



SMART

*Second Chance Schools Working with
Systematic Measurement of Outcomes*

www.edu-smart.eu



**EVIDENCING SUCCESS FACTORS IN INFORMAL LEARNING:
HANDBOOK FOR POLICY MAKERS**



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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1. Introduction to the Handbook for Policy Makers

The educational organisations have knowledge and information regarding students' academic progress through grading systems and other areas. But there is a clear information and knowledge gap for organisations in relation to the development of the student's social, emotional and personal skills. The SMART project addresses these gaps and have developed a quality framework, for use by providers of second chance education. An important tool in the quality framework is the Smart Measurement System (SMS) and its focus is on validating the informal learning and the distance travelled by students within programmes.

SMART has a focus on validating and evidencing the informal learning and the distance travelled by students within programmes.

1.1 The purpose of the handbook for policy makers

The purpose of the handbook is to support policy makers / decision makers by enabling them to make informed decisions about funding for second chance education or the adoption of its methods into mainstream education.

The handbook makes policy recommendations and provides guidelines to structure a quality assurance system that evidences success factors of second chance education and the value of informal learning. The handbook draws on the results of the literature review, the development of the quality assurance system (SMS system), the Teachers Handbook and the Organisational Handbook. These are available on the SMART project website at www.edu-smart.eu.

The guidelines in this handbook will provide policy makers with the rationale for setting up monitoring and self evaluation systems makes recommendations and provides a structure that facilitates evidencing and justification of success factors in informal learning that can be adapted to curative, preventative and intervention measures.

The Handbook makes policy recommendations and provides guidelines to structure a quality assurance system that evidences success factors of second chance education and the value of informal learning.

1.2 Introduction to the Smart Project

The SMART project aims to develop a quality framework, for use by providers of non-formal and informal learning, that will enable providers to evidence their success factors, enhancing the quality and relevance of learning offers in education, training & youth work. Improving the capacity of organisations to deliver high quality second chance education that will contribute to preventing drop-out and promote participation of disadvantaged groups in society.

SMART fosters stakeholder involvement in a culture of quality improvement and accountability at all levels through a “bottom up” approach to developing a self-evaluation system. Thus all stakeholders will have ownership of systematic measuring of success factors, mapping work that already happens, rather than having an “imposed” model. Teachers and trainers have an important role in sharing best practice in self-evaluation and self-monitoring, bringing their knowledge and competence of quality assurance to build a system that is relevant and accessible for second chance education providers or indeed other providers of informal and non-formal learning. The training programme targets teachers/trainers and professionals working in second chance education and those using informal learning methods and focuses on developing an understanding of accountability and how informal learning can be evidenced and justified through self-monitoring and self-evaluation.

The “SMART” project is funded under the *Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2, and Strategic Partnership* for duration of 24 months from September 2014 to July 2016. The project involved 7 partners from Denmark, Ireland, Belgium, Italy and The Netherlands, representing university, second chance schools, regional authorities and civil society organizations.

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SMART will improve the capacity of organizations to deliver high quality second chance education, contribute to preventing drop-out and promote participation of disadvantaged groups in society.

2. The key findings

2.1 The Literature review

Schools develop both formal and informal skills, however the informal skills are not as well documented. In the SMART project we define informal skills as the learner's personal, key and social competence. Informal learning refers to the process of achieving skills that are important for personal well-being, success and efficacy in a wide range of situations.

When exploring the different second chance educational systems, it is obvious that the policies and practices on measuring and evidencing success factors in second chance programmes and schools are very different in different countries in Europe. The partners in the SMART project have reflected on the different practices/policies that exist and discussed the goals of second chance education. These can differ within the same country over time and between countries. Goals for second chance education can be:

- employment focused
- further education focused
- vocational education and training focused

The majority of the documentation is centred on the end result and the outcomes measured after the students have left school. Therefore there is a gap in the documentation on measuring the ongoing development of informal skills and the small steps taken on the road to reaching their goals.

