EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education and vocational training; Coordination of Erasmus+
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Understanding and measuring policy effectiveness: first reflections

Discussion paper

The purpose of the document is to provide first ideas and set the stage for the planned discussion on the measurement of adult learning policy effectiveness. The discussion is to take place during the upcoming meeting of the ET2020 Working Group on Adult Learning, planned on the 13th and 14th of May, 2014. The Commission, to support the work of the WG, has launched a study to develop an analytical framework for the analysis of adult learning policies. One of the goals of the upcoming WG meeting is to discuss the very first findings of the study and to provide guidance for further work.

This paper provides below a short background - the context and the reasons why effectiveness of policy in general and adult learning policy in particular should be addressed as well as some examples how this is being done in other policy areas. This should help members of the WG to prepare for the meeting. It also provides some content which could be discussed as well with colleagues.

1. Why effectiveness of adult learning policies?

The overall task of the European Commission in the field of adult learning is to support Member States to implement effective adult learning policies. Adult learning policy, like education policy in general, may seek to achieve several different kinds of goal, such as:

-   to improve economic competitiveness of the countries, providing their population with labour market relevant skills;

-   to develop social cohesion, in particular to diminish inequalities by targeting disadvantaged groups;

-   to increase overall well-being of the citizens, by promoting active social, democratic and community engagement as well as capacity of individual to lead fulfilling and happy life;

-   etc.

All Member States have policies in place to promote learning by, and develop the skills of, the adult population; they may be called lifelong learning, adult learning or skills. There is a European benchmark for lifelong learning.

For Adult learning policies, like any other policies, to reach their ultimate aims they have to be effective in reaching their objectives and having the desired overall impact.

Our overall understanding of - and capacity to manage - public policy performance has been developing in recent decades, also strongly influenced by the financial crisis and the overall intention to improve public sector performance. Several models are available, each with its particular advantages.

For illustrative purposes, public policy performance can be understood broadly as a cycle of activities as presented below. This is a general approach, applicable to any policy/governance area.
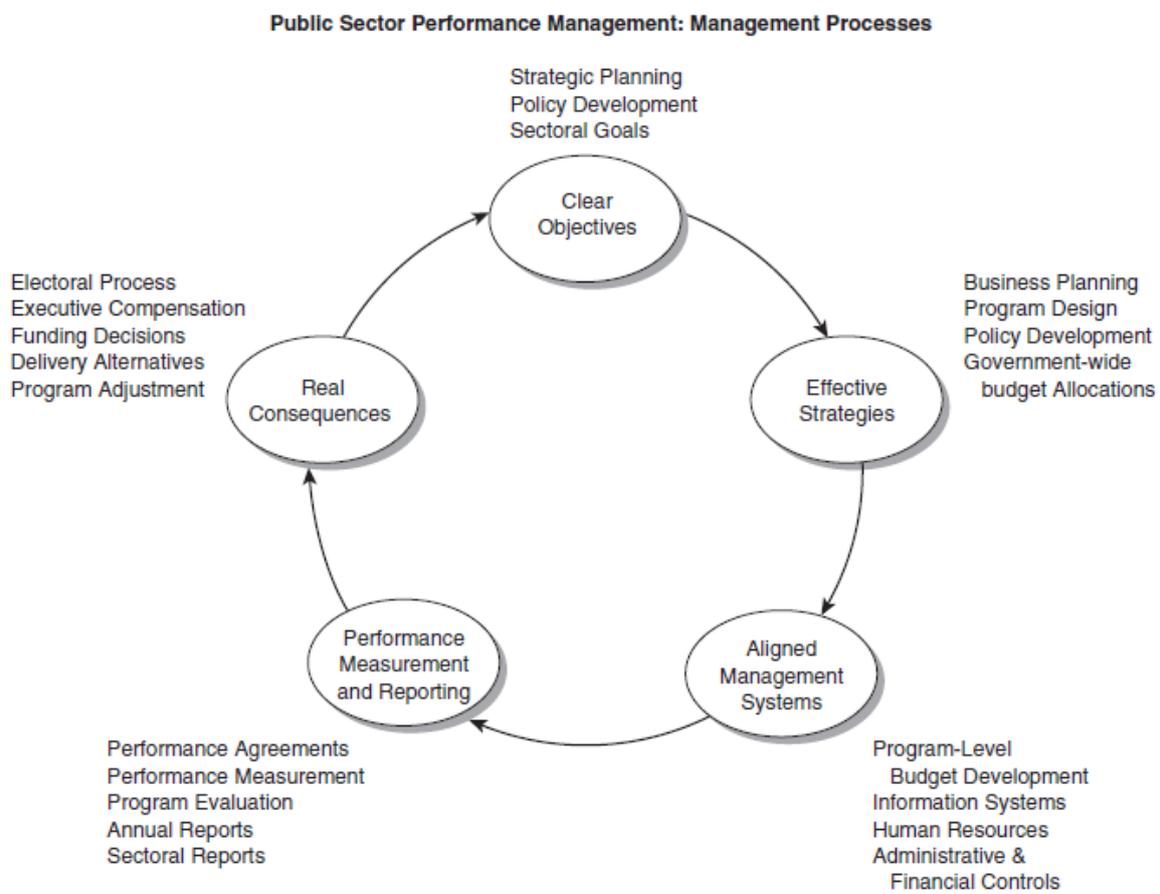

