Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: A Review of Current Practice

Sara Dewson, Jude Eccles, Nii Djan Tackey and Annabel Jackson
Institute for Employment Studies
Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: A Review of Current Practice

Sara Dewson, Jude Eccles, Nii Djan Tackey and Annabel Jackson
Institute for Employment Studies
## Contents

1. Executive Summary ........................................ 1  
   1.1 Introduction ........................................... 1  
   1.2 Research Methodology .................................. 1  
   1.3 Research findings ..................................... 2  
      1.3.1 What are soft outcomes? ......................... 2  
      1.3.2 What are soft indicators? ....................... 2  
      1.3.3 What is distance travelled? ..................... 3  
      1.3.4 What are projects doing? ........................ 3  
      1.3.5 Weaknesses in soft outcome monitoring systems 4  
   1.4 Conclusions and recommendations ..................... 5  

2. Introduction .............................................. 7  
   2.1 Aims and objectives of the research .................. 7  
   2.2 Research methodology ................................. 8  

3. Research Findings ........................................ 12  
   3.1 The research context .................................. 12  
   3.2 Definitional issues .................................... 14  
      3.2.1 What are soft outcomes? ......................... 14  
      3.2.2 What are soft indicators? ....................... 15  
      3.2.3 What is distance travelled? ..................... 15  
   3.3 The research findings ................................ 15  
      3.3.1 Literature review ................................ 15  
      3.3.2 Survey of projects ............................... 16  
   3.4 Core outcomes ........................................ 17  
   3.5 Target group-specific outcomes ..................... 18  
   3.6 How are projects measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled? ........................................ 19  
      3.6.1 Who is doing what? ................................ 20  
   3.7 Weaknesses in soft outcome monitoring systems .... 21  
   3.8 One model fits all? .................................... 23  
      3.8.1 The development of a ‘toolkit’ and national monitoring indicators 23  

4. Conclusions and Recommendations ...................... 25  
   4.1 Conclusions ............................................ 25  
   4.2 Recommendations ....................................... 26  

Appendix: Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled
1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation systems for employment projects and programmes, which are targeted towards unemployed people, have traditionally focused on 'hard' outcomes that are generally simple to record and measure. There is growing recognition, however, that such measures taken in isolation are inadequate in demonstrating the success of a project as a whole. In addition, these 'hard' measures of success do not give a complete picture of a client's increased employability. It is often both unlikely and inappropriate for many projects to expect to achieve 'hard' outcomes from target groups that are socially excluded and facing multiple barriers to employment within the time frame available for training.

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has commissioned this research to develop a model for measuring these increases in employability or 'distance travelled' for projects operating under European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 3. The study has aimed to identify tools for measuring individual employability gains with a view to developing proposals for monitoring similar 'soft' outcomes at the national level.

In essence, the research has sought to establish what is already happening 'on the ground' at the project level, in order to inform the development of a model to measure distance travelled and promote uniform national monitoring.

1.2 Research Methodology

The study has adopted a threefold approach:

- Firstly, a review of existing literature and practice on 'soft outcomes', 'soft indicators' and 'distance travelled' has been undertaken which has incorporated a survey of ESF-funded projects. This first stage of the research has underpinned and shaped the remaining activities of the study.
- Secondly, a design phase was planned to develop a model to measure distance travelled.
The third and final phase when proposals and recommendations for monitoring soft indicators at the national level have been made.

The literature review has drawn on European and American sources of information and empirical evidence of what is happening in the realm of soft outcomes and distance travelled. The survey of 300 projects has sought to explore what ESF Objective 3 projects and those funded by the EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative are doing to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled.

The ESF Objective 3 projects taking part in our survey were part of the 1994-99 programme which was targeted at people who experience particular labour market disadvantage and who are often the hardest-to-help of the unemployed client group. The findings from this study will be particularly relevant to those projects which will now be funded under Policy Field 2 of the new ESF Objective 3 programme and which was launched in England in June 2000. This policy field is aimed towards equal opportunities for all and promoting social inclusion.

### 1.3 Research findings

Although ‘soft outcomes’ is a term which is gaining currency, very little has been written about ‘soft outcomes’ and ‘distance travelled’ \textit{per se} and much confusion exists over these very terms. Our search for literature has thus relied heavily on empirical reports of soft indicator systems rather than any academic literature or reports from government departments.

#### 1.3.1 What are soft outcomes?

In the context of ESF Objective 3 projects and other employment programmes dealing with people disadvantaged in the labour market, soft outcomes are those which, unlike hard outcomes cannot be measured directly or tangibly. They are:

- Intangible, not concrete
- Subjective
- A matter of degree rather than absolute
- Personal, depending on individual client needs
- Intermediate (usually measuring progress towards hard outcomes such as employment and qualifications).

#### 1.3.2 What are soft indicators?

There is an interplay between indicators and outcomes in that indicators are the means by which it is possible to measure
whether outcomes have been achieved. The term *soft indicators* is used when referring to the achievements which may ‘indicate’ acquisition or progress towards an outcome. It is clear that not all indicators, or measures of progression, are necessarily suitable for all client groups; some are target group specific.

**1.3.3 What is distance travelled?**

Put quite simply, the term *distance travelled* refers to the progress that a beneficiary makes towards greater employability (and subsequently harder outcomes) as a result of the project intervention. While the acquisition of certain soft outcomes may seem insignificant for certain individuals, the leap forward in achieving these outcomes can be immense for others.

**1.3.4 What are projects doing?**

Projects reported that they measured many types of soft outcomes which can be classified into two groups: core outcomes and target specific outcomes. Core outcomes are likely to be relevant to most projects and client groups and can be classified as relating to:

- Key work skills, such as the acquisition of key skills, and language and communication skills.
- Attitudinal skills, for example, increased levels of motivation, confidence and self-esteem.
- Personal skills, including improvements in timekeeping, attendance or personal hygiene.
- Practical skills, which may be indicated by the ability to complete forms or to manage money.

Target group-specific outcomes are those which are relevant to particular groups. An example could be a project which works with people with learning disabilities or mental illness: they may identify a greater level of self-awareness, or lowered anxiety as indicators of improved personal skills.

The techniques and indicators used to measure soft outcomes vary from project to project and the scope of soft indicator systems is vast. We have found that a small number of projects do not have any systems in place to measure soft outcomes or distance travelled and their focus is primarily on measuring hard job, training and qualification successes.

Conversely, some projects are much further down the line in terms of designing and implementing systems to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled than others. In particular, those projects which have received development funding seem to have been able to introduce, pilot and fine-tune sophisticated soft outcome systems for their client group.
However, from the literature and the empirical evidence we have reviewed as part of our survey, it is clear that most ESF Objective 3 projects do actually measure soft outcomes and distance travelled albeit it in usually informal and unsystematic ways.

Most projects measure soft outcomes and (perhaps) distance travelled using paper based techniques which examine attitudes and feelings with comparisons over time and many use questionnaires for this purpose. Many projects have used ongoing reviews between trainers or assessors and clients to ‘record’ soft outcomes. These often draw on evidence produced by the client or examples of progress, such as working productively in a team. Reviews such as this are usually recorded on Individual Training Plans and the like although in no systematic format. Improvements over time are recorded, for example, ‘the client is feeling more confident in a group situation’ although there is no actual, formal or absolute ‘measure’ of this kind of distance travelled.

Very few of the projects taking part in our review have aggregated micro-level information on individual clients’ progress to arrive at a project-wide (macro) measure of soft outcomes.

1.3.5 Weaknesses in soft outcome monitoring systems

Our review of systems to measure soft outcomes, whilst illustrating the extent to which projects are already measuring soft outcomes has also highlighted a number of weaknesses. These are:

- **Poor integration with other sources of information.** Most of the soft outcome and indicator tools we have reviewed do not take into account skills gained during work experience, voluntary work, or other activities as an indication of soft outcomes or distance travelled.

- **Attribution.** It is often difficult, if not impossible, to attribute positive, soft outcomes (and thus, distance travelled towards greater employability) solely to the training intervention.

- **Subjectivity.** There are some significant issues concerning the ways in which clients are assessed for soft outcomes and distance travelled. Systems which rely on self-administered questionnaires can suffer from clients overstating or understating their achievements. Similarly, tutors’ personal bias and subjectivity can affect a system of tutor-based assessments. Practitioners may also be working to their own, different definition of the same outcome, for example, what may be deemed as confidence by one tutor may be viewed as aggressive behaviour by another.

- **Language.** It is clear that some of the language used in soft outcome tools is inappropriate for disadvantaged client groups. Some of the language we have seen is patronising or
accusatory suggesting that there is something wrong if clients do not feel a certain way, or have certain characteristics.

- **Different baselines.** Although not a weakness in itself, it would seem that there are too many different client groups to devise one particular soft indicator system or model to fit all projects. The characteristics of individuals from disadvantaged ‘groups’ will vary both within and without the group and such individuality renders comparison both within and between the groups impossible.

### 1.4 Conclusions and recommendations

This study has found that many disparate systems to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled exist at the project level. Whilst these systems measure similar outcomes, particularly those related to ‘core’ soft outcomes, there is no uniformity in the way projects go about measuring them.

