wales is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government and the vehicle to deliver the statutory obligation to make careers information, advice, and guidance available to all children and young people up to the age of 19, whether in or out of education. In recent years, the service has also responded to the growing needs of adults across Wales. In 2020, the service employed some 630 staff, including those within Careers Wales working on a new government-funded *Working Wales* programme, providing a single point of contact through which individuals can access personalised career guidance to help find and maintain appropriate opportunities. Staff are situated in 30+ locations around Wales. In an adult welfare-to-work setting during its set-up phase, the focus of this paper, they served around 1 600 new adults not in paid work each month, in addition to a smaller number of customers who were in the workplace, but perhaps at risk of redundancy or seeking impartial career guidance.

Linked ROI is a formalisation of ad hoc practices seen by the authors in professional practice, such as forecasting social ROI for new programmes as discussed by IMPAQ International (IMPAQ, 2015), estimates of long-term ROI of skills competitions (Frontier Economics, 2021), and some long-term cost-benefit analysis used within government (BIS, 2016). There are several primary contributions from this paper: formalising the linked ROI method to allow better scrutiny of its strengths and weaknesses, how to implement it well, and its position within a suite of evaluation methodologies; publishing an application of the method to UK adult guidance for the first time; and exploring the practicalities and opportunities of partnering on the research with a guidance delivery team who intend to continue expanding and innovating on their evaluation work in the coming years.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 7.2 describes the context of ROI analysis in the career guidance profession, the strengths and limitations of programmatic randomised control trials (RCTs), examples of previous ROI work in the sector, and the context of lifelong guidance initiatives in Wales and policymaker expectations for impact and ROI analysis. Section 1.3 describes the principles and generalised approach behind our six-step analytical process to arrive at linked ROI estimates. Section 7.4 provides a walk-through of each of the six steps as recently applied in Wales for presentation to organisational leaders and policymakers. Section 7.5 presents a critical discussion of where the ROI estimates contribute to policy, of the limitations of the work to date, and of the potential to scale up the

([43]) The primary external stakeholder for the Wales case study in this paper is government officials, both in the sponsoring department and the funding departments from whom budget allocations are requested. The ROI results were discussed with government officials as part of the research.

methodology to identify a more accurate, likely larger, ROI for the programme, working within the budget and operational limitations of the organisation.

7.2. Context

7.2.1. What is ROI and why does it matter?

Return on investment analysis (ROI) is an exercise to estimate a ROI multiplier, being the benefits of a particular activity divided by its costs reflected in financial terms. Any number above one is considered to be a net positive investment, within the constraints of how the benefits and costs were estimated. Future benefits and costs can be included, typically by reducing them by a discount factor for each year they fall in the future: this recognises that there is a time cost to money, i.e. that money in the present is preferred to money in the future. The UK government typically recommends a 3.5% discount rate per year (HM Treasury, 2020a).

The general trend towards accountability is causing organisations to focus more on measuring their added-value contribution, of which ROI is a primary method. In North America, Europe and Asia, ROI applications have increased because of growing interest in organisational improvement, quality and change programmes (Philips, 2012). Writing more recently in the *International handbook of career guidance*, Whiston, Mitts, and Li (2019) highlight stakeholder desire for more information on the effectiveness of career guidance interventions. In recent years, the authors have engaged directly with publicly funded careers services in the four home nations of the UK, each of which has reflected growing pressure from their stakeholders for a greater financial understanding of the benefits of their work.

The career guidance sector has been working to address these requirements, albeit starting from a very low base in the early 2000s. Hughes et al. (2002) described the potential economic benefits of career guidance but highlighted a shortage of empirical evidence. The OECD (2004) called for more information on outcomes and cost-effectiveness of guidance, noting that the sector's research had focused on theories and techniques to date, with little relevance for policy and weak evidence on outcomes and costs. Hiebert et al. (2014) referenced some, but limited, progress since a 2003 symposium in Canada in which policymakers told the community that it had failed to make the case for the impact of career development services and noted a growing focus on value for money spent and proving career guidance works since then. Haug and Plant (2016, p. 147) have called for more pluralistic evidence and the voice of users in response to their observation that 'to present evidence for the outcomes of career guidance is increasingly seen as pivotal for a further professionalisation of policy-making and service provision'.

In public sector usage, ROI is very similar to cost-benefit analysis (CBA) ([44]), although CBA normally presents the results as 'benefits minus costs', i.e. an absolute value with a breakeven point at zero rather than a multiplier with breakeven at one (see e.g. Sinden and

([44]) The purpose of cost-benefit analysis is to provide a consistent procedure for evaluating decisions in terms of their consequences.

Thampapillai, 1995; Sugden and Williams, 1978; Phillips, 2012). Analysts sometimes differentiate CBA and ROI in terms of specific aspects of practice, but such preferences vary across analysts. In both cases, the goal is to include as full a picture of costs and benefits as is practical, to monetise as much as possible qualitative costs and benefits, and to discount partially the value of future activities. In both cases, the challenge lies more in arriving at good estimates of costs and benefits and understanding the limitations of the inputs, rather than the calculations for combining them or the narrative in interpreting the results. As with many forms of evidence and research, ROI can also be misused or misinterpreted by analysts and policymakers, noting that ROI often embodies a number of potentially problematic assumptions about public governance. An account of the ROI critique is beyond the scope of this paper but interested readers may begin with Zerbe (2008), Edwards and Lawrence (2021), and Percy and Dodd (2020).

In the context of monitoring and evaluation frameworks for guidance activities, ROI is a summative practice for one aspect of evaluation – net financial impact – to be conducted infrequently at key programmatic review or initiation points, based either on actual or anticipated data. Specifically, in a career guidance context, ROI typically draws on inputs from both monitoring and evaluation activities: monitoring data on budgets, activity delivery, and immediate user outcomes; and evaluation data on user feedback and longer-term user tracking (potentially on a sample or single cohort basis). The focus can vary depending on the organisational or funder requirements such as changes in attitudes, behaviours, skills, motivation, and wellbeing. ROI can be used both as a narrow exercise, focusing on the fiscal perspective of government expenditure and returns, or as a broad exercise, potentially incorporating estimates of social costs (e.g. the opportunity costs of beneficiaries) and social benefits (e.g. wellbeing gains of participants). Monetary proxies (shadow prices) for intangible benefits can be estimated in a range of ways (Levin et al, 2017), such as observed behaviour (or revealed preferences) in the trade-offs individuals make, and continent valuation (eliciting willingness-to-pay in surveys).

ROI is best used to support go/no-go decisions ([45]) on particular programmes or prioritising across different programmes with similar objectives, where a consistent ROI methodology has been applied across the programmes. It is primarily a strategic exercise for engaging with funders and senior stakeholders, and it behoves analysts to design an ROI process that engages with the decision-makers and explicitly meets their expectations for rigour relative to their willingness to invest in research.

The authors' discussions with guidance service providers across the UK home nations suggest that interest in ROI is growing, driven primarily in government by hopes to influence high-level spending decisions at treasury or department level. An appreciation of how ROI can be used constructively within organisations and/ or to support delivery remains early stage and under-explored. Programmes with a negative ROI may still be recommended to

([45]) 'Go/no-go decisions' refers to a specific choice to fund an activity such that it proceeds (typically because its benefits, broadly defined, are seen as worth it in an absolute sense) or not to fund it. One alternative approach is having a set budget targeted to a particular outcome, where the objective is to allocate the funds over a set of available programmes as best possible to support that outcome, regardless of whether they might individually pass a go/no-go decision.

proceed, but would likely be under additional scrutiny for the non-financial outcomes they might deliver (including such benefits as improved equity in outcome distribution, community cohesion and stakeholder support).

7.2.2. The role of RCTs

Randomised control trials (RCT) play an important role in evaluating public sector initiatives, providing robust causal insights into the impact of the initiative relative to an identified and tracked counterfactual group (White, 2013). Evaluators can therefore assume that, in the absence of the intervention, the outcomes of interest would have changed in the same way in the two groups, making the control group a valid counterfactual. Such insights can then be used to drive ROI calculations with confidence.

The governments of both the UK and the USA have strongly supported the use of RCTs in evaluating policy effectiveness (Haynes et al., 2012; Council of Economic Advisers, 2014; HM Treasury, 2020b). However, full-scale, programmatic RCTs are not available for all interventions for which we might wish to calculate an ROI and are often not suitable, with limitations around feasibility, ethical implementation, proportionality, generalisability to the future, insight into heterogeneity, and target questions There is also a risk that RCTs, like any form of measurement, focus people's attention unduly on the few things being measured rather than the totality of a programme and its conditions for success. This limitation is less foundational, however, than others and can be managed through intelligent usage and integration with other evaluation techniques, such as qualitative research and theory-led methods.

RCTs are typically expensive relative to other forms of evaluation ([46]), requiring significant operational adjustment and complexity to implement randomisation, cohort separation, and tracking of both participant and non-participant groups. Medium term outcomes of ROI applicability in adult career guidance are likely to require 1 to 3 years of tracking; such a time delay requires enlightened decision-makers, focusing more on the next decision point than the one immediately in front of them. Standardisation of specified interventions, desirable in RCTs to reduce variance in effect size estimation, is often complex in career guidance, where personalisation and voluntary engagement can be central to provision, and in understanding the impact of these on outcomes.

From an ethical perspective, RCTs require denying career guidance support to an individual or group that is hoped would otherwise benefit from it. Voluntary participation by customers also introduces its own challenges (Ashenfelter, 1978). As a result, it can sometimes be hard to get internal and external stakeholder support to implement an RCT with the necessary operational rigour to be effective.

