

ESF to Reach Out



Tower Hamlets Volunteer Training Project see page 3

Ray Phillips

Plans are well underway to ensure that the European Social Fund Programme 2007-2013 reaches down directly to small groups working with those furthest from the labour market as well as reaches out to vocational initiatives on the European mainland. In the former case, contracts are being finalised in London; whilst, in the latter, a national working group is assembling the building blocks of an innovation/ transnational ESF element under the new Programme.

In London, the London Development Agency as a Co-Financing Organisation is responsible for taking contract negotiations into their final stages to develop the successor to the successful and widely-acclaimed Fast Forward Programme. The objective is to support small groups, engaged with the employment agenda, with 100% grants of up to £12,000 per annum. The launch is expected in the spring.

Commissioning from the Third Sector in Europe

Lessons from Europe
13 March 2008 at Local Government House
Smith Square London SW1P 3HZ

The conference aims to look at issues of commissioning with the Third sector and the impact of European Commissions desire to create a free market for social services.

There will also be representatives from Austria, Belgium, Denmark France and Italy participating in round table discussions on the relationship of the Third Sector and public authorities.

If you are interested in learning about third sector commissioning and sharing good practice contact TSEN for further information www.tsen.org.uk or email info@tsen.org.uk.

In this part of the new ESF Programme, strong emphasis is being given to progression at 2 levels: at the ultimate beneficiary level, to ensure that individuals are placed on vocational pathways that will link them to learning provision or to jobs; at the organisational level, to encourage grant-recipient organisations to link up strategically with other agencies. There will be dedicated support to help projects identify and develop progression routes for participants.

Meanwhile, at the national level, a sub-committee of the national ESF Programme Monitoring Committee is laying the foundations for the sequel to the popular EQUAL Community Initiative, which promoted transnational projects in the 2000-2006 programming period. As a stakeholder, the voluntary/community sector is fully involved in the negotiations that have, so far, identified 5 themes for innovation and transnationality:

- Meeting new challenges, such as skills for climate change and sustainable development;
- Active inclusion, for example strengthening partnerships and networks such as third sector involvement focussing on collaboration not competition;
- Engaging with employers, for example responding to the challenges of Leitch;
- ICT and the digital divide, by improving access and maximising all ICT media in learning;
- Entrepreneurship and social enterprise.

The European Commission is looking for approximately 2% of the ESF Programme to be committed to such activities. In England, this will amount to about £6 million pounds a year, with 2-3 substantial projects in each region for the first half of the new Programme. The expectation is that the Co-Financing Organisations will not be involved in the opening round of bidding on these themes. Instead, current planning is being focussed on a direct-bidding round later in the year. ■

Fresh Support for Small Groups

Since the New Year, LVSTC has been able to step up support for the many small community providers working with people excluded from the labour market, including the economically inactive. This reinvigoration was made possible by funding from the City Bridge Trust for the Small Groups Economic Integration Project.

Commentary

Ray Phillips

Towards Inclusion

The recent Strategy Consultation by the London Skills & Employment Board on behalf of the Mayor gave Londoners an opportunity to reflect on the state of the London economy. The LVSTC submission was entitled "Towards an Inclusive Labour Market", in which we tried to develop our 'tale of two cities' thesis first coined in 1999.

We were keen to point out that a fair skills and employment strategy for London is fundamentally about tackling poverty as much as creating wealth. In this regard, the European Structural Funds have consistently worked to promote social inclusion, even as a crucial element of the Lisbon Agenda, which argues for the European Union as a leading world economy.

Such claims for the EU pall in the shadow of 78 million people living in poverty. In the particular context of London, we have the dramatic contrast of the bonus-rich with those people living within a stone's throw of Canary Wharf! In dealing point by point with the many Priorities and Actions recommended by the Consultation, our submission argued for a dynamic relationship between welfare, skills and employment policies. We highlighted the importance of strategies focussed on engaging the disconnected through enlightened programmes for, say, parent employment that capitalise on the key role of families and for employer links that recognise the empowering experience of volunteering.

As the new 2007-2013 European Structural Funds get underway, the European Commission has been concerned to re-launch its own Consultation on 'Active Inclusion'. In so doing, providers under the Funds are challenged to tackle inequality and poverty. The same concern is driving discussion, already prompted by the 4th Cohesion Report, on the future of the Structural Funds, after 2013.