Any nationally consistent system to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled across projects would necessarily require great prescription. All project staff would need to be similarly trained to enable them to work to the same definitions of soft outcomes and progression and measurement tools would have to be generic in order that all clients and assessors could use them. The multifarious target groups within ESF Objective 3 and other employment-related programmes renders the development of one model to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled unlikely.

However, there is a clear need for guidance to projects on soft outcomes in order to bring about more systematic measurement of these very important achievements. A *Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled* has been prepared as a result of this study and is available to ESF Objective 3 projects to help them devise systems or improve the ones they already use.

Just as it is not possible to develop one model to measure soft outcomes, so too is the development of national indicators unattainable. However, there is again a definite need to incorporate some sort of soft outcomes monitoring at the national level if the full impact of the ESF Objective 3 programme is to be assessed. Our recommendations to the ESF Monitoring Committee, which have now been accepted, are to:

- undertake a longitudinal case study evaluation which explores soft outcomes and distance travelled;
- encourage ESF Objective 3 projects which are involved in the provision of training to devise soft indicator systems;
- endeavour to move towards greater routine follow-up of all ESF Objective 3 beneficiaries and include questions relating to soft outcomes and distance travelled; and to
• consult more widely on developing national monitoring indicators for soft outcomes and distance travelled, and establish a working sub-group to explore the issues in more depth and to pilot various options.
2. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a study commissioned by the ESF Evaluation Team of the DfEE to develop a model for measuring 'distance travelled' under ESF supported projects. Importantly, the study has aimed to identify tools for measuring individual employability gains with a view to developing proposals for monitoring similar 'soft' indicators at the national level.

The ESF Team is aware that work has been undertaken to develop 'soft indicators' as measures of progression towards employability. However, it is also clear that other work is likely to have been carried out in this area of which they (and indeed the DfEE) are not aware.

Our experience of working with projects concerned with the provision of training to disadvantaged groups and long-term unemployed people supports this view. Many projects funded by the European Social Fund and the EU Community Initiative 'EMPLOYMENT', for example, have devised ways of measuring 'soft outcomes' and 'distance travelled' in informal ways whilst some have progressed towards more systematic methods of baseline and measuring employability gains over time. Basic Employability Training (part of Work-Based Learning for Adults) which is targeted towards long-term unemployed people facing multiple labour market disadvantages also assesses clients in fairly standardised ways against many 'soft' criteria before training commences. This includes identifying employability needs such as improving interpersonal skills, confidence, motivation and initiative, and devising individual training plans to enable clients to meet and overcome these needs. There is clearly a move towards greater recognition of 'soft skills', 'soft outcomes' and the concept of 'distance travelled' for those groups who are harder to help back into work.

2.1 Aims and objectives of the research

The primary aims of this current research were:

- to identify what measures of 'distance travelled' existed at the local (ESF Objective 3) project level, and then to
• develop a consistent way of measuring soft indicators to enable monitoring at a national level.

In essence, the research was required to establish just what was happening 'on the ground', at the project level, in order to inform the next phase of the study which was to design a model to measure distance travelled and promote uniform national monitoring.

2.2 Research methodology

Our approach to the study was threefold:

• Firstly, we undertook an assessment of the existing literature and a review of current practice on developing soft indicators with a view to making recommendations for further work if necessary.

• Secondly, we aimed to use the knowledge we had gained from the literature review and contact with projects to design and develop a 'toolkit' or model for projects to assess and record the progress of individual beneficiaries.

• Thirdly, we developed proposals and made recommendations for monitoring soft indicators at the national level for inclusion in the mid-term evaluation of ESF Objective 3.

The first stage of the research underpinned and shaped the remaining activities of the study. We began with a thorough review of existing literature and reports on the subject of soft outcomes, soft indicators and distance travelled, drawing on European and American sources.

We also undertook a survey of 300 ESF Objective 3 and EMPLOYMENT-funded projects to ascertain what work they had carried out to measure soft outcomes and to enquire about the monitoring systems or tools they had developed, if any.

The ESF Objective 3 projects taking part in our survey were part of the 1994-99 programme which was targeted at people who experienced particular labour market disadvantage and who were often the hardest-to-help of the unemployed client group. The monitoring and recording of soft outcomes for these people as a means to track progression and achievement is therefore particularly important. At the time of the study, there were more than 2,400 ESF Objective 3 projects targeting:

• Individuals who had been unemployed for at least six months; and in particular:
  • those without up to date vocational qualifications
  • the long term unemployed i.e. two years or more
  • unemployed individuals aged fifty and over.
• Unemployed people under the age of 25; and in particular:
  • 16-18 year olds not in full time education and those in need of work experience and vocational qualifications.

• Other disadvantaged groups, namely:
  • people with disabilities and or health problems
  • people with learning difficulties
  • single parent families
  • ethnic minorities
  • ex-offenders
  • people living in rural areas.

Objective 3 is also concerned with equal opportunities and supports projects targeting

• 'returners' to the labour market after family or care responsibilities, and
• those wishing to enter an occupation where their gender experiences under-representation.

The new ESF Objective 3 programme, which was launched in June 2000, will be targeted towards five 'policy fields', incorporating:

1. **Active labour market policies** to combat and prevent unemployment.
2. **Equal opportunities for all and promoting social inclusion.**
3. **Lifelong Learning.**
4. **Adaptability and entrepreneurship** to promote a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce.
5. **Improving the participation of women in the labour market.**

The findings from this study will be particularly relevant to those projects which will be funded under Policy Field 2 of the new ESF Objective 3 programme.

Our survey of projects also drew on the EMPLOYMENT programme. This is an ESF Community Initiative which seeks to address the multi-level disadvantage faced in the labour market by certain groups. The transnational projects funded under this programme have piloted innovative approaches to assisting 'hard to help' groups and many have considered the issue of soft outcomes and developed tools to gather such information. The four strands operating under EMPLOYMENT are:

- **Youthstart** to remotivate disadvantaged young people to stay in learning and integrate them into the labour market.
• NOW to address horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market, and to tackle the needs of people returning to the labour market after a period discharging domestic responsibilities.

• Horizon to assist people with disabilities into the labour market.

• INTEGRA which targets disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents, refugees and asylum seekers, those with low levels of basic skills, ethnic minorities, homeless people, ex-offenders, and alcohol and substance abusers.

Projects were selected to take part in the survey primarily at random although we targeted a small number of projects which we knew were actively developing soft outcome and soft indicator systems (approximately 20-30 projects in total). We also contacted a number of key agencies such as the Basic Skills Agency, Single Parent Action Network, NCVO and ICOM to establish what, if any, work they had carried out on measuring and monitoring soft outcomes and distance travelled. Survey respondents were invited to send us copies or descriptions of their soft outcomes systems or tools which we then catalogued and reviewed.

The key criteria against which we assessed both the literature and the tools we received included:

• A description of the sort of ‘soft’ skills or outcomes which were under consideration by the project, for example, confidence, reliable time keeping and attendance, motivation, presentation and personal appearance, social skills and communication skills.

• An assessment of any other information which was collected to measure distance travelled, such as examples of skills gained during work experience and work placements, employer references, unaccredited qualifications, number of job interviews and attendance records.

• Details of the methods employed to gauge progression. We wanted to know what sort of tools were used to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled. How were the tools used? Did clients self-assess for distance travelled or were other people involved? Was IT involved in recording distance travelled or were systems paper-based? What evidence was collected?

• The identification of the specific project target group. For example, were assessment tools being directed towards specific client groups such as homeless clients, people with disabilities, women returners, ethnic minority clients with ESOL needs, clients with a history of drug or alcohol abuse, or very long-term unemployed people etc? Did the systems used to measure soft outcomes differ significantly between target groups?
And finally, what are the outputs from these ‘tools'? What does the information look like? Is it quantitative or qualitative in nature? Can projects produce indicators to show improvements and gains in employability and distance travelled, other than those concerned with job outcomes and qualifications? Are the measures of soft outcomes and distance travelled gathered at the micro level, that is, the level of the individual, or do projects also collate soft outcomes data at the macro (project) level?

Clearly, an overriding issue for the research concerned the wider replicability of these tools (or elements of them). As one of the aims of the study was to design and develop a model to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, we were concerned that all projects involved with training individuals who were disadvantaged in the labour market should be able to use the model. Our concern here was that although projects may welcome the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of soft outcomes, they would not want to do so at great time and cost to themselves, indeed, some smaller organisations would be unable to do so for financial (and other) reasons. A further criterion which we used when looking at the tools then, was how user-friendly are they? Are the tools simple to use? Are they onerous on the project provider or the client? Are they useful tools? Do they have their own intrinsic value as part of an ongoing assessment and dialogue with the client or are they just used as a management information tool? Can they be used across (many) different client groups?

In order to help us judge these criteria we asked projects to send us copies of any evaluations of their systems or tools if available.

