

SFC / ESF Developing Scotland's Workforce

Issue date: 09 June 2016

Reference: SFC/GD/08/2016

Summary: Guidance notes for colleges participating in the European Social Fund (ESF) Developing Scotland's Workforce programme 2015-18

FAO: Principals and Directors of Colleges operating under the 'Developing Scotland's Workforce' ESF programme

Further information:

Contact: Rebecca Fairgrieve-Stewart

Job title: Senior Policy/Analysis Officer, European Social Fund

Directorate: Finance

Tel: 0131 313 6687

Email: rfairgrievestewart@sfc.ac.uk



Scottish Funding Council
Apex 2
97 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD
T 0131 313 6500
F 0131 313 6501
www.sfc.ac.uk

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SFC / ESF Developing Scotland's Workforce

Introduction

1. Developing Scotland's Workforce (DSW) aims to address regional skill gaps and shortages associated with key employment sectors, providing higher level skills to support the development of key growth areas. Funding has been provided to allow the provision of additional FE/HE activity across both Lowlands & Uplands Scotland (LUPS) and the Highlands & Islands (H&I). The DSW project, under the new 2014-2020 programme, is fundamentally different to previous European Social Fund (ESF) programmes.
2. This document provides guidance to colleges¹ on the purpose of the DSW programme and the funding allocated to colleges under it, eligibility criteria, conditions of grant, monitoring/reporting processes and fund management for this project in AY 2015-18.
3. ESF activity funding under DSW has been allocated to colleges in LUPS and H&I based on our demographic model and the need/demand for additional places. The aim of the additional places is to
 - Provide higher level skills, upskilling and job progression.
 - Support emerging employment potential in the national Smart Specialisation sectors and other key national/regional growth sectors.
 - Provide higher level 'Nationally Recognised Qualifications'².

Summary of main programme criteria and monitoring requirements

4. The characteristics of ESF-fundable students under DSW are as follows:
 - The programme has no restriction on age and the clear focus of the programme is progression and upskilling to help support emerging industries and key growth sectors by promoting relevant vocational skills and higher level qualifications - DSW is not focussed on unemployment.
 - Participants must reside in the Lowlands & Uplands Scotland (LUPS) or Highlands & Islands (H&I) geographical area.
 - Students must be enrolled on a programme of study leading to a nationally recognised qualification (full-time or part-time), e.g. Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) accredited.
 - Colleges must provide accredited qualifications at SCQF level 5 or above.

¹ Where colleges are referred to in this document, this includes those under the umbrella of the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) and SRUC

² A 'Nationally Recognised Qualification' is considered to be one that has a Group Award attached.

5. Key points to note:
 - If a participant completes the full course, then the standard course tariff will apply (e.g. they do not have to achieve a qualification).
 - Participants must complete at least one credit.
 - Physical attendance is not monitored by SFC for the purpose of teaching funding. However, we expect colleges to manage attendance/participation on courses effectively to ensure that students who are not engaged in learning are withdrawn.
 - Qualifications achieved must be monitored.
6. Teaching activity is funded by SFC on the basis of the Credit funding model, please refer to Annex A for more information.
7. There are important monitoring requirements under DSW. Although funding is not directly linked to these results, Colleges must be able to report to SFC on the following specific result indicators:
 - (i) Participants in employment, including self-employment, 6 months after leaving.
 - (ii) Participants with SCQF level 5, 6 or 7 qualification upon leaving (within 4 weeks of leaving).
 - (iii) Participants with SCQF level 8 or above qualification upon leaving (within 4 weeks of leaving).

Eligibility guidance

Definition of students and courses eligible for teaching funding

8. Project participants must be ESF eligible and residing within the H&I and LUPS area. Additional places being provided through DSW credits should be in areas highlighted in regional skills plans in order to ensure that participants are gaining higher level skills in national and regional growth areas. Where possible, colleges should focus on emerging potential in the National Smart Specialisation sectors, such as Food & Drink, Life Sciences, Renewable Energy, Low Carbon, Finance & Business and Creative Industries. Colleges should also aim to continue to address under-representation in certain subject areas, for example, women in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM).
9. College regions must follow SFC's student activity data guidance for colleges (Credit guidance). This guidance sets out the details of students and courses eligible for funding as well as credits that can be claimed in respect of full and part time provision. In addition to SFC's Credit guidance, in case of withdrawal, additional rules apply (see 8. ii.)
 - i. For students who complete their course, ESF credits should be based

on the *planned* number of credits to be delivered rather than the actual number. These students should be identified in the FES 2 return as having completed their course, i.e. the outcome selected from the 'student record outcome' list must specifically state 'completed'.

