



Social E-valuator: Measuring Social Impact of Employability Services

Aberdeen City Council piloted the use of the Social E-valuator™ tool to measure the social return on Council investment in two externally provided employability services. Social E-valuator™ is an on-line tool using ten simple steps to measure the social impact of projects and programmes. The Council has now a better insight in the social impact that is created by Pathways to Employment and shmuTRAIN's Positive Transitions programmes and is now set up to use the method more widely to take account of the social impact of interventions in resource allocation decisions.



Background

Aberdeen City Council has to deal with the pressures on budgets and an increasing demand on services due to the economic downturn.

Aberdeen City Council is allocating significant resources in tackling area based and individual poverty and to help more people access and sustain employment opportunities. In 2011/12 it allocated more than £1.6 million to the Fairer Scotland Fund, with which the Community Planning Partnership sources community services that tackle poverty and deprivation. The Council increasingly require more evidence of the impact of the services to justify this spending.

Aberdeen City Council wanted to develop a better understanding of the social value created by public spending and undertook a social impact assessment of two key employability services.

The Council worked with the Ready for Business team to introduce and pilot new technology to measure social value using the Social E-valuator™ tool.

Social E-valuator™

Social E-valuator™ is an innovative, on-line platform that uses the principles of Social Return on Investment (SROI), and is specifically designed to assist funders, commissioners and public agencies to

manage the social impact of their programmes (www.socialevaluator.com).

Scope and focus

The purpose of the SROI evaluation was to understand the value created by Pathways and shmuTrain's Positive Transitions programme, two employability services delivered on behalf of Aberdeen City Council

Pathways to Employment

Pathways to Employment supports unemployed people back in to work through the Employment Keyworker, who provides assistance in all aspects of job search, from identifying job goals, addressing barriers to employment, developing CV's, identification of training where required, assistance to access funding, job matching, help to complete job applications and preparation for interviews.

shmuTRAIN Positive Transitions

The Positive Transition programme offers comprehensive employability support and skills development training to young people. (16-19) who are not in education, employment or training, using community & digital media to engage young people, increase motivation and develop core skills such as confidence, communication and team work, and to support young people to move on to a sustained positive destination.

The Council carried out the social impact analysis on both services for the financial year 2011/12.

The purpose of the Social E-valuator analysis was to understand the value created by the two employability services, using enabling technology to report the social return. Aberdeen City Council has used this study to:

- justify and account for the spending of public funding on employability services;
- report back to the Community Planning partners on the social value created; and
- improve social value monitoring systems.

Implementation

The analysis was carried out by a team led by a lead Council officer and key personnel from Pathways and shmuTRAIN, supported by Developing Markets for Third Sector Providers programme staff.

The assessment followed the Social E-valuator™ tool structure and was carried out in three main stages:

- **Stage 1: Establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders.** The process started by completing Step 1-6 of the Social E-valuator™ tool, agreeing the scope of the assessment, identifying the material stakeholders, developing a Theory of Change, and assessing the input, activity and output of the services.
- **Stage 2: Mapping outcomes.** The team then completed Step 7 and 8 of the Social E-valuator™ tool. This started with both projects undertaking a structured process of stakeholder consultation about what changes had been brought about by the services. The results of the consultation determined what changes to stakeholders were taken into account (material outcomes), helped to develop relevant outcome

indicators, and established what aspects of the change would have happened anyway (deadweight) and to what extent the achieved outcomes were a result of other factors (attribution).

- **Stage 3: Valuing outcomes.** The team completed Step 9 and 10 of the Social E-valuator tool. These steps involved making an assessment of how long the identified outcomes would last (duration) and giving them a monetary value, using financial proxies. Finally the tool calculated the social return for both services, by comparing the total present value of all outcomes with the investment in the services.
- **Stage 4: Reporting, using and embedding.** The Social E-valuator™ tool then generated social impact reports for both Pathways and shmuTRAIN's Positive Transitions. Aberdeen City Council is now in the process of sharing the findings with the Community Planning partners and other stakeholders and looking at embedding good outcomes measurement processes in the monitoring of externally delivered services.

