Review of the Guide on Tracer studies

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Why it is important to have a guide

- Tracer studies well developed in HE, but not so well in VET.

- For VET it is even more important to have data on the School-To-Work-Transition (STWT).

- Having good data on STWT can give feedback to national policymakers, schools and employers.

- Good initiative to develop a practical guide for both HE and VET.

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Is this guide the answer?

- Aim: „ to contribute to the improvement of education in the VET as well as the HE sector by means of conducting successfull high quality graduate surveys or Tracer Studies."

- The important question is: does this guide help in achieving this goal?

- **Our conclusion is: "yes for HE, no for VET".**

- Main problem: it is totally based on experiences with HE tracer studies and does not address the peculiarities and complexity of VET.

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Too much focus on HE

- None of the examples relate to VET tracer studies.
- Typical wording: when talking about the population definition, the report talks about:
  - "take … definition of tertiary education of … OECD", p. 48;
  - "<look at> reputation rankings" (p.48);
  - "type of degree" (p.49).
- Data collection experiences based on HE graduates, not on VET school-leavers:
  - recommendation to use a questionnaire of 12-16 pages may work for HE, but certainly not for VET (and even for HE it is doubtful!). Are there other (administrative) data ?
- Language level B1 at the max. for VET

Typical VET issues not addressed:

- Methodology focused on a system where students attended fulltime programs that are aimed at entering the labour market. This applies to the vast majority of HE graduates.

- But VET is different:
  - Many follow a dual track of learning and working (note that the word 'apprentice' does not even appear in the guide!)
  - Some programs are typically followed by people later in their career, often as parttime students, courses (life long learning) or as second chance education.
  - Many programs prepare for both labour market and further education

The case of apprentices

- How to define and include school-leavers from the apprenticeship system? When are they considered a graduate?

- How to address this group? They often do not recognize themselves as 'school-leaver' as they left fulltime education long before.

- What are the implications for the questionnaire? How to address the learning at school and at work? Which part is evaluated?

- What does it mean for main concepts like: 'time since leaving education', 'timing of job search' etc.?

The case of parttime students

- How to deal with ISCED 4 programs? They are often not part of 'initial education': should they be included?

- If so, what does it mean if these programs are followed part-time, next to working? Or at a later stage in the career as part of LLL? What are the implications for the questionnaire and important concepts like 'since leaving education', 'time of job search', 'link between program and job' etc.?

- Can we mix results with the fulltime students? Does that make any sense?

The case of VET programs that have a double goal: labour market and further education.

- Many VET programs at ISCED 2 and also ISCED 3 level have a double focus. How to deal with them?

- Are students that go to further education included in the sample or no? Is a successful transition to further education an explicit focus?

- What are the implications for the questionnaire?

- What is the implication for your results if only 10% go to labour market? And what if it is 50%?

The case of early school-leavers (ESL)

- ESL are typically not graduates but VET plays an important role in preventing ESL. How to deal with them? Is that a target group or not? Does it tell us something about the quality of VET programs if there are large or small numbers of ESL?

- Many of them return in some kind of VET program. Should we measure return to education?

- How can we define succes in the transition here? How can we define concepts like 'link with education program'?

Is the guide practical?

- Very elaborate: more a handbook. But this works good for HE.

- Difficult to judge whether it works as a practical guide in developing countries, probably yes !, but:

- Would be good to ask some local researchers. Maybe there are complexities that are not well taken into account.

- There is relatively little attention for the role of social media, like LinkedIn or Facebook. This could be of specific importance in the future. Certainly in developing countries.

Some concluding remarks

- This is a handbook of tracer studies written by an experienced and reputed researcher. As a handbook for HE tracer studies it is really good.

- But serious doubts whether it will work for VET.

- Some doubts on practicalities for developing countries and in general. Leave out:
  - Some examples
  - Parts that deal with survey methodology in general

- Possible role of social media is lacking to a large extend.

- We live in an ever changing world, there is a need for maintenace of these guides.

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