

**Interim qualitative evaluation of the
London North Learning & Skills Council
ESF Co-financed programme 2004-07**

JHCONSULTING

March 2007

Introduction

In November 2006, London North Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned an independent interim evaluation of its European Social Fund (ESF) Co-financed Programme activity between January 2005 and November 2006. The key aims of this phase of the evaluation are to:

- identify and explain the reasons for key trends in ESF delivery in London North;
- identify and describe methods of good practice and successful approaches, highlighting why these achieve good results;
- examine delivery and provision that have not worked so well, exploring the reasons for this,
- highlight lessons learnt in the delivery of ESF to date, and how these can help take forward the programme.

This evaluation is essentially qualitative – focusing on the reasons why some activities and approaches are more successful than others in achieving their planned outputs and outcomes, and in having positive impact for beneficiaries and more widely. The evaluation also seeks to identify less obvious impacts, for example, where a project may not be delivering to plan, but where real learning has taken place in terms of project development.

The report begins with an executive summary (pages 2-4) providing an overview of the key findings of the evaluation, and recommendations for future capacity building activity. It continues with a brief background to the ESF Co-financing programme in London North and the methodology used for the evaluation (page 5).

This is followed by a set of narratives that provide illustrative detail for the key findings and recommendations, arranged under the following themes:

- [Delivering for London North](#) (pages 6-7)
- [Project development and planning](#) (pages 7-8)
- [Partnerships](#) (pages 10-11)
- [Reaching and recruiting target groups](#) (11-14)
- [Retention and progression](#) (pages 14-17)
- [Achievements and outcomes](#) (pages 17-19)
- [Contract and programme management](#) (pages 19- 21)

The report finishes with a brief endnote on page 21, followed by a list of those organisations that have contributed to the evaluation.

Executive Summary

The 2004-2006 European Social Fund (ESF) programme in the Learning and Skills Council London North (LSCLN) sub-region is worth £14.1m ESF, match funded with £17.2m from Further Education and Work Based Learning LSC funding sources. All projects complete their activity at the end of September 2007. The programme is successfully delivering against the objectives and targets outlined in LNLSC's 2004-07 ESF Co-financing Plan. It has been supporting over 11,500 beneficiaries through 50 projects delivered by 30 different lead organisations and many more partners. Up to the period November 2006, over 8,000 beneficiaries have achieved learning aims (soft outcomes and some qualifications) and a similar number have moved into positive outcomes including further learning and work.

Recruitment reflects a focus on target groups

- The majority of projects are recruiting to profile and from their planned target groups. There is a good representation from black and minority ethnic groups (BME), women and people with disabilities. Where problems have arisen, there have been a variety of issues including 'competition' from similar programmes, lack of referrals from partners and planned target groups not being the most appropriate for the project activity and vice versa.

Some providers had difficulty in attracting Skills for Life learners, suggesting that they may need to develop more effective 'disguises' to help learners overcome embarrassment and reluctance. A lack of clarity and some misunderstandings about evidence requirements resulted in some recruited beneficiaries becoming ineligible.

Recommendations

- *For future programmes, potential areas of competition should be identified and specifications written to avoid providers 'fishing in the same pool', unless there is clear evidence that existing provision does not meet demand.*
- *Applications for future projects should be developed carefully to ensure that target groups and activities match.*
- *Those projects delivering Skills for Life activities (and activities for the workless group in general) should use the skills templates available from the LSC website to help tailor services more effectively.*
- *LNLSC and/or its Provider Network should develop a set of exemplar forms that meet minimum evidence requirements*

Some good practice in supporting the most disadvantaged

- Projects are highly diverse and include activities ranging from capacity building and professional development for Skills for Life teachers to work experience placements for school pupils, family learning courses and training for retail employees. It is a real challenge for providers to retain learners from the most disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities who have other complex needs, those with 'chaotic lives' and those who have not been in learning for a very long time.

Successful providers have developed a number of effective retention strategies and tend to have built 'wiggle room' into their project applications. The most effective strategies include delivering flexibly and in non-classroom settings, individual learner support, mentoring, and practical and financial support (childcare, travel payments, allowances). Getting the balance between 'strictness' and support often distinguishes successful retention and progression strategies from those that are less effective.

Recommendations

- *Providers should share successful retention and progression strategies with each other. The ESF provider network could provide a forum for this.*
- *Providers should where possible build flexibility into future applications for funding, anticipating the need to accommodate a wide range of beneficiary need – expected and unexpected. LNLSC should acknowledge the need for this flexibility in drawing up specifications for future projects. Consultation with specialists (including former project deliverers) should take place for particularly challenging target groups to ensure they are realistic and achievable.*

Hard targets are challenging

- The programme is leading to the achievement of soft outcomes, which form the majority of the outcomes, as well as learning aims and qualifications. That said, there is a tension between the 'hard outcome' targets and the ethos of the ESF programme. This is not a new situation, but the evaluation feedback clearly identifies that it remains a critical issue, particularly for those projects targeting people who are a very long distance from qualifications, full-time education and training or work.
- Soft outcomes can currently only be recorded by LNLSC as 'generic' learning aims which does not adequately describe or recognise the distance travelled by beneficiaries. Having more effective measures in place would not only help providers to demonstrate the added value given, but also enable the LSC to highlight the particularly valuable impact that ESF support brings. It is anticipated that soft outcomes will have a higher profile in the new ESF programme

Recommendation

- *Opportunities to develop and use soft outcome measures should be taken, not only to enable more effective contract management, but also to reflect more accurately the impact of project activities.*

Planning and knowledge is key to success

- Successful projects demonstrate significant forward planning, as well as a thorough knowledge of the critical factors for good project performance. Ensuring that the target group, activities and outcomes for a project are an effective match and are realistic is crucial. Where delivery and management staff, and partners, have worked together to develop the project and application, projects are more realistic.

Findings show that an understanding of the 'customers' – beneficiaries and employers is essential for a really successful project. Those providers that have not had this understanding of employer/sector culture or beneficiary backgrounds appear to be less successful in delivering activities and achieving outcomes. Projects targeting women wanting to work in non-stereotypical occupations and people with disabilities have been particularly affected. The latter had a good understanding of the target group, but underestimated the scale of the barriers to sustaining learning and moving into employment.

Recommendations

- *LNLSC and providers should draw on the good practice and approaches developed by initiatives that are specifically focused on tackling gender stereotyping and supporting women to move into non-traditional sectors and occupations.*
- *All key staff, delivery and management, should be involved in project and bid development.*

Partnerships can make or break

- Most projects involve partnerships – from the relatively simple delivery partnership to a complex progression path partnership. Having **established** working partnerships with other organisations and employers before the project starts is the best option. Paper partnerships soon become obvious on delivery. Those that have robust partnership agreements in place as part of project planning tend to be working better. However, this is not foolproof and there are examples where agreements have not been able to prevent under delivery, lack of quality and data collection issues.

Recommendations

- *Guidance to providers should stress the skills sets required for partnership working. It may be useful to hold workshops or consider capacity building specifically focused on this area.*
- *A standard format or pro forma for partnership agreement should be used in future funding rounds, developed with providers that are particularly successful in this respect.*
- *Ways of assessing the viability of partnerships and of lead organisations' ability to manage partnerships should be explored.*

Programme development and management

- Relationships between LSC contract managers and providers are generally very positive and many appreciated the regular and supportive monitoring visits. That said, the inconsistency experienced by providers between monitoring and audit has caused tension and disappointment. Whilst most providers accepted the fairly onerous paperwork associated with running a project, many were unhappy about the additional evidence required at audit and which resulted in some beneficiaries being made ineligible. Some providers had requested early audits and as a result appear to have struggled less with evidence issues.