Key challenges

The process of working more closely with the third sector also provided a number of main challenges:

- **Finding time and resources.** Social impact measurement is resource-intensive, especially finding the time to undertake the consultations and the project team found it challenging to find the time to undertake the work in addition to their normal duties.
- **Assessing the duration of outcomes.** By their nature, some outcomes have the potential to last much longer than the period of the intervention (e.g. increased skills), but the team had no robust evidence of the length

outcomes last and no adequate resources to undertake additional research. Therefore they have decided to limit the scope of the research to just one year to avoid over-claiming impact.

- **Valuing the outcomes.** Valuing outcomes in monetary terms can be seen as subjective and complex. For the valuation of the two services the team used where possible the WikiVOIS database of stakeholders, outcomes, indicators and values (www.wikivois.org), that contains a set of Scottish outcome indicators and financial proxies (developed through the Developing Markets for Third Sector Providers programme). This provided a degree of objectivity and consistency to the use of financial proxies.

The Council acknowledged these challenges and will take them into account when considering further social impact measurement.

Outcomes

The findings from the social impact analysis provided a number of new insights for the Council and the services.

The process identified a range of relevant stakeholders and clear evidence of a number of important outcomes from the Service:

- **For service users** the identified outcomes of the services included: increased job readiness, improved family relationships, greater confidence and a more positive future outlook. For the Pathways clients there were also increased skills and an improved social status. The shmuTRAIN clients also reported greater independence.
- **For public sector organisations** the identified outcomes of the services included: an improved ability to achieve key targets, an ability to track clients, a freeing up of resources

because clients move into positive destinations or employment, and improved access to young people.

On average, for every £1 invested by Aberdeen City Council, around £4.60 of social value was created from the services.

There were also a number of benefits derived from the process for the Council, including:

- **Better able to evidence impact.** The Council is likely to face a number of difficult budgetary decisions in the near future, and has now an additional tool to feed into the process and ensure that the impact of services is considered among a range of other criteria.
- **Services providers have a better understanding of social impact.** By including the two services in the social impact analysis their understanding of the social value they create has improved, which will contribute to improved performance of the services in the longer term.
- **Feedback on outcomes.** Through the consultation process the Council and the services have gathered important feedback on the outcomes they achieve for their clients. This proved to be good for staff morale and increased the understanding of delivery staff on the impact of their work on people's lives, which will affect the quality of the services in the long term.

These were powerful effects and provided sound justification for investing time and resources in the social impact analysis.

Critical success factors

There were number of factors that influenced the process in a positive way and enabled Aberdeen City Council to use the Social E-valuator tool as a

method for measuring social impact, including:

- **A bespoke tool.** The Social E-valuator™ tool has guided the services through a complex process in a logical and methodical way.
- **Shared outcomes and financial proxies.** Both services were working in the employability field, with shared outcomes and proxies that could be programmed in the Social E-valuator™ tool.
- **Commitment to understanding and valuing the services.** All parties held a strong commitment to understanding the outcomes achieved. The assessment was undertaken with an open mind and the staff involved were genuinely committed to learning.
- **Support from an independent facilitator.** The support provided by the Developing Markets for Third

Sector Providers programme kept the analysis on track and provided credibility to the end result.

The combination of these factors has enabled the Council to complete the social impact assessment and deliver its outcomes.

Future ambitions

Aberdeen City Council has successfully piloted Social E-valuator as a method to assess social impact.

The Council will present the results of the pilot to the Community Planning partners and share the learning from the process more widely.

Over time it is anticipated that the method of evidencing social impact can be used more widely in resource allocation decisions and to assess other Council services.

For further information, contact:

Susan Thoms

Fairer Scotland Fund Coordinator

P: Corporate Governance, Aberdeen City Council, Business Hub 13, Second Floor North, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB

T: 01224 523833

E: STHOMS@aberdeencity.gov.uk