

Learning and Skills Council
South East Region

ESF Co-Financing 2002 –2008

PROJECT CLOSURE GUIDANCE



Leading learning and skills



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

CONTENTS

Section One – Introduction

- 1.1 Usage of this Guidance
- 1.2 Co-financing
- 1.3 Resources and Timescales

Section Two – The Project Evaluation Report

- 2.1 Evaluation Report Content
- 2.2 Heading for the Evaluation Report
- 2.3 Evaluation Report Submission

Section Three – Final Data Requirements

- 3.1 General Requirements
- 3.2 Final Individual Beneficiary Data: ESF Short Records (or ILRs)
- 3.3 Provider reporting
- 3.4 Supplementary Information

Section Four – Evidence of Project Activity

- 4.1 Retention of Project Evidence
- 4.2 Types of Evidence

Section Five – Final Activities

- 5.1 Purchased Equipment
- 5.2 Laptops on loan from LSC
- 5.3 Reconciliation of Projects by LSC
- 5.4 Dissemination Event
- 5.5 Project Closure Arrangements Form
- 5.6 LSC Contact Information
- 5.7 Abbreviations

Section One – Introduction

1.1 Usage of this Guidance

This guidance has been prepared to assist providers in bringing to a close a period of European Social Fund (ESF) Co-financing for their project.

All Co-financed projects are covered by this guidance. The content of this guidance is not exhaustive, further guidance should be sought from the Learning Skills Council (LSC) if required. In the event of any conflict between this guidance and any Government Office South East (GOSE), ESF or contractual requirements, then the latter will take precedence.

If you have any comments or additions for this guidance manual, please e-mail David Saffrey, South East Regional ESF Administrator, at david.saffrey@lsc.gov.uk

1.2 Co-financing

Co-financing has brought with it new requirements, some of which are significantly different to those traditionally experienced with ESF.

As a Co-financed provider, you no longer have to complete the traditional Project Closure Report (PCR). This task now falls to the LSC as 'final beneficiary'. In order for the LSC to complete this report, you will need to provide the LSC with a range of information about your project.

There is also no longer a need to obtain an ESF Audit Certificate, you are however contractually required by the LSC to have your project accounts audited, also ensuring all expenditure on your project is 'eligible expenditure' in ESF terms.

The following sections will take you through the relevant requirements, which fall roughly into three main categories, an evaluation report, a range of statistical data and retention of evidence.

1.3 Resources and Timescales

The LSC will normally allow up to one month following the end of the funding period for the 'closure' information to be submitted. For the Project Evaluation Report, up to six weeks is allowed.

As it is only possible for funding to be claimed for expenditure/activity that has **occurred up to and including the last day of the funding period**, the following needs to be considered:

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PROJECT CLOSURE GUIDANCE v3 (NOVEMBER 2006)

- Will the necessary project staff (with the required knowledge) be available beyond the last day of funding to complete the required activities?
- Are the necessary resources and monies available to cover the cost of the work?
- Are exit strategies in place to cover any beneficiaries still on the programme until the end of the funding period?

Where the above is not the case, it will be necessary to complete and submit the required information on or before the last day of funding. Where completing this activity will have an impact on the provision of service to your beneficiaries, the arrangements must be agreed in advance with your LSC Partnership Advisor.

Towards the end of your funding period, you will be sent a form for completion and return to the LSC. This will request details of the arrangements you have in place for project closure, dates, contact names/telephone numbers etc. Failure to complete and return this form by the requested date may result in any payments being held.

Section Two – The Project Evaluation Report

2.1 Evaluation Report Content

A Final Evaluation Report for each project must be returned to your LSC Partnership Adviser within six weeks of the project end date. The headings below should be used as a format for your report. This will allow the LSC to collate the information from all of the Co-financed projects. Shown beneath each heading is an indication of the type of information that you should provide. Please ensure the name of the project is indicated at the top of the report.

A useful reference document is the Evaluation Guide produced by Aspire Learning Limited for LSC Sussex. If required, a copy can be requested by email from david.saffrey@lsc.gov.uk

The content of the report should be kept as concise as possible without detriment to the content. The length of the report is likely to be related to the size and value of the contract. Where a detailed report is being submitted a section should be included, the front of which gives a summary for each of the report headings.

As a guide, one side of A4 in size 12 font, for each report heading, should be considered as the minimum requirement.

2.2 Headings for Evaluation Report

The Final Evaluation Report will be an extension of the Interim Evaluation in terms of activities that have taken place after the Interim Evaluations were written and any changes that occurred as a result of Interim recommendations. The Interim Evaluation will culminate in a Final Evaluation Report.