For interventions that are relatively light for individual participants, small-scale, or facing budget limitations, RCTs are often particularly hard to motivate. It can be hard to justify

([46]) In an education setting, RCT costs average around GBP 500 000 (Nevill, 2019). In a review of RCTs in a medical setting, the median cost per recruited patient was USD 409 at the centre of a wide range (Speich et al, 2018). RCT costs can be much lower if administrative data is available for both participants and non-participants and random assignment is built into the usual operational processes for delivering support.

significant investment by individuals in data provision and follow-up tracking for outcomes that are ideally measured over a 1- to 3-year period, such as job sustainment, in-work progression, family fit, and satisfaction. Administrative data linkage can satisfy some but not all of these requirements, and also has demands around such issues as informed consent and proportionality in order to satisfy data protection regulations.

The robust impacts traceable via an RCT also apply only locally within that cohort and at that particular time; it would in principle need repeating every few years and for every variant of a programme to drive near-perfect levels of confidence. For forward-facing decision-making, it is always necessary to make assumptions around how past data, typically collected in a very specific experimental context, are likely to predict future outcomes. As such, even RCT evidence must be combined with assumptions to generate an ROI. There is no assumption-free approach for ROI, so the question becomes what set of assumptions is acceptable to the relevant group of stakeholders. Because RCT costs scale with the number of participants, they typically have much smaller sample sizes than administrative or management information data sets. They are rarely able to attain a large enough sample to examine sub-sample effects. Differences between subgroups can be crucial in career guidance, where a personalised approach reflects different circumstances and the different barriers customers face.

Finally, not all questions can be addressed through RCTs, which require a fairly tightly defined intervention that can be contained within a small enough unit (such as individual, family, school, village) with minimal influence or knock-on effects outside that area that a large enough sample size across units can be reached.

RCTs are nonetheless extremely helpful, as is other high-quality evidence designed to surface probable causal effects. Since an assumption is needed to extrapolate from any RCT to a future programme, stakeholders may be willing to draw on RCTs (or other high-quality evidence) from third party programmes to understand the likely impact of their own programme, particularly where that programme and its context are approximately similar to their own. Any increase in distance from the original programme introduces further uncertainty over the applicability of the evidence, though this can be mitigated through making a sufficiently conservative set of assumptions throughout the process, such that stakeholders feel able to act on the findings as reasonable minimum estimates.

7.2.3. Prior ROI work in guidance

There have been two primary approaches to published empirical ROI estimates that address career guidance programmes: high-cost evaluations to specify an impact relative to a counterfactual; and hypothetical modelling in which the implications of illustrative impacts are considered without a firm empirical grounding. Theoretical accounts of potential benefits have been addressed more widely, such as the microeconomic framework set out by Mayston (2002) or the lists in Percy and Dodd (2020), Hughes et al. (2016; 2021) and Harris-Bowlsbey (2014).

High-cost evaluations typically commission an expert third party to run experiments or conduct extensive analysis in order to arrive at a counterfactual to the delivered service. The impact relative to that counterfactual is then used to drive the ROI. A key issue is that evaluation investment is generally easier to justify for programmes that are higher cost per participant, reflecting more intensive interventions, novel, or higher uncertainty in some way. As a result, there are more evaluation data on complex career development and welfare-to-work programmes, than on the core guidance provision that is at the heart of many public services, such as the case study in this paper. Guidance practices are often embedded in these career development programmes, but sometimes as a small proportion of costs overall and without a clear methodology or motivation for disentangling any benefit proportion that is particularly tightly tied to guidance itself. Disentangling guidance from jointly located activities may even be an inappropriate way of understanding the benefits of holistic programmes, where such activities might include informal or formal training, job search / application assistance, health support, workplace reintegration assistance, and financial incentives (whether for jobseeker, support provider, or employer).

A rare example of an experimental design applied to relatively light touch welfare-to-work support is found in an RCT in Nevada, drawing primarily on administrative data to track employment outcomes (Michaelides et al., 2012). Unemployment insurance claimants were randomly allocated to the REA initiative (Reemployment and eligibility assessment), in which claimants were reminded they had to be actively job searching to be eligible for benefits and were provided mandatory job counselling support as part of reemployment services (RES). The counselling sessions also comprise tactical assistance in several key areas for finding work: labour market information provision, unemployment eligibility check, development of an individual re-employment plan, job search, CV assistance, and referrals to training or other services and follow-up if required. The authors identify a direct ROI of 4.3x, based on an average USD 873 reduction in benefits claimed (the primary outcome measure) against an average cost for USD 201 per intervention cohort member. This is a fully internal/unlinked ROI in that it relies only on data and impacts identified within the programme; its calculation chain does not require third party studies or reference values, such as commonly used for monetising the long-term benefits of an intermediate outcome, like youth NEET prevention, qualification gain, or university admission (e.g. Frontier Economics, 2021). Confidence is further built from a replication RCT on the programme during positive economic conditions (contrasted with post recessionary conditions in the first trial) which identified similarly positive findings (Michaelides and Mian, 2020).

Maibom et al. (2012) conducted cost-benefit analysis on randomised experiments in Denmark on different combinations of early and intensive treatment in terms of meetings and active labour market programmes. Frequent meetings between newly unemployed workers and case workers were found the most cost-effective approach, increasing employment rates over the next 2 years by up to 5 weeks, corresponding to 10%. A historic review of diverse active labour market programmes by O'Leary et al. (2011) included 'employment assistance services' as one of its categories, comprising guidance support along with other related activities. Over 30 studies of such programmes from the 1980s to 2010 (excluding pure financial incentives/sanction-based approaches) identify impacts in the range of 0.2 to 5-week reductions in welfare claims, as well as a handful of cases identifying no impact. The authors conclude that such programmes typically have small positive impacts, but with a low cost per person, they are typically socially beneficial on net. A more recent overview was less positive about such services but restricted its focus to youth beneficiaries (Kluve et al., 2017).

The UK's New Deal programmes from the 1990s have also been assessed using ROI frameworks driven by non-randomised comparison group analyses (Hasluck et al., 2000, Van Reenen, 2001). RCTs to drive ROI analysis in the welfare-to-work sector have been more commonly applied to more intensive or more novel interventions with a higher cost per participant, in which guidance is combined with other services. For instance, Greenberg and colleagues, (2013) find positive ROI from combined job coaching and financial incentives to support job retention among recently long-term unemployed adult men (but not other groups, such as lone parents, where programme costs were typically higher).

Major technical training programmes targeted at supporting employment have also been the target of large-scale RCTs, such as career academies (Kemple and Willner, 2008) and job corps (Schochet, 2020), as well as supported employment programmes for disabled jobseekers (e.g. Yamaguchi et al., 2017) or vocational rehabilitation programmes (e.g. Schmidt et al, 2019 and others in the same special issue). However, such programmes incorporate career guidance only as a minor component of the overall cost of delivery.

Considering those welfare-to-work programmes in which guidance plays a larger role, a more common route than RCTs to generating impact data has been the use of statistically constructed comparison groups, drawing on existing data (such as longitudinal data sets or administrative data) or one-off surveys; typically these are significantly lower cost than primary research involving new longitudinal tracking as part of an experimental design. One example is the economic analysis conducted by London Economics (Lane et al., 2017) on England's National Careers Service (NCS), comparing users to a statistically matched comparison group (via PSM). Approximately 80-90% of in-scope customers had a single session, mostly face-to-face but sometimes online or over the phone. In this case, the identified impact is negative, with customers typically taking longer to return to work and having greater dependency on benefits, although they were more likely to progress into education and training than the comparison group. The authors caution that without an RCT, unobservable differences between the customers and the matched comparison group may be driving these differences, rather than the intervention itself.

Three further examples of the approach of non-randomised, statistical comparison groups are offered: Killeen and White (2000) examining career guidance for adults (specifying impacts but not ROI); the Health Careers Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati (ICF, 2016), which has a cost of USD 1 900 per participant, primarily spent on job-readiness training and job search assistance (identifying a positive ROI); and a series of benefit-cost analyses on workforce development programmes in Washington State (see e.g. Hollenbeck and Huang, 2016). The last of these mostly address training and education schemes, but some schemes focus on guidance or have subgroup analyses for individuals that received guidance support without training (notably, the Workforce Investment Act programmes).

The second common approach to ROI is hypothetical modelling, which has been applied in cases where a programmatic RCT or quasi-experimental data are not available. This method was applied for adult guidance in the Yorkshire and Humber region of England (Hughes and Hogg, 2018). Two calculation logics were presented. In the first, 50% of all claimable moves ([47]) from unemployment to employment which followed careers support are credited to that intervention (resulting in an ROI of 10x, including the GBP 5.6m annual cost of delivery); the second identifies the breakeven attribution assumption for an ROI of 1x, being an attribution rate of 5.5%.

A similar concept was invoked by Hughes (2004), calculating that a 1 percentage point increase in productivity through improved career services (such as a result of people performing better and persisting for longer in better fit roles, or any other target benefit from career services) could create up to GBP 10.6 billion in increased value per year in the UK, based on the UK's total annualised GDP of around GBP 1.060 billion in 2002. With such benefits dwarfing the costs of career guidance ambitions by an order of magnitude, the intention was to help stakeholders recognise the size of the prize for getting career services right. Breakeven modelling, projecting demonstrated short-term benefits into an uncertain future, has also been applied to workforce investments to analyse welfare-to-work initiatives in Ohio (ICF, 2016). Hypothetical calculations have been conducted for the European Commission on the combination of short-term training with job search assistance, noting the absence of sufficient impact data to generate point estimates for ROI (Eureval et al, 2010). PWC similarly estimated the number of NEET ([48]) young people whose outcomes would need to have been prevented for a certain approach to career guidance to break even, based on their costings of the staff time and resources required to deliver the services (PWC, 2014). Such hypothetical modelling is useful in discussions with stakeholders, helping them to understand what you need to believe for a programme to be net positive. However, if a funder or other target stakeholder does not accept the breakeven point as intuitively easy to exceed by an intervention, the analysis adds little by way of new persuasive evidence.

