

FUTURE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS TRAINING FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS: A SUCCESSOR TO THE ESF

Introduction

For decades the funding provided by European Social Funds (ESF) has provided critical support to many of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society often neglected by mainstream public services. However, its bureaucratic nature has often impacted on the ability of providers to deliver programmes of support to their full potential.

With the UK poised to leave the European Union in 2019, the government now has a once in a generation opportunity to develop a world-leading initiative that builds on the best aspects of ESF while addressing the design flaws which have led to excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy. To support this objective, this paper, which reflects the views of organisations primarily operating in England, sets out the importance of ESF provision for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and proposes a set of design principles to inform the development and delivery of a successor fund.

Background

The ERSA / NCVO Post EU Working Group

In early 2017, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) brought together a cross-sector Working Group of organisations with the joint aim of developing a set of design principles for the successor fund to the European Social Funds (ESF) after the UK leaves the European Union. The Working Group comprises leaders from skills and training, employment support, civil society, children and youth, local authority, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and private sector organisations, as well as frontline providers of ESF. This paper is endorsed by the following members of the working group:

- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
- Employment Related Services Association (ERSA)
- Groundwork
- Shaw Trust

- Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales
- London Voluntary Sector Council (LVSC)
- VONNE
- Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change
- Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF)
- Locality
- Mencap
- Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)
- St Giles Trust
- Family and Childcare Trust
- Give us a Chance
- Pluss
- National Enterprise Network
- Policy in Practice
- Reed in Partnership
- Advanced Personnel Management
- Papworth Trust
- HOLEX
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- Association of Colleges
- Learning and Work Institute
- The Salvation Army
- Charity Finance Group (CFG)
- Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF)
- United Response
- Steps to Work
- Barnardo's
- Network for Europe

The European Social Fund

ESF offers crucial investment for the UK in education, training and employment support, specifically targeting some of the most vulnerable groups through a broad range of programmes and initiatives. This includes young people (particularly those who are NEET), long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and health conditions, people facing multiple complex barriers to employment, and prisoners, prison leavers and ex-offenders.

Future employment & skills training for disadvantaged groups: a successor to the ESF

These funds have been incredibly important in generating positive employment and skills outcomes, particularly for the most deprived communities¹. Between 2007-2013, the UK received €4.47bn of ESF funding, which when matched by national co-funding, brought the total spend on ESF projects to €8.6 billion. A further €3.5bn has been allocated to the UK for the period from 2014 to 2020.

Department of Work and Pensions figures² show that as of May 2015, there had been over 5.59 million participant starts on the programme and over:

- 521,000 unemployed or inactive participants have been helped into jobs
- 262,000 participants have gained basic skills
- 682,000 participants have gained qualifications at level 2 or above
- 533,000 disadvantaged young people have been helped to enter employment, education or training

According to the Welsh Government³, since 2007 EU projects have achieved the following in Wales:

- Supported 229,110 people to gain qualifications
- Helped 72,700 people into work
- Created 36,970 (gross) jobs and 11,925 enterprises

The current funding round, 2014-2020, has earmarked a total of £500m per year and focusses on access to work and support for vulnerable cohorts including:

- Young people (particularly those who are NEET)
- Long-term unemployed
- People with disabilities and health conditions
- People with multiple complex barriers
- Prisoners, prison leavers and ex-offenders

A selection of case studies demonstrating how ESF provision provides essential support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups is provided in Appendix A.

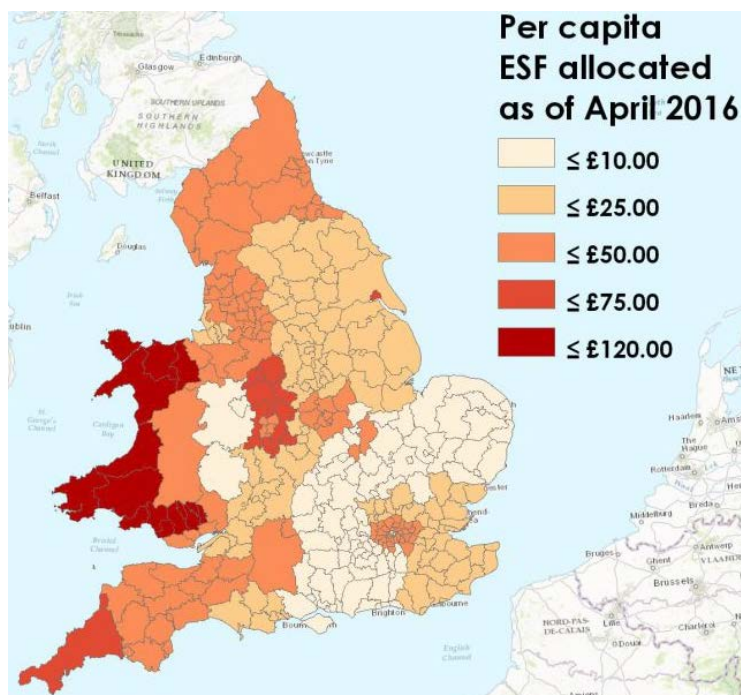
¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/press/uk-government-needs-plan-boost-poorest-regions-following-brexit>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/european-social-fund-2007-to-2013>

