

# European Social Fund: support for families with multiple problems

Call for evidence

April 2011

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# ESF and families with multiple problems – engagement questions

## Introduction

DWP is looking to commission employment focussed provision for families with multiple problems, supported through its European Social Fund (ESF) Co-financing (CFO) arrangements. Funding for the provision is limited to England. The funds available across the English regions may vary in scale.

The EU has set out criteria which ESF funded support must meet. In particular, strict accounting rules mean that, as a CFO, the Department is not able to pool ESF funding with funding from other bodies. In addition, all provision must be contracted for in a fair and open competition – funding cannot simply be allocated to existing organisations that are already providing support to families with multiple problems. Clear audit trails are also required, to demonstrate that customers meet eligibility criteria, and that the provision is delivered according to ESF requirements.

It is our intention that Local Authorities will be the primary route to identify families who would benefit from the provision, and it is likely that providers and local authorities would work closely together. Under current assumptions, to be eligible, families would have to have at least one member on DWP out of work benefits and a history of worklessness in the family. Once specifications have been drawn up we intend to let the provision through the DWP Framework for the Provision of Employment Related Services.

The provision would offer support focussed on moving customers closer to the labour market. In order to achieve this, paid-for outcomes would include the delivery of measures that progress individuals towards work, as well as job outcomes. We would want this support to complement, rather than duplicate, currently available provision.

There are a number of areas of policy design listed below, where we would welcome input from Local Authorities and other interested parties. We will be accepting all contributions set out on this form and returned to [ESF.Engagement@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ESF.Engagement@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) between 12 April and 6 May 2011. Only one response representing the collective views of your organisation should be submitted. We will publish a response, setting out the chief points raised, later in May; therefore, if you wish any part of your completed form to be treated in confidence please state this clearly at the beginning of each relevant answer. Please note, you do not need to complete every section of the form in order to return it.

All views will be considered; however, we expect a broad range of opinions to be expressed, and we cannot guarantee that your input will be reflected in the final policy design.

## Contact details:

Please fill out your contact details below:

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Organisation that you represent: London Councils.

London Councils represents the 32 London boroughs and the City of London Corporation. London Councils delivers influence, improvement and excellent direct services for Londoners.

# 1) Progress activities and measures

We are considering using ESF support to deliver a number of activities that progress customers towards work. Providers would be able to help customers using the appropriate support from a wide menu of possible work-related progress activities.

These might include:

- Attitudinal change, such as improved aspirations and motivation
- Life skills, such as time-keeping and coping with authority
- Work place skills, such as problem solving and improved organisation
- Personal skills, such as improved presentation and health
- Basic employment skills, such as brushing up literacy, numeracy or use of IT
- Improved labour market knowledge

And more substantial, measurable progress activities such as:

- A set period of work experience or voluntary work
- Participation in short job-related skills help, such as work-related certification in health and safety, etc.

**a) Do you think that the suggested progress activities and measures are appropriate?**

**b) Are there other measures we should consider?**

**c) Do you have any views on how we can ensure that the support delivered by ESF providers to each family best complements current Local Authority activity?**

a) The suggested progress and measures are appropriate. Providers should have clear mechanisms in place to measure and demonstrate this progress. In London, basic employment skills are lacking in a large proportion of the population. More than 600,000 Londoners have no qualifications. A fifth of Londoners lack functional literacy and half lack functional numeracy<sup>1</sup>. Therefore achieving progress or qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ESOL will be an important element of the support. This will be particularly important for members of the family on out of work benefits but not active benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) – Work-Related Activity Group. These people will not be fully funded under new Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding criteria but may still need this support to become job ready. ESF could meet an important funding gap. All ESOL, literacy and numeracy courses should be work-focussed. ESOL is a particularly important measure in London where there are large numbers of people with English as a second language. Measures should address issues that act as barriers to progress in work, such as providing access to appropriate child care or social care of dependent adults and improving the ability to understand household budgets.

<sup>1</sup> Mayor of London, *Increasing Employment in London: A plan for growth*, August 2010

- b) As this is a two-year programme, it is likely that some people benefiting from support will achieve qualifications and may secure employment in this period. This should be included in the measures. However, job and qualification targets should reflect the fact that people will face many barriers to getting a job and some may be referred onto other programmes of support after a period of time e.g. the Work Programme. They should be realistic. Other support activities could include improved debt and money management skills. Around half of London households have some form of unsecured debt<sup>2</sup>. Debt can be a significant perceived barrier to entering work. Higher living costs in London (particularly housing and childcare costs) and skills gaps in London mean that other interventions to increase access to intermediate, technical and supervisory jobs are needed to result in sustained employment. As this is a two year programme, accredited and non-accredited training (with substantial employer input) could be included in the measures of progress.
- c) It is essential that employment support provided through this ESF programme is fully integrated into the local authority's family intervention approach. Specialist provision for families with multiple problems will only be truly effective if it is genuinely tailored to local circumstances. This means working with local authorities to not only identify those workless families most in need of support, but also aligning resources and services to provide the personalised, wrap-around support these families will need to achieve sustained employment.