Nobody is saying the job's done ~ but, at least, we can try seriously to step in the right direction! ■

Building on the earlier success of the pan-London Skills for Economic Inclusion Network, the new Team will concentrate on targeted support for about 500 small groups over 3 years, whilst disseminating up-to-date information to the wider SKEIN network. In particular, the Project will target provider groups that have just failed to attract funds under the special ESF small-grant programmes and will, therefore, seek to work closely with the successor to Fast Forward.

Further details will follow in the next issue. Meanwhile, information is available, at LVSTC, from Geoff Robinson geoffr@lvstc.org.uk or Ian Foster ianf@lvstc.org.uk ■

Around the new CFOs

London Development Agency (CFO)

The LDA-CFO has recently had the first bidding round for the new ESF Programme. The round covered 2 measures: 1.1 Improving Employability and 2.1 Basic Skills – Skills for Life Provision in the Workplace. The total funding available through this Prospectus is £21.26 million.

They received 320 applications and expect all scoring to be finished by the end of February, with moderation panels meeting, in March, to confirm project approvals. Successful projects will be notified in the week commencing 17 March for the main programme and 25 February for the Personal Best programme. This should enable projects to start on 1 April 2008.

A second bidding round is expected this Autumn. ■

Department for Work & Pensions

The current programme for ESF is beginning to wind down with some projects extending to May, including the Pre-Employment Security Programme.

In the new ESF Programme, 16 'prime' contractors have been invited to tender for 15 projects in the London region. Hopefully, delivery will begin by 23 June 2008. This Measure 1.1 programme clearly focuses on job outcomes and a feature of delivery will be the involvement of all sectors through partnership and consortium arrangements.

The LVSTC Partnership Portal has offered both prime contractors and voluntary/community providers a useful mechanism to assess potential for cross-sector delivery. Both the impact and formation of delivery partnerships will be reviewed and monitored.

London Councils

A total of £7.220m was available under Measure 1.1 'Improving the employability and skills of the unemployed and economically inactive' for 11

specifications. London Councils is in the process of scoring 138 applications and it is anticipated that the list of successful projects will be published at the beginning of March, allowing delivery to start from 1st April.

London Councils will launch a second bidding round in autumn 2009 to commit the remaining 50% of their 2007–2010 funding allocation. ■

Learning & Skills Council

The first stage of the Learning & Skills Council e-Tendering Process, the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) closed on the 28 September 2007. Those that were successful with their PQQ were invited to Tender (ITT) for mainstream 2008/09 funding as well as the initial funding opportunity made available through the ESF 2007-13 programme.

The ITTs were launched on 12 November 2007. The process was administered by Bravo Solutions. Contracts are expected to be available for clarification in April 2008. The response rate for this round was 274 organisations responding to ITT and 328 tenders received across 5 measures [1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3]. In comparison to previous programmes and taking into account the large size of the LSC allocation (£24m per annum), this has been viewed as a disappointing response.

The next round of ESF will involve Level 3 activity, particularly aimed at childminders as well as other areas yet to be decided. Therefore, this round may well be of particular interest to 'Train to Gain' providers. Up to £38 million of ESF will be available in the next round plus any unallocated funds from the previous round.

The PQQ for the next round started Friday 8 February 2008 and will close on Monday 3 March 2008. Providers registered with Bravo Solutions should be alerted by email and those approved under the previous round will not be expected to complete

another PQQ. The ITT stage of the next round will then commence on 28 March 2008. This forthcoming ESF round is part of a wider procurement round - also including OLASS (Offenders' Learning and Skills Service) /ex-offender learning.

Moderation

External moderation in the previous Programme offered a useful check on the strategic value of applications. This enabled CFOs and partners, including LVSTC representing voluntary/community providers, an essential mechanism to ensure that that there was a spread of activity and that strategic objectives were being reached.

Moderation also offered the programme a mechanism to ensure that duplication of resources and provision could be avoided. LSC, London Councils and the LDA-CFO will be holding their moderation panels in March. However, the DWP has decided not to include moderation as part of their assessment process. ■

Mayor consults stakeholders on skills strategy

Stewart Goldring

Prior to publishing the London Skills and Employment Board Skills Strategy, Mayor Ken Livingstone and Harvey McGrath (Deputy Chair LSEB) consulted with key stakeholders, including LVSTC and other sector representatives, to receive feedback on the document.

The Mayor and Board have been given unprecedented powers by Government to harness and coordinate resources dedicated in London to raising skills and employment levels. The Mayor tackled issues of worklessness, globalisation and competitiveness in his address, stressing the importance of recognising that London as a region was a 'special case' for the UK that had to be recognised. Government has tasked the Mayor and his Board to deal with some of the infrastructural challenges created by many funding streams in the capital. The task is to define a coherent response to needs, targeting key issues and avoiding duplication of effort and resources.