Recommendations

- *The LSC should continue the work to create more effective links and consistency of approach between contract management and audit teams.*
- *The idea of a 'question and answer' website should be explored to help address monitoring and audit issues swiftly and consistently.*

Brief background to the ESF Co-financing Programme in London North

The current ESF programme in LSC London North is worth £14.1m and has been supporting over 11,500 beneficiaries through 50 projects delivered by 30 different lead organisations and many more partners. 46 projects are still running, 4 have completed and 2 were terminated early. The ESF programming period was extended and now finishes in 2008 rather than 2006. All projects finish by September 2007. London North LSC's ESF Co-financing Plan for 2004-2007 identifies a range of activities under eight ESF Measures. At the time of conducting this evaluation, the 46 projects currently running were distributed across Measures as follows.

Measure		Number of projects currently running
1.1	Advice and guidance	1
1.2	Improving prospects of unemployed	12
2.1	Widen access to basic skills	1
2.2	Help those at risk of exclusion in the labour market	11
3.1	Promoting Lifelong learning especially, basic and key skills	12
3.2	Improving skills to meet employers needs	2
4.1	Update and upgrade employees vocational skills	1
5.1	Improving women's access to learning and employment	6

This distribution and associated budget allocation is largely in line with what was proposed in the Co-financing Plan, although there appears to have been a significant under allocation in Measure 3.2.

The projects delivered through the programme are very varied. They target a range of groups from 13-17 year olds who are excluded or at risk of underachieving to employees needing help to develop their skills. Detail on the target groups, activity, achievements and geographical spread of the programme is presented at relevant points throughout the report.

Methodology

The fieldwork and desk research for this evaluation was carried out between November 2006 and early February 2007 and involved:

- ◆ visits to 12 providers to undertake one-to-one, in depth discussions with personnel from 15 projects sampled from across the Measures;
- ◆ face-to-face and telephone discussions with 7 LNLSC personnel, including ESF staff and contract managers;
- ◆ construction of a web-based survey and analysis of the data from the 26 project responses;
- ◆ desk review of monitoring and evaluation materials for the sample of 15 projects, LNLSC's Co-financing Plan and Measure level quantitative data supplied by LNLSC (for the period up to November 2006).

In line with the agreed scope and approach of the evaluation, beneficiary and employer feedback and views have been identified where possible from project evaluation sources and are incorporated in the report. Pertinent quantitative data drawn from LNLSC ESF figures and the results of the web-based survey is included throughout the narrative of the report to enhance the qualitative findings. Raw ESF data can be found on pages 23-28.

All discussions were based on standard questions for consistency. Direct quotes from those who participated in the evaluation and discussions are included in the report in italics, although the quotes are not attributed to protect confidentiality. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who assisted us with the evaluation, provided information and took part in interviews and discussions. Their views have very much helped to shape this report.

Delivering for London North

The programme is delivering a varied and effective range of activities that meet the objectives of the ESF Objective 3 Programme and of the LSC. Successful approaches and good practice are being developed in a variety of ways. As would be expected, the programme has not been without its challenges. That said, *“whilst there are some issues of delivery, eligibility, targets/prior attainment which have needed to be addressed, it has generally been fine.”*

Lead organisations for projects include four of the sub-region’s colleges, as well as other education providers, sports, arts and community organisations and specialist partnerships. This variety helps to ensure a mix of activities that can reach the range of disadvantaged and hard-to-reach beneficiaries and small businesses that are the primary focus of ESF.

There was a general feeling from contributors that the programme has resulted in some particularly interesting projects that *“are a bit different from the mainstream”*. There is some evidence to suggest that it is in the smaller projects that really innovative work is taking place – perhaps reflecting that smaller scale work facilitates the development of new approaches. Many contributors commented that the length of the programme was a real advantage, and that for most, contracts were let on time.

Interestingly, beneficiary data indicates that residents from the boroughs of Haringey (30%), Enfield (23%) and Barnet (20%) are well represented on projects. Given the level of deprivation in parts of Haringey, this would be expected. Only 8% of beneficiaries come from outside of the London North boroughs.

Two projects are for capacity building and seven have a particular sector focus:

- 2 in retail
- 2 in creative and cultural industries
- 1 each in childcare, health and social care, construction and manufacturing

Of course, many of those without a sector specific role do have an employer focus in order to enable beneficiaries to move into employment.

Successful approaches

Particular examples of successful approaches and good practice are discussed throughout the report. Some strong general themes that show positive impact on disadvantaged beneficiaries include:

- working on outreach basis, getting to people who would never have been reached and generating an interest eg: teenage mothers, young people with autistic spectrum disorders;
- developing voluntary work placements for beneficiaries as stepping stones to paid employment, and Saturday jobs for young people with special needs to help build employability and wider skills;
- real practical support that makes a difference, for example, disabled people being given computers they would not have been able to afford and the skills and confidence to use them;
- enabling a *“huge increase in confidence levels”* for many people;
- enabling imaginative ‘hooks’ and rewards to retain, support and raise the aspirations of young people with special needs in vocational training;
- introducing a 3 week introductory work experience for young people rather than going immediately for a permanent placement which has been a great success;

- delivering training in the workplace, for example, for Skills for Life (SfL) teachers working in work-based learning providers – which *“worked really well because the training consultants went into the workforce, and helped to integrate SfL into vocational training”*, and
- increasing the time that staff can spend with clients, developing CVs, offering more intensive support – *“we have been able to offer good intensive provision”* and it is *“great for staff motivation and commitment”*.

This gives an indication of some of the breadth of activity being delivered and the imaginative way in which many providers are using this funding.

The launch video which gave early recognition of projects and encouraged provider organisations that wanted to feature in it was seen as very helpful and generated interest in and motivation for the programme. A provider network has also been set up and meets quarterly. Feedback suggests that it gives an opportunity for providers to meet and exchange experiences, as well as helping LNLSC to get a feel for the kind of support that providers might find useful, for example, a series of workshops is being planned on exit strategies.

The approaches piloted through some projects not only benefit disadvantaged individuals but also feed into the development of key national initiatives. For example, the work to continue building collaborative work between schools and employers is informing the development of the new diplomas, highlighting the learning points as well as successes.

Project development and planning

Thorough project development and planning emerge as key factors for success. Evidence suggests that a good proportion of providers have been thorough and realistic in putting their project proposals together. However, some had appeared not to have planned sufficiently well at the beginning of their project when their proposals were starting to be implemented.

Some projects do not represent a particularly good fit with what learners/employers really want and others have been unrealistic about what they can deliver. Providers may have modified a project idea too drastically in order to fit the specification, resulting in a project that is difficult to run. Although LNLSC supplied guidance, ran workshops and entered into detailed contract negotiations, one provider did not understand the LSC’s outputs or outcomes, how strict the LSC would be in adhering to these and resulting impact on funding if these targets were not met.

Although it is true that at application stage, providers must be realistic about what can be achieved, it is also the case that specifications must also be realistic and achievable. ESF is targeted on the most challenging groups (individuals and employers), and this should be reflected in what is expected of providers. This may be a relevant finding that could inform the planning of the new ESF programme.

An example of this difficulty is the A1 assessors’ awards. All projects that include this activity are struggling to deliver – citing practical difficulties in trying to deliver these outputs. The awards can take a lot of time to achieve and small employers don’t have the numbers of staff who need to be assessed for the assessors to gain the necessary experience and evidence. All of these projects included these awards because they were requested at the tender stage. All respondents noted that they would not include them in future bidding.

A further issue for project development and planning is continuity and involvement of staff. If delivery staff are not involved in the project development, application and contracting process, it may result in an unrealistic project plan. Applicants are responding to a tightly defined specification. If it is not what they would normally do/plan to do or think is

the most effective way of responding to needs, the funding and outputs profile may not be in line with what they know works. Continuity of staff can also be an issue. Quite often the person who wrote the bid is no longer working for the provider and so there is little or no in-house intelligence in terms of how the project was developed.