Public Sector Performance Management: Management Processes

Figure 1.1 Performance Management Cycle

SOURCE: Adapted from Auditor General of British Columbia and Deputy Ministers' Council. April, 1996. *Enhancing Accountability for performance: A framework and an implementation plan.*

Despite the continuous development of tools and principles to manage policy performance, their practical use across countries and policy fields varies. This is particularly evident for policy areas which are newly developed or still developing as well as those with a limited state intervention.

The adult learning field is notable for its recent rise - lifelong learning strategies started appearing only in the last 10-20 years. This sector is also notable for the limited scope of public policy intervention, as in majority of countries the largest part of adult learning is either personal or carried

out as part of employer-employee relations, without explicit links to public policy or public institutions.

But the maturity of the institutions, processes and instruments intended to manage and achieve effective performance of those policies still varies. Hence the aim of the Working Group's task is to use the experience from different fields and countries to support further development of the capacity of the EU Member States to manage the performance (effectiveness) of Adult learning policy(-ies).

2. What the intended final outcome of the study on policy effectiveness and the Working Group?

The key intended outcome to be produced is a tool – an analytical framework that would guide policy makers in designing and managing the performance of adult learning policies.

To understand what an analytical framework should be it is useful to look at the definitions of an analytical framework in the Oxford dictionary:

- Analytical is defined as "relating to or using analysis or logical reasoning".

- A framework is defined as "a basic structure underlying a system, concept, or text"

For further clarifications, we can see how each of these can be understood further.

Analytical, as based on the definition should include some sort of analysis – a detailed examination of elements or structure of something; in this case it should include some sort of analysis of adult learning policies and systems. An analytical approach by definition also should include logical reasoning – conducted using valid, factually or logically sound arguments and according to the rules of logic.

A framework, based on the definition is separated into two key elements – a basic structure underlying a broader (complex) system. The description and analysis of a structure is an analysis of the ***arrangements*** or/and ***relations*** between the parts or elements of that policy/ system. In this case the need will be firstly to describe and distinguish the elements of adult learning policy / system and then look into their arrangements, links and interactions. At the same time this basic structure should simplify but still represent well the broader overall system.

Thus the final outcome of this work – an analytical framework for the analysis of adult learning policy effectiveness- should:

- define key elements of the system,

- describe how they are arranged and

- explain how they are linked with the use of sound (factual and/or logical) explanations.

It should thus allow the user to evaluate policy effectiveness through the use of sound facts and arguments in a sequential, interlinked manner, which simplifies but still represents well the functioning of adult learning policies and adult learning systems.

Finally, the produced framework should be applicable not only to one particular country or system, but would allow the evaluation and comparison of policies and systems across countries or even regions. It could achieve this by, for example, setting good-practice examples, performance standards or in other ways.

3. An existing example of an analytical framework

To further illustrate what an analytical framework for a specific policy could look like, it is worth looking into a recent outcome of a still on-going World Bank project, dedicated to a number of countries across the world. It aims to produce comparative data and knowledge on education policies and institutions and to evaluate the quality of education policies against evidence-based global standards.

The approach tries to establish the link between inputs into the education system and the outcomes by distinguishing three important elements: the quality of policy, the quality of implementation, and the quality and quantity of education.
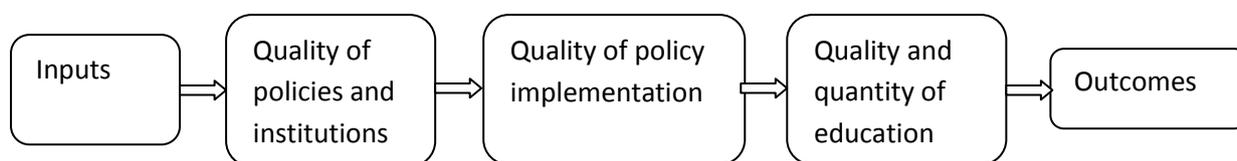