³ <http://gov.wales/funding/eu-funds/previous/?lang=en>

The potential financial impact of not replacing ESF

The withdrawal of ESF without a replacement programme in place would have a serious impact on the vital support some of the most disadvantaged communities receive. For example, **based only on the 21 per cent of the total ESF for 2014-2020 allocated as of April 2016**, figures from Policy in Practice⁴ show that under ESF:



- Local authorities in West Wales and The Valleys receive an average of £101.53 per person.
- Several local authorities in the West Midlands, Cornwall and Hull receive at least £50 per person.
- Several boroughs in North East greater London receive at least £50 per person.

Given this represents just over 21% of the total ESF for 2014 – 2020, the per capita allocation of ESF for the whole period would be

much higher.

Furthermore, in providing underpinning funding, ESF often helps attract money from other sources such as independent Foundations and the Big Lottery Fund.

Leaving the EU

Seizing the opportunity to build a world-leading successor to European Social Funds

Despite the many successes of structural funds, leaving the EU provides an opportunity to design a better, world-leading initiative to replace the investment made through ESF. By helping to create a fairer and more inclusive society where all communities have an opportunity to

⁴ <http://policyinpractice.co.uk/brexit-whats-next-esf-local-authorities/>

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contribute to economic growth, an effectively designed successor fund to ESF will help the UK fulfil its post-Brexit potential.

A successor initiative should invest in services that support disadvantaged and hard-to-reach communities neglected by mainstream state provision. In doing so, it will help tackle the UK's current skills gaps and productivity challenges and deliver a thriving labour market in line with the government's Industrial Strategy. Importantly, communities will also be better positioned to generate local opportunities for themselves and withstand the impact of economic shocks by becoming more economically resilient.

A well-designed successor programme would assist public authorities in fulfilling their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act 2010. Additionally, the cross-cutting themes of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming – which cover both ESF and ERDF – should also be carried forward and would further orientate a successor programme around tackling inequality and ensuring the representation of marginalised communities⁵.

To deliver against these objectives, a new initiative should be led through partnerships that develop community-driven solutions which build social cohesion and opportunities for people on the margins of society. This vision is part of a long-term investment strategy, which can deliver significant long-term savings by helping to tackle some of the UK's most entrenched social problems.

The Conservative manifesto set out a commitment to create a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), specifically designed to reduce inequalities between communities across the UK, which may provide a vehicle for replacing ESF. Regardless of the approach taken, whether through the UKSPF or a separate successor fund to ESF, the total amount of money provided for a successor fund should be no less than existing levels of ESF funding currently provided to the UK to ensure hard-to-reach communities continue to be adequately supported. If devolution is to play a significant role in the successor initiative, a minimum level should be set for local areas to spend on ESF-orientated programmes. A successor Fund should ensure that the devolved legislatures, local Government and elected mayors have input into the allocation of funding. It is essential that the devolution settlements are respected and that devolved governments have control over how funding is distributed'

⁵ The UK government's own Equality Impact Assessment of the 2014-2020 ESIF concluded that the impact on equality would be "significantly positive", so there is high-level recognition of the importance and impacts of the structural fund's explicit focus.

Key design principles for a successor fund to ESF

Through a series of workshops and meetings with key stakeholders we have identified a set of design principles which would help address lessons learnt from the distribution of ESF and create an efficient and effective replacement fund. In particular, a new fund should:

1. Ensure that it delivers interventions that reflect the link between health, wellbeing and employment services, as well as other interlinking barriers

A successor fund to ESF should take a holistic approach by promoting service integration, preventative action, and community cohesion. Issues related to health and well-being can make finding work or participating in training programmes difficult for certain groups. Similarly, an individual's ability to find work or take part in activities that increase their likelihood of finding employment can have a positive effect on other wellbeing factors such as mental health. Better co-ordination and partnership working between local actors – including frontline providers, public bodies, businesses, charities, communities and the public – would help to deliver more effective 'wraparound' support for people with multiple barriers while simultaneously helping agencies achieve shared outcomes.