Evidence suggests that some providers were unrealistic in assessing the costs and viability of running their projects at the application stage and they haven't allowed enough budget for administration (e.g. to track beneficiaries), for partnership working or for affordable venues eg: for projects that have crèches attached.

Success is based on understanding and knowledge

Unsurprisingly, providers that clearly understand the ESF Co-financed programme, know their beneficiaries and how to put together a good project are having greater success than those that were not really clear from the outset. Of the projects visited as part of this evaluation, a significant number are built on previous activity, for example, as *"part of a coherent strategy to extend service across London, in line with Government inclusion policies"*.

Others have been developed directly in response to a need or issue identified through existing work. One respondent explained that the project *"emerged out of a workshop with work based learning providers around the help and support that they wanted to help deliver and collaborate"*. The main issue was employer engagement – *"specialist staff had been let go because of budget pressures, and this appeared to be the potential basis of a project and addressing need through collaboration"*. Another commented that developing their project *"has enabled us to turn a concept into a reality"*.

A good example of understanding the advantage offered by ESF funding is a project working with harder to reach young people. The provider has found that ESF can be more flexible than mainstream funding. For instance, if an individual does leave the programme early, then the provider can recruit another eligible learner in their place. Although the provider is not paid for this additional start, the LSC can pay for the outcome that they achieve. This means that providers are not penalised should a learner leave the programme for valid reasons. This has taken the pressure off staff who *"don't feel this programme is output driven"*. This provider knew exactly what it wanted to deliver and how the application should be structured to make this happen. Another project used the funding creatively to build on their CoVE and take their ways of working a stage further.

Evidence suggests that some providers may not have understood the target beneficiaries or sector sufficiently when developing the project idea. Examples include:

- setting targets to do a training needs analysis (TNA) for all companies – however in the sector targeted (construction), many people are self-employed and TNAs had to be carried out for almost every beneficiary;
- being unaware or too optimistic about the culture of an industry (construction) and its attitude to non-stereotypical employees (women)
- committing to 100% achievement for challenging target groups at the contracting stage which they are not able to achieve so are having to over recruit to meet achievement targets.

The importance of prior knowledge of the target groups is borne out by other examples where providers had not realised how difficult it would be to recruit and/or retain certain beneficiaries. Some underestimated their support needs, particularly those that are unemployed or from more vulnerable groups and who therefore have many complex support needs. This suggests that these providers did not have sufficient experience of working with these groups when they submitted their application.

Responding to change

Feedback from provider visits and from the survey indicate that a number of projects have been flexible and adaptable in their approach, helping the project to be innovative and more responsive to needs.

A provider that focuses specifically on engagement with small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), highlighted that when Train to Gain was implemented and *“everyone started doing employer engagement”* there was a need to adapt how the project was being delivered and to develop a protocol for working together, because *“employers don’t want competing approaches”*. The provider has also found that employer placements work much better with groups of five young people.

In addition, employers respond much more positively to being asked to provide work experience initially for 3 weeks, rather than immediately being ‘permanently on the books’, because it means that *“if the placement collapses it’s not disastrous, but builds up the confidence of the employer and young person”*.

Another example includes keeping abreast of industry changes. Since one project offering mini-cab training was established, mandatory topographical tests have been introduced for all mini-cab drivers in London. This was added to the programme, along with supporting criminal records bureau and medical checks, as well as the application to the police for the ‘public carriage licence’. These are all prerequisites for working for a mini-cab firm without which progression into legitimate work would be impossible.

A number of providers commented on the inflexibility of the contracting culture. In order to enable projects to be responsive and to avoid the issue of *“being asked to do one thing, but report on another”*, some providers have decided that in future applications they will be less prescriptive about target groups, how they define their industrial sector and what qualifications they offer. This would appear to be a sensible approach and which lends itself to a positive contracting arrangement. That said, it is a fine line between flexibility and lack of focus, and it may be helpful for the LSC and providers to explore further ways of ensuring that projects can remain responsive, whilst maintaining a sharp focus.

Planning for the future

All those contributing to the evaluation were asked about what plans were in place for projects once funding finishes at the end of September 2007. Only one survey respondent, and none of those who took part in detailed discussions, intended to terminate their projects. Four survey respondents intend to mainstream their project activities into other programmes that they run. All those taking part in discussions felt that there was still a need for the activity that they delivered through the project and that an exit strategy would be the last resort. Additional funding to continue projects was seen as needed, the alternative being that *“it won’t be on the same scale but will continue.”*

Delivery organisations are used to dealing with funding issues, and many have good sustainability strategies in place, for example, *“we deliberately keep our overheads low – all staff are on short term contracts etc – so that we can respond to new situations, though we will be trying to maximise new funding opportunities”*. That said, it is clear that the two year funding that has been available for these projects has helped to provide the environment for the kind of innovation and effectiveness that is at the heart of the ESF programme.

It is encouraging to note that a number of respondents clearly had a good strategic view of the context within which their projects are delivering. This is enabling them to spot opportunities for continuing the work. Examples include being aware of potential funding opportunities that may result from:

- New Department for Work and Pensions’ strategies for lone parents;
- The increased push for delivery of learning in workplaces – through the Leitch recommendations etc.;

- Opportunities for using expertise and staff in other initiatives eg: Skills Coaching;
- Government focus on developing the employability skills of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of being in this situation, and
- Collaboration with registered social landlords with a remit for training residents to participate in change management.

64% of those responding to the survey stated that they and/or their partners are looking for other sources of funding to continue their projects. In depth discussions and survey feedback highlighted a range of possible sources of funding including the London Development Agency Opportunities Fund, future ESF programmes and London Councils. One respondent echoed the views of a number in saying that *“we will keep up momentum of applying for funds though it is getting harder all the time”*. Others were hopeful that, since their projects meet a number of LSC objectives and targets, further funding may be available from LSCLN, for example, through the Local Intervention and Development fund or through bringing the project into mainstream activity. It must be stressed that there is **not an expectation** on the part of providers that the LSC or ESF will be able to continue funding projects – in the words of one *“we are keeping our fingers and toes crossed”*.

One survey respondent intends to find ways of delivering activity on a more commercial basis. This is very positive and to be encouraged, but is clearly only possible for some projects eg: those targeting employers or other groups that are in a position to pay for services, or through a financial basis that enables activity for disadvantaged groups to be supported by income generation from other services.

Those providers without clear ideas for continuation were conscious that they needed to put plans in place very quickly. Three survey respondents stated that they hadn't yet decided what to. Only one respondent has used the Government Office for London's Readiness Assessment Tool, and only one had used the services of a 'second tier' organisation such as the London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium (LVSTC). LSCLN's plans for workshops to help providers prepare for the next steps are likely to be very helpful.

Partnerships

The majority of projects, funded through ESF or other sources, involve some kind of partnership arrangements. The projects delivered through LSCLN's programme range from large and complex partnerships to fairly simple or informal arrangements. Many responses to the survey highlight that partnership is a critical factor. A number of providers feel that their partnership has been a very successful part of the project, and others cite instances where partnership issues have caused great difficulty.

Although partnerships can bring great benefits to a project, if they are not well managed, they can hinder or even prevent good project delivery. Evidence suggests that the effectiveness of partnerships and partnership management varies across the projects. Quite a number of the partnership aspects of project plans did not seem to come to fruition. In some cases this is because lead organisations are not good at managing their partners – there has been no partnership agreement or what agreement there is, is vague in terms of who should do what. In at least one instance there were very different expectations of partner roles. For another project, major recruitment difficulties have been experienced because the lead organisation assumed incorrectly that the partners would be doing the recruitment. It is clear that all partnership projects should have a partnership or service level agreement in place. This could form part of the pre-contract conditions and a standard format could be used to help providers that may be new to this concept.