The intention of this paper is to formalise a third approach to ROI modelling that links internal programmatic data to insights from high-cost evaluations of third- party programmes. These high-quality third-party evaluations add confidence and specificity to hypothetical modelling to support stakeholder conversations, for use in circumstances where budget or operational constraints limit the ability for full-scale experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations. The rigour and benefits remain less than programme-specific impact analysis, but at a fraction of the cost and time. For instance, the case study in this article was calculated part-time over 2 calendar months from inception to report.

7.2.4. Implementation in Wales

The Welsh government has invested in expanding its nationally delivered all-age careers support service Gyrfa Cymru/Careers Wales. Those looking to improve their careers prospects or those seeking employment, regardless of current employment status or personal circumstance, have access to a national careers service both online and embedded in local communities. Gyrfa Cymru/Careers Wales manages a team of some 630 staff, operating on

([47]) 9 917 individuals moved from unemployment to work in a way that was claimable in the 2016/17 year, representing 17% of all customers seen; while 31% in total moved into work, not all were contractually claimable. The fiscal value per individual from a government estimate in 2013 was GBP 9800, uprated to c. GBP 10 200 due to inflation between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

([48]) Not in education, employment, or training.

a budget of approximately GBP 30 million per year to deliver its services across a population of 3.2m in Wales. This investment responds to education and labour market concerns and is there to support the service to deliver to anyone aged 16 or over, regardless of their work status, as well as support to secondary schools and colleges. Wales has higher rates of economic inactivity than the UK as a whole (24.0% vs 20.8% for Aug-Oct 2020), lower qualification levels (36.3% NVQ Level 4+ vs 40.2% for 2019), and stubbornly high rates of long-term unemployment over 1 year (2-4% points higher than the UK) ([49]).

For the Welsh Government, working closely with professionally trained careers advisers is part of an added-value solution for citizens, employers, educationalists, training providers, and local communities. Careers Wales works in partnership, not competition, with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide specialist careers guidance and coaching to those most in need. This dual approach is designed to improve the prospects and ability of individuals to find employment and/or to increase their earnings capacity through engagement with a range of activities and interventions.

In May 2019, a new government-backed flagship Working Wales programme #ChangeYourStory was launched, managed and delivered by Careers Wales. The idea was for a simpler approach to employability support for individuals with a single point of contact through which they can access personalised career guidance to help find and maintain appropriate opportunities. Pre-pandemic, this was made available at Careers Wales offices, local job centres, libraries, community hubs, and shared locations within health and wellbeing centres. Careers advisers offer career guidance and coaching, workshops, career information, and advice. Adults registered with Working Wales (WW) participate voluntarily and receive a personalised programme of support, typically including a career development action plan. This results in a wide variation in the number of one-to-one hours and additional support that adults out of work receive, dependent on need as identified by programme staff and agreed with the customer.

Working Wales had an initial 2020/21 budget of GBP 11.0 million, including contributions to overheads, being a subset of the overall Careers Wales budget mentioned previously. It primarily adds value as a triage, specialist diagnostic and preparation service, as there is a complex landscape of possible programmes available that may be hard for customers to identify and secure funding for (where applicable), even among those able to diagnose their needs accurately and independently. However, the full infrastructure of the referral organisations and outcomes data collection is not yet in place, pending ongoing development work by the Welsh Government.

In the interim period analysed in this paper, i.e. the period while the additional infrastructure was being commissioned and not yet in place, Working Wales increased the level of support it provides direct to customers to mitigate the shortfall in provision across the system as a whole. Where applicable, third-party referrals still take place, but additional hours

([49]) Labour market statistics drawn in Q4 2020 and Q1 2021 from: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2013265930/report.aspx and https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Unemployment/ILO-Unemployment/unemploymentwalesuk-duration-year of one-to-one information, advice, and guidance, and referrals to internal Working Wales services, such as STEPS or Access or React, have become widely used ([50]).

Policymakers and stakeholders within the Welsh Government, who commission and oversee Careers Wales, have increased their requests for impact analysis and ROI modelling within the organisation; this seeks to bolster confidence that the programme is generating positive benefits, both in terms of non-financial benefits and fiscal returns. This interest has prompted a range of evaluative activity, including partnerships with university academics via WISERD ([51]) and specialist consultancies, such as Beaufort Research (2019) and DMH Associates Ltd ([52]). As part of this work, the authors of this paper were commissioned to conduct initial return on investment calculations, beginning with available data across approximately half the areas of operation of Careers Wales. The remit did not include primary data collection. The interim results were reported in the 2021-26 *Brighter Futures* vision document, which states (Careers Wales, 2021, p50-51):

'Over the next 5 years we will be continually assessing and reporting on the impact that our services will have on the educational, economic and wellbeing outcomes for people in Wales […]. Our recent modelling has shown that activities analysed to date, comprising circa GBP 15 million of our typical annual spend, deliver over GBP 35 million in long-term fiscal benefits for the Exchequer (in net value present terms). We will build on this ROI analysis to address more elements of the theory of change model for careers guidance and coaching and build this into our service planning to ensure that we are delivering real value for money for the people of Wales.'

7.3. Method

7.3.1. Linked ROI principles

Our intention is to introduce some of the confidence in ROI gained from experimental or quasi-experimental studies into circumstances where resources or operational constraints prevent such evaluations taking place. The heart of this approach is to motivate a particular assumption around intervention attribution/impact by identifying appropriate evaluations of third-party programmes which are sufficiently similar that their estimates can be used, potentially with an adjustment to reflect differences between the programmes. In doing so, we gain a more grounded ROI estimate than that enabled from purely hypothetical or breakeven modelling. This is a pragmatic approach grounded in the circumstances in which

([50]) https://www.careerswales.com/prof/upload/pdf/Steps_Factsheet_English.pdf; https://businesswales.gov.wales/skillsgateway/access#:~:text=Access%20aims%20to%20provide%20employability,and%20help%20with%20training%20costs

([51]) The Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) is a national, interdisciplinary, social science research institute, designated by the Welsh Government as a national research centre. It is a collaborative venture between the universities of Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, South Wales, and Swansea, and is able to draw on administrative governments datasets in its work.

([52]) https://dmhassociates.org/

most careers services operate; it does not seek to replace large-scale robust evaluations as the approach is reliant on such evaluations and hopes to increase awareness and willingness to fund them.

The five key principles driving the approach are intended pragmatically to identify an initial estimate within a short time frame (e.g. 2 months or less) and to establish confidence that it is a minimum 'floor' estimate, where the truth is likely to be higher. As such, we:

(a) use data that are currently available for generating the first estimate rather than requiring new data collection (although ideas for new data collection may surface through the process);
(b) focus initially on fiscal rather than social ROI, since fiscal ROI is a narrower and more easily estimated requirement (although aspiring towards social ROI in later models);
(c) acknowledge uncertainty and assumptions, making conservative choices in particularly uncertain areas;
(d) engage stakeholders to understand what type of evidence and assumptions are likely to be accepted by the key audience (in this case: the government sponsoring team and funders, but other projects could prioritise different stakeholders, such as public audiences, partner organisations, or customer representatives);
(e) treat the initial estimate as part of an ongoing process supporting organisations to become more serious in their approach to impact understanding and analysis.

7.3.2. Six-step process overview

We draw on internal interviews and workshops to ensure understanding of the career guidance programmes in question, scope the analytical process, and review interim findings. The calculations are modelled in an Excel spreadsheet that can be shared with the careers service team, supported by a written report. The calculations connect internal budget data on costs with internal monitoring data on activity categories and volume, and the academic literature to provide plausible scale of impact with a counterfactual. Prior evaluations can also help provide additional confidence on impact or bolster the bridging assumptions to the academic literature.

A structured approach will typically proceed based on six steps that can be applied to delivery organisations in general:

(a) step 1: identify and prioritise impact strands;
(b) step 2: identify total budget across activities;
(c) step 3: data review to specify ROI calculation chain (internal programme data and evaluations of third-party programmes to serve as reference studies);
(d) step 4: construct model with internal and external data;
(e) step 5: document assumptions with conservative choices;
(f) step 6: review, refine, and discuss implications.

The six-step method formalises an approach applied earlier to one-to-one personal guidance interviews delivered by qualified professionals in English secondary schools. The analysis in an English secondary school setting was developed with a steering group including guidance sector leaders and government funders (Percy, 2020). The formalisation of the approach set out in this paper also builds from the directional cost-benefit analysis tool developed for decision-makers in small and medium-sized enterprises for which full-scale CBA would be a disproportionate, inefficient process (Percy, 2021). The next section provides detail on how each step can be operationalised.

7.4. Results

This section provides a walk-through of the six-step process, as applied to Working Wales support to unemployed adults, to arrive at a linked ROI estimate of 1.6x as a probable underestimate.

7.4.1. Step 1: Prioritisation of impact strands

An impact strand refers to a combination of beneficiary group and specific benefit, such as disadvantaged students aged 14 to 19 who matriculate university or out-of-work low-skilled adults who gain functional literacy. This framing helps clarify that an organisation can serve many beneficiary groups and provide many different types of benefits to each, but the ROI is only focused on a subset of those.

Working Wales supports a range of different customer groups, including those in work, in education, not ready for work, and ready for work (Table 1). We prioritised unemployed customers who were seeking work as the first group to focus on, since they were the largest single group by adviser staff time and were of significant policy concern.

Table 1. **Split of all 1:1 activity duration logged against customer status on first Working Wales contact (Feb 19 – Oct 20)**

Initial customer status	Distribution of adviser time
Not in paid work	67%
Unemployed	62%
Not available for EET	3%
Not ready to enter EET	1%
Voluntary work	0.4%
In work	21%
Key Stage 34	5%
FE	4%
Apprenticeship/Traineeship	2%
Sixth Form	1%
Other	1%

NB: EET is education, employment or training. FE refers to further education, typically a college.
Source: Careers Wales management information.

