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Investing in jobs and skills

2007-2013 Action Note

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Action to increase the female participation rate in the second half of the 2007-2013 ESF programme

Who

ESF Managing Authority; the Greater London Authority (GLA EPMU); GLA CFO; and ESF Co-financing Organisations (CFO).

What

This action note is a **further update to Action Note 070/12 UPDATE** that was issued on 22 January 2013. ESF Division has agreed to provide the European Commission with **two further progress reports** on action taken by CFOs to increase female participation during 2014. CFOs should send updated CFO Provider Priority Lists and CFO Provider Review Schedules (see annexe 1) to ESFD **on 30 April 2014 and 31 October 2014**.

CFOs should also encourage their best performing providers to apply for the 2014 ESF Gender Equality Award. The criteria for the 2014 award will be amended to reward projects that are taking the most effective action to increase female participation.

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Background

1. The European Commission has asked ESFD and its partners to take action to increase the female participation rate to achieve the Operational Programme (OP) targets during the second half of the programme. This will mean aiming to achieve an overall female participation rate of 51% across the OP in contracts starting in 2011-2013 (compared to 38% achieved in the first half of the programme). It will not be possible to

achieve the female participation for the whole of the 2007-2013 programme. The programme will, therefore, aim to achieve the targets for the 2011-2013 period only.

2. Action Note 70, issued on 24 February 2012, required CFOs to review the performance of individual providers in terms of the extent to which female participants were accessing their provision. CFOs were asked to: (a) identify providers who had a female participation rate of less than 51% using the CFO Provider List pro-forma in Action Note 70; (b) compile a CFO Provider Review Schedule providing details of when the providers would be reviewed and the action that had been agreed with providers to try to improve female participation during the remainder of their contracts; and (c) send completed returns to ESFD who would report on progress made to the European Commission and national ESF Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities Sub Committee. This exercise was repeated in 2013.

3. Although good progress was made in establishing the CFO provider lists and review schedules during 2012 – 2013, further completed CFO provider review schedules will be required explaining what action has been agreed with providers during 2014 (where further action is appropriate).

Action

4. CFOs should send an updated Priority List of Providers and an updated CFO Provider Review Schedule (see Annex 1 for both) to ESFD **on 30 April 2014.**

5. The priority List of Providers and CFO Provider Review Schedule will need to be **reviewed and updated during the year and further updated versions will need to be sent to ESFD on 31 October 2014.**

6. NOMS CFO should only include providers who are failing to achieve their 9% female participation rate target on provider lists / review schedules. (NOMS is an exceptional case, given the nature of its provision.)

7. Smaller CFOs will need to complete the provider lists and schedules for individual underperforming project providers even where the CFO's overall provision exceeds the 51% female participation rate.

8. A good practice checklist to help inform discussions and reviews with CFOs is provided in Annex 2.

9. **CFOs should also encourage their best performing providers to apply for the 2014 ESF Gender Equality Award.** The criteria for the 2014 award will be amended to reward projects that are taking the most effective action to increase female participation. Details of the ESF Gender Leader Award will become available in May 2014 when the annual ESF Leader Awards are launched.

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Annex 1 CFO Provider Priority List (Female Participation)

CFO:

CFO Provider name	Is the provider achieving a female participation rate of 51% (yes / no)	If the provider is not achieving a female participation rate of 51% when does their current contract end?	Should this provider be included in the review schedule (see table below)? Yes/No (Consider scope for future action.)	If this provider should not be included in the visits schedule – explain reason.

CFO Provider Review Schedule (Female Participation)

CFO.....

CFO Provider name (selected from priority list)	When will this provider be reviewed? (either indicate date OR Indicate which quarter of calendar year 2012 / 2013)	Date of actual review	Action taken / future action future action agreed

Annex 2: Good practice checklist for promoting female participation in ESF provision

This basic and generic checklist aims to help generate ideas for action and inform discussions between CFOs and providers when considering ways to promote female participation in ESF.

The questions and issues in section 1 relate primarily to recruitment of women – an obvious way of increasing female participation. Sections 2 and 3 relate to issues which may encourage those women who are recruited to remain in training or on the provision rather than leave the ESF support prematurely.