The afternoon workshops revealed major concerns. Community providers stressed that, to tackle worklessness effectively, resources must be targeted at ESOL, child-care, and pre-vocational skills. Although there was recognition that higher Level 4 & 5 qualifications were necessary to ensure continuing competitiveness, there is a need to ensure the inclusion of those people suffering from multiple disadvantages including disability, housing, health, poor attainment and qualifications.

The event also reflected some of the key concerns that would have to be addressed by the government agencies currently responsible for redressing skills and employment shortfall. These include government departments (DIUS and DWP) and their agencies (LSC and Jobcentre Plus). Additionally, regional & local government have the responsibility to meet the priorities determined by the 198 national targets and area-based assessments, such as the new Local Performance Framework and Comprehensive Area Assessments due to be implemented next year.

LVSTC has submitted a comprehensive response to the Board's strategy, Towards an Inclusive Labour Market, available on the LVSTC web site. ■

Commentary

Stewart Goldring

Capturing the ESF Legacy

As the current programme for ESF in London draws to a close, all parties will wish to measure the effectiveness of the Programme, confirm outcomes for those benefiting, and ensure that the new programme is fully informed by lessons learned from the past.

The third sector has made an enormous contribution of skills, knowledge and experience in delivering high quality effective projects. The new 2007-2013 Programme will need to engage these highly successful organisations, ensuring that their beneficiaries are served in the new regime. Our discussions with the new Co-Financing Organisations (LSC, DWP, LDA-CFO and London Councils) reveal 3 key considerations for projects currently reaching completion.

Firstly, the lack of certainty of outcomes for clients is worrying – this reveals a lack of beneficiary tracking and more emphasis will be placed in future programmes accordingly. In short, we need to be more certain about the result of ESF interventions

for qualifications and jobs. Beneficiary tracking systems will also enable providers to verify jobs and substantiate claims.

Secondly, exit strategies and continuity of provision need to be more realistic and sharply focused, demonstrating a clear connection with future strategic planning and funding opportunities. Project evaluation will need to demonstrate a clear relationship between exit strategies, the funding landscape and infrastructure and opportunities for funding.

Thirdly, if we are to maintain the reach of this Programme and involvement with communities, working collaboratively and in cross-sector partnerships will be a key driver for providers. New alliances and relationships are already being forged as a result of the LVSTC Partnership Portal. Now, new prime contractors will need to demonstrate how providers in the current programme can migrate and transfer their knowledge to a new landscape.

LVSTC remains determined to ensure that current third sector providers are successfully accessed to the new ESF programme. ■

Opening ERDF Bidding Round

Steve White

Launched in December 2007, the initial Expression of Interest Phase of the London Programme closed on 1st February. London has been allocated £120m ERDF over the period 2007-2013. The recent fall in the value of Sterling against the euro means that the value of the Programme is currently 8% higher than at the time of adoption of the Operational Programme.

Over 2007, LVSTC held 6 meetings beginning with the Consultation Event convened on behalf of the LDA in February. More recently, we organised regular Focus Group meetings with representatives from the voluntary and community sector providers. The meetings explored the possibilities for bidding for projects in the new ERDF Programme and were a useful forum for networking for identifying possible partnerships.

Many of the attendees expressed an interest in bidding into the new Priorities. LVSTC has also been keeping the sector up to date with developments; via London Euroscene (including the February 2007 ERDF Consultation Special); via regular monthly issues of our e-bulletin Euroscene Bytesize; and, most recently, via the ERDF Partnership Portal on our website for those groups seeking possible partners.

By the closing date, provisional information supplied to the ERDF programme monitoring committee indicated that the LDA received 170 formal Expressions of Interest with an approximate net ERDF value of £144m (£345m gross). Of these, 42 were submitted by the voluntary/community sector (VCS) with an approximate net ERDF value of £19m (£43m gross)

Bidders were invited to respond to a set of Priorities and Themes:

Priority 1: Business innovation, research and development and eco-efficiency.

Theme 1.1: Developing a culture of, capacity for, creating and using innovation throughout London's businesses to create sustainable economic growth.
Theme 1.2: Leveraging value from London's world class knowledge base to benefit London's economy.

Priority 2: Access to new markets and access to finance.

