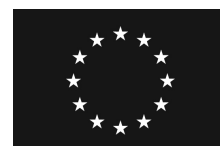


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For European Social Fund (ESF)
Specifications 2012-15

November 2012

Of interest to all colleges and training organisations



European Union
European Social Fund
Investing in jobs and skills

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Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment document covers the procurement for the 2007-2013 European Social Fund (ESF) Programme of the following three projects:

- Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU) and Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE)
- Skills Support for Redundancy (SSR)
- Work Placed Learning (WPL)

Contracts under these specifications will deliver training and support activity from April 2012 to July 2015. The assessment encompasses all three specifications looking at the common themes within them. Unless otherwise stated, the notes in this document reflect all three specifications.

Summary

Through the three ESF specifications we expect:

- to have a positive impact on the identified priority groups, without detriment to other groups
- that there will be no change to inclusion of priority target groups
- to continue the monitoring of provider performance to targets and
- to review performance on a quarterly basis. All new procurement activity will be impact-assessed to the same criteria.

Scope

- 1 What policy (ies)/ decision(s)/ activity (ies) are you are assessing?
 - The current ESF commissioning strategy/policy, to procure Skills Support for the Unemployed (SSU) - which includes Apprenticeship Support to Employers (AGE) - Skills Support for Redundancy (SSR) and Work Placed Learning (WPL).
- 2 What has triggered this assessment (for example, new policy, change to policy or periodic review)?
 - New procurement activities.
- 3 What is the aim of the policy/change to the strategy/policy, and who is it intended to benefit?
 - For SSU, the aim of this provision is to ensure capacity is in place to provide skills support to unemployed individuals on benefits who are looking for work but face a skills barrier to entering the labour market.
 - For SSR activity, the aim is to ensure that capacity is in place to respond to redundancies and the employment implications of local economic conditions. The Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) is seeking to procure training opportunities for individuals who are under consultation or at notice of redundancy.
 - WPL aims to promote the in-work progression of employed individuals with low skills through the delivery of work-related skills training. The Agency is seeking to fund provision that will raise the learners' level of attainment, enabling individuals to improve their employment status and to move on to undertake higher levels of training.
 - The overall aim of these specifications is to update ESF policy in line with government changes in policy; to further the aims of the Agency and [New Challenges, New Changes \(SIS\)](#) through the use of the ESF to add benefit and/or increased provision capacity and to meet the Agency's objectives as a Co-financing organisation (CFO).
- 4 Is the Agency fully responsible for the policy/ decision/ activity? Yes
 - What other organisations have responsibilities?
 - The ESF Division, part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), is responsible for the ESF Operational Programme in England and sets requirements and targets for the Agency as a co-financing organisation.
 - What have they done/are they doing to take equality into account?
 - The ESF Operating Programme has an equality and diversity programme and is aimed at the social inclusion of disadvantaged individuals.
- 5 Within the Agency, who has the lead responsibility for the policy/ decision/ activity?

- The ESF Management Group, to ensure the continuing improvement of the management and delivery of ESF co-financing provision.
- 6 What are the relevant timescales, and when does a decision need to be made by? Note: public bodies must have due regard “before and at the time that a particular decision is being considered”. This means that equality must form part of the decision-making process as it happens and not after the event.
- Timescales were established as part of the pre-procurement exercise in August 2011 and full consultation given to equality and diversity impact and the ESF priority requirements for protected status individuals. These were built into the specification accordingly at the time of development. The ESF Management Group signed off the specification (6 November 2011). As the specification has adhered to existing ESF programme policy and requirements regarding the inclusion and prioritisation of individuals with protected characteristics no decision to specifically include or exclude them was required.