Figure 3.1   Results chain of learning

Furthermore, they look into the elements of quality, for example the quality of policies and institutions by setting a number of quality criteria, which are presented below. An important point to keep in mind is that these criteria focus specifically on the quality of workforce development policies, but they are not necessarily directly applicable to other policy areas.
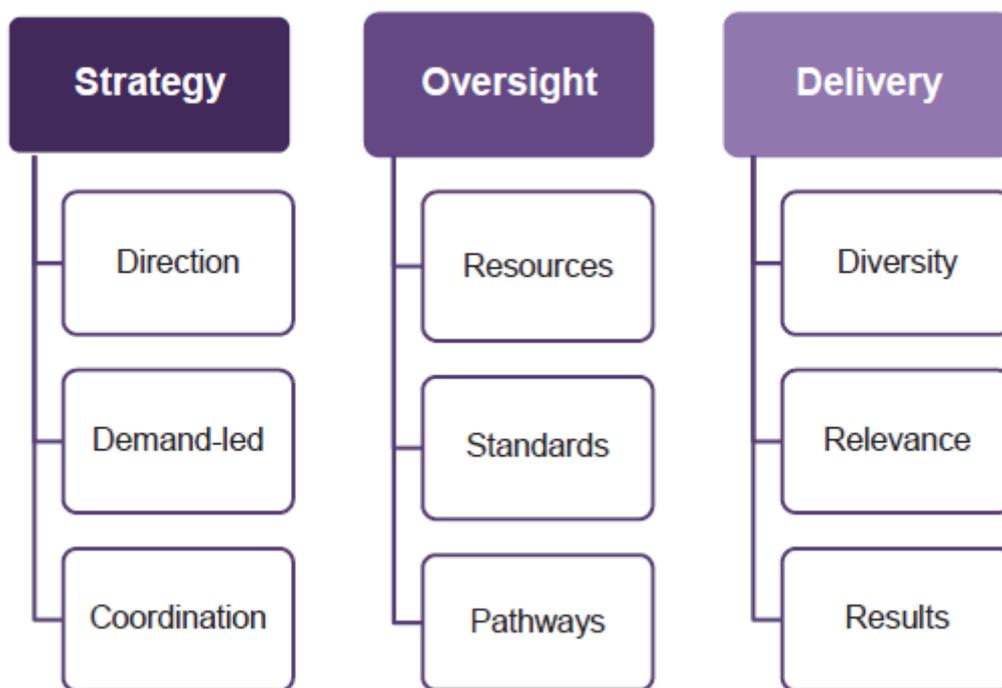
Figure 3.2 Key quality dimensions and policy goals under each quality dimension

Each item then is underpinned by a number of qualitative and/or quantitative evaluation criteria. For example, the first policy dimension (strategy), which is underpinned by three policy goals, as presented above are further detailed in specific policy actions and topics, which then can be evaluated and measures. Such detailing is presented below.

		Policy Goal	Policy Action		Topic in DCI 2.5
Dimension 1	Strategic Framework	G1 Setting a Strategic Direction	Provide sustained advocacy for WfD at the top leadership level	T1	Advocacy for WfD to Support Economic Development
				T2	Strategic Focus and Decisions by the WfD Champions
		G2 Fostering a Demand-Driven Approach	Establish clarity on the demand for skills and areas of critical constraint	T1	Overall Assessment of Economic Prospects and Skills Implications
				T2	Critical Skills Constraints in Priority Economic Sectors
			Engage employers in setting WfD priorities and in enhancing skills-upgrading for workers	T3	Role of Employers and Industry
				T4	Skills-Upgrading Incentives for Employers
				T5	Monitoring of the Incentive Programs
		G3 Strengthening Critical Coordination	Formalize key WfD roles for coordinated action on strategic priorities	T1	Roles of Government Ministries and Agencies
				T2	Roles of Non-Government WfD Stakeholders
				T3	Coordination for the Implementation of Strategic WfD Measures

Figure 3.2 Dimensions, policy goals and actions for workforce development policies.

4. Concluding remarks

You have been asked to reflect on a concrete policy intervention in your country Please use the five elements of the cycle (figure 1.1) to help you consider which aspects were more or less effective.

Furthermore, during the WG meeting the discussions are intended to cover a number of challenging issues. You are invited to reflect in advance upon some of these issues:

- **The difference between Adult learning system and Adult learning policy.** We have seen from the above that Adult learning policies often cover only parts of the overall system. How can these be linked?

- **Selection of elements to be included in the analytical framework.** It is clear that Adult learning systems consist of a variety of elements and parts. However, for the final tool to be useful it has to be sufficiently simple and clear. What could be the criteria to prioritise and select key elements to be included in the analytical framework?

- **The possibility to use or combine different approaches**. The very few examples selected for this discussion paper already identifies a number of substantially different ways how to describe a certain system. This includes a policy performance cycle (circular approach) as well as an input-output model (a linear approach).