Of course, even where clear agreements are in place, it can be *“a challenge downstream and you can seem to lose control of things”*. Sometimes this is unforeseeable and the best that partners can do is to try and find an alternative means of delivery. One provider commented that its progression arrangement with a partner didn't work out and that

“there were probably issues about how this was handled and continuity of support offered– we maybe would do it differently again”, indicating a lesson learnt. There are a number of examples where lead organisations have taken a tough line with partners that do not meet quality requirements or do not deliver, resulting in the project ultimately being delivered to plan.

Unexpected outcomes for partnerships are in the nature of piloting new approaches, and having the mindset and ability to recognise and respond to this turns an average project into a good one. For example, a bid was written in such a way that individual providers would do some employer engagement and placement and be paid for it. But it was difficult to manage, not consistent and not continuous. This pointed to considerable benefits of bringing the activity in-house so that *“it is tighter, provides a consistent service and is easier to evidence”*.

A number of respondents highlighted data collection as an issue in partnerships. Even where partnership agreements are tight and enforced, some lead partners still find it difficult to get data from partners. Since the lead organisations takes the responsibility and risk for the project this is a particularly difficult situation to deal with and the LSC is not in a position to waive the rules. Cashflow also can be an issue within partnerships.

Whilst this evaluation did not explicitly seek to establish the nature and extent of partnership working between the different ESF projects, during the course of the fieldwork it became clear that there was significant potential for two projects that involve recycled computers to work together. This does not appear to have been picked up either at project or programme level. In future funding rounds, it could be very helpful to highlight potential synergies between projects and to alert project managers to these possibilities.

The projects that are most successful are those that are building on established partnerships or working relationships and where there is clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. A number of respondents viewed their partnerships as particular strengths, some examples include:

- working on outreach basis – using community centres, libraries, charities as venues for IAG the *“partnerships have been great”*. For this provider, *“the partners were very supportive and helpful”* when experiencing some difficulties with audit;
- an existing network of education-business partnerships that *“is very co-operative”* and has been delivering in collaboration which allows each partnership to play to its strengths and deliver what is appropriate in their particular area;
- developing links with Connexions – *“we send weekly bulletins on job vacancies to them and they send referrals. We have good links that are continuing to be built up eg.: Connexions were concerned that they didn’t know what had happened to young people referred – now we have sorted out a feedback form that we now send to them”*, and
- active, working links with sector skills councils and employers e.g. through an employer-led steering group helps to ensure that the project content and delivery is meeting employer needs as closely as possible within the constraints of the funding.

Reaching and recruiting target groups

Qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests that the programme overall is reaching the intended target groups. The majority of providers feel that they are not only engaging with the planned target groups, but also reaching beneficiaries who would otherwise not engage in learning. 16 survey respondents stated that they were recruiting to profile and 4 said they had waiting lists. The majority stated that they were recruiting from the planned target groups. Only 6 survey

respondents cited beneficiary recruitment as a significant challenge. Although these and other respondents reported some initial difficulties in recruitment, these appear to have been largely addressed.

Programme level data shows that 10% of all beneficiaries across the programme declared a disability. Of these 1,168 beneficiaries, over one third are in projects under Measure 1.2, just short of the Co-financing Plan target of 40% for that measure. Measures 1.1 and 3.1 also show 13% of beneficiaries declaring a disability. It should be noted that disability is self-declared and therefore it may be the case that more people with disabilities have in fact been helped by the programme to date.

ESF data capture records all of the disadvantaged groups into which a person may fall. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the total **number** of beneficiaries experiencing disadvantage. That said, figures up to November 2006 show nearly 9,000 **entries** for disadvantage, compared against the total **number** of beneficiaries of 11,500. This indicates that a significant proportion will fall into one or more of the disadvantaged groups. Of the 9,000, the largest representations are as follows:

- 28% are 13-17 year olds in danger of exclusion (under Measure 2.2)
- 16% returners to the labour market (mainly in Measures 3.1 and 1.1)
- 46% fall in the 'other disadvantage' category (mainly in Measures 2.2 and 3.1)

No data relating to learner background has been submitted by providers working with employed beneficiaries, suggesting that there may be a disclosure issue for employees.

The programme shows a good gender balance with 51% female. Measures 2.1 and 4.1 appear to have attracted a particularly high proportion of women at 73% and 69% respectively. This may reflect the fact that only one project is funded under each of these measures – a basic skills tutor support project under Measure 2.1 and a care workers project under Measure 4.1.

The age representation is more or less in line with the Co-financing Plan targets. Over half of beneficiaries are under 24 years old and 33% are 13-15 years old, reflecting the LSC's prioritisation of young people. 8% are over 50 (just short of the 10% target).

50% of beneficiaries are assessed as having no prior attainment when beginning their programmes and a further 22% have attainment assessed at Level 1 or below. This indicates that the programme is targeting those who are educationally disadvantaged. Overall, women tend to have slightly higher prior attainment levels.

Just under 60% of beneficiaries are from black and ethnic minorities, the largest proportion in Measure 5.1. The largest ethnic representations are African (14%) and White Other (12%). The latter may well include significant representation from EU Accession State countries. Asian Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups together account for 10% of beneficiaries.

Successful marketing and outreach

As is often reported, the most successful method of engaging beneficiaries is through word of mouth recommendation. Other approaches that are cited as being particularly successful include:

- Adverts in publications with the right circulation audience, for example, the 'Getting There' Transport for London magazine that is sent to 110,000 disabled people in London. Local publications are also used for a range of target groups;

- Publicity releases to borough based Councils for Voluntary Service and local community and voluntary groups working with disabled people who then put information in their newsletters etc;
- Presentations to Jobcentre Plus staff meetings was cited as “*an excellent way*” to get referrals going from this agency, targeting Employment Advisers and Incapacity Benefit managers;
- Leafleting parents and carers at schools;
- Developing close links with Connexions, Next Steps, community organisations, mental health agencies for referrals, and
- An organisation using its website to attract beneficiaries.

Many respondents commented on the particular importance of their partnerships in getting referrals and in reaching those that are least likely to engage in learning. In the survey, the two main reasons given for recruitment problems are partners not making referrals successfully and other projects recruiting from the same target groups.

Projects targeting harder to reach people including lone parents, ex-offenders and young people leaving care have tended to include their referral organisations as partners in the funding bid. Where partnerships are well established, recruitment has not been a problem but where it is more of a “*paper partnership.*” recruitment has faltered. In many instances, having ‘trusted intermediaries’ – groups and organisations that beneficiaries know and feel comfortable with – was seen as absolutely essential, for example, in family learning where projects work with vulnerable people who would not come forward of their own accord.

There is one very specific issue for recruiting women onto projects focused on non-stereotypical occupations. In common with the experience of other projects and initiatives over the years, it is often women with Level 2 or higher qualifications that are attracted into this type of provision and it can be very difficult for providers to recruit lower skilled and qualified women. The LSC mainstream prioritisation of Level 2 qualifications creates a particular problem with Policy Field 5 of the current ESF programme.

Engaging employers and employees

420 SMEs are being provided with support through the programme, indicating that, despite the significant challenges of working with small employers, activity is taking place. Providers are having mixed success in engaging employers. Some feel that employers are reluctant to train their employees, unless they have a legal or statutory duty to do so, because they are concerned that employees will go elsewhere. This view is based on anecdotal evidence.

Some lead organisations recognise that “*it isn’t our niche to work with employers*” and have involved partners that do have this particular expertise. There appear to be a significant number of organisations that still do not have employer links. Clearly, this is an important attribute for organisations targeting unemployed people as well as those that are employed. The way in which the current ESF Measures work tends to separate out these two foci. It could be helpful in future to find ways of combining them, not least to underline the importance of continued learning after getting a job.

Projects that target employed beneficiaries have found that working with employer networks is the best way to reach employed people. Not all projects were doing this from the start and it has been a valuable learning point. There are some sector specific recruitment issues including:

- **Construction:** most recruitment is via the larger contractors that use their supply chains for referrals.
- **Retail:** personal contact with employers is most important, as they tend to be suspicious of anyone “official”.
- **Care:** offering free training was a big draw in attracting employers.

