GOAL
Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners

Final cross-country evaluation report

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UCL Institute of Education

January 2018

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Acknowledgements

The UCL Institute of Education evaluation team would like to thank everyone who contributed to the GOAL evaluation. Most importantly, this includes the local evaluation teams in each of the six GOAL countries. The national-level data collection and analysis conducted by these teams is reported in the GOAL evaluation national reports, which can be found at:
http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications.

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Glossary

Except where otherwise stated, the definitions included here are derived from the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) Glossary: http://www.elgpn.eu/glossary.

Terms in English	*Definition*
Adult basic skills	Basic skills may include competences in literacy (reading and writing), numeracy/everyday mathematics, Digital competence/ICT skills, and oral communication. Adult basic skills courses/programmes are literacy and numeracy education for adults who for some reason did not acquire these skills or a level sufficient for everyday adult life when they were at school. Source: Project GOAL definition.
Basic skills assessment	An assessment tool that measures skills in reading and/or writing and/or Maths and/or digital skills. Source: Project GOAL definition.
Career	The interaction of work roles and other life roles over a person's lifespan, including how they balance paid and unpaid work, and their involvement in learning and education.
Career guidance	A range of activities that enables citizens of any age, and at any point in their lives, to identify their capacities, competences and interests; to make meaningful educational, training and occupational decisions; and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.
Counselling	The interaction between a professional and an individual helping them to resolve a specific problem or issue.
Early leaver from education and training	A person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training. Source: Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Category:Glossary
Early school leaver	See **Early leaver from education and training**.
Educational counselling/guidance	Helping an individual to reflect on personal educational issues and experiences and to make appropriate educational choices.

Employment counselling/guidance	Counselling or guidance that addresses one or more of the following domains: career/ occupational decision-making, skill enhancement, job search and employment maintenance. Activities include assessment, development and implementation of an action plan, follow-up and evaluation.
Guidance	Help for individuals to make choices about education, training and employment.
Guidance counsellor	A trained individual delivering guidance as defined above. Guidance counsellors assist people to explore, pursue and attain their career goals.
Guidance services	The range of services offered by a particular guidance provider. These might be services designed for different client groups or the different ways that guidance might be delivered (e.g. face-to-face, online, telephone, etc.).
Interest inventory	An interest inventory is a career guidance tool that assesses an individual's interests in order to identify the employment or educational opportunities that are most appropriate for those interests. Source: GOAL Project Definition
Lifelong guidance	A range of activities that enables citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.
Lifelong learning	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons.
Low-educated adult	An adult without upper secondary education.
One step up	A priority of the 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning is to "Increase the possibilities for adults to go one step up and achieve at least one level higher qualification". Source: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52007DC0558
Outcome (quality)	Positive or negative longer-term socio-economic change or impact that occurs directly or indirectly from an intervention's input, activities and output.

Self-knowledge

Knowledge that an individual has about him/herself. Developing self-knowledge/awareness is considered an important activity in career counselling: many career interventions are designed to increase self-knowledge.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning/ validation of prior learning (VPL)

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes against a relevant standard. It consists of four distinct phases: (1) identification – through dialogue – of particular experiences made by an individual; (2) documentation – to make visible the individual experiences; (3) a formal assessment of these experiences; and (4) recognition leading to a certification, e.g. a partial or full qualification.

Vocational rehabilitation

A process which enables persons with functional, psychological, developmental, cognitive and emotional impairments or health disabilities to overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining or returning to employment or other useful occupation.
Source: http://www.vra-uk.org/

Abbreviations

CMS	Career management skills
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CZ	Czech Republic
deSOM	Agency of Integration in the Province of West Flanders
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EU	European Union
FL	Flanders
GOAL	Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IOE	Institute of Education, UCL, London
IS	Iceland
ISIO Centre	Information and guidance centre in adult education (regional, sub-regional; 17 in Slovenia)
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LT	Lithuania
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NL	The Netherlands
NUV	National Institute for Education, Czech Republic
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service

PI	Penitentiary Institution (Netherlands)
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
ROE	Return on Expectations
SI	Slovenia
SIAE	Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
VAEC	Vilnius Adult Education Centre
VDAB	Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding —Public Employment Service in Flanders
VET	Vocational education and training
VJLMTC	Vilnius Jeruzalem Labour Market Training Centre
VPL	Validation of Prior Learning

Executive Summary

This summary presents the main findings from the final cross-country evaluation of the Erasmus+ funded "Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners" (GOAL) project. The evaluation was carried out by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), London, working with local evaluation teams in the participating countries. A range of evaluation publications from this project is available at http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications.

About GOAL

GOAL aimed to develop or expand guidance and orientation interventions for low-educated adults in **six countries**: Belgium (Flanders); Czech Republic; Iceland; Lithuania; the Netherlands, and Slovenia. Running from February 2015 to January 2018, GOAL was coordinated by the Flemish Government's Department of Education and Training.

GOAL was a guidance pilot targeted at adults without upper secondary education (ISCED level 3). It tested the hypothesis that a guidance service centred on the needs of **low-educated adults** may help to **increase the participation of this cohort in education and training**. Each of the six partner countries piloted new guidance models at two or more programme sites to specific target groups within the low-educated adult population.

Though the specific focus of the GOAL intervention differed somewhat across countries, the pilot had **four primary implementation objectives**:

- developing and/or enhancing **partnerships and networks** with other organisations serving the target groups
- engaging in **outreach activities** designed to bring guidance services to those target groups
- defining the **competences** which counsellors require to enable them to address the specific needs of GOAL clients, and
- developing and effectively using **guidance tools** tailored to low-educated adults.

Through the combination of these four intervention strategies, countries pursued **a fifth, overarching objective**: to provide **high-quality guidance services** that optimised adults' education and/or employment outcomes.

About the GOAL evaluation

The GOAL **evaluation had three aims**. The first was **developmental**: to support programme development across the six countries by providing evidence during the life of the pilot on **programme processes**. The second was **summative**: to assess, as rigorously as possible, **the impacts of GOAL** on service users and other programme stakeholders. The third aim focused on **knowledge cumulation**: to provide evidence on programme processes and outcomes in order to support future policy and programme development in the field of adult education guidance.

Five research questions were asked:

1. To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention objectives, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?
2. What service user outcomes were achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?
3. What *programme-level* factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?
4. What *policy-level* factors were associated with the achievement of those outcomes?
5. To what degree were programme expectations met?

This was a mixed methods evaluation. Data were gathered via **a range of quantitative and qualitative methods** including: client monitoring data; a client satisfaction survey; a client follow-up survey; and qualitative interviews with clients, programme staff, programme partners and policy actors. The collection of client monitoring and satisfaction data was ongoing, qualitative data were collected in two waves in Spring 2016 and 2017, and the follow-up survey was conducted in Spring 2017.

Programme participants

The six GOAL programmes were targeted at specific sub-groups of low-educated adults who were seen as particularly in need of guidance in their respective countries:

- **Czech Republic:** early school leavers, immigrants, and adults with a criminal record
- **Flanders**: unqualified school leavers, migrants and unemployed job seekers
- **Iceland:** vulnerable adults facing multiple barriers to progress in education and employment
- **The Netherlands**: adults with low basic skills
- **Lithuania**: early school leavers and low-qualified adults
- **Slovenia**: low-educated adults, migrants and people aged over 50.

Within each country, diffrent intervention sites typically had different mixes of the national target groups, due to local demographics.

A total of **981 service users** was reached by the GOAL programmes across the six countries: **132** in the Czech Republic, **418** in Flanders, **95** in Iceland, **100** in Lithuania, **76** in the Netherlands, and **160** in Slovenia. This distribution in part reflects the different recruitment targets set by each country based on resources and other factors. Most countries achieved their recruitment targets, with the Czech Republic, Slovenia and (especially) Flanders exceeding their targets. The relatively small figure for the Netherlands masks a much larger number of clients (1,525) who used that country's Literacy Screener tool (see below).

Sixty percent of service users were early school leavers. There were **equal numbers of male and female** clients in the full GOAL sample, although not within countries. Across the six countries as a whole, more than seven in 10 service users (71%) were aged 35 years or under, with the most common age range being 19-25. Eighty-four percent of service users were citizens of their country of

residence. Just over seven in 10 (71%) were native speakers of their country of residence's primary language(s).

One in five GOAL clients (20%) had no qualifications beyond primary education, while three in five (59%) had lower secondary education as their highest qualification. Although the GOAL project was targeted at adults without upper secondary education, a significant percentage of clients (21%) had qualifications beyond lower secondary, with approximately half this group having some form of vocational qualification. **More than half (56%) of GOAL clients were unemployed, and another 21% were economically inactive.** One in three (34%) had some previous experience of adult guidance, e.g. through employment services. Clients cited a number of barriers that had prevented them from improving their qualifications or career prior to coming to GOAL, with the most common being the cost of education (28%), low motivation (25%), health problems (19%), family commitments (18%) and lack of confidence (18%). Overall, general self-efficacy was high and self-reported attitudes to learning were positive.

Generally speaking, GOAL clients could be categorised into **three broad groups reflecting their starting points and guidance needs**:

1. Some clients had relatively clear ideas of their educational goals and the steps they needed to take to achieve those goals, and **primarily needed information** from their counsellors.
2. Other clients were less clear and/or less motivated, and **needed more support and guidance** in order to define and pursue their educational goals.
3. Still other clients faced particularly significant personal barriers, including poor psychological and/or physical health, substance abuse problems and social isolation. These clients typically needed a **high level of support** in a range of areas.

Clients in these three groups exhibited different levels of "readiness" to enter education or training.

The GOAL guidance services

Although each GOAL programme sought to develop the guidance service model best suited to that country's potential clients and to the wider context in which the service would operate, there were a number of shared principles and practices. Generally speaking, the programmes aimed to provide services that:

- were **one-to-one** and **face-to-face**
- were **client-centred** rather than institution-centred
- were **custom-fit to the clients' needs** and their personal circumstance
- encouraged clients to be active participants in the guidance process, and supported them to **make their own decisions** regarding their next steps
- helped clients to understand and navigate the complex range of adult education options by providing **information and support**.

The exception to this overarching approach was the Netherlands, where the intervention was not based on the provision of in-depth, client-centred guidance by experienced counsellors, but on the

deployment of a "**Literacy Screener**" tool across a range of partner organisations, e.g. social services. The aim in the Netherlands was for those organisations to use the Literacy Screener to identify, from amongst their their own clients, individuals who may have literacy difficulties. Partner organisations would then provide "light touch" counselling focused on the client's possible literacy needs.

The Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Netherlands started GOAL with counselling models based on **one counselling session only** for each client. In Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia, GOAL allowed for **several guidance sessions** with no set limit on number or length, or rules on frequency. In the second half of the pilot, Lithuania amended its programme model so that GOAL in this country also offered multiple counselling sessions. This adaptation was in recognition of the **limitations of the one-session model and the greater benefits of a multi-session approach**.

Across the six countries, 98% of the first counselling sessions and 97% of all subsequent sessions were **individual face-to-face sessions**. Almost half of all clients (45%) had one planned session only; a further 34% had two planned sessions and completed them. For slightly more than half (55%) of GOAL clients there was no specific number of sessions planned. Fifty percent of first guidance sessions were **31-60 minutes in length** and **28% were 61 minutes or more.**

Most clients (75%) came to the guidance service to **explore educational opportunities**, followed, with a significant gap, by clients who came to **find links between personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities** (37%). A further 22% of service users wanted **assistance with job seeking**. (Clients could choose more than one objective.) The desire to **explore educational opportunities** showed an inverse U-shaped curve with age. Exploring educational opportunities was an objective for 67% of 19-25-year-olds, rising to 84% for 26-35-year-olds, and falling slightly to 76% for 36-55-year-olds.

A key strength of the GOAL approach was that the **counselling was tailored to the individual clients' needs, interests and personal context**, and sought to **empower clients** to make their own decisions and take their own steps. As such, GOAL guidance differed from that typically provided by agencies such as employment services, where the counselling tends to be less individualised, and more focused on institutional targets or objectives. Within GOAL, a central objective was for clients to enrol in education or training, but the primary focus was on helping clients take the steps that were most appropriate for their current situation. For many clients, this meant that GOAL focused on "stepping stone" (i.e. intermediate) outcomes that were a necessary part of a longer journey towards educational enrolment. Such stepping stones included noncognitive outcomes such as the building of self-esteem and motivation.

Findings: intervention strategies

Given the limited research and under-developed programme theory in the field of educational guidance for low-educated adults, it was important that the GOAL evaluation provide evidence on:

- the **impact of the different national contexts** on programme implementation and the achievement of programme objectives
- programme resources and processes, and their relationship to programme quality and outcomes.

Partnerships and Networks

For the GOAL programmes, partnerships proved to be a **rich source of benefits**, including:

- more successful **recruitment of clients** than could be achieved through direct routes
- **cross-organisational learning** about counselling tools and approaches that work well for the target groups
- expanded capability to provide holistic, cross-organisational and cross-sectoral services for clients.

Overall, the GOAL programmes were **very successful at strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks** with other service organisations such as social services, labour offices and educational institutions. The key contextual factor facilitating this achievement was the willingness of partner organisations to work with, learn about and learn from GOAL, despite some initial scepticism. Over the life of the GOAL pilot, there was a growing **recognition by partner organisations that the GOAL counselling service added value** to their own work with marginalised adults, particularly through the provision of specialised education-focused guidance of a sort that went beyond the expertise of the partner organisations themselves.

To cultivate and then capitalise on other organisations' willingness to work with GOAL, counselling staff devoted significant resources, in the form of time and effort, to informal networking. These efforts were successful: the improvement in partners' understanding of and respect for the added value of GOAL served as a stepping stone towards increased partner willingness to commit to working more, and more closely, with GOAL. Partnerships appeared to flourish best when they **built on previously existing relationships across organisations**.

Although the GOAL programmes succeeded in their aim to develop, enrich and extend partnerships and networks, they **were not successful in their objective of formally embedding these partnerships** within regional and national policy systems. Primarily due to barriers in the policy landscape, partnerships and networks remained dependent on individual counsellors' efforts to maintain them, and thus may not prove sustainable beyond the life of the pilot.

Outreach activities

Outreach activities focused on identifying and attracting low-educated adults to GOAL. Most countries **achieved their service user recruitment targets.** GOAL countries typically did this through **referrals from partner organisations: "reaching in"** to these organisations and gaining referrals from them was the most successful form of outreach. In some countries, direct outreach to clients also played an important role in recruitment. The most common route for client enrolment in GOAL was referral from employment/unemployment services (30%), followed by self-referral (15%) and referral from social welfare services (14%).

The **key contextual factor** influencing outreach and recruitment was the **willingness of partner organisations to work with, learn about and learn from GOAL**. Programme staff worked hard to develop and maintain relationships with the organisations that would be instrumental to referral pathways, and to show these organisations the added value of GOAL. They were highly successful in doing so; however, this was a **resource intensive** process.

Counsellor competences

Most GOAL staff (83%) were female. The average age of programme staff was 43 years old; ages ranged from 26 to 71. In Slovenia all staff members were over 40 years old whereas in Flanders none were. Staff were generally well educated: just under two-thirds (64%) had a Masters degree. The majority of counsellors (52%) had a degree in education; two-thirds (66%) of counsellors had a specific guidance/counselling qualification. GOAL staff's **average years of experience ranged from two years in Flanders to 12 years in Slovenia**. Aggregating all GOAL countries (except the Netherlands), the average years of experience in adult counselling was seven years. Surveyed in Spring 2016, most GOAL counsellors said they had engaged in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the past two years. Of the GOAL countries, only Iceland has structural professional standards for adult guidance professionals.

In each country, GOAL programme teams **defined the competences** needed to provide effective educational guidance to low-educated adults in general and the GOAL target groups in particular. While the exact definitions differed slightly across the six countries, all national definitions of counsellor competence emphasised the importance of**:**

- a rich (and regularly updated) **knowledge of the complex and fragmented adult education landscape**
- well-developed **guidance counselling skills** to address a range of client needs and challenges
- excellent **communication and interpersonal skills**, which were needed both when working with clients and when engaging in partnership and outreach efforts**.**

Clients were **very pleased** with the counselling they received, and said they would recommend the service to others. Most clients across all countries thought that the counsellors respected their choices, understood their needs, explained things clearly, were encouraging, and gave them helpful information. Counsellors appeared to be **highly committed** to their clients' well-being, and were keen to offer guidance which took account of service users' personal contexts, needs and challenges.

GOAL counsellors highlighted the positive impact of the pilot on improving their counselling competences. Key drivers of competence development were: having a **supportive workplace environment that encouraged informal learning on the job**, and having the opportunity to **learn from partner organisations** that serve the client group. However, a number of barriers to competence development were identified. Opportunities for external training were generally limited and there was lack of policy support for adult educational guidance as a profession. An absence of formal national professional standards and formal competence profiles may impact negatively on **professional identity**. Furthermore, the relatively high salience of GOAL clients' personal problems (particularly in some countries) meant that service users often needed counselling that went beyond the professional remit of GOAL's education-focused counsellors; this presented challenges with regard to professional boundaries. Finally, **in some countries, counselling was a "bolt-on" to other responsibilities such as teaching**: counsellors at some sites devoted only a few hours per week to GOAL.

Guidance tools

Overall, the programme teams were **successful in their aim of developing and using appropriate guidance tools**:

- existing tools were mapped and assessed
- relevant tools were adapted and applied in the field
- counsellors acquired the skills they needed to use the tools to the best effect.

Where teams did encounter challenges, these were primarily related to the complexities of working with the vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups targeted by GOAL.

Some **key messages** regarding the effective use of tools emerged:

1. Not every tool is right for every client, nor every counsellor.
2. Services can benefit from using a **data monitoring tool** that helps to structure guidance sessions and facilitates the collection of contextual and specific data. Such data help counsellors learn more about clients and address their needs with greater precision. A data monitoring tools also provides evidence for programme monitoring and evaluation purposes.
3. In the GOAL countries, there was not a strong need to develop counselling tools from scratch: it was feasible to **adapt existing counselling tools** to meet the needs of GOAL clients.
4. The process of selecting which existing tools were best suited to use or adaptation for the target group ideally begins with a **mapping exercise** conducted by experienced counselling staff.
5. **Other service organisations** working with the client group can potentially provide relevant tools and guidelines for their use.
6. **Social media** can be a powerful tool, enabling more frequent, informal contact between the counsellor and client, with the aim of keeping the client motivated and engaged.
7. Counselling tools include instruments such as **manuals that support the work of the counsellor**.

Providing high quality guidance services

The overarching aim of GOAL was to implement high quality guidance services for low-educated adults. The pilot was primarily exploratory – investigating **what level of service quality could be achieved under differing national conditions**, and what impacts GOAL might have on different groups of low-educated adults in the various national contexts. It proved possible to achieve a high degree of programme quality across a variety of national settings and contexts, and in the face of a range of obstacles. However, although high quality counselling was a necessary condition for successful outcomes, it was not a sufficient one: what happened during counselling was but one part of the equation determining client outcomes.

Clients themselves rated service quality very highly: **97% of clients said they were satisfied**. To a large degree, this was related to counsellor competences: clients felt that counsellors did a very good job of meeting their needs. GOAL appeared to be most effective **when programme resources were matched to client need**. Where the counselling model allowed for only one session per client, service users with higher levels of need were not able to receive as much counselling as was desired. This resource limitation placed clear **limits on counsellors' ability to provide "custom-fit" counselling**. Single-session counselling models may be more suited to an environment such as an educational institute, where potential pathways are more clearly defined and limited, clients have more pre-existing awareness of the range of available options, and counsellors have more in-depth knowledge about those options.

Findings: client outcomes

Information and support were key to positive client outcomes. Many clients were motivated to improve their qualifications but found it difficult or impossible to navigate the complexities of adult education without the support of GOAL. Counsellors appeared to do a very good job of providing information and support that was tailored to clients' interests, objectives and contexts. From the client perspective, **information made a significant difference to their understanding, ambitions and ability to progress into education**. Many clients had been held back, not by poor attitudes to learning, but by a lack of information and support to act on the opportunities available to them. Almost all clients agreed that their **next steps were clearer after counselling**.

Clients were supported to **develop their own education plans and goals**, rather than simply following the counsellor's lead. This client-centred model takes more time but appeared to help clients improve their education-related motivation and self-belief. For many clients, the process of achieving their goal was one that required overcoming a range of obstacles and challenges, and taking a number of intermediary steps (e.g. gaining information about available opportunities, increasing motivation and self belief, and identifying barriers to enrolment and persistence on a course). In qualitative interviews, clients spoke positively about the **impacts of counselling on their personal motivation**. Clients across countries reported that the counselling helped them to **improve their self-image and educational motivation**.

Surveyed 2-4 months after leaving GOAL, 38% of the 149 follow-up survey respondents reported that they had fully achieved their educational goals and an additional 50% said they had made some progress towards those goals. Exit data from the GOAL monitoring instrument for 438 clients showed that **66% of these clients said that they had fully taken their planned steps** by the end of counselling, and an additional **23% said they had taken at least some steps**. **Forty-eight percent had entered education/training, 7% had entered employment and 4% had improved their employment**. Amongst follow-up survey respondents who entered GOAL to pursue educational (rather than employment-focused) objectives, **71% had enrolled on a course** by the time of their exit from GOAL and, of this group, 77% had enrolled on a course leading to a qualification. The availability of free or heavily subsidised courses played a central role in educational enrolments: in Slovenia, where there is funding for some further education courses, 61% of GOAL clients enrolled on a course, and more would have done so if sufficient funding had been available. In Flanders, where adult education funding is more widely available, a sub-sample of service users was tracked: 74% of these clients had enrolled on a course by the end of the evaluation's data collection period.

Implications for programme and policy development

The key programme and policy messages emerging from this evaluation can be grouped into two broad categories: 1) the costs and benefits of partnerships and outreach, and 2) the potential benefits and limits of the GOAL approach to guidance.

The costs and benefits of partnerships and outreach

Successful partnerships increase the likelihood that the policy and programme environment addresses the "whole client" rather than just individual, sector-specific aspects of the client's life. Future programmes should be aware of the **clear benefits of partnerships, but also the costs in terms of programme resources**. Successful outreach involves the investment of considerable staff time to build relationships of trust between organisations and between the guidance service and potential clients. The GOAL pilot suggests that the efforts and costs associated with outreach are likely to be higher the more vulnerable or hard-to-reach the potential client is. Future programmes may need to focus on target groups which are characterised by more active demand for the service and which present fewer outreach challenges. In other words, it may be more financially viable and more sensible for these programmes to target "low hanging fruit" than to use their finite resources to target more marginalised adults, even if the latter are the most in need.

In the long run, the strength and sustainability of partnerships and outreach is dependent upon financial and other policy mechanisms being in place to support these efforts. The GOAL project represented **joined-up policy in action** – that is, there was an explicit aim to develop, contribute to and benefit from partnerships that crossed policy boundaries and moved beyond the traditional "policy silo" approach to public services. Programmes would benefit from greater policy support aimed at reducing structual barriers to cross-sectoral partnerships. Policy makers would benefit from a clearer understanding of **how educational guidance for low-educated adults fits in with existing (and more high profile) policy objectives** and commitments, (e.g. **reducing early school leaving or increasing participation in lifelong learning**).

The potential benefits and limits of the GOAL approach to guidance

Guidance programmes for low-educated adults should base their expectations and approach on client need and readiness. Where programmes focus on more vulnerable clients, it is likely to prove difficult to provide evidence of large average gains in clients' education and/or employment outcomes. It is possible for even very vulnerable service users to make a great deal of progress, but these clients are unlikely to achieve measurable educational or employment outcomes without addressing a range of personal and psychological issues first. The population of low-educated adults is highly heterogeneous, however, and for many adults in this cohort, progress into education is possible with only a small number of high quality guidance sessions. Given the likely need for future programmes modelled on GOAL to justify their costs to funders and policy makers, such programmes may wish to target their services (at least initially) at low-educated adults who have relatively high levels of "readiness" to enter education or training.

In general, the key problem for most GOAL clients was not a lack of desire to improve their qualifications, but a lack of knowledge about educational opportunities. This suggests that there is a substantial level of **untapped desire or willingness amongst the low-educated population to pursue further education**. Guidance targeted at low-educated adults could thus play an important role in helping Member States achieve their education targets. However, in the absence of sufficient policy commitment to providing educational guidance for low-educated adults, it will be difficult or even impossible to develop and maintain high quality, sustainable guidance programmes, and in the absence of **adequate funding for adult education courses**, few clients will be able to progress into and through education, no matter how high the quality of the guidance they receive. This latter point suggests that adult education guidance programmes may not be a sensible investment for governments in the absence of free or subsidised courses that clients can progress into as a result of guidance. However, in the appropriate policy environment, guidance of the type piloted in GOAL **appears to produce significant results, and can play an important role in the pursuit of national education objectives**.

1 Introduction

The "Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners" Project (GOAL) was a collaboration between six partner countries: Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Slovenia[1]. Project GOAL sought to develop existing models of guidance and orientation for adults in the six countries in order that these services could reach **low-educated adults** and address their needs. GOAL was a three-year project, running from February 2015 to January 2018, and was coordinated by the Flemish Government's Department of Education and Training. Project GOAL was evaluated by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), London, in partnership with national evaluation teams in each of the GOAL countries.

This final report presents cross country findings from the GOAL evaluation. These findings cover the full evaluation period, which consisted of two waves. A Wave 1-only (i.e. interim) report is available on the GOAL project website: http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications. The evaluation draws on quantitative data on GOAL service users collected between the launch of the programme in February 2015 and April 2017; qualitative data collected from programme stakeholders and service users in Spring 2016 and 2017, and contextual data gathered during needs and strengths analyses undertaken in 2015 in all six countries.

1.1 The GOAL project

Funded under ERASMUS+, Project GOAL addressed the European Commission's priority theme of reducing the number of low-educated adults through increasing participation rates in adult education. As well as contributing to the European Agenda for Lifelong Learning (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/adult-learning/adult_en.htm), GOAL contributed to three priority areas of the 2008 "Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies", that is, to facilitate access by all citizens to guidance services, to develop the quality assurance or guidance processes, and to encourage coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

Project GOAL was targeted at low-educated adults, that is, at adults without upper secondary education (ISCED level 3[2]). The context for GOAL is that adult education provision in the six countries is fragmented and there is a lack of coordination between the different providers and stakeholders that are involved with low-educated adults. Moreover, although the partner countries have some forms of guidance for adult learners, or have specific policy strategies that focus on educational guidance and orientation, the existing services, or the structures on which these services rely, do not reach the adults most in need of education as well as they could or in sufficient numbers.

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[1] Two members of the Turkish Directorate of Lifelong Learning participated in GOAL as observers, with the aim of learning from the project and identifying opportunities to promote its lessons in Turkish guidance policies.
[2] For more on UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) see: http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-2011-en.pdf

The hypothesis underpinning GOAL was that an independent one-stop guidance service that puts the specific needs of low-educated adults at its centre could help to increase the participation of this target group in adult education. To this end, each of the six countries piloted new guidance models, in (at least) two locations within each country, to specific target groups within the low-educated adult population. **Five intervention strategies** were implemented by the GOAL partners, although not all strategies were implemented in all countries:

1. **Networks and partnerships** with relevant organisations were established or improved.
2. **Tools** were developed to facilitate the delivery of guidance specifically to low-educated adults.
3. The **competences** which counsellors require to enable them to address the specific needs of low-educated adults were defined.
4. **Outreach activities** designed to bring guidance services to specific target groups within the low-educated population were developed.
5. Each country sought to provide **high-quality guidance services** with the aim of optimising individuals' learning and/or employment outcomes.

The aims of the GOAL project were that, through developing, piloting and evaluating these interventions:

1. The **processes** to implement effective guidance services and supporting networks that improve service user outcomes would be mapped.
2. The **criteria, success factors and conditions** on implementation (processes) that contribute to outcomes of guidance users would be identified
3. Potential generalisable **case studies** would be made available to be analysed by policymakers to understand and analyse challenges and success factors in establishing "joined-up" programmes in complex policy fields.
4. The **policy processes** that play a role in influencing programmes success would be identified and described.

1.2   The GOAL evaluation

The GOAL **evaluation had three primary aims**. The first aim was **developmental**: to support programme development across the six countries by providing ongoing evidence of programme processes and outcomes. The second was **summative**: to assess, as rigorously as possible, the effects of GOAL on service users and other programme stakeholders. The third aim focused on **knowledge cumulation**: to provide evidence that will enrich and enhance the field of adult education guidance, and evaluation science in this field.

The evaluation focused on **processes and outcomes**, thereby enabling the identification of success factors across different programme contexts. This evidence can potentially be used to develop a structural support basis amongst decision makers and relevant stakeholders for scaling up the pilot learning guidance and orientation models in partner or other countries.

Five research questions underpinned the GOAL evaluation:

6. To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?
7. What service user outcomes were achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?
8. What programme-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?
9. What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?
10. What was the Return on Expectations? That is, to what degree were programme expectations met?

The evaluation unfolded in a series of **stages**:

1. Pre-implementation stage (February 2015 – October 2015): activities centred on needs and strengths analyses in each of the six countries; on reporting the results of these analyses, and generating data collection tools.
2. Ongoing (cross-wave) data collection (November 2015 – April 2017)
   a. Client satisfaction survey
   b. Monitoring data
3. Wave 1 data collection (with national reporting completed in October 2016)
4. Wave 2 data collection (with national reporting completed in October 2017), including a longitudinal follow-up survey in each country
5. Data analysis and final reporting.

Chapter 3 of this report outlines the evaluation methodology in greater detail.

IOE carried out this evaluation with the assistance of local evaluators who gathered, analysed and reported on national-level data. GOAL's national programme coordinators were responsible for hiring these local evaluation teams and oversaw their day-to-day work. IOE was responsible for developing the evaluation methodology, the evaluation instruments, and the data and reporting templates, as well as all cross-country analysis and reporting.

1.3   Project GOAL in the six countries

Contexts

The six GOAL programmes had a range of starting points. At one end of the scale, in the **Czech Republic** there was no career guidance for low-educated adults and the pilot projects there were, in effect, **starting from scratch**, by establishing two regional centres where the GOAL service could be offered. By contrast, in **the Netherlands**, although there is no existing guidance for adults with low basic skills, the GOAL pilots involved taking a **tried and tested basic skills screening tool** to new locations and target groups.

In **Flanders**, bespoke counselling services are available for unemployed young people and those in employment: these services focus on jobs and careers, and not explicity on educational guidance. Previous initiatives have demonstrated that there was a need in Flanders for **a specialised service focusing on educational guidance** to direct adults towards an educational programme that fits their interests and needs. The GOAL project in Flanders built on the model developed by these earlier initiatives.

In **Iceland**, although educational and vocational guidance for adults is generally well-developed and professionally staffed, a lack of knowledge about low-educated adults means that current services are not adequately **meeting the needs of more vulnerable adults**, particularly with regard to addressing the barriers they face when engaging and participating in adult education. In **Lithuania**, **adult educational guidance services are fragmented**: services are not equally distributed throughout Lithuania; adults are not always aware of the availability of such services in their neighbourhood; services are not always targeted to low-educated adults, and guidance staff may lack knowledge of and tools for this group.

In **Slovenia**, adults can access counselling services either at one of 14 regional guidance centres, which provide services for adults enrolled in adult education, or at school centres, where counselling services are available to adults both before and during the learning course. The main weakness in the current system is that **counselling activities in the regional guidance centres and the school centres are not linked**.

The Wave 1 evaluation report from the Netherlands identified **three broad challenges** governments face in providing educational and/or career guidance services to adults with low levels of education. While the target groups differ across the six GOAL countries, these challenges are relevant to all:

1. **Increasing the number of people reached**; in particular, the challenge of helping this target group to recognise that guidance tailored to their situation can be beneficial to them. Given that the demand for guidance services from the target group is generally low, meeting this challenge may involve a shift from a demand-driven to a need-driven service.
2. **Increasing the number of organisations involved** in delivering guidance services.
3. Making guidance services for adults with low education or low skills **effective at each stage of the journey from advice to action to impact**.

Needs and Strengths Analysis

In the project's pre-evaluation stage, a GOAL Needs Analysis Report (available at: http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications) was produced by the UCL Institute of Education (IOE). The aim of this Needs Analysis was to learn about the adult guidance background and current (2015) situation in each of the six countries. This knowledge was used in the evaluation to investigate how existing conditions/resources in the pre-programme environments influenced the relationships among programme operations and outcomes, and to study change and impact over the life of GOAL. From the six nations' perspectives, the Needs Analysis served as a starting point for programme development.

The Needs Analysis consisted of three components: first, IOE conducted an English-language **review of international literature** on the policy, practice and research contexts for GOAL, with emerging findings used to generate two templates for local evaluators working in each of the six partner countries; this literature is summarised in Chapter 2 of this cross-country report. Second, local evaluators populated one template with findings from **reviews of national-language evidence**; third, the second template was used by local evaluators to capture findings from **local SWOT analyses** of guidance and orientation provision for adult in the intervention locations.

This key purpose of the Needs Analysis Report was to serve as a reference document for the GOAL partners through which they could see the pre-intervention situation in the other countries and reflect on the situation in their own. Although each country used the same broad intervention strategies with the same broad target group (low-educated adults), the specific target groups varied, each intervention was unique, and each country had a different starting point. The Needs Analysis Report provided partners with the opportunity to view these complexities through the lens of common themes.

Work on the international and national literature reviews and the SWOT analyses took place between March and September 2015. All findings were synthesised by IOE prior to the rollout of the pilot experimentations in October 2015.

GOAL programme

The six GOAL programmes had a common aim: to increase the participation of low-educated adults in education and training, by offering educational and/or vocational guidance to this target group. It is hoped that lessons learned from the design, set-up and implementation of the GOAL projects will inform, at both the programme and policy levels, a wider roll-out of similar initiatives.

Within this broad aim, each country had its own specific objectives, summarised in Table 1.1.

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Table 1.1. GOAL *Intervention objectives by country*

Czech Republic	To promote the **availability** of and increase the **demand** for further education and to develop schools as centres of lifelong learning.
Flanders	To provide policymakers with **evidence of the potential value** of educational guidance and its complementarity with more established services. The GOAL project in Flanders implemented different aspects of educational guidance services in different contexts (urban and rural), with different types of target groups and within different collaboration structures.
Iceland	To bring together organisations that are involved with the target group, and through improved cooperation and information-sharing, **increase knowledge of low-educated adults** and how their situation can be addressed through guidance.
Lithuania	To improve the **participation rates** of low-qualified people in adult education; to identify ways of **reaching** low-qualified or low-educated people and **motivate** them to get involved in the guidance process; to find the most suitable ways and tools to provide counselling to this group; and to establish and/or strengthen the partnerships between the different stakeholders and service providers in this area.
Netherlands	The project aims stemmed from the belief that more people with low literacy could be reached and consequently engage in adult learning when there is more attention given to identifying low literacy in organisations whose primary objective is non-literacy related. GOAL in the Netherlands therefore aimed to **get more organisations trained at and successfully using a Literacy Screener tool**, and to develop a regional road map directing adults with low basic skills to education and career-service providers.
Slovenia	The programme teams worked in two local environments, in the hope that by studying the outreach activity of adult guidance centres they could test which **approach was suitable for schools**. Establishing new regional cooperation and networks was another key objective of the Slovenian workplan.

Activities

Activities in the GOAL project addressed five major themes – these are the five intervention strategies outlined in Section 1.1 above. Not all countries carried out activities for each of the five intervention strategies. Table 1.2. below shows which countries focused on which intervention strategies.

Table 1.2. *Intervention Strategy, by country*

Intervention strategy	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
1 Partnerships	x	√	√	√	√	√
2 Tools	√	√	√	√	√	√
3 Competences	√	√	√	x	x	√
4 Outreach	√	√	√	x	√	√
5 Quality	√	√	√	√	√	√

In the **Czech Republic,** GOAL activities centred on establishing careers guidance centres. In **Flanders**, activities related to all five interventions strategies were built into two established educational guidance projects. In **Iceland**, activities on the five intervention strategies focused on what could be learned and achieved through partnership and cooperation with other interested organisations. The focus in **Lithuania** was on adding GOAL services to those offered by existing centres of adult education and VET institutions**.** Activities in **Slovenia** were also focused on existing educational institutions (both adult and school) and on strengthening cooperation between the two.

The pilot in the Netherlands can be characterised as the implementation of a quick screening tool (known as the Taalmeter or "Literacy Screener") aimed at assessing the client's literacy skills, followed (in cases where the screening tool indicates that the client may have low literacy) by referral to an appropriate adult literacy course. **GOAL in the Netherlands was thus markedly different from the other five countries**. In the Netherlands, the programme focused not on holistic educational guidance provided by experienced counsellors but on the deployment of a single tool (the **Literacy Screener**) across a range of partner organisations, so that those organisations could identify, from amongst their their own clients, individuals who may have literacy difficults. These organisations would then provide counselling focused on the client's potential literacy needs. GOAL in the Netherlands was thus focused on a particular issue and a particular set of objectives – identification of poor literacy and enrolment in a literacy course. GOAL in the Netherlands was also more "light touch": instead of emphasising in-depth counselling that focused on the "whole client", the focus was on quickly but sensitively identifying literacy problems, so that these problems could then be addressed. And rather than have clients come into a dedicated counselling service, GOAL in the Netherlands involved getting the Literacy Screener out into the field, i.e. into (and used by) partner organisations serving potentially disadvantaged adults. A key principle underpinning the Netherlands approach is that literacy difficulties can have negative impacts on other aspects of life (e.g. employability) and thus hamper the success of a broad range of interventions. If other service organisations can identify their clients' literacy problems, they can help those clients find courses to address those problems. This in turn improves the potential impacts of other services the client receives. (For more details on the Literacy Screener, see Section 9.3 of this report and/or the Netherlands' national report.)

Sites

In the majority of the six GOAL countries, programmes were implemented in **two geographic locations:** this was the case in the Czech Republic, Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia (see Table 1.3.). In Lithuania, there were two intervention sites, but both were located in the capital, Vilnius. In the Netherlands, the original proposal was to work with eight different organisations clustered in two regional locations, Drenthe and Twente. To offset recruitment problems encountered in the project set-up stage, this reach was widened to include three additional regions, Friesland, Flevoland and Gelderland: in the end, the Dutch team worked with four intervention sites.

Table 1.3. GOAL *Intervention Sites, Wave 1*

Country	Sites	
Czech Republic	Center for Lifelong Learning and Recognition, Olomouc	Higher College of Business Studies, Social Work and Healthcare, Business Academy, Secondary Pedagogical School and Secondary Healthcare School, Most
Flanders	De Stap, Word Wijs!, City of Ghent	De Leerwinkel, West-Flanders
Iceland	Mímir Lifelong Learning Centre	MSS Lifelong Learning Centre
Lithuania	Vilnius Adult Education Centre (VAEC)	Public Institution Vilnius Jeruzalem Labour Market Training Centre (VJLMTC)
Netherlands	Penitentiary Institution (PI) Lelystad (Flevoland)	Municipality of Emmen (Drenthe)
	Penitentiary Institution (PI) Achterhoek (Gelderland)	Aksept, an organisation specialising in services relating to labour market participation and health care (Twente)
Slovenia	ISIO Guidance Centre and Biotechnical School Centre, Llubljana	ISIO Guidance Centre and School Centre, Velenje

The two **Flemish** sites were chosen for the contrasts they offer between urban (Ghent) and rural (West Flanders) services. In **Iceland,** Mímir and MSS are similar lifelong guidance centres in the network of the Education and Training Services Centre; Mímir is located in Reykjavik, MSS in a more rural area in the Southern peninsula where the challenges in relation to unemployment and social welfare are greater. The two sites in Vilnius, **Lithuania** are both adult educational institutions, but differ in the learners they attract: there is some overlap, but broadly speaking, VAEC focuses on second chance education and VJLMTC on vocational training. The four organisations in the **Netherlands'** sample included two prisons, a private company and a municipal authority. In the **Czech Republic**, there were contrasts in the economic and social profiles of the two sites. In **Slovenia**, one site was located in the capital city, Llubljana, the other in the east of the country, in the town of Velenje.

Target groups

The six national GOAL programmes had a common target group: low-educated adults, that is, adults without upper secondary education. Within this broad target group, some countries focused on specific sub-groups, which were identified as particularly in need of guidance in their respective countries.

In **Lithuania** there was a different focus in each of the two sites because of the different client groups each site serves: early school leavers and low skilled/qualified adults. This was also the case in **Slovenia**, where the sites in one location worked with low-educated adults whereas the other location sought to recruit migrants and people aged over 50. In **Flanders**, services in the City of Ghent are specifically targeted at unqualified school leavers between 18 and 25 years old, and the second site has a far broader intake of clients, although in practice the latter site has attracted mainly migrants and unemployed job seekers. A specific goal of the Flemish project was to map how the approaches for the target group of 18-25-year-old guidance seekers did or did not differ from approaches aimed a broad target group of adults of all ages. GOAL in the **Netherlands** focused explicitly on adults with low basic skills. In the **Czech Repbulic** the emphasis was on adults with labour market problems. In **Iceland** the focus was on particularly vulnerable adults, who tend to face multiple barriers to progress in education and employment.

1.4   About this report

This is the final cross-country evaluation report for the GOAL project. **This is the full report; a summary report can be found on the GOAL project website**: http://www.projectgoal.eu/. That website contains a range of evaluation reports, including an interim cross-country report, published in 2016, and national evaluation reports.

The current report is comprised of 12 chapters including this Introduction. This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of research and policy literature covering key concepts in the field of adult education and guidance.

- Chapter 3 describes the methodological design of this evaluation.

Chapters 4-5 provide an overview of the GOAL programme:

- Chapter 4 provides an overview of the GOAL programme participants and stakeholders.

- Chapter 5 describes the GOAL services in the six partner countries.

Chapters 6-10 focus on the implementation, development and improvement of programme processes, covering the programme intervention strategies:

- Chapter 6 discusses GOAL partnerships and networks.

- Chapter 7 looks at outreach strategies.

- Chapter 8 discusses counsellor competences.

- Chapter 9 focuses on guidance tools used in the provision of GOAL services.

- Chapter 10 discusses the quality of the GOAL service.

Chapter 11 then provides an overview of programme outcomes. Chapter 12 concludes this report. This chapter answers the five overarching evaluation questions, and addresses the potential implications of this project for future programmes and policy development.

As noted above, each participating GOAL country produced a stand-alone national evaluation report; these are available on the GOAL website. In this cross-country evaluation report, we focus primarily on key cross-country findings and messages. However, as national contexts, resources, target groups and approaches differed within the GOAL pilot, we also highlight a number of country-specific findings and messages, in the hope that these will be useful for future policy and programme developers. For more national-level detail, however, please see the national reports.

It should be noted that the unique nature of the GOAL intervention in the Netherlands presented challenges for the cross-country evaluation, and for the reporting of this evaluation. In five of the six countries the GOAL programme model followed the same general template: context-and client-centred guidance was provided to clients by professional counsellors. In the Netherlands, the programme model was markedly different, as will be discussed in the following chapters. In the current report, there are a number of instances in which messages from or about the other five countries are not relevant to the Netherlands, and vice versa. As much as possible, this is made clear in our reporting.

2 Conceptual and empirical background: literature review

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of the key themes in research and policy literature of relevance to programme developers and evaluators in the field of adult education and guidance. It provides brief overviews of:

- What is meant by "guidance", including employment and career guidance, and educational guidance (section 2.1).
- The role guidance in plays the knowledge economy, including critical perspectives on this (section 2.2).

The second part of the chapter gives an overview of programme-focused literature on:

- Programme participants and stakeholders (section 2.3)
- Service delivery (section 2.4), and
- Programme outcomes (section 2.5).

A fuller review of the literature on guidance within adult education is included in the GOAL project's Needs Analysis Report (http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications). Our purpose in this summary chapter is to foreground the conceptual background to both the GOAL project and its evaluation, and highlight some themes that will occur throughout this report.

2.1 Defining lifelong guidance

In order that the development of quality guidance services might be achieved across Europe, in 2008, the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. This resolution **defined lifelong guidance** as:

> *a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills* (p. 2).

This definition marked an acknowledgement which had grown at the European level, and in individual Member States since 2000, that Information, Guidance and Counselling is a key component of lifelong learning policies and a priority area for action (Sultana, 2003). Indeed, the 2008 resolution laid down four policy priority areas (p. 4):

1. encouraging the lifelong acquisition of career management skills;

2. easing access for all citizens to guidance services;

3. developing quality assurance in guidance provision;

4. encouraging coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

It is important to remember that while definitions of what guidance is have a professional usefulness – for example in determining which services qualify for a particular funding silo and which lie outside – definitions may not be meaningful to service users (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2007: pp. 11-12). One consequence of this is that many adults "stumble across" provision (p. 19) rather than making an informed choice about where they are going to go for guidance.

This said, for most people there are meaningful distinctions to be made between services that consist primarily of information-giving, and services which offer guidance and orientation (whether towards education, training or employment), and services which offer counselling, in terms of personal or motivational coaching.

Looking across Europe as a whole, the culture of **adult guidance is underdeveloped**, especially among adults who are traditionally less likely to engage in work-related and other forms of learning, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills. There is a perception – which to some extent is still borne out by practice – that guidance is almost exclusively a careers-focused service offered in schools at or near the point where students are completing their compulsory education.

Guidance focused on employment and careers

The Department of Education in Northern Ireland, when launching a consultation in 2007 on a new Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance strategy that would take a broader approach and encompass the development of "career management skills" (CMS), defined **careers advice and guidance** as "the provision of impartial, learner/client centred, advice and guidance, to assist people make career decisions and choices, which are informed and well thought through. It enables people to apply their knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences to manage their career and make informed decisions about their education, training or employment" (Department of Employment and Learning, 2007: p.11).

Career guidance can play a number of roles for adults who are not in work. It can help them to build confidence, to examine their skills, to gain an assessment of the labour market and to understand processes of transitions. It can also help adults to identify and weigh up the value of further postponing labour market re-entry in favour of further education and training (Hooley, 2014). As pointed out by the OECD in 2003, the mission of career guidance has widened as the importance of broader career management skills to social mobility has been recognised and understood. This is in step with a policy drive towards **active unemployment**, where there are expectations on welfare recipients to be active in job searching in exchange for benefits.

Integrating CMS into career guidance presents challenges outside of compulsory education, as services have traditionally focused on immediate outcomes rather than personal development (partly due to funding imperatives). The 2003 OECD report documents changes to career guidance which in many countries have seen a reduced emphasis on psychological testing in favour of an approach where practitioners are viewed as facilitators of individual choice and development.

Going beyond the individual, career guidance services also support economic efficiency, make the labour market operate more effectively by reducing drop-outs from education and training, adjust mismatches in supply and demand, and reduce market failure by helping ensure that individuals maximise their talents (Hughes, 2013).

However, the provision of career guidance for adults is underdeveloped – as those **services that exist are primarily aimed at the unemployed**, a challenge is to widen access to career services, both in terms of access for more target groups and access throughout the life course. Public employment services tend to focus on short-term employment options rather than longer-term careers (OECD, 2003) – meaning there are service gaps for employed people who want **to improve or change their career direction**. In 2003 the OECD concluded that the "creation of career services capable of serving all adults remains a daunting task. Web-based services may help with supply, but these cannot fully substitute for tailored help to individuals" (p. 40).

In the context of Project GOAL study should be remembered that "career guidance can help improve the efficiency of education systems, as well as labour markets. In principle, it can help to increase access to learning, and to improve course completion rates. It can assess learning needs and interests, and put people in contact with learning providers so that they enrol in appropriate programmes" (OECD, 2003, p. 45). Importantly, liaison and communication between those working in guidance and in learning "can help to articulate better the scale and nature of demand for learning, as well as its supply, and help improve the match between the two. It can increase the transparency of learning systems, and their responsiveness to consumer demand. In these ways, it can help not only to increase participation, but also reduce dropout rates" (p. 45). Thus increase in career guidance for adults and the range and flexibility of learning opportunities for adults are linked.

Lastly, Hawthorn and Alloway point out that **the term "career guidance" can be off-putting when working with disadvantaged adults**, as "career" sounds more high level than "job", and guidance sounds very in-depth. The word "career" can be alienating to people in the target groups addressed by GOAL – it is a word associated with middle-class professionals. Young people, low-skilled workers, and those who are accustomed to casual employment, want to find "jobs" (Beddie et al., 2005: pp. 11-16). The term needs explanation to these target groups, with examples of what other terms might be included under the umbrella of "career". A study from Australia (Beddie et al., 2005) argues that "career development" is a more useful term than "career counselling", as it is more representative of the range of services that can be included.

Guidance focused on education

According to the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN)[3], which was established by the European Commission in 2007 to promote lifelong guidance, **guidance within adult education typically takes three forms** (Hooley, 2014):

- **Pre-entry guidance** which supports adults to consider whether to participate in adult learning and what programmes might be right for them.

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[3] See http://www.elgpn.eu/about-us for further details.

- **Guidance as an integral part of adult education programmes**. Some adult education programmes are strongly focused on career planning or on the development of employability and career management skills: in these cases lifelong guidance is often built into the core of the programme.
- **Exit guidance** which supports graduates of adult education programmes to consider how they can use what they have learnt to support their progress in further learning and work.

Of particular interest to the GOAL project was the role that high-quality guidance services for adults might play in raising participation rates in adult learning. However, education guidance for adults is underdeveloped when compared to employment guidance, and there has been limited research in the area of adult education guidance, compared to the role of guidance within secondary schools, VET or higher education. Where guidance is linked to adult education institutions it can be hard for these organisations to provide advice that is comprehensive and impartial. There are financial challenges associated with offering guidance through adult education institutions, and efforts in OECD countries to achieve this through private markets have largely been unsuccessful.

2.2 The role of guidance in the knowledge economy

In education, as explained above, guidance can assist in broadening access to lifelong learning and can encourage adults to participate and continue in education. In employment, the European Commission views guidance as a means of securing occupational mobility and flexibility, of increasing labour force participation, and of promoting active ageing. Guidance contributes to policy goals in lifelong learning, in social inclusion, in labour market efficiency and in economic development. Lifelong guidance is concerned with more than just job-matching – it is about developing individuals.

Guidance is an important plank in **overcoming the barriers to participation in adult learning**. A 2015 report on the effectiveness of adult learning policies in Europe (European Union, 2015) emphasised the importance of guidance and support to two of the six key factors for significantly increasing adult participation in learning and the positive benefits that flow from it – "increasing learners' disposition towards learning" and "improving equity of access to learning for all". Outlining national strategies and policy actions for adult learning, the report described access points (one-stop shops) set up in a number of Member States that integrate various learning services, such as the validation of non-formal and informal learning and career guidance, and offer to provide tailored learning programmes to individual learners to address skills gaps and employability. At this date, almost half of Member States had policy actions in progress or planned for improving guidance to adults (p. 44). The report emphasises in particular the relative effectiveness of guidance and counselling services over financial incentives for attracting specific target groups (including the low skilled, the unemployed and migrants) to adult learning (p. 63).

However, an OECD literature review on policy interventions for adults with low literacy and numeracy skills (Windisch, 2015) draws attention to the fact that few European countries have guidance services specifically targeted at low-skilled adults:

in most European countries, the provision of publicly subsidised guidance services for adults outside public employment services (which are often restricted to unemployed jobseekers) is limited (Eurydice data collection cited in European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015a). Only a few countries have a structural guidance service that is specifically geared towards adults with low literacy and numeracy skills, such as Austria's central level institution that delivers guidance services related to basic skills and literacy (Zentrale Beratungsstelle für Basisbildung und Alphabetisierung) and Germany's telephone guidance service for those facing literacy problems (Windisch, 2015, pp. 49-50).

Critical perspectives

Traditionally, career guidance was used to guide students to their next destination after compulsory schooling, with guidance mostly taking the form of one-to-one interviews at the point of leaving school. As the OECD summarised in a 2004 report, *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*, at that time services were "available largely to limited numbers of groups, at fixed points in life, and [...] focused upon immediate decisions. The future challenges [were]: to make a shift so that services focus upon developing career-management skills, as well as upon information provision and immediate decision-making; and to make services universally accessible throughout the lifespan: in ways, in locations and at times that reflect more diverse client needs" (p. 7).

There has been a shift from talking about lifelong employment to lifelong employability. Critics such as Grubb and Lazerson (writing in 2004, as summarised in Sultana, 2008) argue that much of this discourse about the career management competences which are needed in the knowledge economy is irrelevant to people working in knowledge-poor sectors, where jobs have been untouched by these changes.

Another critical perspective is one that takes issue with the central focus on the individual citizen having to take responsibility for being entrepreneurial and innovative enough to negotiate this changed world – with guidance being something palliative that helps individuals cope, or worse, colludes with the idea that the blame for poor life chances rests with the individual and not the economy (Sultana, 2008). Alternatively, Sultana argues, the State has a duty to provide support, and guidance is a public and private good.

2.3   Programme participants and stakeholders

Service users: low-educated adults

The GOAL project targeted low-educated adults, broadly defined as adults who have not completed upper secondary education. In trying to understand more about this group, some countries have been aided by participation in the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which assessed the proficiency of adults from age 16 onwards in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. In addition, the survey collected a range of information on the reading-related activities of respondents, the use of information and communication technologies at work and in everyday life, and on a range of generic skills. In the first

round of PIAAC, 166, 000 adults aged 16-65 were surveyed in 24 countries and sub-national regions. The first results were published by OECD in 2013. Three of the six GOAL countries participated in PIAAC in 2012: the Czech Republic, Flanders, and the Netherlands. Slovenia and Lithuania participated in the second round of the survey, from 2013 to 2016.

Analysis of PIAAC data has begun to provide rich information on adults with low literacy and numeracy proficiency. Grotlüschen, A. et al. (2016) highlight, in particular, that "adults with low proficiency are considerably less likely than their more proficient peers to participate in formal or non-formal adult education or training programmes, which is mostly due to the socio-demographic and employment characteristics of this population. However, the lower participation rates among the low proficient adults does not appear to be a consequence of their lack of motivation as much as of **the presence of various obstacles to participation**, such as lack of time and the cost of training" (p. 4).

Results for the Czech Republic showed **lower than OECD average results for middle-aged adults**, and significant differences in results between those with high and low socio-economic status: in the Czech Republic, literacy is – more than in the other countries – influenced by **parental educational attainment**. Adults with less education had lower skills, but those with higher numeracy and literacy and with better skills at problem solving in technology-rich environments were more likely to participate in further education and to do so on a larger scale, even when the influence of age, education, and gender was taken into account. A significant challenge for the further education system in the Czech Republic is the implementation of appropriate forms of education and motivational instruments for the people with lower education and those without employment. The benefits of further education are, according to the PIAAC survey, greatest for these groups, both from the perspective of increasing their competences and from the perspective of their employment and success on the job market.

In Flanders, as in most countries participating in PIAAC, relatively large minorities of the adult population have poor literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills. The level of economic inactivity amongst adults with low proficiency is considerably above the OECD average. Foreign-language immigrants in Flanders have much lower levels of proficiency in the Dutch language than native-born adults whose first language is Dutch. Their average proficiency is also among the lowest observed across participating countries. The share of low-educated adults within the working population is much smaller than their share in total within the labour active population (age 25-64) which is an indication of under-representation of those with low education in paid labour. In the Netherlands, 12% of working age adults were assessed as having low literacy. However, the PIAAC data reveals an increase of both low literates and adults scoring as "excellent", meaning that **the gap between those with excellent skills and poor skills has grown**.

Adults in Lithuania showed above-average proficiency in numeracy and average proficiency in literacy compared with adults in the OECD countries participating in the survey, and, unlike in most countries, men and women showed similar proficiency in numeracy and literacy. Young adults have higher proficiency in literacy than on average across all participating countries and economies. However, a large proportion of adults in Lithuania show low proficiency in problem solving in

technology-rich environments: in terms of guidance this suggests that **low-educated adults may struggle to use online guidance resources**. Lithuania has one of the largest shares of workers who have higher literacy skills than those required for their jobs.

In Slovenia, PIAAC results show that higher levels of literacy and numeracy are positively linked to: inclusion in the workforce, higher wages, non-economic factors (e.g. trust in others, political effectiveness, voluntary work and assessment of own health). However, the share of adults achieving the highest levels in the three skills domains did not exceed 10% (lower than the OECD average), and only 3.7% of adults were classified at the highest level of problem solving in a technology-rich environment. Compared to other countries, Slovenia has a **high proportion of low-skilled adults** (those who do not achieve Level 2 in literacy or numeracy), with 400,000 adults (33% of the adult population) ranked as low-skilled. The survey results show that there are low-skilled adults in all social groups, in the employed and unemployed populations and across all age ranges, particularly the over 50s (Javrh, 2017).

With no participation in PIAAC, and no large-scale research surveys, less quantitative data is available on the low-educated population in **Iceland**. It is estimated that 6.1% of 25-35 year old people in Iceland experience difficulties with literacy; 10.7% in the 46-55 age group and 20.7% of 5665 year olds: 4,600 people in total. The number of unemployed immigrants in Iceland grew substantially after the economic crisis. Many are low-educated and those that do not have a good grasp of the Icelandic language are especially vulnerable. Although unemployed migrants face occupational problems, their issues are first and foremost social ones.

Supports and barriers

Hawthorn and Alloway (2009) conducted case studies of 12 agencies working with disadvantaged (including but not limited to low-skilled adults). This exercise, part of a fact finding study for a proposed adult advancement and careers service in England, identified seven **key messages for effective careers advice with disadvantaged adults**:

i.   Help starts from what is immediately needed by the client
ii. Careers advice is couched within a much broader programme of support
iii. Help is closely linked to the client's readiness and need for help
iv. Progress is achieved through small steps
v.   Effective help involves persistence
vi. Staff really care, and celebrate success
vii. The advice empowers the client to help him/herself in future.

Multiple problems can prevent adults from engaging in work and in learning (European Union, 2015). Barriers include:

- previous negative experiences
- unused to long or longer term planning/planning for the future
- financial constraints
- systemic barriers (e.g. will the learning or work opportunity impact on benefits).

Advisers interviewed as part of an evaluation of a careers information advice and guidance project in Wales reported that "regardless of background, the biggest issue for all clients was low confidence. It was felt that all types of clients could experience emotional barriers such as low self-belief, fear of the unknown, low motivation or low expectations arising from previous negative experiences" (BMG, 2011: p. 2). In longitudinal qualitative evidence gathered by Bimrose et al. (2008) the majority of service users talked about various constraints on their career progression, including what might influence, or need to be considered in the future. These ranged from: ill-health; financial responsibilities; caring commitments; lack of self-confidence in skills and abilities; lack of opportunities; lack of courage to take risks and make changes; time-management; and poor motivation. Approaches to dealing with these constraints seem to be central to career decision making styles.

2.4   Service delivery

Guidance for adults can take many forms. For some clients, a one-off session leading to an action plan will be sufficient. But for others, the process is a more complex one lasting a longer time (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2007: p. 13), and perhaps including periods of non-engagement from the counselling journey.

Bimrose et al. (2008) identified four main categories which typified useful guidance: building a working alliance; exploring potential; identifying options and strategies; and ending, follow-through. Tracing the European journey from policy to practice, Sultana (2008) concludes that lifelong guidance in Member States can be seen on a continuum, with traditional guidance services at one end, and a new approach at the other. The process of change to service delivery is gradual and has not led to abrupt changes in practices. For example, a new approach might offer services in non-traditional locations; it is likely to be more differentiated, and individualised, which has the added benefit of taking account of the different starting points (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2007: p. 26). Guidance and orientation can now be online and computer-based, often offered in combination with more personal support.

Evidence analysed by the ELGPN suggests that there are ten **evidence-based principles** (see Figure 2.1.) which should underpin the design of lifelong guidance services (Hooley, 2014: p. 8).

Figure 2.1. *Ten principles for designing lifelong learning guidance services*

Focus on the individual	Support learning and progression	Ensure quality
1) Lifelong guidance is most effective where it is genuinely lifelong and progressive. 2) Lifelong guidance is most effective where it connects meaningfully to the wider experience and lives of the individuals who participate in it. 3) Lifelong guidance is most effective where it recognises the diversity of individuals and relates services to individual needs.	4) Lifelong guidance is not one intervention, but many, and works most effectively when a range of interventions are combined. 5) A key aim of lifelong guidance programmes should be the acquisition of career management skills. 6) Lifelong guidance needs to be holistic and well-integrated into other support services. 7) Lifelong guidance should involve employers and working people, and provide active experiences of workplaces.	8) The skills, training and dispositions of the professionals who deliver lifelong guidance are critical to its success. 9) Lifelong guidance is dependent on access to good-quality career information. 10) Lifelong guidance should be quality-assured and evaluated to ensure its effectiveness and to support continuous improvement.

Cross-organisation collaboration

A major issue for the provision of IAG services for adults is that the **involvement of a range of different providers** (as opposed to services for younger people that are offered by schools) meaning that it can be hard to find clarity; and that there is a lack of active promotion of services to adults (DEL, 2007: p. 29). Reviewing recent progress in reforming lifelong guidance, Sultana (2008) stressed that the implementation of lifelong guidance systems is dependent on effective cooperation and coordination between service providers at national, regional and local levels. At the time of writing, Sultana concluded that that **links were generally underdeveloped, leading to the presence of "disparate subsystems"** (p. 26), rather than coherent, integrated arrangements – where the model is more systematic it balances the interests of the stakeholders in favour of the interests of the user. In larger countries, sub-national coordination is necessary for effective implementation of policy actions (European Union, 2015). There were no genuinely integrated systems at the time Sultana's review was conducted, although some evidence of progress. There is increasing awareness of the **need for more holistic approaches**; some of this awareness has been translated into legislation/formal documentation (although not necessarily practice). Where it is being put into practice, this tends to

be with services taking holistic client needs as their starting point and which draw together a large range of service providers to deal with this. Scotland held up as an example, as in reporting it is claimed: "it has succeeded in welding together many different organisations, with different cultures and different practices, by developing a common framework for service delivery, within which a coherent range of services and programmes can be located" (Sultana, 2008: p. 28).

Links may be organised at four levels:

i.   **Within government**: both within ministries and between government ministries. Most countries have two systems – one in employment and one in education and responsibility is fragmented.

ii. **Among practitioners** – this can be achieved by setting up national associations to bring practitioners and policy makers together (e.g. Lithuania – Association of Career Guidance Specialists; in Czech Republic the various associations and professional bodies work together) or by training initiatives – maybe comprised of core modules and specialised modules – that bring together professionals from different sectors.

iii. At a **national level**, involving these and other stakeholders.

iv. At **regional and local levels** – local guidance partnerships, guidance forums (see Slovenia as an example).

Hawthorn and Alloway (2009) identified links with other agencies as one of 11 critical success factors in offering careers advice to adults. As they explain, their case studies showed that network arrangements are important in order to meet client needs through referral, to provide professional support, to encourage partnership working including setting up new joint initiatives, and to keep in touch with funding opportunities. Their review also stressed however, that networks can be time- and resource-intensive to maintain, meaning it is often more effective to capitalise on existing networks – identifying gaps and building on what exists already – rather than establish new ones.

Policy makers in some countries have grappled with the issue of **whether fragmented guidance services for adults should be drawn together into a coherent whole** and if so, how this should be done. It can be argued that consolidation offers greater possibilities for quality assurance and the setting of national standards, without which there is confusion and lack of transparency for guidance clients (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2007: pp. 8-9). In an evaluation of services in Wales (United Kingdom) (BMG Research, 2011), advisers reported that partnership working was effective where there was:

- A shared goal between organisations, of helping people move forward
- A mutual awareness – knowledge of each other's strengths and selling points
- An understanding of each other's organisations, maintained through regular and personal contact
- To some extent, a physical location, perhaps through co-location, where opportunities for drop-in referral can happen.

Although the views of advisors about partnerships were generally very positive in the Welsh evaluation, some possible disadvantages were cited, including the damage done to partnerships

because of fluctuations in referrals or the risks involved of duplicating work, or of limited project funding.

A **community learning audit** can help to build a picture of local opportunities for occupational participation, to include volunteering, work experience, employment, informal and formal learning opportunities. Australian research (Beddie et al., 2005) found that this type of exercise not only encouraged new thinking about available resources, local partnerships were identified and enhanced. Furthermore:

> Consultations during the research confirmed there is also potential for such an audit to assist in rationalising or pooling resources, identifying community work projects, encouraging better cross-promotion of existing services, seeking out mentors and so on. This suggests that part of the role of a community-based career advisor could be to act as a learning broker/coordinator in the town. It is conceivable also that an explicit part of the job would be to identify skills and training gaps and to channel this information into more formal labour market data collection systems (p. 21).

Counsellor competences

As a 2008 report on Adult Learning Professions in Europe (Research voor Beleid/PLATO, 2008: p. 76) observed, those working in counselling and guidance services in adult learning may focus on *career guidance* (in relation to finding a job), *study counselling* (in relation to study choice and planning and coaching of the study process) or *more personal guidance* (in relation to people's personal problems and questions). This report emphasised that these roles may be contained within a wider job description, or that those in teaching positions have counselling and guidance tasks alongside or as part of their teaching activities.

A recurrent theme in the literature on guidance for disadvantaged or vulnerable adults is the need for the guidance professional to have local knowledge, of the labour market and of learning opportunities. Tyers et al. (2003) stressed the importance of knowing about the target group: successful programme staff not only knew the barriers faced by their clients, but also knew what they would respond to (p. xii). One approach suggested by Hawthorn and Alloway (2009) is that services recruit practitioners from those who already have an understanding of the client group, and then provide guidance training following recruitment.

The QAE framework developed by the ELGPN (see section 2.5 below) identifies three criteria relevant to practitioner quality: the possession of recognised qualifications relevant to the careers sector; engagement in CPD, and membership of a careers professional association. In 2003, Sultana concluded that guidance workers do not seem to have a strong professional identity, are poorly organised and often poorly supported by a disparate network of professional associations and research and training organisations. Consequently, their ability to determine their work roles as well as to impact on policy-making is weak.

2.5 Programme outcomes and impacts

Kirkpatrick (1994, cited in Hooley, 2014) identifies four levels of impact that can result from training and development interventions. These levels can be adapted to structure thinking about the impacts of lifelong guidance:

1. *Reaction. How do participants in guidance describe their experience? Did they enjoy it and do they feel their participation has been worthwhile?* Reaction is most easily monitored through client satisfaction surveys.
2. *Learning. Can the evaluators quantify what has been learnt?* Measuring learning is particularly important because guidance is essentially a learning process, by which individuals learn about themselves and the world of learning and work, and acquire the skills they need to be successful within it. An example of impact at this level therefore might include assessing the acquisition of career management skills (CMS) against a CMS framework.
3. *Behaviour. Do learners change their behaviour as a result of participating, e.g. working harder, actively exploring their careers, or entering a new course or job?* Measuring this outcome requires evidence to be collected at more than one time and requires caution in data collection over the difference between actual and reported behaviours.

As European Union (2015) summarised, guidance can play an important role in changing adults' disposition toward learning. Guidance can, for example, lead to clients making clearer connections between work and learning – this report cites research on adult learning pathways by Taylor (2002) who identified this connection "as being important for making learning attractive for participants because it made learning directly relevant to them" (European Union, 2015: 58). Guidance for learners has a role in raising awareness about the benefits of learning but also in changing their **disposition towards learning** (ELGPN, 2014). Tyers et al (2004, cited in European Union, 2015) report that the Adult Guidance Partnerships (AGP) across the UK were effective in recruiting learners to learning – 30% of clients surveyed reported that they had gained new skills since contacting the AGP. Evaluations of the Irish Adult Educational Guidance services (Hearne [2005] and Philips and Eustace [2010]) showed that clients of the service attributed their progression to further learning or employment to the guidance they had received. In one case, 20% stated that a guidance intervention played an important part in ensuring that they remained in education.

4. *Results. Are there any observable impacts on systems, organisations or individuals, e.g. increased retention or academic attainment, improved transitions, increased career and life success?*

As well as **levels of impact** Kirkpatrick highlights different **types of impacts**: 1) educational; 2) economic and employment; and 3) social. These can be viewed through a range of policy lenses. There are also different beneficiaries – guidance is usually directed at the individual, but can have wider consequences: individual; organisational; community; country; EU.

However, Hooley (2014) argues that the Kirkpatrick framework does not sufficiently capture data on changes in attitudes (such an increases in self-confidence) – non-cognitive outcomes that can be

critical steps on the way to making concrete changes, and which can influence the level of engagement experienced. As Hooley explains:

> *Building evaluation into service design becomes more problematic as one moves up Kirkpatrick's hierarchy of impacts [...] So it is relatively easy to ask client to give a reaction to the service that they have received and to routinely record this as a part of monitoring. Such forms of evaluation can provide useful ongoing management information, including meeting service targets (e.g. to consistently achieve an 80% customer satisfaction rating). However, it is far more difficult to routinely investigate learning, behaviour or results of services, as these generally happen outside the normal service interaction. Whether someone leaves a career guidance session and actually goes on to implement what they have discussed, for example, is not normally information that is available to those involved in service delivery, and requires additional resourcing to collect* (Hooley, 2014: p.59).

Hooley (2014, p. 60) argues that an **evaluation strategy should address**:

- How does the evaluation approach fit with national and European approaches to evaluation, most importantly that developed by the ELGPN?
- What level of impact data should funders require and how should the collection and analysis of data be funded? What level of resourcing is needed to support both monitoring and evaluation?
- What are the objectives of service evaluation? What kinds of impacts can and should be identified? How can Kirkpatrick's four levels (reaction, learning, behaviour, results) be used to help to refine evaluation aims?
- What should be monitored routinely? How will such monitoring data be used to inform service development? How will such data be used to provide a basis for evaluation?
- How will evaluation be used summatively to explore the impacts of the service and to identify the return on investment? How will evaluation be used formatively to support service development? How will findings be fed in to support strategy development? How will findings be fed back into service delivery?
- How will practitioners and managers be engaged in understanding, acting and developing the evidence base for the services that they deliver?
- Who will be responsible for conducting the evaluation? Will professional evaluators be utilised? Will an independent, external agency be responsible for overseeing or undertaking the evaluation?
- How will results from the evaluation be published to contribute to the broader evidence base in the field?
- How will evaluations connect to wider policy goals in a way that supports the development of evidence-based policy?

The Canadian Research Working Group on Evidence-Based Practice in Career Development (2014) points out that, in Canada at least (but the observation holds good for other countries) careers service **evaluations are often very crude**[4]:

> As a country, we (Canada) measure whether clients become employed or not (and sometimes how long that takes) and, often, the nature of the employment (e.g., full-time or part-time) […]

> Traditional performance measurement systems measure very little about fundamental concerns such as the quality of employment (Does it fit with the person? Will they stick with it? Is it suited to their skill set?), the means by which the client went from being unemployed to employed (What interventions work?; How does self-help differ from practitioner-help?); the context in which the client is seeking a change (Is training available near them? Is work readily available?), or the living context the client carries with them as they walk in the door of the employment office (How hopeful are they? What needs do they have? What barriers are in their way?) (pp. 1-2).

However, lack of consistent measurement in these indicators means that getting meaningful or robust data on how these indicators affect each other is problematic – Canadian researchers therefore embarked on their project with the aim of finding consistent measures and connections between what they measure.

Outcome data indicating that clients have gained a job or embarked on a course of learning following the guidance is, after client satisfaction, the variable most likely to be monitored by guidance services or their funders. In some cases changes of employment can include a move into voluntary work experience – which may include work experience in the service itself (Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009). This area is, however, problematic, in part because of the connection between these data and programme funding. As Sultana (2003) points out: "the fact that the criterion for evaluation of provision tends to be the rate of successful job-placements of clients skews services towards brokerage and networking with potential employers" (p. 43). There is also a challenge at the funder level, on government-funded programmes: "There can be a conflict between the need to restrain expenditure on unemployment benefits and the need to ensure rapid returns to work on the one hand, and the longer-term career development interests of individuals on the other" (OECD, 2004).

Client satisfaction

Client satisfaction is the **easiest aspect of a service to measure** as it is relatively easy to ask client to give a reaction to the service that they have received and to routinely record this as a part of

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[4] The most commonly tracked indicators are: current employment status of client; current education level of client; designated group status of client; client participation in: Employment Services, Skills Development and Upgrading, Work Experience, Combination of work experience and skills development, Workplace Based Skills Development, Action Plans Opened and Completed; Labour Force Attachment at end of service and at 3 and 6 months post service; Client earnings.

monitoring. Such forms of evaluation can provide useful ongoing management information, including meeting service targets. Kirkpatrick (1994, cited in Hooley, 2014) argues that evidence usually collected through feedback forms and customer satisfaction surveys which attempt to identify and understand the experience of the service user should be a critical element of service design and evaluation. Client satisfaction levels are traditionally high: Hearne (2005) in evaluating an adult guidance service in Ireland reported that 89.4% of clients experienced benefits and 94.5% would recommend the service to others; Tyers et al. (2003), evaluating adult guidance pilots in England, reported that "Client ratings of the service they received from their AGP were overwhelmingly positive. Over 80 per cent found the service either fairly or very useful. Around two-thirds would probably or definitely use the service again if it was available, and half of users found the AGP to be very useful" (p. x).

A problem with rating client satisfaction is that for most services, this process tends to take place shortly after the guidance session itself and it is rarer to follow-up on client satisfaction. Longitudinal qualitative evidence gathered by Bimrose et al. (2008) over five years suggest that although levels of satisfaction with the original guidance remained high, these levels did drop with time, with clients becoming less convinced of its usefulness.

