

Policy Bulletin #1 **Active Inclusion**

Foreword

This Policy Bulletin is one of a series focusing on issues close to the heart of delivering projects under the European Social Fund (ESF). At current estimates for the 2007-2013 ESF Programming Period, London will benefit from £371 million ESF to be matched £ for £ from domestic public sources. This series of Briefings will seek to identify and understand some of the essentially "European" characteristics of ESF in becoming part of the general landscape of public provision.

In this Bulletin, we shall consider the policy of **Active Inclusion**.

The Issue at European Union Level

With regard to developing the EU strategy for Active Inclusion, initial work was undertaken by the European Commission on establishing a base-line definition of 3 'pillars' or elements:

"A comprehensive **policy mix** combining three elements

- a **link to the labour market** through job opportunities or vocational training;
- **income support** at a level that is sufficient for people to have a dignified life;
- **better access to services** that may help remove some of the hurdles encountered by some individuals and their families in entering mainstream society, thereby supporting their re-insertion into employment (through, for instance, counselling, healthcare, child-care, lifelong learning to remedy educational disadvantages, ICT training to help would-be workers, including people with disabilities, take advantage of new technologies and more flexible work arrangements, psychological and social rehabilitation)".

(EC Consultation on Promotion of the Active Inclusion of People Furthest from the Labour Market)

The Issue at UK Level

The social justice thrust of ESF is recognised in the introductory section of the European Social Fund Division¹ national website: "By focusing on those most in need of help, it contributes to policies to reduce inequality and build a fairer society."

In response to the EC Consultation, the UK Government recognised the importance of the EU's commitment to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010 and of the need to review strategies constantly to get closer to achieving that goal. The response goes on to argue that multiple-disadvantage requires multiple and integrated solutions, including inclusive labour markets and enabling social support.

The UK Government believes that work on Active Inclusion should focus on increasing employment opportunities for priority groups. In particular the area where more effort is needed by all Member States is on investment in human capital.

The UK response to the Commission's Communication identified the following priorities:

- focusing resources on the people and localities that are in the worst position compared to overall employment levels;

¹ The ESFD is based within the Department for Work & Pensions

- underpinning the welfare reform agenda with a framework of rights and responsibilities, extended appropriately to those who are economically inactive and receiving previously passive benefits;
- combining employment and skills support and services, focusing not just on job-entry but also on retention and progression;
- using a personalised and responsive approach;
- working in partnership to make best use of expertise across public, private and third sectors and empowering regions, cities and localities.

In 2008, the UK Government produced the *UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2008-2011*, which was submitted to the European Commission. These Plans are required to quote examples of ESF projects to illustrate how EU-linked funds help to deliver on the inclusion agenda. Significantly, this period covers the year 2010, The European Year Against Poverty², which partly focuses attention on the delivery of Active Inclusion:

"The 2008 international economic and financial crisis may have long-term consequences for growth and employment in the EU, and it is the most vulnerable people in our societies who are likely to suffer most. The European Year against Poverty should therefore have a crucial impact in raising awareness of social exclusion and promoting active inclusion, as no country can escape the consequences of this global crisis".

(European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010 ~ European Commission Strategic Framework Document).

Meanwhile, under the ESF England Innovation & Trans-nationality Programme, attention has been given to Active Inclusion as 1 of 6 Priorities for the Innovation & Trans-nationality Programme. Under this Priority, 5 regional bids have been successful.

In the guidance notes, the ESF Division has indicated the type of activity that is officially envisaged as coming within the remit of Active Inclusion:

- Inclusive labour market interventions
- Joining-up labour market interventions with other services to address barriers to work
- Adding value to the City Strategy and Working Neighbourhood Fund
- Worklessness and Health

In London, the successful project is "*New Pathways to Work in West London*" comprising a 15-member partnership led by West London Working, which is the City Strategy Pathfinder for West London committed to delivering a sustainable increase in the number of local residents in employment and a reduction in child poverty. This Project will be getting underway in the next few weeks. There will be opportunities for third sector street-level organisations to engage as part of the European Year.

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² Please see Policy Briefing No. 2