Theme 2.1: Enabling access to appropriate investment finance to support innovation and growth
Theme 2.2: Increasing new and established SMEs' access to new market opportunities

	type	No	%	gross £	ERDF £	%
1.1	All	64	100	88.5m	44.4m	100
	VCS	18	28	15.8m	7.9m	18
1.2	All	18	100	36m	17.9m	100
	VCS	2	11	1.3m	0.6m	4
2.1	All	15	100	12.8m	6.4m	100
	VCS	3	20	0.9m	0.4m	7
2.2	All	56	100	52.9m	27.4m	100
	VCS	14	25	10.5m	5.3m	19
3	All	29	100	156m	48.5m	100
	VCS	5	17	14.3m	5.1m	11

Priority 3: Sustainable places for business.

Theme 3: Environmental improvements to employment premises, sites and their surrounding environments, support for de-centralised energy, water and waste systems and support for business clusters

The Expressions of Interest are currently being assessed. Unsuccessful applicants will not have a right of appeal but will be able to request feedback on their bids within two weeks of receiving their outcome notification letter. The larger-than-anticipated response will mean a few weeks delay to the timetable than originally envisaged. The next stages will be:

- **10 March** ~ notification for full applications
- **16 April, 12 noon** ~ full application deadline
- **May onwards** ~ appraisal and notification of contract negotiations

LVSTC will be offering support to those who go through to full application rounds. We shall be holding more events throughout the year to promote the new programme. We expect further rounds possibly towards the end of the year and shall be convening more Focus Groups once the first round is over. We'll keep you informed of future dates and are now conducting an online survey on our website to ask you for your experience of the current bidding rounds.

If you would like LVSTC to help you with any future Expressions of Interest or simply with discussions on your project ideas in relation to the ERDF Prospectus, please contact our advisers either via our telephone/e-mail Helpline or ask for a bidding surgery at our premises. We also provide feedback on draft applications.

If you would like to receive more information or to join our Focus Group or to register on our Partnership Portal, then please contact: Angela Heap on angelah@lvstc.org.uk or Steve White on stevegw@lvstc.org.uk

The Tower Hamlets Volunteer Training Project

Jo Ellis, Volunteer Coordinator

The Project was identified by the Tower Hamlets Community Legal Services Partnership, a network of advice agencies seeking to:-

- address the difficulty advice centres had reported in recruiting skilled/trained advice workers.
- increase the capacity of local advice agencies to provide advice through additional voluntary staff.
- help unemployed people find work and gain training in advice work.
- improve training opportunities and advice centre retention of volunteer workers.

The Project was jointly funded by Tower Hamlets Mainstream Grants and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, providing essential match funding.



In 2005, the Island Advice Centre, on behalf on the Tower Hamlets Advice Agency Partnership, made a successful two year funding application, securing European Social Fund within London Objective 2 Programme 2000-2006.

We addressed the broader theme of community skills development by enabling participants to secure underpinning knowledge to secure an NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance complemented with work placement opportunities. The content of the course included: advice policies, practice and procedures, welfare benefits, housing, debt, employment, consumer rights, and immigration.

Trainees also worked voluntarily in an advice centre throughout the period of the training. Island Advice Centre and the Bethnal Green Rights Shop were the main placement providers taking half of all the trainees. 15 other advice centres in the Tower Hamlets area also offered work placements to volunteer/trainees.

A placement agency commented:- "It's a brilliant start for people who want to work in advice; we really need good people in the advice field. The volunteers have been a breath of fresh air for the Law Centre and we really value their contributions. I think there is huge potential for further development of the project, taking the training to a more complex level".

From a beneficiary perspective, there were no formal entry requirements for the course. A reasonable level of numeracy and literacy was essential in advice work. Applicants were assessed to ensure they had the

appropriate entry-level skills in reading, writing, and basic maths.

A beneficiary commented "Overall this training has given me a better insight to advice work and has broadened my knowledge of what's actually involved. This course is very appropriate for someone wanting to take advice work as a career".

Despite the geographical restrictions placed upon the Project as a contractual condition promoting CED, we managed to train 40 beneficiaries. All received formal qualifications 20 secured employment.

It is important to review our performance more critically. The skills necessary to become an experienced caseworker would take considerably more than the six months training offered. It would be useful to be able to develop the training project further, perhaps offering intensive, full time paid training and work opportunities to enable beneficiaries to increase their skills to caseworker level.

The hidden success of this Project centred upon our partnership approach within the voluntary sector. Notwithstanding the various challenges that we faced, the partnership managed to withstand the strain and as a consequence Tower Hamlets voluntary sector is much stronger. We shall use this experience to engage with funding opportunities in the near future.

