



QUALITY LABELS AND STRUCTURAL INDICATORS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

NESET II Seminar Summary

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INTRODUCTION

The question arises, *why engage with quality labels and structural indicators for social inclusion in education?* Both promote system change for social inclusion. They can offer transparency of strategy for an education institution, as well as accountability for implementation to ensure that institutions actions live up to their strategic commitments. System scrutiny through structural indicators addresses system barriers to change to challenge 'system blockage' (Downes, 2014).

Whereas structural indicators offer system scrutiny especially with regard to *prevention*-related issues, a quality label can seek to *promote* aspects of change in a system, analogous to a health promotion focus. Both prevention and promotion is needed. Structural indicators can also be adopted within a quality label to guide its strategic direction and priorities. Rather than taking place at a national level to analyse a Member State's strategic direction, a quality label takes place at an education institution level.

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO EVALUATION AND TRANSPARENCY: STRUCTURAL INDICATORS

Developing structural indicators for a system for transparency is already taking place for the UN Right to Health and can be extended by analogy for social inclusion in education (Downes, 2014). Structural indicators are generally framed as potentially verifiable yes/no answers, they address whether or not key structures, mechanisms or principles are in place in a system. As relatively enduring features or key conditions of a system, they are, however, potentially malleable. They offer a scrutiny of State or institutional effort (Downes, 2014; UN Rapporteur 2005, 2006). This proposed adaptation of structural indicators for review processes in education is not contingent on a rights-based approach.

Structural indicators go beyond the quantitative/qualitative distinction, as they are factual, potentially verifiable yes/no answers. They provide a systemic-level focus for change rather than reducing change to one simplistic magic bullet cause. They are action guiding and policy and practice relevant. The indicators can distinguish State *and* university effort and offer an incentive for governments to invest in the area of access to higher education. They offer a framework for strategic direction as to *what* issues are addressed at system level, while also offering flexibility at local or national contextual level as to *how* to address these issues.

TABLE 1. Illustrative Examples of Structural Indicators (SIs)

<i>Guiding principles as SIs:</i>	
➤ Active involvement of target groups in design	YES OR NO
➤ Active involvement of target groups in delivery	YES OR NO
<i>Roles in organisational structures as SIs</i>	
➤ Intervention of sufficient intensity to bring change	YES OR NO
➤ System-change focus and not simply individual-change focus	YES OR NO
➤ Clear focus on level of prevention – universal, selected and/or indicated	YES OR NO
➤ Distinct age-cohort focus	YES OR NO
➤ Clear outreach strategy to reach marginalised groups	YES OR NO
➤ Alternatives to Suspension	YES OR NO
<i>Physical spaces as SIs</i>	
➤ Specific space in school building for parents to meet	YES OR NO

Source: Downes, 2014a, 10 European city municipalities, PREVENT project.

Quality labels are used to encourage and reward desirable policies, practices and outcomes.

Doolan ⁽¹⁾ highlights the following considerations when developing a quality label:

- coordinating and awarding body;
- voluntary or compulsory;
- unit of assessment (department, faculty, institution);
- levels of assessment (fully implemented [A], partially implemented [B], beginning phase [C], not started [D]);
- levels of award (e.g. advanced, intermediate, beginner – gold, silver, bronze);
- self-evaluation or external review;
- one off or renewal and development (duration);
- focus areas.

⁽¹⁾ Karin Doolan, personal communication, 2015.

SYSTEM REVIEW PROCESSES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN EDUCATION: THE RELEVANCE OF THE TWO EU2020 HEADLINE TARGETS FOR EDUCATION

EU2020 Headline Target (1) for Education: The share of 30–34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40 %

This headline target implies a focus on access to higher education for socio-economically marginalised groups – this focus needs much more development. It is a legitimate inference from this headline target that a key dimension of increased participation in higher education must include areas and communities which are strongly under-represented in higher education. There appears to be a lack of intensity of focus on this headline target both generally and for socio-economically excluded groups, for example, through EU Presidency Conferences, country-specific reporting processes, Commission Working Groups on Access to Higher Education. All of these take place at Commission level for the early school leaving headline target and are less visible for the higher education headline target.

This lack of focus on the headline target and on access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups is evident also from the Commission's U-Multirank initiative. Launched in February 2013, the Commission's U-Multirank proposes to rate universities in five separate areas – research, quality of teaching and learning, international orientation, success in knowledge transfer and start-up contribution to regional growth. While this initiative is a laudable one, a *major omission here is a focus on access for diversity and community engagement*. This is indicative of the need to remedy this strategic gap at European Commission-level for access to higher education issues for marginalised groups.

EU2020 Headline Target (2) for Education: The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10 %

For this EU2020 headline target, a key basis is already in place to develop structural indicators at national level, as well as quality labels and structural indicators at municipality and school levels. This foundation is provided through the EU Council Recommendation 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving, the Commission documents 2011 on Early School Leaving and the Commission TWG Report (2013) which significantly provides a checklist on comprehensive policies for early school leaving (see also Ecory's 2013 report).

Regarding the Commission TWG Report (2013) checklist on comprehensive policies for early school leaving, focus is now required on tightening the wording for system accountability on key themes through structural indicators. Such key themes highlighted in this checklist include: '...involving pupils in decision-making at school level'; 'Schools have outreach programmes to encourage the engagement of vulnerable families in particular in school education'; 'Preventing ESL is part of both initial education and continuous professional development'; 'Multi-professional teams work inside schools or in cooperation with several schools'.

