



European Union
European Social Fund
Investing in jobs and skills

LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL NORTH WEST



Leading learning and skills

PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION REPORT REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDANCE FOR 2007-13 PROJECTS

Introduction

This note seeks to provide LSC Northwest ESF Co-finance contractors with:

- An explanation as to the benefits of undertaking evaluation.
- Timescales for the submission of a Performance and Evaluation Report to the LSC.
- Guidance on how to submit a Performance and Evaluation Report.
- Details of what must be included in the report and guidance regarding the length of the reports.

Why Evaluate?

Evaluation is an essential part of a project. It is an important learning exercise as well as a way of demonstrating the performance of a project. It should not simply be viewed as an “end-of-project” exercise that forms part of project administration, but should be conducted so that all parties can take something from how a project has developed and delivered. Evaluation findings are useful in developing future projects. Furthermore, they can provide a valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation as a whole.

Project evaluations have some important uses and benefits as they embed the process of self assessment and continuous improvement, particularly for providers themselves:

- **To ascertain performance against output targets** – an evaluation should consider whether the project has achieved against its original objectives in terms of outputs and other activity in the delivery profile, and also softer outputs. If the project has performed well against its objectives, the evaluation should consider why this has occurred so that the project can gain insight into continuing to meet output targets in the future. If the project has underperformed against targets, the evaluation needs to determine why this has happened so that the project can learn for future delivery. This can be particularly useful for interim evaluations, because, with the project still running, it means that it may be viable to turn things around.
- **To learn lessons** – as well as learning lessons that can be taken on board for the remainder of the project (as in interim evaluations), evaluations give the opportunity for the project to learn and improve as a whole, particularly in the sense of designing and delivering other projects.
- **To understand the fit with local priorities** – an evaluation should assess how the project has helped to address the original priorities and issues that were identified in the tender specification and particularly the project tender. This can help determine whether provision should attempt to be continued or perhaps modified.
- **To publicise achievements** – an evaluation of the project can draw-out the impact that it has had on individuals and the communities. In most cases this impact will be positive and worth sharing with others, with the potential knock-on effect of stimulating interest and involvement in future activity, as well as creating awareness of the issues that the project attempts to address.

Why does the LSC Require Performance and Evaluation Reports?

The Performance and Evaluation Reports are a key element of the performance management process that the LSC has adopted for managing its ESF funded activity. In addition, project evaluations are also useful for us at LSC Northwest, who can:

- Learn about different activities and methods of delivery that are being adopted and to what degree of success. In addition, evaluation reports can provide a useful starting point on sharing innovative methods of delivery;
- Use the findings to understand what works in practice, so that LSC Northwest is able to design effective training and development provision in the future and decide how its funding should be allocated.
- Gauge the overall effect that funding programmes have had, both in terms of outputs and results, and wider impact.

How often are Performance and Evaluation Reports Required?

LSC Northwest requires a half-yearly Performance and Evaluation Report; these must be submitted to the LSC in line with the timescales defined in your contract, which normally indicate that reports must be submitted in February and August. The LSC also required a final Performance and Evaluation Report which must be submitted at the end of your project. The reports must be submitted at the same time as Delivery Statements are submitted.

How should Performance and Evaluation Reports be Submitted?

Performance and Evaluation Reports must be emailed to the following LSC email: **nwresfdata@lsc.gov.uk**.

What goes into a Performance and Evaluation Report?

You must include the following headings in your report.

1. Rationale for the Project

This section must indicate the issue(s) that the project was seeking to address. For example, it may have been seeking to tackle English skills amongst certain communities or help to raise NVQ levels in some professions. The rationale will be based on the tender specification that the application for funding was made under. However, it will obviously be more specific than that, and you must detail the key issue(s) behind the development of the project and the application for funding.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

A rationale for the project must be included in both the interim and final performance and evaluation reports.

2. Aims and Objectives

Stemming from the rationale for the project, the aims and objectives must be described clearly. This must include both the aims and objectives for the project, and the contracted deliverables (in bullet point format). These aims and objectives must be based on

information included in your original application and contract. If these aims and objectives changed or were clarified during the life of the project, this must be explained as well.