A successor initiative to ESF based on a multi-agency and multi-sectoral community partnership approach, combined with long-term funding, similar to ESF timeframes and across parliamentary terms, would not only facilitate better service integration, it could also provide significant cost savings for the Exchequer as highlighted by the NAO⁶.

It is also important that any successor fund to ESF is not used to subsidise existing state provision. As such there should be a condition made that it only funds provision which is currently missed by mainstream support, creating a clear route of employment support for disadvantaged groups and people with complex needs neglected by existing public services. The funding mechanism should be designed to go above and beyond existing services and engage with the hardest to reach.

⁶ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Integration-across-government-Executive-Summary.pdf>

2. Be developed and delivered through multi-agency and multi-sectoral community partnerships which should be commissioned around place and needs

By bringing together charities, statutory partners, LEPs, voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, skills, training, employment support providers and other partners with specific areas of expertise and knowledge of local and regional needs, a successor fund to ESF could deliver more effective and better value services. At its heart, services should be designed around people, rather than people being expected to fit into existing service silos.

This will help achieve:

Service integration

Support should be holistic and cater for people with complex and multiple needs. A place and needs-based multi-agency and multi-sectoral approach to delivering education, training and employment support, with an element of co-production, could simultaneously help address other issues such as poor housing, social isolation, health and fragmented service provision as these issues are often interrelated. The NAO has noted how the integration of public services and programmes offers government the potential for substantial cost savings and service improvements, highlighting how better coordinated primary, acute and social care has led to cost savings and better services for patients in some local areas⁷. Similarly, a greater level of coordination between commissioners and providers would lead to a better fit between different programmes of support and help avoid overlap and duplication, particularly with existing state provision. It would also reduce the potential for service providers to compete for referrals.

An increasing number of examples exist of service delivery which demonstrate how partnerships, for example between employment support and health professionals, are working successfully in practice through different programmes and in various geographies. These include Individual Placement and Support, NHS-Employability Partnerships social prescribing and more. As such, innovations in service integration should play a major role in the programmes developed through the successor fund to ESF and how they interact with other public services.

Improved engagement

Closer working between delivery agents and statutory bodies would help to engage traditionally hard-to-reach groups by broadening the reach of a project or programme. For example, disadvantaged groups often know and trust local service providers, while these organisations

⁷ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Integration-across-government-Executive-Summary.pdf>

often understand the challenges these communities face. Furthermore, specialist providers tend to already have existing support projects in place which can be used to complement the design and delivery of new programmes.

Better data sharing

A multi-agency and multi-sector approach to delivery would also facilitate the better sharing of information and good practice between organisations with different areas of expertise, for the benefit of service users. For example, Jobcentre Plus staff would be better aware of particular projects or programmes which they could either refer participants onto it, or be aware that a participant was already taking part in, avoiding duplication of effort and unnecessary distress for the participant.

3. Foster innovation, bringing in new actors and finding new approaches to tackle entrenched problems

The fund should be partly used to develop innovative ways of tackling entrenched social problems. By broadening the mix of delivery and development partners to include non-traditional actors with a good understanding and engagement with disadvantaged groups, a successor fund to ESF could significantly improve the reach and effectiveness of employment, skills and learning provision.

These non-traditional actors should include:

Service users and volunteers

Service user involvement allows people who have experience of a service to become involved in its planning, development and delivery. Because of their experiences of using services, users have a unique insight into what works, which can then inform and improve services. For example, people with direct experience of employment, skills and learning programmes will be well-placed to identify challenges around referral processes and opportunities for the engagement of disadvantaged groups, as well as what works best. A successor programme should therefore have a strong focus on enabling people with lived experience to be part of the commissioning process.

The Revolving Doors Agency which aims to improve services for people with multiple needs who are in repeat contact with the criminal justice system gathered the views of its service users and found that different things are important to different groups. For example, women wanted support around access to children and advice on finances; for BAME service users, staff

awareness of different cultures was important; while for older people, access to medication and being treated with dignity and respect was key.⁸

Similarly, volunteers can be an effective way to liaise with certain communities of interest, as both mentors and befrienders, while volunteering as an activity can help move disadvantaged people closer to work by building skills and confidence, and providing work experience. However, it should be borne in mind that volunteering does not come for free and needs professional management or infrastructure.