The Member States have developed school inspection systems, so structural indicators and quality labels could be built into these existing quality processes. The potential for schools to embed structural indicators and quality label-related issues into their work is evident from the pervasiveness of internal self-evaluation processes in schools across Europe, as highlighted in the recent Eurydice (2015) report, 'the only countries

where schools are not compelled or recommended to carry out internal evaluation are Bulgaria and France, the latter limited to primary schools’.

Access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups

Illustrative examples of structural indicators, at both national and higher education institution levels, can be highlighted for access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups. These are based on a 12 country EU-funded study (Downes, 2014), involving 196 interviews with members of senior management from 83 education institutions, as well as from senior officials in government departments relevant to education and lifelong learning in each country. Sixty-nine of these interviews were with senior representatives from higher education across 30 institutions. Participating countries were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Russia, Scotland and Slovenia.

TABLE 2. Illustrative examples of structural indicators for access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups at higher education institution level

Structural Indicator	Education institutional strategy for access for groups experiencing socio-economic exclusion (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	An access strategy of third-level institutions which engages with primary and secondary students experiencing socio-economic marginalisation (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	Formal links between universities and non- governmental organisations representing marginalised groups (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	University outreach strategy to communicate with spokespersons, community leaders in socio-economically marginalised or ethnic minority communities (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	Development of outreach institutional strategies that go beyond mere information-based models (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	Availability of school and university institutions free of charge during summertime and evenings for community groups from marginalised areas (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	Preparatory admission courses (Yes/No)

Source: Downes, 2014.

Marginalised groups must not be simply objects of policy but must also become subjects leading policy direction for matters affecting their groups. Outreach requires going to places where groups feel at home, on their own turf, rather than in an environment where they may experience alienation and cultural distance (Downes, 2014a).

TABLE 3. Illustrative examples of structural indicators for access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups at national strategic level

Structural Indicator	A central driving committee at state level for access to higher education for marginalised groups, including clear funding sources (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	The existence of incentives for third-level institutions such as differentiated funding from the state based on implementation of access goals (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	State-led incentives to different faculties and departments within third-level institutions to increase access: a faculty- and departmental-level focus to increase access (Yes/No)
Structural Indicator	Clear country-specific criteria to ascertain socio-economic exclusion (Yes/No)

Source: Downes, 2014.

Early School Leaving

A potential key role exists for municipalities/local authorities both as recipients and implementers of quality labels for schools for social inclusion. Municipalities could be incentivised to develop local action plans for early school leaving guided by structural indicators and establish local support groups for these, including schools and NGOs, as done in the *EU PREVENT* project across 10 municipalities (Downes, 2014a, 2015). An EU Commission-promoted quality label for these local action plans and for individual schools in a municipality would be a logical and important step forward for developing strategic approaches to early school leaving at local and regional levels.

While a quality label could clearly be applied to a municipality's local action plan for early school leaving prevention, a more positive quality label is needed for schools on issues related to early school leaving. Just as the proposed university quality label is a positive approach focusing on 'Outreach and community engagement for access', such a quality label for schools could be titled, 'Inclusive systems', with terms such as 'Relational systems' or 'Democratic systems' as possible alternatives. It is important however to recognise that the indicated prevention level, i.e. students in chronic need (Downes, 2014a), addressed by structural indicators, must not get lost in a quality label approach as part of a strategic focus on early school leaving prevention.

A first step here is to propose that the EU Commission develop structural indicators for inclusive systems (EU, national, regional, municipality and school levels) for early school leaving prevention. As a second step, it is proposed to build from these structural indicators for early school leaving at national and school level to develop a quality label for inclusive (relational, democratic) school systems at both municipality and school levels. This quality label can add layers of detail, such as gold, silver quality labels for inclusive systems. The institutional level quality label needs to be integrated with the national strategic approach. It needs a funding commitment from the EU Commission.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While a key strength of quality labels is in promoting attitudinal and conceptual change for practice, as a promoting and not simply preventing approach, there is nevertheless a danger of displacement of focus from national strategic issues onto education institution level if they are adopted in isolation from a wider national strategy. Furthermore, there is a need to sustain a cross-sectoral focus for social inclusion in education (Edwards and Downes, 2013) and not simply a school- or university-based one that a quality label may become confined to (see also the European Commission Recommendation (2013). *Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage* on the need for a cross-departmental, holistic approach to social inclusion).

A first step is a *national strategic* response to an issue, e.g. access to higher education, early school leaving. With this strategic background in place, then a quality mark at institutional level can be effective. Without this national strategic commitment (supported by structural indicators), education institutions can simply claim lack of financial support for attaining a quality label. A quality label needs to be understood as a dimension of a wider national strategic focus. There is a key role for the Commission in stimulating national strategic commitment through structural indicators and review processes for implementing these EU2020 headline target areas – a quality label for schools and universities plays a role within this wider system of strategic commitments and review processes.

Two Key Recommendations are:

RECOMMENDATION 1

DG EAC establish an expert working group on access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups, possibly in conjunction with NESET II to:

- focus on developing structural indicators at *national* level for access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups;
- focus on developing structural indicators at *university institution* level for access to higher education for socio-economically excluded groups;
- develop a quality label for *university outreach and community engagement for access*;
- establish a *review process* with Member States for these structural indicators and quality label.

RECOMMENDATION 2

DG EAC to build on established working groups for early school leaving prevention such as the School Policy Group and the TWG report, possibly in conjunction with NESET II to:

- focus on developing structural indicators at national level for early school leaving prevention;
- focus on developing structural indicators at primary and post-primary school levels for early school leaving prevention;
- develop structural indicators and a quality label for the local action plans of municipalities for early school leaving;
- develop a quality label for inclusive (relational, democratic) systems at: a) school level and b) teacher pre-service level;
- establish a review process with Member States for these structural indicators and quality labels.

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