The headings are the same as in the Interim Evaluation Reports. If required, a copy of the Evaluation Report Format can be requested by email from david.saffrey@lsc.gov.uk

Please note that the final evaluation should also stress upon the following aspects of the project:

Outcomes

Did you achieve the planned outcomes? How were the actual outcomes different to those planned? What were the problems/benefits encountered in striving for these particular outcomes? Were there any other outcomes that would have been useful for the target group? What measures did you take to ensure that planned outcomes were achieved? Were there any unexpected outcomes or opportunities that emerged from the project?

Expenditure

What was your actual project expenditure? How did actual expenditure differ from planned expenditure? Which areas had a particular under/over-spend? What measures did you take to ensure that expenditure was on target?

Quality and Sustainability

How did you ensure that the work of the project was in line with quality standards? Which other methods of project evaluation and dissemination have you used? Which steps did you take to guard against health and safety risks, and did any health and safety issues arise? What steps will you take to ensure that the work of the project is sustained in the future?

Partnerships

Did you work with any partners on the project? How did this partnership enhance the project? What lessons have you learnt from working in partnership? How did you keep track of your partners' expenditure and achievement of outcomes? How did you ensure that your partners maintained quality standards? Were any new links or networks created as a result of the project?

Lessons Learnt

What lessons have you learned from carrying out this project? Which aspects of the project worked well, and which did not? Would you bid for additional funding in the future for a similar project? What would you do differently? Were there any specific lessons you learned about the target group? How will you ensure that relevant colleagues within your own organisation are aware of these lessons?

Information Available

Please detail any reports or other information that has become available as a result of this project. Where can the information be obtained?

2.3 Report submission

Once completed, a hard copy of the report should be signed by a senior member of the provider organisation, and along with an emailed soft copy, sent to your LSC Partnership Advisor.

Section Three – Final Data Requirements

3.1 Requirements

As previously mentioned, the LSC has the responsibility for completing an ESF PCR for each of its ESF measure level plans submitted to GOSE. Each of these PCR's will draw together data from the provider contracts relevant to that measure level.

The range of data required to complete the report is drawn from a number of sources. The remainder of this section will describe these sources and identify potential activity providers will need to undertake.

3.2 Individual Beneficiary Data: ESF Short Records (or ILRs)

The majority of the required data for the PCR is collected through ESF Short Records (ILRs) for most projects. Short Record data is collected either via the providers MI System or Provider Information Collection System (PICS) submitted electronically to the LSC through the web portal every month. The data is then extracted, interrogated and analysed to produce the PCR.

Therefore, it is essential that providers complete and submit Short Records electronically to the LSC as soon as possible. The recommended timescale for this data should be no later than 1 month after the end of the project. For colleges and former External Institutions submitting batch data, please submit within the published timescales.

Regardless of the format used in submitting beneficiary data, it is important to ensure all beneficiaries are reported as leavers on or before the last day of the funding period. This applies even where a beneficiary is remaining on a project, i.e. supported with alternative funding or a new round of ESF.

Various checks are undertaken by the LSC on the beneficiary data submitted to ensure accuracy and completeness. Where such checks identify any issues, providers will be requested to supply the required information. Any such requests should contain a reply by date, but in any case should be dealt with promptly. This is also to avoid the opportunity of obtaining data being lost.

Where the beneficiary data is not found to be accurate and complete, and the missing information cannot be supplied, it is likely that that particular beneficiary and associated outcomes will have to be discounted from the project.

Further guidance on completing ESF Short Records can be found on the LSC website www.lsc.gov.uk in the 'Providers' section under 'Data'.

3.3 *Provider reporting*

Information is also drawn from the monthly/quarterly reports you have been submitting to the LSC from CMR submissions and Quarterly Project Progress Reports.

Your final monthly/quarterly reports will contain the totals required for compilation of the PCR. Please ensure these reports are submitted promptly and contain only data relevant to activity for the period up to and including the last day of the funding period. CMR data has to match PICS/Provider Online (POL) submissions before the end of the project, as any missing data may affect your payments.

As detailed in the ESF Short Record (ILR) section above, any issues identified during the checking process will similarly be addressed.

3.4 *Supplementary Information*

Some supplementary information is likely to be required in order to finalise the PCR. This is likely to relate to data on employers/organisations supported. In most cases you will have already been advised that collection of this data is required, and have provided some interim data. You will be advised of what further data/activity is required.

Section Four – Evidence of Project Activity

4.1 Retention of Project Evidence

As the 'final beneficiary', the LSC has the responsibility for ensuring that all evidence of a projects activity remains available for audit purposes. The LSC would therefore be responsible for payment of any monies back to ESF in the event of missing evidence. **The LSC would in turn seek to recover any claw back of monies from providers where they cannot produce the required evidence.**

Under the terms of your contract with the LSC, you are required to ensure that all project records/evidence are safely retained **at least** until the **31st December 2014**. You will, during the closure process, be required to give details of how and where the evidence will be retained.