Fit between outcome and client aspirations and/or needs

The appeal of measuring the fit between the outcome of the guidance and the client's abilities, aptitudes, interest and achievements is clear and thus this "matching" process is a traditional feature of guidance practice within a practical framework. This practice is not without criticism, however. As Bimrose et al. (2008, p. 32) summarise, matching fails to take into account human behaviour, and the fact that individuals do not always act in their own self-interest. Disadvantaged adults may be more likely than others not to act in a rationale way (by, for example, not turning up to a job interview, or leaving a training course before it is completed). Notions of adaptability and intuition need, therefore, to be incorporated into attempts to try to develop a more rigorous understanding of adult transitional and career behaviour. As Bimrose et al. argue:

> *The situation where guidance practice is still heavily influenced by the matching paradigm presents a major challenge in providing high quality guidance services for adults that clients value and want to use. Practitioners should be required, and supported, to engage with continuing professional development that keeps them up-to-date with new thinking, practice and research findings. They need encouragement in taking the risks in their practice that would enable them to try out new approaches, perhaps through the more widespread introduction of supervisory practice and greater familiarisation with web-based approaches to guidance. In addition, the broad community of guidance practice needs to take responsibility for developing measures of "softer" outcomes for guidance interventions. The concept of "distance travelled" also needs to be accepted, respected and integrated into service delivery, both by practitioners and their managers at different levels* (p. 58).

Assessing programme quality and impact

One of the key issues in lifelong guidance for adults is the limited evidence, with most evaluations of services limited in scope and focused on short-term outcomes or on progression rates to employment, education or training. With reference specifically to career guidance for adults, Hughes (2013) reports that in general, there is a lack of evidence – as services are fragmented, studies are rarely longitudinal and employers seldom track the participation in guidance of low-skilled employees. The increasing recognition of the role that guidance and orientation has to play in adult employment and education services means that there is an increasing interest from policy makers in making a case for the funding of such initiatives, and therefore in looking at what the outcomes of the services are across a range of variable. This includes looking in the long term, although this is also where the evidence is most lacking (Pollard et al., 2007: p. 11).

More research is needed to assess the effects, and in particular the long-term effects, of participation in adult guidance. Research and evaluation is more likely to have taken place about career guidance rather than educational guidance. Most monitoring that takes place does so in terms of "top down" targets and performance indicators which are set by governments or by funding bodies (Hughes & Gration, 2009) and tend to focus on the outcome variables which are easiest to measure quantitatively. Benefits that are harder to quantify but which may be of more importance to users are equally valid but less easy to measure, meaning that there is a reliance on "counting that which can be measured rather than measuring what counts" (ibid: p. 10). This can lead to services chasing targets – the most common example found in the literature is where quality is assessed by measuring employment outcomes. This can lead to clients being encouraged to take the first job, not the best job. This said, even those outcomes which seem to be easier to measure can be complicated, when it involves measuring longer-term impacts (because it is expensive and complicated to track adults over an extended period), and because causality is not easily established, especially for clients who are utilising multiple support services. Outcome measures are problematic because guidance does not happen in isolation. Often adult career guidance (OECD, 2003) is integrated into other interventions – for example as part of wider personal guidance or as part of an education or work programme: "Where this is the case, it can have low visibility, be difficult to measure, and clear performance criteria for it can be hard to define" (p. 42). The same OECD report went on to state:

> One reason for conclusions from evaluation research being only cautiously positive is that the model for evaluating career guidance properly is a very complex one (Maguire and Killeen, 2003). Types of clients and their needs and problems vary widely. The help that they receive also varies widely, co-exists with other concurrent interventions and influences, and is often quite brief in duration. Outcomes, both intended and unintended, behavioural and attitudinal, short- and long-term can also vary widely. Obtaining clear answers about impacts under these circumstances requires large-scale research with complex experimental designs and statistical controls. Such research is lengthy and expensive. To date no government has provided the funds needed to do it (p. 44).

As summarised by the OECD (2004), evidence is "stronger for its impact upon short-term learning outcomes than upon medium-term behavioural outcomes, and in turn this evidence is stronger than evidence on longer-term impacts. The longer-term evidence is quite weak, and obtaining it will require more and better longitudinal research" (p. 8). Few evaluations have the capacity or the funding to track clients over such a long period. One example is Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes (2008) who conducted a five-year longitudinal qualitative study of effective guidance in England, following the career trajectories of participants, with a starting sample of 50 in-depth case studies, ending in 29 interviews in the fourth year. However, as Tyers et al. (2003) point out, tracking programme participants is made even more complex when those participants come from populations such as refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and ex-offenders (p. 81).

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network has attempted to address issues including quality of service delivery by piloting a **Quality-Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework**. This framework contains five key elements that support service delivery and underpin the collection of evidence about services:

- Practitioner competence.
- Citizen/user involvement.
- Service provision and improvement.
- Cost-benefits to government.
- Cost-benefits to individuals.

The ELGPN QAE Framework is a matrix with indicators, organised around an input-process-outcome framework:

Input:

- Available opportunities
- Practitioner /service capability
- Client potential

Process:

- Assessment of needs
- Development of action plan
- Effectiveness of practitioner
- Engagement of client

Outcome:

- Changes in knowledge or skill
- Changes in life circumstances
- Changes in employment or training status
- Fit of employment or training with skills and aspirations
- Fit of training with employment opportunities.

Whereas this framework was not explicitly used in designing the current evaluation, the IOE research team did implicitly draw on the framework, for example when considering topics that should be addressed in data collection.

3 Methodology

This chapter summarises the GOAL evaluation methodology, discussing the overarching evaluation design, quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, and methodological challenges across the six-country project as a whole.

The GOAL **evaluation had three aims**. The first was **developmental**: to support programme development across the six countries by providing evidence during the life of the pilot on **programme processes**. The second was **summative**: to assess, as rigorously as possible, **the impacts of GOAL** on service users and other programme stakeholders. The third aim focused on **knowledge cumulation**: to provide evidence on programme processes and outcomes in order to support future policy and programme development in the field of adult education guidance. As part of this aim, we sought to help advance programme theory in this under-researched area. In doing so, the evaluation may potentially offer evidence and analysis that can be used by policy makers in similarly complex fields, to help them better understand challenges and success factors in establishing "joined-up" programmes in complex policy fields.

3.1 Evaluation design and methods

The methodological approach for this evaluation was shaped by the complexities of the project design, namely that:

- GOAL was multi-site (two sites in each of five countries, and four sites in the Netherlands) and multi-organisational.

- GOAL had multiple objectives.

- GOAL was predicated on cross-organisational collaboration.

- Each partner country had its own unique context and target groups (and target numbers to achieve).

- Programme resources were finite, and were by necessity and logic primarily focused on the interventions rather than the evaluation.

For these reasons, it was neither feasible nor advisable to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation involving comparison groups. Instead the evaluation has positioned itself within the broad '**Theory of Change**' (Weitzman et al., 2002) approach. Evaluations adopting this approach (Rogers and Weiss, 2007; Weiss, 1997) typically seek to address two levels of theory: 1) Implementation theory and 2) Programme theory.

Implementation theory focuses on how programmes are implemented, e.g. the intervention strategies that underpin programme activities. **Programme theory** focuses on programme *mechanisms*, by which we refer not to programme *activities* but to the *changes* within the participants that those activities facilitate. These changes, in turn, may lead to the desired

programme outcomes. For example, in a counselling programme such as GOAL, counselling is not a mechanism, it is a **programme activity**. Programme activities will ideally **trigger mechanisms (i.e. responses) within programme participants** – such mechanisms may include greater knowledge, increased confidence or motivation, and/or heightened ambition. These mechanisms, in turn, may then contribute to client actions and outcomes, such as enrolling on a course. As these examples illustrate, mechanisms serve as potential *stepping stones* towards the achievement of desired programme outcomes. Theory of Change approaches to evaluation focus not just on outcomes (i.e. what happens) but on how these outcomes are achieved. As such, there is a strong focus on these stepping stones.

While drawing on Theory of Change approaches in general, the GOAL evaluation also draws on a specific type of Theory of Change evaluation: **Realist Evaluation** (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The Realist approach emphasises the central importance of the **interplay between programme contexts and mechanisms (stepping stones)**. A central tenet of Realist Evaluation is that programmes do not themselves produce outcomes in a direct causal fashion: programmes are not catapults with which clients are metaphorically launched into a better future. Unlike balls launched by catapults, clients have **agency**. Furthermore, they live their lives within **structural contexts**; these contexts produce **constraints and opportunities** within which agency may flourish (or not) to greater or less degrees. Causality (in terms of the intervention producing the desired effects) is thus contingent rather than deterministic: in the appropriate context and for the people, programmes (through their activities) *may* facilitate the triggering of mechanisms which *may* in turn lead to desired outcomes. Realist Evaluation, as with Theory of Change evaluation more generally, seeks to develop and test hypotheses about which interventions (or aspects of those interventions) work for whom in what contexts. As a corollary of this objective, Realist Evaluation rejects the assertion that to be considered successful, programmes must be context-independent, in terms of their ability to produce desired outcomes through the same intervention strategies for all target groups across all contexts. Whereas such context-independence and broad-scale generalisability may potentially be achieved with simpler interventions, it is unlikely to be feasible with complex interventions such as GOAL. A key objective of Realist Evaluation (and Theory of Change evaluation more generally) is thus to produce **theoretical generalisations which future programme developers and policymakers can draw on** when developing interventions in their own particular contexts and for particular target groups. This means measuring not only the degree to which a programme does or does not work, i.e. the degree to which it produces the desired outcomes, but also generating knowledge about **how programmes work, for whom, in what contexts, and why**. This requires in-depth understanding of intervention strategies and activities, and their relationship to programme contexts, mechanisms and outcomes.

In generating knowledge not just about whether programmes work but also how and why they do so, evaluators seek to go beyond merely providing a summative assessment of a specific programme. Summative evaluation is necessary but not sufficient. A broader goal is to contribute to the **cumulation of knowledge** in a field. Such cumulation, and the theory development it implies, is particularly essential in underdeveloped fields such as that investigated by GOAL: guidance and counselling for low-educated adults. This objective is important not just because of the **limited**

amount of credible evidence in this nascent field, but also because of the **inherently complex nature of interventions such as GOAL**. Evaluations which seek to understand and assess complex interventions must take account of a range of complicating factors within the programme (Rogers, 2008), including: 1) multi-agency governance and/or implementation; 2) simultaneous causal strands leading to desired outcomes; 3) alternative causal strands leading to desired outcomes; and 4) recursive causality. These four factors are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The importance of **multiple agencies** will be apparent throughout this report, particularly in discussions of partnerships and networks. As these agencies exist at programme and policy levels, the evaluation takes a multilevel approach: an important element of the evaluation is the description and assessment of the policy factors that play a role in influencing programme success. It is hoped that this dual focus on **programme-level and policy-level processes**, and their interaction, will provide useful evidence for a range of policymakers working in complex fields.

The notion of **simultaneous causal strands** refers to the presence of two or more causal strands that are required in order for desired outcomes to be achieved – e.g. for programme participants to enrol on a course, they may need to improve their motivation (causal strand 1), but viable courses also need to be made available to them (causal strand 2).

Alternative causal strands refers to the likelihood that one aspect of the programme may work for one client (in terms of producing a desired outcome), whereas another aspect may work for another client. For example, one GOAL client may take the "next step up" into education as a result of increasing their previously low self-confidence or self-belief. Another client may take the same step for a different reason, e.g. perhaps she was already motivated but simply lacked information about relevant courses.

Finally, the notion of **recursive causality** refers to the non-linearity of many causal pathways. A linear model of programme theory might, for example, show a client moving in a direct, linear fashion across the stages illustrated in Figure 3.1. overleaf.

Figure 3.1. *Programme theory: linear model*
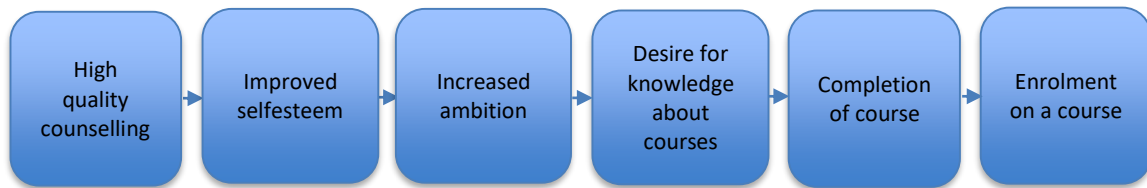
As illustrated in this linear model, high quality counselling *leads to* improved self-esteem, *which leads to* increased ambition, *which leads to* desire for knowledge about further education courses, *which leads to* enrolment on a course, *which leads to* successful completion of the course.

A more realistic (particularly for disadvantaged target groups), recursive model of causality might include all of these stages, but would take account of the tried and tested maxim that humans often need to take one step back in order to take two steps forward. Thus, a recursive model of causality (see Figure 3.2.) might be:

1. Improved self-esteem, *which leads to*
2. Increased ambition, *which leads to*
3. A crisis of confidence: the client had never seen herself as an ambitious person, and is uncomfortable or even threatened by this new identity. This *could lead to*
4. Additional focus on self-esteem and identity, *which leads to*
5. Desire for knowledge about further education courses, *which leads to*
6. Enrolment on a course, *which leads to*
7. Another crisis of confidence[5], *which leads to*
8. Renewed focus on self-esteem and identity, plus a focus on study skills and resilience, *which lead to*
9. A new, expanded identity or self-concept as a capable learner, *which leads to*
10. Successful completion of the course.

A central objective of the GOAL evaluation is to develop and present a rich understanding of the range and types of causal pathways to be found in the programme, and the relationship of these pathways to specific national and local contexts.

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[5] To reduce visual complexity this stage is not shown in the accompanying figure.

Figure 3.2. *Programme theory: complex model*
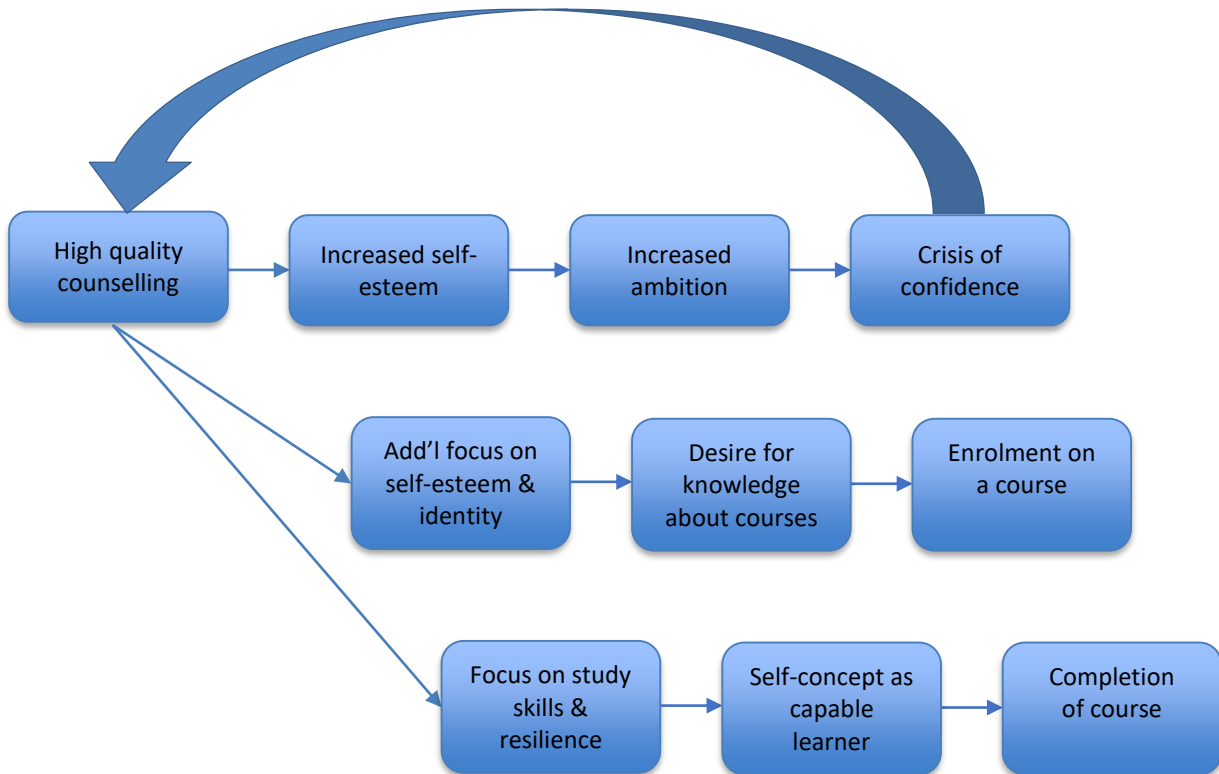
Modifications to the Realist Evaluation approach

The Realist Evaluation approach has a straightforward (albeit analytically demanding) primary objective: to develop understanding of what works, for whom, and in what contexts. However, this straightforward objective is accompanied by rather non-straightforward academic jargon. Realist Evaluation terminology – particulary with regard to definitions regarding programme contexts, resources and mechanisms – can be difficult for non-specialists to grasp. In particular, there are conceptual challenges regarding what is meant by "context" and "mechanisms" (Dalkin et al., 2015). Rather than burden readers of this report with these challenges and the debates surrounding them, we have chosen to modify this terminology to make our analysis more easily understood by lay (non-academic specialist) readers. Instead of the tradition Realist Evaluation tripartite focus on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes, we have instead opted for a four-part approach, focusing on the following factors and their interaction:

- the **contexts** (e.g. policy environments) in which programmes are implemented
- the **resources and strategies** that programme staff draw on or utilise
- the intermediate or **stepping stone changes** (referred to as "mechanisms" in the Realist Evaluation literature) that lead to changes in action by clients or other programme; these stepping stones are changes in reasoning or beliefs that lead to programmes' desired outcomes (e.g. an increase in client self-confidence is a stepping stone that may trigger an outcome such as enrolment on a course), and

- the interplay and influence of these contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones on the achievement of **client outcomes** (e.g. enrolment on adult education courses) **and/or implementation objectives** (e.g. the successful development of partnerships and networks).

In summary, this evaluation has sought to achieve three **overarching objectives** (Berriet-Solliec et al., 2014): 1) to measure the effects of GOAL, with regard to client outcomes; 2) to understand how, why, for whom and in what contexts outcomes are (or are not) achieved; and 3) to contribute to joint learning and knowledge cumulation – both (a) within the GOAL programme itself (e.g. by sharing process evaluation evidence with programme developers and other key stakeholders), and (b) in terms of the broader field of adult guidance and counselling (by providing credible and relevant programme theory and evidence that future programme developers and policymakers can draw upon in their own endeavours). In working towards these objectives, evaluation evidence has been gathered via:

- client monitoring data (to establish baseline, ongoing and exit data)

- client satisfaction and outcome data (user survey and qualitative interviews)

- programme and policy data (literature review; needs and strengths analysis)

- case studies of programme sites (qualitative interviews, document analysis, analysis of quantitative data)

- qualitative interviews with policy actors.

The evaluation includes: a) ongoing data collection (i.e. data collected throughout the life of the GOAL programme) and b) wave-specific data collection.

Five research questions underpinned the GOAL evaluation:

1. To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?
2. What service user outcomes were achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?
3. What programme-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?
4. What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?
5. What was the Return on Expectations? That is, to what degree were programme expectations met?

Return on Expectations (ROE)

Return on Expectation (ROE) analyses can support the development of programme theory by detailing programme stakeholders' (including clients, programme staff and policy funders) expectations of programmes and the rationales for those expectations, and then analysing the

degree to which those expectations have been met and the factors associated with that. ROE analysis can thus provide valuable programme and policy learning that contributes to the cumulation of knowledge in nascent fields, and helps in the development and refinement of future programme theories (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, 2011).

Local and central evaluation teams

As noted above, the GOAL programme was implemented in six countries, and an important consideration for the evaluation was to maximise learning about programme processes and outcomes at national level, as well as overall. That is, the research aim was not just to see if the intervention worked, but to understand and provide knowledge on the different ways that it worked (or struggled to work) in each of the six countries. A related evaluation objective was to provide stand-alone country-level evaluation reports as well as a synthetic cross-country report. For these reasons, a two-tier evaluation design was adopted: the overall GOAL evaluation was designed and run by the central UCL Institute of Education (IOE) evaluation team, but in each country there was a local evaluation team charged with collecting data and doing country-level analysis (guided by IOE).

Interim (Wave 1) reporting

An interim national evaluation report for each GOAL country was published in November 2016. These reports, along with an interim cross-country report synthesising findings and key messages from all six countries, are available at http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications under the heading "Wave 1 Evaluation Reports". A key aim of this interim reporting stage, which drew on data collected in Spring 2016 (see national reports for exact dates for each country), was to analyse and share early messages in order to facilitate service adaptation and improvement.

Evaluation manual

To ensure the collection of robust data and the consistency of instrument administration across the six countries, IOE created an **evaluation manual** for use by local evaluators. Version 1 of the manual (November 2015) included protocols for two quantitative instruments used in ongoing data collection. Version 2 (March 2016) added guidelines for the administration of the Wave 1 Topic Guides and other instruments, as well as guidance for completing the interim national reports. Version 3 (February 2017) provided guidance on the development and use of all Wave 2 data collection instruments, and guidelines for completing the final national reports.

3.2   Quantitative sample and data collection

Due to **different implementation timeframes and challenges** across the six countries, client data collection began at different points: April 2015 (Flanders), January 2016 (Czech Republic), February 2016 (Iceland, Lithuania, and the Netherlands) and March 2016 (Slovenia). In all countries, data collection ended by April 2017.

Quantitative client data were collected throughout the life of the programme via: 1) a data monitoring instrument and 2) a client satisfaction survey. In addition, a follow-up survey was conducted with clients in Wave 2.

Client monitoring data

The data monitoring instrument created by the IOE evaluation team gathered detailed information about the clients on the GOAL programmes, enabling evaluators to measure target numbers and track a range of programme processes and service user outcomes (see Appendix C, Data Monitoring Instrument, and Appendix D, GOAL data monitoring instrument codebook and guidelines). The instrument was used **each time** a client had a guidance session, although not all fields were completed at every session[6], as some were relevant to first sessions only and others designed to collect exit data. Each client was assigned a unique identifier by the counsellor, allowing evaluators to link data for clients who participate in multiple sessions.

At the project proposal stage, each country set a target for the number of service users that their guidance programme would reach (see Table 3.1.).

Table 3.1. *Target and realised sample sizes, GOAL*

Partner country	Wave 1 target (number of clients)	Wave 1 achieved (number of clients)	Full evaluation target (number of clients)	Full evaluation achieved (number of clients)
Czech Republic	50	15	100	132
Flanders	100	148	200	418
Iceland	50	21	100	95
Lithuania	50	50	100	100
Netherlands	100	8	200	76
Slovenia	75	49	150	160

Taking the end of Wave 1 data collection as the project's mid-point, we can see that two countries reached (or exceeded) the Wave 1 **sample size target**: Flanders (148 service users) and Lithuania (50 service users). The remaining four countries did not reach the sample size target in the first wave of data collection: Slovenia reached 49 service users (target 75), Iceland 21 service users (target 50), and Czech Republic 15 (target 50). With only eight service users in the Wave 1 data set, the Netherlands was furthest from the target sample size (of 100 adults). These eight clients all came from one of the Netherland's four interventions sites: no service user data were collected from one

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[6] GOAL counselling in Flanders began in April 2015, well in advance of the counselling programmes in the other five countries; a negative consequence of this early start was that the programme began before the roll out of the data monitoring instrument (November 2015). As a result only very limited data are available on 90 of the Wave 1 clients. For all other Flanders clients, full data are available.

site, as, contrary to expectation, client intake at this site was negligible. The remaining two Dutch sites were recruited to the study too late to include clients in Wave 1.

By the end of the full evaluation, however, recruitment targets were reached (or exceeded) by all but two countries. The Czech Republic surpassed their target of 100 clients by 32 and Slovenia exceeded their target of 150 clients by 10. Lithuania fully reached their target of 100 clients. Flanders recruited 418 clients, more than twice their target of 200. The remaining two countries did not reach the full sample size. However, Iceland was only five clients short. As in Wave 1, the Netherlands was furthest from the target sample size (76 out of 200 adults). However, this figure primary highlights one of the challenges of the "light touch" approach in this country. In terms of administering the Literacy Screener through partner organisations, the Dutch GOAL project far exceeded its expectations: 1,525 Literacy Screeners were administered across the four intervention sites (far more than the intended 400). However, data collection challenges at the partner organisations meant that client monitoring data was collected for only 76 clients. (These challenges are detailed in the Netherlands' national report.)

Client Satisfaction Survey

The **Client Satisfaction Survey** was designed to gather data from service users about their experiences of counselling services. As discussed in Chapter 2, satisfaction surveys can play an important role in programme evaluations. However, it must be recognised that whereas clients are undoubledly experts in terms of judging their own level of satisfaction with a service, this does not make them experts at judging the quality of the service.

The client satisfaction survey instrument was a short, two-page, self-completion survey offered in either **paper or online** formats. It contained eight questions: two gathered demographic information on the client (age, gender); five focused on the counselling session, and one question asked clients to record if they received assistance in completing the survey[7]. There were small differences between the surveys offered in the six countries, reflecting the different contexts in which the guidance was offered and the different objectives of various programmes. Flanders, the Netherlands and Iceland opted for an online version of the client satisfaction survey and Lithuania, Slovenia and the Czech Republic collected the client satisfaction survey data through paper-based questionnaires. Generally speaking, countries opted for the format that national evaluators felt would be easier for their service users to complete.

In Flanders client satisfaction survey data were collected through an online tool, with the survey completed anonymously by clients immediately after their first session. In the Netherlands clients whose Literacy Screener indicated that they had low basic skills were asked to complete an online client satisfaction survey at the end of the intake session (if necessary with the client manager's support). In Iceland the client satisfaction survey was administered using the online survey software, *qualtrics*. After the first or second interview clients were shown into a room separate from where the interview took place. They took the survey using an anonymous survey link. Assistance was optional

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[7] It was anticipated that low literacy levels, or migrants' low skills in the national language, might prevent some clients from completing the survey without assistance.

and given, if needed, by a staff member at the programme site but not from the counsellor that just had the session with the client. Once clients had completed the survey they submitted their answers which were then automatically registered and simultaneously made accessible to local evaluators. For evaluators in Iceland, an electronic survey represented a more effective way of reassuring clients about anonymity than a paper-based survey did.

In the Czech Republic clients completed the client satisfaction survey in paper version distributed at the end of each session. Questionnaires were printed for the clients, as it was felt that offering the survey in this format would be easiest for clients. All of the questionnaires were filled by the clients themselves, without any help. Data from the questionnaires were then entered into Excel. After each session in Lithuania each service user was asked to fill in a paper-based client survey questionnaire about their experience of the guidance. Completed client satisfaction questionnaires were collected in a sealed box. All answers were then entered into an Excel file by local evaluators. The Slovenian survey was also paper-based.

The total number of completed client satisfaction surveys is 804. In all countries, clients could choose to receive assistance in completing the survey (although not from the staff members they had been counselled by). Overall 20% of service users (162 out of 804) had some **help in completing the survey** (see Table 3.2.). No help was needed in Lithuania; help was needed in only a few cases in the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Around one-third of service users from Flanders and almost half from Iceland and the Netherlands had help to complete the client satisfaction survey.

Table 3.2. *Did anyone help you complete this survey?*

		Yes		No		Total	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Country	**CZ**	3	2	132	98	**135**	**100**
	FL	72	30	165	70	**237**	**100**
	IS	44	48	47	52	**91**	**100**
	LT	-	-	100	100	**100**	**100**
	NL	32	43	43	57	**75**	**100**
	SL	11	7	155	93	**166**	**100**
	Total	**162**	**20**	**642**	**80**	**804**	**100**

In Lithuania the number of completed client satisfaction surveys was equal to the number of clients; in other words, each service user completed the survey once, generally after completing their first counselling session (see Table 3.3.). In both Iceland and the Netherlands, all but one client completed the survey. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia there were a (slightly) greater number of surveys than clients because some of the clients who had more than one session filled in the satisfaction survey after each session rather than just their first one. A far greater shortfall in completed surveys can be observed in Flanders, where 58% of service-users filled in the satisfaction survey. This shortfall can partly be explained by the fact that, as with the data monitoring, some clients in Flanders were engaged in the guidance programme before the satisfaction survey went into the field. Additionally,

local evaluators indicated that this poor response, particularly in Ghent (de Stap), was likely related to some clients' language difficulties.

Table 3.3. *Satisfaction survey sample, N of respondents by country*

	Service users	Satisfaction survey respondents	
	N	**N**	**% (out of service users)**
CZ	132	135	102
FL	418	241	58
IS	95	94	99
LT	100	100	100
NL	76	75	99
SI	160	166	104
Total	**981**	**811**	**83**

Client follow-up survey

Beginning in January 2017, a **mixed methods follow-up survey** was conducted with 148 clients, either face-to-face or via phone, depending on the country. This survey sought to collect longitudinal outcome data from clients approximately two to four months after they left GOAL, in order to provide evidence on programme effects. The survey also collected quantitative and qualitative data on clients' perspectives on the programme and its impacts on their lives. As we can see from Table 3.4., three of the countries reached their target of 30 clients for the follow-up survey. As discussed in greater detail in the national reports, recruitment for this follow-up survey typically proved challenging: relatively few clients were willing to give permission to be contacted after leaving GOAL, and amongst those who did agree to be contacted a significant proportion either were not contactable (e.g. because of a changed phone number) or refused to participate.

Though the follow-up survey was conducted in as rigorous a manner as possible, any conclusions drawn from it must be considered tentative: the limited time period of the evaluation means that only short-term outcomes could be assessed. Furthermore, participation in the follow-up survey was voluntary and thus non-representative; therefore it is not possible to generalise from the survey findings to the broader group of GOAL clients. That being said, the survey may provide valuable insights into the experiences and outcomes of particular clients or subgroups of clients. As discussed in Section 2.1, this evidence may thus contribute to programme theory regarding how to meet the needs of such clients.

As Table 3.4. demonstrates, the overall number of clients is quite uneven, both when taking account of study waves and when comparing across countries. This needs to be taken into account when analysing the data available to distinguish between overall patterns and some more country specific charecteristics and trends.

Table 3.4. *Data Collection by country, showing Waves 1 and 2 (W1, W2) and Total (T)*

Method	CZ			FL			IS			LT			NL			SI		
	W1	W2	T	W1	W2	T	W1	W2	T	W1	W2	T	W1	W2	T	W1	W2	T
Monitoring data	15	117	132	91	327	418	21	74	95	50	50	100	8	68	76	49	111	160
Client satisfaction survey	18	121	139	79	162	241	21	73	94	50	50	100	7	68	75	49	117	166
Follow-up survey	-	18*	18	-	30	30	-	22	22	-	31	31	-	14	14	-	33	33

*Information from only 6 clients was used in this evaluation report as some of the CZ data collection took place too late to include the additional clients in the cross-country dataset.

3.3 Qualitative sample and data collection

Qualitative data was collected at two different stages over the life of the programme. The first stage (Wave 1) of qualitative data collection took place in Spring 2016. The second stage of qualitative data collection took place in Spring 2017. By collecting such data in two waves rather than only one, the evaluation is able to provide a longitudinal focus on issues explored through the qualitative analysis.

During each data collection wave, **semi-structured qualitative interviews and/or focus groups** were conducted with a range of programme stakeholders. In the first stage of qualitative data collection, four topic guides were developed by IOE to assist local evaluators in Wave 1 data gathering and to ensure consistency across the programme locations: **1) Programme Staff; 2) Programme Partners; 3) Policy Actors; and 4) Service Users**. A fifth Topic Guide, used in Iceland only, combined questions for Programme Partners and Policy Actors.

Similar topic guides were developed for the **second wave of qualitative data collection**. However, the development of these later topic guides was led primarily by local evaluators in each country, in consultation with IOE. The second wave of topic guides was somewhat more targeted in terms of the issues that were focused on: after qualitative data from Wave 1 had been analysed, key issues requiring further exploration or understanding were highlighted. These issues then formed the basis for Wave 2 topic guide development.

In Wave 2, interviews with service users were conducted as part of the mixed methods client Follow-up Survey (see section 3.2).

Table 3.5. *Qualitative data sample by country, Waves 1 and 2*

	Wave	Clients (N)	Programme Staff (N)	Programme partners (N)	Policy actors (N)
CZ	1	2	2	0	3
	2	18	2	2	2
FL	1	4	6	24	5
	2	30	8	8	8
IS	1	2	4	4	2
	2	22	4	4	2
LT	1	8	4	4	6
	2	31	4	4	6
NL	1	0	4	7	5
	2	14	4	4	4
SI	1	2	8	8	6
	2	33	4	4	8
Total		**166**	**54**	**73**	**57**

N = number of interviewees / focus group participants.

NB: Clients, programme staff, partners and policy actors may have been interviewed in Waves 1 and 2, thus totals for these groups do not represent the total number of individuals interviewed.

3.4 Programme staff: quantitative background survey

In Wave 1, a short quantitative survey was administered to all **GOAL programme counsellors** (not only those participating in qualitative interviews and focus groups) to gather some basic data on their educational background, their current employment, and their professional development and training.

This programme staff background survey includes data on 29 members of staff from five out of the six countries. In the Netherlands, no quantitative information was collected from programme staff as evaluators chose not to burden participating organisations further, because of the complex situation (for example, in the case of the two participating prisons) and because staff data were considered as less relevant given the light touch nature of the Dutch intervention. Data were received about four staff members in each of the three project countries (see Table 3.6.): the Czech Republic, Iceland and Lithuania. Slovenia provided data on 10 programme staff and Flanders on seven.

Table 3.6. *Staff background survey sample, by country*

		N	%
Country	**CZ**	4	14
	FL	7	24
	IS	4	14
	LT	4	14
	SI	10	34
	Total	**29**	**100**

3.5 Data analysis

In this **mixed methods evaluation**, a number of analytical approaches were used. Quantitative data were analysed using mainly **descriptive statistics**, e.g. frequencies, averages, group comparisons and cross-tabulations. Where appropriate, in particular with regard to outcomes (see Chapter 11), some inferential statistics in the form of **bivariate analysis** and **regression models** were also used to explore the impact of the programmes while controlling for individual client charecteristics.

Raw data from national monitoring data collection, client satisfaction surveys and programme staff surveys were merged into one database and used for all the analysis in cross country reports. Where some variables needed **coding and banding** this was done from the raw data rather than using existing codes from the national datasets, in order to check the data and its consistency across all six countries.

Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were analysed using mainly thematic analysis around the topic guides that was explicitly linked to the main aims and objectives of the project. In addition some typology analysis and group comparison analysis were also used.

3.6 Methodological challenges and study limitations

Differences in national programme models

The unique nature of the GOAL intervention in the Netherlands presented challenges for the cross-country evaluation, and for the reporting of this evaluation. In the current report, there are a number of instances in which messages from or about the other five countries are not relevant to the Netherlands, and vice versa. As much as possible, that is made clear in our reporting.

More generally, differences in national target groups and intervention types across the other five GOAL countries make it difficult and perhaps misguided to attempt to compare programme outcomes. Due to the large number of differences in programme target groups, resources and policy environments, it was generally not possible to isolate quantitative variables and point to these as key factors in shaping client outcomes.

Data collection

There were a number of initial challenges associated with the collection of robust **monitoring data**. Because **programme rollout typically took longer than expected**, many clients were still in an early stage of counselling during Wave 1 of the evaluation, and as a result little outcome data was available for the interim (Wave 1) report. For example, all the clients in Iceland and most of those in Slovenia were still in the guidance process at the Wave 1 cut-off date, meaning that it was not feasible to measure even relatively short-term programme impacts. In some countries the programme model allowed for one guidance session only, meaning there was no true exit data.

Evaluators from Flanders reported that staff members at one of the programme sites needed time to build up experience and familiarity with the data monitoring system. (Existing registration systems at

de Stap were not suitable for the collection of GOAL data.) Flemish counsellors felt that the data registration system required too much time during the session, so both de Stap and de Leerwinkel developed their own forms to make notes during the sessions. They then entered the data in the electronic system after the session. This placed additional burdens on counsellors. Initial resistance to the volume of monitoring data teams were required to collect by IOE was not unique to Flanders. Although fears about the onerous of this system soon proved to be unfounded, they draw attention to the fact that under modern managerial and workload efficiency pressures, it is **difficult to add an extra task into the counsellor's workload**, especially where it is unclear to the organisation how this additional work will bring them direct benefits.

With regard to the **Client Satisfaction Survey**, several countries reported that it was a challenge for some service users, especially those with poor basic skills, to evaluate their experiences. Lithuanian evaluators reported that clients with low levels of education found it challenging to summarise, analyse and reflect on their experiences.

As discussed above (Section 3.2), the **Follow-up Survey** presented a number of data collection challenges with regard to recruiting participants. Furthermore, the voluntary, self-selecting nature of participation in this survey greatly increases the likelihood of selection bias; thus these survey results must be seen as indiciative rather than generalisable. However, there is evidence of consistency between findings of the follow-up survey and the client monitoring data. As part of the monitoring data, clients who had more than one guidance episode were asked during their last session (N=432) if they had taken the steps they hoped to. Two thirds (66%) of these clients agreed fully that they had taken the planned steps and 23% partially agreed. Only 12% of clients reported that they had not taken the steps they hoped to at the point of their last guidance session. Despite these results covering a much broader (and less self-selecting) range of GOAL clients than the follow-up survey results, the findings from the two instruments were very similar, suggesting that follow-up survey respondents are not necessarily unrepresentative of GOAL clients who had more than one guidance session. However, when generalising it is important to err on the side of conservatism and thus to avoid generalising from the follow-up survey to the broader GOAL client group.

Challenges associated with measuring education and employment outcomes

A key implication of the fragmented, complex nature of adult education (see Chapter 12) is the difficulty of tracking clients over meaningful periods of time following programme exit. The lack of data sharing across educational institutions and policy sectors makes the **longitudinal tracking of outcomes** from interventions such as GOAL methodologically problematic, in large part because of the tremendous resource investment that would be required both to: a) track programme participants for sufficient time after programme participation, and b) establish and maintain matched comparison groups. In the absence of sufficient – and sufficiently rigorous – longitudinal tracking of programme participants, evaluation assessments of programme impacts are merely indicative, and make it difficult for programme developers and policy makers alike to assess the true impact and thus value of the intervention.

This lack of longitudinal data is an unfortunate characteristic of almost all evaluations in the adult education field: in contrast to interventions focused on school children, it is extremely difficult to track adults and their outcomes after they leave interventions. This challenge would be greatly alleviated by the use of and access to harmonised data across policy domains, which would allow, for example, the tracking of GOAL clients' future educational and employment outcomes. However, data sharing is a contentious topic, and national policies on data protection vary. In the GOAL project, data policy influenced what information could and could not be collected by the national evaluation teams, and what information could be shared within countries. Privacy norms and historical lack of joined-up policy making mean that shared data were not available in the GOAL countries. This lack of shared longitudinal data has implications for counselling services seeking to develop their programmes on the basis of what has been learned, or attempting to construct referral arrangements to other organisations. Data-sharing privileges and tools would support partnership working and the accurate measurement of longer term programme outcomes.

4 Programme Participants and Staff

This chapter provides descriptive data on the GOAL service users and staff in the six participating countries. These data are drawn from quantitative and qualitative data gathered over the life of the project. The aim of this chapter is to provide baseline data on: a) the target client group across the six countries, and b) GOAL staff. In doing so, we seek to develop an overall picture of the context for the GOAL project's objectives, successes and challenges.

Changes in some of these baseline data are discussed in Chapter 11, which focuses on programme outcomes. Programme partners (i.e. organisations that GOAL programmes worked with) are discussed in Chapter 6 (Partnerships and Networks).

The chapter begins by providing an overview of GOAL service users' demographic, educational and employment characteristics (section 4.1). Following this, GOAL programme staff characteristics are described (4.2) The chapter concludes with a brief synthesis of key findings (4.3). The implications of these findings will be discussed in later chapters.

4.1 Service users

This section first provides an overview of service users' demographic, educational and employment characteristics, synthesising data from all six countries. The section concludes with a brief country-by-country summary of service-user characteristics at the national level. (For a more in-depth look at programme participants at the level of individual countries, see the national evaluation reports available at http://www.projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications.) Figure 4.1. shows the total number of service users across the six countries.

Figure 4.1. *Number of service users in each country (N=981)*
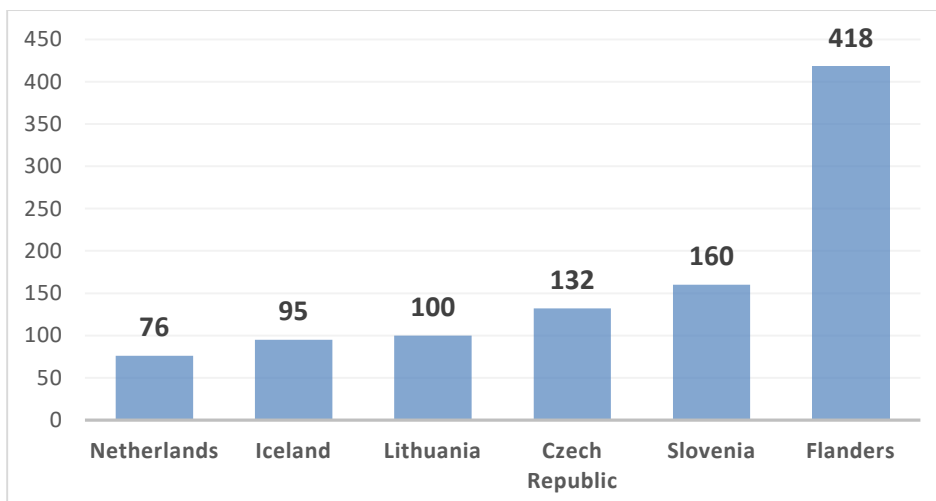
Demographic characteristics

Target group

All counsellors were asked to record the target group to which each service user "belonged". Only one answer could be selected, although in practice many service users belonged to more than one category, e.g. service users could be Unemployed *and* Early School Leavers. As Table 4.1. illustrates, **60% of service users were early school leavers**. The other sizeable subgroup was that of **job-seeker/unemployed** – almost one in four of the service users across the six countries was placed in this category.

Table 4.1. *Target groups*

	N	%
Job-seeker/unemployed	224	23
Early school leaver	585	60
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	39	4
Detainee	22	2
Over-50	50	5
Employed (& low-educated)	61	6
Total	**981**	**100**

Gender

Across the six countries as a whole, **the number of male service users was almost exactly equal to the number of female service users** (491 males, 490 females, see Table 4.2.). However, within countries the gender profile of clients was less balanced. In Iceland, two-thirds of clients were female (see Table A.2 in Appendix A). In Lithuania, 80% of the clients were male, as the intervention sites through which the guidance services were offered attract considerably more males than females to their educational (second chance) and vocational courses. Similarly, in the Netherlands, 74% of the clients were male (as a high proportion were detainees in a male prison). In Flanders and the Czech Republic the gender groups were well balanced and in Slovenia there were more female (65%) than male (35%) service users.

Table 4.2. *Characteristics of service users: Gender*

	N	%
Male	491	50
Female	490	50
Total	**981**	**100**

As Table 4.3. shows, **different target groups had only slightly different gender balances**. The group of detainees were all male service users, but among the migrant/refugee target group there was a much higher proportion of female service users and among over-50s a slightly higher proportion of female clients.

Table 4.3. *Characteristics of service users: Target group by gender*

Target group	Male		Female	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Job-seeker/unemployed	124	55	100	45
Early school leaver	286	49	299	51
Migrant/refugee/asylum seeker	8	21	31	79
Detainee	22	100	0	0
Over-50	21	42	29	58
Employed (& low-educated)	30	49	31	51
Total	**491**	**50**	**490**	**50**

Age

Looking across all six countries (see Table 4.4.), we can see that 71% of GOAL service users were aged **35 years or under**, with the most common age range being between 19 and 25 years old. As Table A.3 in Appendix A shows, clients in the Czech Republic and Flanders were on average younger than in Lithuania, the Netherlands and Iceland, with the oldest average age of the service user in Slovenia.

Table 4.4. *Characteristics of service users: Age (missing data N=28)*

	N	**%**
18 and under	92	10
19-25	366	38
26-35	218	23
36-55	244	26
55-65	32	3
66 and older	1	0.1
Total	**953**	**100**

Note: percentages are rounded

As the data summarised in Table 4.5. demonstrate, GOAL female service users were only slightly older than male service users.

Table 4.5. *Characteristics of service users: Age by gender (missing data N=28)*

	Male		Female	
Age bands	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
18 and under	47	10	45	9
19-25	197	41	169	36
26-35	105	22	113	24
36-55	112	23	132	28
55-65	16	3	16	3
66 and older	-	-	1	0.1
Total	**477**	**100**	**476**	**100**

Note: percentages are rounded

Residence and home language

Most service users in Wave 1 were citizens of the country in which they lived: 84% were nationals. The next most common residence status was refugee (45 clients, 5%).

Table 4.6. *Characteristics of service users: Residence status (missing data N=41)*

	N	%
National/citizen	789	84
EU national	41	4
Non-EU national with residence permit	35	4
Asylum seeker	25	3
Refugee	45	5
Other	5	0.5
Total	**940**	**100**

Note: percentages are rounded

The greatest diversity with regards to the residence status among GOAL clients was in Flanders and Iceland and the most homogenous groups of the service users were in the Czech Republic and Lithuania.

Table 4.7. *Characteristics of service users: Residency status by country, percentages are given in brackets (missing data N=41)*

	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
National/citizen	131 (99)	291 (77)	74 (79)	98 (98)	62 (82)	133 (83)
EU national	-	19 (5)	13 (14)	1 (1)	4 (5)	4 (3)
Non-EU national with residence permit	1 (1)	4 (1)	5 (5)	1 (1)	2 (3)	22 (14)
Asylum seeker	-	22 (6)	-	-	3 (4)	-
Refugee	-	42 (11)	1 (1)	-	2 (3)	-
Other	-	-	1 (1)	-	3 (4)	1 (1)
Total	**132 (100)**	**378 (100)**	**94 (100)**	**100 (100)**	**76 (100)**	**160 (100)**

Almost three-quarters (71%) of GOAL service users across all six countries were native speakers of a main language/s of the country they resided in (see Table 4.8.).

Table 4.8. *Characteristics of service users: Home language (missing data N=130)*

	N	%
Native speaker	602	71
Linguistic minority	249	29
Total	**851**	**100**

As the data summarised in Table 4.9. demonstrate, service users who were native speakers tended to be slightly older than service users from linguistic minorities.

Table 4.9. *Characteristics of service users: Age by home language (missing data N=145)*

	Linguistic minority		Native speaker	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
18 and under	25	10	49	8
19-25	95	39	217	37
26-35	63	26	138	23
36-55	56	23	161	27
55-65	5	2	26	4
66 and older	-	-	1	0.1
Total	**244**	**100**	**592**	**100.1**

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Looking across the six countries (see Table 4.10.), most GOAL service users in the Czech Republic and Slovenia were native speakers of the language of the country they lived in. This was not the case in the Netherlands, where 68% spoke Dutch as their native language, or in Flanders, where Dutch was the native language of 61% of the sample or Iceland with 66% speaking Icelandic as their home language. Lithuania had the most linguistically diverse group of GOAL clients: this can be explained by country's population history.

Table 4.10. *Characteristics of service users: Home language, percentages are given in brackets (missing data N=130)*

	CZ	FL	IS	LT	NL	SI
Linguistic minority	-	116 (39)	31 (34)	45 (45)	24 (32)	33 (22)
Native speaker	132 (100)	182 (61)	61 (66)	55 (55)	52 (68)	120 (78)
Total	**132 (100)**	**298 (100)**	**92 (100)**	**100 (100)**	**76 (100)**	**153 (100)**

Education and employment characteristics

Highest educational level

The GOAL project was specifically targeted at adults without upper secondary education, and **79% of the sample had lower secondary education or less** as their highest educational level (see **Table 4.11**). The remaining 21% had completed higher levels of education, including 37 (4%) clients with tertiary level education. (Some immigrant clients had tertiary qualifications from another country.)

Table 4.11. *Highest Educational Level (missing data N=32)*

	N	%	Cumulative %
Not completed primary education	42	4	4
Primary education	155	16	20
Lower secondary education	557	59	79
General upper secondary education (gymnasium)	67	7	86
Vocational education (upper secondary level)	84	10	96
Post-secondary education, non-tertiary	7	1	97
Tertiary education (bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees)	37	4	101
Total	**949**	**101**	

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Current education and learning

222 (23%) service users were involved in learning at the time of their guidance session, and out of those, 40% (89 clients) were working towards a qualification. Slighly over half of Lithuanian service users were engaged in education and training; however only a small minority (ten clients) were working toward a qualification. 39% of service users in Lithuania and 44% in Slovenia were involved in education and/or training when they started their guidance sessions (see Tables A.5 and A.6 in Appendix A). At the other end of the scale, 98% of clients in the Czech Republic and 90% in Flanders were not involved in education, and very few of those who were were working towards a qualification. In the Netherlands, also, only a small minority were in education at the time of their guidance sessions (21%), although over half of these (69%) were working towards a formal qualification.

There were some differences among service users with different residency status with regards to their educational status. However, the numbers for some groups were too small to draw any reliable conclusions (see Table B.3 in Appendix B).

Employment status

Over half (56%) of GOAL clients were unemployed. A fifth of service users were registered as economically inactive, that is, not retired and not looking for a job. As the collected data (see Table B.1 in Appendix B) suggest there is **no strong connection between educational level and employment status** for service users. This may be because the project overall has had a focus on a relatively low-educated group of people but their employment status was not a primary criterion for them to be selected into the project. If anything, there was a trend for slightly higher qualified service users to be more likely to be unemployed at the start of the counselling sessions. This is perhaps explained by desire for a career change from the area of their existing educational qualifications.

Table 4.12. *Current employment status of service users at the first session (missing data N=21)*

	N	%
Employed full-time	132	14
Employed part-time	39	4
Self-employed	14	2
Unemployed	538	56
Retired	3	0.3
Inactive (not retired and not actively looking for a job)	198	21
Other	36	4
Total	960	101.3

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding up

Previous guidance

On aggregate, **34% of service users had some previous experience of adult guidance**. Very few of the GOAL clients in the Czech Republic had previous experience of receiving such guidance. Only 21% of the service users in Lithuania, 28% in Slovenia and 34% in Iceland had received guidance previously. In Flanders and the Netherlands, however, around half the service users had previous experience of guidance.

Table 4.13. *Previous guidance received by country*

		No		Yes	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Country	**Czech Republic**	121	92	11	8
	Flanders	226	54	192	46
	Iceland	62	66	32	34
	Lithuania	78	79	21	21
	Netherlands	43	57	32	43
	Slovenia	45	28	112	70
	Total	**575**	**59**	**400**	**42**

Note: Six clients did not know if they have received previous guidance.
Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding.

This highlights an important contextual difference amongst the GOAL countries, which may have an impact on the uptake of guidance and the impact it has. **Neither the Czech Republic nor Lithuania have a tradition of adult guidance**; furthermore, both national reports draw attention to a cultural resistance to counselling/guidance and, certainly in the Lithuanian context, among men in particular. In the Czech Republic, this is further complicated by the links between the GOAL service and the Labour Office. In this environment the career counselling can appear as a mandatory service to clients, with receipt of benefits contingent on attendance (although this is not actually the case). This perception can impact both on what clients expect can be achieved through the sessions, and also the responses they give to data monitoring questions about goals, attitudes and expectations, as social desirability may be a strong influence.

Previous barriers to improving education or career

Service users cited a broad range of reasons why they had not improved their education or career more up to this stage in their lives. **No single reason or set of reasons stood out**, but the most commonly cited factor, **not being able to afford education or training**, was cited by 28% of respondents, as shown in Table 4.14. Other leading causes were lack of motivation (25% of respondents), mental or physical health problems (19%), being too busy taking care of family (18%), lack of confidence (18%), and negative prior experiences with schooling (16%).

Table 4.14. *Barriers: What sort of things have stopped you improving your education or your career up till now? (multiple choice question answers do not add to 100%)*

	Responses N	Responses %	% of Cases
Insufficient basic skills (e.g. cannot read or write, poor reading and/or writing skills)	70	4	9
Low country's main language proficiency	108	6	13
Lack of prerequisites (entrance requirements)	51	3	6
I was too busy at work	106	6	13
I was too busy taking care of my family	146	8	18
Cost of education or training was too expensive/I could not afford it	226	12	28
Lack of information about courses	44	2	5
No suitable courses available	27	1	3
Courses offered at an inconvenient time/place	41	2	5
Negative prior experience with schooling	127	7	16
Learning disabilities (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia)	71	4	9
Age	38	2	5
Health problems (incl. mental and physical health)	152	8	19
Lack of confidence	149	8	18
Lack of motivation	202	11	25
Lack of support from family	115	6	14
Lack of support from employer	19	1	2
Lack of transport or mobility	69	4	9
Cultural or religious obstacles	10	1	1
Criminal record in the past	10	1	1
Other personal reasons	106	6	13
Other	20	1	3
Total	**1907**	**100**	**235**

Further data analysis (see Table B.4 in Appendix B) reveals that **female service users were more likely to mention cost of education and being busy taking care of their family, as well as lack of support from family and lack of confidence,** as barriers to improving their education and career. The data also show that younger service users (see Table B.5 in Appendix B) were more likely to mention negative experiences at school as barriers for improving education and career, while a higher proportion of older service users mention their age, taking care of family and being busy at work as things that stopped them from advancing their education and career until now.

As exploration of data suggests (see Table B.7 in Appendix B), **early school leavers** were more likely to mention lack of basic skills, lack of confidence and negative prior schooling experience as barriers for improving their education and career. Service users classified as **job seekers/unemployed** or **employed with low education** were more likely to mention lack of motivation.

The quantitative evidence does not suggest any clear association between employment status and/or educational qualification level and barriers for improving education and career. The data demonstrate that across most of the barrier categories those who were unemployed or economically

inactive and those with lower qualifications mentioned those barriers more often than those service users who had higher educational qualifications and were in employment (see Table B.5 and B.6 in Appendix B).

Self-efficacy

In the initial guidance session clients were asked to answer three questions concerning their own judgment about their self-efficacy, i.e. their self-perceived ability to achieve desired outcomes in life. Each question was made up of two statements, one presenting a more positive view and the other a more negative view. The positive statement gave the client a score of 1 point for that question and the negative statement gave them a score of 0 points; thus the scores for the whole scale could range from 0-3 points, with 3 representing a client who chose the positive statement for all three questions and who thus had the highest possible score on the self-efficacy scale. The lowest possible score was 0.

Table 4.15. *Self-efficacy scores*

	N	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
0	36	4	5	5
1	110	11	15	20
2	171	17	23	43
3	423	43	57	100
Total	**740**	75	100	
Missing data	241	25		
Total	981	100		

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding up

Across the six project countries, only 36 (5%) of the 740 clients for whom we have data gave three negative answers and thus scored 0 on the scale. Slightly more than half of the service users (57%) gave three positive answers, scoring 3 on the scale (see Table 4.15.). As summarised in **Klaida! Nerastas nuorodos šaltinis.**., the self-efficacy scores across the six GOAL countries were similar, with slightly more than half of clients scoring at the highest point of the scale. The proportion of the clients who scored at the top of the self-efficacy scale was highest in Slovenia (71%).

Table 4.16. *Average self-efficacy scores by country*

		CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-	**0**	3	2	12	6	4	5	5	5	8	11	4	3	**36**	**5**
efficacy	**1**	25	19	34	17	12	16	11	11	10	13	18	11	**110**	**15**
score	**2**	33	25	52	26	13	17	29	29	20	26	24	15	**171**	**23**
	3	71	54	99	50	47	62	55	55	38	50	113	71	**423**	**57**

At first glance, these self-efficacy scores may seem higher than might be expected give the multi-problem backgrounds of many in the target group. Lithuanian evaluators speculated that results for that country might be influenced by a stereotype in Lithuania that it is unacceptable, especially for males, to recognise and show own weakness in public. Higher than expected self-efficacy scores for

this target group may also potentially be explained by selection bias, as **many GOAL clients are motivated** enough to choose to seek help and come to guidance sessions.

Attitudes to learning

In their sessions service users in the six project countries reported on their enjoyment of learning (see Figure 4.2.). Slightly more than a half (53%) of service users agreed that they liked learning a lot, a further 40% reported that they liked learning new things a bit and only 7% said they did not like learning new things.

Figure 4.2. *% Do you like learning new things, service users' responses at first session (N=775)*
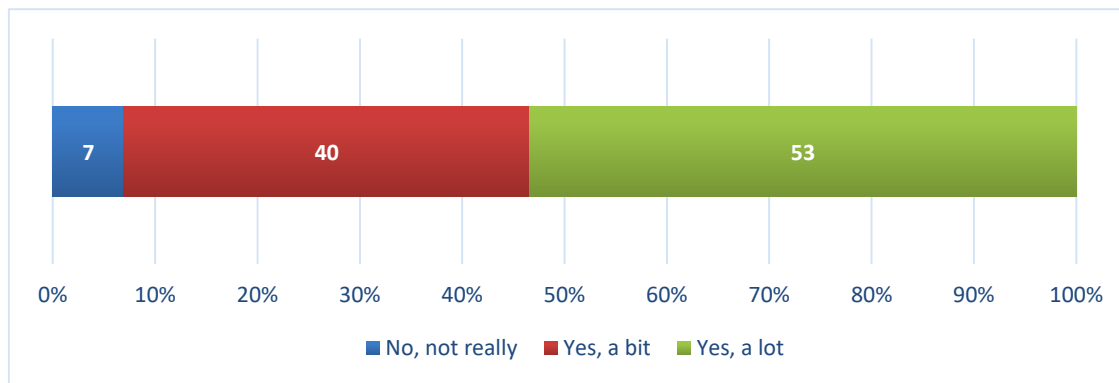
A very **high proportion of service users in most countries reported they liked learning new things** a lot or a bit; however, Lithuania (10%) and the Czech Republic (21%) had a much higher proportion than other countries of service users who said that they did not like learning new things (see Figure 4.3.). Evaluators in the Czech Republic speculated that there was little interest among their client sample in education for education's sake: clients wanted to learn only where this learning was part of their route towards employment.

Figure 4.3. *% Do you like learning new things, service users' responses at first session by country*

Horizontal stacked bar chart showing responses by country:

Country	No, not really	Yes, a bit	Yes, a lot
Slovenia (N=160)	3	26	71
Netherlands (N=76)	4	37	59
Lithuania (N=100)	10	49	41
Iceland (N=95)	2	41	57
Flanders (N=230)	3	37	60
Czech Republic (N=116)	21	53	25
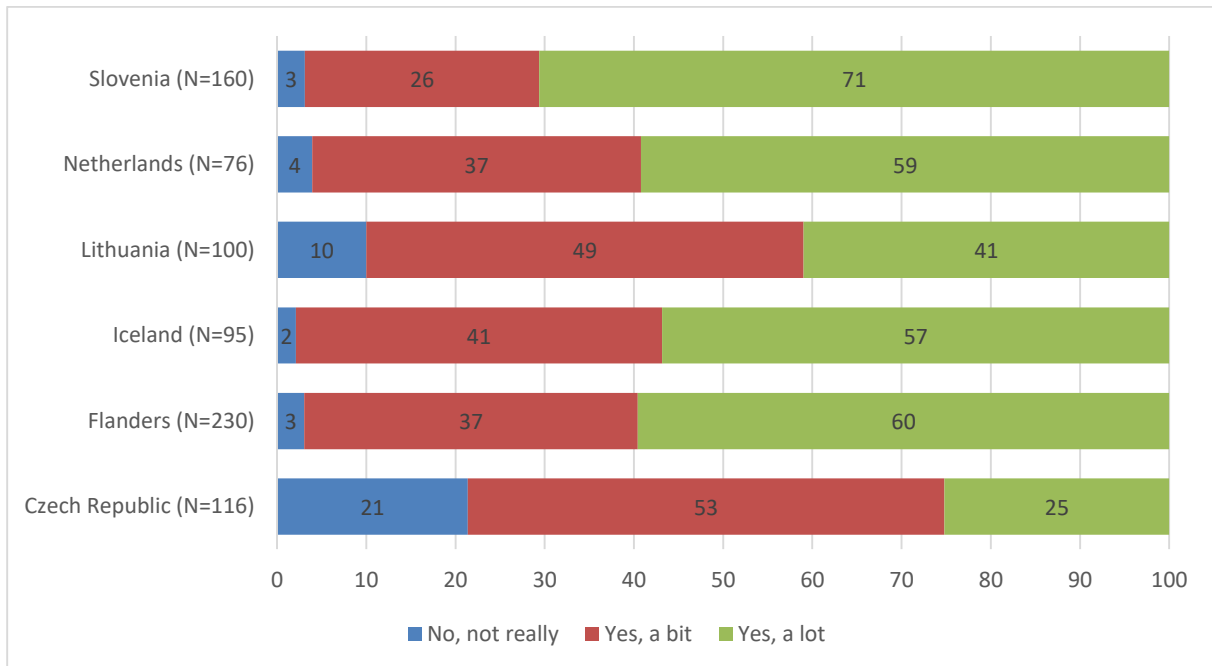
Learning goals

Service users whose guidance focused on educational opportunities were asked if they had specific learning goals. Answers are presented in Table 4.17. Almost half of these service users (44%) reported that they wanted to achieve a specific qualification and 39% that they needed learning to find a job. Very few service users did not have any specific learning objectives.

Younger service users were more likely to mention achieving qualifications as their learning objective, whereas a higher proportion of older GOAL clients wanted to improve their skills in a specific area and/or needed training for their current job (see Table B.10 in Appendix B). Evaluators in Flanders did report that although the young people in their sample wanted to obtain a diploma, their previous negative experiences meant that they were disinclined to embark on this goal within a school setting.

Table 4.17. *Do you have specific learning goals? (N= 730)*

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
Yes, I want to achieve a qualification of any sort	199	16	28
Yes, I want to achieve a specific qualification	315	26	44
Yes, I want to improve my skills in general	146	12	20
Yes, I want to improve my skills in a specific area	193	16	27
Yes, I need this training for my current job	49	4	7
Yes, I need this learning to find a job	275	22	39
No, I do not have any specific objectives	50	4	7
Total	1227	100	172

Note: clients could choose more than one response, thus the final column adds up to more than 100%.

There were some slight differences based on the **educational level**. Service users with a higher educational level were more likely to be more specific and practical about their learning objectives, with a higher proportion wanting to gain specific skills and/or needing training for their current job (see Table B.12 in Appendix B). However, there was no clear association between learning goals and gender (see Table B.9 in Appendix B). The data provide evidence for an association between learning goals and target group (see Figure 4.4.). Employed low-educated service users were more likely to cite the goals of achieving a specific qualification or improving skills in a specific area and/or needing training for their job. In contrast, a higher proportion of early school leavers wanted to achieve a qualification and needed learning to find a job.

Figure 4.4. *Specific learning goals, % by target group*
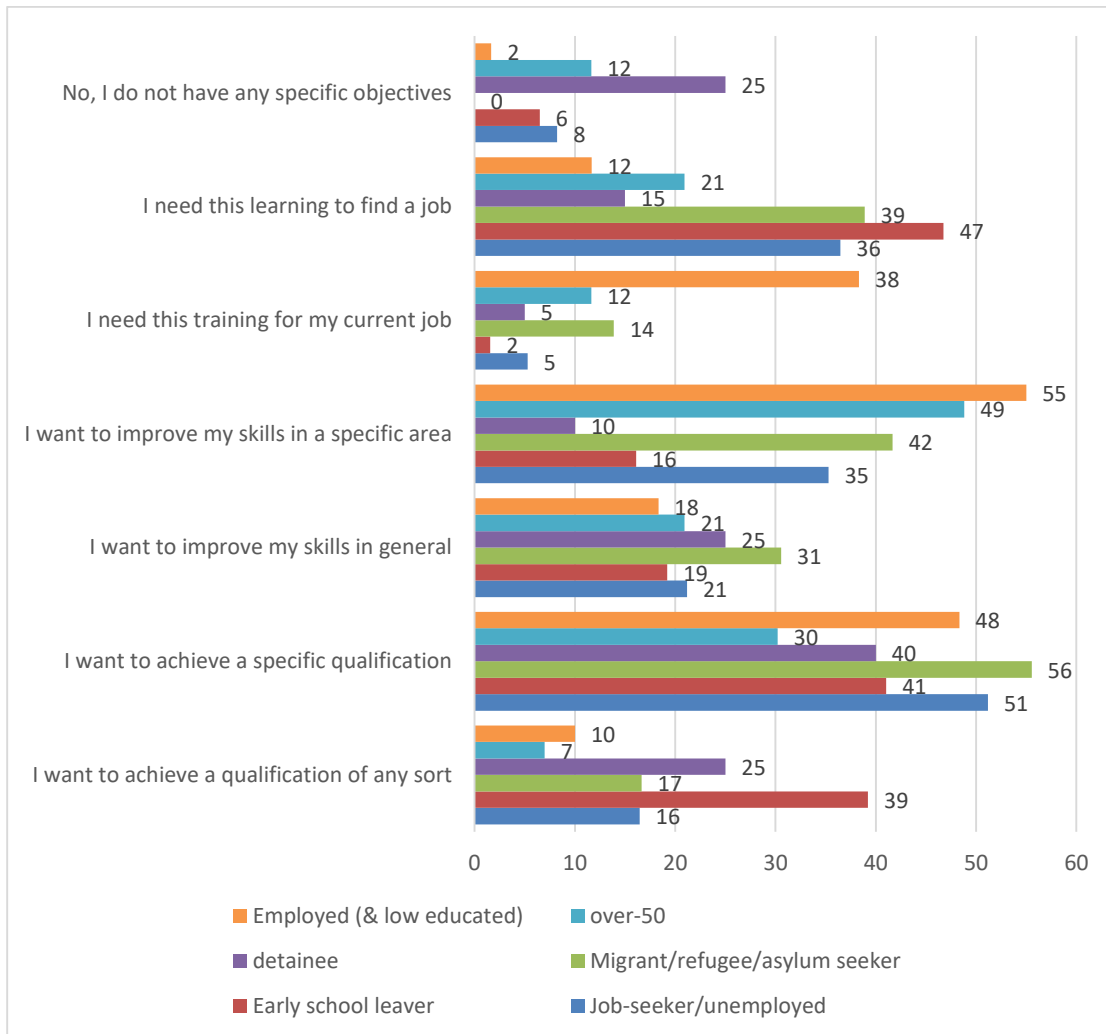
Career goals

Amongst service users whose guidance focused on jobs, **most did not have clear career goals** (see Figure 4.5.). Only around one fifth (22%) of service users had a specific job in mind and around one third (31%) knew what industry they wanted to work in and/or the type of work they wanted to do. The remaining clients (47%) did not have any career or specific job in mind.

Figure 4.5. *Clarity of career goals: Does your client have clear career goals? % (N=501)*
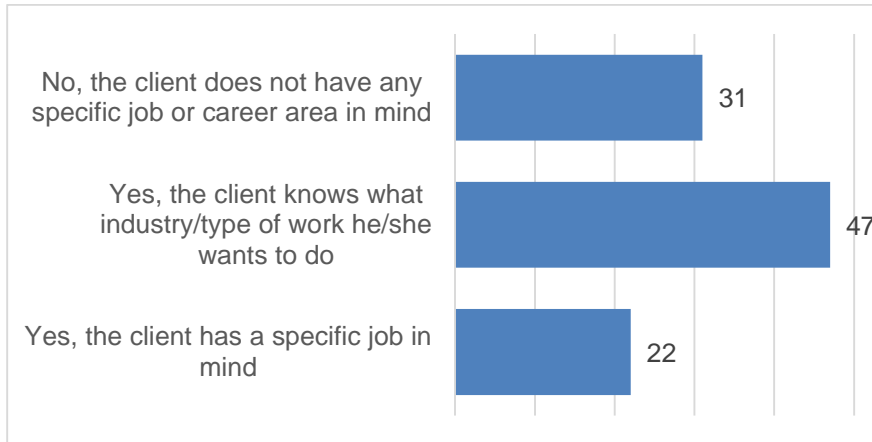
It is noteworthy that a slightly higher proportion of younger service users had more specific ideas about their career, e.g. what job they wanted to do or what industry they wanted to work in (see Table 4.18.).

Table 4.18. *Clarity of career goals by age*

		No, the client does not have any specific job or career area in mind		Yes, the client has a specific job in mind		Yes, the client knows what industry/type of work he/she wants to do	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Age	**18 and under**	9	23	7	18	24	60
	19-25	50	26	53	28	88	46
	26-35	47	36	23	18	59	46
	36-55	36	32	23	21	52	47
	55-65	10	45	1	5	11	50
	66 and older	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		**152**	**100**	**107**	**100**	**234**	**100**

Service users with higher educational qualifications had more specific ideas about what job they wanted to do or what industry and/or type of work they wanted to do (see Figure 4.6.).

Figure 4.6. *Clarity of career goals by highest educational level, %*
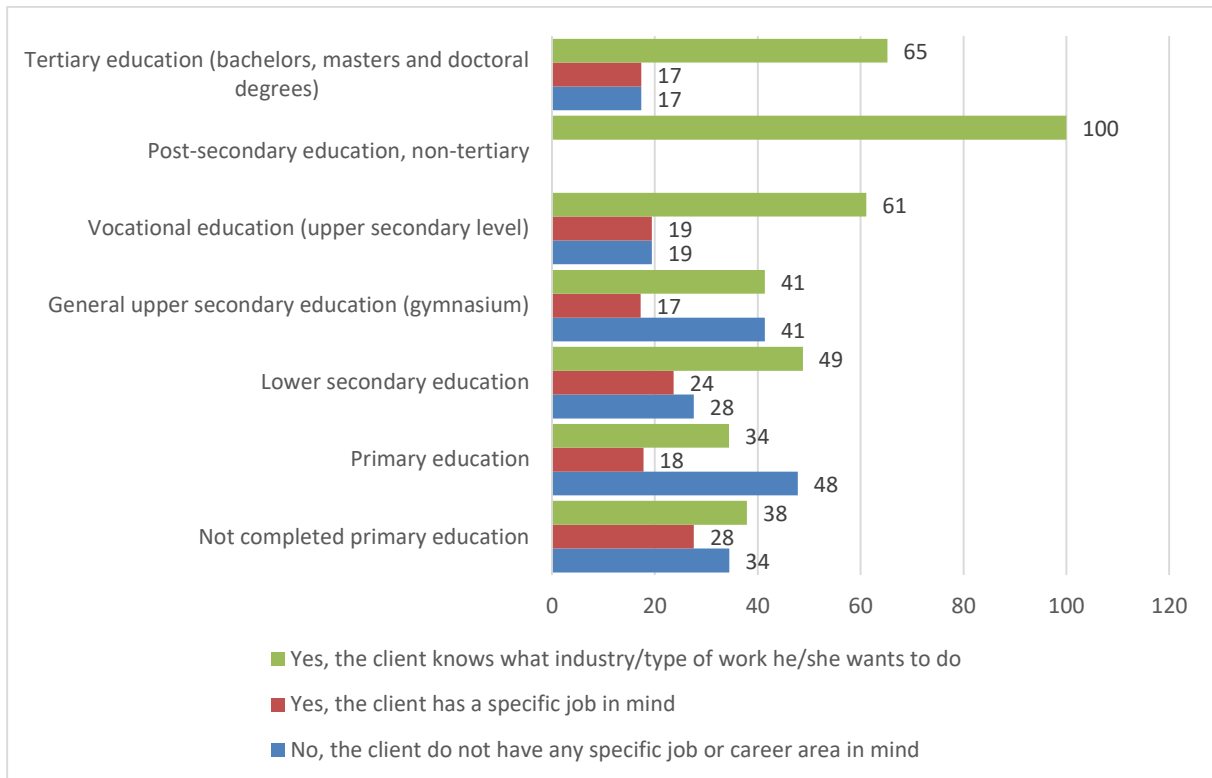
The data did not provide any evidence for an association between career goals and gender (see Tables B.13 in Appendix B).

Country-by-country summary of service users' demographic, educational and employment characteristics

Czech Republic

A total of **132 adults** (72 women and 60 men) used the GOAL services offered at the two intervention sites in the Czech Republic. More than three-quarters (77%) were classified as early school leavers by counsellors in the monitoring data, with the remainder job-seekers: this said, most early school leavers were also looking for work. Over half of service users (70 out of 132) were aged 25 years or younger, a demographic group particularly susceptible to unemployment; only six clients were aged over 56. Unlike some other GOAL countries (e.g. Flanders and the Netherlands) service users in the Czech Republic can be characterised as homogenous, with all but one client having Czech nationality and 93% naming Czech as their home language.

Very few GOAL service users in the Czech Republic (5 out of 132) were educated to above the lower secondary level; clients were also highly unlikely to be engaged in education and learning at the time they sought guidance, with only seven studying at the time they entered the guidance. Eighty-six per cent (N=113) of service users were unemployed. Very few clients (9%) had previous experience of guidance services, and the minority who did all came from one intervention site only, that located in Most.

Flanders

A total of **418 adults** (210 women and 208 men) used the GOAL services offered at the two intervention sites in Flanders. All clients were early school leavers. As in the Czech Republic service users in Flanders were at the younger end of the age scale: almost three-quarters (73%) of those whose age was recorded were under 26 years old. This age profile is in part a reflection of the business remit of the intervention sites, with De Stap specifically focusing on younger people; this said, over half (52%) of clients at De Leerwinkel were also aged 25 years or younger. Three-quarters of service users (77%) were Belgian by nationality, but the client group is by no means homogenous: 26 different home languages were recorded in the monitoring data.

Only 17 service users were educated to above the lower secondary level. A greater proportion of clients than in the Czech Republic were engaged in education and learning at the time they sought guidance, although at 30% (N=127) it was still only a minority who were studying. The majority (56%, N=220) were registered as unemployed, a reflection of service referral routes through employment and welfare services. Service users in Flanders were far more likely that those in the Czech Republic to have previously attended guidance services: almost half (46%, N=192) had experienced educational or career guidance in the past.

Iceland

A total of **95 adults** used the GOAL services offered at the two intervention sites in Iceland; unlike in the Czech Republic and Flanders where there was a more even gender balance, more women (67%, N=64) than men (33%, N=31) participated in GOAL in Iceland. There was also more diversity recorded in Iceland in terms of target group: the largest group (38%) were classified as early school leavers, but there were also large numbers of unemployed people (27%) and migrants/refugees/asylum seekers (19%). In Iceland the composition of the client group changed between the first and second waves of the evaluation, with more women and more job seekers using the service in the latter stage. Women were more likely than men to be job seekers, and all service users in the migrant category were women.