Combined authority mayors and other local leaders

Combined authority mayors are responsible for setting out a strategy to grow the local economies in their areas. While their powers vary, each has powers over transport, housing and skills. However, they will not be limited by these powers. As the elected leaders of their areas they will be able to raise the profile of entrenched problems relating to employment, skills and learning. As seen in Greater London, mayors can often influence policy areas and should play a role in the coordination of service provision which brings together councils, government bodies, frontline providers and businesses. Involving city mayors in the planning and development of employment and skills support for vulnerable groups would also align with, and support, the government's local growth and devolution agenda.

4. Include a mix of long term funding and short-term trials, for stability and flexibility

A successor fund to ESF should include programmes with a mix of short-term trials for flexibility and testing ideas, and long-term funding which provides stability for commissioners and providers, and allows for strategies to be forward thinking and preventative in nature.

Short term funding

The use of short term funding, particularly through grants, can allow for innovative new ideas to be piloted and tested. Providing short term upfront funding can help providers develop proposals for longer-term solutions and help smaller specialist organisations participate in service delivery. This approach has proved successful the Purple Futures⁹ Innovation Funding model which encourages the piloting of innovative approaches to reducing reoffending.

⁸ Case study taken from NHS England guidance on service user involvement in commissioning
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2015/10/ohc-paper-06.pdf>

⁹ <http://purplefutures.sites.interserve.com/purple-futures/>

Long-term funding

Long-term funding, such as contracts spanning three years or more, is particularly important as it provides financial certainty for commissioners and providers and enables continuity of support for service users. It also enables the development of forward facing solutions, such as the use of preventative or early action initiatives which help overcome problems, including long-term unemployment, before they become harder to tackle. While most agree with the logic behind early action and its potential for long-term cost savings, current spending mechanisms limit investment in preventative initiatives. Longer-term programmes could help break away from the current patterns of spending and service delivery, which tend to focus on ‘downstream’ treatment and care. Not only would this benefit service users, it would make any proposed fund that replaces ESF more cost effective through what the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) labels a “public pound multiplier”, where targeting public investment effectively reduces financial pressures elsewhere.¹⁰

In practice, a mixture of short term pilots to test new ideas, leading to longer-term interventions, will often be desirable.

5. Involve a better and quicker process to identify need and allocate funds, providing an earlier return on investment and impact on communities

Allocating funds

A replacement fund will benefit from avoiding the bureaucracy of EU legislation around co-financing, and will consequently be better able to support a quicker process for identifying need and allocating funding. Funding should be allocated to meet local needs, shaped by organisations that understand the needs of communities and individuals best. The asymmetric shape of the UK landscape in terms of disadvantage hotspots means that the mechanism will require flexibility. Different powers exist within and between local authorities and combined authorities, while the resource and knowledge of other local bodies such as CCGs should also be harnessed.

Identifying need

Need should be identified through regional boards consisting of statutory partners, LEPs, local voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, skills and training and employment support providers, alongside other partners with specific areas of expertise and knowledge of local and

¹⁰ www.cipfa.org/-/media/files/topics/health/cipfa%20%20publichealth_v14.pdf

regional needs. These could potentially build on the manifesto commitment to enable Skills Advisory Panels and Local Enterprise Partnerships to work together at a regional and local level.

If LEPs are chosen as the preferred method of identifying local needs, the government should ensure that all LEPs have sufficient capacity and expertise in the area of deprivation, skills and employment support, with a membership fully a representative of the communities they cover. This could be achieved by putting LEPs on a statutory footing as set out in the Conservative Manifesto.

6. Ensure ease of access for providers of all sizes and sectors

The effectiveness of any fund to deliver education, training and employment support to a range of target groups, such as young people, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and health conditions, ex-offenders, people with multiple complex barriers and those currently in work, requires a diversity of providers, each specialising in specific areas of activity. To achieve this, a successor fund to ESF needs to ensure accessibility of funding to locally based providers of all sizes, who are close to the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and have relevant specialist understanding and expertise.

Using appropriate commissioning processes and procurement methods is essential for maintaining a diverse market of providers and delivering value for money, ensuring as much money as possible is channelled to the frontline.

