



## Supported Education

### 3.11 Sustainability (quality, evaluation and finances)

#### Introduction

We do not develop Supported Education (SEd) because it is currently trendy now, but as a lifeline and support for educational institutions to provide quality education to all people despite their possible disabilities.

#### Conditions of sustainability of SEd

1. *There has to be a continuing need for SEd in society.* As documented elsewhere in this toolkit, the number of young people with mental illness in many European countries is rising, while in others it remains at a constant level. Little effort was put into developing support for students with mental illness in schools over the last century. Nowadays, the situation is different. The majority of countries have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which proclaims that people with disabilities must have the same resources as others. Students with a disability have a right to get the support they need to study. This is why we see SEd as a very important service.

2. *SEd is recognized as a unique and independent service.* It is not special education, treatment of mental illness or case management. SEd is a multidisciplinary service. It stays at the border of mental health care, education and social care, and some would say that SEd does not specifically belong to any of those branches. Thanks to the clear definition of its aims, target group and methods, it is an independent and unique service. We do not see any healthcare, social or educational spheres struggling to absorb SEd—in fact, mostly we see exactly opposite process. This is why we consider SEd to be an independent service and we are building its independent existence by choosing the name, editing its toolkit, calling conferences on SEd, and so on.

3. *SEd is a progressive, self-developing, quality focused, effective service, whose results can be substantiated.* This can be either evidence based or practice based.

4. *SEd is adequately funded.*

If these conditions are met, than there is a good chance that the SEd program will be sustained. In the following paragraphs, the latter two conditions will be explained in more detail.

## **Quality and evaluation of a SEd program**

Supported Education programs are all presumably acting in the best interests of their clients, namely the students. Programs are constructed according to student needs as these are understood by the providers, both with regard to established universal evidence and also according to and influenced by local contexts. Key stakeholders will need to make thorough evaluations of their programs on a regular basis to ensure the best possible services for their students. Implementing, maintaining and further developing any SEd program is best seen as a continual process, a never-ending incremental process of improvement. To this end, quality and evaluation are two overlapping constructs needing periodic attention from all important stakeholders.

At its most fundamental level, programs need to ask themselves basic questions about both process and content. Examples of such basic questions are, has the SEd program been implemented as planned? Is the program serving the intended target group according to plan? Are interdependent parties functioning properly according to the initial plans, and are they satisfied? Once established, and once enough time has elapsed, can it be said that the SEd programs' goals are being fulfilled—i.e., do we see satisfactory results?

We think that any evaluation of SEd services should focus on whether or not students receive services that assist them in attaining their own goals. Questions to be asked are:

- What does (higher) education mean to you?
- What helped you to remain at school?
- What hindered you from remaining at school?
- How do you value the support from the Supported Education service/professional?
- How can we improve our Supported Education service?

In short, we need to know both how things are being done and what comes out of the process. This entails developing and collecting process measures and outcome measures. Process measures will help provide structured and objective guidelines by which stakeholders can implement and/or improve practices currently deemed both valid and reliable. Together, these measures will constitute a norm from which evaluators can measure fidelity to said norm. We also need to collect outcomes, and in this context we are actually evaluating whether or not the SEd program succeeds in helping the student attain his/her educational goal(s). Goals can be long term or short term and both can be translated into specific measures. Processes and outcomes make up the evidence from which stakeholders can evaluate SEd programs locally, and the aggregation of such evidence helps to build the field of Supported Education as a specific and worthwhile service as a whole, above and beyond local contexts. It behooves all SEd program stakeholders to assign weighted and structured attention to these issues on a regular basis.

Stakeholders may harbor differing ideas about how goals are to be understood. Though we have emphasized throughout our consortium collaboration the importance of a human rights based service provision, one wherein the value orientation supersedes economic considerations, we must also attend to economic realities and the goals of SEd program funders. More often than not, a funder will be heavily invested in outcomes, as these are reflected in student goal attainment and subsequent movement towards

employment. These are ultimately macro goals with ramifications for unemployment rates and socio-economic inclusion in the greater society. More often than not, these goals mirror the goals of the individual student.