- **Skills for Life teaching:** attracting and retaining teachers from work-based learning providers remains difficult because of the different employment conditions experienced in this sector, in comparison to Further and Adult Education Institutions.

A number of respondents commented on the lessons they have learnt from their experience of trying to engage employers. These include recognition that *“for SME retailers one day courses are less of a problem in getting them to commit their staff to training”* and *“employer engagement is essential to arrange and have in place at the beginning”*. For projects with young people, it was highlighted that delivering the project using *“established partnerships with schools and employers have been vital”*.

One respondent commented strongly that if the project were to be run again they would want to have much stronger *“job broker engagement”* indicating that they recognised that this was not a particular strength of their own organisation and that their preference would be collaboration rather than service expansion. This demonstrates a positive attitude towards driving up employer engagement activity and to developing collaborative approaches.

Retention and progression

Beneficiary retention is not a significant issue for the programme, although it is very challenging to retain particularly disadvantaged beneficiaries. Over 80% of survey respondents put their retention rates at over 70% and only five highlight it as an issue. When asked what works particularly well in retaining beneficiaries, half cited ‘delivery that fits with work commitments’ and ‘individual mentoring and support’. Financial support and learning support were also cited as helpful.

It seems that there can be some cash flow problems for projects in respect of childcare payments. Providers are trying to manage these so that it does not pose an access to learning problem for lone parents. One provider suggested that a flexible fund for childcare that can pay out quickly and be reconciled at regular intervals could solve this problem. Whilst the LSC clearly has contracting regulations that it is required to follow, it is important that all avenues are explored to ensure that practical access issues for target groups are addressed. Lone parents have recently moved up the ‘national priority group list’ and therefore it is vital that flexible funds such as ESF are able to be used imaginatively to support these beneficiaries.

Getting the balance right between engaging beneficiaries and providing the ‘discipline’ that supports them to focus on learning and/or employment goals whilst at the same time not putting them off *“is a difficult one to handle”*. The evaluation highlights a number of methods that providers have developed to maximise retention, and ideas that they would use in future projects. These include:

- Asking beneficiaries to sign a commitment letter before they start outlining their commitment to the project and a requirement to repay the cost of training if they don’t complete. This has not been followed through but it is felt that it acts as an incentive to stay on the programme.
- Carrying out a thorough assessment and recruiting only when convinced the beneficiary will complete within the time. If there is any doubt about their level or ability to complete, beneficiaries are referred to other courses within the provider.
- Delivering as much training as possible at the beginning of a programme for employed beneficiaries because *“they are very enthusiastic in the first 4-6 weeks but then attendance and commitment seems to wane”*. This seems to be particularly important in the construction sector where there are many self-employed sub-contractors who come and go over a relatively short period of time. Providers also thought that aiming for modules rather than full qualifications is a better approach.

- Being flexible to make sure that learning can take place in different ways and at times that suit learners. One provider uses on-line learning (they are a Learn Direct centre) and another delivers through a mix of on and off the job training using self-directed materials, tests and group work. Another delivers in late evenings and weekends to suit the needs of the retail sector. There is also a recognition that retail employees are more likely to sign up for L1 & L2 training – they find the L3 training too onerous / too much of a time commitment and therefore drop out early.
- Working closely with employers and involving them in identifying people who they think will stick to the training.

Offering ‘carrots’ to get beneficiaries engaged can be a useful ploy and of immense benefit to individuals, though potentially can muddy the focus of the project. For example the experience of one provider offering free recycled computers meant that they had lots of responses to their advertising. When they interviewed people to establish learning and employment goals however, only 4 out of 10 went onto the programme, and for some of those there continued to be difficulties around interest and commitment to progression. Although this may appear disappointing, it illustrates very well the ‘cost’ involved in reaching very hard to engage beneficiaries and that rigorous sifting of beneficiaries at the early stages is an essential part of the process.

Unemployed beneficiaries often have many other barriers that get in the way of learning. Good strategies for learner support are important for retaining these learners and evidence demonstrates that where this is well planned and managed, retention is higher.

Examples of effective learner support strategies include:

- delivering in non classroom settings;
- keeping regular contact with learners;
- tutors being sensitive to learners needs, taking into account poor ability to study and adapting their approaches accordingly, for example, by being strict with some learners and being more flexible with others regarding attendance, lateness etc;
- Personal Development that helps to prepare people for work, confidence building, skills analysis, career development and that is integrated into project because it is much more effective than when delivered separately;
- when working with young people, formal training experience was thought to be less important than skills, personal qualities and approach i.e. being empathetic, knowledgeable in their subject etc;
- involving ‘real life’ employer experience to capture the imaginations of young people who are less academically orientated and in danger of being ‘switched off’, and
- a weekly allowance has also been used as a retention (and recruitment) strategy with young people.

Some providers have struggled to recruit Skills for Life (SfL) learners. This may be a marketing issue. It’s often the case that literacy, numeracy or language needs to be ‘disguised’ in order for it to be effective – both through marketing and delivery. Evidence suggests that there are not enough providers that have the skills, expertise and overall approach to embed and/or contextualise SfL, or to market it in ways that are attractive to employers and learners. One respondent who was keen to make sure that materials are attractive to the target group commented on the lack of SfL resources for working with young people so they have devised their own.

An interesting issue has arisen with one provider who has found that the attitude of young people towards ICT is similar to that towards SfL. That is, they are reluctant to admit that they cannot use a computer and think that teaching the basics of computing is “babyish”. This may reflect the fact that ICT is now considered a basic skill, particularly among young people.

The challenge of overcoming disadvantage

The evaluation highlights the issue faced by providers that are working with very disadvantaged groups. Often those with the really intractable issues that result from, and in, long term worklessness, progression often takes a lot longer than for other groups. Many of these beneficiaries are affected by serious motivational and behavioural barriers reflected in the comments from providers about the attitude, lack of commitment and poor ability to study and learn that they see. For beneficiaries who are having their first experience of learning for a long time *“you can’t underestimate how long it takes and the amount of support they need to stay on the programme and move on”* *“it is about lack of confidence and fear of moving onto new things – they may need more preparation and support than was available”*. This includes supporting E2E learners to progress onto Apprenticeships, and is reflected in the very low number of beneficiaries who had moved into this outcome by November 2006.

This reflects the experience in some similar projects in other London sub-regions and is an issue that has also been recognised nationally. Reflecting on how their programme could be further developed, one programme was very clear that mentoring would be an important additional component, to be able to address consistently the motivational and other barriers that many young people face.

Those providers that demonstrate a thorough understanding of these issues use a number of strategies to make sure that they can respond to need whilst at the same time perform to contract. Over recruiting to anticipate drop out is used by many. Balancing some beneficiaries who they know will take an enormous amount of support with some that will be able to get the project outputs. Those who are going to be formally registered are selected so that achievement rates are at the right level - *“We have to do that – no way could we meet the achievement rates in the specification – they are totally unrealistic”*. Whilst the LSCLN does put its specifications out to tender for potential providers to comment on at the drafting stage it could be more proactive in terms of how it seeks feedback.

This is skilled and tricky work. In the words of one respondent, *“you need to really target support on those who want it and will benefit from it. There are many people who join the programme for other reasons and just don’t progress.”* Many felt that this was exacerbated by the very high employment rates (50 – 60%) expected in some specifications, and felt that more flexibility and fewer hard targets would help to make sure that providers could really focus on those with most need. Whilst the LSC Co-financed support has its targets and constraints, it is important to acknowledge this issue, particularly in terms of thinking about the new ESF programme and how this can best address the needs of those who are most disadvantaged.

Linked to this point is that some learners have *“unrealistic expectations of finding a job and the salary they are going to get”* but also that some are not looking for a ‘career’, but a reasonably paid part-time job. This is a very real issue in the debate about employability. At strategic and operational levels, if we are too prescriptive about what is regarded as a ‘good’ job or insist that people must get a qualification, we run the risk of creating a further barrier for people who are workless.

