



Measuring psycho-social outcomes – where angels fear to tread

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Insights of the bursary support provider sector regarding ways of optimising student success in higher education – and the (unique) contributions it might make to this.

Diverse sector

Do BSP = a sector?

✓ Provide financial and personal support for students at universities (colleges) – to promote their success.

≅ Diverse in how, and how much



makes simple comparisons and generalisations difficult

Measuring difference

- How does the sector know it is making a difference
 - and which bits MAKE the difference?
 - Internal question.
- Making a difference at individual student level
- Difference implies change and /or comparison.
 - within organisational practice
 - across organisations
 - with national data

Measuring difference

- Three working groups about measuring:
 - academic outcomes
 - employment /income-generation outcomes
 - psycho-social outcomes.
- Academic outcomes – sector not naming or counting the same; not comparable with national stats.
- Very few measuring employment /income-generation outcomes or psycho-social outcomes

WHY?

Psycho-social support

Psycho-social support = **signature of the sector**, particularly one-on-one interactions

Unique to the sector as **labour intensive** and not easily offered by universities (academic advising?)

Seven directors: psycho-social support non-negotiable.

- **Difference based on experience**

In service of academic outcomes

Psycho-social support instrumentalised for academic success.

Throughput and **year-on-year progression**
= indicators of the difference made by BSPs
- therefore one possible indicator of
contribution of psycho-social support.

Academic outcomes: Retrospective study

Purpose

Use historical statistics to say something about

- throughput rates
- time to completion
- year-on-year progression rates.

Data sets

- 8 data sets from 4 NBSPF orgs (one org = 5 projects)
- 946 students
- **Throughput:** intake / award cohorts 2014 & 2015
- **Year-on-year progression:** end of 2017, 2018 & 2019

Comparing: Profiles

Similar:

- Students' household incomes (some missing middle)

Different :

- Overall aim / character of orgs
- Recruitment & selection of students
- Geographical origins of students
- Study options (HEIs, phase of study, field focus)

Implications for making comparisons

- with one another
- with national stats

Comparing: Support offered

Similar support

Financial support

- 7 'fully funds' students
- 1 = only tuition, sometimes book allowances

Psycho-social support

Similar but different intensities

- Full (light) psycho-social support (x5)
- Full compulsory psycho-social support – dosages intense to light acc to academic level (x2)
- Limited psycho-social support - visits and mentoring.

Findings: throughput

**Table 3: Throughput of students in award cohorts
2014 & 2015 - by participating organisation**

	2014		2015	
	total	Throughput	total	throughput
AVERAGE		74%		69%
Org A	76	91%	50	88%
Org B	78	65%	104	48%
Org C	138	57%	117	58%
Project D	15	100%	9	78%
Project E	149	91%	11	91%
Project F	52	71%	11	55%
Project G	74	67%	50	85%
Project H	8	63%	4	50%

Findings: Causal factors (contd)

Factors that might influence success

None simply determining

X Academic selection criteria

- May be for Org A - universities' rigorous Health Sciences selection
- Various academic selection criteria for Org J's successful projects
- Org B - slightly higher academic requirements than Org C, but similar in STEM fields.

Findings: Causal factors (contd)

X Full funding

- Some projects with high throughput fully funded while Org A students only adequately funded.
- Those with lower throughputs also varied:
Org B students are 'fully funded' while Org C students may also have to look for funding for some shortfalls.

X Rural/urban origins

- Org A (high throughput) and Org C (lower throughput) recruit exclusively from rural areas

Finding: The case for a lighter touch

One possible commonality

Two orgs/projects with high throughput rates:

- adequately but not fully/ funded AND
- provide light psycho-social support

Two orgs with lower throughput rates:

- fairly heavy dosages of both funding and psycho-social support.

Indicates that light dosages can work.

But what do they need to be combined with?

Finding: The case for a lighter touch

	Org A	Project G
Throughput	91% and 88% for 76 and 50 students	67% and 85% of 74 and 50 students
Funding	just enough 'full funding'	only provides some funding
Psycho-social support	regular but not frequent psycho-social support through part-time mentors	only 'some psycho-social support - limited to visits and mentoring'
Development	very few workshops , given the Health Sciences students' schedules.	' no workshops or additional skills'

Compared with NSFAS

DHET cohort study:

'2000 to 2016 first-time entering undergraduate cohort studies for public higher education institutions' (March 2019)

Not clear:

*'... in this document we calculate **the proportion of NSFAS funded students that graduated in 2017.***

Proportion of what?

- all current NSFAS-funded students?
- all NSFAS-funded students in final year?

What does that say about throughput?

Compared with NSFAS

- *'It was possible to identify **50,253 NSFAS funded students** that had graduated in 2017.'*
 - *'The total number of graduates from public HEIs in 2017 was **197,045**.'*
 - *'This means that NSFAS funded students constituted **25.5% of graduates in 2017.**'*
- ✓ **proportion of all graduates in 2017 who were NSFAS-funded.**

X throughput (not a proportion of a cohort)

X '25,5% of NSFAS-funded students graduate...'

Throughput: Projects compared with NSFAS

Compared

- our seven-year cohort (2014) with their 2010 NSFAS-funded cohort (7 years to 2018)
- our six-year cohort (2015) with their 2011 cohort (6 years to 2018)

Findings

Throughput rates of this study's cohorts - 16 project years:

- half (8) were above the NSFAS-data average
- one was on par
- the other seven were below.