In the following sections of this report, we discuss the findings from the literature review and survey of projects which, in turn, defined the next phase of, and outcomes from, our research. We then go on to make our final conclusions and recommendations.
3. Research Findings

3.1 The research context

Monitoring and evaluation systems for employment projects and programmes, which are targeted towards unemployed people, have traditionally focused on 'hard' outcomes that are generally simple to record and measure. Projects usually record and provide standard monitoring information on outcomes such as the number of jobs obtained, numbers of qualifications, and numbers of people progressing into further education and training.

There is a growing recognition, however, that such measures are inadequate in demonstrating the success of a project as a whole. In addition, these measures are an insufficient indicator of a client's increased employability. It is often both unlikely and inappropriate for many projects to expect to achieve 'hard' outcomes from target groups that are socially excluded and facing multiple barriers to employment within the time available for training. Some individuals may simply be a long way from being able to acquire a qualification or maintain a training placement and may have more immediate problems which will have to be addressed in the first instance. It may take much longer for target groups with particular difficulties to obtain hard outcomes and this is (arguably) particularly the case for ESF clients or beneficiaries.

Increasingly ESF Objective 3 and other similar employment-focused projects have taken an 'holistic' or integrated approach to helping their target groups. It is not enough to merely provide vocational training to individuals. They commonly need help with other areas of their life to enable them to engage and benefit from employment related assistance. Examples of 'holistic' approaches might include help to build confidence, self-esteem and motivation, and help with basic skills and language skills. These may be deemed to be 'soft outcomes' in their own right. In addition to this type of help, specific target groups will have particular needs (for example, homeless beneficiaries, ex-offenders or lone parents) and ESF projects will commonly tailor their approaches and pitch the level of training and support to fit the needs of these 'target' beneficiaries.
Employers are particularly interested in the development of 'soft' skills and abilities. A recent study of employer views\(^1\) has highlighted the need for an increased focus on softer skills when considering an individual's employability which is about work and the ability to be employed. The components of employability in this instance are defined as:

- **Assets** comprising an individual's knowledge, skills and attitudes including basic skills, occupation specific knowledge (ie vocational skills) at different levels; and
- **personal attributes and attitudes** which can range from basic levels of reliability, common sense, attitude to work and integrity, problem solving, and initiative, through to self management and commercial awareness.

Employers, who may otherwise be reluctant to employ people who have been long term unemployed, are looking for evidence of motivation, reliability, flexibility, and stable domestic circumstances which can be provided by soft outcome assessments and measures of distance travelled. There is no doubt that soft outcomes (in addition to the more traditional hard outcomes) are becoming increasingly recognised as important measures of success from training interventions.

Although it remains important to monitor quantitative outcomes, a focus on soft outcomes can provide real added value to a project evaluation and bring benefits not possible with a purely quantitative focus. Jackson (1999)\(^2\) identifies the following potential benefits:

- **Range**. Broadening assessments to include soft outcomes can bring in a complete range of personal, social, economic and practical skills which people need to get on with all aspects of their life.
- **Relevance to individual need**. Broadening outcome measures and indicators allows projects to take account of the variation in need and promotes greater customisation of services.
- **Starting levels**. Soft indicator systems can take account of the different starting levels of different clients.
- **Intermediate position**. Soft indicator systems can measure relatively small improvements and progression towards personal objectives, and project objectives over time.

In essence, the benefits of developing systems to measure soft outcomes accrue for both the project and the individual. Perhaps more importantly, if soft outcomes are considered in addition to

---


the more traditional hard outcomes, a much fuller indication of project success will result.

3.2 Definitional issues

At the outset of this study, it became clear that we needed to offer some working definitions for 'soft outcomes', 'soft indicators' and 'distance travelled' as much confusion exists, not least at a project level, about what these terms actually mean. Our definitions, whilst not set in stone, provided a broad framework for our literature review and survey of projects. We began our research on the understanding that:

*Indicators (or measurements) of soft outcomes can be used as tools for measuring distance travelled towards greater labour market participation.*

In fact, the findings from our research helped us to determine what we mean by the terms 'soft outcomes' and 'distance travelled'.

3.2.1 What are soft outcomes?

In the context of ESF Objective 3 projects and other employment programmes dealing with people disadvantaged in the labour market, soft outcomes are those which, unlike hard outcomes cannot be measured directly or tangibly. According to Jackson (1999) soft outcomes are:

- intangible, not concrete
- subjective
- a matter of degree rather than absolute
- personal, depending on individual client needs, and
- intermediate (usually measuring progress towards hard outcomes such as employment and qualifications).

Soft outcomes may include achievements relating to

- interpersonal skills, for example, social skills and coping with authority
- organisational skills, such as personal organisation, and the ability to order and prioritise
- analytical skills, such as the ability to exercise judgement, managing time or problem solving, and
- personal skills, for example, insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and health awareness.
3.2.2 What are soft indicators?

There is an interplay between indicators and outcomes in that indicators are the means by which we can measure whether outcomes have been achieved. The term soft indicators can be used when referring to the achievements which may 'indicate' acquisition or progress towards an outcome. A project may wish, for example, to explore whether an individual’s motivation has increased over the length of the project. Though this is, to all intents and purposes, a subjective judgement, indicators (or measures) such as improved levels of attendance, improved time keeping and improved communication skills can suggest strongly that motivation has increased. Not all indicators will be suitable for all target groups, and some will be target group specific.

3.2.3 What is distance travelled?

Put quite simply, the term distance travelled refers to the progress that a beneficiary makes towards greater employability (and subsequently harder outcomes) as a result of the project intervention. For some particularly hard-to-help clients, it is unlikely that they will secure jobs or qualification outcomes at the end of the project, however, they may improve their soft skills, such as motivation and confidence. While the acquisition of certain soft outcomes may seem insignificant, for certain individuals, the leap forward in achieving these outcomes is immense.

It is crucial to assess clients at the point at which they enter the project intervention if distance travelled and the acquisition of soft skills and outcomes is to be measured over time. Baseline (initial) assessments and ongoing monitoring also assist in the development of tailored provision which is suitable for the individual or target group concerned.

3.3 The research findings

Our research has revealed much about current practices and philosophy in the field of soft outcomes and distance travelled.

3.3.1 Literature review

Although ‘soft outcomes’ is a term which is gaining currency, very little has been written about ‘soft outcomes’ and ‘distance travelled’ per se.

The US Department of Labor website alludes to both hard and soft outcomes from training interventions, however, there is no indication of how these outcomes are measured. These references emphasise the more traditional measures of throughput and outputs such as the eventual destinations of clients and length of
time on scheme etc. but give no methodological detail. Likewise, a search of European and American academic literature has produced articles on Welfare to Work policy in America, although again these discussed hard outcomes and the effect that policy has had on job-getting targets; there has been no discussion of soft outcomes. A subsequent search of British journals was also fruitless and did not bring to light any substantive literature on soft outcomes or their measurement.

Our search for literature has relied heavily on empirical reports of soft indicator systems, the most important of which has been the review carried out by Jackson in 1999. This review, carried out for Centrepoint (for The Off the Streets and Into Work Partnership), examined ten soft indicator systems and provided an initial insight into the range of approaches that are in operation. This work was carried out in response to the perceived limitations of hard outcome monitoring systems and the need to take a more holistic view of needs and progression.

3.3.2 Survey of projects

It became clear that our research would need to draw primarily on empirical reports and examples from projects responding to our survey. From these sources, we have been able to assess and review:

- the level of understanding amongst projects, of soft outcomes and distance travelled;
- the range of different systems that are being used 'on the ground', and form an understanding of; and
- how soft outcomes are being measured.

One hundred and twelve projects responded to our request for information and examples of soft outcomes systems. Although some projects replied that they did not have systems for measuring soft outcomes, by far the majority of projects welcomed the idea of doing so and all recognised the importance of soft outcomes.

As we said earlier, it became clear that a significant number of projects were unsure about what actually constituted a 'soft outcome' and many were confused over the distinction between soft outcomes, indicators and measures of distance travelled. However, from the information that we have received, we have identified two broad groups of soft outcomes (and their commensurate indicators) that many projects measure and record. These are core and target group-specific outcomes.
3.4 Core outcomes

Core outcomes are likely to be applicable to most target groups and clients and may be classified as relating to:

- key work skills
- attitudinal skills
- personal skills, and
- practical skills.

These outcomes, and some of the indicators that projects have used to measure them, are highlighted in Table 3.1. Although some outcomes, such as key work skills and practical skills are perhaps easier to measure, less tangible attitudinal outcomes are widely recognised as equally important as they can move clients towards ‘harder’, more vocational outcomes and jobs. Personal skills and attitudes are as important to employers as their vocational counterparts.