Appropriate payment mechanisms

Where possible, grants should be the preferred procurement method. Competitive grant making often provides excellent value for money, from one-off projects to engage with beneficiaries to piloting a new idea where contract design and monitoring is deemed unnecessarily burdensome. The benefits of grant giving have been highlighted by the Lloyds Bank Foundation¹¹, and NHS England's guidelines on the use of grants¹². This would help put smaller providers on a more sustainable footing and increase the quality of some education, training and employment services, whilst also enabling charities to leverage in other in-kind help, particularly volunteering.

Using grants does not have to be a risky investment for funders. For example, foundations manage risks with staged payments, robust reporting, and grant agreements. Indeed, grant

¹¹ See <https://voluntarycommunitysocialenterprisereview.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/vcse-health-review-foundation-perspective.pdf> (page 4 onwards) and <https://vcseview.org.uk/2015/09/01/the-strengths-and-drawbacks-of-grant-funding-creating-a-sustainable-funding-mix/>

¹² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-standard-contract/grant-agreement/>

funding can avoid being overly prescriptive or locking providers into set ways of running their services.¹³

Where payment-by-results (PbR) is deemed appropriate for a contract (for example, following use of the NAO payment by results analytical framework¹⁴), the proportion of upfront payments to outcome payments should be carefully considered. This should be calculated on an assessment of the ability of the provider market to cope with the financial risk and cash flow implications. For example, the more specialist provision that is required because of the difficulty of the target group, the lower the proportion of payments based on outcomes and the higher the upfront 'attachment' fee.

Regardless of funding term, overhead costs of service providers should be covered. This is particularly important for smaller organisations who often struggle to cover core costs in contracts and grants. At the heart of this, is the need for a greater weighting towards upfront funding than was the case under ESF.

Contract sizes

A successor fund to ESF should ensure that a greater proportion of smaller providers are able to participate as prime or lead contractors in programmes, rather than just subcontractors. To do this, appropriate sized contracts should be used where possible, which are likely to be smaller for non-mainstream, specialist interventions. When deciding the suitability of different contract sizes, existing relationships with service users, the size of the target group, the ability and willingness of the provider market to deliver certain contract sizes, the degree of specialist services required and an assessment of whether larger contracts can deliver economies of scale and lower unit costs should be carefully considered.

Where organisations are involved as subcontractors, support should be provided for assessing the service-level agreement between themselves and prime contractors. Similarly, toolkits to help subcontractors negotiate contracts with prime or lead contractors would help ensure contract agreements are deliverable and mutually beneficial. Extending the use of DWP's Merlin

¹³ The 'Grants for Good' campaign highlights how grant funding from government is essential for communities to thrive, and aims to reverse the trend towards the increasing use of inflexible and overly restrictive. contracts <https://www.dsc.org.uk/grantsforgood/>

¹⁴ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Payment-by-results-analytical-framework-for-decision-makers.pdf>. See also the NAO's successful commissioning guidance <https://www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/sourcing-providers/>

Standard¹⁵ would help promote sustainable excellence within any supply chains developed and ensure subcontractors are treated fairly.

Tender timescales

The time given to respond to invitations to tender should be proportionate to the size and complexity of the contract in question. Often smaller organisations do not have the resources and staff time to develop effective partnerships, budget and plan for projects and programmes at short notice. Where possible, commissioners should provide supportive dialogue and practical help and hold ‘market warming’ exercises at an early stage in the procurement process to help enable organisations to develop strong and effective partnerships for delivery.

Level of audit and administration

A successor programme, while robustly and proportionately evaluating what works best, should seek to minimise the significant bureaucratic and administrative burden associated with ESF programmes, which, due to European audit requirements, have often undermined attempts to help the people who need support the most. For example, the new initiative should ensure that programmes are audited on factors directly related to value for money and quality of service, rather than the ability of providers to evidence what proportion of funding has been spent on minor overheads such as stationary. Thanks to the removal of the EU level of regulatory burden, the collecting and submitting evidence for outcomes achieved could be minimised and reflect the value of the contract, the nature of the client group being supported, and the style of intervention required. Indeed, the focus should be on simplifying the regulatory burden, so that evidence relating to outcomes and costs can be better compared between different programmes.