There will, however, be students who seek support for no other reason than to obtain higher education for and in and of itself, without any concrete aspiration to qualify for a particular vocation or future employment. Our stance towards these students is the same as it is to those seeking specific education for specific employment-related reasons. Therefore, although we do want to collect outcome measures, such measures should be collected and evaluated according to student educational goals.

The ImpulSE consortium collaboration functions to enhance each member's understanding of the SEd program in general and also to help consolidate the burgeoning practiced based evidence (PBE) not yet systematized and validated against the principles of evidence based practice (EBP). One shared and salient piece of PBE across all consortium national lines was the reported importance of the student's evaluation of the specific relationship with the SEd worker. In other words, the student's themselves point to and emphasize what we may call a basic requirement for any constructive process leading toward a desired outcome. The positive relationship with the SEd worker is seen as necessary in maintaining hope and stamina throughout the higher education process. These results further emphasize the existing recovery research, wherein service users evaluate the fundamental requirements of recovery processes. This is discussed at length elsewhere in this manual.

There are various accomplished sources in the literature covering the topics of evaluation and quality for developing evidence based practices in the field of human service. We lean heavily on one specifically geared for SEd, *Supported Education: A Promising Practice. Evaluating Your Program*, provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and available online at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov). We strongly recommend that stakeholders at any stage of assessment review this excellent work in order to evaluate their own practices against these helpful suggestions.

## **Finances**

Money is somehow always important.

As has been said in many places within this document, the point of Supported Education is to help fulfill the educational aspirations of people with mental health problems. Since the right to education is one of the fundamental human rights according to the UN, thus compliance becomes the responsibility of individual states. From this general point of view, we consider it essential to say that Supported Education should be financially secured from state resources.

Returning to the practical level of funding: if we want to establish Supported Education as an independent service, it is difficult to build only on voluntary work or work in

addition to the main work arrangements. Rather, it is necessary to budget cost as for any regular service of this type.

The costs of a SEd service can vary widely, but the main component is always the personnel costs—the SEd professionals. Furthermore, there are operational rooms and facilities, offices, telephones, internet, travel expenses, training and education of workers, supervision, printing, promotion. Acquisition costs are for computers, phones, perhaps a car (depending on the area of service provision—whether housed at the university, where university campuses are, or, alternatively, if it's an independent agency and works for multiple institutions in multiple locations).

*Sources of financing.* Generally, the basic rule applies that where the service can ask for money, it will be inclined to do so. Due to the Europe-wide impact of the toolkit, it is difficult to offer clear and specific financial resources that could be used throughout Europe.

Similar types of new service usually start as a small volunteer project or an initiative of individuals or institutions which are later supported by grants from ministries (education, healthcare, social affairs) and governments, or from EU structural funds (as this project). Moving on from the immediate type of financing, it is necessary to search for ways to finance permanently.

Non-governmental organizations sometimes follow the path of building a network of regular donors. This is a tradition in the U.S., but it is not a typical means of sustainable funding on the European continent. It is preferable rather to seek connections to the budgets of larger organizations, or state (regional, municipal, etc.) departments. SEd can become a part of the information and counseling centers (or other student welfare centers) at universities. In some countries, SEd is provided within the framework of psychosocial rehabilitation and is financed in a similar way to supported employment and related services, through government subsidies or payments of health insurance or welfare benefits. To become a part of the state budget is the target level for sustainable financing of this service. In the countries where SEd has been developed, experience shows that no ministry has been willing to give SEd a clear sign of independence, but rather the between-departments status of the service has been seen as an opportunity to shift the burden of responsibility to another area.

Full recognition of the uniqueness and effectiveness of SEd by governments is yet to come. We are not aware that SEd has been systematically funded from the state budget of any state. We cannot therefore recommend any guaranteed right way to procure sustainable financing for the SEd. However, experience has taught us that a way to maintain the SEd service is always somehow found, and this feeds us with hope for further consolidation of SEd services in the systems of our countries.