Measurement systems are unable to provide causal explanations of whether the outcomes can only be attributed to the efforts. However measuring and evidencing success factors can be used as an indication of this. The measurement system, whether the measure academic, social or personal skills cannot stand alone, nor replace the experiences and professionalism of the staff working in these educational settings; they can only supplement the latter.

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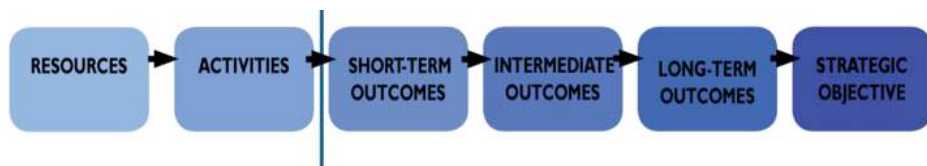
2.2 The SMS: Systematic Measurement System

Systematic measurement of outcomes gives an organisation continuous knowledge about the outcomes of the work that the organisation aspires to achieving.

It is a tool that can be applied to continuously develop the organisation and thus ensure that the organisation achieves the best possible outcomes for its learners/students.

At the same time, it is a tool that can be used to document the outcomes internally as well as externally.

The SMS has been developed on the base of the logic model, telling us what would be relevant to include in the measurement. The SMS collects data that can describe the outcomes a school or an organisation wants to bring about for the students and what activities the school undertakes in order to achieve the intended impacts and changes (outcomes). The logic model describes the relationship between theory and practice. It describes the purpose of the school (the strategic objectives/impact), the school's intended outcomes for the target group (short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes), and the practice of the school (activities and methods (efforts). This can be illustrated in the model below:



On the left of the line are the things that can be planned and monitored, and which can be adjusted or changed directly: this concerns **resources** and **activities**. Resources cover human, financial and organisational resources. Activities constitute everything the organisation does with the resources: these are approaches, methods and activities that are initiated in order to create the intended results.

On the right of the line are the intended outcomes of the activities, which can only be adjusted or changed indirectly, as they are the outcomes that an organisation hopes to achieve by the means of certain activities: these are **short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes** as well as the overall **strategic objective(s)** of the organisation.

When making a logic model for an educational organisation, the organisation clarifies its ideas of the correlation between the activities it sets in motion and the intended outcomes and results of the activities.

The logic model is used for mapping out the work of the school, and the systematic measurement (SMS) is part of the documentation that can describe the outcomes a school wants to bring about for the students and what activities the school undertakes in order to achieve the intended impacts and changes.

E-Platform: In order to help the organisation in the process, the SMART project has developed a menu of pre-set quality indicators and measurement indicators and put them onto an e-platform. The organisation can use the platform to make its own questionnaire. The questionnaire is made by choosing between different categories of qualitative indicators. Each qualitative indicator has a number of related questions (the measurement indicators) that the organisation can choose from. The e-platform is found here: <http://52.38.131.123:8080/smstool/login>

The SMART project has developed a menu of pre-set quality indicators and measurement indicators and put them into an e-platform.

The organisation can use the platform to make its own questionnaire.

2.3 The teachers handbook

The handbook is a guide for teachers to enable them to implement self-monitoring and self-evaluation of their practice. The handbook can be used as support guidelines during training events, as a reference “bible” after training and as a standalone guide for teachers. The handbook provides the rationale for monitoring and evaluation, guidelines for implementing the process, good practice examples, example templates and tools.

It is recommended that teachers participate on a training programme that addresses the gaps in knowledge and skills of teachers/trainers and introduce the Logic Model, the E-platform and the collection and use of data enabling teachers to prepare and implement a Systematic Measurement System in their own organisations through a step-by-step action-plan.

The logic model is used for mapping out the work of the school/centre, and the systematic measurement (SMS) is part of the documentation. The model introduced in the Teachers Handbook measures the short-term outcomes. The reason for focusing on the short-term outcomes is that it enhances the opportunity for the organisation to adjust approaches, methods or activities along the way – while the students still attend the school/programme, if the desired or expected outcomes do not occur. Also, other sources of data in the quality framework of the school will often provide knowledge about the long-term outcomes. It could be e.g. statistics of how many students complete a youth education after having finished a programme.