Women in non-stereotypical occupations and people with disabilities

Another key issue raised by the evaluation is providers underestimating the levels and type of support needed by beneficiaries, suggesting that they either did not have sufficient experience of working with these groups, or had not worked with these groups in this particular context. Those projects targeted on people with disabilities and those on women in under represented industries and occupations, whilst not alone in facing this challenge, certainly seem to have experienced particular problems.

Projects under 5.1 are struggling with progression into employment. Whilst the funding available for these projects may not reflect adequately the level of difficulty required for women to enter non-traditional areas of activity – *“we would need another £500 per beneficiary to do the additional things needed”*, it may also reflect a general lack of understanding of the challenges and nature of this highly specialised Policy Field. It is important that these niche projects are more than women only versions of generalist courses. This includes providing positive role models of women in the industry, working with employers to change attitudes, being able to explore flexible patterns of working etc. Efforts have been made to find suitable work placements for beneficiaries, but it is clear that there is a need for further reflection and understanding of how the ethos of this Policy Field should be implemented.

A further difficulty for these projects is the LSC emphasis on prioritising learners who do not have a Level 2 qualification. Whilst this is an LSC priority, it is a poor fit with the market profile for these types of projects which typically attract women returners from a wide variety of educational backgrounds. It is interesting to note that one project is also suffering the effects of ‘qualification inflation’ where many candidates for IT jobs now have a whole stream of qualifications including Microsoft, Cisco etc and even women who managed to do their Cisco qualifications were not able to move directly into IT jobs. All the project job outcomes were in other types of occupation/sector.

Provision that supports people with disabilities is a very challenging area of work. It is clear that those involved in this work through the LNLSC ESF programme are very familiar with many of the needs and strengths of people in this target group. That said, discussions revealed that the massive issues of lack of self confidence and the fear of failure amongst disabled people who face multiple barriers to learning and work were even more testing than had been anticipated.

Helping a person with disabilities and other barriers to move from a point where they *“can’t even think of employment because it’s far too big a leap”* to taking up a job is a very large task, and illness is a very real feature that affects retention. One respondent commented that *“If we were doing it again we would probably put more hand holding into stage between initially expressing an interest and closing the deal on them joining the programme”*.

This and other reflections on the experience of running the project underline the positive impact of being able to pilot activity under this programme. The very important point is about learning lessons and feeding this into future projects, which clearly is a feature of this respondent’s thinking.

Achievements and outcomes

Achievement data for the period up to November 2006 shows that over 8,000 beneficiaries have achieved learning aims. 97% of these are in the ‘generic’ category which is used to record softer outcomes including non-accredited learning, information advice and guidance, job search, personal development etc. Of the NVQs achieved to date, the majority are at Level 1 (129 qualifications) and female achievements are nearly double those of males. As the programme is due to finish in September 2007 the majority of the target NVQ or equivalent qualifications are profiled to be achieved in the period June – September 2007.

Achievement appears most frequent among those still at school, followed by the unemployed and then the employed cohort. This may be a reflection of a number of factors including school pupils being more of a ‘captive group’, and the particular challenges faced by employed people in continuing with programmes long enough to gain a qualification. That said, these figures do include the ‘generic’ achievements and therefore further exploration would need to be undertaken to clarify this point.

A number of providers felt that, across sectors, the qualifications on offer are frequently not what employers really want or need. They report that employers want the training that they require to comply with legislation, including first aid, health and safety etc, but these are no longer eligible for LSC funding. This leads to a mismatch and tension between what

projects are contracted to deliver and what employers are demanding. Whilst the rationale for employers funding this type of compulsory training is understandable, the advantage of using it as a 'foot in the door' to encourage wider workforce development has now been lost. It is important to note that employer engagement is an issue that reaches well beyond ESF projects and is a major challenge for skills provision funded through any agency.

A need to capture distanced travelled more effectively

Feedback from a number of respondents indicates that whilst soft outcomes are a recognised 'output' of projects, 'distance travelled' is not always being captured sufficiently to be able to make a really informed view of impact. Existing targets do not pick up all the added value that the programme is providing. The only way to capture these outcomes currently is through the 'generic' learning aim.

For example, for people with disabilities involved in one project, being able to do banking and shopping on line or join discussion groups is a real step forward. Even though progression to further education or jobs has been less than hoped, the impact in helping people to take another step towards these goals is significant. One provider has produced some case studies which demonstrate the soft impact of project activities on individuals.

A further interesting point here is that whilst SfL has been delivered well through family learning, there is a concern that the pursuit of qualifications might undermine the other work that family learning projects deliver. For example, developing confidence and self esteem and providing progression into more formal learning. Again, the use of soft outcomes in addition to SfL qualification targets could help to demonstrate the benefits of learning more effectively.

Following up early leavers and leavers

LSCLN ESF data shows that for the period up to November 2006:

- 38% of beneficiaries moved into further/higher education or training
- 8% of beneficiaries have moved into full, part-time or self employment
- 22% are classified as unemployed (but may actually include some who have subsequently moved into positive outcomes)

A quarter of beneficiaries were continuing on their existing programmes, as would be expected at this point. Most projects finish at the end of September and it is reasonable to assume that further positive outcomes will be recorded. However, the level of positive outcomes does point to the particular difficulty of getting beneficiaries into work or self-employment. It is highly likely that the nature of the disadvantages and barriers faced by the target groups is a significant factor.

There are only 3% of beneficiaries for whom destinations are not known, indicating that at this point in the programme, providers generally have a good idea of where their beneficiaries go. That said, it is possible that the 'unemployed' category masks some unknown destinations.

Most providers have some systems in place for following up early leavers, some are not particularly proactive and many find it difficult and time consuming. The most common method of follow up seems to be a phone call if a beneficiary doesn't turn up, although an equal number of survey respondents also said that they used an exit interview. For partnership projects, lead organisations are dependent on partners to carry out follow up and to feed this back. As with other data capture, some partners are much better at doing this than others! Some providers make a second phone call or send a letter but many do not, citing insufficient time to chase up as their reason. A small but significant number of providers said they focus on the beneficiaries who stay on the programme rather than try and chase up early leavers. Very few

respondents appear to use text messaging as a means of contact. This may be worth promoting since it is now a very acceptable and accessible form of contact.

Survey responses show that the most frequent reason given for leaving early is family or personal problems, followed by not being able to cope with attendance requirements. This resonates with discussions and feedback about the nature of the target groups catered for by projects and the resulting difficulties for retention. Their lives are often 'chaotic' and it is a challenge and a triumph for many if they are able to attend even part of a programme. Many respondents emphasised that even this has a positive effect in some cases, enabling the beneficiary to return to learning when the rest of their life gives them the space to do so.

The destinations for those leaving early are varied, with no particular trend emerging other than, as would be expected, the majority are not known. Of those that are known, responses range from switching to a programme with a different provider, moving into a job, caring for family and 'not doing anything else'. For some providers, getting the evidence required to substantiate a destination is difficult, particularly for short intervention projects.

The trends for those completing programmes are little different, although not surprisingly there tend to be fewer unknown destinations. This suggests that early leavers do not have characteristics that are vastly different from those that complete programmes. This seems logical, and perhaps the difference between an early leaver and a completer is that the former's barriers and needs get 'too much' or circumstances worsen for them. This makes it even more critical that these beneficiaries have easy access to returning to learning when they are ready – something that may be more difficult to accommodate in the current target driven climate.

One provider voiced the feelings of many in saying that *"we don't track them (beneficiaries) into jobs – it's not part of the project and we don't get paid for it – but it does mean that we can't say what the full impact is"*. Traditionally, providers are expected to absorb the costs of follow up as part of the project budget. Since it is a key activity in terms of evidencing and evaluating impact, it may be worth placing more emphasis on it in future funding rounds and encouraging providers to identify budget lines that are specifically for this purpose.