Increased confidence, motivation and self esteem are extremely common indicators which are used in the context of ESF projects. Many clients face multiple barriers to labour market participation and suffer high levels of disadvantage which converge to increase the likelihood of low confidence and self esteem. The growing emphasis on social inclusion in the new Objective 3 programme from June 2000 means that projects will be increasingly required to identify needs relating to core soft outcomes.
Table 3.1: Project examples of ‘core’ soft outcomes and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ‘soft’ outcomes</th>
<th>Examples of indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key work skills</td>
<td>The acquisition of key skills <em>eg</em> teamworking, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numbers of work placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The acquisition of language and communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion of work placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower rates of sickness related absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal skills</td>
<td>Increased levels of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased levels of confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of prior skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased feelings of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased levels of self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher personal and career aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal skills</td>
<td>Improved personal appearance/presentability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved levels of attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved timekeeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater levels of self awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better health and fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater levels of concentration and/or engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical skills</td>
<td>Ability to complete forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to write a CV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved ability to manage money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved awareness of rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Target group-specific outcomes

Projects have reported their interest and inclusion of a number of target group-specific soft outcomes. Although the outcomes and indicators presented in Table 3.2 are by no means an exclusive listing of all possible outcomes, they do illustrate the broad scope of ESF Objective 3 project activity.
Table 3.2: Target group-specific outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Possible indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disaffected young people</td>
<td>Improved behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved attendance at school or at project sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved engagement with learning or project activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women returners</td>
<td>Recognition of prior skills and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/alcohol (ex)abusers</td>
<td>Better health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower levels of drug or alcohol use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved personal appearance/presentability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-offenders</td>
<td>Lower rates of reconviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower rates of reoffending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A slowing of reoffending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people</td>
<td>Permanent accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with mental illness</td>
<td>A greater level of self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced anxiety and depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many current projects already measure a number of the outcomes presented in the table above although often with different areas of emphasis depending upon their target client group.

3.6 How are projects measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled?

Probably, the most over-riding concern that projects have regarding soft outcomes is that many are difficult, if not impossible, to record as they are often not quantifiable. As we have seen, soft outcomes are largely intangible: they cannot be measured with the same ease as numbers of jobs and qualifications. Increased motivation, for example, is a subjective judgement which beneficiaries may report or which may be observed by project workers: it cannot be ‘counted’ as an output in the same way as a job or NVQ can be.

The techniques and indicators used to measure soft outcomes vary from project to project. This variety may be due to differences in the project objectives and the training being delivered, and also because of differences between clients and client groups (SCVO, 1999). From our review of projects, we have identified the most common techniques for collecting, measuring and recording soft outcomes. These are presented in Table 3.3.

---

Table 3.3: Methods of collection, measurement and record keeping of soft outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Collection Methods, including:** | Self-completion questionnaires  
|                                 | Tests                                                                       |
|                                 | Portfolios and other written examples or evidence                            |
|                                 | 1:2:1 informal/formal reviews                                               |
|                                 | Recorded observations of group or individual activities                      |
| **Measurement by:**             | Scales of feeling, agreement etc.                                           |
|                                 | (eg between 1 and 10 or ‘agree strongly’ to ‘disagree strongly’)            |
|                                 | Comparison to normative, benchmark data                                      |
|                                 | Comparison with previous records/questionnaires                             |
|                                 | Satisfaction and achievement of stated standards, eg qualifications          |
|                                 | Assessor/trainer views                                                      |
| **Record keeping, including:**  | Paper-based records                                                          |
|                                 | Computer-based records                                                      |

The scale and scope of soft indicator systems is vast. We can see that soft outcome collection methods range from simple observations of client behaviour and activities to more complex tests and questionnaires. The measurements (or indicators) which projects employ to assess soft outcomes and distance travelled also range from (subjective) trainer views and opinions of baselines and progress to more systematic measures using numeric scales. The two most common methods of recording soft outcomes and progression are on paper or computer-based files.

3.6.1 Who is doing what?

Our review has highlighted a significant degree of variation in the tools and systems which projects are using to measure some or all of the array of soft outcomes.

We have found that a small number of projects do not have any systems in place to measure soft outcomes or distance travelled and their focus is primarily on measuring hard job, training and qualification successes. It is quite clear, however, that soft outcomes are being achieved by these projects but their successes are not being recorded.

Conversely, some projects are much further down the line in terms of designing and implementing systems to measure soft outcomes than others. In particular, those projects which have received development funding seem to have been able to introduce, pilot and fine-tune sophisticated soft outcome systems for their client group. These types of projects are very much in the minority and are more likely to be funded under the EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative than Objective 3. They are
also much more likely to be measuring distance travelled in a
systematic way.

However, from the reports and the empirical evidence we have
reviewed as part of our survey, it is clear that most ESF Objective
3 projects do actually measure soft outcomes and distance
travelled albeit it in usually informal and unsystematic ways.

Most projects measure soft outcomes and (perhaps) distance
travelled using paper based techniques which examine attitudes
and feelings with comparisons over time. Self-completion
questionnaires may be administered at the beginning of the
project intervention and then repeated when the client finishes the
course. The latter results are then compared with the earlier
questionnaire to arrive at an indication or measure of progression
(ie distance travelled). Very few projects use any type of scoring or
scaling system to measure this progression.

Many projects have used ongoing reviews between trainers or
assessors and clients to ‘record’ soft outcomes. These often draw
on evidence produced by the client, such as portfolio evidence or
examples of progress, such as working productively in a team.
Reviews such as this are usually recorded on Individual Training
Plans and the like although in no systematic format. Improvements
over time are recorded, for example, ‘the client is feeling more confident in a group situation’ although again there
is no actual, formal or absolute ‘measure’ of this kind of distance
travelled. We found that very few project staff had received any
formal training on how to measure soft outcomes and distance
travelled.

Very few of the projects taking part in our review have aggregated
micro-level information on individual clients’ progress to arrive at
a project-wide (macro) measure of soft outcomes.

Our review of systems to measure soft outcomes, whilst
illustrating the extent to which projects are already measuring soft
outcomes (that is, largely informally), has also raised a number of
issues regarding the systems themselves. These issues highlight a
number of weaknesses inherent in some of the systems we have
seen. It is not our intention to criticise the systems which have
been devised so far. Rather, it is to highlight any potential
shortcomings which can inform the development of existing and
future systems.

3.7 Weaknesses in soft outcome monitoring systems

The main weaknesses we have identified in the soft outcome
systems we have reviewed are:
• Lack of integration with other sources of information

Most of the soft outcome and indicator tools we have reviewed do not take into account skills gained during work experience, voluntary work, or other activities as an indication of soft outcomes or distance travelled. It is important that projects take an holistic approach when assessing or measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled and look more widely than just the training intervention as sources of information and evidence of progression.

• Attribution

It is often difficult, if not impossible, to attribute positive, soft outcomes (and thus, distance travelled towards greater employability) solely to the training intervention. Increases in confidence or motivation, for example, may be due to a positive change in the personal circumstances of clients rather than because of the support they have received on a course. Whilst this may also be true when we talk about hard outcomes and the impact that personal circumstances can have on those, it remains that any measure of success must acknowledge that other factors may have played a role. There may be no absolute causal link between a soft outcome and a training intervention. It can be a number of (often unrelated) factors which have brought about change.

• Subjectivity

Potentially, there are some significant issues concerning the way(s) in which clients are assessed for soft outcomes and distance travelled. Those systems which rely primarily on self-administered questionnaires can suffer from clients either overstating or understating their achievements at any given time, particularly as self-awareness increases. Similarly, a system of tutor-based assessments also has its problems. These are wholly reliant upon the tutors’ professional skills and can suffer from tutors’ personal biases and subjectivity. Practitioners may also be working to different definitions of the same outcome, for example, what may be deemed as confidence by one person may be viewed as aggressive behaviour by another. Similar definitions and parameters are therefore important in any system to measure soft outcomes. It is equally important that staff are similarly trained to use soft indicator systems and are willing and motivated to do so.

• Language

It is clear that some of the language used in questionnaires and assessment frameworks is inappropriate for disadvantaged client groups. Some of the questions we have seen could be perceived as patronising whilst others suggest that there is something wrong if clients do not feel a certain way, or have certain characteristics. It is very important that the language and words used to measure soft outcomes and progression are carefully chosen to encourage
honest reflection and completion. Language must be unambiguous and free from jargon.

- Different baselines
Although not a weakness in itself, it would seem that there are too many different client groups to devise one particular soft indicator system or model to fit all. The characteristics of individuals from disadvantaged 'groups' will vary both within and without the group. There is a need to assess clients individually to establish their baseline against which training provision can be shaped and distance travelled can be measured – it is a highly personal and subjective issue. Such individuality renders comparison both within and between groups more difficult.

3.8 One model fits all?

Overall, these findings presented us with a dilemma as two of the key aims of the study were to:

- develop a 'toolkit' for projects to assess and record the progress of individual beneficiaries, and
- develop a consistent way of measuring soft indicators to enable monitoring at a national level.

We had to ask whether there was one model for measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled which was suitable for all projects. Our literature review and survey of projects illustrated the variety and range of activity in the realm of soft outcomes and also highlighted the difficulties of applying one model to fit all projects. As a result, we organised and facilitated a workshop with a small number of projects to discuss our concerns. Staff from seven projects (mainly EMPLOYMENT Community Initiatives projects) attended the workshop together with representatives from the European Commission and the ESF Unit of the Department for Education and Employment.