On the whole, service users in Iceland were also somewhat older than those in some other countries: half of service users (51%, N=47) were aged between 26 and 35 and a quarter (24%, N=22) fell into the next age bracket, 36-55 years. As with gender and target group, the Icelandic sample became more diverse in terms of nationality and home language as the project progressed, although four-fifths of particpants were Icelandic nationals and 66% (N=61) used Icelandic as the main language in their homes.

A large proportion of Icelandic service users had achieved only limited education: 64 clients had no more than primary level education, and of these, 10 had not finished primary school. Service users in the migrant category were more highly educated. This said, over half of clients (56%) were engaged in education and learning when they came to the GOAL service: the vast majority (81%) of these adults were not working towards any qualification and were likely to be taking part in initiatives outside the formal education system. One third of service users (N=32) had had career or educational guidance as adults.

Lithuania

A total of **100 adults** used the GOAL services offered at the two intervention sites in Vilnius; unlike countries where there was a more even gender balance, far more men (N=80) than women (N=20) participated in GOAL in Lithuania. In Wave 1 of the evaluation all the Lithuanian service users were men, a reflection in large part of the institutions these clients were drawn from, and the inclusion of women in the second wave was the result of targeted recruitment efforts by the project team. All but one female client came from the service offered at one site only (the Vilnius Adult Education Centre).

In terms of target groups, the Lithuanian sample in Wave 1 was fairly evenly split between early school leavers and job-seekers/unemployed. As with gender, efforts to diversify the body of service users in the second wave changed this picture: over half the final client group comprised of job seekers (N=55), with 29 service users classified as early school leavers, and a futher ten allocated to the "over-50s" target group. As with gender, the two intervention sites differed in their client bases: 88% of GOAL service users at the Vilnius Jerusalem Labour Market Training Centre were job-seekers/unemployed. Looking across the age profiles of service users in Lithuania, there were roughly even numbers of clients in the 19-25 years (N=28), 26-35 years (N=26), and 36-55 age brackets (N=29). Male service users and early school leavers tended to be younger.

In terms of citizenship, the characteristics of the Lithuanian sample were similar to those observed in the Czech Republic: 98% were Lithuanian citizens. Their home languages reflected the distribution in the general Vilnius population, with 55% speaking Lithuanian, 30% Russian and 14% Polish. Native speakers tended to be slightly younger than service users from linguistic minorities. Overall Lithuanian service users were more highly educated than those in the other five countries, with 42% of service users having attained upper secondary education (either general or vocational). Female GOAL service users were far less likely to be educated to this level than male. Thirty-nine of the GOAL clients were engaged in education, although only a small minority (N=9) were working towards a qualification. Two-thirds (N=63) of service users were unemployed. As in the Czech Republic, very few clients (N=21) had previous experience of guidance services.

The Netherlands

Monitoring data were recorded for a total of **76 adults** using GOAL services at three intervention sites in the Netherlands. Of these service users, 30% (N=23) were detainees and the remainder (N=53) were in the job-seeker/unemployed target group. As two of the intervention sites were male only prisons, unsurprisingly males outnumber females in the Dutch sample: there were 56 male service users and 20 female service users. The age distribution in the Netherlands was older than in the Czech Republic or Flanders: most service users fell in either the 26-35 (N=21) or 36-55 (N=33) age brackets. Eighty-two per cent (N=62) of GOAL service users were Dutch citizens and 71% of clients named Dutch as the language they most commonly spoke at home.

The majority (61%) of service users were not educated above lower secondary level: however, the Netherlands' client group was diverse and nine clients (12%) were educated to tertiary level. Seventy-nine per cent of service users were not currently engaged in education and training; of the minority who were (N=16), two-thirds (N=11) were working towards a qualification. The proportion

of service users who had previous experience of guidance services was similar to that observed in Flanders: 42% (N=32) fell in this category.

Slovenia

A total of **160 adults** used the GOAL services offered at the two locations (in four intervention sites) in Slovenia: as in Iceland, more women (65%, N=104) than men (35%, N=56) participated in the programme. In terms of target groups, the largest single group was unemployed people (40%), although there were also substantial sized groupings of employed, low-educated people (29% of the sample), the over-50s (19%) and migrants (11%). All of the service users in this last category accessed the GOAL programme in Ljubljana and service users in that location were also more likely to be unemployed than those in the Šaleška region, where the client base had more diversity across unemployed, employed and older adults. Overall, the Slovenian service users were older than those in the other five countries, in part because particular efforts were made to recruit clients from this target group. The 46–55 age group accounted for the largest single share of clients (29% of the sample), followed by the 36–45 age group (27%), the 26–35 age group (25%) and the 19–25 age group (10%).

As in most other countries, the vast majority of service users were citizens: 89% had Slovenian nationality. As we would expect, Slovenian was also the most common language spoken at home: 76% spoke Slovenian, with the second largest group comprising native Bosnian speakers (6%), followed by speakers of Serbo-Croatian (4%).

Over half (57%) of GOAL service users in Slovenia were not educated above lower secondary level; 35%, however, had attained upper secondary education (either general or vocational). Service providers from the Šaleška region included clients with lower levels of education than service providers from the Ljubljana region. Around half (51%) of the sample were engaged in education and training at the time they sought guidance from GOAL: across most age groups, more people were involved in education and training than were not, except in the 26-35 age band, where those not studying (66%) outweighed those who were (34%). One third (34%) of the sample was in full time employment: generally, those clients with lower levels of educational attainment were more likely to be employed than those with higher levels. Of the six countries participating in GOAL, Slovenian service users recorded the highest levels of previous experience of guidance services: 70% of clients had had previous involvement with guidance services.

4.2   Programme staff

All staff working on GOAL were asked to complete a pro forma which gathered information on some demographic characteristics, on their job role, and on their qualifications and training. No quantitative data were collected from programme staff in the Netherlands as the nature of the intervention used there made this information less relevant, both in itself and in comparison to the other countries.

In this section, we report on programme staff's demographic and employment characteristics, as of Spring 2016 (one year into the GOAL programme). Chapter 7, which focuses on counsellor competences, reports on staff experience, education and training.

Gender

Most GOAL staff (24 of 29) were female. All four programme staff in Lithuania were female, likewise in Iceland. In Slovenia, seven of the nine counsellors were female, as were six of seven counsellors in Flanders (Table 4.19.).

Table 4.19. *Programme staff: gender by country*

		Female		Male	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Country	**CZ**	3	75	1	25
	FL	6	86	1	14
	IS	4	100	-	-
	LT	4	100	-	-
	SI	7	70	3	30
	Total	**24**	**83**	**5**	**17**

Age

Across the six countries, the average age of programme staff was 43 years old, with the youngest being 26 years of age and the oldest 71. Only seven programme staff out of 29 (24%) were 30 years or younger (see Table 4.20.). The two countries that were the most different from one another with regard to age were Slovenia and Flanders: in the former, all staff were over 40 years old whereas in the latter no staff were.

Table 4.20. *Programme staff: age by country*

		30 and under		31-40		41-50		over 50	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Country	**CZ**	-	-	2	50	-	-	2	50
	FL	6	86	1	14	-	-	-	-
	IS	-	-	2	50	-	-	2	50
	LT	1	25	-	-	2	50	1	25
	SI	-	-	-	-	7	70	3	30
	Total	**7**	**24**	**5**	**17**	**9**	**31**	**8**	**28**

Education

On the whole, GOAL counsellors were very well educated: 64% were qualified to the Masters level, with another 21% qualified to degree level (Table 4.21.). The majority of counsellors (52%) had a degree in education (Table 4.22.). As shown in Table 4.23., 66% of counsellors also had a specific guidance/counselling qualification.

Table 4.21. *Programme staff: education level by country (missing data N=1)*

		Level 5 (EQF): Diploma		Level 7: University degree		Level 8: Masters		Level 9: PhD	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	-	-	2	50	1	25	1	25
	FL	-	-	2	29	5	71	-	-
	IS	1	25	1	25	1	25	1	25
	LT	-	-	-	-	4	100	-	-
	SI	1	11	1	11	7	78	-	-
	Total	**2**	**7**	**6**	**21**	**18**	**64**	**2**	**7**

Table 4.22. *Programme staff: education subject by country*

		Education		Psychology		Other	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	3	75	-	-	1	25
	FL	3	43	-	-	4	57
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-
	LT	-	-	2	50	2	50
	SI	6	60	-	-	4	40
	Total	**15**	**52**	**3**	**10**	**11**	**38**

Table 4.23. *Programme staff: specific qualification in educational, employment or career guidance/counselling by country*

		No		Yes	
		N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	1	25	3	75
	FL	3	43	4	57
	IS	1	25	3	75
	LT	3	75	1	25
	SI	2	20	8	80
	Total	**10**	**34**	**19**	**66**

Employment conditions

As shown in Table 4.24., GOAL staff across the six countries were all on either permanent (76%) or fixed term (24%) contracts. No counsellors were employed on casual or temporary contracts.

Table 4.24. *Programme staff: contract type by country*

		Permanent		Fixed-term		Casual		Temporary		Other	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	CZ	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-	-	-
	FL	3	43	4	57	-	-	-	-	-	-
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-	-	-	-	-
	LT	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	SI	10	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	22	76	7	24	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4.25. provides a full-time/part-time breakdown. Three quarters (76%) of programme staff were employed full-time, with 17% being part-time and 9% being either sessional or hourly-paid.

Table 4.25. *Programme staff: contract type (hours) by country*

		Full-time		Part-time		Hourly paid/Sessional	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	CZ	2	50	1	25	1	25
	FL	4	57	3	43	-	-
	IS	3	75	1	25	-	-
	LT	3	75	-	-	1	25
	SI	10	100	-	-	-	-
	Total	22	76	5	17	2	7

Across countries, counsellors differed substantially in various aspects of their work history and situation, as can be seen from national reports. Counsellors in Slovenia tended to have been employed by their current organisation for a relatively long time, averaging just under 17 years in their current organisation. At the other end of the scale, counsellors in Flanders averaged just over one year with their current organisation.

4.3   Key findings

The number of service users for whom monitoring data was recorded differed across the six GOAL countries, ranging from a low of 76 in the Netherlands to a high of 418 in Flanders. However, in the Netherlands, that small figure masks a much larger number of clients who used that country's Literacy Screener tool: 1525.

Across the six countries as a whole, client gender mix was evenly balanced, although it was not necessarily balanced within each country. More than seven in 10 service users (71%) were aged 35 years or under, with the most common age range being 19-25. More than eight in 10 clients (84%) were citizens of the country in which they received counselling. Just over seven in 10 (71%) were native speakers of their country of residence's primary language.

One in five GOAL clients (20%) had no qualifications beyond primary education, while three in five (59%) had completed lower secondary education. Although the GOAL project was targeted at adults

without upper secondary education, a significant percentage of clients (21%) had qualifications beyond the lower secondary level.

More than half (56%) of GOAL clients were unemployed, and another 21% were economically inactive. One in three (34%) had some previous experience of adult guidance. Clients cited a number of barriers they had faced with regard to improving their qualifications or career prior to coming to GOAL, with the most common being the cost of education (28%), low motivation (25%), health problems (19%), family commitments (18%) and lack of confidence (18%). Overall, general self-efficacy was high and self-reported attitudes to learning were positive.

The most common goals at the start of GOAL counselling were: achieving a specific qualification and engaging in learning to find a job. At the start of GOAL, most clients had at least a rough idea of the type of work they would like to do in the future.

Most GOAL staff (83%) were female. The average age of programme staff was 43 years old; ages ranged from 26 to 71. In Slovenia all staff were over 40 years old whereas in Flanders no staff were. Staff were generally well educated: just under two-thirds (64%) had a Masters degree. The majority of counsellors (52%) had a degree in education; two-thirds (66%) of counsellors had a specific guidance/counselling qualification.

5 The GOAL guidance service

In this chapter we look more closely at the six GOAL guidance services to build up an in-depth picture of each programme and a typical counselling session within it: it aims to explain why clients came to the service, what happened to clients when they met with the counsellor, how often they came and how long they saw the counsellor for. In providing this overview the objectives are both to give a sense of each individual pilot and to also identify points of similarity and difference in their founding principles, programme models and in the challenges that were faced in putting these principles and models into practice.

The chapter begins by taking a closer look at the six national guidance models (5.1). This is followed by a summary of quantitative data on clients' reasons for seeking guidance and the types of sessions (number, length, focus) clients had with their GOAL counsellors (5.2) and, in section 5.3, two case studies that illustrate contrasting client experiences are presented. We then move on to identify and analyse the main challenges and barriers (5.4) teams faced, and which will be recurring themes in the remainder of this report. Chapter 5 concludes with a synthesis of key findings (section 5.5), and a discussion of the implications of these findings for future programme development and for policy (section 5.6).

5.1 Guidance activities and processes: national guidance models

In all countries (with the exception of the Netherlands[8]), the counselling model was based on the principles of **acknowledging clients' starting points, customising information and support to their needs, and supporting them to take forward steps**. Despite the shared principles, however, the counselling model did differ across countries – instead of there being a single model piloted across GOAL, each country had the freedom to develop the model that they felt was most appropriate to their context, given national needs and resources. This section presents an overview of each country's GOAL model, as provided by the local evaluation team in each country. Fuller descriptions are available in the national reports on the GOAL project website.

Czech Republic

A guiding principle in the Czech Republic was that the client should be an **active partner** in the counselling process. The underlying assumption behind this was that active cooperation in the counselling process will help motivate clients to take responsibility for a range of outcomes in life. Another key principle of the service was that effective cooperation and progress required **voluntary participation** on the part of the client.

Although the counselling was customised for each client, there was a common approach. In the introductory phase, **counsellors gathered information about clients** on factors such as family commitments and support, their wider social network, client health, ambitions and interests. Based

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[8] The Netherlands had a different, less intensive model centred around a specific tool and objective. See Section 1.3 of this report for more detail.

on this information, counsellors then chose methods for meeting the client's needs and helping the client achieve his or her goals.

Key focuses of the guidance process included:

- An explanation of project objectives;
- discussion and clarification of the client's expectations from guidance;
- identificiation of the client's needs;
- concretisation of the client's goals;
- mapping of the client's current situation and his/her competences.

This was typically followed by:

- identification of strengths and weaknesses;
- searching for solutions (e.g. regarding educational options, career changes, personal development journeys);
- and writing proposals or plans that emerged from the sessions.

Finally, the guidance process typically entailed supporting the client to reach their target (e.g. setting an action plans and checkpoints or milestones in the client's development based on his/her career objective/goals) and concluding the guidance process.

Flanders

In Flanders, the key principles underpinning guidance process were that: 1) counsellors would provide a **custom fit approach** tailored to the needs and interests of each client, and that 2) the **clients would be supported to take the lead in the guidance process**, rather than following the counsellor's directions and advice. Taking account of the **client's personal context** and developing a bespoke approach influenced by that context was a central component and one of the strengths of the GOAL service in Flanders. This approach meant that there was no standard or "off-the-shelf" guidance route. For instance, there was no fixed number of sessions or fixed duration of sessions. That being said, during the GOAL project, the two GOAL sites (de Leerwinkel and de Stap) worked together to develop a common flow chart outlining the key stages of the guidance process (see national report for more information). Key differences between GOAL and other counselling services in Flanders were the former's focus on education and training (as opposed to a strict focus on employment) and independence from educational providers.

Clients were typically referred to GOAL by a network partner (see Chapter 6) or they came on their own initiative, having heard about the service through an outreach promotion (see Chapter 7) or their personal network. GOAL in Flanders emphasised the value of a **"warm transfer"** whereby network partners who referred clients were encouraged to provide information about the client, and vice versa. The biggest benefit of "warm transfer" across service organisations was that it meant that clients did not have to explain as much to each organisation. By cooperating with referral organisations, the GOAL counsellors could start with a general idea of the client's background; according to counsellors, this helped create an environment of trust and helped limit client

frustration[9]. Prior to the first guidance session data was collected from client on topics such as educational need or interest, the guidance or service the person received from the referral partner, and their employment or social service status.

Once counselling began, it could roughly be divided into the following phases:

1. **Intake and information mediation**. During the first session, the counsellor tried to identify the learning needs and demands of the client and created a client profile containing his or her learning past, interests and personal context. For clients with a straightforward learning demand the **"intake conversation"** also helped the counsellor to verify whether the learning demands of the client fitted with their personal needs and interests, educational past and context (e.g. family commitments, local options, etc.). In the same session, the counsellor would give an overview of the local adult educational landscape, with a focus on ways to obtain a diploma of secondary education (de Stap) and/or with a focus on relevant educational options for the client (de Leerwinkel). Some of the objectives of this first phase were: getting acquainted, mapping the client's competences, general interests and achieved qualifications, listening to the client's learning demand or learning need and analysing it, providing general information on obtaining a qualification and the landscape of adult education, and providing information on a particular field of study and/or about specific courses and/or a particular educational institute.

2. **Guidance**. If the client decided that he or she needed more time to make an educational choice, additional sessions were planned. Typically the client and the counsellor would try **to find a training/educational programme that best suited the client**, taking account of his or her interests and personal context (e.g. the supporting network, practical barriers in the educational offer). During this process, the client would be supported to develop a personal action plan and to carry out the necessary steps to make an educational choice (e.g. attending information sessions in educational institutions, talking with someone in his or her personal network, developing a competence portfolio). There were site differences in how the personal context was explored – whether it focused on the complete context (de Stap) or whether only personal barriers and problems were discussed (de Leerwinkel). (See the national report for more discussion of within-country differences.) Some of the key objectives of this phase were: analysing personal and vocational interests; discussing competences; providing Information about a field of study or course; analysing different educational programmes or courses based on specific interests; making a selection of study programmes that fit individual expectations and needs; and developing the action plan.

3. **Choice and follow-up**. After an educational choice was made, the client was ready to arrange enrolment in a programme. In this phase, counsellors needed to provide additional support to clients with difficult educational pasts and/or clients with weak personal networks, as these people were the most likely not to follow through on their decision. This support was given either by keeping in contact during enrolment (de Leerwinkel) or during enrolment and the study programme (de Stap). At de Stap, the aim was for counsellors to be able to identify

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[9] Many GOAL clients had contact with several service organisations – e.g. labour offices, social welfare, et cetera – and did not enjoy having to provide the same information to multiple organisations.

motivational or other issues in a timely fashion, so as to increase learner persistence (Comings *et al.,* 1999; Comings, 2009) and reduce the likelihood of dropout. The key objectives of the choice and follow-up sessions were: clients making an educational choice; sharing information about enrolment; supporting clients' applications; following up on enrolment; and supporting study planning.

A unique feature of the Flemish programme model is the use of **"micro contacts"** in addition to face-to-face sessions, that is, motivational communication between the counsellor and the client, mainly by means of text message or social media. On average Flemish clients received eight emails, eight text messages and five phone calls during their guidance programme.

Iceland

The Iceland GOAL programme was aimed at a particularly vulnerable target group, and **clients typically required more sessions and took smaller forward steps** (if they progressed at all) than in other countries.

The most common format of engagement in Iceland was individual face-to-face meetings between the counsellor and the client. The main premise of the guidance service provision was that **the needs of the service user were in focus in every session** – the counselling was very much client-centred rather than institution-centred. An implication of this was that there was a great deal of variation in terms of guidance routes, session structure, session duration and the frequency of appointments. Every client had at least three sessions but some clients had up to 10. Similarly, the length of the sessions ranged from 10 minutes to two hours depending on the client's needs and the focus of the session.

Despite these client-centred variations, a typical counselling process in Iceland could be divided into **five focuses or phases**:

1. **Attending**. The clients and counsellors met in a safe environment; the counsellor explained the process and expectations from both sides. The clients had an intake interview in which their situations, feelings, needs and issues were described and discussed.
2. **Exploring**. The phase in which reporting, listening, and relationship building represented the key activities. In this phase clients' circumstances were explored further and their problem(s) were known and understood.
3. **Understanding/goal setting**. Key activities of this phase included developing and setting goals, assessing the current situation, and exploring the causes of clients' problems, as well as exploring possible solutions.
4. **Intervention**. In this phase, clients and counsellors worked together to generate options and alternatives. The clients were supported to make informed choices, act on those choices, and then evaluate their actions. The focus was on developing clients' problem-solving and decision-making skills. The counsellors supported the client in generating, evaluating and deciding on alternatives, and provided feedback on these.

5. **Finalisation**. In this phase, clients evaluated gains and losses, acknowledged changes, and planned further steps. Counsellors assisted clients in evaluation, gave feedback on plans and readiness for further steps, and planned possible follow-up meetings with clients.

In addition to the phases of the guidance process, the guidance activities in Iceland can be further characterised, based on the *type* of activities, as "Intake" and "Guidance sessions".

- **Intake and general information provision** (1-2 sessions) focused on building trust between client and counsellor. Key activities were: learning about the background interests and desires of the client. Building on this background context, the counsellor provided general information on secondary education qualifications of and/or the general landscape of adult education. Finally, the counsellor provided information on a particular field of study, specific courses and particular educational institutions, as well work-related aspects of the clients' options.
- **Guidance sessions** included activities such as: testing and analysing personal and vocational interests and discussing results of the test; identifying client competences and domains of interest; identifying relevant educational programmes; developing a personal action plan and following up on the plan; selecting a study programme; preparing for intake to a study programme; discussing the resolution of obstacles; and study planning.

Lithuania

The underlying philosophy of guidance services in Lithuania was to take into account the needs, interests and context of each client, and dedicate the counselling sessions to improving the identification of clients' needs, skills and competences, and how these competences could be developed. This meant that counsellors needed to be **highly flexible and able to adapt** to the clients' needs.

During Wave 1 of the GOAL project, time and resource limitations meant that a model of **one guidance session per client** was adopted. This *one session only* approach was generally considered successful for clients who were well-motivated and had a good idea of their next steps. Another factor in the selection of this one session model was the relatively limited range of options that GOAL counsellors in Lithiania were able to offer. The two GOAL sites in Lithuania were based in specific educational institutions, and counsellors' recommendations were generally limited to those institutions. This is in particular contrast to the model in Flanders, where the GOAL service was completely independent of any education institutions.

However, after analysing the Wave 1 results, it was agreed that less-motivated clients and/or those with more complex or challenging issues needed more than one session. As one counsellor observed, with more disadvantaged clients:

> *You need to give much more attention to them, to make them eager. And for this aim you use all possible measures, talk to him, try to motivate by comparing how does it*

feel to be with and without a job … It just means more resources, time, more preparation.

The model was therefore altered in Wave 2 to allow for more guidance sessions for some clients.

In Lithuania, the guidance process, whether one or two sessions, typically featured the following components:

- First, **introductions and getting acquainted**, followed by the counsellor providing information on the educational institution and GOAL.
- This was followed by a focus on **identifying and/or clarifying the client's objectives** and reasons for coming to counselling, and a discussion of what the client would like to achieve, and why. This typically involved **mapping of the client's current situation and identifying potential career or education pathways** (e.g. exploring the capabilities and interests of clients, their past educational experiences, prospective careers, and information about financial support).
- In the final steps, the client was **supported to make a choice** about learning or work routes and an agreement was made between the counsellor and client about the next steps (e.g. creation of an action plan, and agreement about potential next sessions).

During any **follow-up sessions**, clients informed counsellors about their progress and any obstacles encountered. Depending on individual situation, the follow-up sessions could include activities such as: the completion of additional tests; visits to workshops and training classes; interviews with teaching staff or professionals in relevant fields; assistance in completing CVs; and job interview support.

The Netherlands

The guidance process in the Netherlands consisted of **three steps**.

1. The first step was to **administer the Literacy Screener**. The Literacy Screener tool is timed, with a maximum of 12 minutes allowed to complete the test. (See Sections 9.3 and 9.5 for more discussion of the Literacy Screener.)
2. The second step was the **discussion of the outcome** of the Literacy Screener. If clients achieved a low score, the counsellor discussed what this meant (i.e. that it was an indication but not a definite sign of low literacy) and tried to gain a picture of the learning needs of the person in question.
3. The final step was **referral to a language provider**: if the client was open to taking language lessons, the client was referred to an (internal or external) language provider for a language course.

Programme staff members said that the **total guidance process** (introducing and administering the Literacy Screener and the discussion about the outcome and any referral) **took on average about 20-30 minutes**. This process was implemented in organisations where addressing low literacy was not the main objective in order to reach out to a wider group of potential service users.

Slovenia

In Slovenia the rationale underpinning guidance provision was that if guidance was to be successful, it was necessary but insufficient to have a well-informed and professional counsellor – more than anything, **the client must be placed at the fore of the process**. As clients' situations and objectives differed, guidance processes were **highly tailored** in terms of frequency of sessions, number and duration of guidance sessions, and activities during guidance sessions. No set rules existed as to when and how frequently guidance sessions would take place; instead, sessions were held as required, e.g. when a client had achieved a short-term objective or was struggling with an obstacle or issue. The guidance process typically aimed to achieve a **string of objectives rather than a single objective**. As in other countries, counsellors in Slovenia observed that **different clients required different approaches**.

In the majority of cases, the first session took place as follows. The counsellor collected the client's details and information about their education and qualifications, personal circumstances, skills and preferences. They also collected information about any obstacles to participation in education. The counsellor and client then explored options for achieving the desired objectives and set short-term and long-term goals.

The second and all subsequent sessions focused on moving forward: exploring any results achieved since the previous session and providing assistance in cases where a client had encountered obstacles or required help (e.g. when completing forms, producing a personal education plan or taking a skills test in a foreign language). When clients did not meet an objective, counsellors worked with them to find out why and achieve a solution. In many cases, this process involved revisiting activities conducted in earlier sessions (e.g. identifying interests, searching for information).

As in other countries, counsellors devoted **different amounts of time to individual sessions**. In Slovenia, sessions lasted between five and 120 minutes with an average of 40 minutes and some regional differences (see national report). Differences in the amount of time spent were due to the nature of the session and the client's need (e.g. whether the client had turned to the counsellor with a straightforward query, whether the counsellor and client merely wished to check whether a task had been performed, or whether more extensive guidance was required).

As in Flanders, there were meaningful **cross-site differences in the Slovenian GOAL model** (i.e. within-country differences). Counsellors at the two adult education centres were able to devote more time to individual guidance sessions, i.e. between 40 and 60 minutes, while counsellors at secondary education centres, who also had other tasks to perform, had less time available for individual guidance sessions (typically 20 to 30 minutes). Guidance approaches differed across the two types of centre as well. Secondary education centres said that they:

> offer their own services to a greater extent, while [adult education centres] *have to offer all services independently and depending on what the participant wants ... to explore what the client actually wants and then guide him or her independently.*

In this sense, the counsellors at secondary education centres were more like counsellors in Lithuania (i.e. associated with a particular education institution and its offerings,) whereas those at adult education centres were more like counsellors in Flanders (independent of any particular educational institution). From the perspective of the counsellors in adult education centres, this meant that their counselling had a wider scope, as they advised clients about various education levels, programmes, locations, institutions and qualifications. However, counsellors at the secondary education centres (who were simultaneously education organisers) felt that there could also be advantages to being affiliated with a specific institution: this gave them a deeper insight, they felt, into the programmes they were recommending.

The client profile also varied between two types of centres. At secondary education centres, clients were more likely to know what they wanted, and be more motivated to achieve their goals. As one counsellor observed, these clients were likely to:

> *recognise* [the centre] *as a school and come to seek assistance in learning or* [...] *seek assistance when they are already enrolled and ask [the centre], for example, if they could have a consultation in a [particular subject] with which they are having difficulty – for support during the education process itself.*

Clients at the adult education centres typically were less clear about their direction and options, and needed more guidance.

5.2 Guidance activities and processes: quantitative findings

Reasons for seeking guidance

During their first counselling session, service users were asked about their reasons for seeking guidance. (Clients could choose more than one response.) The most popular reason (see Table 5.1.) was to **explore educational opportunities** (78%) followed, with a significant gap, by **to find links** between personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities (37%). A further 26% of service users selected to get assistance with job seeking.

Older service users were more likely than younger ones to seek validation of prior learning and to get assistance with job seeking (see Table B.14 in Appendix B). Younger GOAL clients were more likely to seek guidance to explore educational opportunities and to carry out an interest assessment.

Table 5.1. *Client reasons for seeking guidance (multiple choice question answers do not add to 100%)*

	Responses		% of
	N	%	Cases
To explore educational opportunities	605	36	78
To validate existing competences/prior learning	99	6	13
To find links between personal interest and occupational/educational opportunities (Interest assessment)	288	17	37
To get assistance with learning technique/strategies	78	5	10
To find financial resources for learning	77	5	10
To get assistance with job seeking	202	12	26
To get assistance with writing a CV	78	5	10
To get information about different institutions and their roles	188	11	24
Because of personal issues	53	3	7
Total	1668	100	215

A high proportion of clients in all countries (excluding the Netherlands) sought to explore **educational opportunities**, as shown in Table 5.2. Another common reason was **finding links between personal interests and educational/occupational opportunities**. However, in no country was this reason as common as exploring educational opportunities. Clients in Iceland were the most likely to seek to validate prior learning, with 35% citing this as a reason. In contrast, this objective did not arise in Flanders. Clients in Iceland were also the most likely to seek guidance to address personal issues. Clients in Flanders were the most likely to seek information about different institutions and their roles.

Table 5.2. *Client reasons for seeking guidance by country*

	Country											
	CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
To explore educational opportunities	101	78	221	96	70	74	70	71	19	28	124	78
To validate existing competences/prior learning	14	11	-	-	33	35	8	8	3	4	41	26
To find links between personal interest and occupational/educational opportunities (Interest assessment)	44	34	120	52	56	60	27	28	4	6	37	23
To get assistance with learning technique/strategies	-	-	7	3	36	38	15	15	4	6	16	10
To find financial resources for learning	12	9	-	-	32	34	22	22	3	4	8	5
To get assistance with job seeking	40	31	19	8	43	46	32	33	54	81	14	9
To get assistance with writing a CV	2	2	-	-	34	36	8	8	17	25	17	11
To get information about different institutions and their roles	-	-	152	66	17	18	15	15	2	3	2	1
Because of personal issues	3	2	-	-	24	26	18	18	5	7	3	2

There were some **gender differences in reasons for seeking guidance**. Male service users were more likely to want to validate prior learning, to get assistance with job seeking and to get information

about different institutions and their roles, while female service users were more likely to seek links between personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities (see Figure 5.1.).

Figure 5.1. *Reasons for seeking guidance by gender*
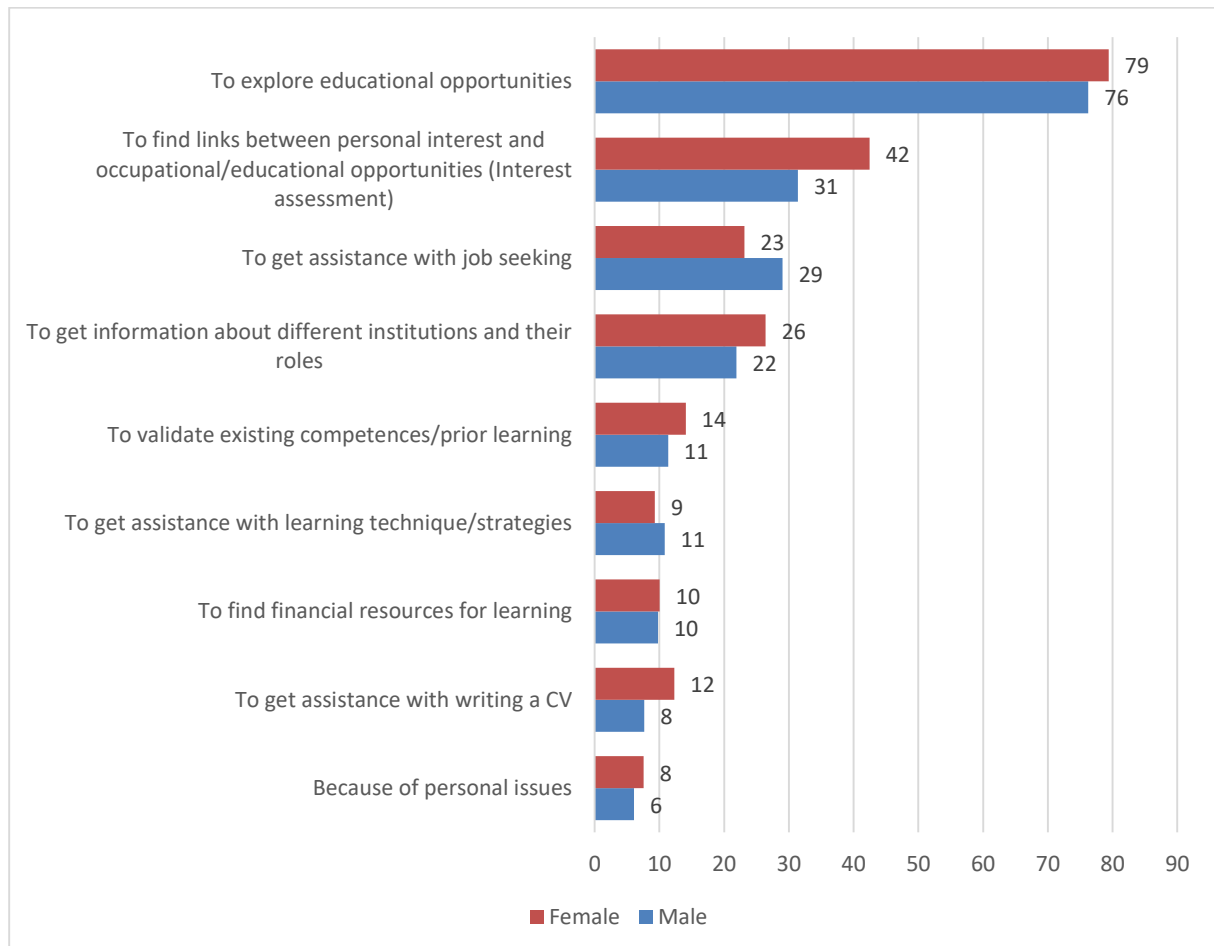
As further data exploration suggests (see Table B.15 in Appendix B) early school leavers were more likely to cite exploring educational opportunities and finding links between their personal interests and occupational/educational opportunities. Not surprisingly, unemployed/job seekers were more likely not only to cite exploring educational opportunities, but also seeking a job as their reasons for coming to GOAL. The data also suggest that clients with higher educational qualifications were more likely to seek guidance to explore educational opportunities and less likely to seek assistance with looking for jobs, as compared to service users with lower educational qualifications (see Table B.17 in Appendix B).

Contact type

Across the six countries, 97% of the first counselling sessions and 85% of all subsequent sessions were **individual face-to-face sessions** (see Table 5.3.).

Table 5.3. *Type of contact for the first and subsequent sessions*

	First session		Subsequent sessions	
	N	%	N	%
Phone	18	2	64	7
Email	1	0.1	2	0.1
Face-to Face individual	875	97	803	85
Face-to-Face group	11	1	73	8
Other	-	-	1	0.1
Total	**905**	**100**	**943**	**100**

Number of sessions

Generally speaking, **GOAL clients (except in the Netherlands) could be classified into one of three categories, depending on the type and amount of educational counselling they needed**. These three categories were:

1. **Low need clients.** Clients falling into this category were those who could quickly figure out the next step (and/or who had an obvious next step), and **primarily needed information** about how to take that step. Clients in this category typically only required one counselling session in order to make the necessary progress towards their objective. In some cases, this group of clients had a specific learning question or a clear idea of the occupational sector or profession they wanted to prepare for. In other cases, these were clients who had language needs. For example, in Flanders, individuals who did not speak Dutch as their home language were more likely than native Dutch speakers to opt for a single guidance session, because their "next step" was clear: enrol on a Dutch language course. However, even in these cases, the counsellors provided clients with context-specific options and routes, e.g. with regard to options that best meshed with clients' family or work responsibilities. (The role of client context is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.)

2. **Moderate need clients.** Clients in this category typically required two to three guidance sessions because they were less sure about where they were heading, and thus needed tools such as an interest inventory to help them **develop their ideas and objectives**. In addition, many of these clients had a rough idea of their learning needs but did not know how to make progress towards meeting those needs. For example, a client might know that she needed (or would be likely to benefit from) a diploma of secondary education, but not know what educational pathway(s) to pursue and/or how to go about doing so. Counsellors typically worked with such clients over two to three sessions to further define and refine their learning objectives in relation to their personal contexts and interests, and to find the appropriate educational path to follow in pursuit of their goals.

3. **High need clients.** Clients in this category required more sessions, generally due to personal and other problems. Some clients had a **range of needs and barriers that had to be addressed or overcome** in the process of choosing an educational pathway and embarking on it.

The experiences of GOAL programme staff in Slovenia illustrate these three client "types". At secondary education centres, counsellors were contacted by individuals who more or less already knew which education programme or National Vocational Qualification interested them (at least in technical fields) – in large part this type of client was in evidence here because the secondary education centre provided these programmes. In such cases, guidance was generally straightforward, with a focus on the presentation of a programme or qualification and the preparation of a personal education plan or portfolio. Generally these tasks could be achieved in **one session**, or slightly more. (In Slovenia, monitoring data was only collected on clients who needed more than one session.) In secondary education centres, **further sessions** after enrolment in a programme depended on the client, and above all on how successful they were in realising their personal education plan and progressing in their education. When secondary education centre clients needed additional sessions, counsellors adapted a plan in collaboration with their client; such a plan might include the offer of learning support or help developing a learning strategy. In Slovenia, clients who came to **the adult education centres typically were less sure about their options and interests, and therefore needed more support**. As one Slovenian counsellor observed:

> *Those requiring one session already have their own educational objectives fairly well set out. We help them to weigh up the options, search for additional information, encourage them and also provide them with support. Other clients, on the other hand, have set no objectives for themselves. With them, one first has to search out their interests and, only then, look for as much information as possible. They only find it easier to opt for a specific appropriate education programme at the second or third stages. Some* [clients] *are very resourceful and proactive, while others need help and therefore multiple sessions.*

Turning to the quantitative data, there were significant variations across the six countries with regard to the number of sessions that were planned and delivered in each programme (see Table 5.4.). All clients in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands attended one session only. In the Netherlands, this was a product of the "light touch" Literacy Screener model; in the Czech Republic, a consequence of limited programme resources. In Lithuania, as explained above, the initial plan was that each client would attend one session only. However, evidence from Wave 1 data collection suggested that this model was not sufficient for addressing these clients' needs, and 50 Wave 2 clients had two or more sessions (however, monitoring data was only collected on the second session, not subsequent ones). In Slovenia all clients attended at least two guidance sessions.

Table 5.4. *Number of sessions per client by country*

	Country													
	CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 session	132	100	183	44	1	1	50	50	76	100	-	-	442	45
2 sessions	-	-	117	28	11	12	50	50	-	-	123	77	301	31
3 sessions	-	-	51	12	23	24	-	-	-	-	28	18	102	10
4 and more sessions	-	-	67	16	60	63	-	-	-	-	9	6	136	14
Total	132	100	418	100	95	100	100	100	76	100	160	100	981	100

There was variation between countries about how and when formal exit from the guidance occurred. The "exit schedule" could also differ between sites within a country. For example, at de Leerwinkel site in Flanders, the client exited the guidance system when he or she signed up to an education or training course. Thereafter, the client's guidance needs were the responsibility of the educational institution. At de Stap, however, the GOAL guidance could continue as long as the client felt a need for it. Thus, the client could continue to receive GOAL guidance during their educational programme, either for part of their programme or up until the point they gained their qualification.

Across the six countries, almost half of all clients (43%) who completed all their planned sessions had two planned sessions (see Table 5.5.); a further 36% had one planned session only. For slightly more than half (55%) of GOAL clients there was no specific number of sessions planned. For the most part, this was due to the open counselling model in Flanders: counsellors in this country typically did not agree a set number of sessions but instead left this open and flexible, and 83% of clients with no planned number of sessions came from Flanders (See Table A.11 in Appendix A). Where clients did not have a specific number of sessions planned, it is difficult to draw conclusions about counselling completion rates.

The distribution of the number of sessions completed for those clients where a specific number of sessions was planned and not planned was very similar. Only a very small number of clients (53 out of 890) did not complete the planned number of guidance sessions. Moreover, out of those 53 only nine clients completed just the one session before they withdrew, others completed more than one session before they did not return to the guidance. Among the reasons for not completing the planned counselling sessions, health and work and/or family commitments were mentioned most often.

Table 5.5. *Completion of sessions by number of sessions attended*

	Has the client completed all the planned guidance sessions?							
	No		Yes		There was no specific number of sessions planned		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 session	9	17	126	36	218	45	353	40
2 sessions	15	28	150	43	135	28	300	34
3 sessions	14	26	31	9	57	12	102	11
4 and more sessions	15	28	42	12	78	16	135	15
Total	53	100	349	100	488	100	890	100

Length of session

Fifty percent of the first sessions were **31 minutes or longer and 28% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes** (see Table 5.6.). Most first sessions (83%) in the Netherlands were under 20 minutes, a fact explained by the Literacy Screener-based model used in that country, for which a maximum of twelve minutes is allocated. Most sessions in the Czech Republic were between 31 and 60 minutes. Excluding data from the Netherlands, the proportion of sessions lasting less than 20 minutes decreases to 8% and the proportions of sessions lasting 31-60 minutes or 61+ minutes increases to 54% and 30% respectively.

Table 5.6. *Length of the first session by country*

		under 20 min		21-30 min		31-60 min		61 min and above	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	**Czech Republic**	-	-	8	6	113	86	11	8
	Flanders	36	9	11	3	197	47	174	42
	Iceland	-	-	5	5	51	54	39	41
	Lithuania	13	13	11	11	47	47	29	29
	Netherlands	63	83	13	17	-	-	-	-
	Slovenia	24	15	37	23	82	51	17	11
	Total	**136**	**14**	**85**	**9**	**490**	**50**	**270**	**28**

Of the four countries (Flanders, Iceland, Slovenia and Lithuania) where clients could have more than one counselling session, data on the second and subsequent sessions is available for the first three countries. In these countries, one-third (33%) of these second and subsequent sessions were 31 minutes or longer and 26% lasted between 31 and 60 minutes (see Table 5.7.).

Table 5.7. *Length of the subsequent sessions by country*

		under 20 min		21-30 min		31-60 min		61 min and above	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Country	Flanders	155	31	39	8	163	33	138	28
	Iceland	74	24	31	10	96	32	103	34
	Slovenia	70	44	30	19	48	30	12	8
	Total	**299**	**31**	**100**	**10**	**307**	**32**	**253**	**26**

Focus of the sessions

All counsellors were asked to indicate the main generic focus of each guidance session. Table 5.8. presents the focus of the first sessions, while Table 5.9. shows the focus of all subsequent sessions. Most sessions (whether first or subsequent) focused on learning, followed by jobs. (Clients could choose an option for a focus on jobs *and* learning, meaning that the potential total of focuses exceeds 100%). Table A.13 in Appendix A provides a country by country breakdown for the focus of sessions.

Table 5.8. *Focus of the client's first guidance session. What did you talk about with your counsellor today? Client monitoring data. Multiple choice (N=807)*

		Responses		Percent
		N	%	of Cases
Focus of the session	Jobs	171	14	18
	Learning	830	69	86
	Validation of prior learning	62	5	6
	Other	142	12	15
Total		**1205**	**100**	**125**

Table 5.9. *Focus of subsequent guidance sessions. What did you talk about with your counsellor today? Client monitoring data. Multiple choice (N=807)*

		Responses		Percent
		N	%	of Cases
Focus of the session	Jobs	125	11	13
	Learning	752	63	80
	Validation of prior learning	87	7	9
	Other	229	19	24
Total		**1193**	**100**	**125**

Results of the sessions

As part of the monitoring data collection, counsellors recorded the primary **results of each session**. Across the six countries, the **most common first session results** were: the client being informed about what they could study and where (60%), the client gaining information about formal education courses (52%), and the client gaining information on formal qualifications (49%). As indicated in

Table **5.10**., slightly less popular, but still common results included: the development of a personal action plan (35%), getting information on short courses (22%), completing an interest inventory (22%) and getting information on overcoming barriers (19%).

The results of the subsequent sessions were similar, but showed greater variation. It is also interesting to note that second most popular result of the subsequent sessions was the client being given **information on how to overcome barriers** (40% compared to 19% for the first session). The percentages also suggest that **many first and any subsequent sessions had multiple results** and covered a wide range of issues.

Table 5.10. *Results of the session (multiple choice question)*

	First session		Subsequent sessions	
	N	%	N	%
Being informed about what can study and where	558	60	365	45
Information on formal qualifications	458	49	270	34
Information about formal education courses	487	52	297	37
Information about non-formal learning	135	14	143	18
Information on short time courses	208	22	158	20
Information on retraining courses	93	10	32	4
Development of a personal action plan	327	35	277	35
Career plan / portfolio	44	5	52	7
Interest inventory	202	22	156	19
Given information on how to overcome barriers	179	19	322	40
Given information on how to find financial resources for taking up a study course	162	17	126	16
Help in preparing the documentation for validation of prior learning (VPL)	55	6	48	6
Referral to other professionals/specialists	62	7	67	8
Assessment of key competences	39	4	21	3
Assessment of study skills/ study habits	25	3	33	4
Other	31	3	122	15

Female clients were more likely than males to receive information about short-term courses (26% of females, 19% of males), information about formal education courses (55% of females, 49% of males) and formal qualifications (53% of females, 46% of males) and information about non-formal learning (17% of females, 12% of males) as well as preparation for the VPL (8% of females, 4% of males). Gender differences were small or non-existent in the other categories (see Table B.21 in Appendix B).

Older service users' sessions were more likely to include the validation of prior learning and to provide information on short courses, as well as on non-formal learning (see Table B.22 in Appendix B). Younger clients were more likely to have been informed about what and where to study, formal qualifications and formal education courses, how to overcome barriers and find financial resources for studying as well as the development of a personal action plan as results of their guidance sessions.

Looking at specific target groups, jobseekers were most likely to receive information about what they could study and where (42%), and to develop a personal action plan (34%). Early school leavers were most likely to receive information on: what they could study and where (65%), formal education courses (61%), and formal qualifications (58%). Jobseekers were also more likely than other groups to work on the development of a personal action plan (39%) during their counselling session. Employed and low-educated people also focused on educational aspects and were most likely to receive information on short courses (58%), what they could study and where (43%), non-formal learning (40%), and formal education courses (40%). Sample sizes for other groups were too small to make meaningful statements (see Table B.23 in Appendix B).

5.3 Client case studies

This section provides two contrasting client case studies. The first is of a client who had a good general sense of what he might like to do in the future, and who primarily needed information. The client who is the subject of the second case was facing a number of challenges across several domains, and needed much more extensive and broad ranging support.

Case Study 1: Providing information to a "lower need" client

Background

After living abroad for several years, Client 1 returned to Lithuania. He wanted to gain a new qualification and find a well-paid job. He came to the training centre where the GOAL counselling service was located to find out what kind of training programmes were on offer, the duration of training, and the fees.

Session 1

The client was provided with information about training programmes, their duration and price. He was interested in welder training programmes (duration 11.5 weeks) and plumber training programmes (duration 29 weeks). He was unemployed and was not registered with the public employment service (PES). The GOAL counsellor explained that if he registered with the PES he would be eligible to participate in that organisation's "Discover Yourself" scheme, which provides financial support to young people (under 29 years) seeking vocational training. The client was interested in this opportunity, and said he would contact the PES for more information.

Session 2

After a couple of days, the client returned to GOAL. He had registered with PES and enrolled in the scheme, which would pay for his vocational training. He was still interested in both the welding and plumbing programmes. Together with the GOAL counsellor he used a "professional possibilities" tool – an informal test which suggested that he had the requisite skills and mindset for either of the programmes he was interested in. To help him in his decision-making, the counsellor arranged meetings with the teachers in the institution's welding and plumbing courses;

these teachers told him about the training programmes and discussed employment opportunities in each profession. Having obtained this information, the client decided to study to be a plumber.

Session 3
The client enrolled on the plumber training programme. All fees were paid by the PES.

Epilogue
The client completed training and successfully found a job at a local plumbing company.

Reflections on this case study

This case study provides an example of a "lower need" client. Such clients typically have a good level of motivation and a good general idea of the type of profession they would like to pursue, but lack information about vocational education options. In this particular case, the client was unaware of an available route for getting government funding to pay for his education. In interviews with evaluators, GOAL staff across the six countries repeatedly emphasised the complexity of the information landscape: **even highly-motivated clients struggled to find user-friendly information about the educational pathways open to them**. A core responsibility of GOAL counsellors was to stay well-informed about such opportunities, and to help clients find the information they needed to make well-informed decisions about their next steps (see Chapter 7). GOAL staff suggested that finding information about courses was more daunting for clients with low levels of education than for better educated clients, for two primary reasons: 1) low-educated clients are less likely to be adept at searching for the information they need; 2) information in the adult education sector is much more fragmented and difficult to find than information and (for example) the Higher Education sector. The combination of these two factors makes the **information-sharing role** of GOAL counsellors particularly important.

Case Study 2: A more complex counselling journey for a "higher need" client

Background
Client 2 lives in Slovenia. She had a secondary-level qualification in hairdressing and wanted to further her education, but her ability to do so had been hampered by the need to fit education around work (she was employed part-time) and family commitments (she had two young children). The client wanted advice about how to achieve her educational objectives within the constraints of her other obligations.

Session 1
The client had completed an adult education hairdressing programme and then, at her employer's suggestion, decided to continue studies at a technical college. She came to GOAL because, after several lectures, she had begun to despair of being able to meet the demands of her study because of her obligations at work and home. The client had taken a very active part in the lessons she had attended, but had then abandoned her studies because of her excessive external

obligations. She explained her situation to the counsellor: she was employed on a factory conveyor belt and her employer had offered her the option of advancing if she completed technical college studies. She therefore decided to pursue higher professional education studies. She turned to the counsellor in order to find a way of studying successfully and with as little stress as possible as she tried to juggle family, household, employment, and the struggles and stresses associated with low income. The counsellor began working with her on a one-to-one basis, and also sent revision material and homework to her home address. The counsellor and client agreed on weekly sessions if required, and agreed that the client could consult the counsellor after each lecture if she had any questions. They also agreed that the counsellor would keep an eye on whether the client was taking her examinations as required or whether she was encountering obstacles or required help.

Session 2

The client became more independent and self-confident, daring to ask questions if there was something she did not understand during a lesson. Previously she had been reserved and kept herself to herself (there were fewer women at the secondary education centre and they normally sat away from the men); now she became more communicative and began to open up to others. Exhaustion meant that her motivation was still problematic. However, the counsellor noticed that she was making rapid progress in her studies and had become more confident that she would succeed. In part, this was due to the counsellor's approach: in creating personal education plans with clients who were returning to education, the counsellor typically encouraged them to start out by taking subjects that were shorter and less demanding. This enabled them to gain good marks more quickly, thereby improving their self-image and building their motivation and sense of self-efficacy for more demanding subjects of longer duration.

Session 3

Using the counselling centre's online system, the counsellor checked whether the client was taking her examinations as scheduled. When she discovered that the client had missed the examination deadline, the counsellor invited the client in for another session. At this session, the counsellor learned that the client had been unable to arrange childcare for the exam period. They counsellor and client agreed that she would inform the counsellor if such scheduling conflicts arose again, so they could be addressed.

Session 4 and subsequent sessions

The client passed her examinations and was now in a position to take the upper-secondary vocational certificate. Thus far, all the examinations and tests had been written (with some subjects also being examined by colloquium so that students could take them in instalments). However, the upper-secondary vocational certificate was to be examined before a committee and covered an entire module (rather than just aspects of it). The counsellor noticed that the client had begun to feel a general sense of panic in the month leading up to the examination. The counsellor therefore gave the client general tips on how to combat stress, increase concentration levels, etc., as well as advice on learning, e.g. how to break a subject down, how to learn "smart", and so on. In order to do this, the counsellor cancelled one of her own lessons (she is a

mathematics teacher) and devoted the time to the GOAL project in the form of a "learning to learn" workshop for clients.

The client completed her studies successfully, so the counsellor suggested that she enrol in a higher education programme. The client demurred, saying she wanted a break from education. However, when the counsellor contacted the client a few months later, the client told her that she had now enrolled in higher education studies. These studies were going well, and she was enjoying them, she said.

The counsellor and client had no further sessions, but agreed that the client would contact the counsellor if she had any further study-related problems.

Reflections on this case study

As in Case Study 1, this client came to counselling with a good level of motivation and determination. However, she faced a range of obstacles. Because of these obstacles, she came to GOAL not with questions that could be answered through the provision of information, but with more complex questions and needs – in particular, how to successfully juggle her various life commitments in such a way that she could achieve her educational objectives. **Complex challenges such as this have no simple solutions, and thus require ongoing, adaptable support from counsellors.** GOAL counsellors across the six countries exhibited a high level of commitment to their clients – even if, as in this case study, it meant cancelling one's own class in order to provide the support that the client needed.

As is illustrated in Case Study 2, a key practical difference between lower-need and higher-need clients is that the latter often require many more counselling sessions than the former, and are likely to take far longer to complete their counselling journey. This means that motivation may need to be rekindled multiple times, and that a broad range of challenges is likely to be encountered. Another implication of high need clients' longer counselling journeys is at the personal/psychological level. Whereas a client who only needs one or two sessions is still very much *the same person* at the end of the counselling process (albeit with more information and a clearer sense of direction), a client with a longer and more complex counselling journey may change in important ways over the process of that journey. These can be positive ways, e.g. growth in self-esteem and self-efficacy, but also negative ways, e.g. a divorce or health problems. The client's objectives may also change during that journey. Complex clients are typically **not static** during the counselling process; their lives, capabilities and needs change, and counsellors must adapt to this.

5.4   Challenges and barriers

The descriptions of GOAL counselling services in Section 5.1 highlight three challenges or tensions which proved particularly relevant to this evaluation:

1. The impact of client needs and "readiness" on counselling provision.
2. The impact of programme resources on national programmes' ability to provide a client centred, "custom fit" counselling approach.

3. The independence of the guidance provided.

Client starting points: the impact of client needs and readiness on counselling provision

As discussed in Section 5.2, three "types" of clients could be distinguished across countries:

- Clients with high motivation and clear objectives,
- Clients with low motivation or lack of clear objectives (e.g. the long-term unemployed),
- Clients with multiple intersecting problems or vulnerable clients (e.g. clients at risk of marginalisation).

For the first group of clients the primary value of the guidance process was its **provision of accurate and up-to-date information about educational and work-related options** – information that even well-motivated clients would otherwise struggle to find. For the second group of clients what was distinctive about the GOAL guidance process was that it was helping them **learn not just about the educational landscape but about themselves**: e.g. their interests, preferences and strengths. For the third group of clients the distinctive aspect of GOAL guidance was that it involved **motivation, confidence and capacity building** in order for client to be able to participate fully in educational or work-related guidance processes.

In countries where there was more than one guidance session, the type of client played a central role in shaping the length and focus of the guidance process. A comparison of the pathways of two clients in Flanders may be instructive. *Client A* **needed only a small amount of guidance and support**. He discovered his interests quickly, and acted on his own initiative to begin an educational programme. In this client's first session, he discussed his challenging background and his negative previous experiences of school. His counsellor explained the variety of options he could pursue in order to attain a diploma of secondary education, and they discussed the feasibility of these options together. The most interesting option to the client was adult education; the client also appeared to have an interest in ICT. After the first counselling session, the counsellor gave the client "homework": he was asked to use an online interest assessment tool to explore his interests. By the time he showed up for his next guidance session, the client had already shown a high level of initiative, by contacting an educational institution that offered a course in web design. Between sessions 2 and 3, the client attended an information session at the school of his choice and took the necessary tests to see what subjects he could be exempted from on the basis of prior knowledge. At the third session, he and his counsellor agreed that he would enrol on the course. It was agreed that this motivated and self-reliant client needed no further counselling.

In contrast, *Client B* had attended five sessions at the time of reporting, with the possibility that she would attend more. This client **was far less sure of the direction she wanted to take**, and **suffered from a number of physical and psychological health problems**. For *Client B*, the counselling therefore had a strong focus on **establishing the building blocks needed for progress in life**, e.g. building her self-esteem, getting professional help to deal with psychological problems, and learning to talk about her problems with others. Sessions were not spaced evenly, but were instead scheduled

around the client's needs and motivation. For example, session 2 took place only one week after session 1, but session 3 did not take place until three months later, with session 4 happening one month after that. By session 5, the client had discovered, perhaps to her surprise, that she had a strong academic ability, both in general subjects and languages. Building on this development, the client took and passed an entrance exam to study to be a "poly-lingual secretary", a course she was very excited about. Even by this point (session 5), however, the client still needed motivational support from the counsellor. In contrast to *Client A*, who appeared to be highly self-reliant, *Client B* appeared to struggle with some aspects of motivation and self-belief, even after taking successful steps forward.

These two clients differed in a number of key ways, and these differences affected the pathways and focuses of their respective guidance sessions. However, the clients were similar in that they were pursuing educational objectives and appeared to be at a stage in their lives where such objectives could feasibly be attained, with the right support.

Other clients were more vulnerable. In Iceland, the aim was to reach out to more vulnerable groups of adults who generally do not seek guidance (thus falling into the third client "type" listed above). This client group was highly disadvantaged, and that had an impact on the focus of guidance sessions and the progress that could be made during counselling. This target group needed more sessions and needed more support and motivational guidance. They also needed a guidance approach focused on addressing their more immediate problems, e.g. psychological or substance abuse issues, as a prerequisite to a focus on further education. As counsellors in Iceland observed, most clients in that country simply were **not yet ready** to make educational progress. Instead, they needed to focus on getting to a level (personally and psychologically) where they could then begin to focus on educational advancement. As one Icelandic counsellor said:

> I think that we assumed that the clients would be more ready and that it was really just a question of them not knowing about all the fantastic resources available to them. But, that was never the problem, their challenges were much more profound and complex. I always picture it like steps: in order for a person to be able to even consider educational and career guidance, she has to be in step four or five. But most of our service users in GOAL are maybe in step three or two, even lower, some haven't even reached the ladder.

Sessions in Iceland therefore tended to focus on more basic, pre-educational steps such as developing motivation, ensuring the clients arrived to meetings, and supporting clients to develop a belief that it was possible to be in charge of one's own direction in life. In Iceland, developing self-esteem was considered to be a building block for the subsequent development of self-reliance and the undertaking of active steps into education or employment.

Client needs also differed across sites within some countries. In Slovenia, for example, clients at secondary education centres typically had more information-centred needs than clients at adult education centres: the latter typically needed more support and thus more sessions. The need for more sessions was not inherently a problem, except when two other factors came into play:

- Clients whose needs were so great that, even with a large number of sessions, it was difficult for them to make educational progress. Iceland had a particularly high proportion of this type of client, as well as "no shows" and drop outs, and issues regarding the relationship between high levels of programme inputs and low levels of educational outcomes for such clients are discussed in subsequent chapters.
- Clients who needed more sessions than programme resources, and thus the programme counselling model, allowed for.

The first point will be discussed in greater detail later in this report, particularly Chapter 10. The second point is discussed in the next section.

The impact of programme resources on national programmes' ability to provide a client centred, "custom fit" counselling approach

In addition to having different mixes of clients, in terms of need, countries also had differing levels of counselling resources. These differing levels played a central role in shaping countries' counselling models. Whereas all countries sought to provide a client-centred counselling approach, e.g. taking account of factors such as client context, interests and needs, **not every country was able to be client-centred in terms of the number of sessions** available to clients. There were also differences within some countries, e.g., as described early in this chapter, in Flanders the counselling model for one site (de Stap) allowed GOAL to continue even after the client enrolled in an education programme, whereas the other site (de Leerwinkel) ended counselling at that point. However, it should be noted that both Flanders sites featured a multi-session, very client-centred counselling model. In the Czech Republic, the counselling model was limited to a single session per client. In Lithuania, this was the model for the first half of the project, but in the second half counsellors tried to provide more sessions to clients who needed them. Lithuanian counsellors noted that even two to three sessions were in some cases **not enough to build a relationship of trust** between counsellor and client – across countries, building trust seemed to be particularly important when counselling clients who had previously had negative experiences of education.

Across countries, **the consensus by the end of the pilot was that most clients needed a multi-session counselling model**, and where it was not possible to offer such a model, needier clients did not receive as much help as they required.

One advantage of a multi-session approach is that clients were less likely to be overwhelmed by information and possibilities in a single session. Due to the background of clients (low-educated, no qualifications, early school leavers) it was often not possible – or indeed desirable – to try to cover too much ground or try to accomplish too much a single session. This desire to avoid overwhelming – and perhaps even demotivating – clients was a key principle underlying counselling in Flanders, where counsellors said that they took care to present only the information or task that was required for the current step of the counselling journey. In addition to helping clients avoid a feeling of being overwhelmed by information and options, this approach appeared to help "put clients in the driver's seat", in terms of clients being able to act on discrete bits of information or advice at their own pace. As clients from de Stap reported:

I don't think that my coach gave me too much information. She only told me what was relevant for me. And when I forgot some of the things she told me or asked me to do, she repeated those the next time she saw me.

Every counselling session was important. Every time I came to de Stap I knew it was a new step towards my goal. If the session was over, I knew the steps I had to take to make progress.

The independence of the guidance provided

Another area where GOAL was not client-centred in all countries was with regard to the **independence of the guidance** provided. In Flanders, GOAL was a completely independent service, without formal relationships with any education providers. This independence was a conscious reaction against ongoing trends within the Flemish adult education landscape. Educational institutions in Flanders belong to educational networks (e.g. the Catholic Network, the Communal Network, the Network of Community Education, and the Provincial Network). In a region there are often different schools from different networks offering similar programmes, leading to some level of competition between the networks. This competitive environment provides strong incentives for institution-centred advice rather than client-centred advice: institution-based counsellors naturally focus on the options available in their own centres, even if better or more suitable options for the client are available elsewhere. In response to this, GOAL in Flanders actively positioned itself as fully independent and fully client-centred. A central message from the counsellors and programme developers in that country is that this independence has been an essential and positive aspect of the pilot.

Programmes in some other countries had less independence. In Lithuania, the two GOAL services were based in specific educational institutions, and this had impacts on the guidance provided, in terms of the options that were presented to clients. In Slovenia, the secondary education centre-based GOAL provision focused on options within that centre, whereas the adult education centre-based counselling was more likely to offer alternative options. However, as highlighted by counsellors in that country, this was in part based on client type: clients in a secondary education centre were more likely to have a good idea of what they wanted to study, and to know that this course was available in that particular educational institution.

Counsellors in Slovenia suggested that greater independence might come with some negative trade-offs. Because GOAL counsellors in secondary education centres were institution-based, they argued, these counsellors had more in-depth knowledge of the courses they offered to clients. For the more independent services, such as in Flanders and Iceland, it was inevitably more challenging and resource intensive to have rich knowledge of all the options available to clients. Another positive of being based in a specific institution was evident in Lithuania, where counsellors were able to take clients to meet vocational teachers, and to arrange "taster sessions" for clients. Again, this would be significantly more challenging to do across a range of institutions.

5.5 Summary of key findings

The aim of Project GOAL was to develop or expand guidance and orientation interventions for low-educated adults. Within this shared aim, the six participating countries were able to develop the guidance service model(s) best suited to the starting points of their potential clients, the context and needs of these clients, and the wider institutional and policy landscape in which the programme would operate. Although the GOAL programmes were therefore all different to each other, the descriptions of guidance activities and processes presented in this chapter highlight a number of principles and practices shared by most:

1. The service would be **client-centred**.
2. Following from this, the service on offer would not be generic, but rather would be **custom-fit to the clients' needs** and his or her personal circumstances. In other words, although guidance sessions might follow a rough general structure, individual pathways would show great variety.
3. The client would be encouraged to be an **active participant**, and supported to take a lead in the guidance process.
4. Given the complexity of the education and training information landscape, **information sharing** would be a key feature of each programme. However, the services would do more than provide information; the client would be **supported** by counsellors to use this information and **motivated** by the counsellor to achieve the outcome that best suited his or her situation.
5. Most guidance sessions would be **face-to-face meetings between an individual counsellor and an individual client**.

All the above features would require counsellors to be **flexible and adaptable**.

Beginning with the foundations of the guidance services being provided through GOAL, two countries (Flanders and Lithuania) were building on and seeking to further fine tune previous guidance efforts aimed at GOAL target groups. Two countries (Iceland and Slovenia) were building on previously existing guidance services, but were expanding the services from less disadvantaged groups to GOAL target groups. The Netherlands intended to roll out a previously existing service (the Literacy Screener) to new regions and partners. The Czech Republic was launching a new initiative.

In the Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Netherlands it was planned that there would be **one guidance or orientation session only** for each client. The programme models in Flanders, Iceland and Slovenia allowed for **several guidance sessions** with no set limit on number, or length, or rules on frequency. As the programmes went into the field it became clear that the single session model was more appropriate for clients who had a good level of motivation and could be specific about the "next step". Those who were less sure about where they were heading or who struggled to make progress usually needed **two or three sessions** with the counsellor in order to clarify and concretise their aims. A third category of client required **multiple sessions**, as the **range of needs and barriers that had to be addressed or overcome** was complex and often personal. A consequence of this

finding was that the programme model in Lithuania changed in Wave 2 so that some clients could have one or more additional sessions.

Three challenges emerged in the course of programme implementation. Firstly, in a client-centred programme **the structure and content of the guidance is shaped by the level of "readiness"** the individual client has to embark on counselling. Where clients lack motivation, lack direction, or have particularly vulnerable or chaotic lives, this impacts both on the level of programme resource needed and on the likelihood of a positive outcome. Second, **programmes can only be as "custom fit" as programme resources allow**. Not every GOAL service was able to offer clients as many sessions as were truly needed to build a relationship of trust or to make a change. Third, tensions may emerge where client-led services operate in an institution-led framework. The GOAL pilots in Iceland and in Flanders were able to offer guidance and orientation **independent of any institutional affiliation**: indeed, in Flanders this was a raison d'etre for the service. The pilots in Lithuania and in two of the four Slovenian intervention sites were associated with the educational providers where the services were housed, which may have limited progression pathways but also meant counsellors were extremely familiar with the available education and training options.

5.6   Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy from the evaluation findings presented above. In terms of programme development it offers some **lessons** that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. The policy implications section summarises the **influences of policy** issues and factors on the GOAL programmes, and the **messages for policy** from the GOAL project's experiences.

Implications for future programme development

One clear overarching message for future programme development emerges from this overview of the six GOAL guidance services: **an effective educational guidance programme is one which matches the counselling model to the client need**.

In practice, this means that the **needs and the context of clients will be the key determining factor of the length, number and content of the guidance sessions**, and thus in the amount of programme resource that is needed. Programmes that are built around a model where only one guidance session can be offered would do well to target counselling only to those clients who can be expected, because of their higher levels of motivation and/or clarity of direction, to be able to take the next step after a low-level, relatively low resource intervention. This type of programme may be more suited to an institutional environment such as a college, where potential pathways are more clearly defined and limited, clients have more pre-existing awareness of the range of available options, and counsellors have more in-depth knowledge about those options.

Programme developers embarking on more intensive counselling programmes need to consider how best to provide resources for counselling models (particularly with regard to the appropriate number of sessions) that provide the ongoing support that clients need in order to take the steps required to successfully achieve longer term outcomes such as enrolment on a course. In countries where the

target group is particularly disadvantaged, very basic steps are necessary before larger steps can be taken in education or employment. Counsellors in Iceland refer to this process as "planting seeds" that may later grow.

Policy implications

Influence of policy

The existing policy environment affects each stage of **the counselling journey, from advice to action to impact**. Where that policy landscape is complex, this has impacts on the accessibility and transparency of information on educational and training opportunities. In such cases, substantial programme resources must be devoted to ensuring that counsellors are familiar with all the different possibilities open to clients.

We can see in the case of the Czech Republic, for example, how policy affected the "action to impact" stage. Although clients got good advice and were able to see the next steps, they were **impeded from taking these steps because of financial barriers** (the cost of education and training courses). Thus rolling out educational guidance of the type offered by GOAL on a wider basis in the Czech Republic will be hampered because there is no integrated system and support from the state budget that will enable low-educated clients to enrol in particular courses within the further education system.

Messages for policy

As this last example makes clear, the effectiveness of the guidance service (in terms of the outcomes such as educational enrolments) is heavily dependent on broader policy structures. Clients can gain information and motivation to progress in education, but if funding is lacking they are very unlikely to make that progress. This issues is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11.

With regard to counselling models and factors such as number of sessions, there is a need for policy makers to support programme models that are appropriate for the chosen client groups. This would involve the development of **clear pre-programme understandings between programme developers and policy funders** regarding who the counselling is targeted at, what are realistic outcomes for those groups, and what resources are needed in terms of providing an appropriate counselling model in order to achieve those outcomes.

6 Partnerships and Networks

In the next five chapters we turn to the five GOAL intervention strategies. The first we focus on is **partnerships and networks**, wherein countries devised strategies both **to improve** their existing partnerships and networks and **to develop** new ones. Many members of the GOAL target groups are marginalised from career services and educational institutions, and have multiple needs that require multi-agency support. Given these needs, the hypothesis was that partnerships and networks may be key to ensuring positive outcomes for service users. In this respect, well-functioning partnerships are critical to the success of GOAL.

Although each of the six countries developed partnership and networking strategies, the Netherlands differed in its approach. The diffused nature of GOAL in the Netherlands meant that the programme was **particularly dependent on the establishment of strong partnerships**, with partners themselves administering the Literacy Screener and then referring potential clients on to another organisation. Whereas in other countries GOAL was a discrete service working with partners, in the Netherlands GOAL is more of a process distributed across a network of organisations.

This chapter provides description and analysis of the partnerships and networks that were developed to support the work of GOAL. This includes programme contexts (section 6.1), followed by an assessment of the aims (section 6.2), actions (section 6.3), strengths and achievements (section 6.4), and challenges and barriers (section 6.5) involved in developing and maintaining these partnerships and networks. Section 6.6 analyses the results of the partnership and networking strategies using a Realist Evaluation-influenced approach which focuses on the interacting influences of programme contexts, resources, strategies, and the stepping stones or mechanisms through which intervention objectives were achieved. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key findings (section 6.7), and a discussion of the implications of these findings for future programme development and for policy (section 6.8).

6.1 Context

As part of the final reporting, local evaluators were asked to describe the partnership and network landscape in their countries prior to the GOAL project and assign it a baseline score on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents non-existent or non-functioning preconditions and 10 a situation of excellence (see Table 6.1. below). The primary use of these scores is to gauge distance travelled within individual countries over the life of the project. Due to cross-national differences in factors such as expectations, comparison of scores between countries should be seen as indicative only: precise score comparisons cannot be drawn across countries as they reflect country-specific *perceptions*, not objective criteria. For example, we cannot say for certain that one country's rating of a "3" implies the same level of development as another country's rating of a "3", nor that one country's "8" represents twice the level of development of another country's "4". That being said, triangulation of these data with qualitative interview material does indicate that significant cross-country score differences do reflect meaningful qualitative differences in the level of development.

Table 6.1. *Baseline partnership and landscape evaluations by countries*

Country	Baseline Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	1	At the beginning of project, there was no cooperation with stakeholders, e.g. the regional branches of Labour Offices. The GOAL project team started from the scratch in building partnerships and networks.
FL	5	Some relatively longstanding partnerships were in place, but many potential partners did not refer clients to the service as they did not always know the service existed.
IS	4-5	The relatively longstanding partnerships that were in place were informal and partners did not have a good understanding of the importance of adult guidance or the potential added value to their work of GOAL. Partners were worried about GOAL "coming into their territory" or taking away some of their future funding opportunities
LT	5	At the start of the programme there were some long-established partnerships at the two GOAL sites. Some had a more formal basis (e.g. signed agreements on future cooperation, participation in events, and dissemination of news) and worked well (e.g. partnerships of VJLMTC with public employment office and employers).
NL	6	There had been a focus on regional collaboration for some time, with the preconditions for addressing low basic skill levels mapped out in a number of regions in the Literacy for Life pilot programme (2012 and 2015). Partly due to the outcomes of this previous pilot, strengthening networks was incorporated as one of the five action lines in the national *Count on Skills* programme (2016-2018): the aim being to establish active networks in all 35 employment regions in the Netherlands. The goal of the action line is to ensure that at least 45,000 people start literacy training, in which materials and volunteers from the programme will be used.
SI	5	At the start of the GOAL project, the two participating ISIO centres already had experience with partner cooperation, as both had a regional partner network in place from the outset of their operations. The two participating secondary education centres had less experience in partner cooperation in guidance activities, but had experience of cooperation in the provision of education services. Before the GOAL programme there had been several national coordination groups/partnerships in the field of adult education and more narrowly, and one of the national groups was also involved in directing the development of lifelong career guidance.

As these descriptions illustrate, relevant partnerships and network arrangements were in existence in five of the six countries (the Czech Republic being the exception) before the GOAL programme was launched. However, **the exisiting structures were not best equipped to serve the GOAL project's aim of offering educational guidance to low-educated adults**: some forms of cooperation were too informal or fragmented to support joined-up working, referral routes were weak, financing was unstable or insecure, and generally partners lacked an understanding of the target group,

educational counselling, and the benefits this service could bring to the work of their own organisation.

Looking outside of the existing partnerships and networks, the contextual factor that would prove critical to the ultimate success or failure of this intervention strategy is that eduational guidance services of the type offered by GOAL were not structrally developed in any of the six countries; educational guidance for low-educated adults did not have a wide roll out, nor in the pre-programme environment was it offered as part of the services of other organisations.

6.2 Aims

In the partnerships and networks intervention strategy, countries sought:

1. **To develop, enrich and extend current partnerships and networks**, and
2. **To embed those partnerships and networks in the policy structure**, so that collaborations were systemic rather than dependent on individual knowledge, interests and energy.