Contract and programme management

Positive relationships

Discussions and survey feedback from providers and LSC personnel indicate that overall, there are *"very good relations between LSC and projects"* which is clearly beneficial to the development and delivery of individual projects and the programme as a whole. Of course, there are variations, dependent on how well the project is progressing and in some instances, whether or not staffing has been consistent both for providers and the LSC.

Where there have been several different LSC contract managers, advice has sometimes been conflicting which has led to tensions and difficulties. Likewise, it can be difficult for a contract manager to maintain a good relationship with a project if provider staff have changed and a new project manager is not given a thorough handover. A small number of respondents, notably those that have had problems in the early stages of the project, feel that they may have not had as much support from their LSC contract manager as they might.

There is some evidence that there has been an increased focus on relationship building with smaller providers. Monthly visits have taken place initially, moving to quarterly visits once the project is going well. This seems to have been very helpful and one respondent commented that *"some bigger providers didn't have this and it has led to problems"*. There may have been an assumption that the larger organisations, including those in the statutory sector, did not need this kind

of support. However, unless the project manager within a larger organisation has experience of running an ESF project it can be a *“very steep learning curve, especially if you’re not involved in doing the application”*. In these instances evidence suggests that these providers need as much support as smaller organisations, especially in the early stages.

Another advantage of supportive monthly monitoring visits is that *“no matter how good the contract negotiation phase is there will always be issues – good monitoring picks this up and it is important so profiles can be adjusted”*. The culture of seeing the LSC as a trusted ‘ally’ that can help support the success of a project was summed up by one respondent who reported that projects are *“clearly are used to just phoning up if they have a problem and want advice”*.

A potential disadvantage of frequent monitoring visits is the danger of duplicating information. Although this issue was directly raised by only one respondent, it would seem wise to ensure that the review and development of monitoring and audit processes should include checking that information is collected as efficiently as possible. This will benefit providers and LNLSC staff.

Evidence requirements and paperwork

The vast majority of respondents commented on the onerous paperwork, bureaucracy and evidence issues generated by running a project – especially at the beginning. Whilst it is accepted that ESF brings paperwork with it, there do appear to be some particular learning points from the LNLSC experience to date.

Beneficiary eligibility has been a significant issue for the programme. Although the LSC ran audit workshops, there are examples where there have been misunderstandings and/or a lack of clarity relating to the evidence that should be collected by a provider. As a result the LSC has requested that additional information is collected several months later in order to prove eligibility. Many providers quite unwittingly did not collect the right evidence from the outset, for a number of reasons including:

- Providers that had previously had LSC contracts (non ESF) had assumed that the evidence requirements for the ESF contract would be the same as for other LSC contracts.
- Project partners thought that to ask for eligibility evidence was too intrusive and so either did not collect the evidence or did not recruit beneficiaries – the lead partner then took on this responsibility
- Some partners did not understand the LSC definitions of who would be eligible

The LSC needs to be consistent regarding the evidence it requires from the outset. A number of providers thought that exemplar forms issued by the LSC for providers to use would be very helpful in ensuring that providers know they have collected the correct evidence.

A number of respondents commented that getting evidence from clients was difficult especially for short term interventions and working with non-UK born beneficiaries because *“you are trying to engage people in things they may not have done before – it is difficult to first of all ask to see their passport”*. Some are fearful of ‘handing things into officials’, women clients often stated their husband had the passports, some just never return and outreach workers sometimes simply didn’t have ready access to photocopiers. Reducing the evidence requirements for short interventions would help considerably in ensuring that hard to reach groups are not ‘disengaged’ at the first hurdle.

There have been other issues about beneficiary evidence, including one respondent who felt that because employers have a legal responsibility to check whether someone has the right to work, the provider should not have to verify this. There is some anecdotal evidence that employers are reluctant to complete some of the forms, because *“there are too many”* and *“some ask questions about size and turnover or staff salaries that employers are not prepared to answer”*.

There are particular difficulties in gathering beneficiary evidence in some industrial sectors. For example, the lack of continuous employment in the construction industry creates problems in terms of delivery, tracking and evidencing eligibility. People move between being self-employed, salaried, unemployed and casual labour often over a short period of time and so completing paperwork can be difficult. In addition, there is still some confusion over eligibility for this sector. Many potential beneficiaries work in the LNLSC area but live outside of it. This sector is dominated by self-employed sub contractors with head offices/home/postal addresses outside the LNLSC area, but the main contractor has an office in the area - there is some confusion as to whether or not these people are eligible.

More coherence required in monitoring and audit

There also appears to have been conflicting information between contract managers and auditors leading to “*very mixed messages in terms of audits.*” For example, a contract manager accepted evidence of employment on a compliment slip. The auditor insisted that it had to be provided on headed notepaper. The provider then needed to deliver additional volume to make up the shortfall.

Unsurprisingly, such instances have caused significant dissatisfaction amongst those providers affected, which is not conducive to positive relationships with the LSC. A number of providers have felt “*very unsupported*” during audit and in particular commented that “*the LSC didn't really argue our case at the audit despite having monitored us*”. The negative impact of this is not limited to affecting morale. It also means that providers have to “*devote all our energy into sorting out paperwork – it became just target and number driven and we could have had so many more people supported if it hadn't been for this*”.

Whilst providers clearly have to take responsibility for audit, there does seem to be an inconsistency when successful monitoring visits are followed by difficult audits. “*The contract managers come and you show them everything – and it all seems fine – they do sampling. Then the auditors come and tell you that there are lots of things wrong and payments will be withheld.*” The apparent lack of communication within the LSC is causing a negative impact on some of London North's valuable provider base. It is encouraging to note that contract managers and audit personnel are now meeting regularly to try and address this issue.

An interesting finding is that some of the larger, more established organisations have experienced difficult audits in contrast to some smaller voluntary sector providers that have not experienced any problems. This runs counter to the common perception that smaller community based organisations are a ‘high risk’.

Endnote

LSCLN's ESF programme is enabling providers to develop and deliver a range of imaginative and innovative activities that are helping to engage some of London North's most disadvantaged young people and adults. A programme such as this is not without its challenges. Many project managers and LNLSC staff are demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in piloting new approaches. As would be expected, success is variable, but the experience is providing valuable lessons that project deliverers and LNLSC should draw on in the final months for delivery of this programme and for the development of the new programme.

Contributors to the evaluation

- Learning and Skills Council London North – seven personnel including ESF programme staff and contract managers

Contributions from 28 projects delivered by the following lead organisations and their partners:

- Prospects (North London IAG)
- Prospects Services Ltd.
- Employer Led Apprenticeship Network
- North London Training Partnership
- U Can Do I.T.
- New Directions Training Centre
- North London ITeC
- Keeping it Simple
- Rainer (Break Free)
- Urban Futures London Ltd
- Haringey Adult Learning Services
- Deltaclub
- Barnet College
- Waltham Forest College
- London North Business into Education
- Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme
- O-Regen
- Capel Manor College
- College of North East London
- Barnet College BTAS
- JHP Training Ltd
- Communitas EU Ltd
- In House Training Services

London North LSC ESF Data

Count of Borough	Measure								
Borough	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
Barnet	227	69	17	1019	798	29	34	61	2254
Enfield	163	165	35	966	1208	25	49	87	2698
Haringey	81	201	25	1747	1251	26	23	89	3443
Outside London North Area	70	62	24	153	487	29	22	38	885
Waltham Forest	134	181	8	673	615	20	6	31	1668
Unknown	20	23	21	78	399	11	17	14	583
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Ben Numbers	Measure								
Ben Numbers	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
Number of Bens	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of ESF Emp Status	Measure									Grand Total
ESF Emp Status	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1		
Employed	19	1	130	19	1438	138	151	37		1933
Full Time Education	23	35		1108	222					1388
Self Employed					116	2		9		127
Unemployed	497	665		179	2982			274		4597
Still at School	156			3330						3486
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320		11531