The primary aims of the workshop were to discuss the feasibility of developing a 'toolkit' or model for projects to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, and to determine, what if any, monitoring indicators might be useful at the national level. We also wanted to explore the demand for, and usefulness of, further guidance on soft outcomes for projects.

3.8.1 The development of a 'toolkit' and national monitoring indicators

Feedback from projects at the workshop confirmed our view that it was inappropriate to develop one model to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled. In fact, this research has highlighted the need for further detailed work and consultation in
this area. In addition, we concluded that it was not feasible to introduce a national monitoring system for soft outcomes and distance travelled at this stage. Our main reasons for this are that:

- Many disparate soft indicator systems already exist. Any nationally consistent system to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled across projects would necessarily require great prescription. All project staff would need to be similarly trained to enable them to work to the same definitions of soft outcomes and progression. Measurement tools would have to be generic in order that all clients and assessors could use them and the lowest common denominators would have to be identified to achieve this. ESF Objective 3 projects, by their very nature, deal with a wide range of hard-to-help groups who are often facing multiple disadvantages. The nature of the help they receive is usually holistic, integrated and geared to the individual needs of clients. A ‘one-model-fits-all’ system to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled runs counter to this type of client-focused intervention.

- Many soft outcomes and indicators are intrinsically subjective and intangible – they do not lend themselves to calculation and quantification.

- Many projects have not developed any tools to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled and to prescribe one tool for general use would be (too) resource intensive for many (smaller) projects. Whilst projects welcome assistance on measuring soft outcomes most do not want methods prescribed from the national level.

Having said this, however, we have identified a clear need and desire for guidance on soft outcomes and distance travelled. Several projects require help to determine the soft outcomes resulting from their activities and many more would welcome further guidance on how to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled in a systematic way. It is clear that weaknesses in some current systems also need to be addressed and some form of guidance to projects would be useful. Projects attending the workshop confirmed this view and gave their suggestions at to what the guidance should contain.

The outcome from this work is the ‘Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled’ which can be found at the end of this report. Because of the very intangible and amorphous nature of the issue, it is impossible to be fully comprehensive when discussing soft outcomes, distance travelled and their measurement. Rather than providing all the answers, the Guide is intended to lead projects towards a greater awareness of the issues and to provide some suggestions as to how they might go about setting up a soft indicator system which meets their needs and those of their clients.
4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

We have undertaken a number of activities to explore the measurement of soft outcomes and distance travelled within ESF Objective 3 projects. Our findings indicate that:

- Most projects assess 'soft' issues, such as confidence and motivation, when clients join projects.
- Further assessments of soft outcomes and distance travelled are undertaken when reviewing general progress.
- Measurements of soft outcomes and distance travelled are usually subjective and relate only to the individual.
- Very few ESF Objective 3 projects have developed sophisticated tools to measure soft outcomes or distance travelled systematically.
- Projects do not use soft outcomes and distance travelled data to assess or track project progress at the macro level.

It is clear that projects require and indeed, would welcome further guidance on measuring soft outcomes. To this end we have produced a ‘Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled’ as a stand-alone document which can be sent to all projects providing training to disadvantaged people.

We have also found that whilst projects would welcome recognition for their work with beneficiaries and for the improvements made to their 'softer' employability skills, a number of factors significantly inhibit measurement of soft outcomes and distance travelled at the national level:

- It is difficult to attribute positive, soft outcomes and distance travelled to the project intervention per se.
- No one system of collating soft outcomes or distance travelled data exists; the systems in use are multifarious, project-specific and highly subjective.
- As client groups differ so do systems to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled. Aggregate measures of soft
outcomes and distance travelled across many projects are rendered meaningless.

Thus, we are unable to offer any proposals to devise national indicators which can systematically collect soft outcomes or distance travelled from projects in any meaningful way. However, whilst we acknowledge the difficulties of collating national aggregate monitoring data, we support the need for the collation of more information regarding soft outcomes from ESF Objective 3 project interventions. As a result we have identified other, qualitative and more incremental ways of measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled.

### 4.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made to, and accepted by, the ESF Monitoring Committee. The findings from this study suggest that the ESF Monitoring Committee should:

- Undertake a longitudinal case study evaluation of a number of ESF Objective 3 projects as part of the mid-term evaluation which explores soft outcomes and distance travelled *per se* (i.e. the means and methods used to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, their effectiveness and wider applicability).

- Encourage all those ESF Objective 3 projects which are involved in the provision of training to devise soft indicator systems and specify when these systems should be in place.

- Endeavour to move towards greater routine follow-up of all ESF Objective 3 beneficiaries and include questions relating to soft outcomes and distance travelled in these surveys.

- Consult more widely on developing national monitoring indicators for soft outcomes and distance travelled, and establish a working sub-group of project representatives, government officials and other key individuals to explore the issues in more depth and to pilot various options. This should be taken forward in the context of ESF Objective 3 (Policy Field 2).

There is clearly a need for greater collaboration and exchange of expertise and information as soft outcomes continue to be recognised as important measures of success from employment-related training programmes and projects. The efforts of the ESF Monitoring Committee to broaden the debate on soft outcomes and monitoring indicators are to be welcomed.
Appendix: Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Traveled
If you have any comments about this guide, please write to: Jacqui Hansbro in the ESF Evaluation Team, Room W620, DfEE, Moorfoot, Sheffield SI 4PQ. E-mail jacqueline.hansbro@dfee.gov.uk
# Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 The aim of this guide 1

1.2 Some definitions 1
   1.2.1 Soft outcomes 2
   1.2.2 Soft indicators 2
   1.2.3 Distance travelled 2
   1.2.4 'Models' and 'tools' for measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled 3

1.3 The importance of measuring soft outcomes and 'distance travelled' 3

2. WHAT ARE SOFT OUTCOMES? 5

2.1 Core outcomes 5

2.2 Target group-specific outcomes 6

2.3 Other issues to consider 7

3. HOW TO MEASURE SOFT OUTCOMES 8

3.1 Process or method 8
   3.1.1 Establishing a baseline 8
   3.1.2 How to collect and record information on soft outcomes and distance travelled 8
   3.1.3 The assessment process 9
   3.1.4 Different assessment formats 9
   3.1.5 Measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled 10
   3.1.6 Inferences 11

3.2 Who measures? 11

3.3 When to measure? 12

3.4 Management of systems 12

3.5 Presentation and use of soft outcome and distance travelled information 12

4. THE TOOLS THEMSELVES 14

4.1 Phrasing the questions 14

4.2 Scoring the Questions 18

4.3 Final word 20
1. Introduction

1.1 The aim of this guide

This guide has been written to assist projects and organisations to understand and implement systems for recording soft outcomes and distance travelled. It offers a definition of these terms and presents different methods for recording soft outcomes and measuring ‘distance travelled’. It has been written primarily for organisations running projects under the ESF Objective 3 programme and particularly those in Policy Field 2 (equal opportunities for all and promoting social inclusion). In addition, it will be of interest to other projects and organisations working with ESF target groups (primarily those people who are some distance from labour market participation).

The guide is intended to offer an introduction to soft outcomes and distance travelled. It is not designed to be fully comprehensive, or to answer all the questions that you may have, as that would not be possible within the scope of this guide. However, we hope that you will use this guide as a basis for discussion within your organisation and importantly, you will use it to inform the development of your own soft outcome monitoring system. We have presented a range of different activities and options but it is important to recognise that:

- It is not possible to touch on all the monitoring systems and tools that can be used. Your project may be using a system that is not presented here.
- Not all suggestions will be suitable for your particular project. You will have to decide what is most appropriate.

Several projects have developed soft outcome systems and some of these are listed at the back of this guide. They have provided information to us about their systems and they are happy to discuss them in more detail with you if that would be helpful. We encourage the exchange of good practice in this way - you can only learn by doing!

1.2 Some definitions

Throughout this guide we make reference to various terms which may or may not be familiar. As it is important to have a common understanding of these we provide some brief definitions below. To begin with there is often a degree of confusion as to what is meant by the terms soft outcomes, soft indicators and distance travelled.
1.2.1 Soft outcomes

These are outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes such as, qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly. Soft outcomes may include achievements relating to

- interpersonal skills, for example, social skills and coping with authority
- organisational skills, such as, personal organisation, and the ability to order and prioritise
- analytical skills, such as, the ability to exercise judgement, managing time or problem solving, and
- personal skills, for example, insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and health awareness.

1.2.2 Soft indicators

There is an interplay between indicators and outcomes in that indicators are the means by which we can measure whether the outcomes have been achieved. The term soft indicators therefore can be used when referring to the achievements which may ‘indicate’ acquisition or progress towards an outcome. A project may wish, for example, to explore whether an individual’s motivation has increased over the length of the project. Though this is, to all intents and purposes, a subjective judgement, indicators (or measures) such as improved levels of attendance, improved time keeping and improved communication skills can suggest strongly that motivation has increased. Not all indicators will be suitable for all target groups, and some will be target group specific.

1.2.3 Distance travelled

The term distance travelled refers to the progress that a beneficiary makes towards employability or harder outcomes as a result of the project intervention. The acquisition of certain soft outcomes may seem insignificant, but for certain individuals the leap forward in achieving these outcomes is immense. A consideration of distance travelled is very important in contextualising beneficiaries’ achievements.