Reflecting policy concern, the benefit to be targeted in this impact strand is returning to paid work, providing fiscal value to the Treasury in terms of reduced use of State unemployment benefit, and increased direct taxation. This is only one benefit that career guidance can help provide, along with increased confidence, wellbeing, resilience in the face of future career uncertainty, reskilling, and others. The explicit listing of such additional benefits, not included in the ROI, helps reinforce the idea that the numbers presented are expected to be an underestimate. Discussion of the broader range of benefits that guidance can provide is not the target of this paper but is discussed in the wider literature (see 7.3 for references).

7.4.2. Step 2: Identification of budget

There are two high-level strategies for costing activities. A bottom-up approach, as followed in Percy (2020), starts with the narrow activity that drives benefit, the guidance session between a professional and a customer, estimates the staff time cost in delivering the session (including preparation/follow-up time) as a proportion of total delivery hours in a salary period (e.g. excluding time for training, management, leave), and then adds any material and indirect costs that should be accounted for.

A top-down approach starts with an organisational budget and then allocates 100% of it over different ROI impact strands, observing that all indirect costs and overheads are ultimately in service of a beneficiary group. Explicit R&D activities can either be excluded from the budget, since they reflect a future beneficiary group/service rather than the present, or be included recognising such investments as part of maintaining a service. The relevant budget proportion corresponding to the target impact strand is then adopted.

The bottom-up approach is well suited to cases where the activity is a small part of an organisation, being mainly focused on something else (meaning that organisational overhead allocation may be hard to motivate), or where a generic activity is being analysed which different organisations might structure in different ways. In this case study, a specific organisation and programme is being analysed with full budget data available; as such a top-down approach is more appropriate for capturing the full set of direct and indirect costs. As most budget is focused on delivery, there is no need to exclude an R&D component. With adviser staff time being the primary driver of costs, and with most overheads and management operating approximately in proportion to adviser time, the distribution of hours from Table 1 can be used directly to apportion the total budget: approximately GBP 7.3 million spent annually in direct and indirect support of unemployed customers.

Focusing on direct fiscal ROI simplifies this step, because we focus on the amount of money the Welsh government spends to resource Working Wales, rather than trying to capture opportunity cost for individuals or any third-party effort unlocked by that budget.

7.4.3. Step 3: Data review to specify calculation chain

Steps 1 and 2 have identified which benefit we wish to monetise and the costs it will be balanced against. Step 3 reviews the data available, both within the programme and via external evidence bases, in search of a calculation chain that could monetise the benefit, focusing initially on benefits to the government budget.

Linked ROI applies when internal programme data and evaluations are insufficient to address the full calculation chain by themselves, but need to be connected to an external evidence base on other programmes to identify plausible assumptions. The calculation chains can potentially involve multiple steps, with some programmes able to address more steps with internal data than other programmes. However, even if comparison group evaluations have enabled a demonstration of short-term outcomes within the programme (such as improved career decision making self-efficacy or increased participation in training), the monetisation of these outcomes for medium-term outcomes (e.g. job applications and starts) or long-term outcomes (e.g. sustainment, career progression) may require reference to third party evidence. Black box evaluations may also be able to demonstrate medium-term outcomes without evidence for interim calculation steps; as example, if administrative data show participants had a higher rate of job starts than a control group but no evidence was gathered in terms of mechanisms, such as improved opportunity awareness, motivation, action planning, or job search activities. Black box evaluations can be used for ROI but confidence is higher when intermediate steps are well understood and evidenced, potentially as a narrative accompanying the ROI model, if not as individually quantified steps in the calculation chain.

In the case of Working Wales, data are available on the circumstances of each beneficiary seen, when they were seen, what type(s) of support they were provided, including referrals to in-house or third-party programmes, and the estimated duration in minutes of each type of support. Some of this information is captured in Table 2, which helps to understand what proportion of customers receive more intensive support and might be expected to see greater change as a result. Where beneficiaries are seen multiple times, their employment status is captured again, but long-term follow-up of beneficiary employment status is not currently available, since this relies on the broader Welsh government infrastructure that is being built. Beneficiaries also complete an optional exit survey; typically around 10% complete it with 95%+ satisfaction rates. No comparison group evidence is available, meaning that the calculation chain has to draw on third party evidence from volume of activity onwards.

Table 2. **Distribution of Working Wales (WW) information, advice, and guidance support to adults not in paid work (Feb 2019 – Oct 2020)**

Total one-to-one support	Customer share (%)	One-to-one support (minutes)	Receiving 3rd party referral (%)	Receiving internal referral (%)
Zero	9%	0	5%	4%
Up to 30 mins	6%	10	11%	6%
30-59 mins	16%	41	23%	22%
1-2 hrs	41%	68	25%	32%
2-3 hrs	16%	111	23%	50%
3-5 hrs	9%	171	30%	56%

Total one-to-one support	Customer share (%)	One-to-one support (minutes)	Receiving 3rd party referral (%)	Receiving internal referral (%)
5+ hrs	3%	334	37%	63%

N.B: Table shows the proportion of relevant customers who get different amounts of one-to-one support from Working Wales, and, within those, intensity of support categories, what proportion of customers are also referred to either a third-party programme or an internal service to receive additional support, such as mental or physical health support, education and training, or work experience provision.

Source: Careers Wales management information,

A search strategy needs to be developed, within the project resource constraints, to identify the most appropriate evidence on third-party programmes to connect with the types of activities Working Wales provides. If no adequate third-party evidence can be identified, either a hypothetical ROI should be constructed out of assumptions that are discussed with, and found plausible by, the relevant audience for the report or a different impact strand should be chosen, returning to step 1 in the process.

In this case study, the search strategy for comparable ROI studies was an English language search for academic articles published since 2000 and indexed on Scopus, requiring both an ROI relevant term and a guidance-related term in the title, abstract or keywords ([53]). A grey literature search using similar terms on internet search engines and citation tracing and direct enquiry to a small number of experts in the field identified additional candidate papers for review. Having identified a number of potentially relevant studies above a methodological quality threshold for (quasi-) experimental design, the best fit study was then chosen based on proximity to the target programme against four criteria: activities involved in the intervention, scale/cost of the intervention, labour market context, and delivery provider type (e.g. a publicly funded national service being preferred to a small-scale charity).

Among the small number of candidate studies, most of which being discussed in section 7.2.3, the most appropriate reference study for the calculation chain was the REA RCT in Nevada (Michaelides et al., 2012). The activities involved are similar, being mostly conversation-driven advice and guidance support to help individuals, with programmatic referrals used where appropriate ([54]). Compared to other ROI studies available, the low-cost, light-touch nature of the Nevada intervention was an important fit to Working Wales (see per participant costs below), as was delivery through a universal State-funded service in a mixed market economy where unemployment benefits are designed to strongly encourage a return to work. The study is also high quality, having already passed one replication test, and was given an evidence rating of 'near top tier' by one of its later evaluation funders (Arnold

([53]) ROI terms included CBA, BCA, ROI, SROI, 'cost-benefit analysis', 'cost benefit analysis', 'return on investment', and 'benefit cost analysis'. Guidance terms included guidance, education, employment, unemployment, career, and careers.

([54]) The Working Wales practitioners, mostly qualified to level 4 or level 6 (if delivering guidance), have three stages in their standards of guidance in order to support outcomes in motivation, decision-making, self-awareness, awareness of options, application, and resilience. As well as direct guidance, customers are supported to access and apply for funding, training, or third-party support services where appropriate. Forming an employment/action plan and providing tactical job search support are important activities. Job counselling via REA/RES is similar, see the main REA/RES activities listed in Section 7.2.3.

Ventures, 2020). The other REA evaluations (which typically had positive, but lower effect sizes than in Nevada) were less appropriate comparisons for Working Wales as the job counselling component in other REA settings evaluated was only optional and partially taken up; this component is regularly provided as part of Working Wales support in one-on-one sessions.

Nonetheless, there are important differences in the programmes. Ideally a comparator would come from one of the other UK regions, rather than the US. The US programme is compulsory and integrated formally into unemployment benefits claims, whereas Working Wales only provide support on this where requested. While this is the best fit reference study out of the search population, its imperfect fit remains a major caveat to the ROI model and a priority for future work. The Nevada REA is described by its evaluators as a high performing programme in its class. To increase confidence in the comparison to Working Wales, intervention success factors were identified from other research in order to narrow the scope of Working Wales customers to which the average effect of the reference study is applied in the calculation chain (see Step 4 for details). This approach borrows insights from theory-led or realist philosophies of evaluation, in that when certain requirements around activity delivery and customer context are met (e.g. fidelity to a proven model or accepted theory of change) we can become more confident that positive impacts will be present.

This case study had a restricted search strategy due to project constraints, particularly with respect to choosing a single reference study which should itself contain a fiscal ROI or CBA model. Larger projects would be strengthened by modelling multiple reference studies (where available) or by drawing on the larger number of robust studies that report effect sizes prior to full monetisation. The disadvantage of the latter is that experimental designs and effect sizes are not necessarily in a format that can be directly used in an ROI model, without requiring additional assumptions that are hard to motivate or require further research. For instance, odds ratios for having returned to work by the end of an intervention (Liu et al., 2014) can be strong evidence of impact but, without further assumptions on the changed distribution of unemployment duration, they do not translate automatically to a specified fiscal saving. The restricted search strategy guaranteed that the effect sizes displayed would be amenable for ROI modelling.

7.4.4. Step 4: Construct model

Step 4 needs to draw on and adapt the data sources identified in step 3, combining them with cost data from step 2 to develop a working model for ROI. The first part of this is specifying the volume of activity in scope and which customers should be assigned what level of benefit with respect to the reference study from Nevada.