- ii. Where the student does not complete their course (i.e. is withdrawn from the course before completing) the college can only claim the units completed before the point of withdrawal. A student who withdraws after one semester of a 16 credit course and completes 7 credits (not just those achieved) can be counted for the 7 credits only.
 - iii. ESF credits can only be claimed once the core SFC credit target has been achieved. A college delivering 101,000 credits with a 100,000 core credit target would only be able to count 1,000 credits towards their ESF project.
10. You can find [current student activity data guidance](#) on the SFC website.
 11. Colleges must adhere to SFC's fee waiver guidance when waiving the fees of students. This includes [FT Further Education \(FE\) and PTFE and Higher Education \(HE\) provision](#).
 12. Colleges must also adhere to [SFC's residency rules](#) outlined in SFC policies, available on our website.
 13. SFC rules on residency align with [Scottish Government residency criteria](#).
 14. In addition to rules on residency, the criteria set out in Annex B, relating to refugees and asylum seekers also applies to the Developing Scotland's Workforce programme.
 15. For each ESF participant, colleges will be required to provide a record of the qualification enrolled for and the credits claimed, broken down to unit level, which we will then retain on the FES system.
 16. There will be reconciliation points during the lifetime of the project to ensure that colleges are on track to achieve their core credit target plus their additional ESF credit target as set out in their offer of ESF grant letter. This is explained in more detail in the section on Quarterly Reporting.
 17. Colleges must collect and record each participant's National Insurance (NI) number as a unique identifier. For each ESF participant identified in the FES return, colleges must upload a list with participants' National Insurance numbers to the secure server. If a student is unable to obtain the NI number then the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) should be used. However, this should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Participants should make

every effort to obtain their NI number, as it would be required if they were asked to take up employment.

18. Colleges will be able to use the SFC in-year redistribution process to request additional student support funds for their core SFC activity.

Definition of students and courses eligible for student support funding

19. To be eligible for support from the ESF an individual must be:
 - Legally resident in the UK.
 - Able to take paid employment in a European Union member state.
20. Colleges must follow [SFC's student support guidance](#), available on SFC's website.
21. Colleges can use student support funds allocated through this project for students enrolled on activity that is eligible for funding through this project and where they meet the student support eligibility criteria set-out in the guidance (e.g. attendance criteria).
22. SFC expects colleges to reduce student support payments to students who are not actively engaged in learning.

23. If colleges are delivering provision to students who are under 18 years of age and will be supported through the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), we will assume that they are pulling down this support from the EMA fund. Colleges should not include a claim for these students against this project, in respect of the EMA allowances.
24. Colleges must also ensure that they comply with the conditions of grant outlined in their Regional Outcome Agreement and the audit guidance. Student support audit guidance will be published at the end of the Academic Year (AY) as per our normal processes.
25. All relevant [guidance](#) will be published on the SFC website.
26. The [ESF DSW project guidance for AY 2015-18](#) is also available on the SFC website.

Standard conditions of grant for DSW

27. It is a condition of grant that:
 - (a) All funds must only be used for the purpose(s) for which they are provided. (SFC retains the right to audit the relevant institutional documentation in order to satisfy itself that this is the case and the College undertakes that it will provide such assistance as SFC reasonably requires to enable it to do so).
 - (b) The College will give SFC prompt written notice of any anticipated under-delivery of credits under the project.
 - (c) SFC may recover any amounts of grant unspent, or which in its view have not been spent in accordance with the conditions of this grant.
 - (d) Use of this funding must meet the eligibility criteria for the Developing Scotland's Workforce (DSW) project.
 - (e) The College must achieve its core SFC Credit target and the conditions of grant attached to your final outcome agreement funding for the current year.
 - (f) The College must deliver the additional ESF Credit target set out in this letter in order to receive the full allocation of ESF funding. Under-recruitment may result in the clawback of funding.

- (g) Should there be a reduction in ESF monies available under the programme, SFC may have to reduce the amount of funding provided to colleges.
- (h) Activity delivered under this project should reflect the College's Regional Skills template, which ensures fit with local needs and priorities, submitted to SFC.
- (i) The College will provide progress and monitoring reports to SFC as required under Developing Scotland's Workforce.
- (j) Student participants under the DSW project must be accurately flagged and recorded by the College in Further Education Statistics (FES) quarterly returns.
- (k) All documentation relating to the ESF DSW student participant must be retained until at least 2032 for European audit requirements, including enrolment form, participant form, notification of ESF funding, record of continued participation on course/withdrawal, evidence of nationality, evidence of permanent residence and records of destination/follow up 4 weeks and 6 months after leaving. Where applicable, student support applications, letters of award, BACS payments, Personal Learning Support Plans and appropriate referral documentation should also be retained.

