



## **Summative Evaluation of Co-financing Round 3 Executive Summary**



EUROPEAN UNION  
European Social Fund

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides an evaluation of the third round of European Social Fund (ESF) Co-financing run by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North Yorkshire. The third round of Co-financing was very positive in North Yorkshire on a number of levels. The LSC contracted a high level of activity and overall achievement against the contracted outputs, outcomes and milestones was strong. Within the projects themselves there were a number of elements of good practice that can be used to further enhance learning and skills provision in the sub-region.

### **Round 3 Approach**

The Co-financing process in North Yorkshire is well run and the approach has been consultative, with a number of opportunities for partners to find out about and comment upon the way that the projects were developing. A number of areas were felt to have been particularly successful.

Round 3 saw a number of changes in approach by the LSC North Yorkshire, including a move to specifying in detail the types of activity that the LSC wished to commission. This has enabled a close alignment of activity with the wider strategic goals of the LSC and ESF and a targeting of activities at identified needs within the sub-region.

The level of partnership working can be considered a real success of Round 3. A partnership facilitation process, undertaken by York and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit (YNYPU), has engendered a high level of partnership working amongst the provider base. This has helped ensure that smaller providers have been able to contribute to the delivery of the LSC's aims and objectives.

Many 'new' partnerships were convened around accessing Round 3 funds and these have worked well where the lead partner has been sensitive to the capacity issues of smaller partners to engage with ESF. In addition, partnerships that were based on shared goals that made use of partners' expertise in delivering different elements of project activity were noted as successful. Some of the new partnerships, convened for Round 3, took longer to establish and deliver effectively than originally anticipated.

### **Financial Performance**

Round 3 has performed well in respect of the use of ESF funds to support activity. The overall expenditure stood at 93% of the total ESF budget. Where there was an identified risk that funds were not likely to be claimed, resources were recycled effectively, either through a reallocation to other successful projects or through the addition of mini tendering rounds.

Overall there has been a high number of successfully delivered projects, contributing to the strong financial performance of a number of the Measures under Round 3.

### **Delivery of Contracted Outputs, Outcomes and Milestones**

The projects mainly delivered well on the target outputs and outcomes they were contracted for and met the required delivery milestones. Based on the aggregate outcome measures we report on, 9 out of the 14 measures achieved more than 80% of target, including 6 in excess of 90%.

Review of the definitions of outcomes leads us to suggest that some would be more accurately defined as outputs. Using these revised definitions, output performance continues to be high, but overall performance on outcomes is not quite as positive. The LSC North Yorkshire should review how some outcomes and outputs are defined to improve understanding of overall performance and impact in future programmes.

### **Project Approaches**

Two main types of project approach were funded under Round 3. The first was the funding of the delivery of training activity to a range of beneficiary target groups. The different approaches adopted included employer partnerships, classroom based training and outreach activity. Outreach is a key area of best practice and innovation and can be particularly valuable in a large and often remote geographical area such as North Yorkshire.

The second approach was the provision of funding for brokerage activities, whereby a broker was funded to provide diagnostics and training needs analyses for employers (usually within specific sectors). The brokerage projects provide a good example of how ESF funding has been used to coordinate with activity through other funding streams. By linking to Yorkshire Forward funding the LSC North Yorkshire has enabled a larger project to be delivered than was possible with ESF alone.

Company beneficiaries have had varying experiences of the brokerage projects with the main request from businesses for future improvement being the provision of clearer advice or guidance over which training to pursue.

### **Impact on Beneficiaries**

Over 7,900 beneficiaries have received some level of training support or Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) through the Co-financed activity and almost 700 have worked towards a qualification. This is a positive result.

Positive experiences were reported regarding a number of the types of provision on offer. These included the supportive and approachable nature of the ICT training provision and the value of the ICT training to business beneficiaries. Favourable reports were also received regarding short taster courses to re-engage those out of learning for a while, and also with regard to the opportunity to learn at home via ICT to improve confidence. Others that received employment related qualifications felt that the provision was worthwhile and greatly improved their chances of finding employment or even setting up their own business.

### **Good Practice**

A number of elements of good practice were identified within the projects contracted under Round 3.

- The development of a means of compiling portfolios of evidence in a less time consuming way has been regarded as a success for the accreditation of workforce skills. The approach is now in use in other project activity.
- Using ESF funds as an integral part of a wider package of interventions to tackle the issue of large scale redundancies has enabled ESF funding to provide a valuable component of a holistic package of highly responsive support.
- The use of outreach centres and learning from home that enables beneficiaries to take part at times and / or locations to suit them was viewed positively. In an area such as North Yorkshire, the availability of this type of provision should be the norm.

### **Sustainability**

Projects have had difficulties in mainstreaming Co-financed activity. That said, a number of providers have been able to continue activity through other funding routes or have built on lessons learnt and gaps identified through their Round 3 project. Examples include the development of the 'slim' portfolio in the *Building for the Future* project and the later management changes to delivery through local partnerships developed from the *Bridge 4 Securing Progression at 16* project.

### **Recommendations**

There are many positive aspects to Round 3. The recommendations that follow are primarily focused on the retention of positive elements of the approach adopted in Round 3 and on a few minor improvements that could be made to the operation of Co-financing. It must be noted that the arrangements for distributing ESF will be much changed under the new programme from 2007. In light of these changes, recommendations relate primarily to good practice that can be applied to discretionary funded learning and skills projects.

- The approach of using project specifications to commission activity enables stronger strategic alignment of contracted activity and should be retained.
- The partnership approach should be retained, though the LSC should seek to ensure partnerships can 'hit the ground' running and that arrangements for smaller organisations to 'capture the benefits' of engagement have been considered.
- Projects that work with the unemployed need to demonstrate how they will deliver positive impacts for this target group, as at present performance is below expectation.

- The use of an interview with potential deliverers is prudent and should be retained. The interview stage should include a focus on the deliverer's plans to overcome some of the more difficult areas of delivery outlined in this report (i.e. working with the unemployed, securing progression, achieving qualifications and ensuring the proposed partnership delivery mechanism is in place and able to deliver from the outset of the contract).
- The LSC should consider including stronger contracted outcomes relating to the provision of supported referrals onto further learning where projects are targeted at beneficiaries learning below Level 2.
- The LSC should consider ways that the contracting process can be undertaken without significant loss of contract delivery time.
- The LSC should continue the arrangement to support partners with partnership working.
- The level of paperwork for beneficiaries should be kept to a minimum - examples such as the slim-portfolio should be replicated where possible.
- Projects requiring sub-regional project delivery should be required to demonstrate how their delivery will be provided to the same standard across the sub-region.