The use of generic contracts which include unnecessary clauses and requirements unrelated to the intervention in question should be avoided. Not only does this produce excessive auditing and administration requirements, it has a detrimental effect on service users as valuable resources are diverted from frontline delivery to unnecessary contractual compliance. Similarly, incorporating pre-contract dialogue into the tendering process would help ensure that programme outcomes are achievable.

A successor programme should have clear plain-English guidance on all of the above which is standardised across commissioning authorities to avoid misinterpretation and conflicting objectives.

¹⁵ <http://merlinstandard.co.uk/>

Appendix A: ESF in action - programmes supporting disadvantaged groups

Building Better Opportunities Project, North East England LEP

An example of ESF helping to tackle the root causes of poverty, promote social inclusion and drive local jobs and economic growth is the Building Better Opportunities, North East England LEP project which has a total budget of £18.5m (£9m from the ESF and £9m from the Big Lottery Fund).

In the North East, health issues are a significant barrier to work for many people. The Building Better Opportunities Project funds schemes that tackle this, such as 'Fitness First' which runs a 12-week physical activity and well-being programme for homeless people in partnership with Northumbria University. The aim of the scheme is to improve participants' physical and mental health so that they are better able to find employment. Similarly, the 'Reaching the Streets' in Newcastle Upon Tyne helps people, mainly aged between 16 and 35, who are affected by homelessness, alcohol and substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues. The scheme offers support on a one to one basis, and improves lives with psychotherapeutic interventions, peer support, recovery support, volunteering and mentoring. As this scheme provides tailored, personal support, the chances of success for people taking part is much greater.

The AIM4WORK programme delivered by the Shaw Trust

The AIM4Work programme, worth £4 million, works with people aged over 25 in the South, North & East Boroughs of London who are out of work and experiencing common mental ill health conditions. The service is based on the principles of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model and Shaw trust is working closely with the Centre for Mental Health during the course of this project. The programme launched in March 2017 and individuals eligible for the programme are able to apply by self-referral or through clinical channels, Jobcentre Plus or local authority services. AIM4Work is delivered by Shaw Trust and its partner organisations: City & Hackney Mind, Resources Plus, the Bromley by Bow Centre and the South West London and St Georges Mental Health NHS Trust.

St Giles Trust support for disadvantaged groups

St Giles Trust delivers a range of ESF-funded programmes, including Step Change in Yorkshire, Job Deal in the South East, STAR in London, CFO3 Yorkshire and Yes London which target support, totalling over £3million since 2014, to groups such as disadvantaged ex-offenders,

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offenders and ex-offenders ‘hardest to reach’ and 16-24 year olds not in education, employment or training. Their approach is to train ex-service users to become Peer Advisors, who are then able to provide additional support to clients, whilst themselves progressing into a career in advice and support work. ESF has enabled the organisation to carry out additional interventions and activities without which the clients would not get engaged or make the progress required to achieve their potential. Examples include:

- Outreach activities, to engage people who often have a mistrust of agencies;
- One to one caseworker support to build relationships of trust and provide personalised services the overcome inequalities and barriers;
- Holistic support, identifying and finding solutions for wider barriers such as housing and health;
- Specialist help, such as support for individuals to prepare and be confident about disclosing convictions to potential employers and training providers; and
- Longer term interventions – clients generally need longer term support and caseworkers who ‘stick’ with their clients despite setbacks.

Abbey Access Training’s ‘Get into Catering Programme’

The ‘Get into Catering’ Programme operates in a deprived ward in Lincoln, where health issues, crime, food banks, are commonplace. The programme provides work experience and catering skills for unemployed people with low confidence, mental health issues and criminal records. The programme helps on average 50 per cent of participants back to work. Similarly, their ‘Get into Construction’ programme provides work experience and work readiness and confidence training for disadvantaged people wanting to work in the construction industry. This includes helping participants gain a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card construction card. The programme helps approximately 75 per cent of participants back to work.

Single Parent Employment Pathway ESF project managed by Gingerbread

This project supports single parents into employment, education, training and job search in the Liverpool City Region. Individual information, advice and guidance sessions with a support worker help each participant to identify their needs, then guide their participants to relevant opportunities which include:

- volunteering with partner organisations.
- ‘Job Club’ employment sessions including CV writing and interview skills.

- linking participants with the appropriate educational support.

The project has exceeded its targets so far with 210 single parents taking part in the programme by January 2017 – 40 of those having found employment. By the end of the project in 2018 it is expected that 460 single parents will have taken part with 40% moving into employment and 60% going onto further training.

