Chapter 1 - Introduction and Overview

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An introduction to the European Social Fund 2014-2020 Provider Guidance

Covid-19
This guidance has been updated to include the interim arrangements that DWP, as CFO for our ESF 2014 – 2020 Programme, has put in place to allow you to continue to deliver provision during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of current ESF 2014 – 2020 Provider Guidance, from chapter 1 to Annex 11 will still apply and are to be used in conjunction with the Covid-19 period easements cited in the text boxes through this and other applicable chapters.

1.1 This programme specific guidance supports you, the provider, by setting out the essential things you need to know and do in order to meet the Provision requirements for the delivery of the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 Provision. It forms part of your contract and provides guidance on processes and requirements, contract details and the legal arrangements for delivery.

1.2 This guidance must be read in conjunction with:
- The Invitation to Tender (IiT)
- Terms and Conditions (T&Cs)
- Contract (once awarded)
- DWP Framework Generic Provider Guidance
1.3 If there is any conflict between the contract, specification and this guidance, refer to clause F12 (entire agreement) of the contract.

1.4 You must ensure any organisations with which you have a sub-contractual relationship also have access to, and read, this guidance and associated documents.

1.5 Any questions which are not covered by this guidance please raise with your performance manager in the first instance. Formalised responses to provider questions will be answered by the ESF Policy Team and published on BravoSolutions.

1.6 Further information about ESF is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-european-social-fund-2014-to-2020

**Background to ESF 2014 – 2020**

1.7 In June 2013 the Government set out the allocation of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), including ESF money for the full seven-year period. The body that has overall responsibility for ESF (including allocation of funds) within England is known as the ESF Managing Authority (MA).

1.8 The European Union (EU) regulations governing use of the funds in 2014-2020 define three different Categories of Region (CoR) in Europe. See the Glossary of Terms for further information.

1.9 For England the geographical areas used to determine CoR were Local Authorities.

1.10 Each CoR, and the LEP area as a whole, require information on ESF funding and performance to be profiled, managed and reported separately. See Chapter 7 for more information.

1.11 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)\(^1\) areas in England have provided an advisory role, documenting their local/strategic needs in an ESIF Growth Strategy. Initial Strategies were submitted to the ESF MA in October 2013, with final strategies being signed off following formal adoption of an Operational Programme by European Union (EU) in Autumn 2015.

1.12 The ESF Operational Programme as part of the ESIF European Growth Programme for England in 2014 – 2020 will deliver the Growth Programme’s priorities to increase labour market participation, promote social inclusion and develop the skills of the workforce.

1.13 ESF Provision can be funded via an approved Co-Financing Organisation (CFO) such as DWP, The Big Lottery or Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The MA will, in addition, organise direct ‘calls for proposals’ which will target specific LEP areas.

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\(^1\) In Cornwall and Isles of Scilly this is the ITI Board
1.14 Provision for offenders will be delivered through the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). This means that current offenders are out of scope for your Provision.

1.15 As a CFO, DWP has worked closely with LEPs to identify local employment priorities.

1.16 DWP as a CFO will tender, procure, performance manage contracts and provide equivalent match funding from DWP National Programmes.

**Match Funding**

1.17 All projects resourced from ESF will require "match funding". As a CFO, DWP will provide all the match funding required for the ESF Provision it procures. DWP match will be in the form of its existing eligible mainstream Provision.

**ESF Requirements**

1.18 You must meet ESF specific requirements set by the European Commission and failure to comply can result in a high financial risk for both DWP and you, as funds used inappropriately or for ineligible Participants or purposes and/or where the ESF requirements have not been met are recoverable from you. The ESF requirements are that:
   - ESF Provision must add value to existing available DWP Provision and other Provision in the locality and must not duplicate it
   - Evidence must be kept at all stages for Participants who have started on ESF Provision
   - A complete audit trail of key documents and electronic information must be captured, maintained and retained at all stages throughout the process
   - The EU regulations in connection with marketing and publicising ESF are met
   - The requirements relating to sustainable development, equality, diversity and equal opportunities are met, and
   - All required documentation for each Participant, including evidence of eligibility and claims for payment, is made available so that an adequate audit trail exists

1.19 The requirements above apply to your whole supply chain throughout delivery. If sub-contractors are used to deliver any part of the contract it is your responsibility to adhere to these requirements and ensure your supply chain does the same. You are ultimately accountable for the ESF compliance of your contract. Failure to comply with any of the ESF requirements can result in the repayment of funds.

Contract Package Area Specific Information

1.20 The majority of this guidance is generic across the ESF 2014-2020 Programme, however there will be some elements that will differ for each separate Contract Package Area (CPA). See Glossary of Terms for definition of CPA.

1.21 Annex 1 and Annex 1a (London only) will detail any specific information relating to your Contract Package Area for example:
- Aims and Objectives of the Provision
- Activities to support the Provision
- LEP Priority groups
- Contract Package Area
- Variances to the Eligibility Criteria
This list is not exhaustive.

Length of time on the ESF 2014-2020 Provision

1.22 The maximum duration of this ESF Provision for a Participant is a continuous period of 52 weeks from the Participant’s start. See Chapter 4 for the definition of a start. The length of time on Provision for London Troubled Families differs from this, see Annex 1a for details.

1.23 Once a Participant starts DWP ESF 2014-2020 Provision, they are expected to remain on that Provision until they become a completer or early completer (regardless of changes to their employment status and engagement). Participants will be allowed to change DWP ESF 2014-2020 Provision voluntarily during the life of the Provision where it is appropriate.

1.24 Unless a Participant completes early, it is your responsibility to continue to engage with each Participant for the full duration as defined in your contract. Further information about exits from your Provision can be found in Chapter 5.

Delivery Location

1.25 You are expected to deliver the Provision across your entire contract area, via a range of engagement methods that should include, but is not limited to fixed delivery premises (on a full and/or part-time basis) and outreach services to ensure that your Provision is accessible to all Participants.

1.26 The Participant Engagement Meeting must take place at your premises within the CPA. The meetings are not limited to fixed premises and can be held at places used as regular outreach locations i.e. if you were using a community centre or library once per week. However, where ad-hoc outreach facilities are used i.e. a café, you should record the postcode of the usual premises where the Provider Adviser holds these meetings on the ESF1420 form. The location of premises for the Participant Engagement Meeting is important for Management Information (MI) reporting to the European Commission (EC).
1.27 If your CPA covers more than one CoR, as a minimum; you are required to have access to at least one delivery location in each CoR within the CPA. This is important as the CoR that funding will be allocated to will be identified by the delivery location at which a Participant attends to have their Participant Engagement Meeting, have their needs assessed and agrees to start Provision by completing an ESF1420 form.

1.28 Refer to Annex 1 and Annex 1a (London only) for the geographical coverage of your CPA and any specific details of more than one CoR.

1.29 See Glossary of Terms defining the three different categories of ‘region’ in Europe.

**Covid-19 - Delivery Location – Participant Engagement Meetings**

Meetings may take place by video or audio calls and not necessarily at providers premises as stated at section 1.25-1.27 above.

The providers nearest initial assessment building postcode should be used by staff working from home.

**ESF 2014-2020 Provision Timeline**

1.30 Annex 7 describes the various stages of the timeline for this Provision.