Where this evidence is spread around various departments or locations within your organisation, you should ensure that this information is documented and a copy sent to the LSC with your Project Evaluation Report.

If your project has partners or sub-contractors who hold any evidence/records, the lead provider with whom the LSC has contracted is responsible for ensuring the required evidence is in place, and that arrangements are made for it to be safely retained.

If either now or in the future the safe retention of this evidence is at risk, i.e. an organisation closing down, then you should immediately contact the LSC to discuss alternative arrangements.

4.2 Types of Evidence

As a reminder of the range of evidence required, the table below has been reproduced from the guidance originally given to providers.

Activity	Evidence Examples
Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A copy of the original proposal and the LSC contract • Any correspondence related to the project (with the LSC, partners etc.) • Research data used to prove a need for your project • Information about your organisation and partner organisations • Partnership Agreements • A detailed delivery plan • Examples of paperwork and systems • Evidence of publicity for the project • Evidence of steering group meetings and involvement in the project. <p>Staff details including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal details and qualifications • Job descriptions

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PROJECT CLOSURE GUIDANCE V3 (NOVEMBER 2006)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracts
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<p>Beneficiary Learners</p>	<p>Beneficiary files including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESF Short Records - or ILR/Enrolment - forms (providers other than FE colleges) • ISR data (FE colleges only) • Interview notes • Individual Learning Plans/Training Needs Analysis • Timetables • Attendance records • Details of work placements • Details of qualifications gained • Exit strategies/activities • Beneficiary/Employer Evaluations <p>Details of awarding bodies with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration records • Qualification reports
<p>Quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awarding body reports • Evidence of project monitoring (statistics, minutes, reports, and financial records) • Evidence of project evaluation (questionnaires, learner satisfaction surveys, statistics, minutes, and reports) <p>Beneficiary statistics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment rates and statistics • Details of early leavers with retention rate statistics • Details of completers with statistics • Destination statistics
<p>Expenditure</p>	<p>Invoices/receipts/salary records for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff costs • Beneficiary costs • Other costs • Details of apportioned costs with an explanation and justification • Records to show actual expenditure against planned expenditure • Management accounts • Details of any income generated by the project

Section Five – Final Activities

5.1 Purchased Equipment

Any equipment purchased for the project with LSC funding (e.g. computers etc) should be dealt with in one of two ways at project end:

- Providing the equipment will remain within a learning environment, the LSC will normally agree to it being retained by the provider. This arrangement should continue until its value has depreciated to zero. The time taken for this depreciation will be governed by your own accounting arrangements, but the minimum time is normally 3 years from the date of purchase.
- Where continued use in a learning environment is not possible, you should contact your LSC Partnership Adviser to discuss disposal, return or transfer of the equipment.

5.2 Laptops on loan from the LSC

If you have any laptops on loan from the LSC, you will be contacted separately with details on the arrangements for return of this equipment.

5.3 Reconciliation of Projects by the LSC

Once all the final project information has been collected by the LSC, all projects will undergo a reconciliation exercise.

Where problems are identified relating to items such as under performance, missing evidence/data, ineligible expenditure, the LSC may seek to claw back funding in accordance with the terms of your contract. Providers will be kept informed where such action is being considered.

5.4 Dissemination Event

As part of the dissemination of the overall LSC Co-financing project, the LSC will hold a dissemination event. All providers will be invited to take part/attend this event. This is likely to be in 2008, full details will be issued nearer the time.

5.5 Project Closure Arrangements Form

Project Closure Arrangements	
Please complete and sign this form and return it by post or fax to the ESF team at your local Learning and Skills Council	
Provider Name: Project Name: Location of project documentation/evidence:	
Project staff responsible for all closure activities, i.e. entering ESF Short Records, CMR and PICS reconciliation, collection, filing and retention of documentation related to the project etc.	
Senior Manager	
Telephone	
Email	
Date available until	
Contact Name	
Telephone	
Email	
Date available until	
Contact Name	
Telephone	
Email	
Date available until	
Should project staff not be in place after the end date of the project, please contact your LSC Contract Manager to discuss alternative arrangements.	
Please note: Failure to complete and return this form may result in any final payments being delayed.	
Signed: Date	
Print name: Position:	

5.6 LSC Contact Information

Any queries relating to the project closure should be addressed initially to your LSC Partnership Advisor.

5.7 Abbreviations

ESF	European Social Fund
GOSE	Government Office South East
ILR	Individual Learners Record
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
PCR	Project Closure Report
PICS	Provider Information Collection System
POL	Provider Online