In the Teachers Handbook it shows how all stakeholders will have ownership of systematic measuring of success factors, mapping work that already happens, rather than having an “imposed” model.

It is recognised that teachers and trainers have an important role in sharing best practice in self-evaluation and self-monitoring, bringing their knowledge and competence of quality assurance to build a system that is relevant and accessible for second chance education providers or indeed other providers of informal and non-formal learning.

The handbook also reflects on the importance of remembering that the results of the measurements are a reflection of a process between the students, the teachers and the organisation as such. The results cannot and shall not be seen as an evaluation of the competences of the students, or of the skills of teachers or of the organisation. This means that decisions made on the basis of the results should take all levels into account, in a whole organisational approach.

The Teachers Handbook focus on how all stakeholders will have ownership of systematic measuring of success factors, mapping work that already happens, rather than having an “imposed” model.

The Teachers Handbook provides the rational for monitoring and evaluation, guidelines for implementing the process, good practice examples, example templates and tools.

2.4 The Organisational Handbook

The organisational handbook details how organisations can support the introduction of the measurement of soft skills in second chance educational settings. It explains the essential concepts and practices identified and designed in the SMART project. It explores how organisations can develop a quality framework system that measures the soft skills of learners.

Organisations need data to measure development and to document their work. By making a quality framework system that measures the soft skills of learners, the organisation can transform knowledge into data. This means that the organisation can go from having personal and implicit knowledge about the students to having explicit data (the measurements), that can be shared and the development can be monitored.

The measurements can be used as a tool for dialogue, both between management, and the teachers and other employees, internally in the different departments/teams as well as between the teams of staff, and between teachers and students. They can also be used as a dialogue - and documentation tool by decision-makers and other stakeholders who act as the critical friend of the centre/school.

The handbook states that it is very important to remember that the results of the measurements are a reflection of a process between the students, the teachers and the organisation. It is important to note that the results cannot and shall not be seen as an evaluation of the competences of the students, or of the skills of teachers or of the organisation. This means that decisions made on the basis of the results should take all levels into account, in a whole organisation approach.

It is also really important that the organisation values the measurement of soft skills development as part of the overall workings of the centre/school. If this is the case, it will require a cultural shift in terms of accepting the outcomes that have been developed for these young people as a result of validating the informal learning that has been documented and evidenced on the e-platform. Also the recognition of these soft skills that have been developed in these young people must be seen in a similar light as to the hard skills that have been achieved, such as certification outcomes etc.

The Organisational Handbook highlights that the measurement of soft skills development must be seen as part of the overall workings of the centre/school and soft skills must be seen in a similar light as the hard skills.

It is important to remember that the results of the measurements are a reflection of a process between the students, the teachers and the organisation.

3. Key recommendations and guidelines

There is a greater onus on the educational organisations to demonstrate effectiveness. Most schools and organisations have some kind of a quality framework collecting different kinds of data providing knowledge about the function of the organisation and the students' development. Many organisations and schools do not have access to data sources, which provide systematic information about the soft skill development of the students during enrolment. There is a clear information and knowledge gap when it comes to the development of the student's social and personal skills. The SMART project addresses the gaps and have developed a quality framework as well as a Smart Measurement System (SMS) focusing is on validating the informal learning and the distance travelled by students within programmes.

The use of a systematic measurement system concerning the progression of social and personal skills can supplement the existing sources of information about the students, i.e. academic grades and attendance protocols. If all of the information is collected and applied systematically, it will then form a fact-based quality management system.