The underpinning rationale for both these aims was client-focused: in a complex educational landscape involving a wide range of structurally organised public services and other, less embedded, services such as NGOs, partnerships and networks are the main mechanism by which clients in the GOAL target group can access GOAL counselling. Effective referral partnership and networks function in two ways: GOAL programme staff can use partnerships and networks to find potential clients and to learn about educational opportunities and other available services to support these clients; partner organisations benefit from being able to refer their clients to a specialist service with the potential to make differences across a range of outcomes.

The hypothesis that underpins this second ambition is that client gains in one service area (e.g. education) are likely to contribute to gains in other areas (e.g. employment and mental health), if the process is sensibly managed. Likewise, gains in areas such as mental and physical health may have positive impacts on educational outcomes. However, this **cross-service synergy** or symbiosis is not a given, and if a holistic approach is not taken, services may conflict with each other. For example, if employment services focus on moving clients into the first available job, they may undercut the longer term objectives of other services, especially those related to providing education that may lead to more suitable, long-term employment options.

Across all six countries, **partnerships played a central role in efforts to recruit clients into GOAL**. (See Chapter 7 for more on referral.) The experience in Flanders provides a generalisable example. There, a wide range of public services are available for the GOAL target groups. For example, unemployed, low-educated adults receive employment and perhaps social welfare support, while recent immigrants are supported by civic integration services. Furthermore, GOAL clients may also receive support regarding mental health issues, physical health, drug and/or alcohol rehabilitation, or other needs. In this complex service landscape, adults with learning needs or demands would ideally be directed to the GOAL service, where counsellors with specialised knowledge and skills can provide education-focused guidance. **Counsellors in other social service organisations lack specific expertise in the education sector, but do have access (through their own services) to individuals who may**

benefit from GOAL's education-focused counselling. Within this context the GOAL project in Flanders and other countries sought to improve and expand networks and partnerships in order to increase the amount of referrals of low-educated adults from these partner organisations. A key objective of this process, across all countries, was to **raise awareness of the activities of the GOAL guidance centres and to inform network partners about the educational guidance services GOAL offered**. Potential partner organisations in all six countries were often unaware of the availability of specialised counselling for low-educated adults and/or did not recognise the value it could add to their own work with these clients.

Table 6.2. summarises the key aims for the six countries, drawing on local evaluators' own descriptions of programme aims.

Table 6.2. *Programme aims by country*

Country	Aim 1	Aim 2
CZ	Establish close cooperation between relevant stakeholders at the regional level.	
IS	Build sustainable partnerships that were optimally equipped to identify and reach target groups.	Establish formal collaboration around counselling services, and a base for a long term cooperation, structural referrals and network building.
FL	Existing partnerships had to be improved.	Collecting evidence, learning lessons and inferring messages for policy and practice, in order to facilitate further development of structural partnerships.
NL	Establishment and strengthening of regional networks.	Once the regional networks have been established, a second challenge follows: embedding.
LT	Explore and understand existing partnerships, and develop broader, richer networks.	Build a more structured cooperation with current and potential partners and at the same to improve the referral system.
SI	Establish two new regional networks with the aim of reaching the identified target groups.	Increase cross-organisational awareness of the possibilities available to the target group for education, training, career development and employment opportunities.

When pursuing these aims, several countries stressed the importance of **building on currently existing strengths**, and using their understanding (from the Needs and Strengths Analysis) of what had worked well in the past. For example, Slovenia said that they established their first objective, the establishment of two regional networks, "on the basis of positive previous dealings" with particular regional partners. Countries also stressed the importance of "selling themselves" to potential partners, i.e. **persuading other organisations that GOAL could offer clients something that the other services could not**. As Lithuania observed, **partner organisations were often unaware of GOAL and did not recognise the value it could add to their own work**.

Two different types of partnerships were particularly relevant to GOAL: 1) those which existed prior to the launch of the project, and which were then developed further; and 2) those which were developed specifically for the project. Most partnerships were in existence before the GOAL programme began, but during the life of GOAL efforts were made to enrich and structurally embed these partnerships.

6.3 Partnership in action

Looking across all six countries, **four broad types of partners** were consistently present: 1) Educational partners; 2) Employment partners; 3) Welfare (social service) agencies; and 4) Local policy partners.

1. Educational partners

As GOAL is an education-focused service, educational partnerships were naturally an important aspect of partnership networks. In Flanders, for example, GOAL worked with support services in schools and adult education institutions. Partnerships with the former were focused on preventing school drop-out, whereas partnerships with adult education centres emphasised the importance of adults receiving independent advice, as opposed to advice that centred on the offers of particular institutions (which might not best meet the needs of the individual client). In Ghent, the Word Wijs! programme (de Stap) contacted 19 local secondary schools with the aim of providing a bridge into further education for struggling or disaffected pupils. GOAL focused on pupils who were close to dropping out and who could be served by educational guidance for adults before they leave school and disappear off the radar. These partnership efforts led to a small increase in the recruitment of clients from this target group. However, counsellors reported that activities to approach these secondary schools, provide information sessions to them and maintain contacts with student counsellors in the schools were very labour-intensive (particularly with regard to arranging meetings). De Stap concluded that referrals from secondary schools depend heavily on the degree to which individual teachers were convinced of the value of GOAL and more specifically on teachers' willingness to consider options for their pupils outside the secondary school system. This finding highlights the **continued disjuncture between different components of the education system, despite policy makers' rhetoric about the important of a joined-up, lifelong learning approach** to education.

2. Employment services

In some GOAL countries, partnerships with employment services and labour offices were the most intensive ones, leading to high numbers of referrals. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Labour Office distributed promotional and information materials for the GOAL programme and shared its expertise with the programme staff: most (81%) of the clients in the Czech Republic were referred by the Labour Office. In Slovenia, both regional employment offices were important partners. In Flanders, collaboration with an organisation working specifically with young adults (18-25 years) to guide them towards a job, focused on creating a more structural referral process for low-educated clients with general or specific educational needs. In Iceland, it was hoped that a key partner would

be a trade union, Efling, which had had previous but informal collaboration with the Mímir site. The experiences of the GOAL teams working with employment services, employers and trade unions were mixed. Although some referral pathways were very productive, others were less successful.

3. Welfare (Social Services) partners

Welfare agencies (social services) played an important role in partnerships. In the Czech Republic, the Agency for Social Inclusion was valued for its knowledge of the local policy terrain and played a role as an intermediary between the GOAL service and other agencies working with the target group in order to facilitate referral. In Slovenia, regional social services partners played an important role. Within the Reykjavík city welfare system, one GOAL project (Mímir) sought to get participants into GOAL and to build a network that could help potential service users and the relevant organisations in that network. As part of these efforts, the GOAL project in Iceland worked with organisations that specialise in vocational rehabilitation (services targeted at individuals who have had to leave the labour market due to health problems, but could potentially return).

4. Local policy partners

Local policy partners also played key roles in networks. In the Netherlands, for example, there was a previously existing policy emphasis on building regional networks focused on improving adult literacy and numeracy. GOAL sought to integrate itself into this network, which centres around a Literacy Point, which acts as local or regional contact point for the literacy network. The Literacy Screener is then used by organisations such as temporary employment agencies, the UWV (Employee Insurance Agency), Service Points for Career Orientation and Guidance and care providers to identify services users with low literacy more quickly and to refer them to an appropriate literacy training. The network also includes organisations that provide training for literacy volunteers.

In addition to these four main partner types, **migration and integration services** were involved with some GOAL partnerships. In Flanders, for example, deSOM referred foreign language newcomers with an interest in further training or education to de Leerwinkel, comprising almost a quarter (22%) of that site's referrals. IN-Gent, the integration office, referred newcomers with educational questions to De Stap. In Iceland, the Directorate of Labour referred a group of Polish women to Mimir and immigrants were referred to MSS by Landnemaskólinn (The School of Immigrants).

> *Most of them can't afford education but they are interested in knowing how the various systems works in Iceland and how to adapt in society. They are just struggling to make ends meet and bring up their children in a foreign country* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

Partnership characteristics

Not all the partnerships that were developed during GOAL existed on the same footing: **some partnerships were more formalised than others**. In the Czech Republic neither the partnership with the Labour Office nor the Agency for Social Inclusion was formalised through a signed contract: the lack of formal cooperation was not, however, considered to be a barrier to the network fulfilling its

aims in terms of the GOAL project. In the Netherlands, the prisons that piloted the Literacy Screener were not part of any regional networks, although they have their own internal networks which mean that literacy classes can be offered in-house. The Dutch organisations that do belong to regional networks, however, sign agreements to contribute towards preventing low literacy and to address low basic skills, and these networks are structurally embedded. Likewise, in Slovenia, the process of establishing the two regional networks was marked by partners signing an agreement in which goals and common tasks were listed and formal lines of communication established. This formality was considered by the Slovenian team to be a a key component of effective partnership working.

Partnerships existed on municipal, regional and/or national level, although not in all countries. In Slovenia, two regional networks were developed to connect education providers (both of which piloted GOAL) with other organisations. Slovenia also established a national advisory body for guidance. As several bodies for adult education were already established at the national level, the programme coordinators decided not to set up a new national body for the GOAL project but to establish a GOAL project sub-group within the National Lifelong Career Guidance Group, which was organised by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport and staffed by representatives of a number of relevant national organisations.

Looking across all six countries, the partnership development experience of Iceland is largely representative. In Iceland, the **formation of partnerships took time, but went well and all parties who participated were pleased with the increased collaboration**. The slight overlaps between services did not appear to cause problems across organisations, thanks to good communication between GOAL and partner organisations, and the good will of all parties. According to partner organisations, the sharing of knowledge and experience appeared to benefit staff at all services, not just GOAL. The **programme partners, policymakers and programme staff concluded that further implementation of a formalised collaborative network is desirable and could benefit all organisations in the future**. In Iceland, an additional point that did not arise in other countries was the following: in terms of adding to the networks that were developed during GOAL, programme partners felt that the healthcare system should have a presence when finding ways to reach and service the more vulnerable groups in society.

Partnership activities

There was no set way of partnership working across the six projects; there were, however, partnership activities that were present in all of the GOAL countries and can be seen as integral to a high-quality partnership:

- clearly defining the shared interests of the partnership and the remit of each partner
- clearly defining the goals, objectives and tasks of the partnership, of each partner and (where relevant) of the partnership or network coordinator
- engaging in common activities (such as presentations, training workshops, promotional activities) centred around awareness raising and information exchange

- improving the referral process including, in some countries, through the development of collaborative tools to support referral (e.g. an appointment tool in Flanders), or analysis of evaluation data.

6.4 Strengths and achievements

This section summarises the key partnership-related strengths and achievements in the six GOAL countries – looking, for example at key accomplishments with regard to strengthening existing partnerships and developing new ones.

In this evaluation report, strengths refer to *programme resources*, whereas achievements can be thought of as *programme accomplishments*. For example, a programme may have started the GOAL pilot with the strength of previously existing networks, but may have produced the achievement of enriching and expanding those networks.

Across the six countries, GOAL was successful at achieving the objective of strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks with other organisations (see Table 6.3.). Amongst the five GOAL intervention strategies, Partnerships and Networks boasts (by some way) the highest mean progress score, when comparing ratings at the start and end of the programme. The mean score for progress on Partnerships and Networks was 3.2: the mean scores for all other interventions range from a low of 1.7 to a high of 2.2 This average is somewhat inflated by the Czech Republic's large gain, which reflects movement from almost no partnerships at the start of the intervention to "intensive and mutually benefical cooperation" that exceeded national expectations. However, even countries that started GOAL with more established partnerships (such as Iceland, Slovenia and Flanders) were assessed as having made major gains in terms of strengthening those partnerships. (The mean starting score for Partnerships and Networks was only slightly below average compared to the other intervention strategies, indicating that Partnerships and Networks' high gain cannot be attributed to starting from a very low base.)

However, GOAL did not achieve its objective of structurally embedding these partnerships into the broader service landscape. Whereas partnerships and networks were strengthened, they remained contingent upon informal efforts by GOAL staff, and did not become systematised. That being said, in achieving Objective 1 (strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks), GOAL programmes established a strong level of support amongst partner organisations for GOAL to become a structurally embedded aspect of the broader service landscape, and thus achieve Objective 2. However, the realisation of this objective remains contingent upon contextual factors, particularly policy support and funding.

Table 6.3. *Baseline and end evaluations of GOAL project partnerships and networks, by country*

Country	Baseline Score	End Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	1	7	With regional branches of labour offices, the GOAL project team created intensive and mutually benefical cooperation beyond initial expecations. The project team also managed to establish contact with NGOs such as the House of Romani culture in order to reach clients in socially excluded locations (particulary in Ustecky region). Although the cooperation with regional stakeholders was very high, this will not be sustainble in the long term if a systemic solution in terms of funding is not found.
FL	5	9	Partner organisations acknowledged the importance of the service and referrals had increased significantly by the project's closing stages. The quality of partnerships is however dependent on the efforts of the GOAL service and partnerships are not yet centrally structuralised.
IS	4-5	7-8	By the final year of the programme, partners were much more receptive to the importance of guidance in general and to the role of GOAL in meeting the particular needs of the target group. However, employers never committed to the project, and the partnership network remained informal – it did not get embedded into the formal policy structure.
LT	5	7	Sustainable partnerships resulting in client referral were established with a few new NGOs and employers. New partners that were approached by GOAL coordinator and GOAL sites (e.g. NGOs, employers, municipal branch) were open to the idea of cooperation but this was not always matched by action. The partnership competences and networking management of new partners need strengthening.
NL	6	7	The Dutch GOAL pilot did not explicitly focus on the development of partnerships and networks. However, information from this evaluation made an indirect contribution to this aspect of the programme, because further improvement and dispersion of the guidance process (screening for low literacy and referral to appropriate training facilities) means more organisations will work together to tackle low literacy. It emerged from the interviews with pilot organisations and partners that there is room for improvement on embedding regional networks.
SI	5	8	The GOAL project built on previous experiences with partnership at the regional level. Guidance providers acquired new partners important from the point of view of addressing the selected GOAL target groups, which added value to the quality of the guidance process and the guidance outcomes. Most partners were satisfied with the cooperation and wished it to continue. They support an organised, formalised method of operation with clear objectives and joint tasks. Not all partners were equally active at all times; e.g. greater activity by the enterprises involved in one region would have been welcome. Progress was also made at the national level with the establishment of a GOAL sub-group at the national expert group for lifelong career guidance; this gave even greater weight to the field of adult education guidance and the formulation of proposals for further development at the national level. The group comprises representatives of seven different social partners and three representatives of the profession at University of Ljubljana faculties.

A number of themes emerge from local evaluators' reflections on their strengths and achievements in developing partnerships and networks. The primary achievement, and one which underpins all of

the successes in this intervention strategy, was **the ability of the GOAL programme staff to secure "buy-in" from a variety of partners working in a variety of domains to a variety of agendas to the idea that securing couselling for low-educated adults was a shared concern and ambition**.

With the exception of the Czech Republic, which started from a situation of non-cooperation, the GOAL countries focused on 1) **expanding** and 2) **strengthening** partnerships and networks that were already in existence. In doing so, the GOAL teams were able to build on their **preprogramme understanding of the existing partnership landscape**, and their consequent knowledge of where their efforts were best placed.

Achievements in expanding networks

Given the characteristics of the potential clients targeted by the GOAL project, it was essential to expand networking arrangements to draw in a broad alliance of partners, collaborating around a shared message and ambition, and communicating with each other easily and efficiently for the benefit of the client. Partnership development centred around the fact that the service users were drawn from **vulnerable groups who face many challenges and thus use a number of different services**. The GOAL teams were successful in developing active and reciprocal partnerships with a large number and wide range of organisations. Expanded partnerships and networks were key to extending the reach of the GOAL service.

A sense emerges from the national reports of a **strength in numbers**; organisations working together in solid partnerships to make a difference to individual lives but also, potentially, to lobby for changes in policy at the local and national levels in order to better support the needs of their clients. In the case of Lithuania, for example, programme sites and partners were willing to continue their partnership and have more extensive cooperation in the future because of the direct benefits they have received from it, e.g. counselling and training of unemployed people. In Iceland, the GOAL project contributed to the **building of bridges across services**. Relevant organisations became more aware of each other's roles and the services offered by the LLL centres providing GOAL. By the end of the pilot, organisational borders were more permeable, and mutual interest had developed for ongoing cooperation, with the aim of strengthening the full range of services for the target group.

Achievements in strengthening networks

At the centre of strong GOAL partnerships and networks stands a shared commitment to the target groups. In spite of initial worries on the part of the GOAL programme developers that the overlapping concerns of the various partners would either lead to competition or conflict, the partnerships were characterised by a spirit of collaboration.

There were several ways in which this collaborative working was achieved, each of which served to strengthen the developing partnerships and networks and illustrate the features of best practice. First, GOAL programme staff made sure that **the GOAL programme was well-defined, so that its remit, and the boundaries of its aims, were clear to potential partners**. Partners relationships were **built with sensitivity and tact**, especially where partner organisations ran counselling services of their own, in order that existing services should not be belittled, and that the focus remain on

counselling as a client-centred rather than institution-centred service. The time taken to do this work should not be underestimated, and more than one national report emphasises how important the process of **building trust** was to their partnerships' success. The Czech evaluators praised the **negotiating strategy and personality of the counsellors**. In order to bridge initial barriers, **they had to explain to the partners that counsellors are not their competitors – they offer "additional services" not provided by the labour offices to the clients**. Furthermore, **the benefits to the partner organisations** were made clear, not only in terms of shared workload, but also in terms of increasing the quality of services offered by all partners.

> *The programme partners need to see how participation will benefit them, maybe we need to present the GOAL project more in that way [...] of course we should emphasiee the possibility of us taking some of the load off them. Some of their clients have been with them for a long time and it might be useful to them if they are able to refer them to us. It can be good to get a break from regulars* (GOAL Programme Staff Member, Iceland).

Because GOAL was in most cases independent of the institutions through which advice was offered, a greater range of options were open to clients, raising their chances of finding something they wanted to do and would stick to. In the Czech Republic close and intensive cooperation with regional branches of the Labour Office in effect "sold" the GOAL service to these partners. Whereas the work of the Labour Offices focused on trying to get unemployed people into jobs, GOAL counsellors were, through the GOAL referral process, able to offer their clients a different approach, with career guidance offering the opportunity to work more intensively with clients and offer them more information. In this case, then, **GOAL expanded the range of opportunities offered by the Labour Office for their clients**, and made eventual success more possible for clients for whom immediate employment was not the primary goal.

Achievements in information sharing

The main mechanism for collaboration in partnerships and networks was the **exchange of information**: this was the primary focus of partnership meetings, e.g. presentations, training workshops, and promotional events. Programme staff disseminated information about GOAL and what the service could achieve for the clients of the partner organisations. GOAL staff were also able, through information sharing, to draw on the vast experience of partners, their extensive knowledge of the local community, its institutions and its people, and their contacts. In this work, the strong competences in communication of the GOAL staff were a key strength. In developing sustainable partnerships, good communication of the purpose and the value of guidance is a prerequisite. From the programme perspective, this communication can help make the case for the existence and funding of the service. For existing and potential partners, such communication can highlight the benefits and added value that such a service can bring to their own organisation.

A key impact of information sharing is its ability to influence other service's attitudes towards the target group's potential by raising awareness of the possibilities available to them for education, training, career development and employment opportunities.

Achievements in resource sharing

In some countries, proximity of services added strength to the partnership relationships, a finding that is supported in earlier research (BMG Research, 2011). In Iceland, t**he location of the programme partner Samvinna in the same building as programme site MSS benefitted the collaboration greatly**. The counsellors knew the employees of Samvinna, and their communication was informal and friendly. They were in close vicinity to potential service users and could easily remind them of upcoming sessions. Such proximity in this case led to another benefit, shared ownership of the collaboration:

> *The staff members at Samvinna usually say that this is our shared project* [the GOAL project]*, they are so great* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

An additional achievement is related to the **development and sharing of effective guidance tools**. (Tools are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.) In the course of the evaluation, a number of partners indicated that a strength of the GOAL partnership was its facilitation of joint learning and sharing regarding tools. Several partners said that they had a strong array of tools that they were able to present to other partners at meetings of the network. The network was thus able to contribute to the exchange of expertise on different tools – an outcome that had not been envisaged in the network's operating plan.

Achievements in sustainability

As is explored in the next section on Challenges and Barriers there are likely to be problems sustaining partnerships and networks built around the referral process when the funding for the GOAL project ends, especially given the absence of structural legitimacy. But in this section on achievements it should be noted that that the six national teams indicated that by the end of the pilot there was a very high level of good will towards continuing the networks, evidence of the mututal benefits that have been created through their cooperation. In Iceland, experiences from the pilot suggest that the level of commitment to the common goal of bettering the educational and vocational chances of the target group will in itself sustain the partnerships.

Of the six countries, Flanders took the greatest steps towards making their networks and partnerships sustainable. During the life of the GOAL project there was no tangible evolution in government commitment to sustaining GOAL services beyond the life of the pilot, but the project did help to spur the development of a **policy paper produced by the GOAL project team that provides a blueprint for the structural implementation of GOAL services throughout Flanders**. As an outcome of the pilot process, this policy paper is (at the time of writing) being discussed with the Flanders GOAL advisory committee (with the involvement of representatives of different policy domains at Flemish level) and an endorsement of these members is being sought in order to stimulate political support for a structurally embedded, sustainable GOAL service.

6.5 Challenges and barriers

Challenges relating to working with new partners

In general, the six countries experienced **more challenges working with new partners** than with partners where there was a tradition of collaborative working. **Establishing new sustainable partnerships was a challenge**, particularly with regard to getting partners to move their level of cooperation **beyond information dissemination** to taking an active part in referring their clients to the sites. The experiences in Lithuania raised a related challenge. Because the GOAL service was generating sufficient clients through their existing networks and had limited resources, the two intervention sites had only a limited interest in working with new partners and were thus not proactive about finding them. A similar scenario arises where there are limits, because of funding, to how many clients a guidance service can take on: in such cases, putting energy into developing partner relationships is pointless if the referral routes are blocked by oversubscription.

Even with a great deal of effort, however, some partner countries experienced **particular problems in bringing employers on board**. This highlights the importance of awareness-raising activities where the pre-programme environment (e.g. in workplaces) is one in which educational or career guidance is not established. The Icelandic team faced barriers in their outreach activites aimed at bringing low-educated adults in employment to GOAL. A possible route to overcoming this challenge in the future will be to form a more effective connection between the adult learning system and the business sector. In Slovenia the expectations of companies were focused narrowly on job-specific training options and not on the more general development of their employees. Cases like this show that it is not enough for effective partnership working to be based on services sharing the same target group – the **services also need to share a vision for their clients**. This challenge is covered in greater depth in Chapter 9; in summary, though, collaboration appear to have succeeded where there was consensus about what services had to offer and a clear vision of the complementarity. In Iceland the feeling was that employers saw educational guidance as an inconvenience they had nothing to gain from.

In Lithuania the least successful partnership efforts were trials to establish cooperation with municipal welfare services. These local policy actors **did not see the benefit of referring their clients to GOAL services since they were already in close contact with employment-focused guidance services**. In Flanders partnerships with Centres of Adult Education proved largely unproductive in terms of referrals, with these centres preferring to promote their own provision before recommending the GOAL service. This finding suggests that **where other organisations are working to their own targets for learners, and perhaps are funded on this basis, institutional objectives will win out**. The extreme examples of this in GOAL were the failed attempts in several countries to work with detainees: programme staff struggled to achieve cooperation with prisons because these institutions already ran their own education programmes for inmates.

Challenges relating to differing contributions to the network

The national report from Slovenia raised two challenges to effective working practices once partnerships were up and running. In Slovenia, some partners did not attend meetings, despite the fact that signed partnership agreements were in place. Qualitative data revealed that the primary reason for non-involvment or non-engagement was the **time pressure on partners**, which meant that they opted not to attend meetings on topics that did not appear to them to directly affect the target groups with which they were dealing, in their own service area. This finding highlights again the importance to effective partnership of communication and of securing "buy-in" to the partnership's aims. Lithuania also reported challenges in converting new partners to new *active* partners, that is, partners who would move beyond the information exchange and into active referral. The evaluators from the Netherlands summed up the challenge of securing active collaboration succinctly as "*no money, no time, no staff*". According to a language point coordinator interviewed, a sustainable network requires partners who are willing to invest in it: "*not only with money, but also with time and energy*". In Slovenia a further a barrier to effective partnership working was bureaucracy within the partner organisations. The **rigidity of the organisational or bureaucratic system** in some partners meant that these organisations did not have the freedom or flexibility to involve themselves in projects and activities at their own discretion; instead, they were constrained by clearly defined rules of operation and cooperation in relation to their specific target groups. With some partners, "over-bureaucratisation" meant that extensive paperwork requirements took time away from other possible tasks and forms of cooperation within the partner network, e.g. client referral to GOAL.

It is clear that a related challenge of converting partnership *in principle* to partnership *in practice* is that of ownership: for partnerships and networks founded on the principle of mutual benefits, is it necessary for one organisation or individual to be responsible for managing and running the network? Where networks and partnerships are informal this is perhaps less of an issue, but where these partnerships move onto a formal and indeed structural basis, then responsibility is more contentious given the crossover between different (and perhaps competing) policy silos. Even if one department (Education) were to have ultimate responsibility for a network including GOAL, other departments (Welfare, Migration, Work) would need to share the mission and vision of a GOAL service and be jointly responsible for the promotion and effectiveness of the service. This requires **buy-in across a range of policy areas and ministries**. Buy-in is also required at multiple policy levels.

Challenges relating to the structural position of services

As stated in Section 6.4, **GOAL did not achieve its objective of structurally embedding the partnerships** that were developed into the broader service landscape. This clearly presents a challenge to the sustainability of the service; although the GOAL programmes proved it was possible for partnerships to work effectively in the short term on an informal or semi-formal basis, there is little security in informal partnerships over the longer term. Recognition of the service is problematic when it is not embedded and has no "official" position; for example, the position of the service is financially insecure when funding needs to be renegotiated regularly to keep the service active. The national report from Flanders draws attention to the fact that because its intervention sites are funded locally and not structurally, this **works against long-term partnerships**: they cannot be

embedded in existing structures in the way that (for example) schools are. Funding was also likely to prove important in Lithuania: because of the public procurement procedures that apply to public institutions, not all partners (e.g. training/counselling institutions) are eligible for funding, and this puts a partnership under test.

A clear challenge to the necessary level of structural recognition and embedment is the **low status of adult education** as a policy sector throughout Europe. Where adult education is not a policy priority, those running programmes of educational guidance for adults will struggle to gain sufficient support for their work, and are likely to see their programmes overlooked or under-supported in comparison to programmes aimed at moving individuals into work as quickly as possible.

As argued in the Icelandic national report, **formalised collaboration is the best and perhaps only way to properly address the multiple problems and complex issues some clients face**, because it is an acknowledgement that education and guidance services alone are not enough for the more vulnerable service users. The main partnership challenge in Iceland was related to **sustainability: taking the next steps of formalising a cross-organisational network between different institutions and systems that work with the target group**. Such structural sustainability requires **joined-up policy making** within and across the relevant sectors (e.g. welfare, healthcare and education).

> *What we need to do is to formalise the collaboration and consultation between systems* […] *The systems need to work together, an overall policymaking* [approach] *is needed* (Programme Partners and Policymakers, Iceland).

Another facet of this is that structural, reciprocal partnerships are essential. The Flemish national report argues for "**warm transfers"** between organisations. These are transfers that do not require the client to start from scratch in terms of providing information to each service he/she uses. Having to provide information to multiple organisations is discouraging and disincentivising for clients, and increases the likelihood of incorrect or inconsistent data. Warm transfers improve organisational efficiency and client experiences, but require the systematised exchange of client information. This requires:

- A shared client registration system that could be accessed by different counsellors from different organisations.
- Approval by clients to share this kind of personal information.

Challenges relating to the time and resources needed for effective partnership work

As a final challenge, we highlight the first major hurdle that GOAL programmes had to clear during the pilot. Setting up and maintaining networks requires considerable time and resources. Lack of coordination among organisations serving the target groups was a factor common to all the countries pre-GOAL and indeed provided a fundamental rationale for the pilot project. Four of the six GOAL countries experienced challenges in achieving their Wave 1 target numbers for service user recruitment. Generally, where the services took longer to launch and get up to operating speed, this was because developing the networks and partnerships to facilitate GOAL was complex and resource intensive, even where cooperative arrangements had been in place in the pre-programme

environment. This challenge exposed the **vulnerability or contingent nature of this type of guidance programme**. In particular, services that **depend on other organisations for referrals** must work hard to establish and maintain relationships with these organisations. Referral processes can be undermined where the guidance service is not recognised officially or seen as part of the official system, which is likely to be the case with pilot interventions. It takes time for programmes to be seen as an essential part of the support system for target groups. For example, in Iceland there was a need to contuinually and regularly remind partners of the GOAL service and what it was doing, in order to keep referrals coming in. The effort needed is greater, and more discouraging, where partners are passive and/or inactive (as was the experience with some partners in Lithuania and Slovenia. As the Lithuanian and Slovenian reports point out, however, cooperation requires time and energy. When no clear results and outcomes for both sides from partnership are present, often partnership becomes formal, but not motivating and not providing any good results.

6.6 Pulling it all together: contexts, resources, stepping stones and objectives

The first evaluation question considered by this study asks: To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?

Throughout this report, in addressing this evaluation question (or, to be precise, pair of questions), we draw on the Realist Evaluation approach to programme and policy analysis. In brief, the Realist Evaluation approach focuses on the interacting influences of programme contexts, resources and strategies in the production of intermediate changes (or stepping stones) that in turn lead to the achievement of programme aims or outcomes[10], whether those aims be implementation-related (such as the development of strong partnerships) or outcome-related (e.g. increased rates of client enrolment on adult education courses). A key supposition underlying Realist Evaluation approaches is as follows. To understand (and potentially increase) programme impact, particularly in complex policy areas, evaluators must take account of:

- the contexts (e.g. policy environments) in which programmes are implemented
- the resources and strategies that programme staff draw on or utilise
- the intermediate or stepping stone changes (referred to as "mechanisms" in the Realist Evaluation literature) that lead to changes in action by clients or other programme; these stepping stones are changes in reasoning or beliefs that lead to programmes' desired outcomes (e.g. an increase in client self-confidence is a stepping stone that may trigger an outcome such as enrolment on a course), and

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[10] Traditional approaches to Realist Evaluation focus only on the interplay of three factors – context, "mechanisms" and outcomes – and use specialised terminology that can be difficult for non-specialist audiences to understand. In this report, we opt for understandability over purity in our choice of terminology and categories. See Section 3.1 for more discussion of our choices and their rational this.

- the interplay and influence of these contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones on the achievement of client outcomes (e.g. enrolment on adult education courses) and/or implementation objectives (e.g. the successful development of partnerships and networks).

A more detailed discussion of the Realist Evaluation approach and our modifications of the approach for this evaluation is provided in Section 3.1.

In this section, we draw on key findings from across the six countries to provide an analysis of the combinations (also referred to as configurations) of programme contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones that appear to support or impede the achievement of the intervention objectives relating to partnerships and networks.

Partnership and network-related objectives

Across the six countries, these objectives centred on two desired outcomes:

- Strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks with other organisations that provide services to the GOAL target groups.
- Structurally embedding those partnerships and networks into the broader service landscape, so that the strength and survival of partnerships was not primarily based on informal efforts by GOAL staff.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, the consensus across the six countries was that Objective 1 was achieved, often with a high degree of success.

Objective 2 was not achieved in any of the six countries, although all countries did report some progress in establishing support for the potential achievement of this objective.

Programme contexts

Across the six countries, the key contextual characteristic supporting the strengthening and expanding of partnerships and networks was the **existence of supportive partner (or potential partner) organisations providing other services to the GOAL target groups**. In many cases, GOAL programmes were able to build on existing, informal partnerships with services serving the target group in the domains of employment, education, welfare and social inclusion.

A key contextual factor limiting GOAL programmes' ability to achieve Objective 1 was some partner (or potential partner) organisations' **initial scepticism about GOAL**. This scepticism typically took the form of suspicion that GOAL guidance services were going to overlap too much with the guidance services provided by other organisations, e.g. Labour Offices. If this proved to be the case, GOAL would not add value to the current range of guidance services already provided to the target groups. Furthermore, it would potentially put other services at risk, in the sense of potentially drawing guidance-related funding away from those services and towards GOAL, without adding sufficient value to justify that funding. As a number of partners observed, there were major questions at the start of the GOAL pilot in these regards. **A key contextual challenge for GOAL was thus to address**

these concerns. To do so, programmes had to draw on a range of resources, as discussed in the following section.

A key contextual factor limiting goal programmes' ability to achieve Objective 2 (the structural embedding of GOAL in the broader programme and policy landscape) was the **short-lived nature of GOAL as a pilot project**. Whereas partner organisations and policy makers did come to view GOAL as a highly valuable partner in providing specialised guidance services to their client groups, they felt unable to make a long-term commitment to a programme that, in the absence of continued funding, was unlikely to continue beyond the life of the pilot.

Another contextual factor militating against the achievement of Objective 2 was the **general lack of policy understanding of and support for specialised guidance services**. As detailed in the research literature (see Chapter 2), guidance services targeted at adults tend to be institution-centred, in that their focus is less on the challenges, needs and potential of the individuals they are providing guidance to, and more on the needs (e.g. targets) of the institution providing the guidance. For example, Labour Office guidance services typically focus on moving clients into employment as quickly as possible, with much less emphasis on helping clients develop the skills needed for long term, sustained employment. Across the six countries, there remains limited recognition of and support for the potential benefits (at individual and national levels) of GOAL's strategy, which involves taking a more long term, developmental approach to the guidance provided to low-educated adults.

Programme resources and strategies

The key resources drawn on to strengthen and expand partnerships and networks were **counsellor interpersonal skills, time and effort**. Across all six countries, counsellors devoted a significant proportion of their GOAL time to establishing and cultivating better partnerships with other service organisations. These efforts had positive impacts. However, as described in other chapters of this report (see e.g. Section 7.5), the time and energy required to cultivate and maintain partnerships can have negative impacts on counsellors' capacity for working directly with clients.

Stepping stones to successful partnerships and networks: becoming known and trusted by partners and potential clients

Given many service organisations' initial scepticism about GOAL's capacity to add sufficient value to the overall client service landscape, it is apparent that a key stepping stone was a **change in other organisations' understanding of and attitude towards GOAL**. GOAL staff were very successful in bringing about this change. Whereas a number of partner organisations had expressed scepticism about GOAL in Wave 1 of the evaluation, by Wave 2 partner organisations across the six countries seemed convinced that GOAL was adding significant value to the overall service landscape by providing clients with a level and form of specialised guidance and support that they could not receive from other services.

Summary: partnership-related contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones

Across the six countries, GOAL was very successful at achieving the objective of strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks with other organisations. The key contextual factor facilitating this achievement was the willingness of partner organisations to work with, learn about and learn from GOAL, despite some initial scepticism. To cultivate and capitalise on this willingness, GOAL programme staff, particularly counsellors, devoted significant resources, in the form of time and effort, to informal networking, and made excellent use of their interpersonal skills. These efforts were successful: the improvement in partners' understanding of and respect for the added value of GOAL served as a stepping stone towards increased partner willingness to commit to working more, and more closely, with GOAL.

GOAL did not achieve its objective of structurally embedding these partnerships into the broader service landscape. This is because **GOAL did not achieve a stepping stone change in policy makers' beliefs about the added value and justified cost of the programme**. Though partnerships and networks were strengthened, they remained contingent upon informal efforts by GOAL staff, and did not become systematised. However, in achieving Objective 1 (strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks), GOAL established a strong level of support amongst partner organisations for GOAL to become a structurally embedded aspect of the broader service landscape, and thus achieve Objective 2. However, the realisation of this objective remains contingent upon contextual factors, particularly policy support and funding.

6.7   Summary of Key Findings

The six GOAL teams succeeded in their objective of building partnerships and networks through which potential clients were identified and referred to counsellors. Partnership working has been multidirectional – upwards towards policymakers and the policy environment, "downwards" towards potential clients, and laterally towards other organisations serving the target groups – and has led to expanded understanding of and interest in GOAL across a range of groups and interests.

As analysed in detail in Chapter 7, countries reached their recruitment targets through referrals, in large measure due to the relationships that were forged with partner organisations who worked with the same target groups and shared similar ambitions; "reaching in" to these organisations was the key to successful outreach. To take Flanders as an example, staff members of the two organisations **invested a large amount of time and effort in developing strong collaborations** with partner organisations. These partnerships have not only been developed with educational institutions but also with local authorities, labour market actors and important social services. GOAL came to be considered a valuable player in this service landscape, a fact that was reflected in the strong rise of referrals from other organisations. The 2016 year report of de Leerwinkel shows an increase in referrals of 33% in 2016 compared to 2015.

Across countries, the key features of partnerhip success were that:

- Partnership and networks with organisations from other policy areas gave GOAL staff access to more potential clients than they would ever get from individual adult education institutions, or even the wider adult education system.
- For the most part, the partnerships and networks strengthened in the GOAL project built on existing relationships rather than starting afresh, meaning that there were established working patterns and a good degree of trust between organisations, even if these agreements were only entered into on an informal basis.
- Due to the quality of the information exchange, the promotion of the GOAL service, and the time and efforts put in by GOAL staff, "buy-in" was achieved. Although, as explained in this chapter, there had been fears that some partner organisations would view GOAL as a competition to their own work, these fears were largely unfounded and GOAL came to be viewed as both a good thing in its own right and an enhancement to the work of the partner organisations.
- The high quality of the working relationships during the project produced an ambition from multiple partners to make these partnerships extend beyond the life of the programme.

Teams faced some challenges in the day-to-day operation of the partnerships and networks:

- Partnerships and networks take time to establish and require intensive work and use of resources to maintain them.
- In some countries partnerships were characterised by an uneven balance of effort. Some networks experienced passive partners, or partners whose own bureaucratic processes impeded the network's processes. Not all partners were equal.
- Not all possible partners were willing to become involved – this was especially a problem with regard to employers. This barrier highlighted issues both about where adult education sits in priorities (especially where there is no policy focus) about separation of like organisations in different silos.

Ultimately, the countries were unsuccessful in their second objective of achieving a formal basis for the partnerships. There were a number of contributing factors to this. Limited finances were a factor, as these impede the ability of GOAL pilot projects to transition into long-term, sustainable services. Finance is in turn influenced by the general lack of policy commitment to education guidance and to adult education in most European countries. Education-focused, client-centred guidance is an under-recognised and under-supported area within a sector (adult education) that is itself under-recognised and under-supported. There are thus numerous hurdles to clear with regard to increased policy support for services such as GOAL – not least the challenge of making other policy areas aware of the potential value of adult education guidance. That being said, this evaluation finds that the GOAL pilot largely succeeded in this task, at least on an organisation by organisation level. The more challenging task is to translate that success into broader policy support and structural embedment. The need for partnerships across a broad range of organisations is vital to future GOAL-like services.

The adult educational system does not seem to be the most effective way of reaching out to the target group, as this system is not one the target group normally engages with. This highlights the importance of and need for successful collaboration with other services, enabling a cross-organisational referral system.

6.8   Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy. In terms of programme development it offers some lessons that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. The policy implications section summarises the influences of policy issues and factors on the GOAL programmes, and the messages for policy from the GOAL project's experiences.

Implications for future programme development

There are a number of implications from the GOAL pilot that should be considered by developers and staff of future programmes of this nature. Some of these implications are relevant across a range of intervention strategies. Partnerships proved to be a rich source of benefits for the GOAL programmes. These benefits included: more successful recruitment of clients than could be achieved through other routes (see Chapter 7); cross-organisational learning about tools that work well for the GOAL target groups (Chapter 9); and expanded capabilities to provide holistic, cross-organisational and cross-sectoral services for clients (Chapter 10). Successful partnership working increases the likelihood that the policy and programme environment addresses the "whole client" rather than just individual, sector-specific aspects of the client. The sharing of information and methods across partner organisations appeared to produce benefits beyond those that accrued only to the GOAL teams. Other organisations greatly valued their partnership with GOAL.

Partnerships and networks appeared to flourish best when they built on previously existing relationships across organisations. During the pilot, GOAL programme teams devoted significant time and energy to enriching those partnerships, with the positive outcome that partners developed a deeper understanding of how GOAL could complement their own work and add value to the overall policy and programme landscape, without duplicating services. This change in understanding was the product of extensive efforts by the GOAL teams, and depended largely on counsellors' interpersonal and networking skills, and their willingness to invest time and energy in the process. Future programmes should take account of the clear benefits of such partnership development, but also the costs in terms of programme resources. Programmes may wish to concentrate such efforts in the hands of specific staff who are particularly well-suited to the task. They may also wish to be clear from the start of the programme about which partners to seek to work with, and the potential barriers to doing so. In some GOAL countries, partnership development took longer than expected. With some organisations, particularly employers, partnerships never developed, despite great efforts (and resource expenditure) by GOAL staff.

Ultimately, the sustainability of partnerships is dependent on financial mechanisms being in place to support those partnerships. Future programme development will have to carefully consider how

sustainable partnerships can be developed and supported given programme and policy resources. This is particularly essential given the importance of partnerships and networks to each stage of the guidance process.

Policy implications

GOAL partnership working represented joined-up policy in action – that is, there was an explicit aim to develop, contribute to and benefit from partnerships that crossed policy boundaries and moved beyond the traditional "policy silo" approach to public services. This is a noble but extremely challenging task: observers of policy in Europe and the rest of the world will have noted the high ratio of joined-up policy *rhetoric* to actual joined-up policy *action*. Despite their best intentions, policy makers in countries around the world (and at multi-national level, e.g. the European Union) have struggled to move beyond a policy silo approach to addressing complex problems and needs. Education policy continues to address the educational aspect of an individual's life, while health policy addresses health aspects, employment policy addresses labour market aspects, and so on. The individual is divided into component parts, based on the traditional division of policy areas and government ministries. This approach, which is generally efficient and more or less successful when addressing the needs of the majority of the population, has proved resolutely unsuccessful for individuals facing multiple overlapping problems across a range of policy domains. GOAL therefore provides an important example of efforts to join up organisations and efforts in a more holistic way. As such, it has produced a number of lessons about the influence of policy on cross-organisational partnership working, and several messages for policy.

Influences of policy

Adult education guidance finds itself doubly unloved: guidance for low-educated adults is an under-recognised and under-supported area within adult education, which is itself an under-recognised and under-supported sector. The general lack of widespread policy interest for adult eduation in general and adult education guidance for low-educated adults in particular affects policy commitment and funding, which in turn effects programme resources and sustainability. In response to the question of "What is the influence of policy on adult guidance for low-educated adults?", one honest response is "Not nearly enough": there is simply not enough policy interest or support. Programmes and interventions thus exist on pilot or project bases, without sufficient and/or sufficiently long-lasting funding, and are dependent on individual efforts and goodwill for partnership development and maintenance, instead of being able to fit into a suitably structured policy landscape. If programmes such as GOAL could garner greater political and structural recognition, they would be more sustainable, and this would have positive impacts on partnership development and maintenance. In Flanders, for example, there was a belief amongst programme staff that the lack of formal recognition impeded the work of the GOAL service, making its position in partnerships and networks less secure. Lack of structural embeddedness in existing structures and the system of temporary funding by different local stakeholders leads to dependency on these stakeholders (for funding). Furthermore, it contributes to dependency on (political) policy priorities of these stakeholders (especially with regard to the funding of local governments). In Flanders and elsewhere, the lack of structural embeddedness served as a barrier to richer collaborations with other organisations,

because the GOAL service had a temporal character and was not always perceived as a sustainable partner. This produced a number of negative inefficiencies, e.g. the referral of clients was less systematic than it should have been, and was heavily dependent on individual goodwill rather than a more systemic approach.

As highlighted above, policy silos and institutional borders make joined-up partnership-based working difficult. Policy actors interviewed for this evaluation said that clients suffered because the overall adult guidance system is too fragmented, with separate parts of it falling under different governing structures. For example, adult may receive employment-focused guidance from employment offices that are under the responsibility of Ministry for Social Security and Labour, education-focused guidance from educational institutions under the responsibility of Ministry of Education and Science, and so on. Municipal welfare offices belong to municipal level and all the aforementioned institutions do not always cooperate with NGOs focused on the needs of the target groups. This means that the guidance that an individual gets is often very specific to and limited by the institutional demands or interests of the sector giving the guidance: guidance is too frequently institution-centred rather than client-centred. GOAL sought to overcome this in part through partnership working. As described in Chapters 7 and (in particular) 11, the pilot largely succeeded at providing educational guidance with a holistic perspective. In contrast, it was not able to succeed in establishing structurally sustained partnerships. This does not mean that these partnerships are not sustainable, and indeed partners have expressed an interest in continuing and extending partnerships. However, to move from *sustainable* to *sustained* they need policy commitment, support and funding.

The GOAL pilot also highlighted within-sector challenges. Adult educaton institutions often operate in isolation from one another and sometimes do not feel a need for partnerships. As such, they may be unaware of a large number of potential clients: as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, it proved easier to find GOAL clients through partnerships with organisations outside adult education than through direct outreach within the sector.

Messages for policy
The above implications lead to some key messages regarding policy commitment, funding and support. To provide better support for partnerships and networks, policy makers need to develop a clearer understanding of how educational guidance for low-educated adults fits in with existing policy objectives and commitments, e.g. reducing early school leaving or increasing participation in lifelong learning. More efforts at joined-up policy making and programme development need to be pursued, and policy makers should focus at least some of their evaluation efforts on understanding how to surmount cross-sectoral partnership barriers, and the benefits of doing so. The European Commission should in principle play a central role in these efforts through its ability to fund cross-national projects; however, it should be noted that even the Commission itself is somewhat hamstrung (when it comes to exploring and supporting cross-policy endeavours) by its traditional policy silo structure.

At the national level, cross-policy partnership working could potentially be supported by the establishment of organisations focused on adult education in its full breadth, rather than adult education *as it is relevant to a particular policy area.* As one policy maker in Lithuania observed:

> *There are good initiatives by Public Employment Services, but they are in their system, non-formal or formal adult education schools function in their system, NGOs and adult education coordinators function on their own. The system is very fragmentised. We don't know about each others' practices*.

A more systemic, partnership-oriented approach, whether led by government or a non-governmental body, could initiate and steer the process of connecting systems (e.g. healthcare system, welfare system, educational system) to facilitate joined-up working targeted at meeting the broad range of inter-related needs of low-educated adults. In this regard, the role of NGOs in delivering and championing guidance services should be explored in more detail. NGOs work with population groups at social risk, typically have a good reputation in local communities, and may be more able to work across policy silos. An independent, non-governmental adult education guidance model may be more cost-efficient than funding specialised guidance services in regular VET or adult education institutions, if the latter institutions are not able to engage in the partnership work needed to recruit and address the needs of low-educated adults, nor to maintain a level of independence that would best serve clients (see Chapter 7).

Programme funding follows from policy commitment, and funding routes can impact on the shape of the partnership. In the Netherlands the policy of decentralised funding was seen as a strength in the creation of local partnerships. In other countries, financing was more often seen as a barrier, with insufficient funding for programme sustainability and impact. Of the six GOAL countries, Flanders has taken the biggest steps towards influencing policy makers by developing a policy paper that provides a blueprint for the implementation of GOAL services. The aim is to engage as many stakeholders and political parties as possible and to generate political will to include the GOAL-style services in parties' policy platforms.

7   Outreach

This chapter evaluates the intervention strategy on outreach activities and includes analysis of both outreach-related strengths and achievements and the challenges the GOAL programmes faced. Outreach activities were undertaken in order **to recruit adults who would not normally engage with either counselling services or further education and training** to the GOAL service. For most of the GOAL countries, these activities to increase the amount of referrals focused on **employment services, welfare services and educational institutions**.

The term "outreach" refers both to strategies for *bringing the guidance programmes to the target group*, for example, by setting up drop-in services in locations that are easier for marginalised clients to access, and strategies for *bringing the target group to the guidance programmes*, such as establishing referral structures or awareness-raising measures. Outreach may thus occur through **"reaching out" to the target group** directly, but it also will occur through **"reaching in" to organisations** that serve the target group.

Five of the six countries participating in the GOAL project developed outreach intervention strategies. Because GOAL services in Lithuania were embedded in educational institutions and GOAL clients were drawn from within these institutions, outreach was not included as a specific strategy in the Lithuanian pilot, although some outreach activities did occur and are evaluated below.

This chapter provides description and analysis of the outreach strategies that were developed to bring potential clients to the GOAL service. After discussing programme context, the chapter provides an assessment of the aims (section 7.2), strategies (section 7.3), strengths and achievements (section 7.4), and challenges and barriers (section 7.5) involved in recruiting clients. Section 7.6 analyses the results of the outreach strategies using a Realist Evaluation approach which focuses on the interacting influences of programme contexts, resources and mechanisms on the achievement of programme aims or outcomes. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key findings (section 7.7), and a discussion of the implications of these findings for future programme development and for policy (section 7.8).

7.1   Context

As part of the final reporting, local evaluators were asked to describe the outreach landscape in their countries prior to the GOAL project and assign it a baseline score on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented non-existent or non-functioning preconditions and 10 a situation of excellence (see Table 7.1 below)[11].

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[11] See Section 6.1 for further discussion.

Table 7.1. *Outreach approaches by country*

Country	Baseline Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	2	The outreach approach in career guidance is uncharted territory. Lifelong learning centres are based in schools and there is good cooperation and contact with schools in the regions. Establishing cooperation with regional labour offices and NGOs was identified as crucial in terms of outreach.
FL	6	At the start of GOAL, educational guidance was already provided by existing organisations, making it easier to promote the service to partner organisations and the target group. However, outreach was primarily a matter of individual contacts between staff members from the educational service providers and staff members of partner organisations.
IS	3-4	Reaching out to the target group identified in GOAL had been very challenging: the group was not responding to outreach measures such as field visits (companies and other) and advertisements.
LT	5	GOAL sites had contacts with partner organisations that were referring clients. Some cooperation, especially with employers and the Public Employment Service, was quite intensive and regular; other partnerships (e.g. with NGOs) were fragmented and dependent on project-based funding. Outreach activities mainly focused on sharing information with partner institutions about services available.
NL	3	In the Netherlands there was a need to reach out to adults who potentially have low literacy in accessible identification sites where there was no existing service for basic skills screening: as these were new types of sites, this outreach strategy formed the core of the Dutch intervention. The four pilot organisations were organisations where people come for an entirely different (i.e. non-literacy-related) purposes.
SI	5	Prior to the GOAL project, counsellors at ISIO centres had had experience with outreach, but believed that these activities needed to be upgraded, chiefly so that they could better reach low-educated adults, particularly those in employment. Counsellors at the secondary education centres had more or less no experience with outreach.

Although the six countries had different starting points in terms of their existing outreach practices, a picture emerges of a landscape where, with the exception of the Czech Republic, outreach work was taking place between guidance and counselling services and a range of governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in education, employment and social welfare, and long-standing relationships existed between some bodies. However, for the most part these outreach relationships were characterised by the GOAL programme staff as fragmented, informal, insecurely financed and heavily reliant on the commitment of individuals to sustain them. Few structural outreach systems were in place. Moreover, existing outreach activities did not specifically serve the interests of the adults whom the GOAL project sought to reach.

7.2 Aims

Looking broadly across the six programmes, outreach activities focused on identifying and attracting to the GOAL guidance those adults who would not normally engage with either educational counselling services or further education and training.

For the most part the GOAL teams aimed to do this by **improving, strengthening and repositioning existing partnerships and services** rather than by starting new outreach networks. In **Iceland** these efforts focused on formalising cooperation across organisations, aiming at the same time to draw new sources of potential clients, in particular employers, into these outreach networks. The programme team in Flanders shared a similar aim, although the approaches of the two sites were different to make the outreach process more efficient and productive. Both organisations focused on strenghtening partnerships and increasing partner awareness on the added value of the GOAL service in order to increase referrals. In addition to this strategy, de Leerwinkel focused on **"reaching in"** to other organisations to serve the target group (integrated service) while de Stap focused more on **reaching out** directly to the target group through direct promotion and raising the target group's awareness of the counselling service and its value. In Lithuania, the aim was to position GOAL services as a **complement to employment-related guidance services**, rather than as a competitor. In the Netherlands, the GOAL objectives were to:

- **Increase the number of organisations that use the Literacy Screener** as an integrated part of their working procedures.
- **Integrate basic guidance services into the working procedures of organisations** that use the Literacy Screener.

These objectives were therefore in tune with the broader policy aim in the Netherlands of identifying more people with low literacy, so that these individuals can improve their skills if they wish. As one Dutch policy actor noted during an interview with the evaluators:

> *What is difficult is that low literate people generally do not report in with the question: "I am low literate and I would like to go to school". Quite the contrary, it concerns people who have been confronted with very negative school experiences and for whom the idea of education has a negative rather than a positive effect. This means that the most complicated task is perhaps finding people and then assisting them in a manner that is suitable for them.*

The Slovenian GOAL team had a somewhat difference aim, in that their outreach strategy focused on **introducing new approaches and examining which approaches were most effective**. As part of this process, two regional partner networks were established; these were made up of professionals from organisations which provided services to the GOAL target groups. At the two secondary education centres, the objective was to reach adults studying inside centres, while also reaching those not at the centres. At the two adult education institutions, the objective was to reach the target groups outside the organisation by means of promotional activities at public events and through cooperation with partners.

Given that the ultimate aim of the outreach strategies was to refer potential clients to the GOAL counselling service, at the project planning stage each of the six countries set a target for the number of service users their programme aimed to reach and the "type" of service user they wanted to attract (see Table 7.2. below).

Table 7.2. *GOAL target numbers and target groups by country*

Country	Target number of service users	Target group of service users
CZ	100	Adults with no or low qualifications; early school leavers; immigrants; persons with criminal record.
FL	200	Early school leavers (age 18-25); low-educated adults (without degree of higher secondary education) including immigrants/foreign language speakers.
IS	100	Immigrants; detainees; adults with low basic skills and unqualified job seekers.
LT	100	Early school leavers; low skilled/low qualified.
NL	200	Non-migrant low-educated; employed and unqualified adults.
SI	150	Immigrants; unqualified job-seekers; low-educated workers; older people 50+

7.3 Outreach strategies

The GOAL outreach plans focused on developing and using partnership and networks (see Chapter 6 for detail on this) to:

- extend knowledge about the target groups and their needs,
- disseminate information about the GOAL service,
- disseminate information about other services, and
- foster a shared understanding of the mutual benefits of the referral service to networks and to partner organisations.

Three strategies were followed in doing so: reaching in to partner organisations; using information campaigns and promotion materials; and outreach in the community.

Reaching in to partner organisations

For most teams, the greatest outreach effort was put into **reaching in to partner organisations**, as this was expected to be the means by which most client referrals could be secured. This expectation stemmed in large measure from knowledge of the target groups: disadvantaged and/or vulnerable adults are unlikely to seek out information, advice or guidance of their own accord, therefore the model traditionally used, where the client comes to the counselling service, is problematic.

In Iceland, partnerships and referral processes were developed with rehabilitation centres, social services, and unemployment services. Steering group meetings brought together stakeholders from these various institutions. The majority of service users that participated in the GOAL project in Iceland **entered GOAL via referrals by the partner organisations as these organisations were already involved in the daily lives of the potential clients**. Counsellors at the programme sites established a connection with a contact within the programme partner organisations. The contact asked the potential clients if they would like to participate, and where the answer was positive, counsellors set up an interview with the potential service user:

> *The aim was to find a way to reach out to the group of people that don't or haven't sought to further their education, and I think we are saying that this will not be accomplished unless there is interdisciplinary collaboration, between various systems and institutions. They* [the service users] *didn't seem to turn up at the programme sites because of their own initiative* (Programme Partners and Policymakers).

Use of information campaigning and promotional materials.

In Lithuania **information campaigns** were organised and publicity about the availability of the GOAL services was disseminated within partner institutions and within the educational institutions that housed GOAL. In the Czech Republic, websites were created to provide potential clients with relevant contact details and information about opening hours: in addition, 1000 leaflets were distributed in Labour Offices and through other staeholders. In Flanders regular group information sessions were provided to counsellors from partner organisations, as well as to clients of these organisations, e.g. the Social Welfare service would visit de Stap with groups of their clients to introduce them to the service. Both sites in Flanders had their own websites, leaflets, brochures, and other materials, although these methods of **directly reaching out** to clients were regarded as tools to support other outreach strategies rather than being outreach strategies in and of themselves.

Early in the project, each of the two Slovenian GOAL regions produced leaflets to promote the service: these included a description of the purpose and content of the guidance, as well as the counsellors' contact details. In one region (Savinjska-Šaleška) the local media, local radio and local television were also involved in promotion, and all four providers published information on GOAL guidance on their websites and on Facebook.

Other promotional efforts in Slovenia drew on **client success stories**. Counsellors felt that personal information on guidance options, whether provided by counsellors or partner organisations at events or through peer exchange with clients who have been involved in the guidance process, was the most effective way of encouraging people to join that process themselves. As one programme partner said:

> *Sometimes, it's not until we see someone achieving something that we say to ourselves, "Why couldn't that be me?"*

Counsellors in the Savinjska-Šaleška region encouraged one client to outline her positive experiences by writing a short personal testimony; this was published, together with her photograph, in a bulletin for adults[12]. They also recorded a short video with one client at the end of the GOAL guidance programme in which the client described how her education path had been supported by the guidance process and invited other adults to seek guidance.

Outreach in the community

Some network partners of de Leerwinkel in Flanders were able to offer a physical space for guidance sessions. At mutually agreed times, the **GOAL counsellors organised guidance sessions with their clients in these partner locations, making GOAL easily accessible for clients** at these organisations. De Stap established a front desk/information point at a new public space in Ghent which **made the service more visible** and served as a meeting point for a broad range of potential clients.

In essence, the Dutch GOAL pilot also reached into new locations to deploy the Literacy Screener: organisations people came to for other reasons and where the work activities were not primarily associated with low literacy. As one policy actor interviewed for the evaluation said:

> There are many conceivable places which we know are visited by a relatively high number of low literate people. If you can use those locations to find people, provide an 'indication' that they are low literate quickly, you can also refer them on more quickly to a low-threshold approach that fits their needs.

The Slovenian team tried three different types of outreach, working from McGivney's (2002) classification: the "satellite model", which focuses on establishment of centres for the delivery of programmes in community locations outside the main sites; the "peripatetic model", which represents work in various organisations such as community centres, hospitals, prisons etc. and the "detached model", where the main focus is on contacting people outside institutional settings, e.g. on the street[13].

7.4 Strengths and achievements

In terms of quantifying progress made on the GOAL intervention strategies across the life of the pilot, Outreach had an average distance travelled score of 1.8. It is perhaps noteworthy that Outreach started from the lowest baseline score (4.1, compared to an overall mean for the four main strategies[14] of 5.1), and finished with the lowest baseline score (6.3, compared to an overall mean of 7.3). However, there were some clear areas of success, particularly with regard to "reaching in" to

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[12] The bulletin presented information on formal and informal adult education opportunities for 2016/2017, financial incentives, guidance support, etc. (Info-ISIO 2016/2017, SIAE documentation and on the website http://arhiv.acs.si/glasila/Info-ISIO_2016-2017.pdf).

[13] A forth model, the "domiciliary model", where education/guidance staff visit people or take the service into their homes, was not tried.

[14] Partnerships and Networks, Outreach, Counsellor competences, and Guidance tools. This figure excludes Service quality, which can be seen as a more general composite score taking account of factors including the four main intervention strategies.

partner organisations as a means of recruiting clients. Table 7.3. below shows the local evaluators'
assessment of distance travelled in outreach over the life of the GOAL project:

Table 7.3. *GOAL baseline and end point evaluations of outreach by country*

Country	Baseline Score	End Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	2	6	Both centres used promotional tools. Project websites were launched together with contacts and information about working hours. 1000 leaflets were distributed and offered to Labour offices and other stakeholders, contact points etc. Regional counsellors struggled with client acquisition initially mostly because choosing suitable partners and establishing mutually beneficial cooperation took more time than expected; a second issue was that clients would not come to counsellors – they had to go to client.
FL	6	9	Both de Stap and de Leerwinkel increased their efforts to build up a strong network of partnerships, as referral by partners is the most important outreach strategy for educational guidance. There was an increase of about 30% in referrals. Additional outreach activities were developed such as regular group sessions to the target group as part of the programmes of partner organisations.
IS	3-4	5-6	Through established partnerships (which took some time), processes for referrals were developed which worked in many cases, but it needs to be noted that there were a lot of "no shows" for scheduled interviews. There is a need for refining the referral process in cooperation with specialists from other stakeholders. There is also a need to identify ways to establish partnership with employers/companies. Personal, financial and systematic barriers need to be addressed.
LT	5	6	The outreach strategy focused on "reaching in" to organisations that serve the target group instead of directly "reaching out" to the target group. Information campaigns were organised and information about the availability of GOAL services was disseminated within partner institutions leading to more referrals. A few new partnerships were established. The sites managed to recruit the planned number of service users and did not report any difficulties. However, the sustainability of partnerships depends on funding available for the provision of guidance services.
NL	3	5	An important first step in the Dutch approach to low literacy is identifying more people with low literacy. The pilot organisations have succeeded in this and their successful implementation of the Literacy Screener gives pointers on how to roll out the implementation on a larger scale in the Netherlands. The identification of those with low literacy is in itself not sufficient; we can only speak of outreach if those with low literacy are also helped in a suitable manner and are "not left to fend for themselves". In three out of the four pilot organisations, the number of identified people with low literacy who then enrol for a

Country	Baseline Score	End Score	Evaluator assessment
			language course is still (too) low. Low literate people whose mother tongue is Dutch rarely enrol in language lessons.
SI	5	6	Counsellors at both the ISIOs and secondary education centres improved outreach via the activities developed within the GOAL project, chiefly in relation to unemployed and employed low skilled adults. They were less successful with the over-50s and migrants. At the end of the project, counsellors made a number of proposals regarding what might further be done with outreach, but did not test these approaches within the GOAL project. Some of the approaches proposed were employed only once; they therefore need to be strengthened as this intervention strategy is developed in the future.

As Figure 7.1. illustrates, most countries achieved their service user recruitment targets for GOAL, with Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Flanders exceeding their original targets. Iceland fell slightly short of the target of 100 service users. Although the Netherlands did administer the Literacy Screener to 1,525 adults – well in excess of their target of 400, data collection challenges meant that only 76 of these screened individuals were included in the client data.

Figure 7.1. *Number of service users in each country (N=981)*
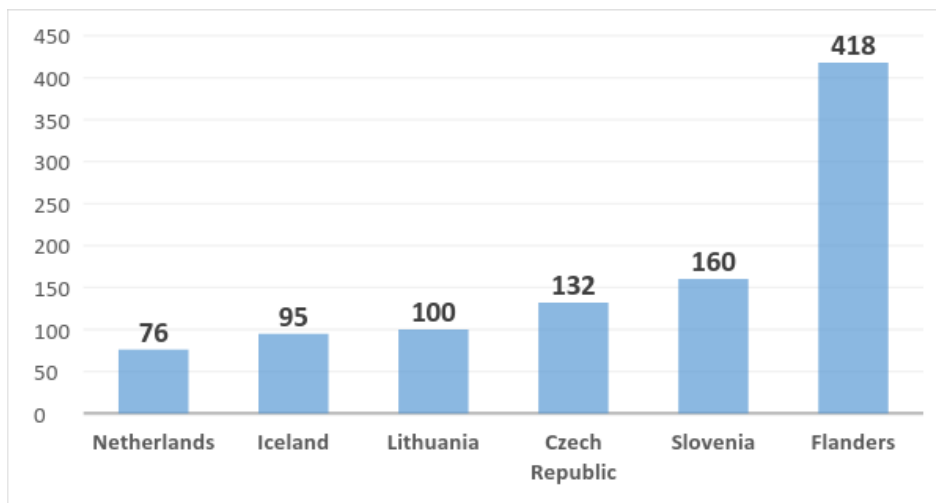
Service users had a **broad range of different routes into GOAL**, as shown in Table 7.4. The most common routes were referral from employment/unemployment services (30%), self-referral (15%) and referral from social welfare services (14%). Table 7.5. shows referral routes by country.

Table 7.4. *Type of referring organisation*

	N	%
Self-referral	149	15
(Un) employment services	293	30
Employer	44	5
Social (welfare) services	140	14
Educational institutions (e.g. schools, colleges)	52	5
Educational support services (incl., other adult education centres)	92	9
Integration/migration services	56	6
Youth services	6	1
Socio-cultural institutions	5	1
(National) prison institution	24	2
Rehabilitation institutions	33	3
Other	87	9
Total	981	100

Note: percentages do not add to 100% because of rounding

Table 7.5. Type of referring organisation by country

	CZ		FL		IS		LT		NL		SI	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-referral	17	13	40	10	4	4	26	26	-	-	62	39
(Un)employment services	107	81	109	26	23	24	31	31	-	-	23	14
Employer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44	28
Social (welfare) services	-	-	65	16	16	17	2	2	53	70	1	1
Educational institutions (e.g. schools, colleges)	-	-	25	6	3	3	16	16	-	-	8	5
Educational support services (incl., other adult education centres)	-	-	59	14	8	8	18	18	-	-	7	4
Integration/migration services	-	-	53	13	3	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Youth services	-	-	6	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Socio-cultural institutions	5	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(National) prison institution	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	23	30	-	-
Rehabilitation institutions	-	-	4	1	19	20	-	-	-	-	10	6
Other	-	-	51	12	2	2	7	7	-	-	5	3
Total	132	100	418	100	95	100	100	100	76	100	160	100

A number of themes emerge from local evaluators' reflections on their strengths and achievements in outreach. Among the strategies used to achieve programme outcomes, that of **"reaching in"** to **organisations was particularly successful**, and by this method programme staff overcame many of the hurdles posed in seeking to work with these target groups.

Partnership and network development

Most countries made great progress in strengthening their partnerships from their former ad hoc basis, but this work stopped short, generally, of moving partnerships to a formal footing (Slovenia would be an exception). No networks managed to become structurally developed, i.e. no networks became a formally systemised part of the broader service landscape. New working arrangements in Flanders were successful in showing to partner organisations that GOAL was a service of value to their clients, as evidenced in a strong rise in referrals to the GOAL counselling from these organisations. For example, social welfare services now organise information sessions for young adults to make them familiar with de Stap and what GOAL can do for them. Furthermore, the broad range of partners meant that de Stap and de Leerwinkel were able to reach a broad and differentiated range of clients within the target population. Similarly, although it took some time to achieve, the GOAL team in the Czech Republic were able to establish a **high level of cooperation with strategic partners** and by the end of the project, cooperation with the Labour Office had exceeded all expectations, in terms of referrals. There was also good cooperation and extensive contacts with schools in the Czech Republic, which allowed counsellors to provide students with relevant information and options to prevent them from dropping out before completing upper secondary education. In Slovenia, counsellors and programme partners believed that the **establishment of these new cooperative partnerships** was an important achievement. The networks helped professionals across services get to know each other and what each could offer clients, thus increasing referrals. Speaking of the **added value** brought by network cooperation, Slovenian partners said:

> I think the added value comes mainly in the dissemination of information on what can and cannot be done, what the programmes are and what the projects are. I have definitely now become better informed in the field of education.

> If you want to get to information easily and more quickly, even a whole range of information you need, it's really good if there's someone you know who you can call and ask. I see a major advantage in this. I can draw a bit of a comparison with other areas in which we work because we have a wide range of work, and it's so much easier if you know someone, so much faster and more efficient.

Reaching in

In **Iceland**, collaboration with relevant partner organisations centred on the **establishment of an informal referral system** and this proved to be the most effective way to reach the GOAL target group. In fact, all parties involved – programme staff, programme partners and policymakers – expressed their interest in extending this cooperation beyond the life of the pilot. As discussed in Chapter 6, close collaboration during the project led to more knowledge about the activities and services provided by the LLL centres among the partner organisations. The **closeness and openness of the cooperation** also had the benefit of reducing the risk of overstepping professional and organisational boundaries. Increased collaboration between relevant institutions is likely to improve overall services to the target group and promote a more holistic approach to meeting their needs.

Finally, the advice and assistance provided by the steering group was seen as highly beneficial. Outreach activities in Iceland seem to have benefitted from a more personal touch.

One of the main lessons about outreach from GOAL in Slovenia was the conclusion from counsellors that of the various promotional methods they tried the most effective were those where the **client personally learned about or received information** on guidance or educational options, either from a counsellor, a professional from a partner organisation or another adult who had been involved in a guidance process. **Personal connection with the counsellor** can be key to effective outreach. In **Flanders** it was emphasised that direct contact with the target group, for example through study orientation events and job fairs, had both brought new clients to the service and, by increasing visibility, advertised the service to potential new network partners.

Independence of the GOAL service from referring organisations

Whether outreach activities were formal or informal, a strength of the GOAL programmes was that that the counselling services themselves were **independent of the referring organisations**. Evaluators from the Czech Republic felt that their service thus side-stepped any negativity potential service-users felt towards either schools or the Labour Office, and avoided any association between attendance at the guidance session and receipt of welfare benefits. The neutrality of the GOAL service was also highly valued in Flanders, where it was lauded as a unique selling point of the programme.

In **Lithuania**, the main achievement of GOAL in terms of outreach was that it helped to **strengthen sites' partnerships with existing partners and to establish new ones**. Information about the availability of GOAL services was disseminated within partner institutions leading to more referrals. In addition, the partnership between the GOAL sites developed and, more importantly, all organisations desired more intensive cooperation in the future. The main lesson learned was that participation in GOAL showed the importance of having good and settled contacts with referring institutions in order to bring new clients, especially where the focus is mostly on low-educated or low qualified adults.

Data collection

Lastly, outreach partners in Slovenia highlighted the fact that data on GOAL clients were monitored and that results were evaluated: this appears to have underscored the validity of the project. In the **Netherlands**, participating organisations are using what they have learned from the pilot and its evaluation to think about **how they can organise the recognition and referral** (and education) of those with low literacy within their mainstream work processes, and understand its importance. The GOAL project has helped to identify what is required for proper implementation of the Literacy Screener in organisations where tackling low literacy is not the main task.

7.5   Challenges and barriers

As the Wave 1 GOAL report illustrates, by far the most significant programme challenge in the early months of the project was that which the teams experienced in getting their services up and running

and, in particular, of bringing the target group to the services. That the six countries did reach or exceed their service user targets in the second wave is evidence that outreach strategies were largely successful and suggests that ongoing outreach activities reap benefits in the longer term even where the earlier stages prove problematic. For example, counsellors in Iceland pointed out that by the mid-point of their project, outreach activities aimed at the most disadvantaged target groups had gained momentum, and their established referral connections began producing more clients than they had in Wave 1.

Challenges related to the characteristics of the target group

Individuals who are marginalised from both education and the labour market are harder to reach and harder to engage. As noted in the **Flemish** national report, the fact that so many GOAL clients come from a **multi-problem background** means that it is easy for more practical or pressing difficulties to crowd out the motivation to engage in educational or career counselling. Another aspect of the challenge is that, with a **history of educational failure**, and **low self-esteem** linked to this, low-educated adults can be highly reluctant to come to guidance services. An important subgroup will be unknown to the mediators such as welfare or employment services on which outreach strategies rely.

More than any of the other five countries, programme developers in Iceland aimed to work with **hard-to-reach groups**: adults who had not previously sought guidance on their own initiative and had not actively engaged in any programmes within other institutions. Reaching out to these adults and engaging them in the programme proved extremely challenging. Programme staff reported that those low-educated adults who are chronically inactive often have problems that need to be resolved before they can start to think about educational or career opportunities. As a result Icelandic programme staff spent a great deal of time **"chasing after" clients**. "No shows" were very common both in the first interview and subsequent interviews. Behind every client that participated in the project there were countless phone calls, e-mails and text messages. After Wave 1 Icelandic counsellors started to collect data on no-shows. According to these informally collected data, 16% of scheduled first interviews (during Wave 2 of the evaluation) resulted in no-shows, as did 39% of subsequent interviews. In most cases, counsellors attributed no-shows to difficult personal circumstances:

> *You see a person with an amazing potential but she is not ready to take the steps for some reason, a reason you are not familiar with* […] *this has been a lot of struggle, both in terms of reaching out to people and maintaining them within the project. And then when you think they are making progress they drop out for some reason, and you might never be able to reach them again* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

Attempts were also made to reach former dropout students at the LLL centres. Many of them account for the "no-shows" and "dropouts" in the GOAL project.

Similarly, evaluators from Flanders found that despite the success of collaborations with partner organisations, the **most vulnerable** adults, those who are the least connected with society, were less

likely to be reached by GOAL. For instance, early school leavers are not officially registered as jobseekers in Flanders, therefore individuals in this group are not known to the employment services and thus cannot be referred from there to GOAL.

Although the Lithuanian programme was more successful than some others in recruiting service users soon after the launch date, they likewise experienced problems in trying to reach beyond the low hanging fruit, i.e. those clients who were motivated, demonstrated initiative and showed up for the guidance session. A challenge was to attract clients whose greater level of disadvantage results in lower motivation. One site (VJLMTC) made greater efforts to recruit more highly disadvantaged clients. A very small share of clients (2%) was referred by social welfare services. This led the Lithuanian team to conclude that social welfare services provide very little guidance and counselling about possible learning and that this is an opportunity to work more synergistically with GOAL in the future. In Slovenia, partnerships were not equally effective for all selected GOAL target groups, as referrals were greater in number from partners whose activities covered unemployed persons and persons in employment than from partners whose clients were older adults and immigrants.

This notion of client readiness, and how it challenges outreach activity was also strongly felt in the Netherlands, with the result that the success of outreach was limited by the inability of organisations to convert those with possible low literacy skills into literacy learners. This is a problem for the programme, as (according to one policy actor):

> The identification of those with low literacy is in itself not sufficient, we can only speak of [successful] outreach if those with low literacy are also helped in a suitable manner and are not left to fend for themselves.