The aims and objectives must be included in both the interim and final performance and evaluation reports.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

3. Delivery Arrangements and Linkages to Other Activities

This section must outline progress in terms of delivery arrangements for the project; this may include any additional protocols, working arrangements or additional pieces of work which were identified as being required for the project. This section should also include details of any promotional activity relating to learner support measures as well as details of the take up any learner support measures.

Include details of any changes which have been made or are due to be made (in the case of interim reports) to the project's delivery arrangements or linkages to other complementary activities.

Providers should also use this section to provide the LSC with an update on Self assessment arrangements, grades and inspection activity.

Community Grant Co-ordinating Bodies should demonstrate how the grants awarded are supporting regional priorities.

Guidance re length of response: 600 words/ 1 A4 page

Required in interim and final reports. The final report should summarise delivery arrangements, including identifying any changes that had to be implemented.

4. Partnership Working

Identify the partners involved in the project and the amount of funding from this contract which has been awarded to them. Outline if there have been any changes to the partnership, in terms of the organisations involved in the project, their role in the project or the funding which has been awarded to them (original and revised allocations). Describe why these changes have happened and what impact of these changes on the delivery of the project. Confirm that any new partners/sub-contractors have been secured via Open and Competitive Tendering processes.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Changes to partnership working must be included in the interim and final reports.

5. Outputs, Results and Other Outcomes Achievement Data

This section of the report must look at the achievements of the project in terms of the contracted deliverables. Key to this is the question "have the deliverable targets in the delivery profile been met?". The report must show clearly the numbers that have been achieved against targets. If targets are amended, the report must demonstrate progress against the original and revised targets.

Remember that the volumes reported must be supported by evidence. In particular, beneficiary numbers must match the number of Individual Learner Records/Short Records completed for the project.

In the case of interim reports, outputs and results need to be looked at in order to assess progress so far. If the delivery profile has not been met, identify why. This is an important way of learning lessons for the future. Reasons why targets were not met, and possible solutions that could have been adopted, must feed into future projects.

If targets have been achieved, the evaluation needs to determine the factors that have helped this to happen. This will enable good practice to be picked up, which the provider will want to take on board for the future.

In addition to “hard” data about the achievement of deliverables, it is also important to evaluate softer outcomes. Soft outcomes are outcomes that cannot be directly measured, and may include:

- Interpersonal skills (such as social skills and coping with authority).
- Organisational skills (such as personal organisation and ability to order and prioritise).
- Analytical skills (such as the ability to exercise judgement, managing time or problem solving); and
- Personal skills (such as insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and health awareness).

Soft outcomes are particularly important in projects funded through ESF, as the prime target for such funding is assisting the employability of those that are “hardest to reach”.

Some Tender Specifications also identified a range of ‘Other Outcomes’ which need to be delivered, if this is the case, providers will be supplied with a separate excel spreadsheet which must be completed and submitted along with each report.

Please also report on any unanticipated benefits that have arisen in relation to the project’s original aims and objectives.

Guidance re length of response: 600 words/ 1 A4 page

Required for interim and final reports.

6. Details of Success Stories/Good Practice/Innovative Activities

Where targets have been achieved, the evaluation needs to determine the factors that have helped this to happen. This will enable good practice to be picked up, which the project will want to take on board for the future. Identify any areas of innovation. If delivering to beneficiaries, you must also include particular case studies describing notable individual achievements. Lastly, if your organisation or the partnership publicised any of these success stories or good practice examples then the way in which this was carried out must be documented.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Details of Success Stories/Good Practice must be included in interim and final reports.

7. How the Project could be Improved and Lessons Learnt

This section must summarise the specific lessons learned and what this means generally for the project in the future.

The interim evaluation must focus on lessons on the delivery that can be taken forward in the remainder of the project's life. The final evaluation must focus on lessons for similar projects in the future or the organisation/partnership as a whole.

This section must provide some detail about difficulties encountered by the project during delivery and what was done to attempt to overcome these difficulties. Almost all projects will suffer some difficulties, and recognising these and potential ways to overcome them is an important part of the evaluation process. Particular attention must be given to the reasons why targets were not met, and the possible solutions that could have been adopted. Where targets were met you must detail the challenges or barriers that were overcome on the way.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Lessons learnt must be included in interim and final reports.