It is easy perhaps, to think that:

Indicators (or measurements) of soft outcomes can be used as tools for measuring distance travelled towards labour market participation.
1.2.4 'Models' and 'tools' for measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled

Within this guide, we use these terms interchangeably to refer to any system which attempts, in some form or another, to measure, assess or record soft outcomes and progress towards greater employability. These take a myriad of forms ranging from simple paper-based tools, to complex computerised systems.

1.3 The importance of measuring soft outcomes and 'distance travelled'

As a project, you may feel that you have enough monitoring responsibilities, and would like to concentrate on the 'job in hand', such as providing training or support and guidance. However, if you do not already do so, it is important to recognise that soft outcomes and distance travelled, and the use of systems designed to capture information on them, should be an integral part of your project. Monitoring soft outcomes and a consideration of the distance travelled by beneficiaries should be an intrinsic and mainstream element of your project evaluation.

The following table highlights some of the key benefits of incorporating soft outcome and distance travelled monitoring into project systems.

1. Benefits of measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled

| General benefits | Hard outcomes such as jobs obtained, numbers of qualifications, and numbers progressing onto further education and training though useful in some cases, do not show the success of the project as a whole and are an insufficient indicator of a beneficiary's increased employability. Target groups that are facing multiple barriers to employment may be a long way from being able to acquire a qualification or employment. Consideration of soft outcomes for such groups is a crucial indicator of success. Measuring soft outcomes can also help with the national level evaluation to provide a fuller picture of the impact of the programme as a whole. |
| Benefits at a project level | Many projects may have specific objectives which relate to the acquisition of soft outcomes. It is vital that projects have the systems in place to be able to measure progress towards these objectives. Soft outcomes can provide a further indicator as to the additionality of the intervention ie positive results which may not have occurred in the absence of the activity in question. |
| Benefits at a beneficiary level | Employers are particularly interested in soft skills and abilities, and have been found to greatly value key skills, and personal attributes and attitudes. The beneficiary will therefore be at a distinct advantage in the labour market if they are able to demonstrate possession of such skills and attributes through evidence gained during the project. Working with the beneficiary to record and monitor soft outcomes and distance travelled, and involving the beneficiary in the assessment process can be a very empowering experience. A project worker may be able to demonstrate to the beneficiary that they have pre-existing skills and attributes of which they were unaware. In addition if beneficiaries are made aware of the distance they have travelled it can be an enormous confidence boost. The development and recognition of soft skills is part of many beneficiaries' long term integration into the labour market. |
In addition to the benefits that accrue to the project and the beneficiary, it is general good practice to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled. It improves the process of working with beneficiaries and raises the standard of service delivery. Consideration of soft outcomes also provides a valuable context for clients' needs and progress. It provides a truer, more rounded picture of successes.
2. What are soft outcomes?

So, what exactly are soft outcomes?

Soft outcomes can be grouped in many different ways. Some ‘core’ indicators and outcomes are likely to be applicable to most target groups and clients. It is perhaps useful to look at these in the first instance before considering some of the other soft indicators and outcomes that are appropriate for specific individuals or project target groups.

2.1 Core outcomes

As you will see, there are no set rules regarding which indicators relate to particular outcomes, but some of the headings or groupings which may be useful in classifying ‘core’ soft outcomes are:

- key work skills
- attitudinal skills
- personal skills, and
- practical skills.

These outcomes, and some of the indicators that you might use to measure them, are highlighted in the table. Although some outcomes, such as, key work skills and practical skills are perhaps easier to measure, less tangible attitudinal outcomes are equally important as they can move beneficiaries towards ‘harder’, more vocational outcomes and jobs. Personal skills and attitudes are as important to employers as their vocational counterparts.

Increased confidence, motivation and self esteem are extremely common indicators which are used in the context of ESF projects. Many beneficiaries face multiple barriers to labour market participation and suffer high levels of disadvantage which converge to increase the likelihood of low confidence and self esteem. Projects need to work towards measuring these outcomes to show the real and full impact of their efforts.
2. Examples of ‘core’ soft outcomes and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of ‘soft’ outcomes</th>
<th>Examples of indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key work skills</td>
<td>The acquisition of key skills <em>e.g.</em> team working, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numbers of work placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The acquisition of language and communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion of work placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower rates of sickness related absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal skills</td>
<td>Increased levels of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased levels of confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of prior skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased feelings of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased levels of self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher personal and career aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal skills</td>
<td>Improved personal appearance/presentability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved levels of attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved timekeeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved personal hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater levels of self awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better health and fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater levels of concentration and/or engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical skills</td>
<td>Ability to complete forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to write a CV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved ability to manage money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved awareness of rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Target group-specific outcomes

The outcomes and indicators presented here are by no means an exclusive listing. Some indicators will be more suited to some target groups than others, and the table below highlights this. It is important to stress again that as projects are working with people, and everyone is different, the suggested indicators may not be appropriate for every individual. Equally some individuals will have additional barriers to overcome and therefore other indicators of progression and soft outcomes will be necessary. In essence it is important to recognise the uniqueness of the individual and the great variety within ‘target groups’.
3. Target group-specific outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Possible indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disaffected young people</td>
<td>Improved behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved attendance at school or at project sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved engagement with learning or project activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women returners</td>
<td>Recognition of prior skills and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/alcohol (ex)abusers</td>
<td>Better health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower levels of drug or alcohol use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved personal appearance/presentability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-offenders</td>
<td>Lower rates of reconviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower rates of reoffending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A slowing of reoffending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless people</td>
<td>Permanent accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with learning disabilities or mental illness</td>
<td>A greater level of self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced anxiety and depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Other issues to consider

It is not only the client group that has a bearing on the decision as to which outcomes should be considered and how they should be measured. Project objectives will need to be taken into account too. It may be useful to ask the following questions:

- Is the achievement of soft outcomes explicit in the project objectives and if not should it be?
- What is the ultimate aim of the intervention or project, and what soft outcomes will be relevant?

Clarity around the project objectives will allow a rigorous and meaningful framework to be established around which monitoring and evaluation can take place.
3. How to measure soft outcomes

3.1 Process or method

Methods to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled are numerous and varied and we must reiterate that one system will not suit all. What may work well for one project may not work for another. The system which you choose and how you implement it will depend very much on the activities and objectives of your project, your target group, the length of the project, and the resources which you have at your disposition. The options we provide here represent some of the methods you may wish to consider when designing a soft outcome monitoring system for your project.

3.1.1 Establishing a baseline

This is a vital process if soft outcomes and distance travelled are going to be measured. It is crucial to establish a baseline of soft skills, aptitudes and attitudes from which individual progress can be measured. This can normally be done during the initial assessment phase when clients' needs are established, barriers to employability identified and personal development targets are set. An examination of ‘soft’ skill needs falls naturally from this phase of the project.

3.1.2 How to collect and record information on soft outcomes and distance travelled

It is vitally important that your methods for collecting and recording information on soft outcomes and distance travelled are rigorous and targeted to your client group. Some of the methods which can be used to collect information on soft outcomes include:

4. Collection methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of collection method</th>
<th>Comments and issues to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual action planning, personal action planning and goal setting</td>
<td>The drawing up of individual action plans is normally carried out during the initial assessment session and then reviewed at regular intervals to gauge whether goals have been met. An action plan can include personal objectives, priorities and reflections on progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews between trainers/assessors and clients to record soft outcomes</td>
<td>Improvements over time can be noted and recorded during regular formal or informal reviews. This system is largely reliant on a sound judgement from the client or project worker and will not provide an absolute or formal measure of distance travelled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily diary or personal journal</td>
<td>Clients can be encouraged to write about progress towards soft outcomes. Issues of confidentiality should be considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth reflection during or after the course</td>
<td>Beneficiaries could be asked to consider and review their progress as they come to the end of their training course, or a particular element of the project (such as a work placement). This could be incorporated as an assignment which could be included in a beneficiary’s portfolio of evidence of achievement. Baseline information is particularly useful here as data can be compared over time. Questionnaires are an important tool for this purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorded observations of group or individual activities</td>
<td>It is important to have comprehensive documentation systems which will allow for the recording of anecdotal evidence of outcomes achieved and progress made. This method requires a high level of observer skill, and there is the danger of observer bias, and also that the observer will influence the behaviour being observed. If the beneficiary(ies) are unaware that they are being observed this may negate the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of material in a portfolio</td>
<td>This could include evidence of tasks completed successfully indicating achievement of outcomes, or progress towards them. An evidence based portfolio would be a concrete output which could be presented to an employer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>Some projects use psychometric testing within the assessment process. This is generally a diagnostic procedure but could be adapted to establish a baseline and measure distance travelled. Tests may be useful in establishing a beneficiary’s existing skill level. The test could then be conducted at a later stage to illustrate any progress made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selecting and implementing a range of methods to collect data on soft outcomes is more likely to capture a full picture of clients’ progress.