Amongst native Dutch speakers, there was a high level of resistance to enrolling on literacy courses. According to one staff member, people often invent excuses for their unsatisfactory Literacy Screener score. Frequently heard responses include, for example, "I do not have a language problem at all, it was very noisy, I was not wearing my glasses". As reports from Lithuania, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic emphasise, seeking guidance is still taboo with some client groups in some countries.

Challenges related to resources (time and money)

Resource challenges were apparent in terms of financial resources, such as investment in promotional and information materials, and staff time, where they must take their message and their service to external organisations.

As the GOAL service in the Czech Republic was starting from scratch, regional counsellors struggled with the client acquisition in the beginning, mostly due to fact that **choosing suitable partners and establishing mutually beneficial cooperation took more time** than expected.

Where capacity is limited, those who are hardest-to-reach are most likely to be excluded from outreach activities and strategies. In Flanders, it was found that distributing folders and leaflets on the streets and in public places was too time and resource intensive.

Programme staff in Iceland reflected that the service would have benefitted from having more staff working on recruiting new participants for the project, as this task turned out to be much more time consuming than was originally anticipated. This was also the case in the Czech Republic, where counsellors did not have sufficient time and financial resources to conduct outreach activities to the degree they desired, especially in rural areas. Counsellors in Slovenia felt that they **would have more outreach success if they had**: a) more allocated time for this in their work; b) more staff working on outreach; c) better training in the development and implementation of outreach activities (e.g. by becoming familiar with the needs of the target groups); and d) better conditions regarding funding, facilities for information-provision and guidance and ICT equipment. It is important to restate that the successes that the teams had in their outreach activities were **the fruits of hard labour**.

Moreover, as the GOAL project model in Iceland required participants to commit to up to ten interviews, there may have been a benefit to offering some kind of financial reward (in the form of gift certificates, for example) for participation, although this is unlikely to be a sustainable strategy.

In the case of the Netherlands, organisations need to feel the urgency and see the importance of addressing low basic skills. An important barrier is the effort and time and the accompanying lack of financial resources that are needed for any screening and follow-up process. For instance, one of the participating organisations stated that there were limited resources available for education and that they preferred people to actively register for this themselves (and thus be motivated) instead of diluting the available resources across people identified via screening. Services to support adults with low literacy in the Netherlands are heavily reliant on volunteers.

Challenges related to accessibility

Accessibility challenges were apparent where the target group were unable, because of lack of funds or lack of transport, to travel to the guidance service. This was particularly a problem in the Czech Republic, with some disadvantaged clients in rural areas lacking the means to come to counselling centres, meaning that counsellors were required to drive to clients. This was time consuming and inefficient. In Wave 1, the Slovenian national report highlighted some potential pitfalls to the "alternative location" approach. If the characteristics of the local environment differ from the environment where the service is usually based, the counsellor is less familiar with the traits of the local environment and thus the needs of adults; and not all outreach locations have suitable premises for guidance activity. Evaluators in Lithuania noted that their programme model had "low mobility" – with **counselling services housed within educational institutions they attracted those who were more motivated, at the expense of those who were less motivated but perhaps more in need**. The Icelandic national report also drew attention to the fact that transportation to and from the programme sites can be costly if clients are to come for many interviews and are in a precarious financial situation:

> *There is one client that comes to see me, he cannot afford the bus fare* […] *He walks and was soaking wet when he came, I had to put his clothes on the oven. He had promised to come and was determined to follow through* (GOAL programme staff member).

Conversely, **proximity to the service** is one way of overcoming the challenge of engaging marginalised adults to the service. And in projects working with prisoners, such as in the Netherlands, practical restrictions such as travelling time do not play a role; issues such as transfer or release for concluding the process however are unique to that situation.

In addition to these three challenges that were faced across GOAL as a whole, focusing on particular target groups created additional outreach challenges for some teams. These additional challenges for some countries were: challenges related to employers and challenges related to working in prisons.

Challenges related to reaching in to employers

Strategies aimed at engaging directly with employers did not prove successful, and in most cases represented an unrewarding investment of time and energy by programme staff. The Icelandic and Slovenian programme models included employed but low-educated adults among the groups to be targeted for the GOAL service. An initial aim in Iceland was to cooperate with companies and trade unions to deliver guidance to low-educated employees. However, despite using a number of strategies including email contact with employers, face-to-face meetings with human resource managers, and direct liaison with potential clients who had been identified through prior involvement at the programme sites, these efforts proved largely fruitless. These challenges have a number of features:

- Interest in the GOAL service was not uniform across companies and, crucially, those higher up the management scale – the decision makers – were less interested in counselling for employees than human resource departments. As a consequence, initial interest in the GOAL project's aims was not converted into action.
- Lack of interest from executives was linked by programme staff to financial imperatives: in an environment marked by cutbacks and rationalisation, funding opportunities for employees, even directly through time release, was a low priority for employers.

The Slovenian team experienced some success in reaching out to employed people: 27% of service users in Wave 1 were employed, and 31% in Wave 2, but in interview counsellors and partners expressed the opinion that closer ties needed to be established with enterprises (management and HR departments) in order to more easily reach employees with lower levels of education. Small and medium-sized enterprises require more guidance support from educational organisations. The Flemish team also noted that their experiences suggested that a specific approach would be needed to bring low-educated adults in employment to the GOAL service.

Challenges related to working in prisons

Detainees were a target group in three GOAL countries. The Icelandic Prison Service, which is responsible for all those in Icelandic prisons and halfway houses, was a new partner organisation at the programme site Mímir, with the aim of referring detainees to GOAL and linking them to education. However, only one prisoner was referred to GOAL in Iceland. In the Czech Republic,

attempts were made in Wave 1 to establish partnerships with prisons but the GOAL service was perceived to be in conflict with educational programmes run in-house.

Two of the GOAL sites in the Netherlands were prisons, and 20 service users in the Netherlands' sample were detainees. However, in terms of outreach activities, working with penal institutions brought particular challenges: although prisons are involved with each other, their closed nature and the involuntary context in which they work means that they are not part of local or wider networks aimed at reducing low literacy. All referrals to literacy courses happen internally, but courses within the prison are oversubscribed and are not always scheduled in line with the prisoner's daily programme: moreover, **clients do not always opt for language course because they would rather spend their time working and thus earn a little money** within the PI. The interviewed policy maker provides the following example of the unfair competition between language courses and work:

> *Will I have an additional telephone card later so that I can call my children or shall I combat illiteracy with a course?*

7.6 Pulling it all together: contexts, resources, stepping stones and objectives

The aim of the analysis in this section is to highlight the primary objectives of the GOAL programmes' focus on outreach activities, and the key configurations of programme contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones that appear to support or impede the achievement of those objectives. Sections 3.1 and 6.6 present more in-depth information on the Realist Evaluation-influenced approach taken in this report to analysing Evaluation Question 1: To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of those aims?

Outreach-related objectives

Across the six countries, the overall outreach strategy objective for the GOAL programme teams was to bring potential service users to the GOAL service. As **five of the six countries reached or came very close to reaching their recruitment targets**, we can conclude that the project teams were generally successful in achieving this objective.

Moreover, there are clear indications in a number of national reports that the outreach networks and partnerships established during the GOAL pilot will continue beyond the life of the project. In such cases this strongly suggests that, as a result of GOAL, there may have been a **step change in the way that partner organisations think about educational guidance, what it can offer their clients and how it adds value to their own work**. The importance of this achievement should not be underrated.

However, looking more closely at the challenges faced by various teams also suggests that this overarching analysis should be qualified.

- In four of the six countries there were **initial problems in recruiting clients**, meaning that it was **necessary to revise or intensify some outreach strategies mid-project** in order that the service user targets were met.
- Within countries, some target groups were harder to reach than others, and **overall success in achieving service user numbers does not mean that all target groups were equally well served by the outreach activities**.
- **Some referral routes worked better than others**; outreach relationships with employers/companies and with penal institutions proved particularly unproductive.

Programme contexts

There are two programme contexts that are relevant to the achievement of the programme aims:

1. the buy-in of the partner organisations – this issue has been discussed in detail in Chapter 6
2. the characteristics of the target group.

In their outreach activities, most countries were able to **build on existing partnership and network arrangements**. As we argue in Chapter 6, a key challenge in partner relations is securing the buy-in of these other organisations to the aims and objectives of the counselling service. The main means of doing so is the exchange of information, knowledge and understanding; in this process, programme staff play a vital role. For outreach partnerships and networks to work well there has to be **agreement on purpose**. For example, recruitment was delayed in Iceland due to lack of a shared understanding on eligibility for the programme. The programme partners were asked to refer clients, but since the target group definition was unclear they experienced difficulties knowing who to refer.

It emerges strongly from the national reports that **the characteristics of the target group are the most important programme context**, as these characteristics determine both the outreach strategies to be used and the amount of resource needed to put these strategies into action. Considerable emphasis in the Icelandic project plan was placed on delivering services to a group of people that has to date been inactive and extremely difficult to reach. Achieving this proved to be more difficult than anticipated; not only was it hard to get clients to participate in the project in the first place, but keeping them in the project after they had agreed to take part and show up for the initial interview was also difficult.

Some countries experienced problems in recruiting some target sub-groups to the study. In the Czech Republic, for example, attempts were made to include prisoners in the project, but cooperation was not possible as guidance and educational opportunities are already offered to prisoners "in-house". Where some programmes (Lithuania, for example) faced fewer challenges in reaching potential service-users than others (such as Iceland) this may point to **important distinctions between the characteristics of the national samples** (e.g. more motivated clients in Lithuania and less motivated clients in Iceland), and the corollary need for different levels of programme resources: to some degree Lithuanian counsellors picked "lower-hanging fruit", whereas counsellors in Iceland were regularly "chasing" clients, e.g. no-shows.

Programme resources and strategies

Among the strategies used to achieve programme outcomes, "reaching in" to organisations was particularly successful. Via this method, programme staff overcame many of the hurdles they encountered when reaching out to the target groups.

As in the programme strategies to develop partnerships and networks, the **key resources drawn on in outreach strategies were counsellor time and effort**. One observation from a number of countries about the pre-GOAL environment was that existing outreach arrangements were heavily reliant on the work of individuals. Although the aim in a number of countries was to put previously informal outreach arrangements on a more formal basis, the personal attributes and skills of programme staff, as well as their hard work, remained key to programme success. This is especially clear from analysis in the national reports of the resources programmes devoted to the hardest-to-reach clients: **"self-referral" and "drop-in" were not significant referral pathways in the six GOAL pilots**. **Potential clients needed to be persuaded** by counsellors and the outreach organisations they worked with to use the service.

Given the importance of the counsellors to achieving success in this intervention strategy the Slovenian national report raised the **absence of resources for training staff in outreach work**, and the **lack of time for outreach work**. From the perspective of the Slovenian team, counsellors were able to develop and carry out outreach activities more easily if:

- the activities were planned in advance and included in the annual work plans;
- they were supported with an adequate number of staff providing guidance within the organisation and their working hours are planned in advance;
- funds were provided to secure the conditions for the performance of these activities, such as the preparation and printing of promotional materials, adequate equipment, ICT support, tools and aids, etc.;
- they were trained to carry out these activities;
- they had support within the partner network.

The Slovenian report also recommends that short professional guidelines on how to plan and carry out outreach activities for vulnerable target groups more effectively are introduced to support new initiatives in outreach.

As outlined above, in some countries a strength of outreach activities was that these activities were monitored through the evaluation methodology. With this in mind, strategies for supporting outreach through data collection may be instrumental in supporting ongoing outreach activity and ongoing partnerships. That several of the countries adjusted their referral strategies after analysis of their Wave 1 data exposed shortfalls in client diversity is evidence of the impact the data collection mechanism can have on programme outcomes.

Programmes also drew on a range of promotional tools to support their work.

Stepping stones to successful outreach: convincing partners to make referrals

Section 6.6. highlighted GOAL programmes' success in becoming known and trusted by partner organisations. A key stepping stone to successful partnership working was a **change in other organisations' understanding of and attitude towards GOAL**. This change in partners' understanding of GOAL and its value fed directly into GOAL's outreach efforts. Partners became more convinced that GOAL was providing clients with a level and form of specialised guidance and support that they would not otherwise receive, so partners were (in most cases) happy to refer clients to GOAL. This change of heart took some time. For example, counsellors in Flanders reported that it takes time to become known by "the right people" at key organisations, and it can remain difficult to be known at all levels within the partner organisations. When organisations were less than familiar with the GOAL service they did not instinctively or automatically refer adults with questions on the topic of training and education. Over time, however, organisations became more familiar with and confident in GOAL, so referrals increased. This was true in other countries as well.

The project team in the Netherlands experienced particular problems in convincing organisations (from which clients would be drawn) of GOAL's value. The major stumbling block was in persuading organisations that there is a direct benefit to them of using the basic skills quick scan with their clients and evaluating its use. For many of the organisations that were approached by Stichting Lezen en Schrijven (the Reading and Writing Foundation), the GOAL requirements represented an administrative burden they were unwilling to take on for the perceived benefits it would bring them, thus outreach was hampered.

In essence, these challenges expose a vulnerability or contingent nature of this type of guidance programme. **Services that depend on other organisations for referrals must work hard to establish and maintain relationships with these organisations**. In order to bring potential referring organisations on board, either the **direct benefits** to that organisation, where these exist, or the **indirect benefits in terms of achieving a shared common goal** (for example, moving people from unemployment to employment) must be clear – and, from the partners' perspective, these benefits must outweigh the drawbacks of partnership, e.g. the administrative burden. (See Chapter 6 for more on this.) Guidance service providers must also take steps to ensure that the information provided about the service by these organisations is clear, up-to-date, and appropriate for the target group.

Summary: outreach-related contexts, resources, mechanisms and outcomes

Across the six countries, there was **general success in using outreach activities to recruit clients to the GOAL services**. Among the strategies used to achieve programme outcomes, that of "reaching in" to organisations was particularly successful. In achieving the objective of bringing adults who would not normally engage with either counselling services or further education and training to the programme, the **key contextual factor** was that there was, as we have seen in Chapter 6, **willingness of partner organisations to work with, learn about and learn from GOAL**. Programme staff worked hard to develop and maintain relationships with the organisations that would be instrumental to referral pathways: success can be seen not only in numbers of service users reached by GOAL, but

also in the recognition by partner organisations that the GOAL counselling service added value to their own work with marginalised and hard-to-reach adults.

However, as the Flemish national report reminds us, **success in outreach can be a double-edged sword**, where services have insufficient resources to meet the needs of all those referred to, or coming voluntarily to, the service. Where promotion of the service is extensive, especially if it is a free service for users, there is a danger that demand may outstrip supply. Moreover, too much success in outreach can heavily impact on counsellor caseloads and thus on the extent and quality of the guidance on offer, as well as leading to a potential drop in counsellor job satisfaction and rise in stress. The national evaluators in Flanders were the only team explicitly to raise the subject of too much outreach success; however, both the Lithuanian and Slovenian national reports raise a related issue. Where there are finite resources for outreach, those who are easiest to reach may be disproportionately represented.

Where outreach was less successful, the key contextual factor was the characteristics of the target group. **Programmes lacked sufficient resources, both financial and in staff capacity, to maintain the levels of involvement necessary to reach out successfully to the most vulnerable**. Service users from the most vulnerable GOAL target groups typically lacked "readiness" and perseverance. What the GOAL project in Iceland has shown is that the most vulnerable groups, e.g. those with substance abuse problems, are less likely to come to sessions or benefit from the programme, no matter how many phone calls or text messages they receive.

Effective outreach strategies are heavily dependent on ensuring that referral partners are familiar with the GOAL service and with what it can deliver for their service users. However, **getting to the stage where partner organisations automatically refer clients to GOAL requires a very significant investment of time and energy**. In this context it seems important that the GOAL programme has some level of **official or structural recognition** in the local policy and programme landscape.

7.7   Summary of key findings

Challenges

There were **three outreach challenges** which were relevant across the six GOAL programmes:

- Challenges related to the characteristics of the target group
- Challenges related to resources (time and money)
- Challenges related to accessibility.

In addition to these challenges that were faced across GOAL as a whole, focusing on particular target groups created additional outreach challenges for some teams. These additional challenges for some countries were: challenges related to employers and challenges related to working in prisons.

Achievements and lessons learned

Most countries **achieved their service user recruitment targets** for GOAL, with Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Flanders exceeding their original targets. Iceland fell slightly short of the target of 100 service users. In the Netherlands, target numbers for screening adults with potential low literacy were exceeded, but monitoring data were only collected on a small proportion of screened clients.

Service users had a **broad range of different routes into GOAL**. As shown in Table 7.4. the most common routes were referral from employment/unemployment services (30%), self-referral (15%), and referral from social welfare services (14%).

Among the strategies used to achieve programme outcomes, **"reaching in" to organisations was particularly successful**. Through this approach, programme staff overcame many outreach hurdles.

Most countries made great strides in developing and strengthening partnerships. Extensive GOAL efforts to cultivate partner relationships and networks, coupled with partners' eventual willingness to work with GOAL teams, led to a step change in partners' understanding of and attitudes towards GOAL. This, in turn, led to greater referrals from organisations that GOAL was "reaching in" to.

In some countries, particularly Slovenia, more direct outreach efforts were effective in increasing the profile of guidance in the local environment. These efforts included information booths at employment services, social services centres, in the local community, in libraries and at local events.

7.8   Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy from the evaluation findings presented above. In terms of programme development it offers some **lessons** that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. The policy implications section summarises the **influences of policy** issues and factors on the GOAL programmes, and the **messages for policy** from the GOAL project's experiences.

Implications for future programme development

As the evaluation findings in this chapter make clear, the most effective strategy the six guidance services used in recruiting low-educated adults was the strategy of "**reaching in" to other organisations serving the GOAL target groups**.

When considering this strategy for future programmes, developers should bear in mind that the costs of this type of outreach activity – both financially and in terms of staff resources – can be high. Successful outreach to generate referrals involves the investment of considerable staff time to build relationships of trust between organisations and between the guidance service and potential clients. What the GOAL experience suggests is **the efforts and costs associated with outreach are likely to be higher the more vulnerable or hard-to-reach the potential client is**.

One consequence for future programmes is that in being realistic about the resources that are available for this type of activity, developers may need to focus on target groups which are

characterised by more active demand for the service or which present fewer outreach challenges (for instance by being in geographic proximity to the service, thus reducing travel costs). In other words, it may be more financially viable and more sensible for educational counselling programmes to target "low hanging fruit" than to use their finite resources to target marginalised people, although these people may be the most in need. Where the decision is made to allocate valuable programme resources to attracting those who are hardest to reach, the quality of the guidance on offer could be negatively affected for some or all clients. **Targeting services to less hard-to-reach adults may be a better compromise given the nascent state of educational guidance for low-educated adults and the possible need for pilot programmes to justify their costs to funders and policy makers.** Programmes need to have a clear understanding of the trade-offs inherent in this type of outreach work.

As experiences on project GOAL demonstrate, in developing guidance services for low-educated adults, reaching in to other organisations is likely to involve identifying and working with new types of partners, such as NGOs and municipal welfare services, outside the spheres of education and employment from which clients are traditionally drawn. The Lithuanian report argues that **a comprehensive national level analysis of the institutional networks dealing with low-motivated disadvantaged clients should be performed** at the pre-programme stage, identifying the barriers that clients face in reaching services and duplications and the gaps in institutional frameworks.

The barriers that teams faced in getting client referrals from employers suggest that national and/or local analyses should include **a survey of existing workplace learning initiatives**. Future needs analysis activity should include a focus on the workplace learning policy environment, as this could give valuable clues as to the potential inability of employers to engage with programmes. Future programmes would want to fit into workplace learning policies in a complementary way, if such policies even exist. Programme developers might also consider talking to employers as an initial step, before including employees as a target group. When doing so, it would be useful to get insights from senior managers. As shown in the GOAL pilot, these staff members are likely to be less open to involvement in projects such as GOAL than, for example, HR managers. Getting the approval only of the former may lead to disappointment – and wasted resources – further down the line.

Direct outreach to potential clients may also be beneficial. In Slovenia, where there was a relatively high level of direct outreach, key recommendations in this regard were:

- the preparation of short professional guidelines on how to plan and carry out outreach activities for vulnerable target groups more effectively
- training for counsellors on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences for the planning and implementation of more effective outreach activities for vulnerable target groups.

Policy implications

Influences of policy

A number of the GOAL programmes experienced challenges in bringing low-educated adults in employment to the service, in large measure because employers and company directors – the decision-makers – were not interested in the initiative (although human resource departments were). Most countries have policy targets for participation in adult learning in line with the European Commission's European Agenda for Adult Learning, which also identifies low-skilled adults as particularly unlikely to be engaged in learning, but this is not always accompanied by support (including financial incentives) for workplace learning. Without this backing employers are less likely to support the education and training needs of their employees; thus without incentives for employers, outreach activities with employers are likely to prove fruitless and thus a waste of resources.

Employers have justifiable concerns about upskilling their workforce; not only is there a risk that employees will change jobs, there are practical concerns about time release for counselling and training. Findings from GOAL suggest that with policy support there would have been more of a case to be made for guidance services to operate with flexible opening hours, for example, so that they were more easily accessible to people in employment and more acceptable to employers.

Messages for policy

The benefits of participation and collaboration can be very vague when it comes to company managers and their staff members, but according to programme staff the benefits of participation for the management need to be very clear. The implications of the employer challenge seem to be **that interesting companies and managers is sometimes too much of a challenge** for the counsellor and extra effort is needed from higher levels, including the policy level.

The policy environment should be one that creates a climate where **guidance and orientation is normalised and supported**. In the Czech Republic, programme staff felt that if the national government was to introduce career guidance as a regular service provided to students and pupils within initial education (for the purposes of dropout prevention, change of programme, choice of suitable career patch), people would become more familiar with the possibiilites and advantages of career guidance. In other words, there should be, at the policy level, **a drive to raise awareness of the benefits of career counselling, thus reducing the need for individual programmes, and outreach networks, to devote substantial resource to this**. Moreover, this awareness raising should be multidirectional: upwards towards policymakers and the policy environment, downwards towards individuals, and laterally towards other organisations serving the target groups.

8 Counsellor competences

This intervention strand of the GOAL project focused on **defining** the competences which eduational guidance professionals need to work effectively with low-educated adults and **improving** the competences of the counsellors working on the pilot programmes. To define competences the national teams did not start from a blank slate but either worked from their own experiences or from existing competence profiles and role descriptions from related fields, some of which were formally or structurally recognised. The various experiences of working with the target groups, in counselling and in other domains, and on the GOAL project itself, provided evidence with which to refine competence profiles and identify areas for improvement.

Two of the partner countries, Lithuania and the Netherlands, did not specifically pilot interventions on counsellor competences. As a consequence, in Lithuania no GOAL-specific training was provided for counsellors working on the project. In the Netherlands, the Literacy Screener was not administered only by counsellors but also by a range of staff including volunteers and interns. All those working with the Literacy Screener attended two workshops which provided information on low literacy and covered the technical aspects of using the instrument. Nevertheless some evidence from Lithuania and the Netherlands is included here as it provides relevant insights.

This chapter provides description and analysis of the strategies that were use to define and improve counsellor competences. After discussing programme context, the chapter provides an assessment of the aims (section 8.2), a description of the counsellor's role (section 8.3), definitions of counsellor competences (section 8.4), strengths and achievements (section 8.5) in improving counsellor competences, and the challenges and barriers (section 8.6) teams faced. Section 8.7 analyses the strategies for identifying and improving guidance tools using a Realist Evaluation approach which focuses on the interacting influences of programme contexts, resources and mechanisms on the achievement of programme aims or outcomes. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key findings (section 8.8), and a discussion of the implications of these findings for future programme development and for policy (section 8.9).

8.1 Context

A 2008 report on Adult Learning Professions in Europe (Research voor Beleid, 2008) observed that staff working in counselling and guidance services in adult learning may focus on:

- **career guidance** (in relation to finding a job)
- **study counselling** (in relation to study choice and planning and coaching of the study process), and/or
- more **personal guidance** (in relation to people's personal problems and questions).

GOAL counsellors focused on study counselling and, to a lesser extent, career guidance. Programmes did not, as a primary objective, seek to address service users' personal guidance needs. However, as clients often came from multi-problem backgrounds and often faced a range of personal challenges, it is sometimes impossible for progress in either education or careers to take place before these

problems are addressed. As such, **GOAL guidance programmes sometimes included all three types of counselling**, though counsellors took pains not to stray too far beyond their own areas of professional expertise. As discussed in other chapters in this report, counsellors instead helped clients find and access other sources of support for addressing significant personal problems (e.g. mental health issues), drawing on the partnerships and networks that were at the heart of GOAL. Despite counsellors' efforts to maintain professional boundaries and to avoid overstepping their own areas of expertise, however, **the characteristics of the target group often mean that counsellors provided somewhat more personal counselling** than is typically required in educational and vocational guidance targeted at more advantaged client groups.

As part of the final reporting, local evaluators were asked to describe the counsellor competence landscape in their countries prior to the GOAL project and assign a baseline score on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented non-existent or non-functioning preconditions and 10 a situation of excellence (see Table 8.1.)[15].

There are two points to note about the **pre-programme enviroments** which are relevant to the findings presented in this chapter. Firstly, **with the exception of Iceland, no GOAL country had formal national competence standards for counsellors working in adult education**, even where there were standards in place for career counsellors and guidance professionals working within the employment sector. Secondly, this lack of, and identified need for, formal standards, does not mean that the national teams rated the preconditions at a low point on the baseline level score measure. In fact the reverse was true, and counsellor competences had the highest starting point score of all the GOAL interventions (see section 8.5 for more on this). This suggests that although the national situation was less than ideal in terms of profesionalisation of the sector, there was strong confidence in the professional competences of the GOAL programme staff and in their abilities and attributes for working effectively with the target groups.

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[15] See Section 6.1 for further discussion.

Table 8.1. *Baseline evaluation of GOAL counsellors' competences by country*

Country	Baseline Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	4	In the Czech Republic there are approved professional qualification standards for career guidance within the National Register of Qualifications. All GOAL counsellors had pedagogical experience (teaching, research and educational projects, etc.) and were very familiar with the national educational system. They were also experienced at working with the target group (social work), they knew the terrain, had contacts at the Labour Office and cooperated with local NGOs.
FL	5	There was not really a clear view of necessary competences. Counsellors mostly have/had a social background. In Flanders there are no diplomas or study programmes that directly relate to educational or career guidance.
IS	8	Quality standards exist and training and networking is in place as well as opportunities for lifelong learning, but there was a need for an introduction to methods and tools especially useful for the target group of the project as well as expanded networking with other specialists. The counsellors in the GOAL project all have a university degree in the subject.
LT	8	There is no national competence standard for adult guidance counsellors in Lithuania. The Lithuanian Labour Exchange has adopted a competence profile for counsellors, but this applies only to the network of local employment offices. In the absence of a national level document, counsellors' competences and guidance quality differs from site to site and depends on the attitude of the institution.
NL	4	Nearly all adult guidance practitioners in the Netherlands have experience in education and/or reintegration practices. However, there are no formal criteria for guidance practitioners and thus a great divergence in quality between various service points. No research is available from the Netherlands on the effectiveness of guidance practitioners. One reason for this is that effectiveness is strongly dependent on the quality of the individual practitioner, but there is currently no policy focus on the quality of the practitioners.
SI	8	In Slovenia a counsellor competence profile is not defined in adult education, though individual profiles are defined or rather, in the "leader/organiser in adult education" profile, the competences for counselling work are defined as one set of tasks. There are no formal programmes in Slovenia intended for adult education or career counsellors. Some study programmes include elements that provide individual competences, but do not provide a comprehensive range of skills. Counsellors from the four participating organisations had developed adult education guidance competences before the start of the GOAL project (counsellors at ISIO centres slightly more than counsellors at secondary education centres). All counsellors were of the opinion that they required additional knowledge for guidance of low-educated adults.

Counsellor professionalisation

There was **no standard approach across the GOAL countries to the professionalisation** of those working in adult guidance and counselling services. To some extent, lack of professionalisation can be a reflection of the attitudes of policymakers to adult education in general: **where adult education is a marginalised and/or underfunded field, there is little impetus to develop professional standards** for staff. Moreover, where (as in Lithuania) the adult education sector is fragmented, there is no clear agreement on where responsibility for developing professional standards lies.

Counsellor professionalisation is most developed in Iceland, where career counsellors are particularly **well supported** in terms of professionalisation of the role. Iceland is the only GOAL country in which counsellors require a **licence to practise**. Counsellors are required to have an advanced degree (Diploma or Masters) to qualify for that licence, which is then valid throughout their career. A job description and ethical guidelines, developed by the Association of Career Counsellors, are in place at the national level. A Masters-level programme for career counsellors has also developed competence standards, which are in line with European and American documentation. The Education and Training Services Centre in Iceland holds biannual national meetings to improve and develop new ways to reach and counsel low-educated adults, where counsellors can gain insights into new methods and tools and exchange good practice. Short courses are also available and managers are reported to support staff in taking up these and other professionalisation opportunities.

In the Netherlands there are no formal criteria for guidance practitioners and thus a great divergence in quality between various service points. Effectiveness is strongly dependent on the quality of the individual practitioner, but there is currently no policy focus on the overall quality of these practitioners, or minimum quality standards.

In Lithuania there are **no national standards or competence profiles** for adult education counsellors. These do exist for counsellors working in employment offices, however. The same situation pertains in Flanders, where a formal competence profile for career counsellors has been developed (although not yet validated) with no equivalent measures taken for educational counselling, and in the Czech Republic, where there are nationally recognised professional qualification standards for career guidance. GOAL programme staff in Lithuania emphasised that their professional development is very much dependent on their personal initiative: there is **no systematic training** for adult guidance professionals, nor are there country-wide support measures. Previous initiatives to develop training have been linked to projects funding guidance services; these efforts have not been sustained after the funding has ended.

In Slovenia there is **no official competence profile** for counsellors in adult education and **no formal, comprehensive study programmes from higher education institutions**, although there are modules on counselling offered as part of education programmes such as study courses on Adult Education and Career Development. This said, the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education has developed **initial training for counsellors working in adult education guidance centres**, and a training programme has been offered by the National Employment Office. More formal structures are in place in the school centres, as guidance counsellors working in schools are required to have a degree in a relevant

subject. Guidelines for school guidance services specify that counsellors spend 65-85% of their time on guidance work and list the tasks in which they should be competent, although do not define the actual competencies.

Programme staff experience and training

At roughly the midpoint of the GOAL project (Spring 2016), data were collected from counselling staff about their background, experience, and other relevant issues. As shown in Table 8.2., counselling staff's **average years of experience in adult counselling ranged from two years in Flanders to 12 years in Slovenia**. Aggregating all GOAL countries (with the exception of the Netherlands, due to the unique nature of the intervention in that country), the average years of experience in adult counselling was seven years.

Table 8.2. *Programme staff: years of experience in adult counselling*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
CZ	4	4.5	3.7	0	8
FL	7	2.0	1.9	0	5
IS	4	4.8	5.6	1	13
LT	4	9.5	7.1	5	20
SI	10	12.0	5.6	0	18
Total	**29**	**7.2**	**6.2**	**0**	**20**

Ongoing training in the form of **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)** is an essential part of ensuring and further developing counselling competences. Across the five countries (that is, all GOAL countries except the Netherlands), 79% of staff had engaged in CPD in the past two years (Table 8.3. and Table 8.4.), with the number of days of CPD over that period ranging from zero for 21% of counsellors to a high of 60 days for one counsellor in Flanders. (In this case, the counsellor was taking a course in French to increase his competences for a "Recognition of foreign diplomas" project.)

Table 8.3. Programme staff: participation in Continuing Professional Development relevant to their guidance and/or counselling role by country in the past two years

		No		Yes	
		N	%	N	%
Country	**CZ**	-	-	4	100
	FL	1	14	6	86
	IS	-	-	4	100
	LT	1	25	3	75
	SI	4	40	6	60
	Total	**6**	**21**	**23**	**79**

Note: In Slovenia only seven of the 10 staff members are counsellors; the other three are staff managers. Of the counsellors, only one did not engage in CPD.

Table 8.4. *Programme staff: Continuing Professional Development in the past two years, number of days by country*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
CZ	4	5.5	1.7	4	7
FL	6	18.0	22.3	2	60
IS	4	12.8	15.2	2	35
LT	3	10.3	4.5	6	15
SI	6	14.3	11.7	2	28
Total	**23**	**13.0**	**14.0**	**2**	**60**

8.2 Aims

The intervention strategy for counsellor competences had two aims:

1. Defining the competences that counsellors need to work with the GOAL target group.
2. Improving the competences of those working with the GOAL target group.

The steps taken to achieve these aims are discussed in Sections 8.4-8.6.

8.3 The role of the counsellor

This section adds to the description of counselling activities in Chapter 5 by providing brief vignettes illustrating typical GOAL counselling responsibilities and activities. The first vignette outlines a typical week for a counsellor in Lithuania; the second a typical counselling day in Flanders. These two countries were chosen because of the markedly different GOAL workload in each country. Whereas counsellors in Flanders devoted roughly half their working time to GOAL activities (including but not limited to counselling) as counselling is the individual's primary work role, counsellors in Lithuania only spent 13% of their time on GOAL, as counselling is a "bolt on" activity to their primary professional responsibility (teaching for example). As discussed in Section 8.6, these widely differing workloads have implications both for counsellors' competence development and for overall counselling quality.

Lithuania: fitting counselling in around other responsibilities

Counsellors plan their week so that counselling can be done across three days, leaving Monday and Friday free for administrative tasks, planning, and dealing with requests from the Labour Office, the programme's main partner in Lithuania. In both Lithuanian GOAL sites, counselling activities included one-to-one counselling, but in one site (VJLMTC) counsellors also took clients to vocational workshops. At these workshops, clients could have "taster sessions" focused on different professions, e.g. bricklaying, decorating, welding, or even working with crane simulators. This was possible because the GOAL service was based in a vocational training institution, thus providing access to a range of vocational teachers and the college facilities.

With the exception of these site visits at VJLMTC, counsellors' weeks at the two sites were organised in a similar fashion. At both sites, counsellors worked primarily as teachers and/or managers. They typically taught lessons throughout the day, so meetings with GOAL clients were usually scheduled for lunchtime or whenever the counsellor and client both had an available time slot. One of the counsellors (at VAEC) was working as a part-time psychologist.

Flanders: A day in the life of a busy counsellor at de Stap

This counsellor starts her day with a cup of coffee while reading through emails. Relevant emails can roughly be classified into:
- General information from outside GOAL, e.g. updates from network partners about their activities, information about forthcoming seminars, et cetera.
- Specific information from outside GOAL, e.g. answers from network partners on questions related to clients' cases.
- Internal emails, e.g. regarding new client appointments.
- Emails from clients.

The counsellor's inbox remains open throughout the day so that incoming messages can be followed up on.

The counsellor checks her agenda for the day and sends brief text messages to clients who are visiting later that day, to remind them of the appointment. Text messages seem to reduce the rate of no-shows, a problem which is common to the target group. The counsellor quickly checks any status updates her clients have made on Facebook to see if there is any information that could be useful during the sessions or for follow-up. She opens Messenger to see if there are any messages from clients. On an average day about eight client-counsellor chat sessions are active.

The counsellor then starts preparing her sessions for that day: checking the client's background, previous steps taken, issues discussed in earlier sessions, and so forth. On average she sees three clients each day.

If she has time before the first client arrives, the counsellor opens her follow-up document in which she has a to-do list of information she has to look up for clients, and professionals she has to call to give feedback on sessions or to ask for information. She works through this document until her first client arrives.

Counselling sessions typically take about 1-1.5 hours. In between sessions, the counsellor registers information about the client in the data monitoring system (based on the notes taken during the session). She tries to record this information as soon as possible after the session, when everything is still fresh in her mind. All collected information, agreements made and steps taken during the session are recorded. If the client mentions specific names of individuals he or she has come in contact with at other service organisations, the counsellor notes these down, in order to facilitate cross-organisational working. The counsellor also notes mentions of any important people in the client's personal network. A key objective of these notes is to improve communication with the client, and to facilitate efficient client communication with other service organisations (e.g. some months later the client may have forgotten the name of his former case worker at an employment office, but the counsellor will be able to provide the name). Messages from WhatsApp, SMS or Facebook Messenger and emails are also copied into the data system. Counsellors in Flanders believe this attention to detail helps to create a relationship of trust with the client.

The approach described above was typical across each of the 30-40 GOAL clients each Flemish counsellor was responsible for. In more complex client cases, informal consultation takes place between the counsellors in order to exchange ideas and expertise.

In addition, counsellors regularly provide information sessions, be it about the GOAL service or the educational system. These information sessions were provided both to professionals from other organisations and directly to the target group. Providing the sessions is a time-consuming activity, but counsellors feel they are important for building and strengthening their networks ("reaching in" to other organisations) and for reaching out to the target group.

From the counsellors' perspective, one of the key challenges of GOAL was the need to engage in a very high level of multi-tasking – e.g. combining counselling, partnership work, outreach and administrative duties all in one afternoon. Counsellors felt that competing demands on their time sometimes made it difficult to focus on clients and their needs.

8.4   Definitions of counsellor competences

The GOAL teams first aimed to identify the competences that counsellors need to work with low-educated adults. Within the project it was agreed that countries would not be a required to agree on a standardised list of competences. Rather, it was felt that each country's counsellors, working with other project staff, should develop their own competence criteria, taking account of local context and needs. One potential benefit of this approach is that it presents future programme developers, researchers and policymakers with a broader range of competences to consider when developing their own definitions and criteria.

The process of defining competences

In most countries, the process of competence definition was bottom-up or inductive: based on their experiences working with GOAL clients, counselling staff and other key programme stakeholders listed the key competences they felt were required to serve these clients. Generally speaking, programme staff were able to draw on their previous knowledge and experience of providing counselling to less disadvantaged groups, and to identify and then further develop the competences required for GOAL clients. In Slovenia, counsellors could do this somewhat more formally that in the other countries: in 2013 Slovenian adult guidance centres had defined "counsellor" (see the Annexes to the GOAL Needs Analysis Report: http://projectgoal.eu/index.php/publications). Slovenian GOAL staff were thus able to take these competences as a starting point for establishing the set of competences specifically required to work with low-educated adults, and developed targeted training programmes with upgrading these skills in mind.

In Iceland, the process was somewhat more top-down or deductive. To identify the competences need for counselling in GOAL, a range of professional and academic resources were reviewed, including: standards from the Master's programme for career counsellors in Iceland, the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), and the NICE handbook[16] for academic training of career guidance and counselling professionals. These resources were discussed and analysed at a meeting that brought together the project steering group, the national project management team and GOAL counsellors. In this meeting, the competences detailed in this range of professional resources were analysed in light of the competences that counsellors felt were particularly important for the GOAL client group. One potential reason for this slightly different approach in Iceland may be the significantly greater degree of professionalisation of the adult

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[16] Masters programme: https://ugla.hi.is/kennsluskra/index.php?tab=nam&chapter=namsleid&id=100435_20166&kennsluar=2016#Mmarkmid;
IAEVG standards: http://iaevg.net/iaevg/IAEVG/nav0f9a.html?lang=2&menu=1&submenu=5;
NICE handbook: http://www.nice-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NICE_Handbook_full_version_online.pdf

guidance sector there. Counsellors in Iceland have a range of educational and professional resources they can draw on when considering appropriate competences.

Note that in all countries this process took place in the first wave of the project; however, no country attempted to define counsellor competences before beginning work with clients.

Key competences for GOAL counsellors

Each of the six countries produced a different list of key competences (see the individual national GOAL reports for country-specific competences). While these national lists differ in their structure and length, the countries were in general agreement regarding the key domains in which counsellors should be competent in order to provide high quality counselling. These domains were:

- The **knowledge domain** of the adult education sector, the clients, and the job market
- The **guidance competences domain**
- The **communication and interpersonal competences domain.**

The competences in each domain are described in the sections below. The categorisation is indicative only because there was some **divergence between the six countries** about the categorisation of some counsellor competences, for example whether a particular competence was best described as a guidance skill or as a communication/interpersonal skill. In the following discussion, we generally classify competences under the heading that countries were most likely to use, although we acknowledge that alternate classification strategies may be more appropriate for the specific countries or contexts.

Knowledge of the adult education sector and the clients within it, as well as related job market issues

That the counsellor should have knowledge of and familiarity with the adult education sector was identified by the six countries as highly important, and, in Flanders as **essential**. On the Flemish GOAL project, the counsellors had deep knowledge *and experience* in the field and followed the trends in educational guidance and labour market developments (e.g. employment trends and employer needs). The counsellors were able to draw on this knowledge in their guidance sessions by providing relevant and salient information to clients with a range of interests, needs, capabilities and obstacles, within the complex adult education landscape.

The knowledge counsellors required was heterogenous and required a combination of different forms of domain-specific knowledge. Counsellors could be required to be familiar with:

- The education sector and formal and non-formal adult education.
- Educational, training and employment trends, as well as labour market and social issues.
- Transitions within education system, transitions from education to work, and transitions from work to lifelong learning.
- Adult education target groups and their specific needs.
- Learning difficulties, learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia) and psychological disorders (e.g. depression, ADHD, ADD, Burn-out, autism) and how address them.

- Procedures for validation of prior learning (VPL), recognition of competences and degrees.
- Labour market trends/forecasts and employers' needs.
- Training courses and training provision.

Guidance competences

Competences in this domain combine professional knowledge and skill with ethical commitment and personal development. The guidance competence could be described as a constellation of six domain-specific competences and skills, values and motivations of counsellors. The counsellor needs:

1. **Psychological counselling skills**, which include: the provision of support; facilitating individual insight and recognition of resources; guiding the individual client towards identifying solutions; encouraging and supporting the client to involve his/her personal network; and managing difficult situations with clients.
2. The ability to **draw on guidance theory, methods and tools** (e.g. effective interview techniques; methods for identifying the values, competences and interests of the client; incorporating the challenges of the individual and social context into the guidance process).
3. The skills and ability to **providing hands-on support to clients** (e.g. following up the actions of the clients, providing feedback to referring organisations if necessary, organisational skills).
4. A **commitment to personal and professional development** (e.g. learning from colleagues, self-reflection, self-study, relevant courses and training).
5. **Strong ethical commitments and professional boundaries** (e.g. integrity, treating clients with respect, respecting the line between educational guidance and social work).
6. The **ability to work with diverse target groups** (e.g. clients from different cultures, with disabilities, psychological problems and special needs; adults with low levels of education).

Communication and interpersonal competences

There are two main areas in which counsellors need strong competences in communication and interpersonal skills: communication with clients and communication with other programme stakeholders. It is important to note that although communication and interpersonal skills often overlap with guidance competences (see introduction to this section for a brief discussion of this), they represent an important subset of the guidance competences.

Communication with clients entails the use of **appropriate communication methods** in interviews with clients. For instance, this may involve **overcoming language barriers** and being able to **adapt linguistic usage** to the client by, example, not using technical or formal language. Effective communication with clients may also require the counsellor to have the skill to **talk about sensitive subjects** with clients, while making the client feel understood and appreciated and not intimidated or embarrassed. The counsellor should be **open to cultural diversity**, and aware and respectful for clients' cultural differences and values. Finally, this competence requires the counsellor to be versed in **specific communication methods and techniques** such as active listening, using non-verbal and verbal communication and showing empathy, warmth and optimism.

In the Netherlands, the main competences that programme staff members needed to have in order to administer the Literacy Screener and to discuss the outcome were social skills and motivational skills. Discussing poor outcomes on the Literacy Screener was the most challenging part of the Dutch GOAL intervention, largely because low literacy is a sensitive subject that is often accompanied by shame and avoidance. Empathy and trust building were therefore essential.

Communication with other stakeholders entail the skills of communicating effectively with colleagues (e.g. being open and helpful to colleagues; being flexible, cooperation and networking with external organisation), communicating with the wider audience for the promotion and marketing of guidance as well as for client outreach. These competences also involve establishing trust with stakeholders and empathy, and having an awareness of how personal attitudes and values may shape the perception of stakeholders.

Programme learning in the Netherlands: expanding that country's definition of key competences

The GOAL intervention in the Netherlands differed from that in the other five countries in significant ways. As it was much more "light touch" than in the other five countries, the range of counsellor competences required was considerably more limited. Programme staff initially identified the personal attributes and social skills of the staff administering the Literacy Screener as the most critical competence, particularly in cases where poor literacy skills might cause the client to feel embarrassed or ashamed. As one staff member remarked: "If [the clients] sit behind the computer and can't read a word, then that is a painful moment". Individuals administering the Literacy Screener needed good interpersonal skills to deal with such situations.

Over the life of GOAL another necessary competence came to light in the Netherlands. Whereas programme staff members may have been competent at administering the Literacy Screener, there were greater **challenges associated with encouraging clients who score low on the Screener to "take the next step"** by enrolling in further education to improve their skills. In such cases the person administering the basic skills scan needed to be empathetic, to create a relationship of trust with the client, and to be capable of motivating the client to take the next step.

However, identifying the skills the counsellor needs is only part of the solution. Programme staff in the Netherlands did not necessarily have any counselling skills nor, importantly, any interest in or capacity for developing these skills, as this was not part of their job description or role. This highlights the risks of "outsourcing" the Literacy Screener to organisations whose principle function is something other than educational counselling.

8.5   Strengths and achievements in improving competences

The second aim of this intervention strategy was to improve the competences of counsellors delivering the GOAL services. The consensus across the six countries was that this objective was generally achieved, albeit not without impediments and hindrances.

The distance travelled score for this intervention was the lowest amongst the five intervention strategies, with a mean level of progress of 1.7 and four of the six countries gaining only one point over the life of GOAL (see Table 8.5.). However, counsellor competences were also rated as having the highest baseline (starting point) score of all the GOAL interventions (6.2, compared to an average across the four main intervention strategies of 5.1.) and the highest final score (7.8, compared to an average of 7.3). Taking account of the quantitative and qualitative evidence produced in our evaluation, we conclude that **whereas overall competence development was moderate, counsellors competences were high, and there were some important gains in this domain**.

Table 8.5. *Baseline and end point evaluation of GOAL counsellors' competences by country*

Country	Baseline Score	End Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	4	7	Steps were taken to provide further training so that staff were up-to-date on current trends and methods in career guidance and how these can be applied to the GOAL target group. None of the counsellors could spend 100% of their time working with clients because there was no external support in client acquisition, PR activities, marketing, etc. Counsellors also had to travel to clients, negotiate with suitable stakeholders and partners and inform them about project activities at the regional level. It is a challenge to ensure that counsellors are trained and developed in the full range of competences required. Nonetheless, counsellors were perceived as competent and received high ratings from their clients.
FL	5	8	Throughout the GOAL project, project staff members formulated and rated the competences needed for educational counsellors. Meanwhile, a competence profile for career counsellors was developed. This provided an opportunity to elaborate this profile and adapt it for education counsellors
IS	8	9	Counsellors had discussions with specialists in the method group (social services and PES) and went through training in motivational interviewing as well as in using the Career Adapt-Ability Inventory (CAAI) tool. The project as an arena for learning has increased counsellor competences.
LT	8	9	Participation in GOAL offered counsellors opportunities to build their capacity by using new guidance tools, expanding the number of sessions, reflecting on their practices and networking among the sites. Almost all clients were satisfied with their contact with counsellor.
NL	4	5	No specific targets were formulated in the Dutch GOAL pilot with respect to counsellor competences, because the intervention consists of a brief screening and referral. Those administering the Literacy Screener have received instruction from the Reading and Writing Foundation on how to recognise low literacy, how to discuss this issue with clients and how to use the Literacy Screener (*Taalmeter*). The client satisfaction survey shows a (very) positive image of the performance of the counsellor.
SI	8	9	Counsellors acquired additional knowledge, skills and competences in the course of the GOAL guidance process. They compared experiences and familiarised themselves with examples of good practice from organisations participating in the GOAL project, from network partners and from GOAL partner countries. The good results obtained by clients from GOAL guidance also show the degree to which counsellors' competences developed.

The remainder of this section is in two parts: the first discusses client perspectives on counsellor competences using data from the client satisfaction survey and the follow-up interviews. The second examines the achievements made by the national GOAL teams in improving counsellor competences and then using these skills, through the four means through which these developments were made: 1) at the individual level, working with clients on the job; 2) through peer exchange with other GOAL counsellors; 3) with staff at partner organisations and 3) more formally and externally through manuals, guidebooks, lists of competence standards, and training opportunities.

The client satisfaction survey included a range of questions about **counsellors' actions and attitudes**. When designing this survey, all countries agreed that it was sensible to ask few questions about more abstract concepts such as service quality, and instead ask questions primarily about more concrete aspects of the service that clients could more easily rate. This was one of a number of strategies adopted in order to make the client satisfaction survey as user-friendly and non-demanding as possible – steps that were felt to be essential given the limited reading skills of many programme participants. However, it must be emphasised that whereas the client satisfaction survey (and follow-up survey) are able to give a rigorous and accurate picture of clients' perspectives on counsellor competences, these surveys are significantly less valid as objective measures, and are only able to provide the clients' perspective. That being said, the surveys do provide good evidence of clients' own views of overall counselling quality, and various competences within that overall picture.

The number of questions service users faced, and the wording of the questions varied slightly between the participating countries because of programme differences, although four questions featured in all six client satisfaction surveys.

Figure 8.1. provides an overview of survey questions and clients' responses. In general, clients across the six countries were **extremely pleased** with the service they received from the various GOAL programmes, and those who were asked said they **would recommend the service to others** in a similar situation. Almost all (97%) clients agreed that they were satisfied with the counselling session. As Figure 8.1. shows, most clients across all countries thought that the counsellors respected their choices (99.6%, in Flanders only), understood their needs (92.2%), and were encouraging (89%). Clients also reported that counsellors answered their questions (94.1%), explained things clearly (97.6%), and gave them information that was helpful (93.4%).

When asked in the follow-up survey, 71 out of 75 clients reported that it was easy to understand information provided during counselling. Additionally, out of the 86 clients who enrolled on a course after the counselling, around half (48%) said that it was their counsellor who told them about the course; a further 7%, even though they found the course themselves, said this outcome was based on the advice from their counsellor.

Figure 8.1. *Client satisfaction survey results*
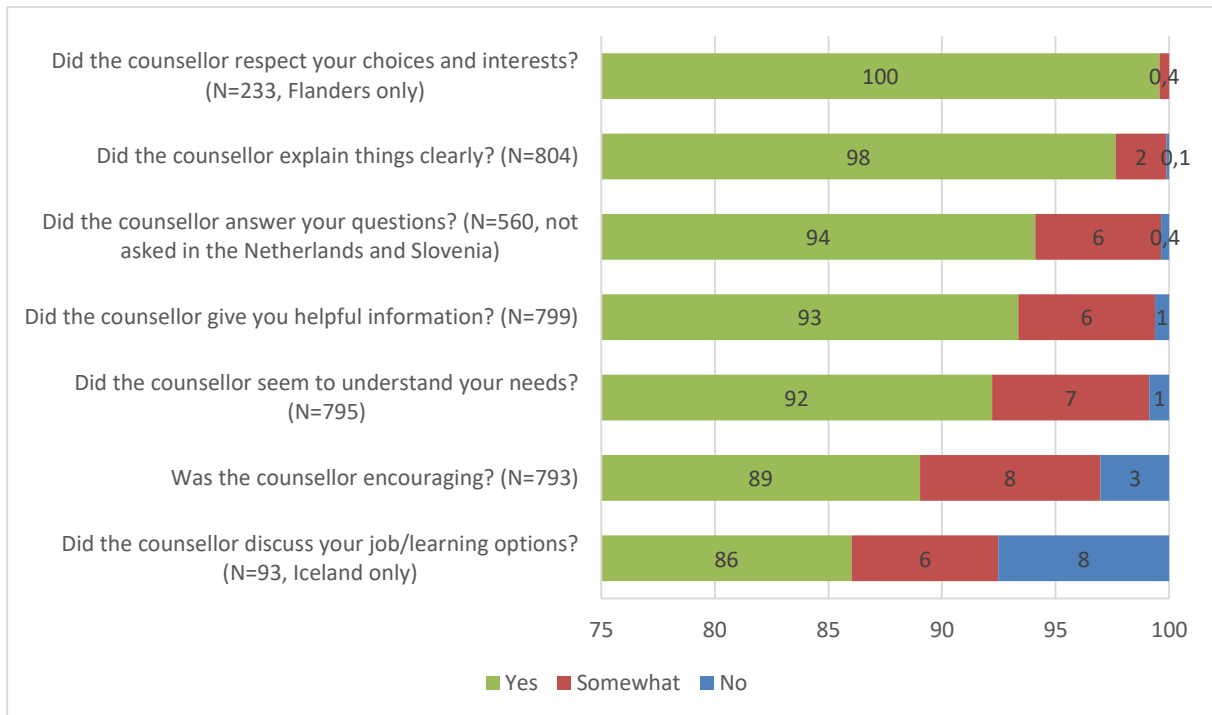
Some clients were not yet able to **reflect fully on the quality of the guidance**. Qualitative interview data from clients in the Czech Republic suggests that although clients felt more knowledgeable, motivated and confident after the sessions, until these feelings were translated into concrete, practical achievements, there was an understandable reluctance to be wholly positive.

In Flanders, clients identified **two aspects of the service they particularly valued: the customised approach and the step-by-step approach**. None of the clients who were interviewed felt uneasy with the personal background questions, because they understood the relevance of sharing the information. In terms of approach, counsellors divided the information and tasks to be done into smaller parts, making it easier to manage. This fragmentation prevented the client from being overburdened or frightened by the work involved in starting a course.

Two service users in Iceland participated in in-depth qualitative interviews. These clients said they **did not initially have high expectations of the service**. They reported that they did not know what to expect but at the same time were very pleased to participate and excited to see where the project would take them. Both of the interviewees thought it was too early to tell if the guidance had helped them in any way. In open text responses to the satisfaction survey some clients said that they hoped the guidance would help them find out about their talents and how these could be used to find activities they are good at. Other clients said that they were very happy with the counselling and felt the counsellors were enthusiastic and eager to help them. They wrote very positively about the service:

> *I felt the counsellor spoke very clearly, was enthusiastic and eager to help me. I also felt it was very easy to talk to her and I was very pleased with the entire interview.*

Respondents felt the information they were given was useful and the counsellors were very professional. The counsellors spoke clearly, were understanding and explained the next steps that they would take.

> *Very clear, explained my options and next possible steps. Very happy.*

The Icelandic interviewees did not have any comments about possible ways in which the service could be improved, largely perhaps because levels of satisfaction were very high, and perhaps also because clients tended to have little or no previous experience of adult counselling. Neither did they make any comments about any possible weaknesses of the service. Both clients who were interviewed at length thought it was too early to comment on this.

The Lithuania clients said that their **expectations for the first counselling session were fully met**. No Lithuanian respondents to the client satisfaction survey suggested any improvements that could be made to the service, and all said they would recommend it to others. According to the Lithuanian clients, counsellors provided the advice and encouragement they needed to fulfil their dreams and objectives. **Personal contact with the counsellor and the counsellor's competences** were highlighted as strengths of the service. Though clients were absolutely satisfied with services received and did not propose any changes, their feedback may provide indirect evidence for the importance of (and the need to strengthen) good personal contact between counsellor and client, and may highlight the strengths of face-to-face contact as opposed to group counselling, as well as a need to concentrate a range of services (e.g. guidance and education) in one location. As an illustration, the following sentiments were expressed by two clients:

> *I was surprised by the sincere and long conversation, I found out many interesting things about myself.*

> *We had a serious conversation, I tried to sketch a detail and they offered a training in the same location. It is good, that I did not have to run from one side of Vilnius to another.*

If Lithuanian clients in the future were to be advised in one location and attend learning in another, the guidance service should ensure a smooth exchange of information amongst services. Low-educated people may be highly sensitive to any barriers, and are at increased risk of dropping out when barriers are encountered. There is thus a need for seamlessness between services.

One of the clients interviewed in Slovenia said that she was helped considerably by the fact that the **counsellor was kind and open**, had a lot of information and knowledge regarding how to help her learn, and was good at listening to her and to respecting her needs and wishes. This client said that the counsellor was very motivational. The client stressed that, for her, "warm" personal contact and the fact that the counsellor took time for her, listened to her and motivated her to start with learning were very important.

Improving competences on the job

Counsellors improved their competences at for working with low-educated adults by *working with* low-educated adults. Indeed in Lithuania, where there was no intervention strategy in this area, learning on the job represented the only means for improving skills, but staff nonetheless reported that they had made progress in their own learning, particularly with regard to identifying and adopting new tools that could be used with their clients. Achievements made on the job were generally situated in the **guidance competences and interpersonal competences domains.** An important strength of learning on the job is that **achieving positive outcomes for clients is highly motivating and boosts the confidence of counsellors**, particularly those who were new to working with this target group. The reverse is also true. Counsellors in Iceland admitted that sometimes it could be demoralising knowing that in some cases the odds were that nothing would change:

> *I somehow always believe it will happen [the clients will improve their circumstances], even if it's not happening right in front of my eyes at that exact moment [..]. Basically you always believe in people and expect and hope that they will surprise you. But sometimes, I'll admit, they can barely be helped [..]. That is the most valuable lesson I have learned in this process* (GOAL Programme Staff).

In this evaluation **counselling quality did not appear to be correlated with counsellor experience**. For example, counsellors in Flanders were on average the least experienced amongst the GOAL countries (see Table 8.2.)[17], but the counselling service in Flanders appeared to be one of the most effective. Likewise, counsellors in Iceland were relatively inexperienced compared to those in Slovenia and Lithuania, but still appeared to provide high quality counselling. In part, this is likely because of the high level of formal and informal professional support and on-the-job-learning provided to the GOAL teams in Flanders and Iceland (see following sections). The impact of experience on quality is also likely to be mediated by work intensity. As discussed in Section 8.6, counsellors in Flanders and Iceland devoted a significantly higher percentage of their working time to counselling in general and GOAL in particular than did counsellors in Slovenia and Lithuania. This higher intensity is likely to have positive impacts on opportunities for workplace learning, competence development and professional identity.

Given the characteristics of the GOAL target population, one example of how counsellors developed their competences on the job is with regard to **hurdle motivation**. For many GOAL clients, there will be a number of hurdles to clear on the pathway to enrolment in and completion of an education course – and in many cases, clients will stumble and fall when first encountering these hurdles. The counsellor's aim on a GOAL-type programme is not just to help the client over a single outcome hurdle (i.e. enrol in education or get a job), but to support them in clearing a successive range of hurdles. Many of these are likely to come on the route to enrolment, but they may also appear after enrolment. De Stap (Flanders) and Slovenia's counselling models put extra emphasis on post-enrolment hurdles by allowing for continued GOAL counselling even after clients had enrolled on courses. There is some evidence in the research literature that such an approach may support client

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[17] Excluding the Netherlands, where the counselling model was less focused on counsellor quality.

persistence, particularly in the early stages of course enrolment, when clients are typically at the highest risk of dropping out (see e.g. European High Level Groups of Experts on Literacy, 2012). However, due to the lack of appropriate comparison groups and sufficient longitudinal data, it was not possible in this evaluation to assess the impact of this "post-enrolment" model.

Whatever the counselling model, however, hurdle motivation played an important role in the GOAL counselling process. For the vast majority of clients, the process of enrolling in an appropriate course was one that required a number of steps, as exemplified in the case studies in Chapter 5 and throughout this report. The steps might include gaining information about available opportunities, but also increasing motivation and self belief, so that those opportunities could be acted upon. Important steps might also include identifying barriers to enrolment and persistence on a course, and planning how to address those barriers. In terms of counsellor competences, what this highlights is that counsellors need the skills to be able to adapt their practice to the individual client and to the immediate, intermediate and longer-term steps in front of that client.

Improving competences through informal workplace learning and peer exchange

Examples from Flanders and Slovenia best illustrate how informal workplace learning served to improve the competences of GOAL counsellors. In Flanders, new counsellors were trained on the job by colleagues. They observed sessions run by more experienced counsellors before moving on to co-counsel with these colleagues. The new counsellor took the lead in the session; the experienced counsellor observed, intervened when relevant or necessary and the session was discussed afterwards. New counsellors felt that a manual or script would also support them: as a result, a guidance flow chart (see Flanders national report) with the description of the different steps to support (new) counsellors was developed. The overview of guidance tools produced as a result of the tool mapping exercise was also felt to be a useful resource by less experienced counsellors. In addition, counsellors at the two Flemish sites worked together to learn through the discussion of methods, cases and to develop their specific knowledge on the education, welfare and employment sectors.

The Flemish national report highlights some features of successful peer exchange that are applicable across other projects:

- Having **the opportunity to speak regularly with colleagues**, e.g. on Skype, even if the chances of meeting up face-to-face are few
- Being able to **draw on specific expertise colleagues may have in particular fields**, and being aware of who in the counselling team has what expertise
- Holding **exchange workshops and meetings on particular service features**, such as the registration system, tools, and competences.

On a more formal basis, but still within the national project team, six theme-based training meetings were held for counsellors in Slovenia on:

- partnership in adult education guidance
- tools in the guidance process

- communication skills
- sharing visions of adult education guidance
- managing a high-quality guidance process from the first to subsequent sessions
- intercultural skills in guidance work with immigrants.

In Wave 2 interviews, counsellors stated that the additional training and specialist material provided to them had helped them to plan and expedite the GOAL guidance process. They highlighted the fact that this was new for them professionally.

Improving competences through partnership work

Achievements made through partnership work primarily related to the **knowledge domain** of guidance competences. The purpose of creating a custom-fit, client-centred information and support service was that through GOAL guidance clients would feel less overwhelmed and confused, and more confident in their ability to make progress towards long-term goals. GOAL was required because although other services do try to provide educational advice and guidance, counsellors in these services typically lack **sectoral specific expertise** regarding educational provision. Moreover, they typically lack professional knowledge and understanding of the educational barriers the client is likely to face, both in general and in terms of specific institutions and/or programmes. GOAL counsellors, on the other hand, were meant to be specialists with **sectoral, institutional and individual-level understanding of educational needs and opportunities**. A key component of GOAL counselling involved drawing on this expertise.

Shared learning activiites, including events and seminars, with partner organisations and others in the wider networks established through the GOAL project work were crucial in developing the counsellors' expertise. In Flanders, for example, collaboration activities with local partners contributed to improved information exchange on legislation or conditions in relation to social security, social services and employment services. The contacts with educational institutes provided counsellors with up-to-date information on the educational provision in the project regions. In Iceland, programme staff identified the steering group, method group and advisory group meetings as avenues for valuable learning: the method group allowed counsellors to identify tools, such as the Motivational Interviewing Technique, that were new to them but had been used by other partners in their work with the target group:

> We got an excellent introduction about various tools during the method group meeting, and that's all very useful. For example, we are very excited about getting introduced to tools that the Directorate of Labour uses, and we are getting certain inputs from them now (GOAL Programme Staff, Iceland).

These experiences suggest that guidance programmes for low-educated adults are supported by rich partnerships that involve a lot of interaction and that seek to **maximise the potential for cross-organisational learning and competence development**. As is clear from section 8.6 below though, this needs to be accompanied by a drive to reduce the amount of partnership administration, development and maintenance work that counsellors are required to do.

Improving competences through external learning

Resources for external training were very limited within the GOAL projects (see Section 8.6 for more on this challenge). Thus, in the context of limited budget and time, the need for informal learning from colleagues becomes even more important. The primary exception to this was in Iceland, where the counsellors, as we have seen, have a formally acknowledged professional status, and where the counsellors' employers are ambitious and supportive of employee training opportunities:

> *They* [the counsellors] *have been on many courses and gotten many new tools. That I think is a certain benefit for the employees and the workplace as a whole* (GOAL Programme Partners and Policymakers).

The Education and Training Service Centre holds biannual nationwide meetings that aim to improve and develop new ways to service and reach adults with little formal education. Counsellors also have the opportunity to attend various shorter courses called "Stiklur" which involve the development and implementation of tools and techniques:

> *I feel that our managers are very supportive and ambitious towards it* [retraining and lifelong learning among the counsellors] *they want us to grow as individuals. I have worked in guidance at different levels within the educational system and the way that the retraining and lifelong learning is organised among employees within the adult education system is exemplary* (GOAL Programme Staff).

Counsellors in Iceland themselves were active in spotting training opportunities, and as no challenges were reported in doing so, this suggests that there are sufficient training opportunities in Iceland, a situation that was not reported in other countries. This is a reminder that unlike improving competences on the job, or through peers and informal networks, **improving competences through external engagement requires a production process as well as a learning process**. This in turn requires a suitable and supportive policy environment. Professional recognition is likely to be a prerequisite of larger scale or national production of training resources. In the Czech Republic, an external non-profit organisation, ASPEKT, which was also a member of the Czech National Guidance Forum, delivered two courses for GOAL counsellors. Counsellors attended the first course prior to the start of the service; training was focused on obtaining core competences for work with the target group as well as various guidance competences. The follow-up one-day training took place in May 2016 and addressed the challenges that emerged from the field during GOAL. In Slovenia, counsellors had three workshops with external trainers.

8.6   Challenges and barriers in improving competences

This section outlines the main challenges and barriers for counsellor competence development. These challenges include working with vulnerable clients, counsellor workload intensity, lack of programme resources and lack of policy support.

Challenges relating to the needs of vulnerable clients

The main challenge in Iceland was that the native-born (Icelandic) **GOAL target group was even more disadvantaged than most low-educated adults**. For example, many GOAL clients suffered from addiction and serious physical and/or mental health issues. However, this only applied to the Icelandic clients in GOAL. The **immigrant clients faced serious, but different, challenges** (e.g. language problems, lack of understanding about the roles of different institutions within the welfare system, and education credentials that were not recognised in the Icelandic educational system). Thus, the challenge for counsellors was to develop different approaches and interview techniques to address these different types of problems. Training in this was provided, and proved highly beneficial, according to counsellors. However, the programme staff in Iceland pointed out that meeting the needs of the particularly vulnerable and challenged subgroup targeted by their GOAL project required the interview techniques and tools developed in other sectors such as welfare or employment. Effective use of both would be facilitated by additional training.

As the Slovenian national report points out, within the broad target group of low-educated adults are smaller subgroups and these subgroups may require counsellors to have different competences. In order to achieve this, knowledge of the group (for example, Roma clients) is key to an effective service, as well as knowledge of other stakeholders with an interest in the cohort (e.g NGOs, social services). Information exchange between professionals is likely to be critical to defining and developing competences.

A related challenge that emerges from the Slovenian national report was that of language. Staff in both the adult guidance and school centres stated that they were in need of the additional knowledge and skills that would allow them to work more effectively with migrants who do not speak Slovenian. When services are reliant on translators this has significant implications for financial resourcing.

Challenges relating to the boundaries of the counsellor's role

One of the main challenges for counsellors was that the frequent need to deal with complex multi-problem situations gave rise to an **unclear demarcation between counselling and social work**, and **between educational counselling and personal coaching**.

For instance, the GOAL service offered in Flanders put particular emphasis on the personal relationship between the client and the counsellor. This close working relationship, based on trust, is a function of a counselling model where the counsellor has a portfolio of clients that he or she is responsible for. However, the downside of this, according to staff in Flanders, is that because of a lack of peer exchange of experience and expertise counsellors can potentially become somewhat isolated from their colleagues. In Iceland, counsellors devoted considerable time to "chasing" clients ("no shows") who missed appointments and/or would not respond to commications.

A key challenge in working closely with diverse groups of disadvantaged clients is to recognise and maintain **professional boundaries**. Many of the issues that the target group dealt with went beyond the scope of educational and vocational guidance, and thus beyond the expertise of the counsellors.

In such cases, the counsellors were usually able to refer service users to other specialists. However, the counsellors reported that maintaining emotional distance was sometimes challenging. Thus, it is important to take into consideration how the personal and professional well-being of counsellors can be addressed. Counsellors also need to be able to **manage client expectations**, in cases where clients believe that the counsellor is there to provide solutions to all their problems.

Challenges relating to counsellor workload intensity

One major obstacle to counsellor's professional competency was **the multiple roles** the counsellors had to simultanously play in their job, i.e. also engaging in a wide range of non-counselling tasks, from administration work to teaching.

There was a high level of consistency across countries with regard to the average number of hours that counsellors worked. In all countries except the Czech Republic, this ranged between 32 and 40 hours per week: generally speaking, then, counsellors were employed on full-time contracts. However, this consistency in terms of total hours worked was not matched in terms of **how much time was spent on adult guidance and counselling activities**. In three countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovenia), counsellors spent less than 12 hours per week on adult guidance and counselling activities. In Flanders, counsellors spent an average of 19 hours per week on these activities, i.e. just under two-thirds of their total working time. In Iceland, counsellors devoted almost all their working time to adult guidance and counselling activities (36 out of 39 hours per week). Nor was time spent on guidance always consistent within countries – for example, counsellors in Slovenian adult guidance centres spent more time on guidance than counsellors in secondary education centres.

It should be noted that "adult guidance and counselling activities" is not synonymous with "GOAL": staff typically provided adult guidance services to groups beyond the GOAL target groups. As shown in Table 8.6., **staff across the six countries devoted 29% of their working time to GOAL, with this percentage ranging widely across countries**, from a low of 9% in Slovenia to a high of 68% in the Czech Republic. In two countries – Slovenia and Lithuania – counsellors **spent only a small proportion of their working time on guidance** for adult learners, as this was not the main function of their job. The counselling staff in these countries felt that this was a weakness of service, and a barrier to competence development.

Table 8.6. *Programme staff: time spend on different activities*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
How long have you been employed by this organisation?	CZ	4	4.5	3.4	0	8
	FL	7	1.3	1.6	0	4
	IS	2	7.0	8.5	1	13
	LT	4	6.5	4.7	1	12
	SI	10	16.6	6.8	8	34
	Total	**27**	**8.6**	**8.1**	**0**	**34**
For how many hours on average each week are you employed by this organisation?	CZ	4	15.8	17.6	5	42
	FL	7	32.3	10.4	18	40
	IS	4	38.8	1.3	37	40
	LT	4	35.5	9.0	22	40
	SI	10	40.0	0.0	40	40
	Total	**29**	**34.0**	**11.4**	**5**	**42**
Approximately how many hours each week do you spend on any adult guidance and counselling activities?	CZ	4	3.8	3.5	2	9
	FL	7	19.2	6.4	12	30
	IS	4	36.3	4.3	30	39
	LT	3	8.3	10.2	1	20
	SI	10	11.2	11.9	0	40
	Total	**28**	**15.4**	**13.0**	**0**	**40**
Percentage of time spend on any adult guidance and counselling activities	CZ	4	45.6	46.9	5	100
	FL	7	62.3	19.6	40	100
	IS	4	93.8	12.5	75	100
	LT	3	21.5	24.8	5	50
	SI	10	27.9	29.9	0	100
	Total	**28**	**47.7**	**35.8**	**0**	**100**
Approximately how many hours do you spend on GOAL project activities each week	CZ	4	6.8	3.2	2	9
	FL	7	14.0	7.5	8	30
	IS	4	10.0	0.0	10	10
	LT	4	4.8	3.6	2	10
	SI	10	3.4	4.1	1	15
	Total	**29**	**7.5**	**6.2**	**1**	**30**
Percentage of time spend on GOAL activities	CZ	4	67.9	45.4	19	100
	FL	7	48.2	28.3	20	100
	IS	4	25.8	0.9	25	27
	LT	4	12.9	8.1	8	25
	SI	10	8.5	10.4	3	38
	Total	**29**	**29.3**	**30.5**	**3**	**100**

Similarly, the main challenge in the Czech Republic was related to resources. Counsellors could not be as focused on career guidance as they would have liked, because they had to deal with other tasks, such as administration, developing partnership networks, client outreach and reporting. Counsellors felt that, in order to have the time and energy to improve their competences in career

guidance, they needed **more administrative support for non-counselling tasks**. In the Czech Republic, the four GOAL counsellors received **no support with administrative tasks**; three of the four were employed on GOAL on a part-time basis (around ten hours each per week). This limited resourcing had significant implications on a project which required reaching out to and maintaining contact with clients who face financial barriers coming to the service (see Chapter 9 for further discussion of this issue).

In a similar vein, Lithuania also had no administrative support for counsellors, and in this country all counsellors had, as their main job role, something other than GOAL counselling (e.g. for three of the four counsellors in Lithuania, 10% of their time or less was spent on GOAL as opposed to Iceland where the figure was 28%). Lithuanian counsellors also pointed to **time and administrative hurdles** that prevented them from spending much time on counselling and thus affected their counselling competences. As one such counsellor observed, fitting counselling in around her primary job commitments made her feel over-stretched or "squeezed out". In addition to having a direct effect on competence development, this may also have had an indirect effect: if counsellors **see themselves primarily as teachers who do a bit of counselling on the side**, they are less likely to develop a **professional identity** as counsellors, and to pursue competence development in that area. This is potentially problematic: as the directors of two different Slovenian adult education centres argued, guidance is highly complex and specialist work, and counsellors working with vulnerable adults should spend as large a proportion of their work time as possible providing counselling, instead of being distracted by other demands. Ideally, they said, these counsellors would be specialists in meeting the needs of vulnerable adults, and would devote 100% of their time to this role. As one of these directors concluded, counsellors "could not be people who simply come and go. These are people you build, nurture and care for". This has implications not only for counsellor workload but also for the larger strategy for recruiting, training and retaining adult guidance personnel and nurturing their professional identity and expertise.

Challenges related to finite programme resources

In Flanders the main competence-related challenges concerned resources: programme budget limits and scarcity of time made it very **difficult to engage in skill development through formal or non-formal training** (e.g. CPD). However, in order to give the best advice, counsellors need to have up-to-date knowledge about two complex fields, education and social welfare (see also findings on key competence for GOAL counsellors in the previous section) and use this knowledge with diverse groups of clients to provide individualised support. Furthermore, developing professional competences requires additional time and effort in what is already a demanding job.

Counsellors in Slovenia pointed out that **guidance work with vulnerable groups of adults was more complex and exhausting, and placed greater demands on them, than other work**. They would therefore like to see adequate professional support, sufficient time and the possibility of supervision.

