



Ireland's EU Structural Funds
Programmes 2007 - 2013
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EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND



A N R O I N N | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

ESF Aided Operations

Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007 – 2013

“Investing in your future”

VEC Sector –Pay and Non Pay 2012

Adult Literacy

Information Booklet and Instructions for Beneficiaries

Department Circular 0020/2013

Table of Contents:

1. ESF Return Requirements and Deadline for Return of 2012 Claims	2
2. Eligibility Issues	4
2.1 Adult Literacy.....	4
2.2 Apportionment	5
2.3 General Eligibility Issues	6
2.4 Sub-Contracting of ESF Aided Measures	9
3. Completing the Expenditure Return Forms (ERF).....	9
4. Adjustment Schedule.....	11
5. Completing the Electronic B1 - 2012	11
6. Action required following the completion of the VEC's annual accounts.....	12
7. Publicity and Publicity File	12
8. Procedures Manual	12
9. Document Retention	13
10. Public Procurement.....	13
11. Audit Requirements and Control Issues	14

12. Contacting the Structural Funds Unit..... 14

This circular was issued by the Structural Funds Unit, Dept. of Education and Skills on: **22nd April, 2013.**

This information circular should be read in conjunction with the following:

Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of 5th July 2006 and Regulation (EC) No 396/2009 of 6th May 2009 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006.

Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11th July 2006, and Regulation (EC) No 1341/2008 of 18th December 2009, Regulation (EC) No 284/2009 of 7th April 2009, Regulation (EC) No 539/2010 of 16th June 2010, Regulation (EC) No 1311/2011 of 13th December 2011 amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

Commission Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 of 8th December 2006, and Regulation (EC) No 846/2009 of 1st September 2009 and Regulation (EC) No 832/2010 of 17th September 2010, amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006.

Department of Finance Circular 12/2008 regarding Financial Management and Control Procedures for the EU Structural Funds Programmes 2007 – 2013 and ESF Certifying Authority,

ESF Certifying Authority, Department of Education and Skills Circular 1/2012 - Eligibility Rules for the European Structural Funds (ESF) 2007 -2013 under the National Strategic Reference Framework.

This information circular has been prepared by the Structural Funds Unit to assist VECs in the completion of the Pay and Non Pay element of the 2012 ESF Expenditure Returns as well as the submission of Electronic B1's. This circular updates, clarifies and consolidates previous instructions and circulars.

1. ESF Return Requirements and Deadline for 2012 Claims

Please note that these instructions refer to 2012 Pay and Non Pay expenditure, in respect of the HCIOP 2007-2013 Sub-priority Adult Literacy.

Note :

Please note that in respect of claims submitted for the Adult Literacy sub-priority, the application of an additional 20% in respect of Indirect Costs no longer applies.

Overlapping of EU funding

VECs are to ensure that funding from other EU sources is not included in these claims and are required to describe the controls they have in place to ensure this. Other EU sources of funding includes:

EGF- European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

ERDF – European Regional Development Fund

LMAF – Labour Market Activation Fund

Pension Costs

Please see separate note relating to Pension Costs in section 2.3 of this Information Circular

Reminder

VEC's are reminded to re-examine all claims already submitted under the HCI-OP 2007 - 2013 for expenditure/activity incurred prior to 1 January 2007 but paid in 2007-2011 and included as eligible expenditure, and to remove any such expenditure by way of negative adjustments in the

2012 ESF claims.

IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT ABOUT THE APPROPRIATENESS OF INCLUDING AN ITEM OF EXPENDITURE IN AN ESF RETURN, PLEASE CONTACT THE SFU.

In order to finalise the above named expenditure returns and secure drawdown of ESF Aid, the following documentation should be completed and returned to the Structural Funds Unit (SFU) by **7th June, 2013.**

Enclosed with this Information Circular, please find:

- **2012 Expenditure Return Forms** for ESF-aided programmes administered by your VEC. The Expenditure Return Form has been customised for the Adult Literacy sub-priority and is uniquely labelled with your VEC's details. See section 3 of this information circular for completion details.
- **2012 Adjustment Schedules**
- **List of allocations** received by your VEC for 2012 from Further Education Section, Department of Education and Skills.