Since Working Wales was only formally operationalised in 2019, it had not had a typical year of operations by the time this research started, as the set-up phase was followed by the COVID-19 pandemic and various phases of lockdown. Examining month-by-month data since its launch, a ‘typical month’, benchmarked on late 2019 and early 2020, might serve around 1 600 new adults not in paid work – noting that some cases can take more than a month to resolve. Over a typical year, this suggests 19.2k adults not in paid work can be served by Working Wales. However, with the reference study reflecting a high performing programme (albeit within the normal range of impacts identified in the literature in Section 7.3), we apply the benefits only to a subset of customers in Table 2 where research evidence suggests impacts are likely to be higher.

The National Careers Service evaluation in England suggests that a single session may not always be enough to drive average benefits, unlike the multiple hour interventions reviewed by Liu et al. (2014) and the value of multiple guidance sessions identified by Brown and Ryan Krane (2000). It also appears important to include a guidance or counselling component, as identified in the meta-analyses of Liu et al. (2014) and Whiston et al. (2017), and in the Nevada RCT where this component was compulsory (Michaelides et al., 2012). Confidence in positive outcomes for Working Wales programmes of tactical, short-term focused counselling is identified more generally in these two meta-analyses and a third (van Hooft et al., 2021); this last one associated benefits with interventions featuring higher job-search intensity and support to help job-search self-regulation. Empirical endorsement of the Working Wales approach of engaging highly qualified practitioners and defined quality processes can also be found in a Japanese study (Shimomura, 2018) and a Swiss study (Behrendt et al., 2019). Confidence in Working Wales provision generally can be identified from the satisfaction surveys mentioned above and the full year 2019-20 3-month-on outcome data for adult beneficiaries of the one internal programme where Working Wales tracks medium-term outcomes; longer-term outcomes are planned to be tracked by the government framework being put in place. Out of 575 participants who completed the programme and were successfully tracked, 49% had secured paid employment and 5% had gone into learning or voluntary work.

The results of these considerations, following discussion with Working Wales management, was to apply the full Nevada benchmark of impact only to individuals receiving over 1 hour or more of one-to-one support (13.2k customers, averaging 1hr 45 minutes of such support); for those receiving 30-59 minutes of support, a smaller average impact is assumed to apply, being a quarter of the average impact from the RCT (3.1k customers). No benefit is assumed for individuals who only do group sessions or self-serve using information online.

The next step is to apply the effect sizes from the reference study to the Welsh context. The RCT evaluation of REA/RES in Nevada identified an average 3.1- week reduction in unemployment benefits claims and a 3% earnings uplift ([55]) across all participants tracked for 1.5 years (Michaelides et al., 2012). Applying these impacts to the Welsh context, we can relate the reduction in unemployment benefits claimed to a typical standard allowance for single persons aged 25 and older under universal credit, set at GBP 410 per month ([56]). The 3% earnings uplift can be applied to an example job with a GBP 20 000 annual gross salary, being approximately 70% of the Wales full-time gross median salary in 2019, assuming

([55]) USD 2600 or 18% higher wages in total, but partly driven by an earlier return to work. With average quarterly wages of USD 7000 and ~19 weeks average on UI in the control group, the wage uplift is ~3%.

([56]) https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get unemployed adults typically enter the labour market at a below median level ([57]). At this level of income, a marginal increase in wage accrues 46% to the State in direct taxation ([58]). A conservative interpretation of labour market participation by formerly unemployed workers and the RCT applies this wage increase for 2 years. Wage benefits tend to persist over time, meaning that stopping at 2 years is conservative. Later research on the Nevada programme showed increases in employment and earnings outcomes of participants and their families for at least 8 years after programme participation (Manoli, Michaelides, and Patel, 2018). We also assume the jobs gained are not at the expense of those who would otherwise go into unemployment.

The result of these assumptions is GBP 846 in direct fiscal return to the exchequer per equivalent participant, cashed over the 2 years following programme completion: GBP 11.8 million in total per year or a positive ROI of 1.6x. Over such a short period, the results are not meaningfully affected by discount rate assumptions. In some cases, such as Percy (2020) addressing secondary school guidance, the audience might first find it helpful to see the breakeven assumption before the point estimate. Such an assumption is most simply stated by identifying a single parameter in the calculation chain that is set to a value that results in an ROI of 1x. This presentation can help reduce perceived reliance on the reference studies and positions the exercise correctly as helping a stakeholder consider what is a reasonable assumption to hold about impact, rather than centring the discussion on an imperfect claim about programme equivalence.

7.4.5. Step 5: Document conservative assumptions

Crucial to this methodology is being able to motivate the estimate as on the conservative side of reasonable estimates. Such estimations ultimately depend, among other factors, on the priors, perceptions, and preferences of the relevant stakeholders, but can be supported by enumerating the conservative assumptions in the model and by providing robustness checks to more conservative approaches, such as the Monte Carlo modelling in Percy (2020) or by providing the underlying spreadsheets as with Careers Wales.

In this case study, key assumptions that suggest the estimate is an underestimate: no economic multiplier effects on economic activity (income tax and employer contributions only); tax take only applied for 2 years post return to work on the marginal wage gain; any benefits for those receiving less than 1 hour of one-to-one support are mostly treated as upside; and any benefits to an individual or the State beyond leaving benefits and a marginal wage gain are excluded (e.g. improved resilience for future job uncertainty).

7.4.6. Step 6: Review, refine, and discuss implications

This analysis was developed in close partnership with operational and data leads at Working Wales, with the results and implications discussed in a senior leadership workshop, including trained guidance practitioners, and with the board, which includes government stakeholders

([57]) https://gov.wales/annual-survey-hours-and-earnings-2019#:~:text=Full%2Dtime%20weekly%20earnings,UK%20countries%20and%20English%20regions.

([58]) Benchmarked for 2020/21 tax year (e.g. 12% NICs; 13.8% employer NICs; 20% income tax band).

and independent academics. Insights and challenges from this discussion exercise are incorporated into Section 1.5. The annex provides a summary of the calculation chain inputs and logic, alongside an example sensitivity table.

7.5. Relevance, limitations, and next steps for policy

The Government policy platform in Wales recognises the importance of guidance to key objectives in prosperity and wellbeing, as set out in, for instance, Prosperity for all: the national strategy taking Wales forward (2017-21); and the Wellbeing of future generations Act (2015). However, as described generally in Section 7.2.1 and with respect to Wales in Section 7.2.4, increased policy support for guidance is conditional on evidence of impact and value for money. The primary objective of ROI analysis is to respond to these expectations as one component in a framework of evaluation and monitoring activities, complementing operational and process evaluations and the monitoring of key elements such as expenditure, beneficiary groups, volume and type of activity provision, user satisfaction, and short-term outcomes.

ROI provides the link between activity and short-term outcomes and long-term fiscal consequences. This ultimately forms an important part of government and stakeholder decision-making in service funding, along with moral, social and equity considerations that typically sit outside a purely fiscal analysis. Government officials on Careers Wales board discussed and welcomed the ROI analysis, supporting the organisation to continue this programme of work and to use it in broader discussions with funding. However, it is important to understand that evidence of positive returns alone is insufficient to motivate investment, with service provision needing also to align to the evolving policy vision, to integrate effectively into broader education and labour market systems, and to demonstrate positive feedback from customers and partners.

Any single impact study or ROI analysis is best presented within the context of a cumulative evidence base and needs to be interpreted with respect to funders' prior expectations and priorities. This ROI for Working Wales can reinforce confidence in programme value or call into question sceptics' concerns, but any single study should not be expected to transform all stakeholders' positions, not least because each study has its limitations. In this case, the key limitations are the reliance on a reference study from the US (discussed in sections 7.4.3 and 7.4.4) and the limited evidence within Wales, since the programme was only recently launched.

One policy risk with ROI studies requires careful management: that its presence over-focuses attention on the topic of the study, to the detriment of other topics. As argued in Section 7.1, almost all ROI studies will only ever address a subset of the potential benefits of guidance (or other interventions), typically those that are more easily measured and monetised and, in the case of linked ROI, where third party evidence is strongest. These factors may reflect operational convenience, institutional inertia, and funder priority idiosyncrasies, rather than necessarily where the benefits are most important. This risk can be managed by presenting studies in the context of other evidence, by mapping out other impacts (e.g. step 1 of this article's six-step method), and by positioning it within an overall framework of measurement and evaluation. It is important to remember that the value judgements embedded in financial metrics chosen for an ROI are only relevant to part of the ethical and political decision-making around guidance.

A further key limitation from a policy perspective is that ROI is poorly placed to decide how to allocate resources across qualitatively different sets of outcomes. This nuance arose from discussion with Working Wales on what can be reasonably concluded from different ROIs for different activities. Even if consistent methods are used, analysis of current activities revealing an ROI of 2x from guidance for unemployed adults relative to an ROI of 5x from guidance for students in secondary education does not imply that new money should be focused on young people or that funding should be shifted from adults to young people. First, this is because the ROI of current activities (as a whole) is not the same as the ROI of future marginal investment, which is harder to estimate and not typically the focus of the ROI methods discussed in this paper. Second, different ROI multipliers disguise different time frames and levels of confidence: in-school interventions can shape life pathways and so often result in larger ROIs, but these take one to two decades to manifest and can be highly uncertain. Support for an adult returning to work may generate fiscal returns with high confidence within 1 to 2 years. Discount rates adjust for the time lapse (and handicaps can be applied for uncertainty), but these distinctions are qualitatively different in ways that may matter to funders or other stakeholders. Third, and most important, the decision to focus resource into different groups or different types of outcomes is a political and ethical decision, which ROI analysis should inform but not define, since numerical analysis alone is poorly placed to incorporate the full range of considerations in complex social decision-making.

As the organisation develops new plans following the 2021 national elections, no firm decisions have yet been taken on which approaches to prioritise for impact measurement, but three key areas of work are partly underway or under consideration by the senior team.

The first area involves drawing on mixed-methods research to improve understanding of impact, including key employment-related outcomes as used in the ROI against a counterfactual. A current external qualitative evaluation with customer interviews will support this work.