Challenges relating to policy support for adult education guidance counselling as a profession

In Slovenia there was **no dedicated funding** available for adult guidance and decisions about priority areas and dedication of resources were left to the adult education institution's management. In practice, this meant that counsellors did not receive sufficient training in key areas such as: counselling with the low-educated adults, recruiting the GOAL groups and motivating them to engage in learning, and establishing and coordinating partnerships.

In Slovenia the primary challenge in terms of staff competence development was the **dearth of training courses for** adult guidance specialists. Their professional development depended on their personal initiative and personal and professional context. Thus, developing the training provision for adult guidance counsellors would be key for the professional development of counsellors in Slovenia. Moreover, led by the Flanders example, the establishing of informal learning and knowledge exchange among counsellors could further address the issue.

In Lithuania, due to a lack of governmental interest and coordination there is no clear understanding about where responsibility lies for developing measures, such as competence profiles, that would enhance counsellor competences. As in Slovenia, there were **no systemic training courses** for adult guidance specialists (except through the network of guidance centres), and professional development of counsellors depended on their own initiative. Counsellors in Lithuania also stressed the importance of support from other colleagues (e.g. vocational teachers) who could explain occupation-related peculiarities. Counsellors in Lithuania reported that the competences that needed to be strengthened were self-reflection and learning to learn.

Again, as the previous section on competence profile of counsellors shows, the key issue was not improving or updating the counselling skills *per se* – instead, it is the fact that in order to provide high quality guidance service, counsellors needed to develop specialised knowledge in a range of areas (e.g. including the **range and availability of adult education courses, labour market opportunities**). This is especially important for counsellors who worked with vulnerable client groups. Furthermore, in Lithuania in particular, the stakeholders agreed that national counsellor competence standards would be beneficial and a vital step towards achieving common standards for quality and competences of guidance specialists.

8.7 Pulling it all together: contexts, resources, stepping stones and objectives

This section looks at GOAL's objectives with regard to counsellor competences, and the key configurations of programme contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones that appear to influence the achievement of those objectives. Sections 3.1 and 6.6 present more in-depth information on the Realist Evaluation-influenced approach taken in this section.

Competence-related objectives

Across the six countries, there were two shared objectives with regard to counsellor competences:

1. **Defining** the competences counsellors need to provide appropriate and effective educational guidance to low-educated adults in general and the various GOAL target groups across the six countries in particular.
2. **Improving** counsellor competences, with particular regard to the competences required by professionsals working with the GOAL target groups.

This section focuses on the second of these objectives. The consensus across the six countries was that this objective was achieved, generally with a good level of success, albeit not without impediments and hindrances as well.

Programme contexts

There were a number of contextual factors that appeared to play an important role in influencing programme outcomes. Across the six countries, these factors can be categorised into three broad headings:

1. The professionalisation of adult guidance counselling in each country
2. Counsellors' day-to-day responsibilities
3. The level of disadvantage experienced by the different GOAL client groups across the different countries and sites, and (as a corollary to this) the readiness of clients for education-focused counselling.

The **professionalisation of adult guidance** differed across countries, with the most important differences being: a) the initial education and training requirements for counsellors; b) ongoing education and training (a.k.a. Continuing Professional Development or CPD), and c) the presence or lack thereof of national competence standards for counsellors. Iceland is the only GOAL country in which adult education counsellors require a licence to practise; in the other countries, even where standards existed for career counsellors, they were not applicable to the GOAL counselling staff.

It might be assumed that the level of professionalisation of adult guidance counselling is likely to influence the baseline competences, knowledge and skills that counsellors bring to their role. It may also influence counsellors' commitment and adaptability, e.g. to vulnerable target groups: counsellors with a richer professional identity and greater levels of initial training and education in counselling may bring greater theoretical knowledge and professional commitment to new and challenging target groups. However, experienced counsellors in Flanders and Slovenia exhibited a high level of counselling competence, even though neither country offers degrees in counselling nor has national standards for counselling competences. (It was not possible in this evaluation to assess the degree to which Flanders' or Slovenia's lack of Icelandic levels of counsellor professionalisation influenced initial counsellor competence.)

At the day-to-day programme level, **counsellors' professional responsibilities** appeared to have a strong influence on counsellors' capacity to develop their competences. Two factors had particular significance:

1. The amount or intensity of counselling work the staff member as a proportion of their broader range of job responsibilities, and, within that, the amount of GOAL-specific counselling work they did.
2. The large amount of partnership, outreach, promotional and administrative work required as part of the GOAL pilot.

As reported in section 8.6, in a number of countries, these non-counselling responsibilities reduced the time and energy that counsellors were able to devote to counselling, and to competence development.

As discussed in Chapter 5, clients exhibited a high level of heterogeneity in terms of the **amount and type of counselling they needed**. Whereas some invididuals only needed client-centred information in order to move forward educationally, others needed varying levels support from their counseller to do so (ranging from a little to a lot), and still others were needed a very large amount of support just to get to a point where they could even begin thinking about progress in education or employment. These differences affected the nature of the counselling process and the competences needed by counsellors.

Programme resources and strategies

The evaluation identified four key categories of programme resources that appeared to interact with programme contexts and mechanisms to influence the achievement of competence-related objectives: 1) the amount of professional support that counsellors received, especially from administrative staff but also from managers; 2) the amount of informal, on-the-job learning available to counsellors; and 3) counsellors' high level of commitment to their clients.

Generally speaking, **counsellors across the six countries received very little administrative support**; programmes simply did not have sufficient resources to provide such support, perhaps because at the programme development stage the level of support that would be required had not been anticipated. This lack of a "back office", coupled with the large amount of partnership, outreach and administrative work the counsellors had to do, meant that counsellors were not able to devote as much time or energy as they would have liked to competence development.

Counsellors had **four primary means of improving their competences through informal, on-the-job learning**. The informal learning resources counsellors could draw on were: 1) their own experiences working with GOAL clients; 2) other counsellors; 3) staff at partner organisations; and 4) manuals, guidebooks and lists of competence standards produced by some programmes to support the counselling process.

Finally, one of the most important programme resources was counsellors' high level of commitment to their clients. Counsellors showed a very high level of commitment to their clients' well-being, and

were typically willing "to go the extra mile" for their clients. Counsellors appeared to be very committed to providing the highest possible quality of counselling, and thus to developing their own counselling competences.

Stepping stones to successful outreach: becoming better known and trusted by partners and potential clients

Improvements in counsellor competence can be subdivided into stepping stones (i.e. changes within the counsellor) leading to higher competences:

1. **Increased knowledge** of the educational and/or employment landscape
2. Better **understanding of low-educated clients' needs**, capabilities, limitations and personal contexts
3. Better **understanding of how to support** those clients. (This includes increased knowledge of and capacity to use appropriate counselling tools, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.)

Summary: competence-related contexts, resources, mechanisms and outcomes

In this section we summarise the key interrelations amongst the contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones discussed above, highlighting how these interrelations support or impede the achievement of increased counsellor competence.

Across the six countries, there was good, although subjective, evidence that counsellors successfully developed their competences to meet the needs of the GOAL target groups. Clients reported a very high level of satisfaction with counsellors' competence, for example saying that counsellors did a very good job of listening, and understanding their situation. Evidence of arguably greater validity is provided via the qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted with counselling staff and programme partners, and by local evaluators' progress (or "distance travelled") scores. Counsellors stressed a number of ways in which their counselling competences had developed through participation in GOAL. While these reports are of course subjective, their validity is enhanced by the consistency and specificity of the messages arising across countries, and by the consistency of these messages with those found in the theoretical and empirical research, particularly with regard to the literature on informal workplace learning (e.g. Fuller and Unwin, 2003, 2004).

Amongst the five implementation strategies, counsellor competences showed the lowest average level of progress, comparing the start and end of GOAL; however, this strategy started with the highest baseline.

Based on this combination of findings, we conclude that in all countries counsellors improved their competences. Two countries particularly stand out in this regard: Flanders and Iceland. We now discuss similarities and differences between those two countries and the role of contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones in those similarities and differences. These interactions took a variety of forms.

In Iceland, adult guidance counselling is a highly professionalised occupation, with national competence standards and rigorous initial education and training, in the form of a Masters degree course. Counsellors therefore began the GOAL pilot with a high degree of general competence. The policy context supporting initial as well as ongoing competence development was further enhanced by supportive managers who encouraged counsellors to take advantage of CPD opportunities. Counsellors at the two Iceland programme sites worked closely together and reported engaging in a large amount of informal workplace learning, both from their own GOAL colleagues and from programme partners. Of particular benefit were cross-organisational meetings where staff could share techniques and tips. Another contributing factor was the relatively high level of intensity of the Icelandic counsellors' GOAL work: GOAL was the primary focus of their jobs. This provided a supportive context for competence development, even in the face of challenges to that development caused by the high level of non-counselling work they had to do, particularly in terms of chasing no-shows. Iceland's well-developed policy context (in terms of the professionalisation of adult guidance) and the relatively rich programme and partner resources available to counsellors contributed to a range of mechanisms, i.e. positive changes in counsellors' knowledge and understanding, with particular regard to addressing the often challenging needs of the GOAL client group in Iceland.

Flanders differed from Iceland in some key respects. First, adult guidance in Flanders is less professionalised than in Iceland. There are no national competence standards nor is there a recognised degree-level (or above) educational qualification: counsellors in Flanders had degrees in subjects such as social work and teaching. Furthermore, counsellors in Flanders do not appear to have access to the CPD opportunities that are prevalent in Iceland. However, clients in Flanders were, on the whole, significantly less disadvantaged than those in Iceland, and were thus readier for education-focused guidance, suggesting that counsellors in Flanders did not need to develop as many new counselling competences as those in Iceland, but could instead focus on refining previously developed competences.

However, there were also key similarities across the two countries, particularly with regard to opportunities for informal learning through experience and from GOAL colleagues. Opportunities for informal learning appeared to be particularly rich in Flanders. This was perhaps a necessity given the lower level of experience and lack of initial education and training of the Flemish counsellors – factors also addressed by the production in Flanders of guidance manuals/scripts to support new staff (see Chapter 9). As in Iceland, Flemish counsellors were able to devote a large proportion of their working time to GOAL. One key message arising across all six countries is that, where counsellors were able to devote a greater proportion of the working time to counselling in general and GOAL in particular, competence development appeared to be enhanced.

As noted earlier in the chapter, competence development is not synonymous with counselling competence. It is possible to have a high level of competence development over the life of the pilot but to complete the pilot with a relatively low level of competence compared to other countries. Counsellors in Flanders had markedly different professional contexts and backgrounds from counsellors in Iceland, but both countries began GOAL with high levels of initial counsellor competence.

8.8 Summary of key findings

In terms of formal national professional standards and competence profiles, educational counselling and adult eduation are the poor relations of career and employment counselling. In five of the six the GOAL countries (all except Iceland), **educational counselling lags behind career counselling** in terms of professional recognition and standards; this may stem from the lower status afforded to adult education and/or from a lack of clarity over where responsibility for developing employment criteria and standards lies. In these countries some competence standards are in place for adult guidance professionals but at an institutional level rather than a national level and primarily in the sense of defining the job role of those in employment or being recruited. One impact of the lack of recognised standards is that it is harder to get training. The onus is on the individual practitioner, or the practitioner manager, to further their own professional development. Only in Iceland do eduational counsellors require a licence to practise and only there are the competences of educational counsellors formally defined.

Each of the six countries defined the key competences needed to provide educational counselling to their GOAL target groups within their own national contexts. Countries were in general agreement regarding the key domains in which counsellors should be competent in order to provide high quality counselling to low-educated adults. These domains were:

- The **knowledge domain** of the adult education sector, the clients, and the job market
- The **guidance competences domain**
- The **communication and interpersonal competences domain**.

The work carried out by the project teams on this intervention strategy demonstrated that the competences counselling professionals require to deliver eduational guidance, especially to low-educated adults, differ from those required in career counselling, although the latter do provide a good foundation to work from. Counsellors working with low-educated adults require a **diverse knowledge base** so that they are able to provide information not only on educational and training opportunities, but also on the range of services and supports that may be able to help vulnerable adults or those with complex lives. Those working with low -ducated adults require the **guidance counselling skills** that enable them to support a diverse body of clients over a relatively long counselling journey on which there are likely to be a number of **hurdles** to overcome on the way – and, in many cases, a number of stumbles. In this regard, it is not only clients but also counsellors who require **persistence**. Counsellors working with low-educated adults require particular **communication and interpersonal skills** as the characteristics of the target group mean there may be more personal coaching required of counsellors than is typical in educational and vocational guidance. Counsellors need good communication skills and cultural sensitivity; they also need to be able to maintain professional boundaries.

The GOAL counsellors had on average seven years of experience in the field across the countries (with the exception of the Netherlands, where staffing was handled differently). In the two years before they were surveyed (in Spring 2016) most GOAL counsellors also had opportunities to develop their skills in CPD courses. Thus despite structural professional

standards, the pre-programme environment can be characterised as one **where counselling staff were qualified, experienced and had a least some organised opportunities to improve their skills base**. The conclusion one can infer from this is that while professionalisation is to be desired it does not appear to be *necessary* so long as there are rich opportunities for informal workplace learning and career development.

On the GOAL project itself, counsellors had further opportunities for skills improvement, and this aspect of the intervention strategy was generally successful. The drivers of this competence improvement were having a **supportive workplace environment** where learning can happen **on the job** and through informal means including **peer exchange**, and having the opportunity to **learn from partner organisations and others in the network** that serve the client group. Some learning did happen through **external training** but the opportunities and resources for this were small.

In improving their competences, GOAL staff were generally successful and there was a **very high degree of client satisfaction** with the service received (97% of clients were satisfied across the six countries). This said, the challenges counsellors and others in the programme teams faced on this intervention strategy were considerable, and not always overcome. Although counsellors made large improvements to their knowledge and skills are working with a vulnerable target group while retaining professional boundaries, not all clients could be supported to a successful outcome. No work on improving skills could address the challenge presented by the fact that counsellors often had little or no administrative support in their role, and that this role involved many more duties than counselling alone. Lack of time combined with lack of resources meant that opportunities for training and professional development were limited. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of policy support for adult educational guidance as a profession.

8.9   Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy. In terms of programme development, it offers some **lessons** that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. The policy implications section summarises the **influences of policy** issues and factors on the GOAL programmes, and the **messages for policy** from the GOAL project's experiences.

Implications for future programme development

Cross-organisational (including cross-sectoral) partnership was a productive way to improve counsellor competences. With this in mind, future programme developers may want to give some thought to establishing rich partnerships that involve regular interactions and that seek to maximise the potential for cross-organisational learning and competence development, but which reduce the amount of partnership administration, development and maintenance work that counsellors are required to do.

Training is also key. The Slovenian team identified four areas in which more training needed to happen in the future. These are likely to be important for any new programme:

- the use of new tools and their introduction into the guidance process;
- adult career management and development;
- planning and implementation of outreach/new approaches to reach vulnerable groups of adults;
- identifying and evaluating adults' non-formally and informally acquired knowledge and skills.

There were very high rates of **client satisfaction** with the GOAL service. Clients are the best judges of their own satisfaction, but are not necessarily the best judges of service quality. Perhaps more importantly, from the standpoint of policy makers and other potential funders of GOAL-type services, client satisfaction is not a reliable indicator of successful achievement of desired outcomes. Therefore, one of the key identified challenges that needs to be addressed in future programmes is that in order for counsellors to develop appropriate competences and expertise (see section 8.5) and provide high quality service (see Chapter 5) the counsellors need to be enabled and empowered to **practice guidance as their primary professional activity**. Particularly when working with more vulnerable adults, it is important (for counsellors and clients alike) that counsellors feel a strong professional identity as counsellors. A high level of client disadvantage may facilitate counsellor competence development while impeding the achievement of client outcomes. In the future, programmes that target counselling at disadvantaged groups may need to aim for a minimum level of counselling intensity, in terms of proportion of counsellor workload devoted to counselling.

Training that is only funded and offered as a part of time-limited projects, but not more generally, is not sustainable in the longer term. Ideally, counselling would be professionalised in every country, allowing for high quality initial education and ongoing CPD, but this level of occupational professionalisation is perhaps unrealistic, at least in the near future. In lieu of (or alongside) national standards, it is **important that counsellors' employers provide support for informal workplace learning**. Workplaces with an **"expansive"** (Fuller and Unwin, 2003, 2004) approach to competence development foster a rich array of learning opportunities for counsellors, and **structure the working environment to support professional growth**. Such workplaces stand in contrast to 'restrictive' environments, which limit workplace learning opportunities. As illustrated in Flanders, an expansive approach to workplace learning can play a significant role in overcoming other barriers to competence development, and in producing and supporting a strong professional identity. However, resource limitations impose barriers on learning-oriented workplaces. To be sufficiently supportive of on-the-job learning, the workplace needs to ensure that the counsellors have a high enough proportion of their working time devoted to GOAL, and, as part of that, should strive to reduce administrative and other non-counselling burdens.

Policy implications

Influences of policy

Where adult education is a marginalised and/or underfunded field, there is little policy impetus to develop **professional standards** for staff. Moreover, where, as in Lithuania, the adult education sector is fragmented, there is no clear agreement on where responsibility for developing such professional standards lies. A lack of formal entry qualifcations or criteria is likely to affect the **quality of counsellors and counselling**. Although the GOAL programme teams were fortunate to have well-qualified and motivated counsellors working on the services, it cannot be assumed that this will be the case in every institution that might offer educational guidance, particularly if staff are being asked to add counselling to already heavy workloads. Programmes seeking to adopt a Netherlands-style model in which counselling is provided by a broad range of organisations may face particular challenges with regard to ensuring counselling quality.

Messages for policy

Adult education guidance would benefit from **professional standards**. This would require greater policy recognition of adult education guidance as a field, and greater recognition of the particular needs of low-educated adults. Currently, it is an underdeveloped area within an underdeveloped field within an underdeveloped sector. There is some drive from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in Slovenia to place counsellor training more firmly within the funding mechanisms for adult education. An alternative avenue might be to piggyback the formalisation of educational counselling qualifications onto an existing framework. This was the recommendation from the Czech Republic, where there is already a formal system for validating and recognising qualifications.

9 Guidance tools for low-educated adults

By "guidance tools" this report refers to the full range of paper-based, online, digital and other instruments that counsellors use when planning and documenting their work, when meeting with clients, and for their own professional support and development. Tools played a critical role in all the GOAL programmes, both in terms of: 1) supporting and guiding counselling, and 2) otherwise enhancing service delivery, e.g. through sharing information (where possible) across partner organisations. Across the six countries, tool development and use primarily happened on two levels. In many cases, the focus of programme staff was on **developing and/or refining tools aimed at directly helping clients**. Such tools had specific guidance purposes, e.g. tools for helping clients identify their interests and strengths. On a more general level, some countries also focused on developing **tools that would indirectly help clients by supporting counsellors'** efforts to better manage, record and act on overall guidance activities.

There are two particular tools that will be discussed in greater length in this chapter:

- The "Taalmeter" (Literacy Screener) tool which was the central focus of the GOAL project in the Netherlands.
- The Data Monitoring Tool developed by the evaluator, the UCL Institute of Education, for the purpose of collecting client data for the evaluation.

This chapter provides description and analysis of the strategies that were use to develop and improve the tools used in the GOAL counselling service. The chapter first looks at programme context. It then includes an assessment of the aims (section 9.2), a description of tool selection, development and use (section 9.3), strengths and achievements (section 9.4) in tool development, and the challenges and barriers teams faced (section 9.5). Section 9.6 analyses the strategies for identifying and improving guidance tools drawing on a Realist Evaluation approach which focuses on the interacting influences of programme contexts, resources, strategies, and the stepping stones or mechanisms through intervention objectives were achieved. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key findings (section 9.7), and a discussion of the implications of these findings for future programme development and for policy (section 9.8).

9.1 Context

As part of the final reporting, local evaluators were asked to describe the level of counselling tool development in their countries prior to the GOAL project and assign a baseline score on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented non-existent or non-functioning preconditions and 10 a situation of excellence (see Table 9.1. below)[18].

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[18] See Section 6.1 for further discussion.

Table 9.1. *GOAL counselling tools' baseline evaluation by country*

Country	Baseline Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	3	A number of tools existed in the preprogramme environment including an information system for school graduation on educational and labour market options (Infoabsolvent.cz), online information on the profressional qualifications system (Narodnikvalifikace.cz), and on occupations (Nsp.cz). There were also client worksheets and picture cards aimed at encouraging self-discovery, self-reflection and awareness, interest identification and career planning.
FL	6	The services use a broad range of tools to provide a high quality service. However there was little time and too few resources to invest in new tools.
IS	7	Various tools existed and counsellors' competences were in place professionally as a base for servicing the new target group.
LT	5	At the start of the programme GOAL counsellors already had a selection of tools for adults counselling. They were however quite basic and customised by counsellors from tools primarily designed for school-age students.
NL	7	At the heart of the GOAL project in the Netherlands is a Literacy Screener, the *Taalmeter*. The Literacy Screener is an online tool which organisations can use to identify quickly and easily people who may have difficulty reading. This instrument was developed in 2013 by the Reading and Writing Foundation because there was a need for a validated instrument that helps identify low literacy. The development of the Literacy Screener constitutes an investment in the approach to the recognition, reduction and prevention of low literacy
SI	7	At the start of the GOAL project, counsellors at both types of organisation involved in GOAL guidance had a fairly large set of tools at their disposal. However, it emerged that they were not using all of them. Together with the counsellors, the national team compiled an overview of all tools, along with a set of recommendations regarding where the tools could be accessed and when a certain tool might best be employed. Counsellors at ISIO centres also had a number of training sessions on the use of certain tools.

The baseline level of tool development across the six countries can be best described as the existence of some counselling tools (the variety and range differed per country) along with an identified need for these tools to be further developed (the Netherlands, Czech Republic), adapted (Slovenia, Lithuania) or extended (Iceland, Flanders).

9.2 Aims

Across all countries, an overarching aim was to develop and use tools to improve the quality of guidance. In most countries, this meant adapting and/or improving tools that were already being used in counselling with other (non-GOAL) target groups in order that these **tools would be effective, simple to use and suitable for the target group**. In addition to the development and refinement of specific guidance tools, countries also needed to implement and adapt to the GOAL evaluation data monitoring system. Some countries aimed to develop tools that were not used in the counselling process, but instead served to support counsellors in their roles and responsibilities. In Flanders, for example, there were particular objectives relating to the improvement of the existing system of data registration and also the appointment and booking process. In the Netherlands, the

three objectives were to increase the number of organisations using the Literacy Screener as an integrated aspect of their work with disadvantaged individuals, to intergrate basic guidance services into the working procedures of organisations that use the Literacy Screener, and to train staff of organisations that use the Literacy Screener to provide basic guidance services.

Taken together, the aims of the programmes' strategies for tool development can be summed up as having the objective of offering **counselling with the right skills using the right tools for each client**. In identifying and improving tools to use with the GOAL target groups, programmes were looking for instruments that would support the independent nature of the GOAL service, be sensitive to the particular needs of low-educated adults, and involve these clients as active partners in the counselling process.

9.3   Tool selection, development and use

For the most part, strategies to improve the tools used in counselling followed a three-stage process highlighted by the Icelandic evaluators: **to identify effective tools, adjust them as needed, and train counsellors in using them as the needs of the target group became apparent**.

Mapping activities were a critical first stage. The two GOAL sites in Flanders worked together to develop a map of the pre-programme tools that were already in use. In this process, **key aspects of the guidance process that involve the use of different types of tools** were identified:

1. **exploring the self** (competences, interests, values and beliefs, self-confidence, studying skills);
2. **exploring the environment** (information on education and training, information on sectors and professions, conditions and obstacles, personal network);
3. **crystallising** (selection of possible choices; what fits best with the client and his/her personal situation), **deciding** (identifying and choosing the best option) and **consolidating** (taking steps to carry out what has been chosen).

Based on this categorisation of tools relative to the key steps in the guidance process, Flanders then sought to identify the difficulties that inexperienced counsellors could face when choosing the right tools to use for each invidual client (see below). The mapping and systematising tools involved developing flow-charts for the use of counsellors in Flanders.

A similar mapping process was embarked on in Slovenia (see case study in Section 9.4 below for more detail), where the most commonly used tools were identified. The range of tools that support staff and clients in adult guidance in Slovenia was broad, and included:

- Traditional, paper-based resources and newer online and digital tools.
- Tools to diagnose and assess levels of skills, including basic skills.
- Tools to support the validation of prior learning (VPL) processes.
- Tools for evaluation and self-evaluation (such as interest inventories, tools for making action plans, goal-setting pro forma).
- Tools that help counsellors to reflect; professional development tools for counsellors.

- Information tools (internal and external sources), including both those which inform the counsellor and those which can be used to disseminate information to clients (such as job-search tools, college websites).
- Data monitoring tools and registrations systems, where analysis of the variables can be used to develop the programme and track outcomes.
- Tools that help to structure the guidance session such as scripts for interview. Data monitoring templates can also support this aspect of the counselling.
- Tools that help clients with job-search, such as tools to assist with CV writing.

Developing new tools also included the (ongoing) development of a new registration process in Flanders, the development of group counselling measures for the target group and training for motivational interviewing and Career Adapt-Ability Inventory (CAAI) in Iceland, and the development of an overarching counselling methodology and plan in the Czech Republic.

The Dutch GOAL project focused on recognising and referring people with low literacy through the use of a screening instrument – the Literacy Screener (Taalmeter) – previously developed by the Reading and Writing Foundation and already in wide use as part of the Netherlands' adult basic skills policy (see www.lezenenschrijven.nl/hulp-bij-scholing/Taalmeter). This is the core instrument of the GOAL pilot in the Netherlan The following case study on the Taalmeter explains more about this instrument and its use in the GOAL project.

Case Study: The Literacy screener tool in The Netherlands

About the Literacy Screener

Guidance tools play an essential role in all the GOAL guidance programmes, but nowhere are they more central to the GOAL intervention than in the Netherlands. Unlike the other countries, the GOAL programme in the Netherlands has a single tool as its core focus. The **Literacy Screener** is an online tool which organisations can use to identify quickly and easily adults who may have difficulty reading. The Literacy Screener tests the general literacy level of an individual but does not determine the precise level of basic skills. It does, however, give a good indication of whether someone may have low literacy or low basic skills. The principle behind the use of the screener in adult guidance is that identifying clients who may have problems with literacy at the start of the guidance process represents a way of ensuring that interventions for those clients are more effective.

The screener comes in two versions: 1F and 2F (levels A2 and B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Version 1F is comprised of five reading assignments. Each reading assignment has several questions associated with it, with a total of 24 different questions. Each of the five reading assignments has 19 different versions, which makes for a large range of possible combinations. Participants have up to 12 minutes to answer the questions. Once the time has elapsed, the Literacy Screener stops automatically. The Literacy Screener 2F has only one version. It is comprised of three reading assignments, with a total of 24 different questions. Participants have up to 15 minutes to answer the questions.

The screener comprises of five reading assignments with a total of 24 different questions. Each reading assignment has 19 different versions. Participants have up to 12 minutes to answer the questions. Once the time has elapsed, the basic skills quick scan stops automatically. The scan is being used as standard with all clients of the partner organisations, except prisons, where participation is on a voluntary basis.

According to the pilot organisations that implemented the **Literacy Screener, the Screener fitted well into their work process and has added value for their services**: insight into the language skills of the client, which comes about through the Literacy Screener, helped the organisations to identify low literacy and discuss the topic with the client, and suggest routes for literacy improvements. Another positive feature of the Literacy Screener is that it is **administered quickly and easily** (in 12 minutes) and scored automatically. In the Netherlands, all pilot organisations agreed that the Literacy Screener was easy to incorporate into normal work processes, and gave organisations and individuals a quick indication of potential literacy challenges. Over the life of the GOAL project, the partner organisations **conducted 1,525 Literacy Screens (far more than the intended 400), identifying 465 people with potential low literacy**.

One client's experience

The following case study is based on an interview with a process supervisor. It shows the trajectory and the guidance process of a client struggling with the proficiency in Dutch in the municipality of Emmen. For this client, Dutch is not her mother tongue. This is typical of the clients from this municipality who agree to take language lessons because the native Dutch speakers refuse to take language lessons (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of the national report of the Netherlands).

Client: a client whose mother tongue is not Dutch, with low language and computer skills. She was progressing slowly.

- **Arrival at the training and diagnostic centre:** the client had applied for social security benefits and came to the training and diagnostic centre the same week. This is the procedure for all clients who apply for social security benefits.
- **Administering Literacy Screener and interview about the outcome:** the client was completely overwhelmed. In the 12 minutes available, she answered 10 of the 24 questions, out of which 5 were correct. This score was a strong indication of low literacy. This was confirmed in a conversation with the client. It became clear that she had difficulty with the Dutch language (e.g. limited vocabulary and low reading comprehension).
- **Referral to education:** the language point coordinator connected the client to a volunteer. The client was eager to take language lessons and started them quite quickly. As of August 2016, she was taking weekly language lessons at the language centre. This involved practical reading and writing exercises using a book, newspaper or the internet. She also did exercises on the computer to improve her computer skills.
- **Tentative Results:** Although her language skills were progressing slowly, she believed that the language lessons were helping her. Moreover, her computer skills were progressing more quickly. However, she still found the Dutch language very difficult and struggled with

expanding her vocabulary, reading a text for an extended period of time or maintaining conversation in Dutch. The client had not yet formulated a specific goal for her counselling.

- **Overall experience of the client:** the client very much liked the support from the volunteer. Her motivation was evident from her persistence: she came to the language centre for lessons every week for almost seven months.

Other experiences

In the municipality of Emmen, at Aksept and at PI Achterhoek, virtually all the clients did the Literacy Screener without resistance. At PI Lelystad, some detainees refused to do the Literacy Screener, in some cases because their release from prison was imminent. In cases where detainees with longer sentences refused to do the Literacy Screener, often they came back after a number of weeks, and according to the programme staff:

> *Then they have calmed down a bit and they can lay it out for themselves better: maybe it is actually more useful to organise my time, to develop myself. I don't gain anything by refusing, I'll just take part and see what I can get out of it.*

9.4   Strengths and achievements

Across the six countries, there were some consistent examples of the successful development and implementation of tools. Looking at local evaluators' distance travelled ratings (see Table 9.2.), the mean score for this intervention strategy was 1.8, placing it slightly ahead of Counsellor Competences (1) abut behind Outreach and Partnerships and networks. Looking at the qualitative evidence on Guidance Tools, there are (as is the case with Counsellor Competences) significant differences in terms of the development and achievements across the six GOAL countries. The development of tools involved refining existing tools in relation to the needs of the client (Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia), mapping and systematising existing tools in use (Flanders, Slovenia) and developing new tools (Czech Republic, Flanders, Iceland).

Table 9.2. *GOAL counselling tools' baseline and end point evaluation by country*

Country	Baseline Score	End Score	Evaluator assessment
CZ	3	5	A methodology for counsellors, "Career Guidance Counsellor Assistant", was developed by the GOAL project team. This methodology outlined the structure of the guidance process, set up the cooperation with clients, the plan for examining solutions, semi-structured steps in career guidance, feedback, and self-reflection. The methodology includes: characteristic of the target group as a receiver of counselling services, preparation of career counsellors, feedback and methodological recommendations, active partnership in guidance process, mapping the client´s needs, structured interview, exploring the client goals, and client attitudes to counselling.
FL	6	8	Both services developed a flowchart which guides the counsellors through the counselling sessions. The services are mainly using existing tools which have been mapped. There remains space to develop new tools such as an improved client registration system.
IS	7	8-9	Counsellors got an opportunity to adjust existing tools, develop group counselling measures for the target group and received training in motivational interviewing and in using the Career Adapt-Ability Inventory (CAAI). These methods and tools have added to their expertise regarding guiding the GOAL target groups.
LT	5	8	A number of guidance tools were offered and counsellors evaluated them very positively. However clients were not capable of thorough reflection on the tools that were used during counselling sessions, meaning that no conclusion can be drawn about how effectively counsellors used the tools from client data.
NL	7	8	In the four pilot organisations, use of the Literacy Screener was successfully integrated into their regular work processes. The tool can be conducted quickly and easily and provides the organisations with a structured method for identifying low literacy. The organisations use this information to tailor their services to the client's needs. The pilot organisations' successes give leads for implementing the Literacy Screener on a larger scale in the Netherlands. The Reading and Writing Foundation regularly encountered resistance to working with the Literacy Screener when recruiting organisations for GOAL as well as outside the context of the pilot. For this reason, the Reading and Writing Foundation is in the process of developing variants of the Literacy Screener that are shorter and more applicable in organisations that have less elaborate work processes.
SI	7	8	Through participation in the GOAL project, counsellors strengthened their awareness of the importance of using tools to support a high-quality guidance process. Counsellors from both types of organisation also presented the tools to each other, mostly those they most often used themselves. At the same time, they were effective in using tools developed within the GOAL project that helped them to conduct a more comprehensive and thorough guidance process (three questionnaires for guidance management and the acquisition of data on clients from the first to subsequent and final sessions, and a protocol for the preparation of a guidance process).

In analysing the strengths and achievements of the six programmes in more depth, this section highlights seven themes that were identified in the national reporting on tool use and development. Across these seven themes, **two key messages** emerge:

1. Tools need to be developed, adapted and used in relation to the clients' sociodemographic context, such as age and level of education, as well as the particular needs of the client (e.g. the specific constellation of problems that affect their learning and guidance outcomes).
2. The experience, counselling style and the counsellors' knowledge and undertanding of the target group plays a crucial role in the adaptation, development and use of tools and thus tool use should not be prescriptive but instead based on the counsellors' contextual judgement.

Theme 1: Selecting the right tools for each counsellor with each client

A strong theme in the national reports is that **not every tool is right for every counsellor with every client.** The effective use of tools involves selecting **the right tool for the individual client-counsellor relationship**.

A strength of the GOAL programmes was that programme staff learned that that the value and usefulness of counselling tools needs to be used contextually. When used in flexible and contextual way tools have the potential to increase the quality of the service (e.g. by decreasing drop-out rates, building trust and confidence). The factors that need to be taken into account when choosing a particular counselling tool are (i) the profile (i.e. needs and aims) of the client and (ii) the counselling style and experience of the counsellor.

One example of this comes from Iceland, where the programme team reported that when deciding what tools to use, counsellors used a "case-by-case basis" approach. For instance, because the target group there was very disadvantaged counsellors found that it was particularly important to use tools that addressed **motivation, resilience, self-assertiveness and positive psychology**. Similarly, Czech counsellors reported that tool selection should be driven by the needs of the individual client. The implications of this for the work of counsellors is that it essential to identify and examine the particular needs and goals of each individual client.

The importance of counselling style and experience of the counsellor for the effectiveness of tools was strongly highlighted in Flanders. The Flemish team identified several essential recommendations for the use of counselling tools, namely, that counsellors should have flexible and balanced guidelines about the use of tools that take into account the context of counselling. In other words, counsellors need tool-related "**guidelines, not prescriptions**".

Theme 2: The collection of monitoring data can be a counselling tool

One unexpected result of the evaluation methodology was the discovery that the instrument for collected monitioring data on clients and the process for collecting these data can serve as effective tools for structuring and developing counselling sessions. **The GOAL data monitoring instrument was developed by the UCL Insititute of Education evaluators as a means of gathering sociodemographic**

and other data (including data on goals) on each client using the service. With information recorded at every guidance session the use of the tool evolves over the course of a guidance programme, with the template plotting progress and evential outcomes, thus facilitating the quantitative evaluation of the service.

During development of the data monitoring instrument concerns were raised from the national evaluators and the programme staff about the complexity and the value of some of the monitoring data (e.g. the self-efficacy scales) and the possibility for the 'data collection' to detract and impede the guidance session. On the whole, however, countries reported that contrary to their initial concerns, collecting the monitoring data enhanced their work. One useful function of the tool was that because it recorded key information about the client it prevented the client having to repeat their background and (multiple) problems over and over again on programmes where there were multiple sessions. A counsellor from Flanders stated:

> The data monitoring system is a useful instrument as it helps to remember relevant information. In this way you reduce the chance of losing clients, by staying connected to them.

The Icelandic evaluators reported that the tool was very effective in creating the profile of the service user, with **the initial data collection functioning as a kind of a needs analysis**. While counsellors collected the data they tried, simultaneously, to connect different needs and interests to a possible action plan and discuss with the client what their expectation and hopes were regarding the programme. According to the counsellors **the first interview did not involve much else than introducing the GOAL project to the clients, general data collection and the process of gaining trust and getting closer to the clients.** As the instrument provided valuable, detailed information about the client's background, circumstances and priorities, **the data monitoring tool enabled counsellors to customise their approach to the specific needs of the clients.** As one counsellor said:

> I think the Monitoring Data, in the first interview, is very effective when you want them to open up about things and highlight positive things about them, that maybe they hadn't thought of themselves (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

In Slovenia, the data monitoring instrument was used by counsellors as a questionnaire/ topic guide to structure the counselling sessions. In particular, counsellors found that the instrument enabled them to ask good questions and quickly identify the problem and to facilitate discussion with more reticent clients. In fact, some counsellors posited that the monitoring tool could have an important role in similar projects like GOAL in Slovenia:

> The protocol we used seems very good … It is a model that could also be used in other projects if slightly adapted. It's great that there's a tool on which we can, to some extent, rely.

In Slovenia, some counsellors have begun using a modified version of the data monitoring tool in other (non-GOAL) counselling services, and the Slovenian GOAL team has proposed that this tool be standardised and incorporated into all adult guidance services.

Theme 3: Adapting existing tools not making new ones

Across the six countries, no strong need to develop counselling tools from scratch emerged: it was **feasible to develop effective tools for the target group from existing resources**. Although this process does raise some challenges, not least because of the complexities of working with low-educated adults who are marginalised from the mainstream education and employment institutions that produce many currently existing tools, on the whole counsellors were able to make the necessary adaptations, in large measure due to their familiarity with and understanding of, the target populations.

In the case of Lithuania, prior to the GOAL pilot, counsellors had access to a number of publicly available guidance tools. However, the majority of these counselling tools were designed for school-age students and the challenge was to adjust and adapt these for adults. This was achieved with the help of experienced GOAL counsellors who worked extensively with low-educated adults and had the **knowledge and experience of the target group necessary for the adaption of tools**. Similarly, in Slovenia, there was a need to further differentiate existing tools for adult learners and modify them for particular client groups.

Theme 4: Rigorous tool analysis and development process

Selecting which existing tools are best suited to the target group starts with a mapping exercise which at its most rigorous will involve close evaluation by experienced counselling staff.

All countries (saving the Netherlands) carried out activities to map the existing tools landscape and from these results select the instruments best suited to their client groups and to their counsellors' skills and practice. The analysis and development process in Slovenia was particularly rigorous and serves as an exemplar of how this work can be carried out.

Theme 5: Cross-service learning

The range of tools included in the mapping exercise, and the range of expertise involved in their development, is broadened and enhanced where collaborative working practices are employed, with consultation across a number of policy and geographic areas. A particular achievement of GOAL project, mentioned across several countries, was the development of a collaborative "methods group", workshops or informal partnership aimed at **sharing best practice in tool use for the GOAL target group**. National evaluators reported that establishing these collaborative partnerships led to improved counselling tools and a higher level of competence and confidence of counsellors when using such tools.

As the GOAL project allowed for more time than usual with the service user, it was possible to use a more holistic approach and address a broader range of issues than might be the case in a more typical counselling approach. Tools that are used during educational and vocational guidance on a regular basis were successfully used with minor adjustments. In addition to this, the **counsellors gained knowledge and skills in using tools they had not used before** (e.g. Motivational Interviewing, Career Adaptability Scale) – this was important for improving the service. In particular, the

combination of tools used by the Icelandic counsellors sought to **strengthen the individual, build self-confidence and promote self-knowledge**.

Theme 6: Social media and micro contacts

The use of social media can be a powerful tool, enabling more frequent, informal contact between the counsellor and client, with the aim of keeping the client active in the counselling process. Some tools used during the guidance process, such as **text messages and social media** may have not been perceived as counselling tools (by counsellors and/or clients) but rather as simple communication tools. However, the regular contact afforded by text messaging and social media was felt (by counsellors and clients alike) to enhance the counselling process.

Flanders was the main user of "micro-contacts": counsellors in this country made extensive use of social media tools (e.g. **WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger**) when working with clients, and referred to their approach as "friendly stalking". These tools were used to more easily keep in touch with clients and to support their ongoing progress and motivation. In particular, in line with the key message regarding tools about the necessity of a client-centred and contextual approach, Flemish counsellors found that **clients with poor personal networks tended to benefit more from relatively frequent micro-contacts** (e.g. phone or text messages) whereas clients with well-developed personal networks were less in need of such contacts. For instance, micro contacts were used by the counsellor to send a brief text messages to the clients who were visiting later that day, to remind them of the appointment. **Text message reminders seemed to reduce the rate of no-shows**, a problem which is common to the target group (see, for example, the experiences of the Icelandic programme team). Moreover, the counsellor could quickly check the status updates of clients on Facebook to find any information that could be useful during the sessions or for follow-up or the counsellor may open Messenger to see if there are any messages from clients.

Regular contact appeared to help keep clients motivated, and may have **helped clients to feel that their counsellor was generally interested in their progress**; this helped the **clients feel more supported**. Regular text and/or social media contact may also have increased course enrolment and reduced dropout after enrolment; however, the GOAL evaluation lacks the control group data required to make that claim with confidence.

Of course, these tools will only work with some clients. It is important that counsellors identify clients' preferences regarding how to obtain additional information after or between sessions. For instance, while some preferred phone, others email and social media, some clients only felt comfortable with face-to-face conversation with the counsellor.

Theme 7: Guidance manuals and referral systems as tools to support counsellors

The definition of counselling tools should include tools such as manuals and flowcharts that support the work of the counsellor.

A key achievement in the Czech Republic was the development of a **counselling manual providing methodological guidelines** for working with clients in both centres. This manual proved highly useful

to the counsellors, none of whom had previous experience of providing counselling to this target group. The manual's guidelines were not followed prescriptively, but rather as a general framework for structuring counselling sessions and addressing key issues. This manual provided guidelines on the key guidance factors such as:

- the structure of the guidance process
- demographic characteristics of the target group
- the types of questions that clients may ask
- establishing cooperation and mutual respect with clients
- identifying and finding solutions to problems
- providing feedback
- how to handle conflicts with clients
- encouraging client self-reflection.

In Flanders, de Stap and de Leerwinkel worked together to develop a **flowchart which guides the counsellors through the counselling process**. As in the Czech Republic, this tool was highly beneficial, particularly for less experienced counsellors and supported them in their choice and use of tools. This instrument was based on the experiences of GOAL counsellors, and their reflections on the key aspects of the guidance process.

Flanders also sought to develop tools to support partnerships: a key aim in this respect was the development of **information and referral tools to help partner organisations** work in a more integrated fashion with GOAL. The use of tools such as a shared online platform allowing partner organisations to directly schedule appointments and monitoring systems facilitated the counselling process by allowing for improved information collection and sharing.

Case study: Slovenia

GOAL counsellors in Slovenia through their mapping activity, identified key counselling tools as well a need for additional training for the use of some counselling tools.

Prior to the GOAL project there were noticeable differences between the tools used by the two types of centres that provided adult guidance and counselling, that is, the ISIO centres and the secondary education centres. The evaluators sought to analyse tool use across the two, with the aim of mapping the various tools and verifying which tools were being used in practice and which tools needed to be adapted or upgraded in order to be useful for counsellors.

First, the programme team first mapped and described existing guidance tools. The Slovenia team then conducted a workshop to improve counsellors' knowledge and use of tools. In this workshop, counsellors selected five tools that they used in their work and then evaluated these tools based on: 1) the ease of use, 2) suitability for the target group, 3) effectiveness, and 4) accessibility. Counsellors concluded that the best and most appropriate tools were: an aide-mémoire for the preparation and implementation of one-to-one sessions, and a personal education plan. Moreover, counsellors acknowledged that these tools (especially the personal education plan) needed to be further adapted for the needs of the specific target group in Slovenia. The evaluation team then monitored the extent to which these tools were used in practice. With the help of a questionnaire, counsellors recorded their use of the tools at guidance sessions over a period of two months. The evaluators found that three kinds of tools were most often used in practice in both types of counselling providing institutions: the aide-mémoire, an interview scheme, and the personal education plan. In addition to these three tools, both provider types also consistently used websites in the course of their work. However, there were also differences in tool use across the two types of provider which can be explained by the different type of guidance provided and different type of tasks that counsellors perform in provide.

In conclusion, the analysis of tool-use in Slovenia showed that the aide-mémoire for the preparation and implementation of one-to-one sessions and the personal education plan had the highest quality due to the frequency, ease of use and effectiveness. Moreover, the analysis also showed the weaknesses of other existing tools such as the tools that were: 1) complex to use or could be used only with prior training; 2) not suitable for the target group or required additional adaptation to be made suitable; 3) not readily available to all counsellors (each provider had their own tools used at their institution, and the tools are not publicly available).

Case Study: Iceland

In Iceland, the overall aims regarding tools were to identify effective tools, adjust them to the needs of the target group, and train counsellors to use them. To support these aims, a **method group** was established. The method group involved partner stakeholders from organisations that work with the target group on regular basis. Of particular benefit was the group's identification, discussion and sharing of best practice tools for the GOAL target group. The sharing of knowledge and experience in the method group was highly valued by the counsellors as evident from the quote below:

> *I think these discussions were extremely valuable, I would like to have meetings like that every month and just get the group together, everyone sharing their experiences and concerns, and just like "Have you tried this? Or, this went really well with this group"* [...] *it's just good to get new perspectives* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

Based on the method group discussions further support for guidance counsellors was put in place, including training sessions for the use of new tools such as "Motivational Interviewing Technique" and the "Career Adaptability Scale (CANS)". The programme staff thought that much of the counselling in the GOAL project had involved motivating the service users and confidence building. The counsellors all agreed that these were effective tools when working with the service users and seeking to promote self-knowledge:

> *What I think is really interesting, is that when you are taking the CANS survey, you can see what issue or point makes you pause. Is it your self-confidence? Is it your curiosity?* [...] *It is basically where you pause and in my opinion that creates a great forum for discussion* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

9.5   Challenges and barriers

As is clear from the preceding section strategies for improving counselling tools were generally successful; the national reports list very few challenges to the GOAL programmes achieving their aims and objectives.

This said, some challenges were reported by the country teams, most of which stemmed from the programmes' **needs for specialised tools designed (or modified) to meet the particular needs of their target groups**. These challenges were partly but not completely overcome. A general sentiment was that if the pilot were to be extended and/or the GOAL service to become more structurally embedded in the programme and policy landscape, programme staff would be able to address these challenges by further improving individual tools and overall toolkits. For example, although the Slovenian programme staff experienced some difficulties in encouraging the exchange of useful tools through the networks they had established, there would be scope to exchange good practice

examples at the local and national levels in any future projects and to develop standardised plans and generic aide-mémoires adaptable to a range of client and provider needs.

A further point is that in most countries there was **no formal process to assess the effectiveness of individual tools**: for the most part their effectiveness was reviewed informally by programme staff and steering groups. Nor was it possible in the methodology of this evaluation to obtain worthwhile data from clients on their experiences of the various tools used in their guidance.

Challenges relating to the collection of data through a monitoring tool

Tools must be as user-friendly as possible and they need to complement the work of counsellors. Counsellors in Flanders felt that the evaluation's data monitoring instrument partly failed in this regard, because it required the collection of more information than was directly relevant to the counselling process. This was seen as somewhat burdensome to counsellors. However, this opinion was not shared by counsellors in the other countries, who consistently reported that the data monitoring instrument enhanced the counselling process and served as a good model which could be used in subsequent counselling initiatives.

Flemish counsellors also felt that the data monitoring system would benefit from the inclusion of long-term outcome data, e.g. qualifications achieved after guidance was completed. However, due to **privacy laws and a lack of data sharing across organisational boundaries** in Flanders and the other countries, this was not feasible during the life of the project.

One possibility for the different reception of the data monitoring instrument in Flanders is that clients there tended to be somewhat younger and perhaps more heterogenous than those in other countries. Also, it is noteworthy that **counsellors in Flanders already had well-developed data collection systems in place** before the GOAL pilot was launched.

In some countries counsellors tackled the challenge of needing to collect complex data on clients by back-filling some fields themselves after the end of the session, or, in cases where multiple sessions with a client were planned, by omitting some fields from the initial session.

Language challenges

GOAL teams who targeted their counselling service at immigrants (for example Slovenia and Iceland) faced additional challenges relating to tools, not least the need for quality **interpretation and translation** services. For example, in Iceland there was a lack of guidance tools targeted at clients who do not speak Icelandic, meaning that guidance tools need to be translated and adjusted to meet the needs of immigrants.

Some adjustments to tools were also necessary bearing in mind the low education levels and complex lives of the target groups:

> *The client has been using drugs for 22 years and the addiction has controlled everything in his life, he has hardly had one sober day during this time. Using these tools that we normally use* [...] *they are just so different [the GOAL service users]. It's*

just too many words, the sentences are too complicated, we have to use very short sentences […] *if the sentence is too long, then you lose their attention* (GOAL Programme Staff).

Challenges specific to the Dutch Literacy Screener

The Reading and Writing Foundation struggled to recruit organisations to take part in the GOAL pilot by using the Literacy Screener, indicating that **many organisations do not believe that the Literacy Screener will fit into their organisational processes** and activities. Further adaptations to the Literacy Screener may be required to address this, or a solution may lie in convincing organisations that the screener is not as onerous or disruptive as they believe.

The four pilot organisations that participated in GOAL reported that the deployment of the Literacy Screener fitted well with their work processes and interviews with service users present a positive image of the Literacy Screener experience from the client's perspective. However, one native Dutch respondent said that she does not consider the Literacy Screener to be a suitable instrument for identifying reading skills, arguing in favour of a written test that allows participants more time. In an interview with three educational professionals from one partner organisation (PI Lelystad), the **time limit and digital nature of the test** were mentioned as presenting challenges for some clients.

9.6 Pulling it all together: contexts, resources, stepping stones and objectives

This section looks at the primary tool-related objectives in GOAL, and the key combinations of programme contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones that appear to lead to influence the achievement of those objectives. Sections 3.1 and 6.6 present more in-depth information on the Realist Evaluation-influenced approach taken in this section.

Tool-related objectives

Across the six countries, the overall tool-related objective was to develop and use tools that were **effective, simple to use and suitable for the target group**. Looking at the national evaluator assessments of distance travelled for this intervention strategy, we can conclude that the project teams were generally successful in meeting this objective. This is underscored by the fact that the national reports listed few challenges and barriers to achieving their aims and the only challenge shared by most teams was that developing tools that were applicable and accessible to the complex target groups counsellors were working with raised some issues where clients had additonal literacy or language needs.

The outcomes of the GOAL programmes were that counselling programmes developed a bank of resources – often referred to in national reporting as a **toolkit** – from which the right tools could be selected by a counsellor. It was important that counsellors had the right skills to use those tools, and that the tools were appropriate for the individual client. In identifing and improving the tools that would be used, programme staff focused on instruments that would support the independent nature

of the GOAL service, be sensitive to the particular needs of low-educated adults, and involve these clients as active partners in the counselling process.

Programme contexts

Three programme contexts were particularly relevant to the achievement of these aims:

1. The existence and **availability of tools in the pre-programme environment**
2. The **professional expertise** of the counsellor and others in their professional networks
3. Counsellor and programme developer **understanding of the target group**.

Baseline evaluations from national evaluators demonstrate that there were a sizeable number of guidance tools in the national and local environments for the GOAL teams to draw on in selecting appropriate resources for the target groups, even if these resources were designed with other clients (for example, school pupils) in mind. As a result of this context, there was **no need to design new tools from scratch**, freeing up financial and staff resources for the less onerous (and less costly) task of revising and refining exisiting tools.

In identifying the exisiting tools, programmes relied on the professional expertise of counsellors who had worked with these tools or similar tools in the past and on established networks which were able to both expand the number and type of tools under consideration. In Iceland and in Slovenia this **professional context** meant that rigorous processes were established to consider the tools on offer and evaluate their suitability, thus substantially increasing the chances of creating effective and sustainable toolkits.

As with other intervention strategies (e.g. outreach) **the characteristics of the target group are an important programme context**, as these characteristics determined both the tools that would be selected and the amount of resource needed to adapt existing tools. Where target groups presented particular challenges (for example, the language challenges presented in Iceland when some immigrants were referred to the service), this had implications for the use of resource (e.g. interpreters and translation services).

Programme resources and strategies

The most important resource for this intervention strategy was the **existing guidance tools**. These included paper-based resources and newer online and digital tools; information tools; diagnostic tools, tools for evaluation and self-evaluation; data monitoring tools and registrations systems; tools to structure the guidance session; and tools that help clients with job-search, such as tools to assist with CV writing.

As in the other intervention strategies, a key resource drawn on was **counsellor time and effort**. In this role of developing and choosing tools, the notion of the counsellor as individual professional is paramount – the main finding from this intervention strategy is not only that the service needs to use the right tool for every client, but that tool also needs to be the right tool for the counsellor, that is, **a tool which they are confident in and which complements their professional skills**.

The presence of existing tools in the pre-programme environment to some extent masks the challenge of **limited financial resources** which is a factor affecting outcomes in other strategies. Because teams worked with what they already had and did not explore options outside of the free-to-access tools already in use by organisations or staff working with different client groups or in different institutions, lack of financial resources was not an issue. It does however remind us that with no money to either purchase tools that were not free, or to fund the development of new tools, and lack of staff resources to work on this, the teams were restricted to the tools that they could access easily and cheaply. This may have been the best strategy for the GOAL programme, but it was also the **only affordable strategy available**.

Stepping stones to successful tool use: the impact of tools on counsellor competence and client motivation

The overarching objective of this intervention strategy was successful tool use with clients. A key stepping stone towards this objective was **increased counsellor knowledge of and skills at recognising and using client-appropriate tools**. This process of increased knowledge and skill could be achieved through a variety of approaches, e.g. rigorous comparison and analysis of tools, and sharing of tools across services. Tools such as guidance manuals played a positive role in shaping counsellor confidence and competence: less experienced counsellors in Flanders and the Czech Republic knew they could turn to such manuals for support and guidance when working with clients. The right tools for the right client also played a role in opening clients up and increasing their engagement and motivation, essential steps in selecting the appropriate outcome and taking the steps to achieve it:

> *I think the Monitoring Data, in the first interview, is very effective when you want them to open up about things and highlight positive things about them, that maybe they hadn't thought of themselves. I also feel that the Interest Inventory is very effective, especially for the foreigners. They take a long time but you go "deep". They often make people look at things from a different perspective, and it's a reinforcement for them* (GOAL Programme Staff Member).

This insight from an Icelandic counsellor highlights a key factor about tools: they are means to better counselling, rather than an end in themselves. As counsellors in Flanders observed, the more they worked out what tools were best suited to what client, and the more experience they gained in using these tools, the less they actually needed the tools in the job, because they had, as it were, **internalised the tools** and their strengths into their working methods.

Summary: tool-related contexts, resources, strategies, stepping stones and objectives

The development and implementation of tools was largely successful across countries. This success was facilitated by the existence of previously existing tools which could be adapted for use with the GOAL target groups, counsellor expertise, and the counsellor's understanding of the needs of those

target groups. The development of counselling tools, and the counsellor's growing expertise in deploying them appropriately on a client-by-client basis, supported counselling quality.

9.7   Summary of key findings

Most countries had a range of pre-existing tools to draw on when developing the counselling instruments that would work best with clients in their target groups. Very few challenges were reported by the teams in any of the stages that occurred when optimising the tools: successful mapping exercises were carried out; the relevant tools were adapted and applied in the field; and counsellors were able to acquire the skills they needed to use the tools to the best effect.

Where teams did encounter challenges, these were primarily related to the complexities of working with the vulnerable and hard-to-reach cohorts targeted by GOAL. Working successfully with immigrants for example, may require programme staff to have access to quality translation services. Collecting data from clients with low levels of education can be a complex process. Although the process of collecting monitoring data, and other data, from clients, was generally successful, and indeed was ultimately felt to have enhanced rather than detracted from the work of the counsellor, there were some barriers to integrating work on the GOAL project with the existing processes in some organisations. A clear example of this is the challenges the team from the Netherlands experienced in getting organisations to commit to using the Literacy Screener.

Overall the six programme teams were successful in their aims of developing and using tools to improve the quality of guidance. Seven themes emerge from the national findings on this process:

8. Not every tool is right for every counsellor with every client: effective use of tools involves the selection of the right tool for the individual client-counsellor relationship.
9. The process of collecting monitoring data on clients can serve as an effective tool for structuring and developing counselling sessions.
10. No strong need to develop counselling tools from scratch emerges: it is feasible to develop effective tools for the target group from existing resources.
11. Selecting which existing tools are best suited to the target group starts with a mapping exercise which at its most rigorous will involve close evaluation by experienced counselling staff.
12. The range of tools included in the mapping exercise, and the range of expertise involved in their development, is broadened and enhanced where collaborative working practices such as method groups are employed, with consultation across a number of policy and geographic areas.
13. The use of social media can be a powerful tool, enabling more frequent, informal contact between the counsellor and client, with the aim of keeping the client active in the counselling process.
14. The definition of counselling tools should include tools such as manuals and flowcharts that support the work of the counsellor.

What emerges strongly from the national findings is that: a) counsellors require a toolkit of resources to support counselling, and this toolkit needs to contain instruments that support every stage of the counselling journey; b) from this toolkit, what clients need is a bespoke service with the tools that best serve their individual needs selected by a counsellor whose competences mean they have the knowledge, expertise, and sensitivity to choose and to use the tools. For the target group it is especially important that: a) the range of tools include those that are able to uncover the psychological factors that underpin the client's situation; b) that the tools enable the client to be an active participant in the guidance process.

9.8   Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy. In terms of programme development it offers some **lessons** that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. The policy implications section summarises the **influences of policy** issues and factors on the GOAL programmes, and the **messages for policy** from the GOAL project's experiences.

Implications for future programme development

The findings from this pilot strongly suggest that counsellors for low-educated adults need a portfolio, or toolbox, of different counselling tools, from which they can select those that best suit the individual client's needs and goals. This is in keeping with the individualised, "custom-fit" approach to counselling. As the Icelandic report emphasises, the adjustment of tools according to individual needs is a continuing process. As with a number of the intervention strategies, understanding the needs of the target group is vitally important, and as this knowledge increases, so tools will require continuing development and adjustment. Networking amongst specialists can be very beneficial in this process, especially with regard to sharing tools and practices.

The downside of this, however, is that there is a risk that there will be so much diversity that it could be difficult to structuralise support for counsellors and evaluate where there is a need for better or more tools. Flanders has taken a step in the direction of systematisation by mapping tools. It would make sense to implement, at specific intervals, the three-stage model for the monitoring of the use of guidance tools used during the GOAL programme (tools-mapping, selection and monitoring) across the entire network and for other projects as well that make use of a guidance process. This would eliminate those tools that are not used or that do not serve their purpose, and add new tools and enable their use to be monitored; moreover, those tools that are actually in use could be evaluated and upgraded where required. This would create and upgrade the database of tools, which would be available to everyone in the network. For example, current compilations of tools (e.g. published on Euroguidance platform) are targeted for school-age students. A similar platform could be established or supplemented for professionals working with adults. Conversely, where partnerships and networks are small, or not sufficiently active, this may limit the possibilities for exchanging tools and learning about good practice. All the GOAL national teams reported seeing that benefits can be drawn from exchanging experiences and resources on guidance tools on an international platform, perhaps more so than on any of the intervention strategies.

There is a recognition that the flexible and contextual use of tools is more feasible for more experienced counsellors than for the less experienced ones. In that sense, having good manuals for tool use along with mentorship programmes and cooperation between the more and less experienced counsellors is crucial for the development of sound judgement about which tools are the most appropriate for each client. In addition to guidelines supporting tool selection and use, counsellors in GOAL did benefit from the use of the data monitoring tool. Though originally conceived as an evaluation instrument, this tool served as an effective means for providing a general structure to guidance sessions, and for collecting contextual and specific data that was essential in understanding clients and addressing their needs. A version of this data monitoring instrument, modified to suit local needs, could be used by future programmes. This would support a general model of guidance, while also facilitating the collection of data for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Policy implications

The policy implications of guidance tool development are perhaps less clear than for the other intervention strategies: with some exceptions, it is not an area where policy visibly has an effect. Decisions about tools and work on the development of tools largely being the responsibility of professionals in the field.

Influences of policy
There is a need to maintain a balanced policy-framework for the development of tools – support for counsellors to develop new tools and share experience without being too prescriptive but allowing professional autonomy in tool-use.

Data sharing is a contentious topic, and national policies on data protection vary. In the GOAL project, data policy influenced what information could and could not be collected by the national evaluation teams, and what information could be shared within countries. This has implications for counselling services seeking to develop their programmes on the basis of what has been learned, or which are attempting to construct referral arrangements to other organisations. Data-sharing privileges and tools would support partnership working and the accurate measurement of longer term programme outcomes.

The Iceland pilot was able to be more rigorous about training staff in using tools because of the status of counsellors there, with the profession being licensed.

Messages for policy
As illustrated in Slovenia, cost can be a barrier to effective tool use: some tools require a subscription, licence or other form of payment, and programmes may not have sufficient resources to afford this. Policy should take into account the potential benefits providing funds so that programmes can "try and buy" appropriate tools.

Policy environments should support cross-organisational and cross-sectoral sharing of tools. As shown in Iceland, counsellors in one sector can learn from counsellors in another, particularly with regard to specialist tools for particular target groups.

Any policy that supports cross-domain working should support counsellors in identifying the full range of tools to deal with their clients' complex needs. Where adult education is fragmented then the same problems identified in the section on counsellor competences and professional development will arise – that is, where does the responsibility for developing tools lie?

A more systematised and formal adult education landscape would support greater sharing and coherence in this regard, supporting knowledge of and access to up-to-date toolkits or databases of tools. Cross-sectoral methods groups would potentially encourage innovation and the development of new tools from the ground up, as well as supporting counsellors' learning about different tools and how best to use them, and with whom.

10 The pursuit of high quality guidance: bringing the intervention strategies together

One of the five intervention strategies piloted in GOAL was the implementation of high-quality guidance services. However, this cannot accurately be described as a distinct intervention strategy in the way that the strategies described in the four previous chapters were. Rather, **the drive to implement high-quality guidance services for low-educated adults was an overaching strategy that harnessed all the elements involved in the counselling process**. In other words, implementing high quality guidance was the strategy that brought together all the other interventions presented in this report.

The preceding four chapters have discussed the achievements and challenges of implementing each of the intervention strategies. In this chapter we focus on the key factors from amongst those intervention strategies, including their interaction with one other. In doing so, this chapter has three main components.

First, this chapter identifies **the programme-level factors in achieving high quality counselling** for low-educated adults (10.1): this includes national evaluator assessments of the distance travelled on this intervention strategy; an analysis of the strengths and the challenges across a number of themes that emerge from the reporting; and a case study from Iceland that illustrates how a number of factors come together in practice for a vulnerable client who attended multiple guidance sessions. Second, this chapter examines the **policy factors influencing service quality** (10.2). This includes local evaluator analysis of the change in policy interest and/or support educational guidance received over the course of the GOAL pilot. The chapter ends with a summary of key findings (10.3) and offers some implications for future programme development and for policy (10.4).

As part of their work in addressing quality, the GOAL project team at the de Leerwinkel site in Flanders defined what was meant by high-quality guidance on their programme. This definition seems apt across GOAL countries:

> *The extent to which the organisation develops the most optimal service, by means of a custom-fit trajectory, in which the needs, preferences, expectations and objectives of the client are realised to the fullest extent possible, while taking into account the social and personal context of the client.*

As this definition makes clear, defining high-quality guidance on GOAL puts the client at the centre: there is a direct relationship in this conception between the quality of the service and the experience of the client. From an evaluation standpoint, working with such a definition implies a necessarily high level of subjectivity when assessing programme quality. It would be misguided and probably misleading to attempt to quantitatively operationalise concepts such as "optimal", "custom-fit", "fullest extent possible" and "the social and personal context of the client" across the six GOAL countries. Therefore the evaluation's assessment of quality is primarily qualitative. However,

quantitative approaches are the centrepiece of the evaluation's assessment of service user outcomes (Chapter 11).

10.1 Key programme-level factors influencing the quality of guidance services for low-educated adults

Section 2.5 of this report provides a brief overview of the research literature on measuring programme quality in guidance and counselling. In summary, the main points from this literature are:

- There is general agreement that quality in educational guidance is determined by the quality of the counselling professionals and the quality of the information and support they provide.
- Measuring quality in terms of client satisfaction is relatively easy, and client satisfaction surveys provide the most common form of outcome data gathered for quality assurance; these data are, however, often very subjective, and clients, while excellent judges of their own experiences, are not necessarily expert judges of service quality.
- It is far harder, and far less common, to measure the cost-benefit ratio of an educational guidance programme, to either individuals or to governments and/or funders. These difficulties are compounded by the challenges faced in terms of longitudinally tracking guidance participants, particularly over longer time periods.
- Data gathered on other outcomes of the guidance (e.g. on educational enrolments or employment) rarely assesses the quality of those outcomes, and often only provide a short-term perspective. With regard to outcome quality, there is very limited evidence on the appropriateness of the educational or employment outcome to the individual client – within the quantitative data it is difficult to distinguish between, for example, entry into a stable, long-term job that matches the client's interest or entry into a short-term, unsatisfactory job. Both are typically counted as a positive employment-related outcome.

In our assessment of the quality of the services provided in the GOAL pilot, each of these themes played an important role. In addition, there were some themes that were particularly salient with regard to the GOAL target groups and the services provided to them. In this section, we summarise the eight key factors that were particularly influential in shaping the quality of GOAL services across the six countries. Before that, however, we summarise local evaluators' assessments of distance travelled. National evaluators were asked to describe **the overall quality of educational guidance** in their countries prior to the GOAL project and to assign a baseline score on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented non-existence or non-functioning and 10 a situation of excellence (see Table 10.1.)[19].

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[19] See Section 6.1 for further discussion.

Table 10.1. *Overall quality of GOAL educational guidance by country*

Country	Start of GOAL Evaluator Assessment	End of GOAL Evaluator Assessment
CZ	**Score: 2** There were insufficient counselling services available for this target group. Labour Offices did not have the capacity (in either personnel or time) to work with clients on an on-going basis. The GOAL project team wanted to increase the participation of the target group in further education and make a positive change to clients' low socio-economic status.	**Score: 6** The main successes of the experimentation have been: the establishment of two regional career guidance centres; motivated staff having a wide range of professional skills; development of intensive and mutually beneficial cooperation with labour offices and other relevant partners; further professional development of the staff.
FL	**Score: 8** The quality of educational guidance was highly-rated by staff members, and also by clients, stakeholders and policy makers. These positive ratings are the result of the main characteristics of educational guidance: • independence of information and advice • non-mandatory character • customised and tailor-fit approach • step by step approach • focus on personal empowerment.	**Score: 9** As the quality of educational guidance was already highly rated at the start of GOAL, the GOAL project did not greatly change this rating. GOAL gave more visibility to educational guidance. This resulted in more referrals and an increase in stakeholders that are convinced of the added value of GOAL. The focus on quality also resulted in better conscienceness of quality criteria at service level, which has led to the development of a quality plan.
IS	**Score: 5-6** The quality of career guidance was high, although not many services were provided to the GOAL target group at the LLL centres. Many services were in place through the PES, social services and other actors focusing on personal issues, but the focus there was not always directly on educational/competence development. Outreach measures were not as successful as expected. More cooperation was needed between stakeholders.	**Score: 7-8** Cooperative partnerships have been strengthened through sharing of information and knowledge towards a common understanding. Partnerships need to be formalised and clear processes for cooperation (e.g. referrals) need to be developed. The aim should be holistic services for the user through common efforts.
LT	**Score: 5** At the start of the programme the sites provided counselling services mainly to their existing or potential learners. The counsellors were experienced at providing services and had a selection of tools for work with low-educated adults. The VJLTMC site was more open to the public and more engaged in outreach activities in order to find potential learners.	**Score: 7** The clients rated the services and competence of counsellors highly. For the majority of clients this was a first experience in receiving counselling services. GOAL counselling seems to have the greatest impact on empowering clients and motivating them to take actions for future. Still rather a substantial part of clients have assessed that they were not fully confident about further steps and following the advice given by the counsellor. On one hand, GOAL could not guarantee outcomes desired by clients will be achieved. There are significant barriers – attitudinal, situational, and more – to overcome. On the other hand, GOAL should not be compared to PES counselling services that are directly oriented to clients' employment after PES services.

Country	Start of GOAL Evaluator Assessment	End of GOAL Evaluator Assessment
NL	**Score: 5** The GOAL project was built on previous successful initiatives: • the previous Literacy for Life pilot programme (2012 and 2015) • Several national action programmes provide a basis for dealing with low literacy at the local level, with the national action programme Count on Skills (*Tel mee met Taal*) parallel to GOAL. • Involvement of the Reading and Writing Foundation, which operates both on a national and local level. However, there was room for improvement: people with low literacy generally do not register themselves for language lessons. Finding low literate people and then assisting them in a manner that is suitable for them is a complicated task. The national government sought to develop a culture in which more social organisations recognise their role in finding and schooling people with low literacy.	Score: 6 In order to find more people with low literacy, the Dutch GOAL pilot had the objective of finding new locations that can deploy the Literacy Screener: organisations where people come for a completely different reason and where the work activities are not primarily associated with low literacy. Within the GOAL pilot, four organisations (sites) were involved: a social service, an agency specialised in services related to labour participation and two prisons. All four organisations have successfully implemented the Literacy Screener into their regular work processes and are convinced of the added value of the instrument. The pilot organisation's successes give leads for implementing the Literacy Screener on a larger scale in the Netherlands.
SI	**Score: 7** An awareness of the importance of adult education guidance was already present in adult education practice when the GOAL project started: a network of 14 regional adult education guidance (ISIO) centres was already in operation (three centres were added to the network in 2017, giving two centres in each of the five largest regions and one each in medium-sized and small regions); guidance was strengthened in each adult education organisation, including in the adult education units at secondary education centres; training for adult education counsellors has also been developed in recent years, along with new adult education guidance tools, and funds for these activities provided from national resources and the EU. However, funds have not been sufficient nor funding stable, and links between counsellors from different adult education organisations are still not sufficient.	**Score: 8** Activities have improved in all four key intervention strategies (partnership, counsellors' competences, tools and outreach), and a national GOAL sub-group established to support and compile more concrete proposals for further development and cooperation at the national and regional levels. The good results achieved with GOAL clients (as shown by the quantitative and qualitative data obtained) support this assessment.

The mean point gain across the six countries was 1.8, which falls in the middle of the range of mean gains for the four main intervention strategies. This may reflect the fact that service quality is a holisitic concept, and scores in this domain take account of those for the four main interventions. That being said, the service quality scores (and accompanying narrative commentary) also draw on other factors beyond those intervention strategies. For example, interviews with programme coordinators highlighted the role of programme sustainability in assessments of programme quality.

As discussed in sections 10.2 and 12.7, programme objectives with regard to establishing sustainability were not achieved. Furthermore, as detailed in Chapters 11 and 12, policy factors limited many clients' ability to achieve desired outcomes. Although "quality" and "outcomes" should not be seen as synonymous – due to policy factors, services could achieve high quality yet poor outcomes – interviews with programme coordinators and other staff indicate that they sometimes were.

As the baseline descriptions reveal, programme starting points also influenced assessments of progress. In the Czech Republic, for example, programme developers were starting from scratch. This meant that: 1) their GOAL project was somewhat more experimental than others; 2) there was more potential for growth from the low baseline score; but 3) there remained a lower likelihood of achieving a high-quality service by the end of the pilot. Contrast this situation with that in Flanders, where counselling services were well-established prior to GOAL and a thorough Needs and Strengths Analysis could be conducted to identify specific areas to further develop when extending these services to the GOAL client group.

Key themes in achieving high-quality guidance

In the six GOAL countries, there were no established quality assurance mechanisms for educational guidance; programmes inductively developed their own approaches to achieving service quality. In this section, we present an assessment of the most important determinants of GOAL service quality, and key challenges associated with those determinants.

1. A high quality service is bespoke to the individual client's needs

A key principle underpinning the GOAL pilot was the observation across countries that low-educated adults were poorly served by counselling approaches that were institution-centred rather than client-centred. For example, programme staff in Flanders and other countries noted that Labour Market-based guidance services typically focused on achieving employment-related targets, e.g. by referring their clients to the first available job. While this approach was suitable for some clients, it was inappropriate for many others, who found themselves in unsuitable (in terms of their interests and skills) and/or non-sustainable employment, matched to their current qualification level rather than a level they could attain with further education. In five of the GOAL countries (excluding the Netherlands, whose programme model was based on identifying and improving basic skills), the GOAL service model was not a "one size fits all" approach to counselling. A key aim in these countries was to avoid generic approaches to counselling in favour of approaches that were "custom-fit" to clients' personal contexts, interests, capabilities and needs. Counsellors did not just provide information to clients, but also made sure that information was context- and client-specific. Counsellors sought to start "from where the client was", gathering information on client factors such as family commitments and support, their wider social network, client health, ambitions and interests. Based on this information, counsellors then chose the most appropriate methods for meeting the client's needs and helping the client achieve his or her goals. As observed in Lithuania, where counsellors provided guidance to GOAL clients as well as more highly educated adults, this bespoke approach to each client appeared to be particularly important for low-educated and/or vulnerable clients, for whom "off the shelf" approaches and advice were less suitable.

Challenges

The provision of bespoke guidance is resource intensive, particularly when clients have complex needs. For some clients, only an intensive guidance process will keep them on track to achieving their goals.

2. *A high quality service provides the information and support that clients need to navigate the complex world of adult education*

In all countries (with the exception of the Netherlands), the counselling model was based on the principles of acknowledging clients' starting points, customising information and support to their needs, and supporting them to take forward steps. GOAL staff said that even highly-motivated clients struggled to find user-friendly information about the educational opportunities open to them. A core responsibility of GOAL counsellors was to stay well-informed about those opportunities, and to help clients find the information they needed to make well-informed decisions about their next steps. However, counsellors in the GOAL programmes needed to do more than just provide context-specific, client-centred information; they had to complement it with understanding and support, in order to help clients to act on that information.

