

PS Plus 2: Measuring Improvements to Employability through Distance Travelled

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Part-funded by the European Social Fund, PS Plus was a project which aimed to assist offenders (beneficiaries) in gaining employment, with the ultimate goal of reducing re-offending in England and Wales. Between September 2002 and June 2008, PS Plus has provided assistance to nearly 80,000 beneficiaries in 42 prison establishments and 15 probation areas. This study covers the second phase of the project, PS Plus 2, which ran between September 2004 and March 2007, assisting over 33,000 beneficiaries in 39 prisons and 3 probation areas.

PS Plus 2 aimed to provide employment, education & training and accommodation for beneficiaries. However, these outcomes alone give an incomplete picture of both the extent and success of the project. PS Plus works with beneficiaries with large barriers to employment, and project intervention may have improved the employability of beneficiaries without them necessarily gaining employment or housing by the time of their release and therefore completion on PS Plus. In order to realise the true scope of the PS Plus project a method of measuring improvements to the employability of beneficiaries was required.

Traditionally, project intervention is difficult to measure unless a clearly defined outcome has been achieved. For example, employment and qualifications can both be easily measured and assured. Generally, such outcomes are referred to as *hard outcomes* and are easily identified as improving employability. However, many outcomes such as receiving guidance or improving self-confidence are subjective and are not easily measured. Referred to as *soft outcomes*, these outcomes should also be taken into consideration when identifying any improvements to a beneficiary's employability. Collectively, *hard and soft outcomes* give the summation of the improvements to employability gained through project intervention.

Distance travelled can be described as the progress made by a beneficiary towards improving their employability through PS Plus intervention on leaving the project. The concept attempts to quantify the progress made by beneficiaries through the accumulation of *hard and soft outcomes*. In doing so, the 'grey area' between the extremes of gaining employment and not receiving intervention can be made tangible.

Opposite is an example of a *distance travelled* map (figure 1). The two lines represent the initial or baseline score and the current or end score. Markers close to the centre of the radar indicate a low score for the given intervention area and that the beneficiary has a long way to travel before employment is attainable. In contrast, markers towards the perimeter of the radar indicate that little or no intervention is required. In the example given opposite we can quickly identify that this beneficiary required a great deal of assistance with employment, whereas there were only minor issues with accommodation. When comparing the end scores to the baseline scores, it is apparent that employability has been improved in all of the four intervention areas. The beneficiary has *travelled* the furthest through employment interventions and much less so with regards to accommodation.

Mapping *distance travelled* in this way allows the beneficiaries to see the extent to which they have improved their employability. This can be of great help in improving self-confidence and motivation, especially when the final goal of gaining employment is far out of sight to the beneficiary. Additionally, PS Plus staff can quickly identify how much work has been carried out and how much is still required for each of the four intervention areas.

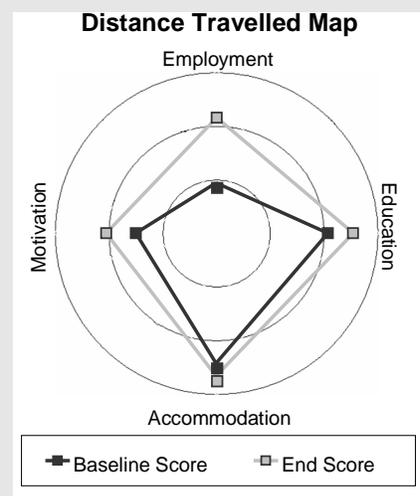


Figure 1 shows an example of a *distance travelled* map.

All of the 33,002 beneficiaries worked with on PS Plus 2 had their *distance travelled* calculated for each of the four intervention areas: employment, education, accommodation and motivation. *Distance travelled* has allowed us to identify how many PS Plus beneficiaries have had their employability improved and the extent to which this has happened. **Of the 33,002 beneficiaries worked with on PS Plus 2, we were able to measure improvements to employability for 93% (30,773) (figure 2).** This was largely through interventions aimed directly at employment or education and training, but employability was also improved to some degree through help with housing issues and motivation.

Further analysis was undertaken in order to identify which possible factors promote or inhibit *distance travelled* and thus PS Plus's effort to improve the employability of its beneficiaries:

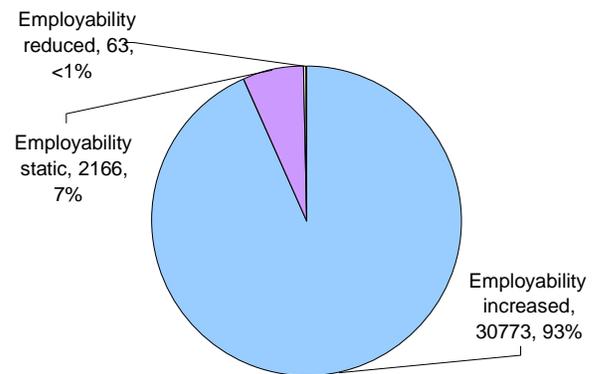


Figure 2 shows the recorded changes in employability of PS Plus 2 beneficiaries.

Key Findings:

- Statistical analysis has been able to reinforce that PS Plus intervention has had a significant impact on improving employability. Actions and referrals made on beneficiaries' Community Integration Plans (CIPs) have been shown to significantly improve their employability, be it directly through interventions aimed at employment or indirectly through interventions aimed at education & training, housing or motivation.
- Additionally, it has been shown that the extensive and varied activities that PS Plus beneficiaries undertake whilst on the project are significant in helping to improve employability, and generally the more hours undertaken the more employable a beneficiary becomes. However, the large scale of this study has made it unfeasible to assess the impact of individual activities and courses, and how these are in turn affected by potential barriers such as substance abuse or age.
- Beneficiaries who did not believe that ETE or housing interventions would reduce their risk of re-offending *travelled* a significantly shorter *distance* towards employment than those beneficiaries who had a more optimistic outlook on PS Plus intervention. Further analysis shows that said beneficiaries were significantly less motivated on starting the project, and reinforces the view that attitude and self-confidence are a crucial factor in helping to improve employability.
- Several barriers were identified as affecting *distance travelled* and thus restricting improvements to employability; specifically financial issues, health problems, and beneficiaries posing 'high' or 'very high' risk to the public. However, when compared to the positive effect of the community integration plans (CIPs) and intervention activities, the effects of these barriers is minimal.
- Evidence suggests that over-crowding has a detrimental effect on motivation: the likelihood of improving motivation decreases significantly as the average percentage of offenders an establishment records are held in over-crowded accommodation increases.
- Although statistical methods were able to identify many significant factors that affect *distance travelled*, such factors could only explain a limited extent of the observed variance in the data. It is anticipated that the greatest effects on improving a beneficiary's employability are: the prison or probation area worked in and the individual activities that are available; the staff and mentors worked with; and the beneficiary's own inherent ability to change. An improved study would focus at establishment level and attempt to take such factors into consideration.