As the Welsh government implements its full new arrangement of referral organisations and tracking data, administrative information on beneficiary progression will be much improved. However, this evolving arrangement does not currently have a natural counterfactual built into it. Better administrative data, referral pathways, and longer-term outcomes will help identify appropriate reference interventions for different subgroups of beneficiaries and support programmes. Possible ideas for internal programmatic impact analysis include, in ascending order of rigour and required commitment: identifying population-level benchmarks; dosage response analysis; regression discontinuity design; area-level variation; and ethical lotteries. Such research should seek to account for displacement, in which the jobs gained by customers of guidance might have been gained at the expense of otherwise similar individuals who remain unemployed for longer; Crépon et al (2013) evaluate a programme in France where displacement effects are estimated to turn negative the modest benefits initially identified. Until such data are available, low-cost ROI analysis, such as set out in this case study, can reassure stakeholders that their investments are very likely to be net positive for Wales.

The second area involves scaling up the existing linked ROI method, particularly through the consideration of other outcomes: wellbeing and the value of increased wellbeing to society; customer resilience, job sustainability, and career progression; and better understanding the benefits of upskilling and training, in terms of the third-party services that guidance professionals refer to, and how those benefits can be increased through high quality triage, referral and customer preparation.

The third area is greater involvement of practitioners and customers or customer representatives in developing theories of change and understanding of success factors, and identifying ways to innovate or improve practice inspired by such discussions. One pilot, currently live in Wales, seeks to operationalise wellbeing support to customers and track wellbeing progression through the guidance process; this could ultimately be connected to ROI models that reflect the value of increased wellbeing to society, such as through willingness-to-pay measures or QALY reference values (Quality of life years used in health sector CBA/ROI analyses).

7.6. Conclusion and lessons learned

The ROI approach discussed in this paper represents the culmination of significant organisational effort to inject an economic way of thinking into how choices are made between different investments within a national careers service context, without conceding the importance of processes and outcomes that are harder to monetise. This effort has involved undertakings not only in developing a practical and robust framework but also in strong leadership, engaging with policy and decision makers at different levels to ensure that their respective views feed into the development work sufficiently for them to endorse the framework. The effort has yielded success in terms of government and board members supporting this first-stage approach.

In addition to the specific areas for further work in Wales discussed in Section 7.4, this research identifies lessons learned for policymakers/funders, providers/practitioners, and researchers/analysts.

For policymakers and funders, the key lesson is to ask for ROI analysis as part of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, being mindful of the range of techniques available and the level of resource required to drive different types of evidence. Such analysis helps to demonstrate fiscal impact, important in budget negotiations within government. It also helps to foster a rigorous approach to measuring impact within the delivery organisation and provides a calculation framework within which areas of weak evidence can be highlighted and incrementally improved on in further research. A second important lesson is to use ROI sparingly and carefully for between-programme comparison. Unless the calculations are designed with this intention from the outset, ROI is better suited to go/no-go decisions rather than choosing between alternatives for a fixed budget. Third, it is important to socialise the analytical process and share emerging findings with policymakers and funders as the ROI research unfolds to encourage better understanding of ROI in a career guidance and wider context.

For providers and practitioners, the key lesson is to treat an ROI estimation exercise as a learning-oriented process, engaging and communicating with staff across the organisation. Leaders are advised to engage with any relevant external audiences throughout, to share mutual understanding of the kinds of evidence that can be made available at different costs and over different timeframes; this will ensure that any new analysis is fit to inform decision-making. In the same way, the work should be embedded into a programme of future data collection and evaluation to build a long-term body of evidence, rather than seeing it as a one-off exercise in document production to 'settle' the question of programme value for money. Interim positive findings should, nonetheless, remain a celebratory moment, used to strengthen relationships with partners and to promote motivation among frontline staff, showing appreciation for the impact of their work.

For analysts and researchers, the key lesson is to be robust about following a method for constructing an ROI, explaining its alternatives/limitations, and using a transparent search strategy for identifying third party evidence (noting that levels of impact and quality of studies varies very widely). Analysts can also inform ongoing programmes of work, by providing concrete proposals for strengthening areas of weakness in any current analysis. Publishing findings for academic and professional peer review can also help raise awareness and improve methods through critical scrutiny.

As the new guidance framework becomes established in Wales, with centralised tracking data for outcomes, it will be important to generate internal impact evidence. Until such data are available, low-cost linked ROI analysis such as set out in this case study can reassure stakeholders that their investments are very likely to be net positive for Wales.

Declaration of interests
The authors were commissioned by Careers Wales to conduct the ROI analysis presented here as a case study. The results are shared here with kind permission of Gyrfa Cymru | Careers Wales.

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Annex

Table A 1. **Calculation chain summary**

#	Parameter	Value	Notes
(a)	Total cost of support to adults not in paid work per year	GBP 7.3m	Apportioned based on practitioner time
(b)	Number of adults seen in a typical year	19.2k	Calculated from example months with reduced Covid-19 disruption
(c)	Proportion of adults to assign zero reference study impact	15%	See discussion in Section 7.4.3
(d)	Proportion of adults to assign 25% of reference study impact	16%	See discussion in Section 7.4.3
(e)	Proportion of adults to assign 100% of reference study impact	69%	See discussion in Section 7.4.3
(f)	Reference study impact: Reduction in weeks unemployed	3.1	Michaelides et al (2012)
(g)	Reference study impact: Increase in earnings	3%	Michaelides et al (2012)
(h)	Typical month of benefits cost to State in UK (direct cost only)	GBP 410	Standard allowance for single persons aged 25 and over; Universal Credit 2020
(i)	Baseline typical annual wage	20k	c. 70% of full-time gross median salary 2019, assuming unemployed adults typically enter the labour market at a below median level
(j)	Typical proportion of marginal wages accrued to State (NICs, employer NICs, income tax)	45.8%	Benchmarked relative to 20k salary for 2020/21 tax year (e.g. 12% NICs; 13.8% employer NICs; 20% income tax band)
(k)	Years to apply wage uplift	2	
(l)	ROI	1.6x	[(c) x 0% + (d) x 25% + (e) x 100%] x [(f) x (h) / 4.3 + (g) x (i) x (j) x (k)] x (b) / (a)

Table A 2. **Example sensitivity table**

		Proportion of relevant customer base in scope for average reduction in weeks unemployed					
		0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Reduction in weeks unemployed (as sole benefit; excl. earnings increase)	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	2	0.00	0.10	0.20	0.30	0.40	0.50
	4	0.00	0.20	0.40	0.60	0.80	1.00
	6	0.00	0.30	0.60	0.90	1.20	1.50
	8	0.00	0.40	0.80	1.20	1.60	2.01
	10	0.00	0.49	0.98	1.47	1.96	2.45

Table cells show the ROI resulting from adopting the intersection assumptions from the row and the column. All assumptions otherwise remain the same as the main calculation chain summary, except that the earnings increase is excluded to present reduction in weeks unemployed as the sole benefit. Positive ROI is anything about 1.00.

Chapter 8.
Conclusion: a way forward on monitoring and evaluation

Cynthia Harrison, Ernesto Villalba-Garcia, Dr Alan Brown and Michael Richardson

8.1. Introduction

This volume is framed within a larger project that looks into individual support to careers and learning. It represents the beginning of the process of exploring the feasibility of arriving at common standards for monitoring and evaluation in guidance. The call requested papers focusing the current state of play in monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling systems and services in Europe and/or proposals for improving existing methodological approaches.

The contributions from the experts in this collection show the different ways in which approaches to monitoring and evaluation can be used which build powerful 'narratives' of the value of career guidance services and particular types of guidance interventions. Different languages are used, for example at the respective levels or domains of or in relation to the lifelong guidance system: national system, organisation, sector, practice/professionals, clients/individuals, research, and theory. Although a number of conclusions can be drawn from the papers, particular value is placed on the themes identified below that may inform the development of minimum methodological standards and approaches to monitoring and evaluation in the field: systemic approaches and networked services; insights into the role of cooperation and coordination; user orientation and focus on different types of individual outcomes; approaches to and use of mixed methods and qualitative and quantitative data collected for analysis in monitoring client progress and in small and large-scale studies, in feedback systems for policy development and monitoring and evaluating the results of career guidance interventions; quality assurance and professional development of practitioners; and innovations cutting across the different methodological proposals.

8.2. Elements for a vision

8.2.1. Systemic approaches and networked services

There are strong arguments made regarding the need for a systemic perspective to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that adapt coherently across the different levels and services to specific target groups and contexts. This ultimately aligns with a user perspective as well, whereby a potential client should be able to understand how services are joined up along a career pathway, using a coherent logic. Several papers make proposals for how this might look and how monitoring systems themselves can be developed. More details are provided in each paper, but a few examples here signal some of these aspects.

Vuorinen and Kettunen (Chapter 2) introduce a proposal for a systemic framework which can be used to design, implement, monitor and evaluate regional cross-sectoral lifelong guidance services. The networked service model developed focuses separately on three levels: on the developmental needs of guidance services visible to clients, service delivery in organisations, and the strategic dimensions needed for policy-making. The Finnish model shows in what way the different levels are interconnected and output data from one level of the lifelong guidance system might be used as input at other levels. Vuorinen and Kettunen argue that the development of guidance services requires a shift towards 'co-development and co-learning' with other sectors. This implies that in meeting individual client needs, career guidance is shifting from traditional expert services to transdisciplinary collaboration to established networks with dynamic combination of independent and communal ways of working (Kettunen and Felt, 2020). Vuorinen and Kettunen contend that this implies that lifelong guidance needs to be defined and examined along three dimensions: 'as a policy, as an activity of individual organisations or networked services, and as an individual process'.

At policy level, Elftorp and Stokes (Chapter 4) conclude that the strengths of the current system for monitoring and evaluation of the adult education guidance services (AEGS) in Ireland are associated with the fact that practitioners, as well as other stakeholders, have played a central role in its development. The Irish case shows how the system has reinforced policy considerations that data gathering in guidance should remain 'strategic, collaborative, and dynamic, with principles of system design reflective of national policy and practice standards'.