London Councils has already submitted a proposal jointly with Westminster City Council to the DWP that sets out how London Councils as a Co-Financing Organisation could co-commission DWP's ESF allocation for families with multiple problems, working closely with London boroughs. This is our preferred option for delivering this ESF programme in London. We are concerned that DWP's proposed approach to commissioning this funding through its Framework will weaken the help workless families get, not strengthen it. The London boroughs are expert in supporting families with multiple problems and have an excellent track record of supporting this group to achieve sustainable employment. If commissioning arrangements are not meaningfully informed by local knowledge and expertise, there is a risk of fragmenting provision and ultimately weakening the support available to workless families in London.

London boroughs have a critical role to play in supporting DWP work within its commissioning strategy to deliver the best outcomes for families with multiple problems:

**Working with families facing multiple barriers is essentially a local activity.** In every London Borough there is a multi-disciplinary team working with the family with one key professional worker that co-ordinates support. It is vital that future employment support is integrated with this approach in order to be effective and provide value for money.

**London boroughs deliver, commission and co-ordinate the core services that support families with multiple problems** – social care, children's services (such as

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<sup>2</sup> NPI analysis of Wealth and Assets Survey, Office for National Statistics, 2006-2008

safeguarding) and education, housing, health and policing. If boroughs are not involved meaningfully in commissioning, there will be a missed opportunity to fully align services, develop strong referral pathways between key agencies, and ultimately develop a clear and effective customer offer to this vulnerable group.

**London boroughs have an excellent track record of working with local families with multiple problems and delivering effective interventions.** This provides a ready-made infrastructure for identifying and supporting families with multiple problems. A commissioning process that does not allow for providers to be fully integrated into local provision risks preventing new services from drawing on existing local knowledge and skills. This will delay the start date for the programme and burden providers with having to make connections with local services that could have been established in the commissioning process.

For these reasons, London boroughs should:

- **Input into the design of the ESF specifications** – so that they reflect the approaches taken in local authorities and are informed by local knowledge and expertise. This will also align this activity effective with local activity. London Councils would be willing to help facilitate these discussions with London boroughs;
- **Participate in the appraisal process** – to identify those providers who are willing to work in an integrated way with the team around the family and local delivery mechanisms;
- **Participate in the performance management of the programme** – local authorities need to be able to highlight where things are working well and flag when performance is not up to the standard needed, given that this should be part of a range of provision provided to the family, led and co-ordinated by the local authority. Performance management will ultimately rest with the commissioning body but this should be informed by borough intelligence.

DWP should re-consider its view that local authorities cannot see specifications or participate in the appraisal process for this ESF programme on commercial conflict grounds. Ethical walls can be put in place for this and there are precedents. Similar agreements were put in place around Flexible New Deal in London with City Strategy Pathfinders and at the early development stages of the Personal Employment Pilot in North London. Authorities should be given the option to opt in and sign an ethical walls agreement.

The ESF providers should be expected to:

- Demonstrate clearly, with explicit and named links, how their delivery model will be integrated locally;
- Work as members of the team around the family, working towards agreed team outcomes;
- Provide regular performance management data and updates to the local authority as part of the work of the integrated team around the family.

## 2) Family characteristics

The families supported through this programme will have multiple problems, and we would expect that they are already receiving support from Local Authorities, for example through family intervention services.

Questions a to e are specifically for Local Authorities.

**a) How do you currently identify which families need support? What criteria do you use?**

**b) How many families with multiple problems do you help currently? What are the likely numbers per year over the 2011-13 period? Do you think the existence of complementary support from an ESF provider will raise that number?**

**c) How large are these families in the Local Authority you represent? What is the average number of over 16s in a family?**

**d) How many members on average are on out of work benefits?**

**e) For funding reasons, it may be necessary to prioritise inclusion across geographical areas. How should families be prioritised for this support within Local Authorities, and what criteria would you use?**

**f) In the experience of your Local Authority/organisation what are some of the common characteristics found in these families?**

**g) In the experience of your Local Authority/organisation what work-related issues would our support need to address?**

Individual local authorities should provide an accurate picture of this at a local level.