Challenges

Counsellors had to be sure that they were well-versed on the full range of opportunities available to clients, and the institutional, situtational and dispositional barriers associated with those opportunities. Keeping up with changes in the adult education landscape requires counsellor time and effort, and is contingent upon information sources, such as education institution websites, being up to date.

A core responsibility of counsellors was to ensure that clients received the right amount of support. It was important that clients not simply follow the lead of the counsellor, but make their own choices and their own plans for acting on those choices.

3. *A high quality service empowers clients*

Supporting clients to make and act on their own choices is a form of empowerment. As much as possible, clients were encouraged to take the lead in the guidance process. As counsellors observed, the aim was not just to achieve a particular result (e.g. the provision of information, or entry onto a course), but to help clients develop their sense of agency more generally.

Empowerment is a relational concept: different clients had different needs and were at different starting points. In many cases, clients had highly positive attitudes towards learning and a high level of general self-efficacy, but were disempowered by the difficulties they faced in navigating the complex adult education landscape. For these service users, empowerment came through receiving the information they needed, alongside advice about how to act on that information. Other clients needed more support: for these individuals, empowerment focused on improving attitudes to learning, and addressing noncognitive aspects of their lives such as motivation, self-imaged and self-confidence.

Challenges

Many GOAL clients faced a number of personal, financial, psychological and/or situational obstacles. In such cases, it would be easy for more practical or pressing difficulties to crowd out a focus on moving forward in (or towards) education or employment. A strength of the counselling was that, by taking account of these challenges, it met clients where they were in their lives, and helped them to address these challenges in the context of taking the next steps in in education/employment.

However, this task gives rise to another challenge faced by GOAL. In cases where it was not feasible for clients to progress into education or employment without first surmounting a number of attitudinal, psychological or personal hurdles, GOAL counsellors worked to "plant seeds", i.e. to help move clients from a complete rejection of future education (and, more generally, the possibility that they could improve their lives) to a point where they were willing to consider the possibility that life could get better, and eduation could play a role in that process. These were important steps forward but, in evaluation terms, difficult to quantify. This has potentially negative implications for policy makers' judgements of the impacts of GOAL.

4. *A high quality service is built on highly competent counsellors*

In order to provide quality services to clients, counsellors need a high level of competence in a number of domains. Across the six GOAL countries, these domains were categorised as:

- **Knowledge of the adult education sector, their clients, and the opportunities available to them**. Counsellors need deep knowledge and experience in the field and need to follow trends in educational guidance and labour market developments (e.g. employment trends and employer needs). Competent counsellors draw on this knowledge in their guidance sessions by providing relevant and salient information to clients with a range of interest, needs, capabilities and obstacles.
- **Guidance skills**. Competences in this domain combine professional skill with ethical commitment and personal development, and include: psychological counselling skills; the ability to draw on and incorporate guidance theory, methods and tools in providing support to clients; a commitment to personal and professional development; strong ethical commitments; the ability to work with diverse target groups; and a high level of commitment to client welfare.
- **Communication and interpersonal skills** when working with clients and fellow professionals.

For many low-educated adults, making forward steps towards, into or through the further education system does not come naturally or easily. More so than with many other adults, counsellor competences play a central role in taking the next step(s).

Challenges

Counsellors were at the heart of the GOAL service, but competing demands on their time, not least from administrative duties that could not be outsourced due to limited resources, threatened their ability to perform effectively in their role. Where clients were particularly vulnerable and each stage of their counselling journey required support, the burden on counsellors was compounded. If counsellors repeatedly take on issues that go beyond their professional boundaries, knowledge and

expertise, the quality of the service may be affected. If there is a lack of organised training or opportunities from continuing professional development, this may impact negatively on staff recruitment and retention. Moderate to high staff turnover again threatens the level of knowledge and experience in the service.

5. *A high quality services is based on a counselling model that matches programme resources to client need*

An effective counselling model is one which matches programme resources to the level of client need. As discussed in Chapter 5 in particular, GOAL clients could generally be classified into one of three categories, based on the type and amount of educational counselling they needed: clients who primarily needed information in one session; clients who needed information and support over a few sessions; and those who needed a higher level of support over more sessions.

Programmes targeted at high need clients need to consider how best to provide resources for intensive counselling models that may not produce many "hard" outcomes, e.g. enrolments in education. When the target group is particularly disadvantaged, very basic steps are necessary before larger steps can be taken in education or employment, and it may take numerous counselling sessions before (or even if) these basic steps can be taken.

Moderate need clients appeared to be significantly more likely to move into adult education, but still had a number of hurdles to clear, and thus benefitted from a counselling model that allowed for multiple sessions (see Chapter 10 on hurdle motivation). In Flander, counsellors paced guidance sessions so that clients received manageable bits of information in each session, and were thus empowered to take the lead in developing their own plans for acting on that information.

Counsellors observed that both high need and moderate need client sometimes followed a non-linear counselling journey: sometimes these clients encountered hurdles that they could not clear. In these cases, counsellors needed to be aware that the counselling journey sometimes included backward steps along with forward ones.

Programmes that are built around a model where only one guidance session can be offered would do well to target counselling only to those clients who can be expected, because of their higher levels of motivation and clarity of direction, to be able to move forward with after only one session. A one-session counselling model may be particulary suited to being situated in an institutional environment such as a college, where potential pathways are more clearly defined and limited, clients have more pre-existing awareness of the range of available options, and counsellors have more in-depth knowledge about those options.

Challenges

No particular counselling model is by its nature superior to other models; however, the quality of counselling models is context- and client-specific. As detailed above, a key challenge for programmes is to accurately match the counselling model to client needs and programme resources. This matching process implies a thorough Needs and Strengths Analysis prior to programme launch, and may require changes to the counselling model during the life of the programme. In GOAL, such

changes occurred in Lithuania, which started the pilot with a one-session only model but later added provision for additional sessions.

6. A high quality service uses the right tools at the right time for the right client

With regard to guidance tools, the following lessons stand out:

- Tools need to be developed, adapted and used in relation to the clients' context, as well as the particular needs of the client (e.g. the specific constellation of problems that affect their learning and guidance outcomes).
- Counsellor experience, style and competences play a crucial role in the adaptation, development and use of tools; thus tool use should not be prescriptive but instead based on the counsellors' contextual judgement.
- Selecting which tools are best suited to the target group is likely to require a mapping exercise which at its most rigorous will involve close evaluation by experienced counselling staff. The range of tools included in the mapping exercise, and the range of expertise involved in their development, is broadened and enhanced where collaborative working practices such as method groups are employed, with consultation across a number of policy and geographic areas.
- Texts and social media can be powerful tools in supporting client motivation, enabling more frequent, informal contact between the counsellor and client.

Challenges

Where clients do not speak the native language, there was a need for more tools in more languages. In the Netherlands, there were challenges specific to the Literacy Screener. In particular, native Dutch speakers tended to disagree with negative assessments of their literacy skills.

7. A high quality service produces and uses high quality data

Somewhat unexpectedly, this evaluation's data monitoring instrument proved to be an effective device for structuring and developing counselling sessions. Countries reported that collecting the monitoring data enhanced their work, in part through guiding them in recording key contextual information about the client. This helped create a profile of the service user, with the initial data collection functioning as a kind of a needs analysis. In Iceland, counsellors used this data collection exercise to explore client contexts, connect different needs and interests to a possible action plan, and discuss with the client what their expectations and hopes were regarding the programme. As the instrument provided detailed information about the client's background, circumstances and priorities, the data monitoring tool enabled counsellors to customise their approach to the specific needs of the clients. This is in keeping with GOAL's emphasis on the importance of client context in shaping the counselling process. The monitoring data also reduced the need for clients to have to repeat information in multiple sessions.

Programmes can thus use the process of data collection in three ways: to provide structure to the guidance; to learn about the clients with the aim of using what is learned to monitor and improve the guidance; and to provide data for monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

Challenges

Data collection should not be onerous; it must complement the work of counsellors. Counsellors in Flanders felt that the evaluation's data monitoring instrument partly failed in this regard, because it required the collection of more information than was directly relevant to the counselling process in that country. However, this opinion was not shared by counsellors in the other countries, who consistently reported that the data monitoring instrument enhanced the counselling process and served as a good model which could be used in subsequent counselling initiatives. In Slovenia, some counsellors incorporated this instrument into their regular (i.e. non-GOAL) guidance work in an adapted form. That being said, programme staff did need to develop strategies for data collection and recording. In some countries counsellors tackled the challenge of needing to collect complex data on clients by back-filling some fields themselves after the end of the session.

8.   *A high quality service uses partnerships to improve the quality of outreach and to support a holistic approach to client welfare*

As analysed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7, countries reached their recruitment targets primarily through referrals from partners. In large measure due to the relationships that were forged with partner organisations who worked with the same target groups and shared similar ambitions; "reaching in" to these organisations was the key to successful outreach. Partnership and networks with organisations from other policy areas gave GOAL staff access to more potential clients than they could have gained from individual adult education institutions, or even the wider adult education system. As a counsellor in Iceland observed:

> *The aim was to find a way to reach out to the group of people that don't or haven't sought to further their education, and I think we are saying that this will not be accomplished unless there is interdisciplinary collaboration, between various systems and institutions. They* [the service users] *didn't seem to turn up at the programme sites because of their own initiative* (GOAL Programme Partners and Policymakers).

Partnership working also supported a a holistic approach to client welfare. At the heart of strong GOAL partnerships was a shared commitment across organisations to the target groups. In spite of initial worries from GOAL programme developers that the overlapping concerns of the various partners would either lead to competition or conflict, the partnerships were characterised by a spirit of collaboration, and by a desire to move away from addressing one aspect of the client in isolation and towards addressing the whole person.

Challenges

Partnership working is resource intensive, and GOAL counsellors often lacked the administrative support they needed to maximise efficiency and effectiveness in this area.

A potential downside of successful outreach is that client numbers may become too great for the resources of the service, with negative impacts on counselling quality. This is especially so where there is a lack of structural embedding of the service, meaning that the chances for expanding the service – getting in more counsellors, for example – are fewer.

Client case study: the interaction of intervention strategies and other factors

The following client case study from Iceland illustrates a number of these themes and how they came together on one woman's counselling journey. This case study was written by the counsellor from the qualitative data and contains her personal reflections on her work with this client.

Client background
The client, her husband and baby came to Iceland in 2011 as asylum seekers; she had little formal education beyond compulsory schooling. They settled in and began Icelandic studies, but moved away from the area of the LLL centre to start work in a factory. By the time they returned in early 2016, the client had had another two children. Both parents had continued with their studies, but as the client spoke little Icelandic and no English, she was very socially isolated, with few friends outside the home, and she depended on her husband to act as her translator. The programme at the LLL centre was her only social forum. By August 2016, the client, pregnant with her fourth child, was divorced, and her former husband had moved to another country. The client joined the GOAL project in December 2016, although she was known to me [the counsellor] through the School of Immigrants. She had support from the welfare services and was doing well enough to make ends meet. She had little labour market experience.

Interview 1
We discussed her circumstances as a single mother with very limited Icelandic skills. She wanted to be able to work in an office in the future. She wanted to study, was positive and optimistic despite her difficult circumstances. The client completed a competence portfolio and we made an individualised action-plan for her next steps, which took into account her circumstances, set goals and enhanced her self-image. Most interviews were conducted with an interpreter that spoke her native language and interpreted it back to me in English.

Interview 2
No interpreter was available, so the next step of doing the interest inventory was delayed; there were many other urgent tasks. The client's Icelandic study was discussed. She was practising at home on the computer and watching Icelandic material. We also discussed her children's homework. She wanted to be able to better support her daughter's studies. I urged her to help her with her reading and practise Icelandic at the same time. I taught her ways to do so. I got her permission to talk to her consultant at the Social Services to look for resources for her children. Her goal today is to strengthen her Icelandic skills by taking part in the programme.

Interview 3
The client was accompanied by an interpreter and requested a certificate for studying in Iceland, because she is applying for a passport. I registered her for an Icelandic course. Before she came to this interview, I had talked to her consultant at Family and Social Services, and we agreed to work together to support her well-being. The consultant was at this time exploring a PMT (Parent Management Training) course for her. The client was also listed in group counselling (course on Self-esteem and Communication that will be conducted on behalf of the GOAL project).

Interview 4
She participated in the course Self-esteem and Communication. She also participated in discussions and exercises after a lecture on the subject.

Interview 5
The client's fourth child was due this month. She was alone with no support/network in Iceland. In cooperation with the social authorities, district commissioner and the State Social Security Agency, we assisted her with getting child maintenance from her former husband. She has a new apartment through the Municipality and should be in the process of returning the old one. She was exhausted and very sad. She did not know if she would get help with moving and I advised her to go to her consultant at the Social Services and make sure immediately. I promised to talk to the consultant to follow up on it. There was very little else I could do but console her. I contacted her consultant at Social Services, who shared my concerns about her situation and promised to assist her. It went well and the next time I talked to her she was very cheerful and grateful for all the help she got. I have, among other things, been in contact with the Red Cross, the rehabilitation centre and the Church's Welfare Fund to get clothing and equipment for the unborn child and the other children. I have a good relationship with her consultant at the Family and Social Services.

At the time of writing this case study, an interview with an interpreter was booked for April. This will be a formal final interview of the GOAL project but she will continue to be interviewed by me. She still needs encouragement and follow-up for Icelandic education and personal affairs.
There is no question in my mind that this hardworking and courageous woman will achieve her goals, given she receives all the support she is entitled to as an Icelandic citizen. Her priorities are clear. She knows that she has to study Icelandic because that is the key to achieving her goal of working in an office in the future.

She needs further support with learning Icelandic and solving personal issues. Her individual plan has been based on her circumstances and while her time and energy are devoted to her children, there is not much time left for other activities. I believe that in due time she will reach her goals. Her priorities are clear. She is resourceful and takes good care of her finances, even though she does not have much. Her self-image has grown stronger these last months. I think, after her husband left her, at a very difficult time, she showed tremendous survival skills and efficiency. With every obstacle she overcomes, she gets stronger.

Commentary on this case study
This client case study highlights the complex range of factors that influence the quality of counselling, both in Iceland and throughout the other GOAL countries. Here we focus on the interaction of three overarching factors that are manifested through the eight quality themes discussed above: client context, needs and readiness; the importance of at taking a holistic approach to the client; and the role of bespoke or custom-fit counselling.

Client context, needs and readiness

Like most GOAL clients, this individual came to counselling not just with an educational need but with a complex range of problems and challenges serving as obstacles to the achievement of educational goals. She had very limited Icelandic language skills and formal education experience, negligible financial resources, few labour market skills and experiences, and extensive family responsibilities with little if any support from other adults.

The client was however clear about her goal: she wanted to get work in an office and she recognised that there was an educational step she had to take to achieve this, namely to improve her skills in the Icelandic language. The client also came to GOAL with a positive attitude: the counsellor notes her optimism. In exhibiting "readiness", this client differed from some of Iceland's other vulnerable clients: whereas many of the native Icelandic clients were not yet ready to focus on educational objectives, e.g. due to problems with addiction and/or the psychological health, this client appeared ready to try to take the next educational step, despite the numerous practical obstacles she faced.

Holistic approach

For this client an implicit emphasis was placed on taking a holistic approach in the guidance. This unfolded on two related levels. Firstly, although the overall focus of GOAL is educational and/or vocational guidance, the counsellor did not limit her own focus to the client's educational and/or vocational objectives, but on the whole person, with particular emphasis on the contextual factors that must be taken account of and addressed if the client is to achieve her educational aims, and the broader range of objectives that the client hopes to achieve, e.g. greater social integration and improved capacity for supporting her children's school work. There is an implicit understanding that progress in these objectives will have positive impacts on the client's self concept, motivation, and potential to achieve educational goals. The client is viewed as a whole, social person, not just an educational or employment target.

Secondly, the counsellor and client developed a shared understanding that the client should be supported by the appropriate organisations across a broad range of needs, and that better results will be achieved if each organisation sees the counsellor as a whole person, rather than merely through the lens of their own organisation's policy domain. As the GOAL counsellor observes: "We work together to support her well-being". This excellent example of joined-up policymaking illustrates an approach that we as evaluators view as necessary when working with clients who have multiple interrelated needs. Another illustration of the complementary approach taken by the organisations in this case study is the cross-organisational awareness of what each organisation is contributing to the client. Working relationships such as this increase the likelihood that each organisation in a policy landscape will be able to focus on adding its own value, and recognising the value of other organisations. They can also help staff in each organisation more clearly define and develop their own professional roles. For example, the GOAL counsellor in this case study does console the client when the latter is feeling defeated; however, the counsellor knows that she can refer the client to other services for issues that fall outside the remit of GOAL.

Bespoke counselling

The counselling model usd here places the emphasis on providing the right mix of information and support that the client needs. This is a "high need/requirement, low capability" client: she needs information, but also a large amount of support to act on that information. For example, because the client lacks the language skills to enrol herself in courses, the counsellor does this for her. The counsellor also contacts other governmental and non-governmental organisations when this will benefit the client. As this suggests, with this custom-fit approach, counselling decisions are not based on a formula, but instead are driven by the client's objectives, capabilities and challenges. Counsellors must be prepared to respond appropriately to setbacks in the client's journey, and help clients develop the capabilities required to respond to those setbacks. The client is also supported by an individual learning plan that enables her to focus on taking one step at a time, e.g. improving her Icelandic as a precursor to pursuing other education and/or employment goals.

Counselling continued for a time after the client had achieved their first step of enrolling on an Icelandic course, but does not go on indefinitely: a key aim of GOAL counselling is to empower clients. This includes helping clients to believe that they can move forward without the support of the counsellor. As the GOAL counsellor in this case study observes, the client left GOAL not only having achieved her educational objective of enrolling in an Icelandic course, but also with an improved self-image and greater belief in her capacity to overcome her obstacles and achieve her long-term goals.

A high level of counsellor commitment must exist alongside a high level of counsellor competence to sustain this counselling model. This commitment is perhaps particularly necessary when clients have multiple problems and complex lives, and are able to make only slow progress despite counsellors' high level of investment in the client. Such clients do not provide "easy wins" for counsellors.

10.2 Policy factors influencing service quality

Service quality is shaped not only by programme-level factors but also by the policy environment. In this section, we provide an overview of three policy factors that were particularly influential in shaping the quality of the six GOAL services:

1. The challenges associated with structurally embedding GOAL in the broader service landscape.
2. The low policy status of adult education in general and guidance for low-educated adults in particular.
3. Funding challenges and their impacts.

Before that, however, we summarise national evaluators' assessments of policy interest in and support for educational guidance in their countries, both at the start and end of GOAL (see Table 10.2.).

Table 10.2. *Policy interest in and support for educational guidance by country*

Country	Start of GOAL Evaluator Assessment	End of GOAL Evaluator Assessment
CZ	**Score: 2** The GOAL project team hoped that this experimentation would help us to build at least one guidance centre in each region in the Czech Republic. These expectations were partially met; career guidance centres were established in 2015 (within the project) in two regions - Olomouc and Ústecký region. Policy makers generally consider GOAL as a first positive step that should lead to an integrated system of the career guidance.	**Score: 5** According to staff members and policy actors, there remains a need for a systematic solution at the national level. In terms of funding, discussion should be focused on finding a systemic solution that addresses the main challenge to the service to date, namely, that the target group are not able to fund their own education. Policy makers would like to use GOAL as the basis for the development of a sophisticated, structurally embedded guidance system. In order to improve the quality of the service, there should be more sophisticated measures introduced and financial issues should be resolved.
FL	**Score: 4** None of the GOAL service providers was structurally embedded. The intention of structurally developing educational guidance services was completely off the political agenda as the development of educational guidance services was not on the government agreement at the start of the current governmental term (July 2014). The services rely on partner organisations for financial support and referrals. Support is coming mainly from a local level (province and city).	**Score: 8** The GOAL project revived discussion on the subject at policy level. Throughout the project awareness of the relevance of GOAL increased within the Advisory Committee (Flemish Level). There is willingness among members to get support within their respective organisations to endorse the policy paper that is being developed with a description of a structural guidance service. Strengthened by the support of the Advisory Committee, the Department of Education aims to get the structural development of the service on the political agenda for the 2019 elections.
IS	**Score: 4-5** There was a lack of discussion and policy making linked to joint cooperation on educational guidance for vulnerable groups.	**Score: 5-6** There is more understanding in regards to the different roles of stakeholders in forming successful partnerships. Interest and commitment has generated towards structuring the system based on common policy making. The results of planning and structuring policy will be based on the efforts of key policy makers
LT	**Score: 4** At the start of GOAL there was very little policy interest in guidance for the target group. There were policy declarations in policy documents, policy makers had some general interest in adult education and guidance, but there were no concrete plans to develop services. Policy interest was not followed up by structural support or funding. There was some structural funding available for the development of counselling system in general in the past and future support was in the	**Score: 5** Because of GOAL, a number of policy makers are now aware that GOAL-style guidance is needed by the target group and that it can be provided in addition to PES services outside of PES system. GOAL gave an opportunity for initial policy level discussion and exchange among actors coming from different parts of the system. There have now been informal expressions of policy support for this type of guidance. However, this increased interest and awareness has not been translated yet

Country	Start of GOAL Evaluator Assessment	End of GOAL Evaluator Assessment
	planning stage. Counselling services were fragmented without national level coordination and underdeveloped cooperation among different parts of the system.	into practical support in the form of funding or policy developments.
NL	**Score: 7** In general, the Netherlands has a strong policy focus on improving literacy and low basic skills. For example, this shows from the national action programme Count on Skills (2016-2018), in which three ministries together have invested 18 million euros to improve the Dutch approach to low literacy. In spite of the policy focus, too few people with low basic skills are reached. Extra focus and effort is needed to better address this problem.	**Score: 7** The national government makes experiments possible to develop proven, effective methods to address low literacy. GOAL is an example of this kind of experiment. Important lessons can be learned from the pilot for the further improvement and roll-out of the guidance process. In this regard, GOAL does not so much influence the extent to which the government is involved, but it does give an outline of the involvement. The lessons that can be drawn from this study should be the focus of future policy on improving literacy and low basic skills.
SI	**Score: 6** The adult education guidance interests of the policy-making sphere, particularly individual stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Employment Service of Slovenia, Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia, Institute for Vocational Education and Training and Institute of Adult Education) had been expressed before GOAL was launched, with guidance identified as one of the support activities for the realisation of the strategy objectives of the Resolution on the National Adult Education Programme 2013–2020. In addition, the importance of adult education guidance and career development was emphasised in the Operational Programme for the Implementation of European Cohesion Policy 2014–2020 (2014), the basis for the preparation and financing of European Social Fund projects. Priority groups under this programme are unemployed adults with lower levels of education and low skilled adults in employment, particularly those aged over 45. The strategic documents contain too little detail on specific activities to make practical implementation easy. Inter-sectoral cooperation at the national level is also too weak to ensure that the policies of different departments are better integrated and provide mutual support. Up to now, the political sphere has failed to supply sufficient and stable funds for all adult education guidance needs.	**Score: 7** In the discussions that took place in the two Wave 1 and Wave 2 focus groups, policy actors and other stakeholders were more aware of the importance of adult education guidance in realising strategic objectives in the field of adult education and the possible measures for development. However, the measures proposed have still not been coordinated, and some have still not been given the concrete form that would allow them to be swiftly implemented in practice. Likewise, financial investments in adult education guidance will have to be greater in volume and more stable than has been the case so far

Taking all countries into account, scores increased from a mean of 4.6 to 6.3. In three of the six countries, evaluators rated progress as low (1 point only), and in a fourth country (the Netherlands), there was no noticeable improvement in the policy environment. However, the lack of change in the Netherlands reflects the fact that the GOAL service in that country was implemented within the context of an already strong policy focus on a particular group of low-educated adults: those with low literacy. It was on this policy basis that GOAL was piloted. In Iceland, Lithuania and Slovenia there was a small positive rise in policy interest in support. This can best be described as a growth in policy awareness regarding how educational counselling might benefit the target group and interest in how these benefits might make a positive impact on policy objectives in education and employment. However, in these countries this interest has not yet been converted into practical action in in the sense of structural change or financial investment.

In Flanders and in the Czech Republic, national evaluators felt there was a larger increase in policy interest in support. In the Czech Republic this was partly because, prior to GOAL, educational guidance was largely unknown in policy terms; the GOAL team there were starting from scratch, with the ambition of affecting a step change in the Czech approach to adult education guidance. National evaluators assessed that the first positive steps along this path had been taken. However, it should be noted that their rating at the end of the project was still relatively low: there remains much work to be done to garner more interest and commitment from policy makers. The reporting from Flanders highlights steps taken in moving the policy agenda forward.

The remainder of this section examines factors in the policy landscape that had particular influence on the quality of the GOAL service.

The challenges associated with structurally embedding GOAL in the broader service landscape

Whereas GOAL achieved a number of successes with regard to partnerships and networks, it did not achieve its objective of becoming structurally recognised and embedded within the broader service and policy landscape. That is, no GOAL pilots managed during the life of the project to become part of the adult education (and broader) service system for the target groups. Perhaps more significantly, there were no formal changes in terms of recognising and embedding the sub-field of adult education guidance for low-educated adults (whether provided by GOAL or any other organisation or project) into policy systems. The challenges to recognition and embedding of adult education guidance for the GOAL target groups is problematic for the field in general and GOAL in particular. Although the GOAL programmes proved it was possible for partnerships to work effectively in the short term on an informal or semi-formal basis, there is little security in informal partnerships over the longer term. Recognition of the service is hampered when it is not embedded and has no "official" position; for example, the position of the service is financially insecure when funding needs to be renegotiated regularly to keep the service active. The Flanders national report draws attention to the fact that because its intervention sites are funded locally and not structurally, this works against long-term partnerships: they cannot be embedded in existing structures in the way that (for example) schools are. Where there is structural recognition of a service this gives it a legitimacy that can be critical when establishing and sustaining partnerships and networks.

The low policy status of adult education in general and guidance for low-educated adults in particular

A clear challenge to the necessary level of structural recognition and embedment is the low status of adult education as a policy sector throughout Europe. Generally speaking, the importance of adult education is not recognised across European countries: it is an under-developed, under-funded and under-researched sector. Even when its importance is recognised, adult education policy is hampered by the fragmented and complex nature of the sector. This lack of recognition, support and penetrability hinders adult education in general, and adult education guidance within it. As discussed below, this has particularly significant impacts on programme funding.

Amongst the six GOAL countries, only the Netherlands, with its strong policy focus on adult basic skills, could be said at the start of GOAL to provide a supportive policy environment for adult education. However, it could be argued that in that country, the strong but narrow policy emphasis on adult literacy and numeracy had a negative impact on adult education *guidance*: it meant that many GOAL clients could not get the custom-fit, client-centred advice that was characteristic of the other five countries. However, it should also be noted that providing this type of guidance was not an objective in the Netherlands, where the focus was on getting the Literacy Screener used by partner organisations.

Where adult education is not a policy priority, those running programmes of educational guidance for adults will struggle to gain sufficient support for their work, and are likely to see their programmes overlooked or under-supported in comparison to programmes aimed at moving individuals into work as quickly as possible.

Funding challenges and their impacts.

There was no scope within this evaluation to conduct a cost-benefit analysis; in any case, the challenges involved in tracking and monitoring clients once they have left the service makes it harder to make a cost-benefit case. It is, however, clear that GOAL is a resource intensive model, and the more vulnerable the client, the more resource intensive it will be. Selecting a vulnerable client group means it is difficult to achieve a high outcome to investment ratio, which is in turn offputting for policy funders.

Related to this, where the vulnerable client group becomes a particular challenge is where funding mechanisms are based on outcomes and equate high quality with outcomes such as transitions to education, training or employment. These mechanisms run the risk of undermining the quality of the service by putting pressure on clients and counsellors to attain a fast outcome (e.g. a job), not necessarily the best outcome (a more suitable job, or a training course that has the potential to lead to a better job).

10.3 Summary of key findings

From a programme-level standpoint, a high quality service:

1. Is bespoke to the individual client's needs
2. Provides the information and support that clients need to navigate the complex world of adult education
3. Empowers clients
4. Is built on highly competent counsellors
5. Is based on a counselling model that matches programme resources to client need
6. Uses the right tool at the right time for the right client
7. Produces and uses high quality data
8. Uses partnerships to improve the quality of outreach and to support a holistic approach to client welfare.

In terms of policy, the key factors influencing service quality were:

1. The challenges associated with structurally embedding GOAL in the broader service landscape
2. The low policy status of adult education in general and guidance for low-educated adults in particular
3. Funding challenges and their impacts.

10.4 Implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development. In terms of programme development it offers some **lessons** that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services.

Unlike previous chapters, the current chapter does not include a Policy Implications section: the key influences of policy on service quality are instead discussed in the Conclusions chapter (Section 12.7), as are key policy messages.

Implications for future programme development

The programme-level factors highlighted in this chapter give rise to a number of implications for future programme development. In terms of outreach, partnership development and maintenance is resource intensive, but "reaching in" to other services is likely to provide better access to potential clients than direct outreach does. Guidance services targeted at low-educated adults will not meet those adults' needs if they only offer "off-the-shelf", institution-centred counselling approaches. In this process, the provision of information that is tailored to the client's personal context, challenges, interests and capabilities is essential, as is the appropriate level of support. An aim is to empower clients to set their own objectives and make their own decisions. This provides benefits within the counselling process itself and in other aspects of life.

Quality services are dependent upon a high level of counsellor competence and commitment. Programmes should be structured so that counsellors can develop and improve their competences, ideally through a combination of formalised professional development, informal workplace learning, and access to support materials such as guidance manuals. The collection of client monitoring data can support the counselling process while also providing valuable evidence for monitoring and evaluation purposes. An overabundance of counsellor commitments can have negative impacts on service quality, as can a service model in which staff provide only a few hours of counselling a week because counselling is merely a "bolt-on" to their primary responsibilities.

Counselling models should strike the proper balance between programme resources and clients' level of need. Programmes that are built around a model where only one guidance session can be offered would do well to target counselling only to those clients who can be expected, because of their higher levels of motivation and clarity of direction, to be able to move forward with after only one session. Programmes focused on higher need clients should be aware that such clients are likely to be resource intensive and may be slow to make measurable gains, particularly in terms of "hard outcomes" such as enrolments in adult education. Programmes that need to demonstrate high level of measurable impact may wish to to focus on easier target groups, i.e. "low-hanging fruit". However, all counsellors should be aware that the counselling journey sometimes include backward steps alongside forward ones.

On a broader level, one of the strengths of the GOAL pilot was its cross-national nature. Programme coordinators met at regular intervals throughout the pilot to discuss local implementation experiences and findings. These meetings played an important role in encouraging cross-national learning during the life of the pilot. Future programmes would benefit from a similar cross-national model, where feasible.

11 Service user outcomes

This chapter presents evaluation findings regarding client outcomes. These findings are drawn from a number of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including:

- The client satisfaction survey
- Programme monitoring data
- A client follow-up survey
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups with clients, counsellors, programme coordinators, programme partners and policy makers.

Each data source is described in depth in Chapter 3. The purposes and limitations of the first three sources are briefly rehearsed below.

The **client satisfaction survey** recorded information from service users on their happiness with GOAL, their awareness about the next steps that were available to them, their plans, and their motivations. However, the full bank of questions developed by IOE was not asked in all six countries: the client satisfaction survey was adapted to the context and objectives of each programme. Across the six countries, almost all client satisfaction surveys were completed after the first guidance session, and only then; they were not administered at subsequent sessions.

The **data monitoring template** included a number of fields in which information on guidance outcomes could be recorded by counsellors. Data were recorded at the first session and (where relevant) all subsequent sessions. Data recorded during and after each subsequent session allow evaluators to investigate the intermediary outcomes or stepping stones of guidance. Fields were also included for counsellors to record exit data during the clients' final session. However, as there was significant variation across countries with regards to the number of counselling sessions per client, caution is required when analysing exit data.

Respondents to the **follow-up survey** are those who agreed to be contacted by researchers some months after leaving GOAL, and who then agreed to be interviewed for the evaluation. These interviews included open and closed questions and thus generated qualitative and quantitative evidence. As relatively few clients agreed to be contacted, the follow-up survey respondents are a volunteer convenience sample rather than a representative sample. As a result, we are not able to infer findings from this sample to the full GOAL client population. Additionally, caution is needed when interpreting the responses of convenience sample respondents, as they may be motivated or feel more strongly than other GOAL clients. Nevertheless, findings from this survey do enable us to explore client outcomes after GOAL programme completion. Overall, we received follow-up survey data from 149 clients; however this included 30 clients in Iceland for whom, due to data privacy and confidentiality issues, follow-up survey data and monitoring data could not be linked. Thus Icelandic follow-up survey data are not included in our bivariate analyses exploring the client and/or guidance characteristics that were associated with specific outcomes.

In this chapter, findings are reported thematically rather than on an instrument-by-instrument basis. Section 11.1 looks at general client satisfaction with the GOAL service, then discusses clients' reflections on the information they received from the counsellors, and the impacts of counselling on their motivation and planning. Section 11.2 looks at attitudinal and non-cognitive outcomes, including self-efficacy, self-confidence and the clients' understanding of their own potential. Section 11.3 focuses on clients' formation of education- and employment-related goals, and the steps they took in achieving those goals. Section 11.4 examines the achievement of education and employment outcomes, e.g. enrolment on courses and entry into the labour market. Section 11.5 summarises findings regarding barriers limiting clients' capacity to take the steps they hoped to take.

Section 11.6 draws on the Realist Evaluation approach used in earlier chapters to discuss the impact on outcomes of programme contexts, resources and strategies, with a focus on the stepping stones or intermediary changes that appear to lead to educational and employment outcomes. Sections 11.7 and 11.8 report key findings and implications for programmes and policies.

11.1 Information, motivation and planning the next steps

Clients reported a very high level of satisfaction with GOAL: 97% of the 800 individuals who completed the client satisfaction survey said they were satisfied with the counselling session. The other 3% reported being "somewhat satisfied". **No respondents said they were unsatisfied**.

Information about possible next steps

As discussed earlier in this report (particularly in Chapters 5 and 7), the adult education information landscape in all GOAL countries is complex, fragmented and difficult to navigate, even for trained professionals. This makes if very difficult for individuals to know what their next steps can be, in terms of education and training. A key aim of the guidance process was therefore to give clients the information they needed about education programmes, training courses, and employment opportunities, amongst others. **This information was a necessary stepping stone (or intermediary outcome) towards clients formulating their own educational goals and acting to achieve those goals**.

In the client monitoring data, **the most frequently reported intermediary outcome of guidance was related to information provision**: gaining information about training/education opportunities (83% of clients) and gaining information about employment opportunities (25% of clients). From the clients' perspective, this information was beneficial, as it improved their understanding of the next steps to take. For example, one Czech client said of the information she received during counselling:

> It was very surprising. I though there is only education which takes place in school where I sit as a student, and due to this [GOAL] service I have learnt there are courses which lead to [a] certain qualification much faster. I am very interested in this and I like it.

As the data summarised in Figure 11.1. show, 78% of clients who participated in the survey in all six countries agreed that the next steps were definitely clearer after the session and 20%

reported that the steps were somewhat clearer. Only 1% said their next steps were not clearer. The same proportion (79%) agreed that the counselling helped them to plan what to do next. As a client in Flanders said:

> I didn't know it is possible to enter [Higher Vocational Education][20] *without a diploma of upper secondary education. Without my coach telling me this, I don't think I would ever have discovered this.*

Around four in every five clients (83%) in five countries thought that they would follow up the advice given during the counselling sessions. (This question was not asked in Slovenia.)

Figure 11.1. *Client satisfaction survey results, %*
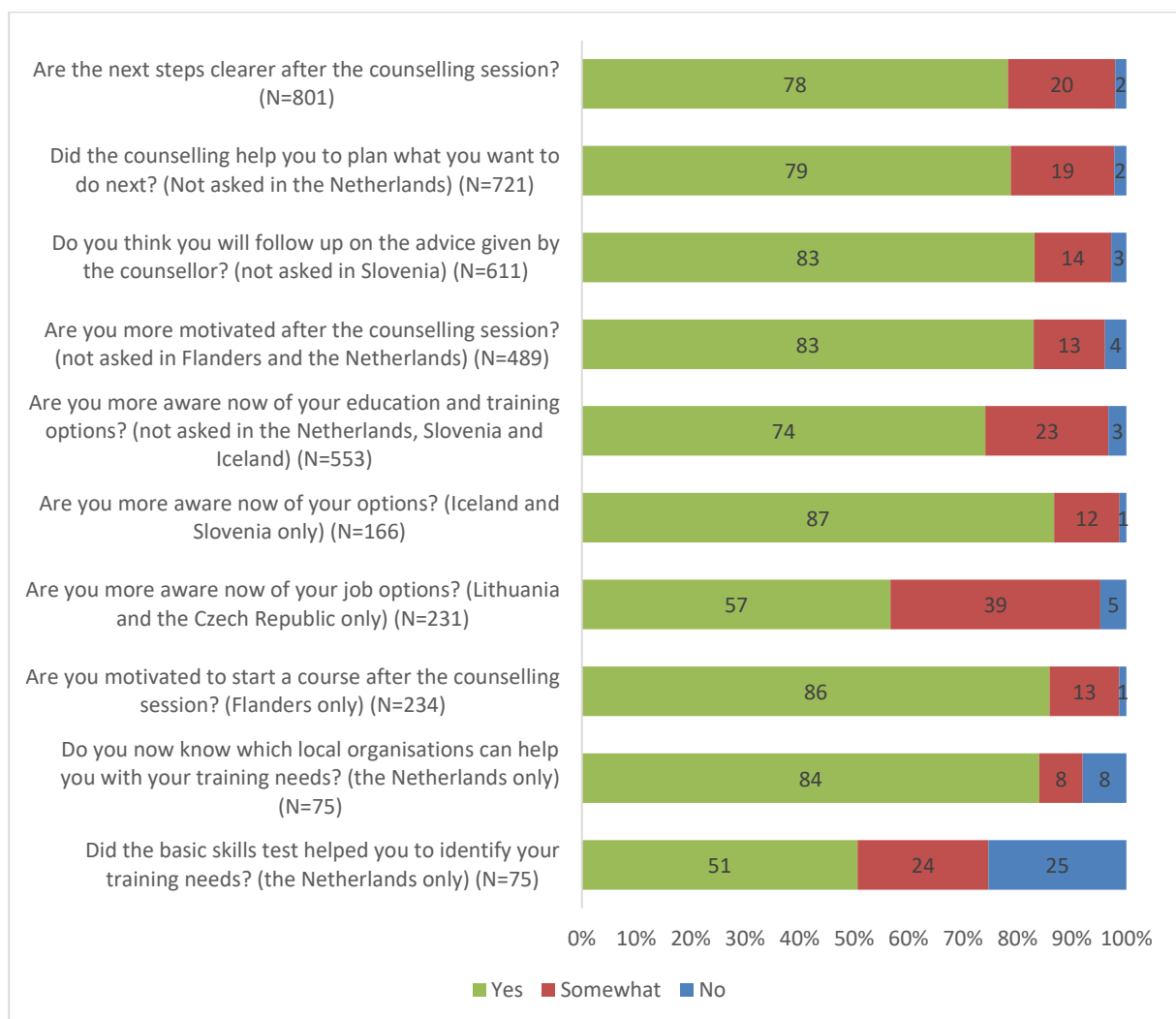
There were some notable **differences across countries**. In the Czech Republic clients were less positive about the information-related outcomes of guidance. Only 59% of clients here agreed that

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[20] Hoger Beroepsonderwijs: Higher Vocational Education at ISCED level 5.

the next steps were definitely clearer after the counselling session, compared to 78% overall. Clients in the Czech Republic were also less likely to say that the counselling session definitely helped to plan the next steps (63% versus 79% overall). On this and other questions, Czech clients were not more likely to say that counselling did not help them, but were more likely to qualify their responses and say that it only helped them "somewhat". In Lithuania, 64% of the clients agreed and 34% somewhat agreed that they were now aware of their training and education options compared to 74% in complete agreement across all countries. It is interesting to note that in the Netherlands one-fourth of the clients reported that the Literacy Screener did not help them to identify their training needs. As noted earlier in this report (especially Chapter 8), many Dutch clients who did poorly on the Literacy Screener disagreed with the assessment that they needed to improve their literacy skills.

Further analysis indicates that **men were slightly less clear about their next steps** and their training and education options after their counselling sessions (see Table B.18 Appendix B).

Compared to the youngest age band of GOAL clients (that is, those aged 18-25), those aged 26 and over tended to be clearer about their next steps and also agreed more often that counselling helped them plan what to do next (see Table B.19 in Appendix B). Lithuanian evaluators speculated that **clients in their mid-20s and older may be more aware of their objectives**, and are thus potentially more active during counselling sessions and more inclined to find answers to questions about their future. However, further analysis also suggests that older clients, those aged 56 and older, reported being less aware of their options and also less likely to follow on the counsellor's advice after the guidance sessions. This may be because older clients' next steps with regard to work-related training are inherently less clear – for example, older people are more likely to question the value of work-related training, as they are closer to retirement and thus stand to benefit less.

Analysis of "focus of the session" data suggests that clients whose sessions (according to them) focused on learning provided more positive outcome feedback with regards to the clarity of next step and future plans than clients whose sessions focused on jobs or learning and jobs (see Table B.20 in Appendix B).

Motivation to take the next step

Motivation played an important role in the counselling process. For the vast majority of clients, the process of achieving a goal (such as enrolling on an appropriate course) was one that required overcoming a range of obstacles and challenges, and taking at least one but often several steps. Such steps might include gaining information about available opportunities, but also increasing motivation and self belief, so that those opportunities could be acted upon. Important steps might also include identifying barriers to enrolment and persistence on a course, and planning how to address those barriers.

In qualitative interviews, clients spoke positively about the **impacts of counselling on their personal motivation**. For example, one Slovenian service user said:

> When [I] *was psychologically at rock bottom and had almost given up, the counsellor helped* [me] *regain the will.*

Across all six GOAL countries, 83% of individuals responding to the client satisfaction survey said they felt more motivated after their counselling session. Expanding on this theme, a client in Iceland reported that:

> *I have delayed this for too long, but I feel very good after the session, I am more positive and open for what lies ahead.*

In Flanders, 86% of clients agreed that they felt more motivated after the first counselling session to start a course. All clients in that region indicated that they were motivated to follow the counsellor's guidance. Although the results were highly positive, Flemish evaluators did raise some factors that may possibly influence these results:

- Clients come to de Stap or de Leerwinkel on their own initiative, meaning that they are already motivated to start a course or get a diploma.
- By visiting the service, clients have taken a first step in their ambition to start a course or get a diploma. This might make them feel more positive from the outset.
- Even though the survey was anonymous, a certain level of social desirability bias might affect the client's response (especially as the counsellor gave the client personal and often positive attention during the session).

Further analysis of the data (see Table A.10 in Appendix A) shows that responses in the client satisfaction survey across all countries were highly positive, with most clients reporting not only that they were clearer about the next steps, their options, and their plans after the session, but also that they were motivated to start work on realising their plans.

11.2 Attitudinal and non-cognitive outcomes

Chapters 6-9 highlight the importance of "stepping stones" or the changes in reasoning or belief that lead to (or at least make possible) the achievement of client objectives and outcomes. With regard to client outcomes, such stepping stones are particularly important: for example, clients are far more likely to enrol on education or training courses if they believe they have a chance of succeeding in those courses. For low-need clients with higher levels of motivation, there may be little if any requirement for counsellors to focus on attitudinal and non-cogntive outcomes such as attitudes to learning, self-efficacy, self esteem and self-confidence. However, most GOAL clients proved less sure of themselves, so it was important for counsellors to focus on these factors as stepping stones towards outcomes such as enrolment.

Attitudes to learning

Clients' attitudes to learning were measured during their first and last guidance sessions. Most clients reported a positive attitude to learning at entry: 50% agreed that they liked learning new things a lot and 40% said they liked it a bit. There is likely a self-selection bias at work here: even though GOAL clients had low levels of education and in many cases had negative prior experiences in education, people who voluntarily came to GOAL (an education-focused guidance service) were

arguably more likely to be open to education and learning than other low-educated and/or multiple disadvantaged individuals.

Overall, there were **no detectable (statistically significant) changes in the clients' attitudes to learning** (see Table 11.1.), a finding that is influenced by the ceiling effect: as 49% of clients started GOAL with a very positive attitude to learning, only the other 51% could potentially improve their baseline score. However, there was some movement across the categories: 15% of all clients (thus 30% of those who had not started at the top of the scale) moved up a category, with 12% of all clients moving from "a bit" to "a lot". There was also some downward movement over time: 10% of all the clients moved from liking learning new things "a lot" at their first session to "a bit" at the guidance exit point. Rather than suggesting that the GOAL programme did not impact on attitudes to learning, these findings have at least two implications:

- Methodologically, the target groups' attitudes to learning may need to be measured on a more fine-grained scale in order to ascertain programme impact on this variable. There may also be a need to disentangle how respondents conceptualised "learning", e.g. some individuals may enjoy learning in an abstract sense more than they enjoy the actual process of engaging in formal educational activities that are typically associated with learning.
- **GOAL clients' positive initial attitude to learning highlights the importance of providing low-educated adults with the information and context-specific support needed to act on that positive attitude**. That is, the clients' positive attitudes to learning suggest that a key factor keeping them from improving their education is not attitude but rather a lack of information, support and/or opportunities.

Table 11.1. *Do you like learning new things? % of table total. First session and exit data*

| | | Exit data | | | | | | | |
| | | No, not really | | Yes, a bit | | Yes, a lot | | Total | |
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
First session	**No, not really**	3	1	9	2	3	1	15	4
	Yes, a bit	9	2	91	22	51	12	151	36
	Yes, a lot	3	1	42	10	204	49	249	60
	Total	15	4	142	34	258	62	415	100

Self-efficacy, self-confidence, self-image and self-esteem

Guidance in all countries sought to help clients have a more positive self-image and become empowered to understand and build on their strengths, both within the domain of education and more generally. As one programme stakeholder in Slovenia observed, this was an important stepping stone to longer-term outcomes:

> *The raising of self-image … immediately helps* [a client] *become more distinctive on the job market and to be active in a completely different way* […] *Self-image is the absolute first precondition.*

In the initial counselling session and at the guidance exit point clients were asked to answer three questions concerning their own judgment about their **self-efficacy**, i.e. their self-perceived ability to achieve desired outcomes in life. Each question was made up of two statements, one presenting a more positive view and the other a more negative view. (See Chapter 3 for more discussion of this variable.) As with attitudes to learning, the baseline scores for self-efficacy were higher than might have been expected: at the start of guidance only 20% of GOAL clients reported a low or fairly low level of self-efficacy (0 or 1), with 23% scoring 2 and 57% scoring the maximum possible score (3). Again, this perhaps surprising finding may arguably be the product of selection bias, with **GOAL clients having a relatively higher self-perceived ability to achieve desired outcomes in life** than other low-educated adults. It is perhaps useful to note that this self-efficacy instrument measures general self-efficacy, rather than domain-specific self-efficacy. One plausible hypothesis is that many individuals who come to GOAL may lack confidence or self-efficacy in the domain of education, but may benefit from a generally high level of general self-efficacy, and thus feel willing and able to seek help in the education domain. (Another potential conclusion is methodological: it is possible that the short self-efficacy instrument used in this evaluation is insufficiently fine-grained and/or nuanced for the GOAL client group.) As with attitudes to learning, a potential implication of this self-efficacy data is that there is unmet need for adult education-specific information and support amongst adults with limited qualifications but relatively high self-efficacy.

Although many clients started with relatively high self-efficacy and thus produced a ceiling effect, there was still some room for change. Overall, the mean self-efficacy score between the first and last session rose from 2.47 to 2.69 (see Table 11.2.); however, attrition bias makes this finding indicative only, and does not allow us to conclude that GOAL had a positive overall impact on self-efficacy. (For example, clients whose self-efficacy did not improve over the course of GOAL may have been more likely to drop out and thus not produce exit data.)

Table 11.2. *Changes in self-efficacy. First session and exit data*

|		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Self-efficacy	**First session**	2.47	249	.84	.000
	Exit data	2.67	249	.68	

Further analysis of the data (see Table B.24 in Appendix B) indicates that those clients who experienced larger positive change in their self-efficacy were those who:

- already had relatively high self-efficacy at their first session
- attended more counselling sessions
- had a more positive attitude towards learning
- were female
- were early school leavers
- were not unemployed.

Respondents to the follow-up survey were very positive about the impacts they perceived counselling had on their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-image. When asked if counselling helped them to be more confident about achieving their education-related goals, slightly more than half (53%) of follow-up survey respondents reported the counselling helped them "a lot" in terms of their **confidence about achieving education-related goals** and a further 35% felt that counselling helped "a bit" in this regard. With regard to their **confidence about achieving career/employment goals**, 46% felt that the counselling helped them "a lot" and 36% said it helped "a bit".

As further analysis demonstrates (see Figure 11.2.) **clients with fully achieved objectives showed a more pronounced improvement in confidence** than those whose objectives were partially achieved or not achieved at all (73% vs 50% and 9% respectively) by the time of the follow-up survey. However, we are not able to ascertain the direction of causality in this relationship. It is possible that achieving objectives led to larger improvements in self-confidence, or that bigger gains in self-confidence made it more likely that clients would achieve their objectives, or that the two factors influenced each other.

Figure 11.2. *% Achievement of educational goals and confidence (statistically significant association, p=0.002, N=93)*
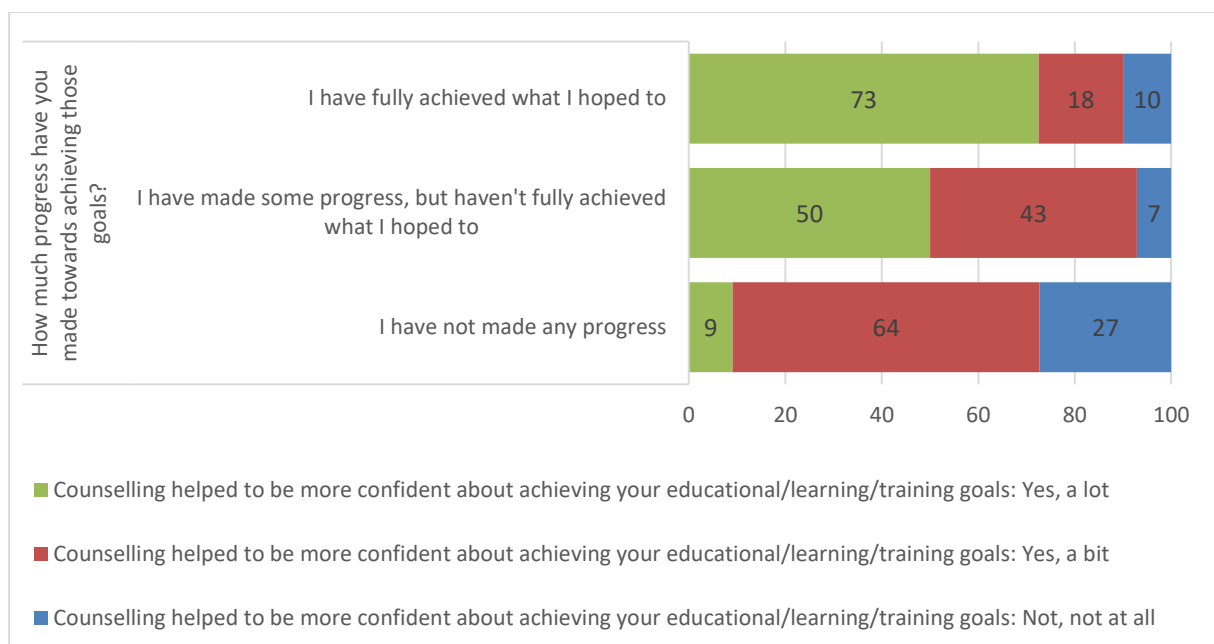
Clients across countries reported that the counselling helped them to **change their self-image through increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem**. As one client in Flanders reported:

> *I grew up in a neighbourhood of public housing. In that kind of environment, nobody thinks about himself as "being smart". Neither did I. Furthermore, I didn't succeed in my primary ambition to develop a professional career as a sportsman. So when I first visited de Leerwinkel, I hardly had any self-esteem. My counsellor really helped me to develop this self-esteem. He convinced me that I was able to achieve more than I thought I could.*

Counsellors in Lithuania said that, from their perspective, one of the clearest and strongest outcomes of GOAL was that **clients began to think more clearly and optimistically about their future, in part due to having more information about their opportunities, but also due to an improved self-image**. As one client in that country observed:

> *After counselling I understood that I am not such a loser as I previously thought. My counsellor persuaded me that after finishing my education I can find a good job, I hope to continue this way.*

Because counsellors in Iceland were working with very vulnerable clients, they placed particular emphasis on self-esteem, self-confidence and self-image. A considerable amount of time during the sessions was dedicated to these issues. As one client in that country reported, this approach:

> *Increased my self-confidence. I felt that hadn't achieved anything, but when we wrote it down I could see that I had achieved a lot of things.*

These gains in self-confidence and self-esteem were sometimes specific to education and employment, but also spread into other areas of life, producing **indirect benefits**. One client in Flanders highlighted the impact of GOAL on her parenting, and her role in society:

> *I feel like I understand the society better. I know my possibilities and that I can play an active role in changing my life and society* [...] *As a mum, you want to be able to help your kids with their schoolwork, but I didn't know Dutch very well. I was afraid my child would be ashamed of me and the fact that I couldn't help her. Because of the counselling and my education I now have a lot more confidence in doing these things.*

Better understanding of oneself and one's potential

In addition to helping clients learn more about educational opportunities, counsellors sought to help clients learn more about themselves, and their own interests and potential. As a client in Iceland observed:

> *The counsellor was impartial and helped me discover myself without pressing me, helped me realise my good qualities and what I would like to do.*

Clients in Slovenia also highlighted this change, saying that guidance:

> *Open your eyes, means a lot, encourages you, makes you realise you're worth something.*

> *Encouraged one to think about things in life that one otherwise did not* [think about].

11.3 The development and realisation of education- and employment-related goals

A central aim of the GOAL counselling model was to **encourage clients to develop their own goals and plans for achieving those goals, rather than just doing what the counsellor suggested**. The aim was to support the client in choosing and then taking their own steps forward – or, to use another metaphor, to put the client in the driving seat. As noted by counsellors in Slovenia, ideally clients would not realise the full extent of the support they had received from their counsellor. For many GOAL clients, the mere fact of forming and pursuing a goal was itself a significant step forward: it involved reflecting on one's life, one's potential, one's interests, one's commitments and one's opportunities, then establishing realistic goals and plans for pursuing those goals. This is something that many clients had not previously done within the educational domain, and particularly not in a systematic, supported way. As one Iceland client observed of GOAL, it was a:

> *Great help in finding myself and my longings and what I am going to do.*

Another client from Iceland highlighted the same theme, saying that counselling:

> *Gave me an idea about what I can possibly do and how I can achieve it.* [It] *increases one's own possibilities and shows you that there is not just one way to reach your goals.*

In terms of goals, the majority of clients (66%) who responded to the follow-up survey said that education/training/learning related objectives brought them to counselling; 42% said they came because of job-related goals. The vast majority (86%) of clients reported that they set some educational goals as part of the counselling process. Educational goals sometimes served as intermediate goals on the route to the achievement of employment goals, e.g. when a client wanted to become a nurse and had to complete particular education and training courses to do so. The follow-up survey data suggest that there are some positive outcomes with regards to the achievement of educational goals set by this group of clients. Responding a relatively short period of time after their counselling (usually two to four months later), 38% of follow-up survey respondents reported that they had **fully achieved what they hoped for**, 50% of these clients said they had made some progress towards their educational goals, and only 12% said that they had not made any progress.

As part of the monitoring data, clients who had more than one guidance episode were asked during their last session (N=432) if they have taken the steps they hoped to. **66% of these clients agreed fully that they had taken the planned steps and 23% partially agreed**. Only 12% of the clients reported that they had not taken the steps they hoped to at the point of their last guidance session. Despite these results covering a much broader (and less self-selected) range of GOAL clients than the follow-up survey results, the findings from the two instruments were very similar, suggesting that follow-up survey respondents are not necessarily unrepresentative of the GOAL clients who had more than one guidance session.

Further analysis[21] of the monitoring data suggests younger clients and those with more positive attitude towards learning new things were more likely to report that that have taken the steps the hoped to. Further analysis of the follow-up survey suggests there was no one single factor that was associated with the achievement of educational goals set during counselling. As a very high proportion of respondents reported that they fully or partially achieved their educational goals, this suggests that the small number of respondents who did not achieve their goals were more likely to represent individual cases hampered by a combination of personal, economic and social factors rather than group-level trends that could be explored using quantitative data. Barriers are discussed in full detail in Section 11.5.

During the first counselling session all clients were asked if they had specific learning goals and the same question was also asked at the guidance exit point. The clients' responses (see Table 11.3.) suggest that there was change in the learning objectives of the GOAL clients following counselling. Amongst clients who did not have any specific learning objectives at the start of the guidance, 29% said at the end of guidance that they wanted to achieve a specific qualification and 21% wanted to improve their skills in a specific area. The data also demonstrate the complexity and multiple dimensions of the GOAL clients' learning goals. At both time points, a number of clients chose more than one learning goal – for example, some had aspirations to improve their skills in general, but also wanting to achieve a qualification. As further analysis shows, 48% of the clients had only one learning objective, 26% had two and 15% had three education/learning-related goals at the start of their councelling.

During the follow-up survey we also asked clients if they had set any job, employment or career-related goals: 44% of the respondents agreed they had set goals in this area during their counselling. Out of this group, **36% reported that they fully achieved what they hoped to in this area and 35% said that they had made some progress towards their goals**. The lower rate of achievement of employment-related goals compared to education goals is likely explained by the salience and proximity of such objectives. GOAL clients were more likely to target educational goals, both as an end in themselves (at least temporarily) and as a stepping stone to longer-term employment goals. In addition to taking longer to achieve, employment goals – in comparison to educational goals – may be more likely to be outside the control of the individual: that is, so long as funding is available, it is likely to be easier to enrol in a course than to get the job one wants.

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[21] These are results of multinomial logistic regression controlling for gender, target group, educational qualifications, employment status and self-efficacy.

Table 11.3. *Do you have specific learning goals? % of row total. First session and exit data, (statistically significant differences p=0.000), multiple choice questions at both time points*

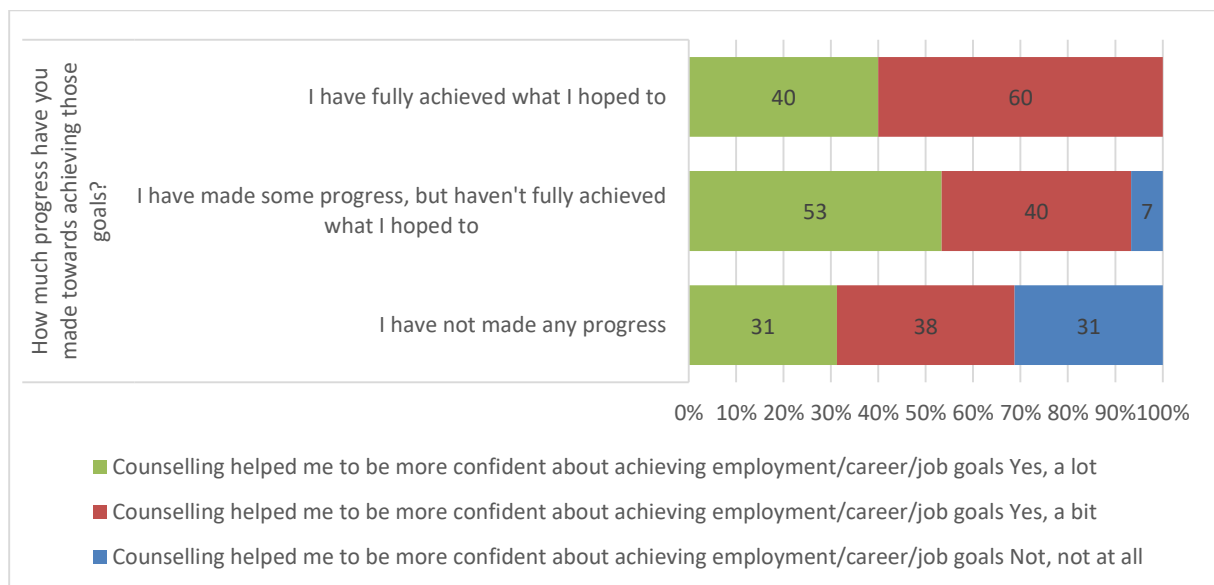| Learning objective at ENTRY	Learning objectives at EXIT						
	I want to achieve a qualification	I want to achieve a specific qualification	I want to improve my skills in general	I want to improve my skills in a specific area	I need this training for my current job	I need this learning to find a job	I do not have any specific objectives
I want to achieve a qualification of any sort	44	54	34	21	5	32	4
I want to achieve a specific qualification	18	72	20	39	9	39	4
I want to improve my skills in general	37	34	57	31	9	36	8
I want to improve my skills in a specific area	14	40	31	65	11	35	3
I need this training for my current job	9	53	9	56	62	18	3
I need this learning to find a job	24	48	23	37	5	62	6
I do not have any specific objectives	7	29	29	21	7	36	43

When collecting monitoring data, counsellors recorded the clarity of clients' employment-related goals, both at the start and end of the counselling process. By clarity we refer to whether the client had specific goals in mind (see Table 11.4.). Overall 28% of all clients **experienced positive changes in terms of the clarity of their career goals**. Out of the clients who did not have any specific career goals, 16% after the counselling had a specific job in mind and 41% knew what industry/type of work they wanted to do.

Table 11.4. *Does your client have clear career goals? % of table total. First session and exit data*

		Exit data							
		No, the client does not have any specific job or career area in mind		Yes, the client has a specific job in mind		Yes, the client knows what industry/type of work wants to do		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
First session	**No, the client do not have any specific job or career area in mind**	37	14	14	5	35	13	86	33
	Yes, the client has a specific job in mind	5	2	38	15	27	10	70	27
	Yes, the client knows what industry/type of work wants to do	16	6	27	10	61	23	104	40
	Total	**58**	**22**	**79**	**30**	**123**	**47**	**260**	**100**

As further analysis suggests (see Figure 11.3.) there is an indication that clients who did not achieve their employment/career goals were more likely to report no improvement in their self-confidence, compared to clients whose objectives were partially achieved or fully achieved at all (31% vs 7% and 0% accordingly).

Figure 11.3. *Achievement of employment/career goals and confidence (close to statistically significant association, %, p=0.144, N=41)*

- Counselling helped me to be more confident about achieving employment/career/job goals Yes, a lot
- Counselling helped me to be more confident about achieving employment/career/job goals Yes, a bit
- Counselling helped me to be more confident about achieving employment/career/job goals Not, not at all

11.4 The achievement of education and employment outcomes

The primary focus of GOAL was guidance towards education; therefore, educational enrolments are a key indicator for measuring outcomes. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, there were a number of methodological challenges impeding the tracking of clients' educational outcomes after they left GOAL. These challenges are not specific to this evaluation, but are characteristic of research on adult education in general – a field in which the tracking of study participants over time is notoriously difficult due to the voluntary nature of adult education, the fragmented nature of the sector, and the lack of shared data across the sector. Similar challenges exist with regard to tracking employment outcomes.

Amongst the 438 clients whose monitoring data includes information on GOAL programme exit, 48% entered education/training, 7% entered employment and 4% improved their employment. In the following sections, we first look at education outcomes, then at employment outcomes.

Figure 11.4. *Outcomes reported by counsellors, % (N=438) (multiple choice question, thus answers do not add up to 100%)*
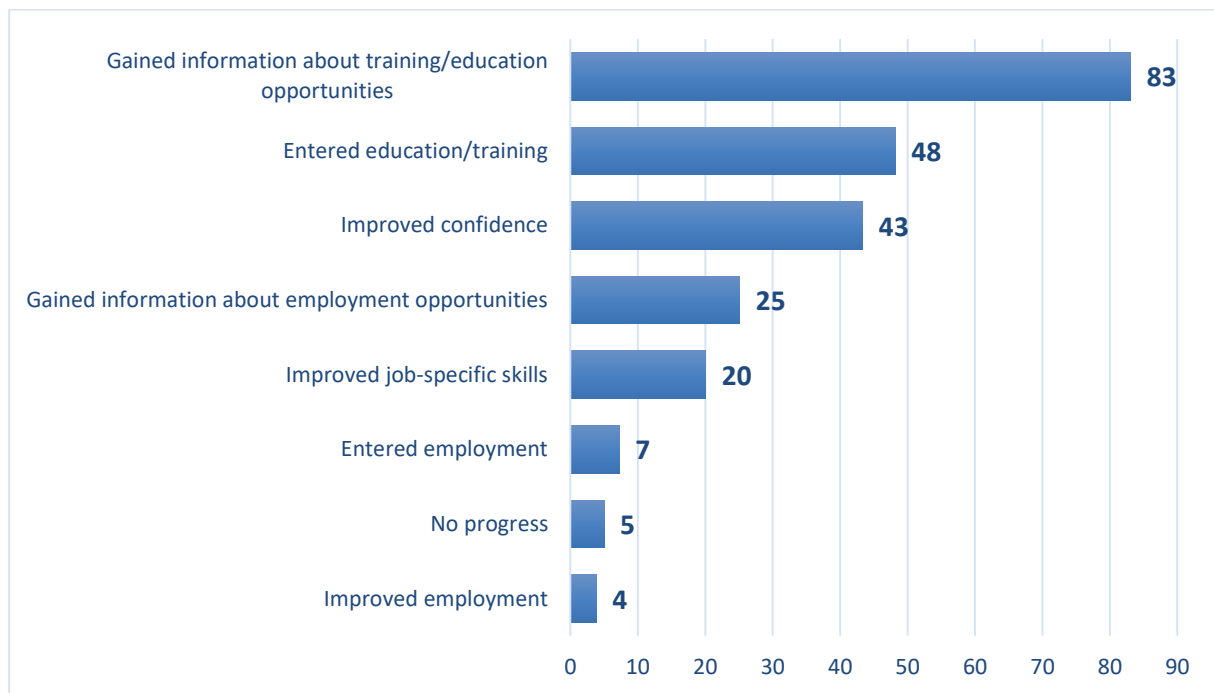
As Figure 11.5. illustrates, there were some country-specific differences regarding client outcomes. Amongst clients for whom we have exit data (from the data monitoring instrument), Slovenia and Flanders had the highest proportion of clients entering education/training (61% and 57% accordingly).

Figure 11.5. *Outcomes reported by counsellors by country, % (multiple choice question, thus answers do not add up to 100%)*
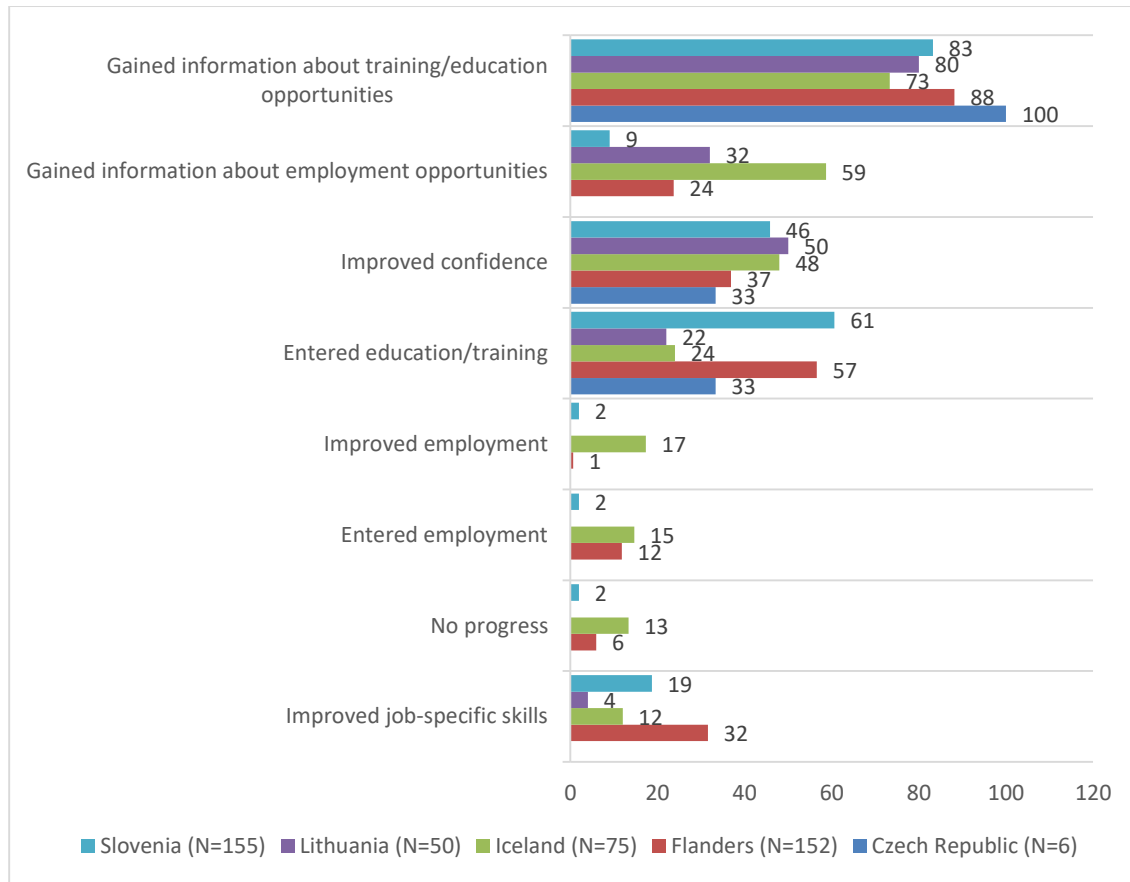

Education outcomes

Amongst follow-up survey respondents who entered GOAL to pursue educational objectives, **71% had enrolled on a course** by the time of their exit from GOAL. Of this group, **77% enrolled on a course leading to a qualification**. The main reasons cited by clients for enrolling on a course (see Figure 11.6.) were improving career prospects (57%) and improving skills in general (42%). However, around one-third of clients (35%) mentioned that they needed to complete the course to get a specific job. A substantial proportion of the clients (36%) mentioned some other reasons for taking up a course, e.g. enrolment as a stepping stone on their journey towards higher or further education.

Figure 11.6. *Reasons for enrolling on a course, follow-up survey data, % (N=86) (multiple choice question, thus answers do not add up to 100%)*
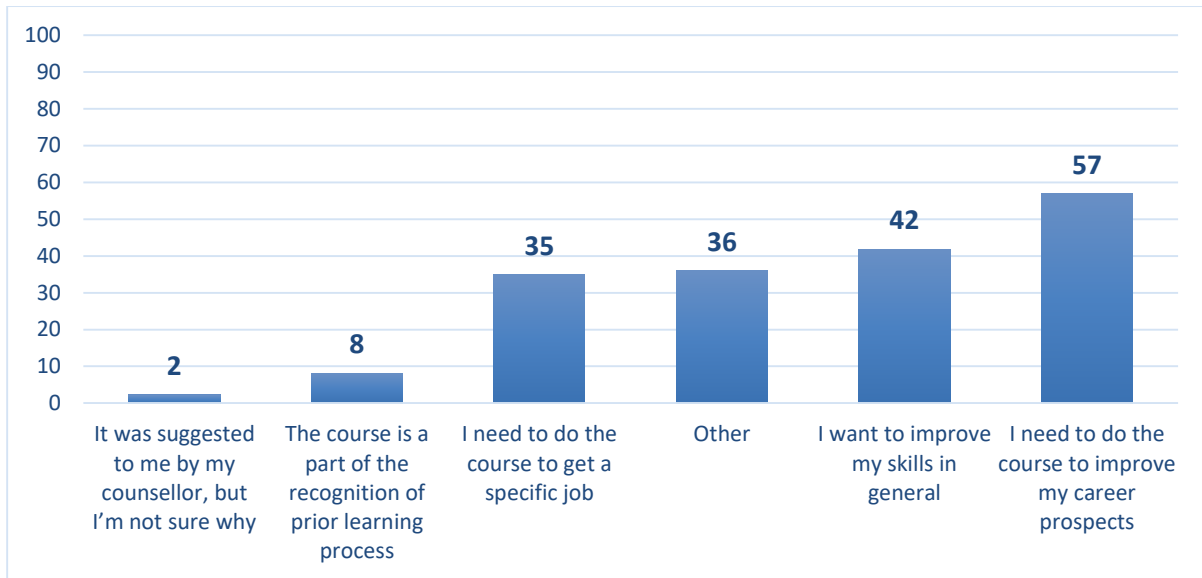
Almost half of the follow-up survey respondents **(48%) said that it was their counsellor who told them about the course they enrolled on** and a further 7% reported that they found the course themselves, but still based on advice from their counsellor (see Figure 11.7.). Some of the other ways that clients found their course was through friends or family members.

