



SUB-REPORT:

Measuring psycho-social outcomes and indicators: A guide

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Penny Morrell
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THIS SUB-REPORT

This report is one of the products of a two-year research project which set out to discover what difference bursary support providers (BSPs) may make to student success at universities – and what their (unique) contributions to this might be.

Funded by the DG Murray Trust and commissioned by the Rural Education Access Programme (REAP), the project was carried out in active close collaboration with members of the National Bursary Support Providers Forum (NBSPF), a network of about 25 organisations which support university students in South Africa.

Working on measuring psycho-social outcomes was the most innovative part of this research. As the claim has historically been that psycho-social support is what this sector can uniquely offer, finding out the extent of the difference they make – and which bits are the most effective – was a key question, but also the most evasive.

Nonetheless the research undertook to identify psycho-social competencies / outcomes that would both support academic success and be an outcome in their own right inasmuch as they contribute to employability. Eight outcomes were eventually agreed to following a review of international workplace competencies – and 28 indicators with rating tools were developed. These are being piloted by two organisations and a third which is piloting their own set of outcomes, will be participating in the conversations about what is possible.

This guide was developed for those organisations who are piloting the measurement of two psycho-social outcomes - and outlines how they might implement this system.

Other psycho-social sub-reports are:

Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary support provider sector	Nov 2020
Eight psycho-social outcomes and their indicators	May 2021
Matrices for assessing the psycho-social outcomes and indicators	May 2021
A selection of compulsory indicators for assessing psycho-social outcomes: An example	May 2021

ACCESS TO THE REPORTS

These sub-reports, along with the full research report and a shorter version comprising the executive summary and findings, are posted on the REAP and NBSPF websites at

<https://www.reap.org.za/pages/reports.html>

<https://nationalbursaryforum.org.za/resource-portal/>

A GUIDE TO MEASURING PSYCHO-SOCIAL OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

Given the interest in the sector regarding being able to produce evidence that psycho-social work makes a difference – and which aspects may be doing so – a working groups has identified eight outcomes as well as two to five indicators for each. These are in the sub-report 'Eight psycho-social outcomes and their indicators'.

It also developed matrices for measuring each indicator described in sub-report 'Matrices for assessing the psycho-social outcomes and indicators'.

Both are available on the websites listed in the introduction.

The idea is to be able to measure any changes that may have occurred.

Measuring psycho-social outcomes and change is not straightforward and some of the complexities will be briefly reviewed.

DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

You cannot measure what you do not influence!

While assessing psycho-social outcomes may be used to check what difference is being made by the organisation's various initiatives – and, as such is regarded as a part of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) – it also has three developmental / capacity building aspects. Assessing psycho-social outcomes can

- align organisation's offerings/programmes more intentionally with their intended outcomes;
- assist staff in focussing on each student's development; and
- assist students in knowing where they are heading and how they can take responsibility for getting there.

As such it is not just an M&E exercise for measuring and reporting.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PILOT

Two of the eight outcomes have been chosen to pilot with a small selection of students in 2021 – to see if this is workable and interesting. The outcomes – with their definitions are:

1. **Communication – oral and written and including emotional intelligence:** Articulates thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively, verbally and in writing, in ways suitable to internal and external audiences. Is able to express ideas interpersonally and in public fora.
2. **Persistence / grit:** Persists with a path of action in the light of difficulties and obstacles, be they external or internal. Draws on personal characteristics and external resources to enable them to negotiate adversity. Remains focussed on, and works towards, their goals.

THE FULL PROCESS

As 28 indicators are far too many to assess for each student two or three times a year, the proposal is that an organisation selects the indicators they want assessed for each phase of university life. (See an examples of this in the sub-report ‘A selection of compulsory indicators for assessing psycho-social outcomes: An example’) after which they may add a few for each particular student according to their needs.

The selection will comprise compulsory and elective indicators:

- **‘Compulsory indicators’** are the indicators identified by an organisation as essential to students at each phase of university life. Different indicators can be chosen for first year students, senior students and final year students’. You will then need to specify the target rating (e.g. a ‘2’ for ‘written communication’ in first year but a ‘4’ by final year.)
This ensures that the organisation can monitor some of the competencies / outcomes it thinks are essential for producing competent graduates.

- In addition the student and their mentor/advisor will together identify a small selection of other indicators – **elective indicators** – based on competencies they think are necessary either for that student’s chosen career and/or are areas the particular student needs to improve for their own wellbeing. Target ratings are mutually agreed for each.
Again once the indicators have been selected, you will need to specify the target rating you have both agreed to.

METHOD / APPROACH

Measuring and assessment

1. The assessment tool comprise matrices with a rating scale of 1 – 4.
2. At the beginning of the year
 - the students are introduced to the compulsory indicators for their phase;
 - **elective indicators** with associated target ratings are chosen with each student;
 - a **baseline assessment** is done with each student - of both the compulsory and elective indicators; and
 - an **individual development plan** is mutually agreed to, which identifies areas for improvement and an action plan. The idea is to use this Individual Development Plan to inform the development opportunities they need that year.
3. **Assessment and measuring change.**

Each students is to be **assessed once or twice during the year** - either with their mentor/advisor or, ideally, publicly to a panel.

Change is measured between the baseline rating and the final rating.

Additional tools

Reviews

Some organisations hold individual bi-annual reviews, in preparation for which the student and staff assess the student against a standard template. They then discuss their respective ratings and impressions and map ways forward.

Some organisations have students present their ratings to a panel – this presentation being part of their own development – and others with an individual staff member.

These reviews are implicitly included in the implementation proposal outlined above – namely that ‘assessment to be done once or twice in the year - either with their mentor/advisor or, ideally, publicly to a panel’.

Student surveys

The regular use of these matrices can be supplemented by the use of student surveys

- either quick ones using something like Mentimeter; or
- more substantive ones using something like Survey Monkey or Google forms.

These can be used, inter alia,

- to assess how students generally are doing in particular contexts; or
- to obtain students' feedback on the organisation's services.

These often do not address psycho-social issues per se. Such an enquiry would need to be done intentionally.

RECORDING DATA DURING THE PILOT PHASE

1. During the pilot year – or if an organisation wants to pilot some of the outcomes to ascertain if it suits them - no development should be done to an organisation's existing database until the way forward has been agreed to. In the interim
 - data is to be collected on a basic temporary Excel database (which REAP has developed).
 - Each student is to have a dedicated worksheet (i.e. record)
2. The temporary Excel database captures the following:
 - the psycho-social indicators to be assessed and the target rating for each;
 - the academic courses being done and the target end-of-year result for each;
 - a baseline rating;
 - an agreed Individual Development Plan based on addressing the gap between the target ratings/ results and the baseline ratings / results;
 - the actual ratings awarded - and comments made - at the agreed times (once or twice a year);
 - records of interim contacts – including in relation to the indicators; and
 - a final outcome showing 'change' in the form of the gap between the target ratings and the final ratings.
3. While not ideal, this dual system proposed for the pilot year – the interim database alongside your organisation's existing database – will serve to refine what is useful and save duplicating / amending database developments.
4. Accessing reports on an interim system
 - Individual reports to be accessed (albeit clumsily while still in this interim form) from individual worksheets.
 - Composite reports to be accessed through pivot tables.