Additional project requirements

28. Colleges must:

- Nominate a project manager, to act as the main project contact with us and to accept responsibility for monitoring, use of the grant and co-ordinating any additional reporting requested.
- Seek our agreement in advance for any alterations to the activity outlined in the initial completed regional skills pro-forma.
- Inform SFC in advance of any publicity arrangements they are making for Developing Scotland's Workforce project. Colleges must also provide examples of publicity used in the delivery of this project when requested by SFC. Please also note the [specific guidelines on ESF publicity](#).
- Ensure that college staff help all participants complete the ESF participant form provided in Annex C within four weeks of enrolment. The form provides evidence for audit that the participant was notified that their course is part-funded by the European Union (EU). Only participants with fully completed ESF participant forms are eligible for the project.
- Upload student enrolment forms and ESF participant forms for all ESF students using [SFC's secure server](#).
- Colleges must collect and record each participant's National Insurance number as a unique identifier – only in exceptional circumstances will an SCN number be accepted as an alternative. For each ESF participant identified in

the FES return, colleges must upload a list with participant NI number (or SCN number where appropriate) to the secure server.

- Accept that we and/or the European Court of Auditors (ECA), Scottish Government may audit relevant project documentation to confirm that the grant has been used appropriately and in line with the conditions of grant and.
- Certify true copies of original paper documents (photocopies) – photocopied documents must contain a ‘certification statement’. The declaration must be annotated on, or appended to, the copy.
- If a document contains multiple pages then the first page should be certified and the number of attached pages indicated on the front page (alternatively, each page could be certified). The certification statement must be signed and dated by an employee who can vouch that the copy is a true replica image of the original.

Specific conditions of grant - course and qualifications aim

29. It is a requirement of these funds that students are enrolled on a course that leads to a full, nationally recognised, accredited qualification.
30. Colleges are expected to reconcile their ESF teaching funds to the students being supported in this DSW project. The funds cannot be used for students outwith this project.
31. Colleges must be able to demonstrate that all ESF SFC project funds have been spent on qualifying students. If less is spent on student support, more credits should be delivered in line with the funds allocated.
32. Colleges cannot use these funds as part of another ESF bid and the beneficiaries must not be used as part of any other ESF or other funded project e.g. Princes Trust. This includes Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) & Skills Development Scotland (SDS) ESF projects.

Data returns/claims

33. Colleges will be subject to some financial testing in relation to student support costs, and will be required to provide evidence of their beneficiaries, such as attendance records and outcomes achieved. The information requirements and the ESF claim categories that we will be asked to report on are shown in Annexes C and D. ESF reporting is built into quarterly FES reporting and it is mandatory that colleges complete additional reporting for ESF students through FES, e.g. status immediately prior to enrolment and highest qualification level at time of enrolment.

Gathering Student Information and Retaining Documentation

34. As the project’s leading applicant, SFC is responsible for collating and submitting college claims based on robust supporting information. This can only

be achieved by sharing that responsibility with colleges, relying on colleges to identify (or 'tag') those students participating in this project within their particular college. This process will require rigour and is critical to the overall success of administering the project.

35. SFC as lead applicant will also be responsible for the retention of all relevant documentation for this ESF project. Documentation will include all relevant financial and participant records pertinent to the project, including the SFC administration costs, college returns and student records to support the Credit payments. SFC will therefore expect all colleges to retain the relevant documentation as prescribed in the [National Rules for the ESF 2014-2020 programme](#). The [National Rules](#) can be accessed from the Scottish Government website.
36. Colleges should retain all student records that show:
 - Evidence of enrolment and notification of ESF funding.
 - Evidence of continued participation / withdrawal.
 - Evidence of student support/childcare (including payments to participants).
 - BACs payment relating to the above.
 - Evidence of any extended learning support provided to the student (e.g. the individual student's personal learning support plan).
 - Records of destination/follow up of participation destination 4 weeks after leaving **and** 6 months after leaving (regardless of leaving date).
37. Colleges should also collect and retain the following:
 - Evidence of participant's nationality - photocopies of passports/birth certificates, residency permit or letter from UK immigration granting indefinite leave to remain (certified).
 - Evidence of the participant's permanent residence, e.g. mobile phone / utility bill, SQA certificate / print from 'SQA Navigator', driving licence (certified)
38. While a certain amount of information can be drawn from FES returns, the level of information required for audit purposes means that each college will be expected to retain that information to support claims submitted to SFC. Following advice from Scottish Government, SFC requires that colleges upload each ESF participant's completed enrolment form and ESF participant notification form onto Secure Send. These documents will be archived electronically by SFC for review by Scottish Government verification officers and by auditors at SFC's offices. Institutions are also required to retain copies of these documents as many audits will be conducted onsite at colleges.
39. Under EU Regulations, project documentation must be retained for three years after the final payment has been made by the European Commission to the Paying Authority. In practice, this can mean that documents must be retained

for up to 12 years. SFC requires that colleges retain this information until at least 2032.