8. Details of Beneficiaries Reasons for Leaving the Programme

You should conduct exit reviews or leaver surveys to ascertain the reason(s) behind individuals leaving their qualification or activity before completing. These reasons must be summarised in this section. It may become apparent that there is a pattern or underlying theme behind the early leaving and these reasons can be taken into account and addressed in the remaining part of the project or in future delivery.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Details of beneficiaries' reasons for leaving the programme must be included in interim and final reports.

9. Publicity

Outline the publicity activities which have been undertaken to raise the profile of ESF and your project and how participants are made aware of the support they receiving via ESF. Further guidance regarding ESF publicity requirements can be found at <http://www.esf.gov.uk/publicity>.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

For interim reports, this section must outline the actions which have been undertaken since the last report was submitted as well as providing details of any planned publicity activities.

The final report must provide details of all publicity activities that were undertaken throughout the lifetime of the project.

10. Cross Cutting Themes

Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities

Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities must be embedded within all aspects of the project delivery. Therefore, the evaluation must assess how equal opportunities – on the basis of gender, ethnicity and disability and any other excluded groups relevant to the project (such as the economically inactive) – were promoted and safeguarded by the project.

The report must address how specified aims of the project promoted gender equality and equal opportunities and how this agenda was met through the delivery.

Like the evaluation of the project generally, the evaluation assessment of the success of the gender equality and equal opportunities aspects of the project report must cover:

- A comparison of achievement rates for the contracted deliverables by ethnicity, gender and disability status of beneficiaries supported (and any other excluded groups relevant to the project ie offenders, lone parents);
- Soft outputs and outcomes, such as raising awareness of equal opportunities amongst participants and reducing prejudice; and
- A brief summary of any challenges (the project had in delivering equal opportunities (eg difficulties reaching certain groups or attitudes of learners), steps that were taken to try to overcome these difficulties, and details on how any such difficulties will be overcome in the future if it is intended that the project will continue.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Required in interim and final reports. If a good practice case study regarding gender equality and equal opportunities has been submitted, details of the good practice should be included in the final report.

Sustainable Development

ESF providers are required to have a sustainable development policy and implementation plan covering environmental sustaining. The policy and implementation plan need to be put in place within the project's first year. The policy statement will cover such issues as:

- How the provider complies with relevant environmental legislation (for example, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations);
- How the provider will reduce waste and energy consumption;
- How the provider will promote recycling
- A commitment to at least explore ways of minimising private transport use and promote public transport usage.

During the first year, the interim reports must comment on progress in developing and implementing the policy and plan, in subsequent reports the focus must be progress against the implementation and plan and any changes. In addition all reports must outline any measures, particularly good practice measures that have been undertaken to reduce or mitigate the environmental impact of the project.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Information on measures undertaken must be included in both interim and final reports, whilst commentary on the Sustainable Development Policy and Implementation Plan must only be included in the interim reports. If a good practice case study regarding sustainable development has been submitted, details of the good practice should be included in the final report.

Health

Identify how the project:

- Improved the health of individuals by improving their education and skills and their access to employment; and/or
- Increased skills within the health and social care sector, and increasing access to such employment for people from ESF target groups, especially the harder to reach groups.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Health case studies should only be included in the final report.

11. Forward Strategy (will the project be sustained and if so how?)

Finally, the evaluation must examine the sustainability of the project (this is nothing to do with Sustainable Development as outlined in Section 10 above). If it is to continue, the evaluation must examine the factors surrounding this:

- Will the project be funded through mainstream funding or new tenders for funding (remembering that there is no guarantee that new tenders for ESF will be successful)?
- Will the project be delivered in the same way or not?
- How will it build upon the current project and the lessons learned?

The original rationale for the project should be investigated to ascertain if it is still valid or whether a slightly different rationale is now appropriate (eg the original priority may have been long-term unemployment in general, and this may need refocusing to target, for instance, a particular ethnic minority group, within the long-term unemployed category).

Similarly the evaluation can assess how the project would fit with other organisations' priorities.

Guidance re length of response: 300 words/ ½ A4 page

Forward Strategy must only be included in the final report.