On a London-wide level:

- Research<sup>3</sup> into cases of serious neglect or harm has found that **domestic violence, parental substance misuse** and **parental mental health issues** are key characteristics of serious family breakdown. **Housing issues** were also prevalent in over half of the cases. **Ethnic minority** groups were over represented in the London study, particularly newly arrived families with no informal support network;
- National Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions from schools statistics<sup>4</sup> show that **pupils with SEN** (both with and without statements) are over 8 times more likely to be permanently excluded than those pupils with no SEN; **children who are eligible for free school meals** are around 3 times more likely to receive either a permanent or fixed period exclusion than children who are not eligible for free school meals.
- **Disabled parents or children, black and minority ethnic groups, lone parent households** and **large families** are all over-represented amongst families at risk, or in, poverty in London<sup>5</sup>;

<sup>3</sup> Undertaken by Ofsted and the Government Office for London

<sup>4</sup> DfE, 2008/09, figures for England

<sup>5</sup> London Child Poverty Commission – Legacy Report, March 2010

- Half of all families in poverty in London have one person working in the household. Support should be considered for potential second earners within a household, something that mainstream employment provision does not usually address.

### 3) Referral mechanisms

Local Authorities will already be supporting and interacting with families with multiple problems. Therefore we are intending to make them the primary mechanism by which the families are referred onto the programme. Where family intervention services or similar programmes are running, referral may sit with or separately from these organisations.

Local authorities might refer directly to providers, but eligibility would have to be confirmed by Jobcentre Plus.

**a) Are family intervention services the most appropriate mechanism for referral?**

**b) Where Local Authorities do not run family intervention services, where should referral sit?**

**c) What information should be supplied to support the referral i.e. previous activities/support given to the customer/family**

- a) Where the support for families with multiple problems sits within an authority is likely to vary across local authorities. Once providers are selected, they should be given one contact point within an authority to provide referrals. Jobcentre Plus should also give one contact who could be copied into referrals, so that JCP confirmations around eligibility can be given simultaneously.
- b) See response above
- c) Providers should be working as part of an integrated team around the family. Therefore information about other support provided to the customer/family should be an integral part of the referral process. ESF providers should be working to team outcomes for the family and be fully aware of these. Informed consent to information sharing should be agreed with each customer or household to help effective working by each agency and between agencies.

### 4) Delivery features

We are interested to know if you have views on any features of delivery that you would consider to be effective mechanisms, or good practice for this customer group, such as use of key workers for individualised support, case-conferencing, outreach delivery, or signposting to other measures.

**a) Please describe any good practices or key delivery features you would strongly recommend.**

Delivery features for the ESF programme should be integrated with those developed locally – as these will reflect local priorities; existing local infrastructure and activities in this area and the nature of the families that live locally. The key delivery feature of the ESF programme for support for families with multiple problems is that it should be integrated and aligned with local work with these families. The ESF providers should fit with this approach whilst providing specialist employment support. Stand alone activity will fragment provision for these families; and will be less effective and efficient. Community budget pilots are looking to align and integrate provision for families working across different agencies. The key delivery feature of the ESF support is that it also aligns and integrates its provision.

Past experience from a number of London Councils' ESF projects suggests that a key worker role can be very effective. Fragmenting provision for this customer group can be demotivating.

The key worker should not become a managerial role or absolve each agency being part of the agreement with the customer. A model should be put in place that supports each agency to deliver agreed achievements for the customer and family.

## **5) Ongoing involvement**

**a) In addition to identifying and referring customers, what ongoing role could Local Authorities play once the ESF support is in place?**

As stated in our response to question 1 c; local authority involvement should start at the beginning of the process, influencing the design of specifications and how the programme is commissioned, as well as having the option to participate in the appraisal process. Their involvement should continue in terms of receiving performance management data and contributing to performance management discussions, as well as being involved in any longer term evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme.

## **6) Other issues**

**a) Are there any other issues which you think the DWP should consider, as part of the policy design and implementation?**

London Councils also welcomes DWP's commitment to commission a substantial proportion of its ESF allocation to support workless families with multiple problems into sustainable employment. However, as outlined in our response to question 1 c, London Councils' preferred option is to develop a formal co-commissioning agreement with DWP for the ESF programme. We believe that this model will add substantial value to the range and quality of provision for workless families in London and comply with DWP's overall commissioning

strategy and ESF requirements.

We are concerned that the DWP's current proposals for the engagement of local authorities in this process do not go far enough for the programme to be effective. London boroughs should:

- **Input into the design of the ESF specifications** – London Councils would be willing to help facilitate these discussions with London boroughs;
- **Participate in the appraisal process;**
- **Participate in the performance management of the programme.**

## 7) Further engagement

Would you be willing to be involved in further discussion on this issue? Please delete as appropriate.

### **Yes, I would be would like to be involved in further discussion**

Thank you. Depending on the volume of responses, we shall not be able to involve all respondents in further discussion.

Thank you for taking the time to reply to these questions, we greatly appreciate your support.