Electronic documents

40. EU Regulations require that the audit trail must be supported by original source documents. These can be retained in either paper form or in electronic format. Please note: if you are keeping copies of original documents electronically, they must meet with Commission Regulation (EC) 2355/2002.
41. Documents must be:
 - Held on a recognised data carrier.
 - Certified as copies of the original.
 - Able to be audited.
42. Commonly-accepted data carriers include:
 - Photocopies of original documents.
 - Microfiches of original documents.
 - Electronic versions of original documents on optical data carriers (such as CD-ROM, hard disk or magnetic disk).
43. You should use the following declaration to certify that the copies you hold on the commonly-accepted data carrier are true copies of the original document.

'I certify that this is a true copy of the original document/s'

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Position in organisation:.....

Reporting process

44. SFC provides grants to colleges to deliver a specified volume of activity (measured in credits) during an AY, and issues guidance each year on eligibility of programmes and students for credit funding.
45. To verify that colleges have met their credit target, SFC collects annual statistical data from colleges. There are two main collections:
 - The Further Education Statistical (FES) return - this collects data on all further education and higher education provided by colleges in Scotland.
 - The student activity return (or credit return) - this collects data on college FE/HE activity that is eligible for SFC funding.

46. The credit return is a sub-set of the FES return. The accuracy of the credit claimed is certified by the college Principal, and the claim is audited by the college's external auditors.
47. The data is collected at individual student level and includes personal information about the student, details of the course, duration of study and outcome. SFC annually publishes detailed performance indicators using data from the FES system.
48. SFC will monitor each college's progress in meeting its additional credit target by analysing quarterly FES returns. Claims for delivery of training and student support costs incurred by colleges will be made once per annum to Scottish Government using the IT system €UMIS.
49. SFC will conduct annual verification checks onsite at colleges to review activities reported and outputs claimed by each college. In order to ensure these verifications are completed successfully, colleges will be required to provide all relevant supporting documentation on request.
50. Verification checks on €UMIS claims will be **in addition** to checks that will be carried out by the SFC, to ensure that a robust audit regime is in place that will stand up to scrutiny by EC or ECA audits.
51. It is a condition of grant that colleges use FES to report on their progress with these funds and additional ESF reporting requirements including the status of ESF participants immediately prior to enrolment and their highest qualification level at the time of enrolment.
52. [FES guidance notes](#) can be found on the SFC website.
53. These documents detail the monitoring information that SFC will collect, including details on disability, ethnicity, gender, age, subject area, qualification of study, bursaries, childcare funds, discretionary funds and postcode which allows us to also report in terms of geographies (local authority areas etc.) and deprivation. College staff will be asked to identify SFC ESF students using the 'ESF funded student' field within the FES 2 data return and/or the appropriate field in FES.

FES quarterly returns

54. Colleges are expected to submit their first return in November 2015. This should include all fields within the FES returns, with the exception of student and unit outcomes. As this is not a final return, some areas will be subject to change. For example, the dominant programme group is likely to change for many courses as these are dependent on the subjects studied by students over the entire AY.

55. FES returns at the end of the AY are only accepted once the data has gone through an extensive cleansing process.
56. As outlined in the FES guidance, fields collecting data required for ESF reporting will become mandatory for ESF students, including status immediately prior to enrolment and highest qualification level at the time of enrolment.
57. The dates for submission of FES quarterly returns for ESF activity delivered in AY 2015-16 are as follows:
 - 13 November 2015.
 - 5 February 2016.
 - 8 July 2016.
 - 14 October 2016.

Payment Profile

58. 75% of funding for Developing Scotland's Workforce will be paid in equal instalments following the issue of the formal Offer of Grant. The remaining 25% of funding will be paid in October once the final FES return has been reviewed and reconciled.

Clawback

59. SFC reserves the right to clawback these funds if they have not been used for the purposes outlined in the individual offers of grant. Final payments will not be released if the college has not achieved the outcomes agreed in their offer of grant. SFC reserves the right to clawback funding dependent on the outcome of audit findings. As is the case with current clawbacks for teaching and student support funds, should we need to clawback funds these will be taken from future teaching and/or student support payments.

Further information

1. Please contact Rebecca Fairgrieve-Stewart, Senior Policy / Analysis Officer, ESF Funding Policy for further information, tel: 0131 313 6687, email: rfairgrievestewart@sfc.ac.uk.



Martin Smith
Chief Funding and Information Officer