Evidence

- 7 Do you have sufficient evidence to judge whether the policy/ decision/ activity could have different impacts on people with different protected characteristics, and what those impacts are likely to be?
- The protected characteristics are as follows:
 - Age – Positive impact, priority group
 - Disability - Positive impact, priority group
 - Gender reassignment – Neutral Impact
 - Marriage and civil partnership – Neutral Impact
 - Pregnancy and maternity – Neutral Impact
 - Race – Positive impact, priority group
 - Religion/belief – Neutral Impact
 - Sex – Positive impact, priority group
 - Sexual orientation – Neutral Impact
 - The Positioning Statement for each specification sets out the priority groups for the provision (as noted above). Within the context of ESF, the groups are identified as potentially requiring additional support to ensure social inclusion and the Agency has engagement targets (see table at paragraph 8). The impact on the other protected groups is expected to be neutral (neither positive nor negative).
 - This assessment of a neutral impact is based on these protected characteristics not being a barrier to physical engagement, participation or achievements in the procured activity or its target cohort. Each of the three procurement activities is targeted at all individuals within the relevant cohorts – unemployed, employed at

risk of redundancy and employed with low skills. Within the cohorts the four identified protected characteristic groups are recognised within the context of skills training, to be under represented groups and so are proactively targeted.

- The main sources of data for the various evaluations are through: ESF targets, a research report in “Engaging Unemployed Women” was undertaken by NIACE and produced in September 2011., and The Agency’s New Register of Training Organisations Positioning Statement.

8 What does the evidence you have gathered tell you about the likely impact of the policy/ decision/ activity on each of the protected groups? What are the key facts/figures?

- There has been positive targeting throughout the programme as outlined above.
- As mentioned previously, ESF activity is targeted at engaging individuals in the four protected characteristic groups identified. The table below shows the targets for these four protected characteristic groups in both Priorities as recorded in the Agency’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which forms the contract with ESF Division.

	Priority 1 & 4 (unemployed individuals)	Priority 2 & 5 (employed individuals)
LLDD	21%	15%
50+	18%	20%
BME	24%	13%
Females	51%	50%

9 Are there any opportunities to use the policy/ decision/ activity positively, to support the goals of the Equality Duty?

- There are two cross-cutting themes: gender equality and equal opportunities; and sustainable development (which incorporate environmental sustainability). EU regulations require these themes to be promoted during the various stages of the implementation of the ESF programme.
- The cross-cutting themes, and the provider’s role in promoting them, will be evaluated during the life of the programme. Their implementation is covered by monitoring and audit activities. All providers are expected to comply with relevant legislation.
- As a co-financing organisation, the Skills Funding Agency will use its procurement process and contract management arrangements to help ensure that Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality are integrated into the services provided by the contracted ESF

providers. For example, we have the flexibility, should we need to use it to adjust the funding levels, engagement targets and priority focus for specific under-represented groups, through future tender exercises.

- Supporting and meeting the requirements of these cross-cutting themes is written into provider contract requirements and outlined in the Agency's [Funding Rules](#).

Options

- 10 In line with the ESF requirements, these specifications prioritise activity at certain protected groups. This is expected to leave a positive impact on the participation rates for these groups but not to the detriment or exclusion of other groups.

Actions

- 11 On the basis of a positive-to-neutral impact the implementation process is concluded at this stage.
- 12 Targeting of priority groups will continue to be monitored throughout the life of the programme and the Agency's requirement is to report to the European Commission on its progress and targets.
- 13 It has been recognised that current engagement of individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD) for workplace learning is below the target level. A research project is being commissioned to investigate the reasons for this, such as the level of non-disclosure, and identify best practice to increase engagement and participation.

Monitoring and review

- 14 Outline how you will monitor and review the outcomes of the policy/ decision/ activity.
 - Programme-level performance monitoring is ongoing. Management actions will be taken where failure to meet priority group's targets is identified.
 - Each region is monitored on a quarterly basis against the agreed ESF targets, for example proportion of LLDD learners engaged. Quarterly performance reports are distributed to all regions showing breakdowns and national performance and are then reviewed by the ESF Management Group (Director Level). This therefore includes elements of content and peer review. ESF Management Group will agree any actions required to compare performance.

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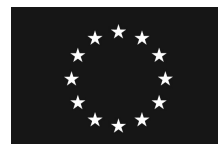
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