Feedback is most welcome on any aspect of the returns process and any clarifications provided and agreed will be circulated to all VECs. Additional copies of all EU regulations and ESF Certifying Authority Circulars are available from the Structural Funds Unit on request. These regulations are also available on www.esf.ie/en/regulations_2007-2013.aspx

Please note that **all** original documentation supporting the expenditure included in the Expenditure Return Form must be maintained and no documents should be disposed without the instruction of the ESF Managing Authority (via Structural Funds Unit). Procedures Manuals should be updated to reflect this position.

The Managing Authority and the Certifying Authority for ESF in Ireland is based in the Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1.

2. Eligibility Issues

2.1 Adult Literacy

The Further Education Section's allocation for 'Adult Literacy' is deemed eligible for inclusion in an ESF expenditure return. A specific budget is allocated by the Further Education section for Adult Literacy as part of its allocation under ALCES (Adult Literacy, Community Education and SPIDAS). Please ensure that only the Adult Literacy element is included in the expenditure return.

ITABE (Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education)

VEC's may include expenditure incurred on **ITABE** in ESF Adult Literacy Returns. VEC's must ensure that expenditure claimed does not exceed the allocation approved for this programme in your VEC and that the programme is operated in accordance with the conditions outlined by Further Education Section of the Department.

DEIS (Developing Equal Opportunities in Schools) / Family Literacy

VEC's may include expenditure funded under **DEIS/Family Literacy** in ESF Adult Literacy Returns. VEC's must ensure that expenditure claimed relates to Adult Literacy, does not exceed the allocation approved for this programme in your VEC and that the programme is operated in accordance with the conditions outlined by Further Education Section of the Department.

Care must be taken to ensure that expenditure relating to the VEC's **non-ESF Aided Community Education** programme is demonstrably recorded separately to **Themed Literacy**, which *can* be included in the Adult Literacy expenditure return, if funded from the Adult Literacy Budget provided by the Further Education Section. Themed Literacy refers to literacy provision through other media e.g. Computing, Photography or Woodwork.

Expenditure on the following **cannot** be included in the Adult Literacy return

- **SPIDAS** (Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme) is a scheme established to support second chance education provision for people who are disadvantaged. It provides this support by way of funding towards the costs of books, materials, travel and meals.
- **Community Education** funding from the Further Education Section aims to assist local Community Education Groups address the educational needs of their community, in particular those who have not attained upper second level education. The funds can also be directed locally to education for categories of special need.

Salary Costs of Adult Literacy Organiser's in Adult Literacy Claims

The salary costs of Adult Literacy Organiser's who are involved in the provision of Adult Literacy are eligible for inclusion in ESF claims provided they are within the Further Education Section's budget allocation approved for Adult Literacy.

This approach is based on the view that the role, function and duties of Adult Literacy Organisers are fully related to the promotion and improvement of Adult Literacy consistent with the National Adult Literacy Strategy.

Many VECs engage with other public and private bodies in the organisation, delivery and funding of Adult Literacy services including, for example, to participants on the Return to Education Programme, the Local Authorities' Workplace Literacy Scheme, Local Industry, NTDI, etc. It is recognised that such cooperation between agencies promotes greater effectiveness and efficiency and adds value to the Adult Literacy measure. Expenditure incurred by VECs (pay and non-pay) in respect of these literacy services is eligible for inclusion in the Adult Literacy ESF claim.

However, in all such cases care must be taken to ensure that any income being claimed for ESF-aid purposes and derived from involvement with other organisations in such programmes is deducted from the Adult Literacy expenditure returned for ESF purposes. As described earlier, only Further Education Section's dedicated grants can be claimed for ESF purposes. The expenditure return forms incorporate a section for netting off any such non-Further Education Section income (Section 6).

Structural Funds Unit has identified that in a number of VEC's income/fees relating to ESOL courses was not deducted appropriately in previous claims submitted. VEC's are required to ensure that any such income is recorded at Section 6 of the Expenditure Return Form.