	2014: DHET 2010 (66,4 - 69,2%)	2015: DHET 2011 (64,7%)
Org A	Above	Above
Org B	Below	Below
Org C	Below	Below
Project D	Above	Above
Project E	Above	Above
Project F	Above	Below
Project G	On par	Above
Project H	Below	Below

Need evidence of making a difference

- Common data sets?
- Common terms?

Causality –

- What role did psycho-social support play in any difference made?
- How do you know that it your initiatives that made the difference?

Changes - individual students

CAN track psycho-social differences made to individual students.

Psycho-social competences

✓ end in themselves, not just academic success

✓ functional adults and employability

So how to measure change in psycho-social competences?

What is assessed

Chose to assess **behaviours that can be observed** - not psychological conditions or states.

Common practice in workplaces.

BSPs' not psychometrists, psychologists or professional counsellors.

(Can be accessed for specialist care if necessary.)

Competencies

Mapped competencies from

- **NACE** (American National Assoc of Colleges and Employers) - competencies 'ensure new college graduates have the skills necessary to enter and become part of a strong, productive work force'.
- **WEF** (World Economic Forum) - the 4th Industrial Revolution 'will transform the way we live, and the way we work. ...What is certain is that the future workforce will need to align its skillset to keep pace.'
- **SAGEA** (SA Graduate Employers' Assoc)

Eight outcomes

1. **Communication** – oral and written and including emotional intelligence
2. **Teamwork/collaboration** / co-ordinating with others
3. **Social and cultural awareness** – including service orientation / purpose
4. **Critical thinking / (complex) problem solving, judgement & decision making**
5. **Initiative**
6. **Persistence / grit**
7. **Work ethic / professionalism**
8. **Personal management**

Outcomes

Each defined:

2. Teamwork/collaboration / co-ordinating with others

Is able to work within a team structure; participates actively and can negotiate and manage conflict. Builds collaborative relationships with people from diverse backgrounds, lifestyles and viewpoints.

6. 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.

.... and indicators

Each outcome has **2 to 4 indicators** – total 28.

e.g. **Teamwork/collaboration / co-ordinating with others**

- 1. The student participates actively and confidently in a group, while being aware of others.**
- 2. The student can interrogate an idea with others.**
- 3. The student contributes to achieving team goals.**
- 4. The student manages conflict in ways that build relationships and ideas and accommodates difference, where possible.**

Rating scale

Each indicator has a four-point rating scale for assessment –
e.g.

Indicator 2.4: The student manages conflict in ways that build relationships and ideas and accommodates difference, where possible

- 1. Does not manage conflict well; is either avoidant or engages in ways that does not build relationships and/or ideas and/or does not accommodate difference.**
- 2. Tries to manage conflict well – but can be avoidant or engages in ways that are not always good for building relationships and/or ideas and/or are not always tolerant of difference.**
- 3. Mostly manages conflict well, engaging in ways that try to build relationships and/or ideas and/or tries to tolerate difference.**
- 4. Manages conflict in ways that build relationships and ideas and accommodates difference, where possible.**

Evidence

Each indicator also has suggested sources of evidence
– e.g.

Observations of behaviour

Their management of conflict as it arises in group sessions and/or workshops.

Self-reporting

Reported examples of how they managed conflict e.g. in relationship difficulties.

Selecting indicators

28 indicators is too many

- **Compulsory** - at different phases of university life.
- **Electives** – individual student's needs

First year = 16 indicators

Senior students = 18 indicators

Final year students = 16 indicators

Selecting indicators

Example

		First year	Senior	Final year
2	Teamwork/collaboration / co-ordinating with others			
2.1	The student participates actively and confidently in a group, while being aware of others.	2		
2.2	The student can interrogate an idea with others.		3	
2.3	The student contributes to achieving team goals.	2		
2.4	The student manages conflict in ways that build relationships and ideas and accommodates difference, where possible.		3	

Implementation process

1. Intro to compulsory indicators; add electives
2. Baseline assessment
 development plan
3. Interim meetings
4. Mid-year review
5. End of year review

Approach to implementation

- Developmental – not judgmental
- Common focussed language for discussion
- Responsibility for assessment and development shared with student

Currently being piloted

- Professionally helpful
- Admin heavy – ultimately to be included in case notes / database

CONCLUSION

To link psycho-social outcomes to improved academic outcomes needs

- qualitative / longitudinal work
- case studies

Measuring psycho-social outcomes

- ✓ **Important part of the development conversation**
- ✓ **Focusses the discussions on specific outcomes**
 - consciously track each student's development
- ✓ **helps to identify which interventions more helpful than others.**
- ✓ **Pilot to see what is do-able**

Reports available on REAP and NBSPF websites:

www.REAP.org.za

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

- ✓ Towards measuring psycho-social outcomes in the bursary support provider sector
- ✓ Eight psycho-social outcomes and their indicators
- ✓ Matrices for assessing the psycho-social outcomes and indicators
- ✓ A selection of compulsory indicators for assessing psycho-social outcomes: An example
- ✓ Measuring psycho-social outcomes and indicators: A Guide

Thank you!