The checklist below is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. CFO staff will obviously wish to add their own ideas and tailor the generic checklist below so that it is appropriate for discussions with their providers.

1. Consider how the provider engages and recruits women:

- Does the provider promote its project via 'word of mouth'? How do they do this?
- Does the provider use outreach? For example does outreach extend to: school gates? shopping malls? children's centres? GP surgeries? local community centres?
- Has the provider asked female participants what they think about the recruitment process and promotional material? What positive feedback did they receive? What negative feedback did they receive? What action needs to be taken?
- Is support for childcare clearly advertised and promoted in the provider's promotional material?
- Does the provider recruit via informal activity such as coffee mornings or informal taster sessions?
- How does the provider / project work with referral agencies and other organisations? Are the referral agencies aware of the need for ESF to help women as well as men? What more could the provider do to raise this awareness?
- Does the project advertise on flyers and newspaper adverts using positive images of women?
- Has the project considered using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and web blogs?

2. Consider the structure and content of provision:

- Is provision accessible to women? How do you know? Have female participants been consulted? What did they say?
- Has the provider reviewed the content of their provision? Is it gender sensitive, flexible, creative and tailored? Have they consulted female participants on how they feel about content / structure of provision? What issues have arisen and how have they been dealt with?
- Is the duration of the course / support appropriate? Where is the flexibility?
- Could on-line learning or training be an option?
- Is there an initial assessment? How does this address women's needs/ aims / objectives?
- How would the participant know that childcare is provided (other than specifically requesting it when joining)?
- How does the provision build confidence – especially for women in jobs/ work placements / sectors which are non-traditional / male dominated?
- What help is available for women wishing to start their own business?
- What about work experience or volunteering opportunities?
- What are the reasons for women leaving the project early?

3. Support:

- Should be personalised
- Should be planned and offered in ways that lead to independence
- Would women-only groups be appropriate?
- Does the provider use mentors and buddies?
- Does the provider build group support?
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG) is essential at each stage of the learning journey
- Progression routes and advice need to be tailored and realistic

Annex 3: Equality targets and target groups – A position statement

Equality indicators and targets were negotiated and agreed for the programme. Equality indicators and targets help to assess the extent to which people with different ‘protected characteristics’ (e.g. gender, race, age, and disability) are accessing the programme. Equality indicators and targets support the public duty to promote equality by monitoring the extent to which disadvantaged people with ‘protected characteristics’ have access to ESF support. The monitoring of equality indicators **helps ESFD and CFOs fulfil their legal obligations** to promote equality.

The programme has target groups (e.g. unemployed, inactive, low skilled employees etc). The justification for supporting people who fall into the target groups was made in the programme’s ex-ante evaluation – which considers the status of various groups in the labour market. The concept of target groups **helps the programme focus support on those who need it most.**

Equality indicators/targets and target groups therefore serve different purposes:

- equality indicators/targets help us fulfil our legal obligations; and
- target groups provide a focus for support to help ensure that ESF supports those with greatest need.

There is, of course, some overlap since some people who fall into the programme target groups will also have protected characteristics which relate to the equality targets.

Although women are not intrinsically a *specific* target group in the ESF programme (except for part time women employees in Priority 2), providers must ensure that women from across the unemployed / inactive / disadvantaged target groups have access to the ESF programme. For example, providers targeting disabled people or employees without level 2 for example need to consider whether female disabled people or female employees without level 2 are accessing ESF support.

It is therefore important to make sure that when providers target disadvantaged people they do so with a corresponding ‘gender focus’. This can include actively encouraging more women to take part in ESF, as well as making sure that the support offered is appropriate and helps meet the needs of disadvantaged women - for example by ensuring flexible support, providing confidence building and offering care support where needed.

Providers MUST NOT:

- **use female ‘quotas’;**

- reject individual eligible men in the target groups; or
- put men at some other disadvantage in order to help achieve a female equality target.

Providers are therefore not being asked to reject men – but to redouble efforts to attract more female participants.