Figure 11.7. *How client found the course, follow-up survey data, % (N=82) (multiple choice question, thus answers do not add up to 100%)*
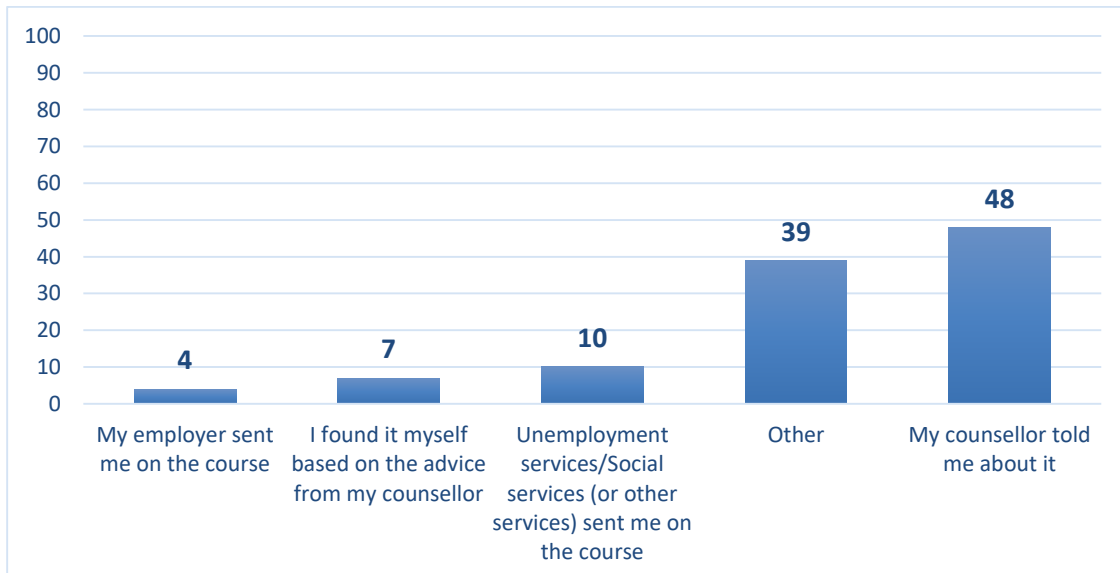
As discussed above and in Chapter 3, it is extremely difficult to track clients as they move into or out of further education. In the absence of extensive, coordinated data sharing across across a range of policy areas and service providers, it was not possible in this evaluation to rigorously assess the

impact of counselling on entry into education programmes. However, **in one GOAL country, Flanders, extensive efforts were made to track clients after they left GOAL** at the intervention site at de Stap. This tracking was done by counsellors, who expended a significant amount of time and energy on this work, in terms of making arrangements with other organisations regarding data sharing and/or routinely contacting education providers to check on enrolments. Counsellors in other countries were not able to engage in such tracking efforts, nor were evaluators in any of the six countries able to secure data sharing arrangements.

In Flanders, there were 145 clients for whom reasons for the guidance ending were registered. A quarter of these (24%) said that the guidance ended because they started a course. However, this percentage understates the effect of GOAL, as clients at de Stap were able to continue GOAL guidance after starting a training or course, and thus would not have been included in this figure. Furthermore, a number of clients were likely to go on to enrol in a course but had not yet done so at the time of their final GOAL session. Educational calendars will have been a factor: clients who complete their guidance in the spring or summer may have concrete plans to enrol in an education programme, but may not be able to do so until the new academic year begins in autumn. Additionally, some clients ended their guidance unannounced without exit data being registered; some may have enrolled in courses without informing their counsellor.

More accurate tallies of enrolment may come from analysis of data sources outside the GOAL monitoring data. In Flanders, **183 clients** agreed to grant GOAL access to a **Ministry of Education** database. Analysis of this data shows that **49% of these clients had enrolled in an educational programme at a Centre for Adult Education** (providing formal education only) as of April 2017**.** Of this group, 74% obtained at least one modular certificate by this date.

However, Centres for Adult Education are but one of the educational options available in Flanders. Counsellors at de Stap sought to address this limitation by directly contacting educational institutions (including but not limited to Centres for Adult Education) to follow-up on clients[22]. This effort revealed a potentially more accurate educational participation rate. For clients who started their guidance between October 2015 and April 2017 (the evaluation's data collection period) and who attended more than one GOAL session, **74% (84 out of 114 clients) had enrolled in an adult education course** (whether formal or non-formal). (Enrolment information was not collected for clients who had only one session, as clients in a single guidance session were not tracked.)

Employment outcomes

The primary focus of GOAL was education and, as discussed above, achievement of employment goals may take longer than the evaluation period and getting data on clients after they leave GOAL is

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[22] The Ministry of Education data only includes enrolments in Formal Adult Education, whereas the data collected by de Stap counsellors includes all enrolments, including in the Central Examination Commission, Secondary Education (normal secondary schools), Non-formal vocational training, Higher Education and Dual System (Part-time Learning and working. The wide range of institutions in which de Stap clients enrolled illustrates the complexity of the adult education landscape in Flanders, and the wide range of educational possibilities for individuals seeking to achieve a qualification of secondary education.

difficult; however, some data on employment outcomes was recorded. In the follow-up survey, **36% of clients reported that some aspects of their employment changed since they started counselling**. Of this group (N=43) the highest number (26) said that they had moved from unemployment into employment. However, it must be noted that this positive outcome is in most cases probably the result not of counselling alone but of a combination of counselling and other factors. Changes in employment typically depend on a complex network of factors, only some of which individuals themselves have influence over.

Figure 11.8. *Changes in employment, follow-up survey results in absolute numbers (N=43), multiple choice responses*
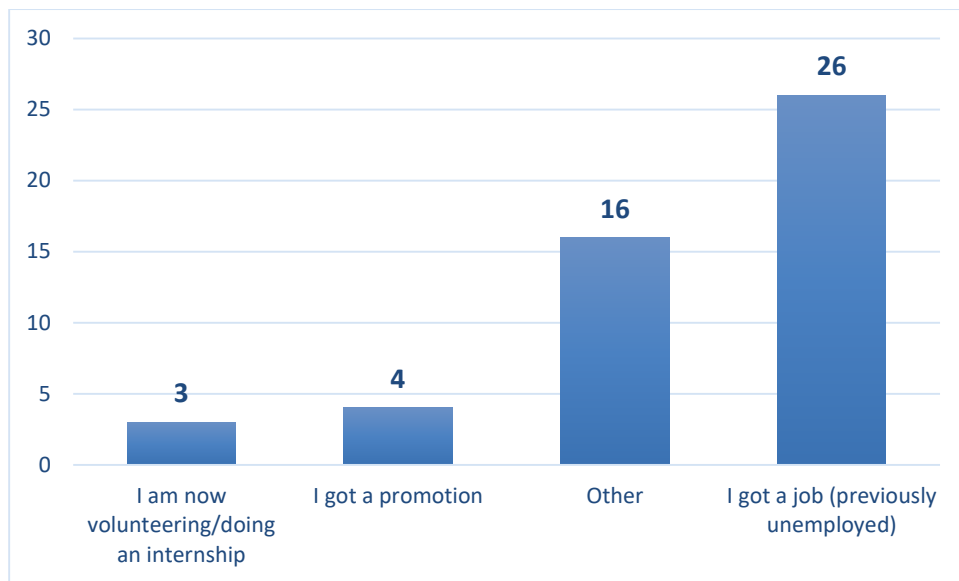

11.5 Barriers to progress

As discussed throughout this report, GOAL clients faced a number of barriers to progression. According to counsellors a common denominator among the clients was the longing to improve their situation and better themselves, but in many cases the barriers were overwhelming, or at least seemed so:

> *Everyone wants to improve themselves, everyone wants to increase their knowledge, everyone wants to grow as an individual and go through self-examination, but there are so many complexities* (GOAL Programme Staff).

The GOAL monitoring data sought to quantify these barriers and challenges. At their exit interview, clients who had not achieved their initial objectives were asked to cite the main barriers that prevented them from doing so. Figure 11.9. shows that the main barriers were reported as: lack of motivation (26%); other personal reasons (19%); lack of confidence (17%); lack of support from family (15%); and health problems (14%).

Figure 11.9. *What would you say has prevented you from taking those steps? %*
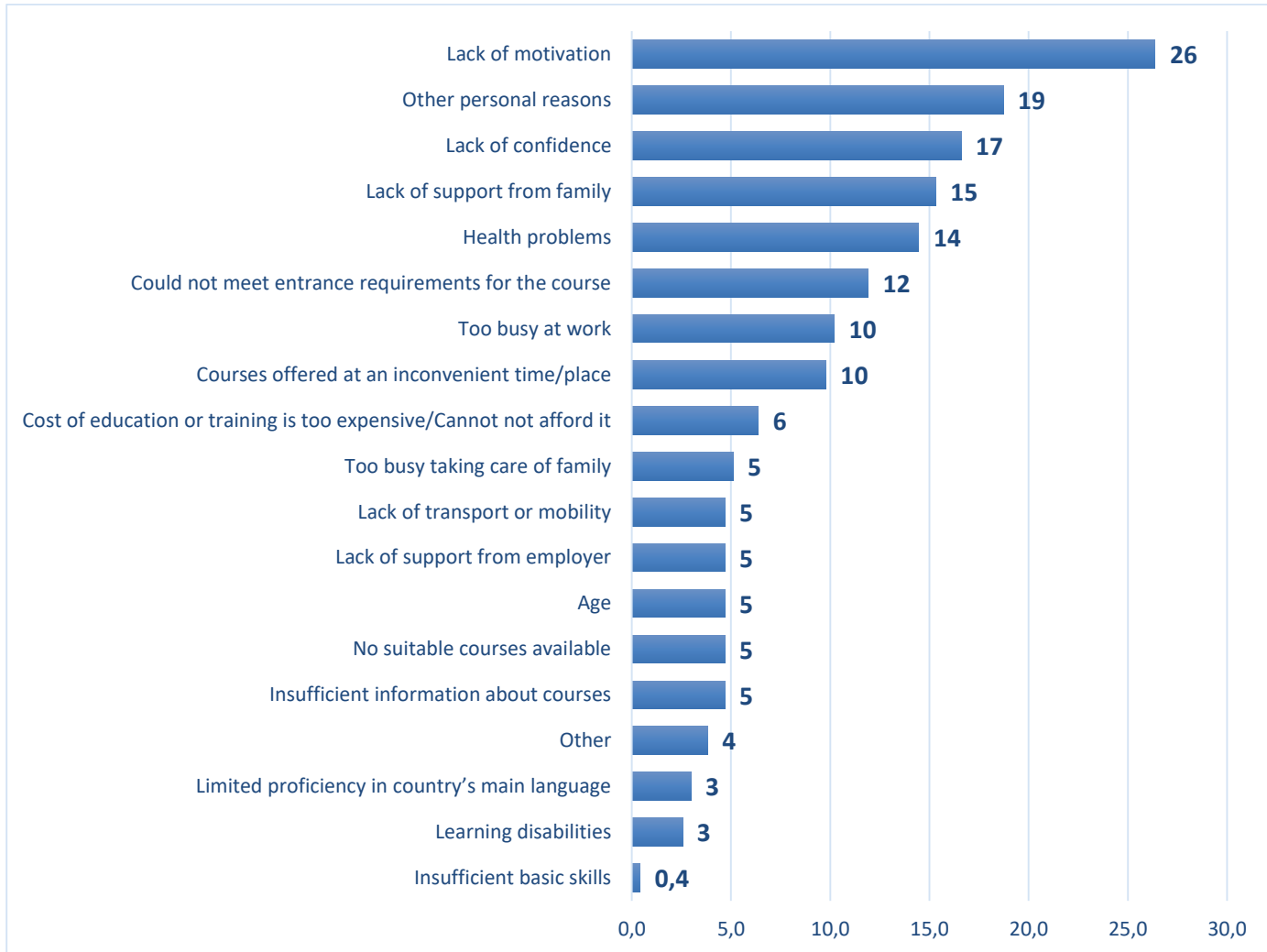

These figures come from the client monitoring data. Comparing these figures to other stakeholders' input on this issue, we found that counsellors and other programme stakeholders (e.g. policymakers) were more likely than clients to emphasise **financial issues** as a barrier to the achievement of client objectives – in particular, the lack of subsidised funding (in some countries) for adult education courses. This gave rise to concerns about raising service users' expectations, as highlighted by an Icelandic policy maker:

> *I wanted us to consider in the very beginning that for these people financial support is the main issue. I felt we needed to be aware of the fact that we were possibly motivating them to take part in something that would never actually be a real possibility.*

However, looking beyond the monitoring data to the follow-up survey findings, we found that here clients were more likely to cite course expense (see Figure 11.10.).

Figure 11.10. *Reasons for not enrolling on a course, follow-up survey data in absolute numbers (N=36) (multiple choice question)*
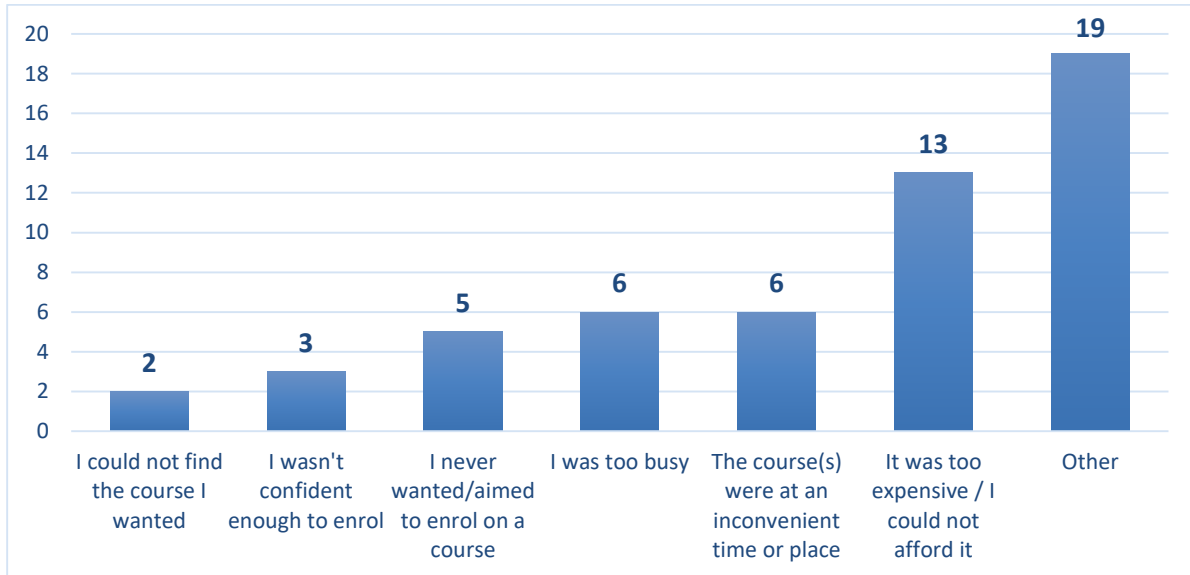
As one Czech client observed:

> *Due to this service I have learnt there are courses which leads to certain qualification much faster. I am very interested in this and I like it. On the other hand, the problem is, it costs a lot of money and I don't have enough financial resources to pay for them.*

There were no clear reasons for the difference in client response on this issue across the two data collection instruments.

In addition to financial issues, another key barrier highlighted by counsellors was **client readiness**. "Higher need" clients typically were less ready to make steps into education or employment, and needed to focus more on stepping stone changes such as improvements in self-confidence. Particularly in Iceland, where clients were especially vulnerable, but also amongst higher need clients in other countries, client readiness played a central, shaping role on the potential outcomes of guidance.

11.6 Pulling it all together: contexts, resources, stepping stones and outcomes

This section looks at the client outcomes pursued by the GOAL pilot, and the key configurations of programme contexts, resources, strategies and stepping stones that appear to support or impede the achievement of those outcomes.

Outcomes

Enrolment in education or improved employment status were the ultimate objectives of GOAL counselling; however, it is recognised in the research literature (and by GOAL programme developers and counsellors) that the journey to one or both of those objectives may be long, involve stops and starts, and is likely to require a number of intermediary steps. These intermediary steps are discussed in the Stepping Stones section below.

Data on the achievement of educational and employment outcomes is limited by the methodological challenges of this evaluation. Due to a lack of data sharing agreements across educational institutions and government ministries in the six GOAL countries, it was not possible to longitudinally track all GOAL clients. Longitudinal data is available via the evaluation's follow-up survey; however, respondents to the survey were self-selecting and cannot be seen as representative of all GOAL clients. Client exit data is available for 438 clients; again, however, these clients cannot be seen as representative of the full GOAL population of 890. Of the 438 clients whose monitoring data includes information on GOAL programme exit, **48% entered education or training by the end of GOAL**, 7% entered employment and 4% improved their employment. Due to a lack of longitudinal tracking across most countries, it is not known how many clients achieved educational or employment outcomes after leaving GOAL. Amongst follow-up survey respondents who entered GOAL to pursue educational objectives, 71% had enrolled on a course by the time of their exit from GOAL. Of this group, 77% enrolled on a course leading to a qualification[23].

The evaluation's most rigourous longitudinal data comes from Flanders. In this country, it was possible to track the educational progress of 114 clients who had attended two or more GOAL sessions one of the programme sites (de Stap). Of these 114 multi-session clients, **74% had enrolled in an adult education course** as of April 2017. It is not known how many enrolled in a course after that date.

An unfortunate challenge faced by this evaluation is the difficulty of contextualising this figure. The research literature contains very little relevant information about the impact of guidance programmes such as GOAL on educational outcomes; to the best of our knowledge, there are no directly comparable studies to our own. Thus our own evaluation can only report our own findings, without contextualisation. Our hope is that these findings contribute to a future research literature that will better enable informed comparisons and evaluations.

Programme context

The key programme contexts influencing client outcomes were:

- client need and readiness
- the availability of free or subsidised adult education courses.

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[23] Due the the Netherlands' different programme model, we have excluded that country from this analysis.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7 in particular, there was a large amount of **heterogeneity within the overall GOAL target group** of low-educated adults. Some clients came to GOAL with relatively clear ideas of their educational goals and the steps they needed to take to achieve those goals. Other clients were less clear and/or less motivated, and still others had particularly significant needs. Clients in this latter group typically faced a range of personal and situational barriers to educational progress, including poor psychological and/or physical health, substance abuse problems and social isolation.

Qualitative evidence indicates that **clients in these three different categories typically had differing capabilities with regards to outcomes**[24]. For clients in the first group (low need clients), context-specific information from the counsellor was generally sufficient to enable the client to enrol in an education course. Clients in the second group needed more support and more counselling sessions but did not typically face major personal or psychological barriers to enrolment. However, they did often face barriers related to motivation, direction and self-belief that had to be overcome on the pathway to enrolment. Clients in the third group were high need, and were typically unable within the duration of the GOAL pilot to achieve "hard outcomes" such as enrolment on a course. The focus for these clients was therefore on taking attitudinal and noncognitive steps.

Despite GOAL clients' low levels of education, they typically entered GOAL with very positive attitudes to learning and moderate to high self-efficacy scores. This suggests that the majority of clients were open to additional learning, and had a general belief in their capacity to achieve their objectives in life. These positive findings in turn suggest that the problem faced by most GOAL clients before the pilot was **not a lack of interest in education or low general self belief, but a lack of knowledge about educational opportunities** and potentially a lack of domain-specific confidence about the achievement of educational goals.

However, even when counselling did enable clients to understand their educational options, and believe in their potential to achieve them, clients in some countries were unable to take forward steps due to the **high cost of adult education courses**. GOAL clients typically had very limited incomes, and in the absence of free or heavily subsidised courses, were unable to enrol on adult education programmes. In such situations, **the clients achieved readiness, in terms of being ready to advance their education, but the policy environment itself was not ready to support them**. The "readiest" (i.e. most supportive) policy environment was that of Flanders, where formal adult education has no or reduced enrolment fees for programmes focusing on obtaining basic education skills or obtaining a diploma of secondary education. In one way the Netherlands also has a highly "ready" policy environment: free adult literacy courses are available to anyone who needs them, and the Literacy Screener is able to identify need. However, as highlighted by the resistance of native Dutch speakers to enrolling on literacy courses, the offer of these courses does not appear to match client interests or self-perceived needs. There is thus a **mismatch between what these clients are**

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[24] These categorisations were arrived at inductively over the course of the evaluation, rather than deductively before data collection began. Therefore counsellors were not able to collect quantitative data matching client outcomes to client type.

ready to study and what policy is ready to offer them. Such a mismatch did not exist for clients who were not native Dutch speakers.

Programme resources and strategies

Policy readiness was variable across countries, and client readiness was variable both within and across countries. **Programme readiness, on the other hand, was more consistent**: across all six countries, **counselling quality was high**. Clients typically got custom-fit, client-centred guidance which took account of their personal contexts, needs and challenges, and which thus increased their likelihood of achieving their goals. Two areas where counselling quality differed across countries were in the **number of counselling sessions** available to clients and **the independence of GOAL** from the educational institutions to which counsellors referred clients. Across all countries, it was generally believed that all but the lowest need clients benefitted from more than one session; where this could not be provided, overall counselling quality suffered, with potential negative impacts on outcomes.

With regard to the independence of GOAL from the educational institutions to which counsellors referred clients, it was not possible in this evaluation to ascertain the impact of this on client outcomes. In countries or settings where GOAL counsellors were embedded in particular institutions, the clients who these counsellors worked with tended to be more focused and "lower need" than GOAL clients on average, which likely had an impact on progression into adult education.

Stepping stones

The concept of "stepping stones"[25] refers in particular to **internal changes in knowledge, reasoning or beliefs**. These changes provide the stepping stones towards more tangible, externally observable outcomes such as enrolments on educational courses or labour market improvements. The journey to "hard" outcomes may be long, and is likely to require a number of intermediary steps, with many of these steps focused on noncognitive traits such as self-confidence and self-image. This is particularly true for the higher need clients targeted by the GOAL pilot. These internal, intermediary changes are important steps forward, and their achievement should not be taken for granted. For many GOAL clients, such seemingly small steps or so-called "soft outcomes" are challenging but necessary prerequisites towards the longer process of achieving the "hard outcomes" of improved educational and/or employment status. Qualitative data from this evaluation indicate that **GOAL was successful at helping clients take positive steps with regard to noncognitive factors such as self-confidence and self-image**. Clients and counsellors alike emphasised the positive steps that clients took in these regards.

The GOAL pilot also appeared to have **strong, positive impacts on clients' knowledge about the educational opportunities available to them and the steps required to act on those opportunities**: surveyed clients reported a high level of satisfaction with the information they received and how it was delivered by counsellors. It was apparent from both clients' and counsellors' perspectives that the fragmented and complex adult education information landscape is difficult to navigate, even for

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[25] Referred to in the Realist Evaluation literature as 'Mechanisms'

trained professionals. A number of clients reported in qualitative interviews that the information they received from counsellors about educational opportunities – and in some cases the funding of those opportunities – would have been impossible to find on their own.

Clients also reported positive outcomes with regards to planning and goal setting – other important stepping stones towards educational outcomes. The GOAL counselling model emphasised the importance of clients developing their own objectives and plans for achieving those objectives, rather than simply being led by their counsellors. As part of this process, clients worked with their counsellors to develop plans for their next steps in education and/or employment. Client monitoring data show that **two-thirds of clients who had more than one guidance session reported that they had taken all the steps in that plan, and 23% said they had taken at least some of those steps**.

Summary

Due to methodological challenges, this evaluation lacks the long-term longitudinal data needed to draw robust conclusions about the impact of GOAL on educational and employment outcomes. However, data from the one country for which we do have relatively robust longitudinal data, Flanders, shows roughly three-quarters of multi-session clients from one intervention site entering adult education by the conclusion of data collection. Across GOAL as a whole, approximately half of clients for whom we have exit data entered education or training by during this period, while 7% entered employment and 4% improved their employment. Two-thirds of clients who had more than one guidance session reported that they had taken all the steps in the progression plan they developed with their counsellor, and just under one-quarter said they had taken at least some of those steps.

The key contextual factors influencing the achievement of educational and employment goals were client need/readiness and the availability (or lack) of free adult education courses. Clients without clear ideas of their opportunities and/or interests, or who lacked general or education-specific self-belief, needed to take a number of intermediary steps before they could enrol in courses. However, across all countries, most clients' attitudes to learning was highly positive and general self-efficacy was also fairly high, suggesting that for most members of the GOAL target group, the **primary barrier to advancing in education was not attitudinal but was a lack of sufficient knowledge and support regarding educational opportunities**. As noted by counsellors, domain-specific confidence and knowledge often go hand-in-hand: it is difficult for individuals (particularly those with limited qualifications) to feel confident about the next steps in education if they do not know what opportunities are available to them or even how to find information about those opportunities. The GOAL pilot appears to have played an important role by meeting these clients' need for the information and support.

Whereas client and policy readiness were highly variable, counselling quality was more consistent. In the five countries adopting the GOAL "custom-fit" counselling model (excluding the Netherlands), the quality of counselling appeared to be high. However, single-sessions counselling models were not as beneficial for most clients as multi-session models – even motivated clients typically required multiple sessions to get the appropriate level of information and support. Clients benefitted from a

counselling model in which digestible and actionable amounts of information were provided in each session; it was important to avoid overwhelming clients with too much information and too many challenges in one session. This was particularly important given GOAL's emphasis on putting clients in the driver's seat, i.e. ensuring that clients made their own decisions rather than just following the counsellor's lead.

No amount of high-quality counselling could overcome the key contextual factor influencing enrolment in adult education: in countries without free or heavily subsidised courses, even the most motivated and focused clients were unable to enrol in courses due to a lack of policy funding for adult education. In these instances, no amount of client and programme readiness could overcome a lack of policy readiness.

11.7 Key findings

Almost all clients **reported being satisfied** with GOAL. They said they felt more motivated and surer of their next steps after counselling, and believed they would act on the advice they were given. Almost all clients agreed that their next steps were clearer after only a single counselling session, with nearly four in five saying they were definitely clearer and one in five saying they were were somewhat clearer. GOAL seems to have done a very good job of providing relevant information to clients – an important task in the complex, fragemented adult education landscape. From the clients' perspective, this information made a significant difference to their understanding and ambitions. Most clients were held back by not by poor attitudes to learning but by lack of information and support to act on the opportunities available to them. In the GOAL counselling model (outside the Netherlands) clients were supported to develop their own educational plans and goals, rather than simply following the counsellor's lead. This client-centred model takes more time than other counselling approaches, but appeared to help clients improve their education-related motivation and self-belief.

As part of the counselling process, clients developed plans for achieving goals such as enrolment on a course. As of the end of data collection for this evaluation, 38% of follow-up survey respondents reported that they had fully achieved their educational goals (e.g. by enrolling in or completing a course) and 50% said they had made some progress towards those goals. Progress data is also available from the GOAL monitoring instrument. **Sixty-six percent of clients** for whom we have programme exit data **said that they had fully taken their planned steps by the end of counselling, and 23% they had taken at least some steps**.

In supporting clients to take these steps, it was not enough simply to provide client-centred, context-specific information, but to support clients in acting on that information. In most cases, this meant providing multiple counselling sessions. A key aim of these sessions was to **help clients take the intermediary steps needed on the pathway to enrolment in education** and/or improved employment. For higher need clients, these intermediary stepping stones typically focused on noncognitive gains such as improved self-belief and self-confidence.

For clients with the lowest levels of readiness (e.g. those facing particularly severe personal and/or psychological barriers), it was generally not feasible to progress into education or employment. Looking at all clients for whom we have exit data, **48% entered education/training, 7% entered employment and 4% improved their employment**. Amongst follow-up survey respondents who entered GOAL to pursue educational objectives, **71% had enrolled on a course** by the time of their exit from GOAL. Of this group, 77% had enrolled on a course leading to a qualification.

This evaluation was hampered by the inability to track GOAL clients after they left counselling. In Flanders, however, 183 clients agreed to grant GOAL access to a Ministry of Education database. 49% of these clients had enrolled in an educational programme at a Centre for Adult Education as of April 2017. However, Centres for Adult Education are but one of the educational options available in Flanders. Counsellors at one Flanders site (de Stap) addressed this limitation by directly contacting educational institutions (including but not limited to Centres for Adult Education) to follow-up on clients. This effort showed that **74% of clients who attended more than one GOAL session had enrolled in an adult education course**.

11.8 Key implications

The final section of this chapter draws out the main implications in respect of future programme development and policy. In terms of programme development it offers some lessons that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. As previous chapters of this report have discussed issues regarding programme quality, we do not revisit those issues here.

The policy implications section summarises the influences of policy issues and factors on the programme outcomes, and outcome-related messages for policy from the GOAL project's experiences. Not surprisingly, there are a number of overlapping themes across these sections. One of these is "readiness". **Whether at the client, programme or policy level, readiness plays a central role in determining what outcomes can be achieved**. Another overlapping theme is the relationship between programme outcome data and policy makers' support for funding. Particularly with regard to this latter issue, the divisions between policy and programme implications are less clear than in other chapters – for example, policy challenges influence the type and amount of data that programmes can collect, and this data in turn influences policy judgements of programmes.

Implications for future programme development

Expectations regarding client outcomes should match client needs and readiness. Even when clients come to counselling with positive attitudes to learning and a generally high level of self-efficacy, they are likely to struggle to to find the information they need. For a client-centred, "custom-fit" counselling service such as GOAL, the aim is not just to provide information about possible next steps, but to provide information that is tailored to the needs, interests and challenges of each individual client. For some clients, this process may take only one session. However, most clients within the GOAL target groups will benefit from two or more sessions.

When establishing initial targets for programme outcomes, client readiness – in terms of how many and what sorts of intermediary steps are required in order to move forward in education or

employment – interacts with programme readiness, i.e. the quality of the counselling provided and the number and length of sessions that are available to clients.

Policy implications

Influences of policy

As discussed earlier in this report, guidance targeted at low-educated adults is an under-supported area of adult education, which is itself an under-supported, under-funded sector. This lack of policy interest and support has a number of implications, with the most important of these being related to **funding**. In the absence of sufficient policy commitment to providing educational guidance for low-educated adults, it will be **difficult or even impossible to develop and maintain sustainable, sufficiently well resourced guidance programmes**. Resources are needed to provide high-quality counselling over a sufficient numbers of sessions, thus enabling clients to achieve outcomes that will benefit themselves and society more broadly.

However, no amount of high quality counselling (or "programme readiness") is enough to overcome a **lack of free or highly subsidised adult education courses**. It is not sufficient to develop programme and participant readiness. For educational outcomes to be achieved, policy readiness is required, in terms of providing an educational landscape that makes it **feasible for low-income individuals to act on their educational ambitions**. In Slovenia, 61% of GOAL clients entered education or training after receiving guidance, but this figure would have been higher if more funding was available for courses. As evaluators in Slovenia reported, the GOAL target groups in that country were hampered in their educational progress by economic obstacles and/or the unsuitability of the programmes available to them. One-third of GOAL clients in Slovenia said they would like to learn but are unable to enrol in the selected programmes because the education and training costs are too high for them. In that country, some free-of-charge programmes are currently being developed at the national level, with the aim of reaching specific underserved groups. However, there are other vulnerable groups, such as the working disabled, for whom appropriate courses are not yet available. A key challenge in all countries is convincing governments to provide a broad range of affordable courses that are in line not just with specific government objectives but the learning objectives of underserved groups.

Another key implication of the fragmented, complex nature of adult education is the difficulty of tracking clients. The lack of data sharing across educational institutions and policy sectors makes the **longitudinal tracking of outcomes** from interventions such as GOAL methodologically problematic, in large part because of the tremendous resource investment that would be required both to: a) track programme participants for sufficient time after programme participation, and b) establish and maintain matched comparison groups. In the absence of sufficient – and sufficiently rigorous – longitudinal tracking of programme participants, evaluation assessments of programme impacts are merely indicative, and make it difficult for programme developers and policy makers alike to assess the true impact and thus value of the intervention.

That being said, it is important that programmes do their best to produce high quality monitoring and evaluation data. Evidence that comes with caveats is better than no evidence at all, a fact which has clear implications for programmes as well as policy. In particular, it is possible that a one-session

counselling model could have indirect, negative effects on programme sustainability. There are two primary reasons for this:

1. One-session counselling models are likely to produce fewer positive impacts than multi-session models.
2. Whatever the range of impacts produced by one-session models, it is impossible under such models to produce even the most basic within-programme longitudinal data – e.g. it is not feasible in a one-session model to assess the degree to which clients feel they have achieved the goals they established at the start of counselling. As such it is less possible to produce meaningful data regarding client steps towards longer-term outcomes.

Another programme-level of implication of policy makers' need for outcome-related evidence is that future programmes may wish to compare outcomes for low, moderate and high need clients. Doing so would provide a clearer picture for programme developers and policy makers alike regarding realistic outcomes for the different levels of client readiness.

Messages for policy

A key message for policy is that **client readiness is a primary determinant** of potential programme effects. As evidenced in the GOAL pilot, it is possible to achieve a high degree of "programme readiness", i.e. programme quality, across a variety of different national settings and contexts, but although this achievement is a necessary step towards successful client outcomes, it is not a sufficient one. Particularly vulnerable clients are unlikely to achieve measurable educational or employment outcomes without making progress in a range of personal and psychological areas first.

That being said, many members of the GOAL target groups came to the programme with positive attitudes to learning, despite their low levels of education. This suggests that there is a **high level of untapped desire (or at least willingness) amongst the low-educated population to improve their qualifications**. For many individuals in the GOAL target groups, the key barriers to doing so were not dispositional or attitudinal but were instead related to the complex, highly opaque information landscape in adult education. Clients were enthused to learn about the educational opportunities that were available to them, and a high percentage of clients reported acting on those opportunities with the support of their counsellor. This suggests that the GOAL approach to guidance could play an important role in helping Member States achieve educational targets. However, as noted above, relevant outcomes cannot be achieved on a large scale without sufficient funding for adult education courses.

12 Conclusion: answering the evaluation questions

This chapter brings together the key findings of this evaluation report. The chapter is structured primarily around the five research questions (or sets of questions) underpinning this evaluation:

1. To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence this? (section 12.1)

2. What service user outcomes were achieved, for what groups, and to what degree? (section 12.2)

3. What programme-level factors were associated with the achievement of high service quality and/or positive service user outcomes? (section 12.3)

4. What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of high service quality and/or positive service user outcomes? (section 12.4)

5. What was the Return on Expectations? That is, to what degree were programme expectations met? (section 12.5)

The chapter then summarises implications and key messages for programmes (section 12.6) and policy (section 12.7), before closing with concluding remarks (section 12.8).

12.1 Evaluation question 1: To what degree did programmes achieve their implementation aims across the five intervention strategies, and what factors at programme and policy level appeared to influence the achievement of implementation aims?

To address this inter-related pair of evaluation questions, we look at each of the five intervention strategies in turn.

Partnerships and networks

As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research (Hawthorn and Alloway, 2009) indicates that collaborative links with other service agencies are key to successful adult guidance, but can be resource intensive. The findings of the current evaluation are in accordance with these earlier findings.

Across the six countries, there were two shared objectives regarding partnerships and networks:

1. Strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks with other organisations that provide services to the GOAL target groups

2. Structurally embedding those partnerships and networks into the broader service landscape, so that the strength and survival of partnerships was not primarily based on informal efforts by GOAL staff.

Across the six countries, GOAL was very successful at achieving the objective of strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks with other organisations. As described in Chapter 6, local evaluators in all GOAL countries were asked to rate the partnership and network landscape in their countries prior to the GOAL project and then again at the end to get an indication of the progress made. Amongst the five GOAL intervention strategies, Partnerships and Networks boasted the highest mean progress score, suggesting a high degree of travel. The key contextual factor facilitating this achievement was **the willingness of partner organisations to work with, learn about and learn from GOAL,** despite some initial scepticism. To cultivate and capitalise on this willingness, GOAL programme staff, particularly counsellors, devoted significant resources, in the form of time and effort, to informal networking. These efforts were successful: the improvement in partners' understanding of and respect for the added value of GOAL served as a stepping stone towards increased partner willingness to commit to working more, and more closely, with GOAL.

GOAL did not achieve its objective of structurally embedding these partnerships into the broader service landscape. This is because GOAL did not achieve a step change in policy makers' beliefs about the added value and cost benefits of the programme. Though partnerships and networks were strengthened, they remained contingent upon informal and semi-formal efforts by GOAL staff, and did not become systematised. However, in achieving Objective 1 (strengthening and expanding partnerships and networks), GOAL established a strong level of support amongst partner organisations for GOAL to become a structurally embedded aspect of the broader service landscape, and thus achieve Objective 2. However, the realisation of this objective remains contingent upon contextual factors, particularly policy support and funding.

Outreach

Across the six countries, the overall outreach strategy objective for the GOAL programme teams was to bring potential service users to the GOAL service. **Five of the six countries reached or came very close to reaching their recruitment targets**. In the Netherlands, there were two targets, and whereas data were collected on only 76 clients (thus missing one target) the Literacy Screener was administered to almost four times as many adults as initially hoped. We can therefore conclude that the project teams were generally successful in their outreach. This conclusion is supported by local evaluators' ratings of distance travelled for this intervention strategy: as discussed in Section 7.4, outreach received a middling rating. An assessment of the challenges faced by various teams suggests some reasons for this:

- In four of the six countries there were **initial problems in recruiting clients**, meaning that it was **necessary to revise or intensify some outreach strategies mid-project** in order that the service user targets were met.

- Within countries, some target groups were harder to reach than others, and **overall success in achieving service user numbers does not mean that all target groups were equally well served by the outreach activities**.
- **Some referral routes worked better than others**; outreach relationships with employers/companies and with penal institutions proved particularly unproductive.

Across the six countries, there was **general success in using outreach activities to recruit clients to the GOAL services**. Among the strategies used to achieve programme outcomes, that of "reaching in" to organisations was particularly successful. Programme staff worked hard to develop and maintain relationships with the organisations that would be instrumental to referral pathways: success can be seen not only in numbers of service users reached by GOAL, but also in the recognition by partner organisations that the GOAL counselling service added value to their own work with marginalised and hard-to-reach adults.

Where outreach was less successful, the key contextual factor was the characteristics of the target group. **Programmes lacked sufficient resources, both financial and in staff capacity, to maintain the levels of involvement necessary to reach out successfully to the most vulnerable**. Service users from the most vulnerable GOAL target groups typically lacked "readiness" and perseverance. What the GOAL project in Iceland has shown is that the most vulnerable groups, e.g. those with substance abuse problems, are less likely to come to sessions or benefit from the programme, no matter how many phone calls or text messages they receive.

Effective outreach strategies are heavily dependent on ensuring that referral partners are familiar with the GOAL service and with what it can deliver for their service users. However, **getting to the stage where partner organisations automatically refer clients to GOAL requires a very significant investment of time and energy**. In this context it seems important that the GOAL programme has some level of **official or structural recognition** in the local policy and programme landscape. Effective promotional activities can reach "upward" to policy makers, laterally to other service organisations, and outward to potential clients in order to raise awareness of adult education guidance amongst a broad range of potential stakeholders.

Counsellor competences

Across the six countries, there were two shared objectives with regard to counsellor competences:

1. **Defining** the competences counsellors need to provide appropriate and effective educational guidance to low-educated adults in general and the various GOAL target groups across the six countries in particular.
2. **Improving** counsellor competences, with particular regard to the competences required by professionsals working with the GOAL target groups.

All countries produced definitions of counsellor competences. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 8 and in the national reports. The consensus across the six countries was that Objective 2 was achieved, generally with a good level of success, albeit not without impediments and hindrances as well. Whereas the distance travelled score for this intervention was the lowest amongst the five

intervention strategies, counsellor competences were also rated as having the highest baseline (starting point) score of all the GOAL interventions, suggesting a high level of competence throughout the life of the pilot. Clients reported a very high level of satisfaction with counsellors' competences. Counsellors stressed a number of ways in which their counselling competences had developed due to participation in GOAL, and a number of factors influencing competence development. Key competence improvements were:

1. **Increased knowledge** of the educational and/or employment landscape.
2. Better **understanding of low-educated clients' needs**, capabilities, limitations and personal contexts.
3. Better **understanding of how to support** those clients. (This includes increased knowledge of and capacity to use appropriate counselling tools, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.)

Key factors supporting these competence gains included:

- The amount of professional support that counsellors received, especially from administrative staff but also from managers.
- The amount of informal, on-the-job learning available to counsellors.
- The proportion of counsellors' working time to GOAL. One key message arising across all six countries is that, where counsellors were able to devote a greater proportion of the working time to counselling in general and GOAL in particular, competence development appeared to be enhanced.
- Counsellors' high level of commitment to their clients.

Guidance tools

Across the six countries, the overall tool-related objective was to develop and use tools that were **effective, simple to use and suitable for the target group**. Looking at the national evaluator assessments of distance travelled for this intervention strategy, we can conclude that the project teams were generally successful in meeting this objective: as with counsellor competences, the distance travelled score for Tools was fairly low but the baseline starting point was high. This assessment is underscored by the fact that the national reports listed few challenges and barriers to achieving their aims and the only challenge shared by most teams was that developing tools that were applicable and accessible to the complex target groups counsellors were working with raised some issues where clients had additonal literacy or language needs.

Most countries had a range of pre-existing tools to draw on when developing the counselling instruments that would work best with clients in their target groups. Very few challenges were reported by the teams in any of the stages that occurred when optimising the tools: successful mapping exercises were carried out; the relevant tools were adapted and applied in the field; and counsellors were able to acquire the skills they needed to use the tools to the best effect. Where teams did encounter challenges, these were primarily related to the complexities of working with the vulnerable and hard-to-reach cohorts targeted by GOAL.

Service quality

From a **programme-level** standpoint, a high quality service:

1. Is bespoke to the individual client's needs
2. Provides the information and support that clients need to navigate the complex world of adult education
3. Empowers clients
4. Is built on highly competent counsellors
5. Is based on a counselling model that matches programme resources to client need
6. Uses the right tool at the right time for the right client
7. Produces and uses high quality data
8. Uses partnerships to improve the quality of outreach and to support a holistic approach to client welfare.

In **terms of policy, the key factors influencing service quality** were:

1. The challenges associated with structurally embedding GOAL in the broader service landscape
2. The low policy status of adult education in general and guidance for low-educated adults in particular
3. Funding challenges and their impacts.

12.2 What service user outcomes were achieved, for what groups, and to what degree?

Enrolment in education or improved employment status were the ultimate objectives of GOAL counselling; however, it is recognised in the research literature (and by GOAL programme developers and counsellors) that the journey to one or both of those objectives may be long, and is likely to require a number of intermediary steps (i.e. stepping stones), with many of the key steps involving improvements in noncognitive traits such as self-confidence and self-image.

The concept of 'stepping stones'[26] refers in particular to **internal changes in knowledge, reasoning or beliefs**. These changes provide the stepping stones towards more tangible, externally observable outcomes such as enrolments on educational courses or labour market improvements. This is particularly true for the higher need clients targeted by the GOAL pilot. These internal, intermediary changes are important steps forward, and their achievement should not be taken for granted. Qualitative data from this evaluation indicate that **GOAL was successful at helping clients take positive steps with regard to noncognitive factors such as self-confidence and self-image**. Clients and counsellors alike emphasised the positive steps that clients took in these regards.

The GOAL pilot also appeared to have **strong, positive impacts on clients' knowledge about the educational opportunities available to them and the steps required to act on those opportunities**:

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[26] Referred to in the Realist Evaluation literature as 'Mechanisms'

surveyed clients reported a high level of satisfaction with the information they received and how it was delivered by counsellors. It was apparent from both clients' and counsellors' perspectives that the fragmented and complex adult education information landscape is difficult to navigate, even for trained professionals. A number of clients reported in qualitative interviews that the information they received from counsellors about educational opportunities – and in some cases the funding of those opportunities – would have been impossible to find on their own.

Client also reported positive outcomes with regards to planning and goal setting – other important stepping stones towards educational outcomes. The GOAL counselling model emphasised the importance of clients developing their own objectives and plans for achieving those objectives, rather than simply being led by their counsellors. As part of this process, clients worked with their counsellors to develop plans for their next steps in education and/or employment. Client monitoring data show that **two-thirds of clients who had more than one guidance session reported that they had taken all the steps in that plan, and 23% said they had taken at least some of those steps**.

Data on the achievement of educational and employment outcomes is limited by the methodological challenges of this evaluation. Due to a lack of data sharing agreements across educational institutions and government ministries in the six GOAL countries, it was not possible to longitudinally track all GOAL clients. Longitudinal data is available via the evaluation's follow-up survey; however, respondents to the survey were self-selecting and cannot be seen as representative of all GOAL clients. In addition, client exit data is available for 438 clients; again, however, these clients cannot be seen as representative of the full GOAL population of 890. Of the 438 clients whose monitoring data includes information on GOAL programme exit, **48% entered education or training by the end of GOAL**, 7% entered employment and 4% improved their employment. Due to a lack of longitudinal tracking across most countries, it is not known how many clients achieved educational or employment outcomes after leaving GOAL. Amongst follow-up survey respondents who entered GOAL to pursue educational objectives, 71% had enrolled on a course by the time of their exit from GOAL[27]. Of this group, 77% enrolled on a course leading to a qualification.

The evaluation's most rigourous longitudinal data comes from Flanders. In this country, it was possible to track the educational progress of 114 clients who had attended two or more GOAL sessions. Of these 114 multi-session clients, **74% had enrolled in an adult education course** as of September 2017. It is not known how many enrolled in a course after that date.

An unfortunate challenge faced by this evaluation is the difficulty of contextualising this figure. The research literature contains very little relevant information about the impact of guidance programmes such as GOAL on educational outcomes; to the best of our knowledge, there are no directly comparable studies to our own. Thus our own evaluation can only report our own findings, without contextualisation. Our hope is that these findings contribute to a future research literature that will better enable informed comparisons and evaluations.

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[27] These figures do not include the Netherlands, which had a different programme model.

12.3 What programme-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?

Differences across the policy environments across the six countries, coupled with further differences amongst the programme models and target groups, means that it is **difficult and perhaps even misleading to compare programme outcomes**. Differences in programme contexts may also affect the generalisability of messages about some programme-level factors and processes influencing outcomes. However, there are key programme factors which do appear to positively affect the quality of individual intervention strands and overall service quality (see Section 12.1), and it is likely that these positive impacts on service quality may also have positive effects on client outcomes. (However, as discussed in Section 12.7, policy environments play the dominant role in determining which outcomes can be achieved.)

When considering the key programme-level factors influencing the achievement of service user outcomes, it is first important to take account of those **service users' needs and their level of readiness to progress** in education and/or employment. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7 in particular, GOAL clients could be categorised into three general groups:

4. Some clients came to GOAL with relatively clear ideas of their educational goals and the steps they needed to take to achieve those goals.
5. Others were less clear and/or less motivated.
6. Still others faced particularly significant barriers, including poor psychological and/or physical health, substance abuse problems and social isolation.

For clients in the first group (low need clients), **context-specific information from the counsellor was generally sufficient** to enable the client to enrol in an education course. Clients in the second group needed **more support and more counselling sessions** but did not typically face major personal or psychological barriers to enrolment. However, they did often face barriers related to motivation, direction and self belief that had to be overcome on the pathway to enrolment. Clients in the third group were high need, and were typically unable within the duration of the GOAL pilot to achieve "hard outcomes" such as enrolment on a course. The focus for these clients was therefore on taking **attitudinal and noncognitive steps**.

For GOAL programmes, the key to realising positive service user outcomes was providing each client with the appropriate type and amount of counselling. Counsellors appeared to be highly committed to their clients' well-being, and were keen to offer **custom-fit, client-centred guidance** which took account of service users' personal contexts, needs and challenges. This approach appeared to increase clients' likelihood of achieving their goals. Across all countries, a general conclusion was that all but the lowest need clients benefitted from more than one session; where this could not be provided, overall counselling quality was reduced, in terms its ability to meet clients' needs.

12.4 What policy-level factors were associated with the achievement of positive service user outcomes?

In previous sections we have discussed the policy-level factors associated with successful programme implementation and thus high programme quality. However, as discussed in Chapter 10, high programme quality does not necessarily lead to successful client outcomes, even when clients are eager and able to achieve those outcomes. This appears to be particularly true if there is a **lack of national funding for adult education courses**. Where adult education courses were not free or heavily subsidised, GOAL clients were generally unable able to take the post-guidance steps required to achieve their educational and/or employment goals. This issue was the most important policy factor related specifically to programme outcomes, as separate from programme inputs and processes. Along with other policy factors, it is discussed in more detail in Section 12.7.

12.5 What was the Return on Expectations? That is, to what degree were programme expectations met?

Adult education-focused interventions such as GOAL are typically difficult to evaluate in terms of outcomes, impacts and return on investment. This is primarily due to lack of sufficiently robust and sufficiently long-term longitudinal data on programme outcomes. In the absence of such data, an analysis of Return on Expectations (ROE) can be beneficial, particularly in under-researched and under-theorised fields such as adult education guidance for low-educated adults. In GOAL, Returns on Expectations (ROEs) were analysed across two broad domains: 1) expectations regarding client perspectives and outcomes; 2) expectations regarding programme implementation and quality.

In qualitative interviews, **clients typically indicated that they had few if any expectations** of GOAL when entering the service. In many cases, clients had no prior experience of educational guidance and counselling. Prior experiences of education tended to be negative, fuelling negative expectations for future educational endeavours. Relatedly, many clients had very low expectations of themselves.

As described in Chapter 7, **clients were very happy with the GOAL service**, rating counsellors and the counselling experience highly, and reporting that GOAL had a positive impact on their lives. When interviewed by local evaluators, a number of these clients emphasised the **positive impact of GOAL on their own expectations of themselves and for their lives**. However, GOAL counsellors in countries without free or heavily subsidised adult education highlighted a potential downside to this generally positive process: there were a number of cases in which **clients' heightened expectations for educational progress were stymied by a lack of financial resources**.

Due to the limited evidence base on the impacts of adult education guidance services, and the difficulties of tracking clients after they left GOAL, programmes had no clear expectations regarding client outcomes. One product of this lack of expectations is a **lack of clear messages regarding the question of whether programmes were successful in improving client outcomes**. As discussed in Chapter 11 and Section 12.2, counsellors in Flanders were able to track client outcomes for some clients. However, it is difficult to make an informed decision about what these outcomes signify in terms of programme effectiveness. Prior to the GOAL pilot, there was no relevant baseline outcome data in Flanders, as the GOAL client group had never been the focus of an education guidance intervention. Likewise, there is not enough relevant international research literature to provide comparative measures of effectiveness.

In Iceland, counsellors quickly discovered that they would have to **downwardly adjust their expectations regarding the number and size of steps forward** that their highly vulnerable client group would be able to achieve. In the Czech Republic, a **lack of national funding for adult education** meant that few clients could enrol on courses after guidance. In Slovenia, more clients enrolled on education courses, but many other clients' expectations for educational progress were not met due to a lack of funding for appropriate courses. In Lithuania, initial expectations that a single-session counselling model would be sufficient were not met; in respose, Lithuania remodelled its GOAL programme so that clients received at least two sessions. However, this adjustment had resource implications.

In the Netherlands, expectations regarding the number of adults who would use the Literacy Screener were exceeded; however, expectations regarding the number of clients who would then move into adult basic skills courses were not met. Whereas immigrant clients were willing to act on the findings of the Literacy Screener, native Dutch clients were resistant to enrolling on basic skills courses. This suggests that any future iterations of GOAL in the Netherlands may need to adapt a more thorough, less "light touch" intervention approach for native Dutch speakers.

Across the six countries, the **overarching implementation and service quality expectations** were that: 1) programmes would successfully achieve their objectives across the four primary intervention strategies, and in doing so would be able to provide high quality services to GOAL clients; and 2) programme staff, partners and policymakers would significantly enhance their understanding of the needs of the GOAL target groups, and their ability to meet those needs. As described in chapters 6-9, countries were generally successful in realising these expectations, albeit with varying degrees of accomplishment. Across countries, expectations of working successfully with employers to attract clients were not met. In the Netherlands, the GOAL programme team found it harder than expected to recruit organisations to participate in the pilot. This difficulty appeared to be a product of what was being asked of organisations: to incorporate the Dutch Literacy Screener into currently existing workflows. This request gave rise in some organisations to a clash of expectations:

- The GOAL expectation that client managers, who work regularly with clients and have built a relationship of trust with them, would administer the Literacy Screener and then advise clients how to address their basic skills needs.
- Client managers' expectation and understanding that their focus is on getting clients into work, and not on helping them tackle their literacy issues.

The primary factors underlying partners' reluctance were: the anticipated additional staff effort; the costs associated with project implementation; the administrative requirements of the evaluation, especially of collecting monitoring data; and the (perceived) lack of direct added value for the organisation itself. A more successful implementation of GOAL in the Netherlands would require **greater cross-organisational agreement on expectations** and roles.

Within the resource constraints of each country, the GOAL programmes were generally able to provide high quality services to their clients. A key factor here is the historical dearth of other targeted adult education guidance services for these clients. Whereas clients in some countries

would likely have received better services had more programme resources been available for a larger number of counselling sessions (for example), even in the absence of these resources these clients were receiving higher quality, better targeted services than they historically would have.

The expectation that programme staff, partners and policymakers would enhance their understanding of the needs of the GOAL target groups, and their ability to meet those needs, was met across all countries, and in most countries was met with a good deal of success. **Possibly the most impressive outcome of the GOAL pilot was the large amount of practical learning achieved, in terms of programme processes and partnership working**. This learning was particularly apparent with regard to counselling staff and project coordinators. It was apparent to a lesser, but still important, degree with regard to other programme stakeholders, including policymakers and programme partners. Counsellors in particular expanded and refined their understanding of the needs of the GOAL target groups and how to meet those needs through specialised counselling approaches. To facilitate further competence development, a process of exchange between counsellors from EU countries should be supported; this would enable the exchange of examples of good practice and the possibility of training in other countries.

12.6 Implications and messages for future programme development

This section synthesises the main implications of GOAL with regard to future programme development. In doing so it highlights key messages that may prove helpful to those seeking to establish similar services. These messages fall into two general categories: 1) developing and enhancing programme partnerships, networks and outreach; and 2) providing client-appropriate counselling models and practices.

Developing and enhancing programme partnerships, networks and outreach

Partnerships proved to be a rich source of benefits for the GOAL programmes. These benefits included: more successful recruitment of clients than could be achieved through other routes (see Chapter 7); cross-organisational learning about tools that work well for the GOAL target groups (Chapter 9); and expanded capabilities to provide holistic, cross-organisational and cross-sectoral services for clients (Chapter 10). Other organisations valued their partnership with GOAL, and the sharing of information and methods across partner organisations appeared to produce benefits beyond those that accrued only to the GOAL teams. However, sustainability requires joined-up policy making within and across relevant sectors.

Successful partnership working increases the likelihood that the policy and programme environment **addresses the "whole client" rather than just individual, sector-specific aspects of the client.** Formalised collaboration is the best and perhaps only way to address the multiple problems and complex issues some clients face.

Partnerships and networks appeared to flourish best when they built on previously existing relationships across organisations. During the pilot, GOAL programme teams devoted significant time and energy to enriching those partnerships, with the positive outcome that partners developed a deeper understanding of how GOAL could complement their own work and add value to the overall

policy and programme landscape, without duplicating services. This change in understanding was the product of extensive efforts by the GOAL teams, and depended largely on counsellors' interpersonal and networking skills, and their willingness to invest time and energy in the process. Future programmes should take account of the clear benefits of such partnership development, but also the costs in terms of programme resources. Successful outreach to generate referrals involves the investment of considerable staff time to build relationships of trust between organisations and between the guidance service and potential clients. The GOAL experience suggests that **the efforts and costs associated with outreach are likely to be higher the more vulnerable or hard-to-reach the potential client is**. This means that future programmes should be realistic about the resources that are available for this type of activity, developers may need to focus on target groups which are characterised by more active demand for the service or which present fewer outreach challenges (for instance by being in geographic proximity to the service, thus reducing travel costs). In other words, it may be more financially viable and more sensible for educational counselling programmes to target "low hanging fruit" than to use their finite resources to target marginalised people, although these people may be the most in need.

Ultimately, the **sustainability of partnerships is dependent on financial mechanisms** being in place to support those partnerships. Future programme development will have to carefully consider how sustainable partnerships can be developed and supported given programme and policy resources. This is particularly essential given the importance of partnerships and networks to each stage of the guidance process.

Providing client-appropriate counselling models and practices

A key message for future programmes is that **client readiness is a primary determinant** of potential programme effects. As evidenced in the GOAL pilot, it is possible to achieve a high degree of programme quality across a variety of different national settings and contexts, and in the face of a variety of barriers. However, although high quality counselling is a necessary condition for successful outcomes, it is not a sufficient one: what happens during counselling is but one part of the equation determining client outcomes. Section 12.7 highlights the role of policy readiness and support in this equation. In the current section we focus on client need. A key message from GOAL is that programmes should base their expectations and approach on client need and readiness. Particularly vulnerable clients are unlikely to achieve measurable educational or employment outcomes without making progress in a range of personal and psychological areas first. It is possible for even very vulnerable clients to make progress on "stepping stone" outcomes such as improved self-belief or self-esteem, but this may require very large resource investments on the part of counsellors, and is likely to require counselling in other areas as well, e.g. mental health and substance abuse, that go beyond the professional remit of education-focused counsellors. This highlights one of the values of joined-up, cross-organisation work, particularly with regard to vulnerable clients.

It also highlights issues regarding programme resources and targets. If a decision is made to focus on high need clients, sufficient programme resources will be required, and it is likely to prove difficult to produce significant gains in clients' education and employment outcomes. Such clients may require more basic support and development on issues such as punctuality and learning how to learn before

they are ready for education-focused guidance. **Targeting services to less hard to reach adults may be a better compromise given the nascent state of educational guidance for low-educated adults and the possible need for pilot programmes to justify their costs to funders and policy makers.** Whatever their objectives and target groups, programmes need to have a clear understanding of the trade-offs inherent in this type of outreach work.

However, the capacity of most GOAL clients to progress should not be underestimated. A key message from this pilot is that, amongst low-educated adults, there appears to be a high level of unmet need for contextualised information and support about educational opportunities. The potential impact of this information and support on clients' lives is significant. A key factor in providing the right levels and types of information and support to clients is the **matching of the counselling model to the client need**. In practice, this means that the **needs and the context of clients will be the key determining factor of the length, number and content of the guidance sessions**, and thus in the amount of programme resource that is needed. Programmes that are built around a model where only one guidance session can be offered would do well to target counselling only to those clients who can be expected, because of their higher levels of motivation and/or clarity of direction, to be able to take the next step after a low-level, relatively low resource intervention. This type of programme may be more suited to an institutional environment such as a college, where potential pathways are more clearly defined and limited, clients have more pre-existing awareness of the range of available options, and counsellors have more in-depth knowledge about those options.

Programme developers embarking on more intensive counselling programmes need to consider how best to provide resources for counselling models (particularly with regard to the appropriate number of sessions) that provide the ongoing support that clients need in order to take the steps required to eventually achieve longer term outcomes such as enrolment on a course. In countries where the target group is particularly disadvantaged, very basic steps are necessary before larger steps can be taken in education or employment. Counsellors in Iceland referred to this process as "planting seeds" that might later grow.

In supporting counsellor competence development, it is **important that programmes provide sufficient opportunities for informal workplace learning**. As illustrated in Flanders, a supportive approach to workplace learning can play a significant role in overcoming other barriers to counsellors' competence development, and in producing and supporting a strong professional identity. However, resource limitation impose barriers on learning-oriented workplaces. To be sufficiently supportive of on-the-job learning, the workplace needs to ensure that the counsellors have a high enough proportion of their working time devoted to GOAL, and, as part of that, should strive to reduce administrative and other non-counselling burdens.

With regard to tools to support counselling: a) counsellors require a toolkit of resources to support counselling, and this toolkit needs to contain instruments that support every stage of the counselling journey; b) from this toolkit, what clients need is a bespoke service with the tools that best serve their individual needs selected by a counsellor whose competences mean they have the knowledge, expertise, and sensitivity to choose and to use the tools. For the target group it is especially important that: a) the range of tools include those that are able to uncover the psychological factors

that underpin the client's situation; b) that the tools enable the client to be an active participant in the guidance process. Seven themes emerge with regard to using tools to provide high quality counselling to the GOAL target groups:

1. Not every tool is right for every counsellor with every client: effective use of tools involves the selection of the right tool for the individual client-counsellor relationship.
2. The process of collecting monitoring data on clients can serve as an effective tool for structuring and developing counselling sessions.
3. No strong need to develop counselling tools from scratch emerges: it is feasible to develop effective tools for the target group from existing resources.
4. Selecting which existing tools are best suited to the target group starts with a mapping exercise which at its most rigorous will involve close evaluation by experienced counselling staff.
5. The range of tools included in the mapping exercise, and the range of expertise involved in their development, is broadened and enhanced where collaborative working practices such as method groups are employed, with consultation across a number of policy and geographic areas.
6. The use of social media can be a powerful tool, enabling more frequent, informal contact between the counsellor and client, with the aim of keeping the client active in the counselling process.
7. The definition of counselling tools should include tools such as manuals and flowcharts that support the work of the counsellor.

There is a recognition that the flexible and contextual use of tools is more feasible for more experienced counsellors than for the less experienced ones. In that sense, having good manuals for tool use along with a supportive workplace learning environment that facilitates cooperation between the more and less experienced counsellors is crucial for the development of sound judgement about which tools are the most appropriate for each client. In addition to guidelines supporting tool selection and use, counsellors in GOAL did benefit from the use of the data monitoring tool. Though originally conceived as an evaluation instrument, this tool served as an effective means for providing a general structure to guidance sessions, and for collecting contextual and specific data that was essential in understanding clients and addressing their needs. A version of this data monitoring instrument, modified to suit local needs, could be used by future programmes. This would support a general model of guidance, while also facilitating the collection of data for monitrong and evaluation purposes.

12.7 Policy implications and messages

This section addresses key policy implications arising from the issues discussed in this chapter and indeed the full report. In doing so, this section also provides policy messages related to these implications. In contrast to earlier chapters in this report, implications and messages are discussed together under a set of thematic headings. These are:

- General policy issues affecting GOAL and likely to affect similar services if they are offered in the future. In particular, the challenges to joined-up, cross-sector policy-making and the the implications of adult education's low status in terms of policy interest and support.
- Limited policy understanding of the needs and potential of low-educated adults, and the role of adult education guidance in fulfilling this potential.
- Funding and resource issues, and how they affect client outcomes and programme sustainability.

Challenges and benfits of joined-up policy making

The GOAL target groups tended to face a broad range of serious challenges in life, and to thus be in contact with multiple policy service organisations across a range of policy areas. The complex range of interrelated needs and challenges faced by GOAL clients is characteristic of what has been referred to as "**wicked policy problems**", i.e. multi-domain problems that cannot be successfully addressed via only one policy area and/or programme intervention (Briggs, 2007). Wicked policy problems have a number of notable characteristics, including:

- multiple antecedents ("multi-causality")

- multiple impacts

- social complexity at the user level (i.e. the service providers must understand not only the individual, but the individual's family, neighbourhood and social networks)

- social complexity at the service provider level (i.e. appropriate service provision involves the cooperation of multiple agencies)

- the need to bring about behaviour change.

Such problems require joined-up policy work, which itself requires policy learning and adaptation. GOAL programmes largely achieved their aim of convincing organisations in other policy domains of the added value of GOAL, and developing close working relationships with some of those organisations. This is a potentially valuable example of policy learning at the local level, and the development of joined-up approaches to addressing complex client needs.

The GOAL partnership thus represented **joined-up policy in action** – that is, there was an explicit aim to **develop, contribute to and benefit from partnerships that crossed policy boundaries** and moved beyond the traditional "policy silo" approach to public services. This is a noble but extremely challenging task: observers of policy in Europe and the rest of the world will have noted the high

ratio of joined-up policy *rhetoric* to actual joined-up policy *action*. Despite their best intentions, policy makers in countries around the world (and at multi-national level, e.g. the European Union) have struggled to move beyond a policy silo approach to addressing complex problems and needs. Education policy continues to address the educational aspect of an individual's life, while health policy addresses health aspects, employment policy addresses labour market aspects, and so on. The individual is divided into component parts, based on the traditional division of policy areas and government ministries. This approach, which is generally efficient and more or less successful when addressing the needs of the majority of the population, has proved resolutely unsuccessful for individuals facing multiple overlapping problems across a range of policy domains. GOAL therefore provides an important example of efforts to join up organisations and efforts in a more holistic way. As such, it has produced a number of lessons about the influence of policy on cross-organisational partnership working, and several messages for policy (see especially Chapter 6).

To provide better support for partnerships and networks, policy makers need to develop a clearer understanding of **how educational guidance for low-educated adults fits in with existing (and more high profile) policy objectives and commitments**, e.g. reducing early school leaving or increasing participation in lifelong learning. More efforts at joined-up policy making and programme development need to be pursued, and policy makers should focus at least some of their efforts on understanding how to surmount cross-sectoral partnership barriers, and the benefits of doing so. The European Commission should in principle play a central role in these efforts through its ability to fund cross-national projects; however, it should be noted that even the Commission itself is somewhat hamstrung (when it comes to exploring and supporting cross-policy endeavours) by its traditional policy silo structure.

At the national level, cross-policy partnership working could potentially be supported by the establishment of organisations (e.g. in the form of **national development institutes**) focused on adult education in its full breadth, rather than adult education *as it is relevant to a particular policy area.* Such an insitute exists in Slovenia, and is central to the adult education policy environment in that country, which is very well developed compared to most other EU countries. A more systemic, partnership-oriented approach, whether led by government or a non-governmental body could initiate and steer the process of connecting systems (e.g. healthcare system, welfare system, educational system) to facilitate joined-up working targeted at meeting the broad range of inter-related needs of low-educated adults.

Addressing the low status of adult education in general and adult education guidance in particular

Adult education guidance for low-educated adults is an under-developed, under-funded and under-researched sub-field within the broader field of adult education, which is itself under-developed, under-funded and under-researched compared to other education sectors and compared to related policy fields such as employment. With some exceptions, the importance of adult education is not sufficiently well recognised throughout Europe. (Exceptions within GOAL are Slovenia and Flanders; there are also some exceptions outside GOAL, e.g. Norway.) However, in contrast to the relatively straightforward compulsory education sector in most countries, adult education is fragmented,

complex and difficult to understand and navigate. Whereas mainstream newspapers frequently report on the compulsory and higher education sectors, adult education is a niche topic, even amongst politicians and other policy makers. This lack of recognition and support hinders the reach and quality of adult education in general, and adult education guidance within it. As discussed below, this has particularly significant impacts on programme funding.

On the whole, GOAL appears to have somewhat increased policy knowledge of and interest in adult education guidance for the GOAL target groups. Because of GOAL, a number of policy makers are now aware that client-centred guidance can benefit the target group in ways that institution-centred guidance may not. However, as of the conclusion of this evaluation, policy interest had not translated into structural support or funding.

One example of GOAL-related efforts to achieve this move from policy discussion to policy action is in Flanders. In that country, counsellors had high hopes that GOAL services would receive enough national-level policy support within the life of the pilot to ensure long-term programme sustainability. Partner organisations and local policy makers expressed similar hopes. However, the GOAL programme coordinators within the national Flanders Department of Education and Training were less optimistic, recognising that political interest and will were lacking at national level. To address this lack, programme coordinators used the Needs and Strengths Analysis aspect of the current evaluation to map the strengths and weaknesses of a range of guidance services targeted at the GOAL client groups. Working with the national GOAL advisory committee, programme coordinators then built on that service map by developing a "Blueprint for education guidance in Flanders", which proposes an overarching, systematic and structurally embedded model for educational guidance services for the whole of Flanders. The aim in Flanders is to get this policy paper on the agendas of all Flemish political parties in time for national elections in 2019. It is hoped that this will lead to concrete policy commitments in the next Flemish government agreement.

As noted earlier in this report, the Czech Republic was starting from scratch in terms of adult education guidance. In this country, GOAL appears to have played a positive role in the development of policy in this nascent area. The Ministry of Education has expressed support for GOAL and feels that the outcomes of the project will stimulate further political dialogue that could lead to a structurally embedded service in the future. GOAL staff in the Czech Republic suggested that such steps could potentially help to produce a virtuous cycle of policy and programme development: through programme success (in the GOAL pilot), the policy environment may become more open to supporting adult education guidance for low-educated target groups, increasing their likelihood of being embedded in national and local policy systems, rather than existing only on pilot or project bases. This would increase policy knowledge and understanding of GOAL-style guidance (i.e. guidance drawing on the key GOAL principles and approaches) and its potential benefits in areas such as dropout prevention and vocational education and training. This would in turn help GOAL-style programmes become more efficient in areas such as outreach, as they would be more widely known and supported.

The role of GOAL in helping low-educated adult achieve their potential

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7 in particular, GOAL clients could be categorised into three general groups:

1. Some clients came to GOAL with relatively clear ideas of their educational goals and the steps they needed to take to achieve those goals.
2. Others were less clear and/or less motivated.
3. Still others faced particularly significant barriers, including poor psychological and/or physical health, substance abuse problems and social isolation.

Like all GOAL clients, individuals in these first two groups had low levels of education. However, most entered GOAL with very positive attitudes to learning and moderate to high self-efficacy scores. These positive findings suggest that the problem faced by most GOAL clients before the pilot was **not a lack of interest in education or general self belief, but a lack of knowledge about educational opportunities** and potentially a lack of domain-specific confidence about the achievement of educational goals. As noted by counsellors, domain-specific confidence and knowledge often go hand in hand: it is difficult for individuals (particularly those with limited qualifications) to feel confident about the next steps in education if they do not know what opportunities are available to them or even how to find information about those opportunities. The GOAL pilot appears to have played an important role by meeting these clients' need for the information and support.

This suggests that there is a **substantial level of untapped desire (or at least willingness) amongst the low-educated population to improve their qualifications**. For many individuals in the GOAL target groups, the key barriers to doing so were not dispositional or attitudinal but were instead related to the complex, highly opaque information landscape in adult education. Clients were enthused to learn about the educational opportunities that were available to them, and a high percentage of clients reported acting on those opportunities with the support of their counsellor. This suggests that the GOAL approach could play an important role in helping Member States achieve educational targets.

Funding challenges and impacts

Most GOAL clients lack the financial capability to pay for adult education courses themselves, meaning that in countries where adult education is not heavily subsidised, clients could not act on their increased hopes and expectations. Guidance provided information and support, and thus enhanced individual agency, but such agency is not sufficient in the face of large-scale structural barriers to advancement. Even in Iceland, where clients were the most vulnerable and those the most likely to take only small steps, some clients were, by the end of their guidance journey, ready to take the next step into further education. However, they lacked the financial means to do so. Adult education courses in Iceland tend to be too expensive for low-income adults, and there is a lack of scholarships and subsidies. As one counsellor observed, this produced insuperable barriers:

> *The need for some kind of a system of scholarships, like we see in other countries, has been discussed many times. But we don't have anything like that here, and studying*

while having a full-time employment and even supporting a family, like is often the case with adults, is extremely difficult. This needs to be examined, a system with scholarships or student loans, or some sort of financial support (GOAL Programme Staff).

Lack of funding for adult education meant that clients could experience important internal changes, in terms of improved motivation, ambition and self-concept, but could not act on those changes. This highlights an important policy issue: one role of policy is to increase individual agency and raise human capital; however, a complementary policy responsibility is to support the development of systems that enable individuals to act on their agency and take advantage of (and further develop) their human capital. In most GOAL countries, this second policy responsibility is lacking with regard to adult education. This suggests that adult education guidance programmes are not a sensible investment for governments in the absence of free or subsidised courses that clients can move into as a result of guidance. Where free or affordable courses were available, e.g. in Flanders, the rate of enrolment appeared to be high, however – suggesting that the GOAL approach can produce valuable results in the right policy environment. This finding regarding Flanders is supported by results from Slovenia, where enrolment was high and would have been higher had more (funded) courses been available.

Funding also plays a central role in programme sustainability. In the absence of sufficient policy commitment to providing educational guidance for low-educated adults, and educational opportunities for those adults to pursue, it will be difficult or even impossible to develop and maintain sustainable, sufficiently well resourced guidance programmes.

12.8 Concluding remarks: participant, programme and policy readiness

The evaluation which produced this report took place over a period of three years. It sought to provide evidence not only on programme outcomes across the six GOAL countries, but on the processes that programmes engaged in as they developed their services across the intervention strategies detailed in this report.

When analysing our findings – both in terms of outcomes and intervention strategies – a key theme that consistently arose was that of "readiness". The first stage of the evaluation (Wave 1) focused primarily on **programme readiness, by which we mean the programme's ability to respond to and meet its clients' needs**. Evaluators documented and analysed the GOAL programmes' efforts at: developing counsellor competences and an appropriate counselling model; expanding and/or enriching partnerships and networks; and reaching out to potential clients. Our conclusion is that even when a country is starting from scratch, as was the case in the Czech Republic, it is possible to attain a high degree of programme readiness. By the end of the second year of the GOAL pilot, all countries appeared to have rich partnerships networks, and counsellors appeared to be highly competent at addressing clients' needs. However, the amount of time and resource it took to attain readiness was strongly influenced by national starting points. For example, the Czech programme took more than a year to get up and running, whereas the programme in Flanders, which was

building on a very solid base of previous guidance provision and programme expertise, was ready to provide high quality counselling almost immediately.

As detailed throughout this report, **client readiness** played a central role in shaping GOAL counselling approaches. Although almost all clients were low-educated, there was a large amount of heterogeneity in terms of clients' needs, and clients' readiness to progress in education or employment. In terms of meeting the full range of client needs, programme resources played a central role. In countries where only one counselling session could be provided to each client, for example, programmes were ready and able to meet the needs of clients who required context-specific information and only a small amount of support, but were not able to provide sufficient support to clients who needed multiple sessions in order to progress. Future programme developers and policy makers should bear such issues in mind.

They should also bear in mind the many positive steps taken by GOAL clients. The one country which was able to provide longitudinal outcome data on progress into adult education showed a 74% success rate. Given the many barriers faced by clients in this country (Flanders), this figure strikes us as an impressive testament to GOAL's potential. Looking across all GOAL countries, evidence on attitudes to learning and general self-efficacy suggest that even amongst diverse populations of low-educated adults, there is a high degree of readiness to progress into adult education, if only the right information and support can be provided.

However, no matter how ready clients are to improve their lives, and no matter how ready counsellors are to help them find and navigate the most appropriate path towards doing so, it is generally impossible to overcome a lack of **policy readiness**. By policy readiness we refer to more general issues such as structural embedding of adult education guidance, but in particular to the **provision of free or heavily subsidised adult education courses**. In the absence of such provision, it is not possible for low-income individuals to act on their educational ambitions. But where such provision does exist, it does appear that GOAL is able to help significant numbers of low-educated clients to enrol on adult education courses. This finding bodes well for governments that are willing to take these messages on board.

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