In this respect, Vuorinen and Kettunen (Chapter 2) argue that, in Finland, the overall lack of a shared understanding among policy-makers and stakeholders of the primary purpose of lifelong guidance services, operation of these services and their desirable outcomes can be connected to differences in the operating cultures between sectors responsible for career guidance (including education, employment, youth, social and health). In the Polish case, and from the view of research and theory to be applied, Bielecki, Płachecki and Stasiowski (Chapter 3) address how different stakeholders will have different 'theories of intervention' and how the theoretical model the authors developed can be used to explore how these theories of intervention can be integrated into a common monitoring and evaluation system. Their methodological proposal attempts to acknowledge and reconcile the idea that different theories of intervention are relevant to each set of stakeholders and services, but that each serves a purpose in respect to career guidance provision. Accordingly, this model can guide the evaluation of effectiveness, data collection and analysis.

A systemic approach in monitoring and evaluation necessarily means involvement, authentic and results-driven cooperation, and collaboration of a vast range of actors and accompanying institutions involved in the design, implementation, management, support, and provision of career guidance services. What is important, as the papers underline, is that there is a common understanding driving policy development.

8.2.2. Transformation of cooperation in coordination

An overlooked input dimension influencing the quality of career guidance provision relates to how cooperation can be transformed to serve certain policy aims. The role and form of cooperation in career guidance is discussed in relation to methodologies for monitoring, on the one hand, and evaluation on the other, and to the potential that well-designed and/or holistic models have for strengthening needed cooperation and coordination; understanding how different institutions and actors play a role in the whole ecosystem is also considered. The papers allow an examination of these critical issues. The theory-based approach in Bielecki, Płachecki and Stasiowski (Chapter 3) examines the potential role of cooperation at different system or institutional interfaces. The paper provides several examples of the value of efforts to design well-informed evaluation models, requisite with explicit assumptions and targeted research questions, grounded in both expert field knowledge and methodological expertise. In this case, challenges and gaps in coordination of services within and between sectors and among institutions can be highlighted to show where potential problems occur. In Vuorinen and Kettunen (Chapter 2), the systemic approach implies a shift from traditional expert services to transdisciplinary collaboration to established networks with new ways of working (Kettunen and Felt, 2020). These shifts demand accompanying and appropriate methodologies for more comprehensively evaluating the total systems and myriad actors supporting provision of guidance and the development of practitioner competences and competence areas. Crucial to the processes outlined is, once again, involving a range of stakeholders, thereby reflecting opportunities to build strategic vision at different levels, with networking, and collaboration while evidencing how services meet the diverse societal challenges.

In terms of those stakeholders with an interest in funding and who sponsor services, Percy and Hughes (Chapter 7) suggest engaging these audiences in the course of an evaluation to understand what type of evidence and assumptions are likely to be accepted. This would likely depend on national context or setting in terms of which groups are priority stakeholders and what role they represent in informing the design and approach to the evaluation.

Elftorp's and Stokes (Chapter 4) paper on the AEGS monitoring system for adult educational guidance users in Ireland also exemplifies how the emergence of the IT-supported system was made possible through a high number and variety of actors and stakeholders, including adult education managers and public organisations, guidance provider service teams and IT specialists involved in developing the tools. Examples are provided on how the monitoring data were utilised to support development of adapted courses, partially funded, to remove barriers clients reported. This was done through collaboration with education and training providers, also securing funding for clients.

Coordination of services in itself has merit, accordingly, but it is not enough to make the best use of expertise and resources, to benefit individual empowerment. Vuorinen and Kettunen (Chapter 2) argue that if the rationale is to improve cooperation among the services, an evaluation will transcend implementation of supplier-driven guidance interventions. Based on this kind of evaluation data, descriptive reports can be combined with information on the efficiency of cross-sectoral service delivery. This might increase flexible use of joint resources, especially when they are scarce, and exploit the 'transversal nature of career guidance' in each sector and show the value of maintaining its quality and strategic position, also transversally. More attention would then be placed on cooperation mechanisms at different levels (Spangar; Arnkil and Vuorinen, 2008).

8.2.3. Local adaptations, individual and user orientation

A system-level perspective does not mean that all measures and indicators need to be standardised and the same across all levels and services. This would prove counterproductive. Vuorinen and Kettunen (Chapter 2) point out in their article that at the same time as having a system-level perspective, degrees of local adaptability are also important to facilitate a user-friendly approach within the career guidance strategy. The papers approach this in different ways, signalling the critical importance of an explicit user orientation in career guidance monitoring and evaluation strategies and the role of unexpected events in the lives of the guidance users, and non-linear aspects of careers. This is a complex issue needing further reflection, with implications for outcomes-based evaluation as well as day-to-day and results monitoring. Taking account of this orientation or focus on benefits for individuals is conceived using different terms applied to methodologies and examples that also include groups of individuals: outcomes (hard and transversal) for beneficiaries, economic and otherwise; citizen involvement; user needs; complex needs; client progression; satisfaction levels; client feedback (data); and (client) demand-side considerations in comparison with supply-side thinking.

Referring to the process aspects of monitoring and assessments at the level of client and practitioner, Kasurinen and Launikari (Chapter 6) outline how the Finnish digital service need indicator, CREAR, shows that if the tool is integrated in a systematic manner in the guidance process from inception to completion, an individual’s progression across different areas over time can be monitored. This intervention helps the guidance counsellor and a client to ‘negotiate’ movement toward certain objectives or whether the goals should be redefined. For example, the authors explain that if a learner has difficulties with their studies, CREAR is used in the initial assessment phase to explore the critical issues; they can involve a practitioner, and at the end of the guidance process they revisit the tool to assess whether a (positive) change took place. The intention is to produce a targeted intervention or steps. As a consequence, the work of the practitioner is more ‘resource-efficient and impactful’. Quality evidence at the early end of the practice actions leading to long-term outcomes (or impact) might provide information for monitoring results at higher levels of the system.

Elftorp and Stokes (Chapter 4) highlight how, at a practical and day-to-day level, data are entered in the Irish AGMS by practitioners as a means of ‘keeping accurate records of client interactions, group work, research, networking activities, inter-agency work, and recording time spent in preparation for such interactions’. These data are used both at strategic and at practice levels. The paper stresses the importance of balancing these elements of both monitoring, and any eventual evaluation of outcomes.

The Irish case (Chapter 4), as one example, shows how the monitoring and evaluation data serve to adjust the types of workshops and information sessions practitioners organise, based on trends in client progress. This is in line with the ELGPN guidelines (ELGPN, 2015a) that outline how citizen involvement is essential in order to ensure improved user experience, develop effective and efficient services, strengthen accountability, and contribute to social justice at the same time.

8.2.4. Monitoring and evaluation and professional development

Elftorp and Stokes (Chapter 4) emphasise that, in Ireland, client feedback is a key aspect of how services are evaluated; as described by one of the services, this is 'the cornerstone of our informed reflective practice' (Elftorp and NCGE, 2020, p.58). In this sense, monitoring and evaluation will also contribute to the professionalisation of career guidance services. As guidance provision is a service which is dependent on practitioner competences, the AGMS asks practitioners to identify key areas for competency development to inform the NCGE and local management of professional development needs. The reporting of the data also informs the provision and development of initial and continued professional training programmes for guidance counsellors (ELGPN, 2015a).

Kasurinen and Launikari (Chapter 6) focus on tools for monitoring the guidance process at the interface between client and practitioner, as well as estimating the effects of interventions. CREAR can increase the quality and efficiency of the guidance process, also aiding professional development of practitioners. The result that CREAR generates can be used to assess the client's need for guidance or support. The analysis enables identification of factors having a positive impact on client career development (Kasurinen et al., 2020). CREAR, the authors sustain, allows for a solid, 'holistic overview' of an individual's situation. If CREAR is systematically used by providers it has the potential to assess overall progress and competences of guidance staff over time. The authors contend that the tool helps provide targeted and effective services, but the competences of guidance counsellors need to cover several elements that the authors describe. Through conducting a small qualitative study on the use of CREAR among different providers and practitioners, the authors draw several conclusions in a critical review of the challenges to the quality of the guidance process. The practitioners' 'lack of critical self-reflection of their professional performance' was also noted.

Weber (Chapter 5) outlines a model which is being applied and carefully refined in Germany to monitor aspects and professional development of career guidance practitioners as critical inputs to quality outcomes for clients. The work is also framed within the wider issue of diverse approaches to quality standards in the country, and the idea that without consistent input service-level standards (not here defined as benchmarks) it is difficult to set up systematic monitoring, which has implications for guidance system development and user expectations. In this way, 'evaluation' is focused on the counsellors and their interaction with clients as part of a multimethod holistic evaluation process. Three levels are classified using the logic of input, process, and output/outcome, accordingly. One level investigates the input in terms of professionalism and competences of guidance counsellors. Another level (process) studies the counsellor's practices and interaction with clients, and the last level addresses the individual outcomes for clients.

Practitioner competences and skills are important but, as emphasised in many of the papers in this collection, factors need to be considered outside the intervention influencing longer-term outcomes, especially the labour market situation (Schiersmann and Weber, 2017). Many influences complicate impact measurement in guidance, as well as the requirements imposed by evaluation methodology, especially when employing rigorous sampling methods. Other experts have pointed out the particular issues surrounding the potential chain of action leading from guidance interventions to impacts at practice level (Robertson, 2021). In Weber's (Chapter 5) evaluation study, professionalism is understood as 'the basis for competent and reflected, independent and dynamically adapted action in dealing with clients'. Exchange, networking, self-directed acquisition of knowledge and self-care are also important. Professionalism is operationalised using a series of criteria ('recognised expert knowledge, qualifications, training, and special competences, professional identity, expert role attribution by third parties or autonomous, self-responsible action'). This paper underlines the multidimensional aspect of practitioners or career support staff within the input dimension, in an overall model for monitoring the results of career guidance interventions.