Links to Work run by Working Links

Links to Work is co-financed by DWP and aims to support unemployed and inactive people in Leicester & Leicestershire into work. Over the three year programme, the project will support up to 1681 clients from the Leicestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area, and aims to help 698 people into short job outcomes (13 weeks) and 625 sustained job outcomes (26 weeks). The project provides access to health & wellbeing and employability workshops helping participants gain confidence, new skills and the ability to job search successfully. By helping local people to identify their strengths, skills and abilities, and to overcome any barriers that they have to employment, the project facilitates participants moving closer to the labour market. This project is also helping many people gain confidence in applying for jobs by linking with other local organisations.

Pathways to Success managed by Career Connect

Pathways to Success supports up to 900 young people aged 15-18, identified by schools, colleges, providers and children's services, who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) across the Liverpool City Region. The ESF funded project aims to help young people develop resilience and overcome individual barriers to employment; ensuring young people make informed and appropriate post-16 choices, and are equipped with the necessary skills to sustain a positive progression. The project works with young people's families to develop their capacity to support the participant in improving their employability skills and confidence, whilst focusing on their strengths and areas of vocational interest, and the needs of the labour market.

EmployAbility, Mencap

EmployAbility works with people with a learning disability, families and employers, helping trainees to develop their employability and, where possible, progress into paid employment. Since starting in 1991, Mencap has used successive rounds of ESF funding to build the project's geographical presence and now provides the only specialist training and employment service for

people with a learning disability covering all of Northern Ireland. The project supported 324 people with a learning disability in the first year, of which 21 entered paid employment and 59 entered long term voluntary work, FE or further training with above 90% levels of satisfaction.

Bad Boys Bakery

The Bad Boys' Bakery is a working bakery located in Brixton prison. It is run by Working Link and is co-financed by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The programme provides skills and work experience to offenders which improves their chances of securing a good job on release. That investment has also led to a dramatic cut in reoffending rates. On average, 47 per cent of ex-offenders reoffend within 12 months of release from prison. For participants of Bad Boys Bakery, that figure is just 3 per cent. The project won the European Social Fund National Project Award at the Adult Learners' Week 2014 National Awards.

Youth Employment Skills – NEET Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities – 16-24, managed by Reed in Partnership

Reed in Partnership, along with partners DABD, Royal Mencap, Hackney Community College, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, deliver this Youth Employment Skills programme in North East London. The aim of the programme is to support young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) who are more likely to experience reduced opportunities and low incomes, and may be unaware of the range of opportunities available to help them continue studying or to enter employment. This programme identifies a range of provision (including but not limited to other NEET strands) and support young people to access this. It identifies opportunities including employment, apprenticeships, further education or traineeships, and support them to sustain for at least 6 months.

Through ESF, Reed in Partnership also delivers:

- Youth Employment Skills – NEET Outreach (16-24 years) in North East London with partners City Gateway, DABD, First Rung, Gingerbread, GLLaB, Hackney Community College, Let Me Play, NXG Group, Springboard, St Giles Trust, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation. This helps many young people who are NEET and unaware of the range of opportunities available to continue studying or to enter employment.

- Youth Employment Skills – NEET Black and Minority Ethnic Groups – 18-24 across London with GLLaB and Let Me Play. There are a number of barriers to entering and sustaining work that people from BAME communities are affected by more than other groups. For example, BAME people are around twice as likely to live in low income (when housing costs have been taken into account) compared to white people and more likely to live in social housing, both of which are associated with poorer labour market performance. This programme aims to improve participants' education, employability and personal skills so that they gain employment/start an apprenticeship and progress successfully in work.
- Youth Employment Skills – Mental Health - 18-24 in South London, Central London and West London. This programme works with NEET young people who experience mental health conditions, drug or alcohol abuse problems or homelessness. Young people who are NEET and face the additional barriers of this target group experience lower employment, education and training outcomes than the general youth population and higher levels of unemployment and inactivity as adults. This programme aims to improve participants' education, employability and personal skills so that they gain employment or start an apprenticeship, further education or traineeship, and successfully sustain for at least 6 months.

Since the YES programme began in July 2016, more than 4,500 young Londoners have engaged with the programme, with 1,571 (35%) of those having already having entered employment, training or an apprenticeship.

An evaluation of the service found that 89% of the 536 who responded said that their confidence and skills have improved since starting the programme; 92% of young people said their prospects of getting a job have improved; and 94% said that their knowledge of options available to them had improved.