Count of Age Group	Measure									Grand Total
Age Group	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1		
13-15	113	3		3653						3769
16-24	153	292	6	980	866	23	9	149		2478
25-49	326	313	95		3292	89	92	148		4355
50-70	103	86	29		594	27	49	23		911
Over 70		7		2	6	1	1			17
Under 13				1						1
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320		11531

Count of Gender	Measure									Grand Total
Gender	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1		
F	355	400	95	1980	2612	69	104	320		5935
M	340	301	35	2656	2146	71	47			5596
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320		11531

Count of Ethnicity	Measure								Grand Total
Ethnicity	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	
Bangladeshi	4	9		96	86	1	1	2	199
Indian	64	23	11	184	315	20	12	10	639
Pakistani	24	14	3	153	137	7	2	6	346
Other Asian Background	29	15	4	167	157	24	7	18	421
African	95	99	12	633	687	14	29	50	1619
Caribbean	57	122	13	536	491	4	13	62	1298
Other Black Background	16	26		129	167	1	4	14	357
Chinese	13	4	2	31	38	2	2	7	99
Mixed - White and Asian	7	3		47	23			2	82
Mixed - White and Black African	7	9	1	75	71			8	171
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	6	20		214	50	3	1	21	315
Other Mixed Background	7	8	1	138	52	1	2	10	219
White - British	212	214	51	1110	1142	37	42	56	2864
White - Irish	20	26	5	54	69	1	12	2	189
Other White Background	92	52	18	383	801	18	10	26	1400
Any Other	38	52	6	461	398	6	8	24	993
Not Known	4	5	3	225	74	1	6	2	320
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Disability	Measure								Grand Total
Disability	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	
Yes	88	255	1	194	612	2	1	15	1168
No	590	389	72	4350	3653	116	123	305	9598
Not Known	17	57	57	92	493	22	27		765
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Learner Background	Measure								Grand Total
Learner Background	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	
Homeless	7	82		2	14				105
13-17 in danger of Exclusion	1			2484					2485
Refugees	22	4		6	142				174
Ex-Offenders	5			63	53				121
Drug or alcohol misuse	8	1			8				17
Returners to Labour Market	258	25			1086			82	1451
People living in rural areas					6				6
Lone Parents	32	78			254			17	381
Other	94	248		1834	1961			48	4185
Grand Total	427	438		4389	3524			147	8925

Count of Prior Attainment		Measure								
Gender	Prior Att	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
F	Level 1	59	109	2	79	654	10	13	93	1019
	Level 2	81	52	14	84	293	15	21	41	601
	Level 3	42	8	23	1	207	2	15	20	318
	Level 4	43	4	37		189	5	2	10	290
	Level 5	15	4	15		55	1		16	106
	Below Level 1	2	4		29	240		2	28	305
	Entry Level	2	4		3	69			16	94
	Other	1	26	4	1	288	11		16	347
	Not Known		29		11	76	13	50	3	182
	None	110	160		1772	541	12	1	77	2673
M	Level 1	51	23	1	131	614	11	2		833
	Level 2	90	29	1	125	227	24	9		505
	Level 3	43	4	5		151	1	8		212
	Level 4	46	3	18		116	4	1		188
	Level 5	15		8		47	2			72
	Below Level 1	3	1		23	175	1	2		205
	Entry Level	12	5		7	38				62
	Other	2	15	2	2	224	3			248
	Not Known		28		19	60	15	25		147
	None	78	193		2349	494	10			3124
Grand Total		695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Prior Attainment		Measure								
ESF Emp Status	Prior Att	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
Unemployed	Level 1	108	131		69	928			85	1321
	Level 2	133	53		22	293			32	533
	Level 3	80	12			222			16	330
	Level 4	84	7			190			5	286
	Level 5	30	4			59			9	102
	Below 1	5	5		2	296			28	336
	Entry	14	8		7	75			16	120
	Other	3	41		2	328			13	387
	Not Known		56		9	85			2	152
	None	40	348		68	506			68	1030
Employed	Level 1	2	1	3	11	287	20	15	7	346
	Level 2	6		15	7	195	39	30	7	299
	Level 3	5		28		121	3	23	2	182
	Level 4	5		55		102	9	3	4	178
	Level 5			23		34	3		4	64
	Below 1					80	1	4		85
	Entry					24				24
	Other			6		153	13		3	175
	Not Known					39	28	75	1	143
	None	1			1	403	22	1	9	437
Full Time Education	Level 1				129	22				151
	Level 2	22	28		179	14				243
	Level 3				1	7				8
	Level 4					3				3
	Below 1				17	28				45
	Entry		1		1	6				8
	Other				1	15				16
	Not Known		1		16	9				26
	None	1	5		764	118				888
	Still at School	Level 1				1				
Level 2		10			1					11
Below 1					33					33
Entry					2					2
Not Known					5					5
None		146			3288					3434
Self Employed	Level 1					31	1		1	33
	Level 2					18			2	20
	Level 3					8			2	10
	Level 4					10			1	11
	Level 5					9			3	12
	Below 1					11				11
	Entry					2				2
	Other					16	1			17
	Not Known					3				3
	None					8				8
Grand Total		695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Aim Level	Measure								
Aim Level	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
Entry Level		3		8	60				71
Generic	695	554	130	4561	4152	46	118	106	10362
NVQ1		101		59	139	33		59	391
NVQ2		35			194	49	15	155	448
NVQ3		7			119	12	8		146
NVQ4							10		10
Other		1		8	93				102
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4757	140	151	320	11530

The Generic Aim Level is used to record softer outcomes such as non-accredited learning, IAG, Job Search, Confidence Building etc

Count of Destination	Measure								
Destination	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	Grand Total
Part-time Employment	7	16			58	1	3	9	94
Full-time Employment	24	7	1	1	705	11	15	12	776
Unemployed	7	87		14	2449	1		4	2562
Self Employed	3	3			75	2			83
Entered FE	36	31		14	54			4	139
Entered HE	35	12							47
Found Voluntary Work	8	5			2			1	16
Full-time Education or Training	146	33		3855	212			1	4247
WBL Apprenticeship					3				3
Continuing Existing Programme of Learning	389	400	128	701	874	125	133	174	2924
Other (including pregnancy)	10	60		30	110			96	306
Not Known	30	47	1	21	216			19	334
Grand Total	695	701	130	4636	4758	140	151	320	11531

Count of Aim Level		Learning Outcome	Measure							
		Achieved								Grand Total
Gender	Aim Level	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	
F	Entry Level					26				26
	Generic	152	126	1	1692	2042			38	4051
	NVQ1		16		1	27			37	81
	NVQ2		5			7		9	7	28
	NVQ3					2	1	2		5
	NVQ4							2		2
	Other					1				1
M	Entry Level		3			22				25
	Generic	142	91	1	2114	1592				3940
	NVQ1		4		19	25				48
	NVQ2					10	2	1		13
	NVQ3		1			3				4
	Other				1	33				34
Grand Total		294	246	2	3827	3790	3	14	82	8258

Count of Aim Level										
		Measure								Achieved Total
ESF Emp Status	Aim Level	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	
Employed	Entry Level					47				47
	Generic	10		2	1	670			1	684
	NVQ1					17				17
	NVQ2					5	2	10	2	19
	NVQ3					1	1	2		4
	NVQ4							2		2
	Other					34				34
Full Time Education	Generic	23	19		702	220				964
	Other				1					1
Self Employed	Generic					77				77
Unemployed	Entry Level		3			1				4
	Generic	105	198		4	2667			37	3011
	NVQ1		20			35			37	92
	NVQ2		5			12			5	22
	NVQ3		1			4				5
Still at School	Generic	156			3099					3255
	NVQ1				20					20
Grand Total		294	246	2	3827	3790	3	14	82	8258