



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

**European Structural and Investment Funds
2014 - 2020**

Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

England ESF 2014-20 Youth Employment Initiative Evaluation Findings

Purpose:

To present the Growth Programme Board with the findings of the first Youth Employment Initiative Evaluation in the ESF 2014-20 Programme, in accordance with CPR Article 110.

Recommendation(s):

That the Board note the findings of the Youth Employment Initiative Evaluation 2016 and provide comments to feed in to the final report.

Summary:

1. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is part of the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme 2014-2020. YEI targets young people in eligible regions who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and aged 15 – 29. In England YEI is used to fund activities that compliment national and ESF provision.
2. The evaluation findings, along with the research aims, methods and considerations for the future, will be presented to the Board by Ecorys UK, commissioned to undertake the first evaluation of the YEI in this operational programme.
3. The research aimed to look into the strategic fit, design and implementation of the YEI in England. Another aim was to prepare for the second evaluation of the YEI.
4. The evaluation's methods included a desk review of YEI documentation and interviews with YEI stakeholders.
5. Findings showed that overall feelings towards YEI were positive. YEI objectives were largely coherent at EU, national and local levels. Topics explored included the relevance of YEI in terms of timeliness; the levels of complementarity between YEI and existing projects; the influence of localism; considerations of value for money; and issues arising from eligibility criteria.
6. Although it is too early to assess implementation thoroughly, according to the evaluation delivery structures appear to be working well so far.
7. The next steps will be to consider the issues highlighted in the research, especially in light of possible future calls for proposals.

Introduction

1. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is part of the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme 2014-2020. YEI targets young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) aged 15 – 29 years. It is delivered in eligible regions across England and is used to fund activities that compliment other national and ESF provision without replicating support. For this reason YEI projects often deliver specialised provision to disadvantaged groups, such as care leavers, ex-offenders or young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
2. Ecorys UK were commissioned to undertake the first evaluation of the YEI in this operational programme. The evaluation began in July 2016 and will report findings by the end of 2016.
3. The research aimed to look into the strategic fit, design and implementation of the YEI in England. Another aim was to prepare for the second evaluation of the YEI, which requirements state should be an impact evaluation.
4. The methodology included a desk review of YEI documentation and 56 telephone interviews with stakeholders involved in YEI policy, design and delivery.
5. The findings showed that overall feelings towards YEI were positive and YEI objectives were largely coherent at EU, national and local levels.
6. The research found that local stakeholders valued YEI despite changes in the landscape of youth unemployment and delays to the programme's start. In general, activities were complimentary to existing provision and reflected EU and national guidance.
7. Localism strongly influenced programme and project design, with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) distributing funds in eligible YEI areas. In some areas only parts of the LEP area were eligible for YEI. This was reported as a challenge when it came to allocating funds to projects, and was one of the issues cited by LEP representatives in eligible areas that chose not to take up YEI. Fieldwork showed that LEP ESIF representatives had a substantial influence in the early stages of YEI projects, but were less involved after the design phase.
8. Value for money was a significant consideration, but YEI is targeted at a group which is inherently expensive to support (the hardest to help).
9. In general, YEI was felt to fit specific local needs in its design. However, strict programme and participant eligibility rules compromised this flexibility; evidence requirements were thought to be unsuited to the target group (e.g. young people in

complex circumstances without correct documentation) and the scope of support at project level was found to be restrictive.

10. Although it is still too early to assess implementation thoroughly, delivery structures seem to be working well so far. Some delivery suffered from initial delays, meaning spending was lower than planned. Confidence in their ability to spend their allocated funds varied between LEP areas. Participant engagement numbers were also low but expected to rise as the programme goes on.
11. The next steps will be to consider the issues highlighted in the research. In light of possible future calls for proposals it is important to review where funding is required and whether all eligible areas will be able to absorb additional funds. The findings also suggest it would be beneficial for the Managing Authority to explore ways of reducing the period between procurement decision and contracting time. Competing and unclear guidance presented a challenge for some, so providers could benefit from a single source of published guidance. Eligibility rules for projects and participants could be another area for reconsideration.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that the Board note the findings and provide comments to feed into final report.

Nicolette Lares, DWP
21st November 2016

Annex 1 - YEI Evaluation Findings Presentation Slides