8.2.5. Providing the resources, evaluating the impact

Resources and assessing impact and outcomes are closely related as resources are needed for setting up solid, reliable monitoring and evaluation systems, and are in focus when considering how to sustain services and improve quality. Going further, monitoring of results is often motivated by the need for savings and to focus programme or service investments; examples include innovative tools and approaches for meeting client needs better, particularly those facing complex barriers or users expressing more demanding career expectations, such as within the labour market sector. The paper on the adult educational guidance monitoring system in Ireland provides a salient example of how adult guidance counselling in some countries tends to cater for clients with complex and multifaceted needs who may face significant barriers to education and the labour market. Meeting their needs and tailoring services implies a need for better resources, sometimes facilitated by improved cooperation, so understanding the positive changes brought about through guidance is critical.

All the papers indicate, through their different narratives and methodological approaches, the difficulty of making choices for monitoring, measuring and evaluating the results of career guidance interventions and services. This is particularly true across services and initiatives in a scattered provider landscape or with lack of a common vision, established quality standards, or without systemic thinking that is also sensitive to local demands. It is ever more important to focus available public resources to respond to the increasing demand for career development services in a world that is becoming more complex on many levels, which is felt by service providers and individual practitioners whose job entails understanding this complexity and accordingly helping design interventions that are client-focused.

A common vision across levels and services will create the mandate and justification to continue specific practices as well as assist in dedicating the necessary resources to monitor and evaluate properly. Greater resources may be needed for setting up these systems and, in turn, impact evaluation may indicate a greater demand for resources. However, Elftorp and Stokes (Chapter 4) and also explain how monitoring and evaluating the impact of guidance counselling is particularly challenging in a service with a strong emphasis on impartiality and a person-centred approach. The authors stress that the value and outcomes of career guidance are often intangible and, therefore, challenging to measure. They put forward that the sense of wellbeing and improved quality of life attached to, for example, engagement with an adult literacy programme, is likely to be felt by the individual, their family, friends, and community. This may contribute to improved employment prospects in the long-term and for future generations. Thus, it is necessary to create monitoring and evaluation systems and strategies that account for this complexity and the multiple factors and variables that may help us understand in what way interventions are successful and at which level, and how to focus public investment.

In their paper, Percy and Hughes (Chapter 7) show how, in the Welsh case, a pragmatic approach to justify certain career guidance interventions can be based on a specific methodology of return on investment (ROI), also emphasising the need to support results using additional evidence. They present an innovative, low-cost and time-saving method and detail the methodology and steps taken. This methodology is designed to assist in decision-making processes about the value of investing resources in career guidance and career development activities. The authors underline that recommendations based on the findings must involve the use of multiple sources to interpret the quantitative findings using fiscal ROI estimates. Among other recommendations, they suggest treating the initial estimate as a way to support organisations in taking a solid approach to impact understanding as well as analysis supporting fully informed decisions.

8.2.6. Importance of qualitative and quantitative data

The different approaches show that there is a considerable amount of qualitative and quantitative data being collected. Diverse methods are used both in the course of external evaluations and commissioned studies but also by providers in monitoring client progress or for reporting requirements, such as evaluating counsellors or when generating data during programme monitoring and evaluation. Combined with other sources, the amount of data has the potential to provide significant advances in building evidence and monitoring the investments made in individual career pathways, and the results of career guidance, to improve organisational and frontline practices and to inform policy in a continuous manner. However, experts point out in the papers that data quality can be an issue in some cases; there are gaps and limitations in conducting large-scale experimental studies in the field, due in part to budget and time-related constraints. Because of the complexity in designing studies in the field or in creating evaluation systems, most findings are limited in their scope and understanding the learning aspect of career guidance and career development processes. The papers in this collection attempt to tackle this complexity and each confront the related methodological issues accordingly. Only a few examples are mentioned here.

Percy and Hughes (Chapter 7), methodologically, draw on internal interviews and workshops to ensure understanding of the programmes, scope the process, and review interim findings. The authors explain that the ROI estimate draws on 'internal monitoring and budget data, internal interviews, and a randomised control trial (RCT) from the United States on a comparable programme'. Third-party evaluations are used to 'add confidence and specificity to hypothetical modelling' to support 'stakeholder conversations'. The findings show an approximate per year fiscal return in relation to annual direct costs to the government, stated as a fiscal return on investment.

Elftorp and Stokes (Chapter 4) explain in detail how data in Ireland are used to inform guidance client feedback, highlight the barriers faced by adult clients, and alert education providers on the need for negotiation of courses more adapted to client needs which can end with a newly designed course in response to the increased demand signalled by the guidance monitoring system. In the AEGS, this is done by the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as regular client feedback and self-evaluation.

In their review of the literature on monitoring and evaluation in career guidance, Bielecki, Płachecki and Stasiowski (Chapter 3) note the significant shortcomings of several effectiveness studies. They include newer studies that move beyond the standard output indicators widely used across the labour market, as they note in the Polish case. From their point of view, theory-based evaluation allows for ‘an understanding of the mechanisms of causal relationships between the intervention and the observed changes’. Through a comprehensive reflection on the counselling process and its conditions their theory-based evaluation (TBE) approach seeks ‘to avoid erroneous conclusions’ about the effectiveness of counselling, resulting from relying solely on what they describe as simple monitoring indicators.

8.3. Final reflections

This volume is framed within a larger project that looks into individual support to careers and learning. It is the beginning of the process of evaluating the feasibility of arriving at common standards for monitoring and evaluation in guidance, as outlined in the original terms of the project. The call for papers intended to elicit a focus on two questions: the current state of play in monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling systems and services in the EU; and proposals for how to improve existing methodological approaches.

Papers assessed some current practices in monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling systems and services at national or regional level. Discussions focused on the methods, quality standards and approaches used, issues faced and ideas on how to overcome shortcomings. Examples of how use was made of results were included (to shape career guidance and counselling services, or to feed into policy development, for example). To some extent, outcomes of services or activities were illustrated both directly and through the extensive reviews of literature in the papers. The authors considered established career guidance and counselling systems (and services) in the five national settings, as well as individual professional interventions and the work of counsellors, how they are monitored, and results for clients.

Several papers look beyond inherited methods and tools to examine innovative approaches that are newly evolving and proposed to address both the existing gaps and methodological challenges, within a changing labour market and skills development context requiring new approaches to monitoring system results, while focusing on cost-effectiveness of proposed strategies. The discussions and reflections on potential/improved methodologies to monitor and evaluate career guidance and counselling systems or services for adults, serve to support building the evidence base to improve practices and offer insight to policy development. These can feed into existing national or other quality assurance frameworks, in different sectoral contexts or guidance strategies at the national, regional, or organisational level. The papers also provide substantial reflection on how to improve existing approaches, propose thorough and well-grounded methodologies or proposals, and discuss their challenges and how to tackle them. To some extent, authors address how the approaches might contribute to the development of coordinated and integrated services (combining different career development and related activities), supporting individuals along the life path.

The papers offer reflections on how their methodologies, models, and frameworks may be transferable to other contexts, despite having been conceived or theorised based on a particular national context or setting. Most papers are future-oriented or describe and analyse relatively recent developments or innovative methodological proposals that draw on previous efforts in the field. Looking ahead to Volume II (forthcoming), which will contain a proposed methodological framework complete with a set of indicators, the papers describe how evaluations at different system levels may be conducted, at the same time reflecting critical aspects needing consideration in any proposed minimum monitoring and evaluation standards. Future work will thus entail selecting measures and methodologies that relate to inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes.

Volume II (forthcoming) consolidates some of these conclusions from the authored papers, in respect to specific lessons learned about evidence-based evaluation for guidance policy development, beginning with the importance of involving a range of stakeholders. Similarly, key points are also extracted from the papers in this volume in relation to how monitoring is helpful in supporting improvements in guidance delivery.

What the papers reveal from the outset are the observed shortcomings, limitations, and gaps in current practices across the landscape of career guidance and career development providers and supporting or accompanying institutions, services and implemented measures across Europe in monitoring and evaluation. They identify, in some cases, a lack of research on results, impacts and outcomes at different levels, from the particular perspective of the field. This is where each paper, reflecting the national context examined, adds particular value to the current study and the growing evidence base: authors write from within the field of career guidance using their inside knowledge and apply expertise in system monitoring from specific vantage points.

Change may be possible, including arriving at systemic and holistic methodologies. Although there are challenges, there is also great potential for methodological standards with specific areas of focus that build on previous work, such as through the European lifelong guidance policy network (ELGPN, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) and numerous experts supporting this work, and other existing frameworks (European Network of Public Employment Services, 2018; European Commission, Ziminiene and Fertig, 2018), as also noted by the authors. It should be feasible to reach some common agreement on measures to include in a potential European framework with measures and indicators that can be adapted according to local conditions and resources. It is important, however, to start with a set of statements or principles tied to quality assurance that are built on consensus, such as the centrality of user orientation, a cross-sectoral approach with common concepts, and involvement of key stakeholders and experts in the field, when setting up monitoring and evaluating systems.

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TOWARDS EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF LIFELONG GUIDANCE SYSTEMS AND SERVICES (VOL. I)

This publication brings together the results of a call for papers on monitoring and evaluating career guidance systems and services, adopting the perspective of career development support to careers and learning. Experts were invited to provide insights into the current situation, with a focus on the methodological options available for monitoring and evaluating adult career guidance and career development services. This volume presents six research papers covering a range of existing and proposed methodological approaches and in-depth reviews of previous work, identifying gaps and considering solutions. The report is framed within a larger project aiming to explore the feasibility of achieving an integrated vision of the results of guidance interventions and establishing minimum standards for comparable monitoring and evaluation of career guidance and counselling services for adults in Europe from a lifelong perspective.

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