

LEARNERS SAY EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND (ESF) HELPS IN FINDING EMPLOYMENT

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The European Social Fund (ESF) helps people find work, improves employability skills and provides encouragement to go into further learning and training, a new survey by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has found.

The Findings include that there was a 34 percentage point net increase in the number of ESF learners in employment compared against the start of the course. Most of those now in new jobs (i.e. who were unemployed prior to the course or who had changed jobs) have secured permanent positions (77%), and half are working 30 hours a week or more.

The survey, which investigated learners' employment levels prior to the ESF provision and their situation in the first quarter of 2009 (approximately 18 months after the course), found that 30 per cent of learners reported they were on Jobseeker's Allowance immediately before starting their ESF course, but this had dropped to 10 per cent at the time of interview.

Learners who were working in a new job or as newly self-employed when interviewed were asked what role the course had played in achieving their employment situation. Over half of this group (55%) felt that the course had been vital or helpful in achieving employment.

Almost all learners (96%) felt they had gained employability skills as a result of the course. Two thirds (66%) of those not working felt that the course had given them more chance of finding a job in the future and two fifths (39%) had undertaken further learning since the course, with a quarter (23%) achieving a qualification. Of those working both

immediately before the course and when interviewed, almost nine in ten had experienced improvements at work, most often increased job satisfaction, and two thirds of these learners felt the course helped them achieve these improvements.

Chris Banks, the LSC's chairman, said:

"The study demonstrates the positive impact that investing time on a course at a further education college has in terms of improving employability prospects.

"It has shown that improving your skills and going through the process of learning does have a very big impact on your ability to get and keep a job."

The vast majority of learners (97%) felt that they benefited from the course; the most common benefits found were increased confidence in their abilities (85%), feeling better about themselves (82%), having more enthusiasm for learning (82%) and being clearer about the range of options open to them (75%). The vast majority of learners believed they had gained one or more work-related skills from doing the course (96%).

Learners were also asked their reasons for taking the course, the main reasons include; gaining new job related skills (25%) and help to get a job (21%).

Kevin Brennan, Minister for Further Education, Apprenticeships, Skills and Consumer Affairs said:

"Further education can make a real difference in helping people get back to work. Interpersonal skills, confidence and the ability to present your ideas can be vital to securing employment.

"This study shows a five-fold increase in the numbers of people entering employment after taking an ESF-funded course and real success in getting people off benefits. This illustrates clearly that if you learn more, you'll earn more."

Notes to Editors

This report presents the findings of a survey of 4,856 learners who were funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the 2000-2006 ESF Objective 3 programme. The survey

was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to assess the impact, as reported by learners, of ESF learning on their employment outcomes and employability skills. The LSC had spent £1.2bn ESF money by December 2007 (approximately £200m a year) which complements and adds value to mainstream Government funding, increases the volume of learners on mainstream programmes, and is used to target hard to reach groups (in particular those not in employment, education or training aged 16-19 (NEET), the economically inactive, lone parents, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and ex-offenders).

The overall aim of the research was to understand the impact of ESF funded provision on the employment outcomes and employability skills of individuals, for example measuring the proportion that say they have: moved into employment and / or off benefit since the course; progressed in their job role; progressed into further learning and / or achieved qualifications; and / or improved their employability skills. More specifically, the objectives of the research were to assess:

- How ESF funding can make a difference to the outcomes of learners compared with mainstream provision alone
- Differences between those on provision funded by ESF only and those funded by a mix of ESF and LSC funding
- Why learners want to participate in learning
- Reasons for non-completion
- From the learners' perspective the main benefits of participating in the ESF funded learning
- Whether the benefits of learning differ by demographic group.

European Social Fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund (ESF) was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and so help raise standards of living. It aims to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects.

As one of the EU's Structural Funds, ESF seeks to reduce differences in prosperity across the EU and enhance economic and social cohesion. So although ESF funding is spread across the EU, most money goes to those countries and regions where economic development is less advanced.

The other main Structural Fund is the [European Regional Development Fund](#) which invests in projects to improve innovation, the environment and infrastructure.

Since 2000, the ESF has been a key part of the EU's [Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs](#). It supports the EU's goal of increasing employment by giving unemployed and disadvantaged people the training and support they need to enter jobs. By focusing on those most in need of help, it contributes to policies to reduce inequality and build a fairer society. ESF also equips the workforce with the skills needed by business in a competitive global economy.

In 2007, the EU launched a new round of ESF programmes for the next seven years to 2013.

For more information please visit: http://www.esf.gov.uk/introduction_to_esf

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