Acknowledgments: Account 3, Age Concern, Cedar Centre, Fair Finance, Law Centre, Lime House Project, MIND, Money Matters, Poplar HARCA, South Bromley Forum, St Hildas, St Peters Advice Centre, Wadejir Somali Community Centre and LVSTC for providing technical assistance. ■

Network 2012

Tom Howat

Network 2012 is a social enterprise. An online business and social network and events company it has been developed and will continue to develop in a spirit of making a contribution to social enterprise and business that becomes sustainable.

We are a marketplace for the promotion of goods and services and a supportive network of individuals and businesses who are committed to making a positive difference in the world through business. Network 2012 and its members contribute to the growth of social enterprise through small membership fees which allow us to provide bursaries for others who wish to start social enterprises. A proportion of those bursaries will go to marginalised individuals and groups who would otherwise struggle for start up finance.

Our objectives are as follows:

- To encourage the growth of social enterprise so that the needs of different communities are met by the communities themselves through the businesses they create and manage.
- To provide support, knowledge and finance

to those individuals and businesses who wish to improve their communities through social enterprise and other means.

- To promote social enterprise and responsible business and business practice to the best of our ability.
- To provide a network of contributors from all types of business of whatever size, sharing knowledge, best practise and innovation.
- To facilitate new forms of dialogue and co-operation between established businesses large and small and community developers and leaders for mutual benefit.
- To raise awareness of social enterprise and the products and services they supply.

For voluntary sector organisations and special interest groups keen on developing social enterprises Network 2012 with chat rooms, classified section, bulletin boards, blogs and forums presents the perfect vehicle for those who wish to market products and services and increase collaboration and knowledge where starting, managing and growing a business is concerned. All of these services are presently provided FREE of charge!

When we do bring in paid membership, members can be safe in the knowledge that the fee will be affordable and that a large percentage will eventually return to

their given communities in the form of bursaries. Network 2012 at its core is based on and will gain its strength from the diversity of its members. We believe that it is our diversity and our emphasis on being as inclusive as possible that make us unique and it is in this diversity that great innovation is to be found.

To encourage this innovation through diversity we will bring voluntary sector organisations into contact with businesses of varying size and type and individual entrepreneurs. We are also keen to stimulate a dialogue on social enterprise between voluntary organisations and the recipients of their services in order to promote the understanding and value of social enterprise to people who are presently socially excluded.

Social enterprises are businesses that in whichever way they choose aim to address a particular need within a community. Network 2012 believes those of us who are taking the lead have to ensure we consult, and bring the community with us! ■

News in brief

LSC Marks Progress in Improving its Outreach to the Third Sector

On 16 January 2008, the Office of the Third Sector, Department for Innovation Universities and Skills and the Learning & Skills Council held a Ministerial reception to celebrate the award of funding contracts worth a total £7.6 million to Third Sector organisations. The contracts were awarded to 43 organisations, 16 of which are new suppliers. This demonstrated the ongoing commitment of the LSC to the Third Sector.

Chris Banks, Chairman of the LSC, said: "The Third Sector has a vital role to play in reaching out to the hardest to help in our society, providing opportunities to learn and train that wouldn't otherwise exist. That is why the LSC is dedicated to improving its working relationship with its Third Sector partners; and following the advice of the LSC's Third Sector Working Together Group, we are updating tendering conditions and support to applicants, making it more accessible for Third Sector organisations. All of these measures will support the LSC's Third sector's shared aim of ensuring that we help the most disadvantaged in our society to fulfil their potential."

The LSC's relationship with the Third Sector has to be framed within the strategies and priorities set by Government which focus on maximum participation and attainment for young people, and on economically valuable skills and economic and social inclusion for adults. The Third Sector is championed at a national level within the LSC by Rob Wye, Director of Strategy, Communications and Learning, Margaret Coleman as Regional Director with a functional lead and

stakeholder champion, and a nominated executive level champion in each LSC region. London's executive level champion is Malaika Culverwell and she is supported by Angela Berry.

Source: LSC news release 495

Health care for London Consultation

London's NHS is consulting on a framework to improve the quality, safety and accessibility of healthcare in London. The proposals set out how services might improve and how health services in London will work in partnership to improve the health of all Londoners. These are key issues for London boroughs, voluntary organisations and communities.

The consultation runs from 30 November 2007 to 7 March 2008. For further information contact Valerie Solomon, valerie.solomon@london.gov.uk.

Source: London bulletin

Adult Learner's week

17- 23 May 2008

Supported by ESF this is the largest annual celebration of adult learning. Nominations for adult learner's awards have closed.

There are tasters for courses from Indian head massage, photography to employment training. Organisations wishing to participate in the celebrations can still register for more information got to: www.niace.org.uk/ALw/2008

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