3.1 What are the guidelines and challenges when implementing the SMS?

It is important to bear in mind that changing current practices might be perceived negatively in the organisation. It may be very valuable to identify change agents, which are individuals who will support the implementation of the systematic measurement system and work with it positively in the staff group. It is also advisable to choose a project coordinator and possibly a working group who can plan the process, keep an overview and who are responsible for the implementation of the different parts and phases. The first part is to analyse the organisational context and issues: what needs to be changed and implemented, and what are the possible obstacles to these changes? Once the context has been identified, procedural changes can take place. SMART have developed the following guidelines to the process:

1. **An analysis** of the management and evaluation systems that the project is seeking to supplement or alter, and an identification of the individuals that will facilitate the change in the school.

2. **A written statement** expressing the long-term change that will come with the implementation of the systematic measurement system.
3. **A timeframe and step-by-step action plan** for the implementation of the systematic measurement system, as well as a workshop for teachers and other staff members in order for them to be presented to the system.
4. **A feedback session** that will consist of a discussion and exchange of reflections on the changes implied by the implementation of the systematic measurement system, the benefits it could bring to the school/organisation and its limitations.

Top management and head of departments must agree to devote time and resources to make a logic model and develop, implement and adopt a systematic measurement system (SMS). The organisation has to monitor and continuously adapt the model, to implement and use the data that the systematic measurement system will provide and to involve employees in the different phases.

The following would be deemed to be the major challenges:

- Overcoming the culture of the organisation
- Budget for CPD
- Staffing working arrangements/contracts within the organisations
- Knowledge within staff to implement the SMS
- Valuing the evidence generated by the model at many levels
- Freeing up staff to do this work effectively

The key challenges when implementing the SMS can be that there is a resistance to change in the organisation and that the evidence generated isn't valued at all levels.

Also budget can be a challenge as well as specific working arrangements for staff and freeing up staff to work effectively and to attend the training programme.

3.2 What are the key recommendations

It is recommended that educational organisations prepare the organisation and the management for the upcoming changes, before they start setting up a systematic measurement system. It is essential to get management actively engaged in the decision-making, development and implementation of the system. This does not only apply for top management, but also for example head of departments as well as employees in general.

SMART fosters stakeholder involvement in a culture of quality improvement and accountability at all levels through a “bottom up” approach. It is recommended that a set of clear coherent policies are to be written with the organisation’s staff handbook that clearly states that staff have a major role to play in relation to the development of soft skills for their students.

SMART recommends that staff must be provided with continuous professional development before they commence using the SMS model. This was strongly made clear in the review of the training events. Not alone, do staff require training in the functionality of the e-platform, they must be brought through a process of critically evaluating of their own teaching methodologies and approaches. This requires time and space to do this in an environment that encourages this analysis at many different levels.

It is recommended that there are developed mechanisms for reviewing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom to ensure that critical thinking methodologies are adopted by staff. This should be part of the quality framework review processes within the overall quality assurance system for the centre/school.

It is recommended that there is a clear acceptance from an organisational perspective that staff would be allocated time to participate in team meetings, completing the e-platform and time for reflection as to the progress of the young people in their centres/schools with regard to soft skills development.

SMART recommends that staff must be provided with continuous professional development before they commence using the SMS model. It is recommended that staff attend training in the functionality of the e-platform, and they must be brought through a process of critically evaluating of their own teaching methodologies and approaches. This requires time and space to do this in an environment that encourages this analysis at many different levels.

It is recommended that organisations write down a policy that state that staff have a major role to play in relation to the development of soft skills for their students. Deliver mechanisms for reviewing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom to ensure that critical thinking methodologies are adopted by staff. It is recommended that this should be part of the quality framework review processes within the overall quality assurance system for the centre/school.

SMART Project Partner Information



Copenhagen Youth School
www.ungdomsskolen.kk.dk
Denmark



Euricon
www.euricon.eu
The Netherlands



CESIE
www.cesie.org
Italy



Art 27
www.artikel27.eu
Belgium



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Co-funded by the
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The **SMART** project has been launched under the Erasmus+ Programme,
Key Action 2 - Strategic Partnership for Adult Education (September 2014 | August 2016).

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