### 3.1.3 The assessment process

Assessment is usually a two-way process between trainer and client to ensure that judgements are reliable, robust and professional. Assessment should serve as a support function for the client to assist them in identifying real needs and bringing them to the attention of project workers. Beneficiaries must be willing participants and be able to see the value in the process.

Any system of assessment needs to be built around positive affirmation of beneficiaries’ current skills and attributes and highlight examples of positive progression. This creates an atmosphere where people feel valued and motivated. Essentially, assessment and review systems should enable beneficiaries to recognise the skills they already possess and identify their own capacity for learning and progress. Assessment systems should also be mindful to guard against highlighting unnecessary and negative regression. This is not to say that regression should always be ignored as clearly it may sometimes be due to circumstances beyond the clients’ control. It is important therefore to identify the cause of the regression and then work with the client to support positive progression once more.

Time is also a consideration when devising a soft indicator system as some techniques require a fairly intensive input of time. Quite clearly, this would not be suitable for a project where contact is only sporadic such as those associated with outreach working.

### 3.1.4 Different assessment formats

Most systems focus on paper-based methods of assessment where beneficiaries complete written questionnaires, or write narrative accounts of their progress or their skills. Although this is appropriate for some target groups, there are
circumstances in which the use of other assessment formats may be more suitable. Beneficiaries with numeracy, literacy or learning difficulties may experience problems in undertaking written assessments. One solution may be to work in conjunction with clients using other media which is perhaps more appropriate to their needs.

In addition to paper-based assessment tools you may wish to consider:

5. Assessment tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment format</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer-based systems</td>
<td><em>eg</em> where a beneficiary may complete assessment forms on-line</td>
<td>PC based systems of self assessment have the added advantage of giving clients the opportunity to learn and develop IT skills at the same time (although projects should not assume that clients possess IT skills). This medium may allow for more systematic aggregation of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td><em>eg</em> self assessment cards</td>
<td>This method may not be as intimidating as a written assessment. If carried out together with a skilled project worker, the use of games may encourage clients to talk about themselves even when they are lacking self-awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D media</td>
<td><em>eg</em> where a beneficiary may move an ‘actual’ sliding scale along a board.</td>
<td>Again this assessment format may be more suitable for those with numeracy and literacy difficulties, and may be less intimidating than a paper based assessment tool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.5 Measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled

Unlike ‘harder’ job and qualification outcomes, it is difficult to achieve an ‘absolute’ measure of achievement and progress in the realm of soft outcomes. In many cases, projects can only record that an improvement has occurred rather than being able to quantify how much improvement.

However, some projects attempt to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled more systematically (and numerically) through scoring systems and scales. Commonly beneficiaries are asked to complete questionnaires based on scales of feeling or agreement. A statement can be presented, such as, “I feel optimistic about my future” and the beneficiary can then indicate their response on a scale of 1 and 10, for example, or ‘I agree strongly’ through to ‘I disagree strongly’). The client’s starting point can then be established (in the case of initial assessment) or a measurement of distance travelled over time be calculated (if used to review progress and ultimate outcomes).

It is important to ask the right questions and to avoid being ambiguous, meaningless or patronising when devising questionnaires and soft indicator systems, a point to which we return when we discuss ‘tools’.
3.1.6 Inferences

Needless to say, the achievement of soft outcomes and progress towards employability cannot always be (entirely) attributable to the project. Other external factors can exert strong influences on beneficiaries’ attitudes and achievements. A client may be more confident because of positive changes in his personal life rather than because of the training and support they are receiving from the project. It is important to understand a client’s external situation in order to gain a better understanding of the context in which progress is being made and the factors that are most likely to be attributable to the project.

3.2 Who measures?

Who actually carries out an assessment of soft outcomes and distance travelled will depend on your particular project. Beneficiaries are clearly the mainstay of self assessment, usually in conjunction with, and perhaps supplemented by, assessments from project staff and external individuals. Those involved in assessment should be those who have regular contact with the beneficiary and whose professional judgements may add to the stock of knowledge about their progression. We have highlighted in the table below some of the issues which may emerge with different assessors.

6. Type of assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of assessment</th>
<th>Comments and issues to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Client or beneficiary self-assessment | Beneficiaries may answer in a way they feel is expected of them, and answers to questions may not be a true reflection of their ability – just how they were feeling at the time. It is possible that a more honest and rounded response would be elicited if there were an honest and trusting relationship between the beneficiary and the member of staff responsible for the assessment.  
  
Self evaluation is a skill in itself, and not all beneficiaries will have sufficient levels of self awareness to be able to self assess in a meaningful way. |
| Employer assessment      | This could provide a very useful addition to the soft outcome and distance travelled picture. If beneficiaries are undertaking work placements, employers could be asked to comment on the progress that beneficiaries have made.                                      |
| Project staff assessment | Staff need to be well trained in the system which is being used and all need to working to common definitions. Due to the danger of subjectivity in assessment, external quality control or verification should be put in place to ensure a consistent approach. It is important to note that it is not always possible to remove bias in the way information is collected.  
  
Staff need to be fully committed to the process and concept of soft outcomes and distance travelled.                                                                                           |
| Peer assessment          | Positive reinforcement from peer group members may be particularly encouraging. However, as a measurement of progress this method of assessment should not be used on its own, as there is a danger of subjectivity and bias.                              |
3.3 When to measure?

In order to measure progress and distance travelled it is essential that assessment takes place at the very least at the beginning and end of your project. If time and resources permit, it is advisable to carry out assessment at regular intervals during the project. Not only does this allow for a more responsive service to changing needs, it also provides a more thorough and reliable evaluation of whether true progress is being made.

3.4 Management of systems

The shift to consideration of soft outcomes and outputs may require a cultural shift both internally and externally, and result in a significant learning curve for project staff. If monitoring and evaluation is carried out externally, these personnel must be signed up to the concepts of soft outcomes and distance travelled.

Communication is particularly vital if systems are to operate effectively. Good communication is extremely important between beneficiaries and staff, between staff, and between projects and other organisations to share good practice. Clear instructions and guidance must be given to project staff to enable them to carry out assessments of soft outcomes and distance travelled.

3.5 Presentation and use of soft outcome and distance travelled information

It is important that you consider how the information that has been collected will be used and how it will be presented. You may want to use the information to:

- Provide evidence that the aims and objectives of the project have been fulfilled.
- Assess the added value of the project at an aggregate level.
- Feed into the overall project evaluation and dissemination strategies, and inform appropriate audiences of the project lessons.
- Provide feedback to individual beneficiaries to increase their confidence and satisfaction with their own achievements. Importantly through feedback they will be able to see how they are meeting their individual aims and objectives, and fulfilling personal goals.

How the information will be used will help to determine in what format it should be presented. You may want to present the information as:

- A written report which collates evidence at the project level. This could be included in an evaluation report, or could be presented as a stand alone document.
- Case studies of individual beneficiaries within a broader report to highlight success.
- Portfolios where beneficiaries can use the evidence of progress and outcomes in interviews or to construct CVs.
4. The tools themselves

There are two basic requirements for the tools that you devise to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled. These are:

- Reliability, and
- Validity.

Your tool should obtain consistently robust results over time, with different client groups and with different staff members applying it, and the questions you ask must measure the outcomes, or performance dimensions, for which they were intended. The tool you use should allow you to improve your learning and understanding of the client group that you are working with, which will then allow you to provide more tailored provision for them.

This need not be a complicated process. Clarity of thought and simplicity of design can go a long way towards ensuring a high quality soft indicator system. This technical note provides some overarching principles to help you design the tools for this task.

4.1 Phrasing the questions

There are four tasks which you need to undertake:

- Think about the outcomes, or dimensions of performance, that you wish to measure.
- Translate these into meaningful and precise questions.
- Review the overall mix of questions to ensure they work together.
- Decide on the order in which questions will be asked.

The questions you use should pass the following tests:

1) Is this the most direct way of asking the question?

Think very carefully about the area in which you are interested. Does the question you have written ask about this? You should avoid proxies, which are simplified or trivial questions that stand in for more important subjects.

2) Is this the most concrete way of asking the question?

Without straying from the area in which you are interested, you should ask your question in the most concrete way possible. The more factual and descriptive the question is, the less subjective the answer will be.
An example

You might not obtain a clear response if you ask “are you on time?” Punctuality could be considered to be composed of four elements:

- How often the person is late.
- How late they are.
- Whether they are late due to circumstances outside their control.
- Whether they telephone to explain the reason.

Perhaps a better way to ask a question regarding timekeeping would be to use a number of separate statements with which the client agrees or disagrees:

- I always arrive for the beginning of work/the course.
- I always telephone with a reason if I know I am going to be late.
- I only miss work/the course due to events outside my control.
- I am never late.
- My personal circumstances mean I often have to leave work/the course early.

3) Is the question really an element of employability?

Can you show a logical link between the dimension you are investigating and employability? It is arguable that we should not include personality dimensions in soft indicator systems because this implies that there is only one acceptable form of personality, which is not true: pessimists do get jobs! Measuring behaviour and attitude has greater validity because these can be changed and are less intimate.

4) Is the question measuring something that will change as a result of your work?

