

Audit of Employer Responsive (Apprenticeships/Train to Gain) and ESF data 2010-11: Summary of Issues

Date of issue June 2011

During the Skills Funding Agency's 2010-11 financial year the Agency's Provider Financial Assurance (PFA) team completed assurance work on the employer responsive and ESF data for a sample of its college and non-college providers. This work was completed under the Joint Audit Code of Practice between the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency. The primary purpose of the work was to independently verify the completeness and accuracy of data provided in support of Apprenticeship, Train to Gain, and ESF funding claims. Each of the providers selected for review received a final report which included recommendations to help address issues identified during the course of the audit work.

The audit work revealed common instances and themes in the type of data errors identified. In the interests of openness the Agency wishes to share knowledge of the issues raised. In this way we hope to assist providers to avoid the types of issues commonly encountered. The main issues are outlined below and have been grouped as follows: a general Provider Data Self-Assessment Toolkit observation in respect of employer responsive data, and common issues arising from audit reviews in respect of employer responsive and ESF data.

Provider Data Self-Assessment Toolkit (PDSAT) (Employer Responsive data only)

Agency audit reports highlight that not all providers are fully utilising or regularly running the Provider Data Self-Assessment Toolkit (PDSAT) reports to review their employer responsive learner data for completeness and accuracy. The review of PDSAT reports by the Agency's PFA team resulted in adjustments to data which could have been identified by providers had their learner data been regularly reviewed. The PDSAT was specifically designed for regular use by providers for this purpose. The PDSAT and guidance is available through the following link:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/Services/DataCollection/software/dsat/>

Some of the issues highlighted below can be overcome by regular review of PDSAT reports.

Issues common to Employer Responsive and ESF

Where the issue raised is specific to a particular employer responsive fund and/or ESF this is indicated in brackets after the title.

Eligibility

Some providers did not hold appropriate or sufficient evidence to confirm that each learner was eligible for Agency funding. In addition, a number of key documents were incomplete and/or had not been signed by the learner or on behalf of the provider.

Start date, planned end date and/or actual end dates

Auditors observed examples of learners not commencing the programme, and inconsistencies between recorded start and actual end dates and key documentation, including ILR/learning agreements/individual learning plans/progress reviews and achievement records. A number of learners had not received an Initial Assessment. In some cases learner agreements and Individual learning plans had not been fully completed and/or agreed/signed by the learner.

Skills for Life (SfL) - (ESF/Train to Gain specific)

Instances were identified where the learner was not undertaking a qualification that was a whole level higher than the results of the SfL assessment and/or there was no SfL assessment.

Achievement

Auditors identified instances where achievements were not recorded on a timely basis on the ILR or substantiated by appropriate supporting evidence for both NVQ achievement and full framework certification.

Inadequate controls over sub-contracted provision

Issues identified included inadequate evidence of robust monitoring arrangements, and instances of providers not holding original documentation to support learner existence, eligibility and/or attendance. ILR field A22 had not been completed to confirm sub-contractor identity in all cases.

Other issues

Other issues reported included minimum wage declarations not held; National Insurance numbers missing; incorrect recording of learner transfers and incomplete data.

Employer Responsive specific issues

Structured progression and progress reviews missing or incomplete

The quality of evidence of regular structured progress reviews held by providers to demonstrate learners' progression towards main aims and subsidiary aims was variable; a number were found to be missing or incomplete. In addition, the audits identified instances where additional learning support funding was being claimed for individual learners but where there was no evidence of a learner support plan having been agreed with the learner.

Learning and subsidiary aims/key skills subsidiary aims

The auditors identified cases of duplicate learning aims, cases where the learner's prior experiences and qualifications had not been taken in to consideration when determining the percentage of remaining funding to be claimed in ILR field A51a, and cases where field A51a had not been used to reflect the learner's actual learning programme. In some instances evidence was not held to confirm key skill delivery or previous achievement of key skills certificates. In addition there were instances where key skills relaxation had been applied but no evidence was held to confirm the learner had previously achieved GCSEs grades A to C. In other cases evidence existed that the learner satisfied the key skills relaxation rule but key skills were still included in the learning programme.

Fully funded provision

Auditors identified instances of learners who were coded as fully funded in error.

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ESF specific issues

On Programme Payments/Milestones/In Learning

Evidence held to demonstrate On Programme Payment/Milestones/In-learning were not within the start and end dates of the project. In some instances there was no evidence of learners working towards their goal/learning.

Publicity Material

In some cases there was insufficient evidence to confirm beneficiaries were aware they were being supported in learning by ESF funding.

State Aid

Auditors observed instances where State Aid forms had not been completed or had been incorrectly or incompletely complied.