Your soft indicator system will need to measure progress across a wide range of clients and individual circumstances. Without making a link between what you do as part of the project and the possible effect this has on clients, the soft indicator system will not show you at your best. If you do not have a good picture of the soft skills affected by your work, the soft indicator system should be able to help you, so review the initial results with this in mind.
5) Are you measuring each element of your project work?

Look at the overall pattern of questions. Does it give a balanced picture of the work that you do? If the system concentrates on one element at the expense of others you might be inadvertently valuing some parts of the project and particular staff more than others. This could distort the work of your project by encouraging staff to divert effort into the elements being measured.

6) Is the question taking too much for granted?

The questions should not assume that the respondent has a particular possession, attitude or set of behaviour. For instance, questions for homeless people need to be reviewed very carefully to ensure that they are not implying that the respondent has a home, car, established set of friends, or daily routine. Questions about drink problems should not assume that all respondents drink alcohol: a filter question might be needed to ask if respondents drink alcohol (telling them to skip the next question(s) if they do not).

7) Is a positive answer necessarily good?

Equivocal questions are difficult to interpret. For example, asking the respondent if they have “stopped themselves when they wanted to shout at someone” or “been pleased with something they have done” does not tell you whether these were appropriate responses; they could reflect passivity or poor self awareness rather than assertiveness.

An example

One system had the following questions for clients to agree or disagree with:

- This week I filled in a form.
- I did something fun.
- Have been pleased with something I have done.
- Have borrowed money.
- Have found it difficult to concentrate on things.

Each of these is equivocal. The form could have been in a police station; the something fun could have been drugs; the self congratulations could have been misguided, showing poor self awareness; the money borrowed could have been to buy clothes for a job interview, a positive action; the difficulty concentrating could have been good if it meant they were trying to listen to lessons where previously they would not have bothered.
8) Does the question duplicate information asked elsewhere in the tool, or elsewhere in the client records?

A lean system is more cost effective. Repetition can be annoying to the client and to project workers. Sometimes soft indicator systems (and other systems such as psychometric tests) have several questions that address similar issues, so as to check internal consistency, but this is not essential and should not be over-done.

9) Is the question unambiguous?

Only ask one question at a time. Never use questions that have two or more parts to them. For instance, the question: "Have you been angry or violent with others?" is really two questions, one asking about anger, and another asking about violence.

10) Is the question in plain English?

Phrasing your questions simply will reduce the time taken for the client to read them, and avoid misunderstanding or misreading. Avoid jargon, slang, or idiom as these will not be understood equally or consistently by all respondents. It is useful to check that all staff are working with the same definitions of any ambiguous words used in questions, and that the client has understood what is meant by the question.

11) Is the question without any possible offence to women, ethnic minorities or other groups?

As well as the obvious mistakes like sexist language, avoid the more subtle offences of taking cultural norms as standard. For instance, what some cultures consider as confidence and assertion might in others be considered unacceptable bragging and pride.

12) Is the question worded from the client's perspective?

You will get a better response from clients if the questions imply some benefit to them rather than simply a requirement for them to fit into society. Thus questions about 'taking responsibility for yourself' could be seen as patronising or preaching, but the same issues phrased in terms of 'overcoming setbacks' could be seen as helping them develop streetwise behaviour. Similarly, wording questions in terms of clients' 'realism' could be offensive as it implies there is only one correct way of seeing things.

A second element of the client's perspective is that the order of questioning must make sense. It is a good idea to put simple, less personal questions at the beginning of the questionnaire and more personal ones at the end.
4.2 Scoring the Questions

Some form of measurement (quantification) is needed in soft indicator systems if a meaningful assessment of distance travelled is to be gained. The three reasons for this are:

- To avoid the subjectivity of words.
- To give precision to the descriptions.
- To allow comparisons between users, and across time periods.

Having said this, measurement does not need to be heavy handed. Matters of degree can be shown through:

- Scales, for example, rating from one to five, or one to seven.
- Symbols or pictures, for example, smiley faces.
- Physical artefacts such as sliding counters on a board.
- The accumulation of evidence.

The following issues should be considered when designing your scales:

1) Is the context clear?

People behave differently in different environments. If the context is not clear, the respondent might be frustrated with the question and tempted to reply "it depends". And remember - you are only really interested in the user’s behaviour at work, not what they do during their leisure time.

An example

A question about drugs might be better received and easier to apply if tied specifically to the work context, for example:

- My drug-taking affects my co-ordination and judgement;
- When I use drugs I have difficulty getting up in the morning;

are better questions than the more general:

My drug use is out of control.

2) Is the time period clear?

Questions about behaviour, attitudes, or feelings should be tied to a specific time period which should be long enough to allow the emotion or response to appear but not so long that the respondent will not be able to remember what they were doing.
3) Are the scales anchored?

People naturally use scales differently: some people group their responses around the middle of the scale whilst others stick to the extremes. You can encourage respondents to use the full range of the scale by giving a brief description for each number.

For example

A project which is interested in gauging the extent of drink or drug use might signpost scales in the following way:

1. No problem of this kind during the period rated.
2. Some over-indulgence within the social norm.
3. Loss of control over drinking or drug taking but not seriously addicted.
4. Market craving or dependence on alcohol or drugs with frequent loss of control and risk taking under the influence.
5. Incapacitated by alcohol or drug problem.

4) Do the scores need weighting?

You can make some dimensions or questions more important than others by multiplying their score up before you calculate the total score.

5) Is an aggregate score meaningful?

Aggregating scores across all the questions can hide more than they reveal and some soft outcome areas might go down as others go up. An example of this is where greater awareness leads to a client acknowledging a problem that was previously denied. Aggregate figures should therefore be used with care. Project workers should always be given the chance to comment on figures so that apparently negative results can be explained.

6) Is the scoring positive?

It is more meaningful to clients if high numbers used for scoring equate with high performance. You should also think about balancing the scoring so that even poor performance receives a result rather than nil. The soft indicator system is intended to motivate clients not to demoralise them!
7) Consider using a norm or standard

People do not need to be perfect to get a job. They only need to be good enough and to meet some form of standard or competency. In some cases the standard is implied in the anchoring used. For instance, in the question regarding drink and drug use given above, a score of 1 or 2 might be considered acceptable, depending on the type of job for which the candidate is applying. If the norm or standard is not obvious then you might like to apply the soft indicator questionnaire to a sample of your colleagues or friends to give a baseline of people in employment.

8) Is the scoring too obvious to the respondent?

Phrase some of the questions positively and some negatively. You do not want respondents to be able to see that there is a 'right answer' and that this can be obtained by ticking the right hand column of the scales all the way down the page.

9) Minimise arithmetic

The value of soft indicator systems can be reduced by mathematical errors. Project staff are busy people and might not appreciate the task of adding up scores. Computerised systems which aggregate scores and reduce errors are often preferable.

4.3 Final word

As you will appreciate, developing and using a soft indicator system will take a good deal of time from you, your staff and your users, so it is important that you get it right. You may want to look at some examples of other systems to assist with the development of your own, and we have given some contact details overleaf to help you with this. Exchanging examples and good practice in this way should minimise duplication and any potential reinvention of the wheel. However, you must be prepared to trial early versions of the system and obtain feedback as you go along. Ultimately though, measuring soft outcomes in a systematic way, in addition to gathering data on the harder job and qualification outcomes, will allow you to identify the real progress and achievements of your project and your clients.
These projects have helped with the development of this Guide. If you would like any further information on the systems that they have devised to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled, please write to them, or e-mail directly.

Stewart Bowman  
**Mentoring Action and Stepping Stones**  
Tyneside Careers  
Careers Centre  
Interchange Centre  
West Street  
GATESHEAD NE8 1BH  
email: s.bowman@tyneside.careers.co.uk

Keith Stead  
**The Rickter Scale**  
Choiceworks  
75 Townsend Crescent  
Kirkhill  
MORPETH  
Northumberland NE61 2EX  
email: keith@kstead.freeserve.co.uk

Amanda Pavon-Lopez  
**Barrier Busters**  
NOW  
Addington High School  
Fairchilds Avenue  
NEW ADDINGTON  
Surrey CR0 0AH  
email: CETS@dial.pipex.com

Tom Farrier  
**HARP (Care Skills for Working Life)**  
Bishop Auckland College  
Woodhouse Lane  
BISHOP AUCKLAND  
Durham DL14 6JZ  
email: driderwentside@connectfree.co.uk

Fiona Philipson and Fiona Langskaill  
**Bridges Project**  
55 Albany Street  
EDINBURGH  
Scotland EH1 3QY  
email: bridgesproject@compuserve.com
Chris Llewellyn  
Learning Partnership West  
Floor 1  
4 Colston Avenue  
BRISTOL BS1 4ST

Robert Triggs  
Anglia Polytechnic University  
Bishop Hall Lane  
CHELMSFORD  
Essex CM1 1SQ

Linda Keith and Karen Burgin  
Health and Social Gains  
Rehab UK  
Melbourne House  
Melbourne Street  
NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE  
NE1 2JQ  
e-mail: lindakeith@rehabuk.org