As a general rule VECs must ensure that there is no possibility of double funding/claiming of ESF or other EU aid in respect of Adult Literacy. VECs are requested to ensure that any income received from third parties that relates to expenditure being included in ESF claims is deducted appropriately from their ESF return of eligible expenditure in respect of Adult Literacy.

All claims of eligible expenditure in respect of Adult Literacy submitted previously by VECs under the HCIOP 2007-2013 should be reviewed to ensure any such income/fees receipts etc have been deducted appropriately and any negative adjustments arising should be declared in association with the claim for period 01/01/2012-31/12/2012.

2.2 Apportionment

Head Office, or any apportioned costs (e.g. for overheads such as Power, Rent etc.) must not be included in any expenditure return. VECs therefore must not include any apportioned costs in expenditure returns for ESF -aided measures.

In compiling the 2012 returns, the following should be examined:

- If costs in respect of a staff member who is **not** based in the centre where the programme is delivered (e.g. a head office based administrator) are included in an expenditure return, please ensure that the officer was assigned solely to duties in respect of the ESF -aided programme in question **only** and that the officer's time can be clearly demonstrated to relate to that programme (e.g. terms of contract, job description). Only dedicated non pay costs appropriate to such a person should be included.
- Where Staff provide administrative support in training centres (or occasionally caretakers, counsellors etc.) across a number of programmes (ESF-aided and/or non-ESF-aided), the non-pay costs of these officers cannot be included in an expenditure return form. The pay costs of such staff can only be claimed if supporting documentation of the time spent on the ESF aided and non-ESF aided projects is available (e.g. timesheets)
- **Tutor hours** that are included in an expenditure return must relate demonstrably to the ESF-aided measure i.e. certified claim forms for tutor hours must be maintained and

must indicate clearly that the tutor provided the hours in respect of the ESF-aided Adult Literacy Sub-priority.

In completing the ESF return form it is therefore necessary to consider the location of the programme delivery for Adult Literacy. If the programme is the only programme (ESF-aided or otherwise) operated from a particular premises, the non-pay costs incurred by the programme in that one building can be included in full in the expenditure return.

Note, that in order to include the full non-pay costs incurred by the programme, you must be satisfied that the building is not used for evening classes, voluntary groups etc. or any other activity. Note also that 'notional' rent amounts charged by VEC head office to apportion costs to various sub-heads cannot be included in an expenditure return form.

If a number of programmes (ESF-aided or otherwise) operate from one premises (multiplex), the non-pay costs incurred by each programme must be examined in detail to ensure that no apportioned costs are integrated in any expenditure return.

In a shared/multiplex building particularly consider the following:

- Costs relating to dedicated telephone lines for a specific ESF-aided programme can be included in the return. Where dedicated lines do not exist, telephone costs cannot be included in the return;
- Costs relating to rent, heat, and light **cannot** be included;
- Insurance costs that are not delineated by building (or in the case of a multiplex by programme within a building) **should not** be included in a return.
- Pay costs associated with caretaker and cleaning staff members **cannot** be included in an expenditure return **unless the staff members are specifically and demonstrably assigned to work on one programme only.**
- Pay costs associated with administration staff working on a number of programmes **cannot** be included in an expenditure return.
- Administration staff members who are specifically and demonstrably assigned to work on one programme only, can be included in the expenditure return for that programme.

In general, notional costs should not be included in ESF expenditure returns. If a percentage of non-pay expenditure is calculated and included in an expenditure return form, it is possible that this calculated amount refers to an apportioned cost and may not be appropriate for inclusion in an ESF return (e.g. a calculation based on square footage, numbers of participants of rooms in a building, etc.).

2.3 General Eligibility Issues

Particular attention should be paid to the following issues: -

- **Eligible Admin** costs are allowable in the ESF return. Examples of non-pay items would be stationery, class/course materials, consumables, art and craft materials, books, cleaning materials, educational videos, DVDs etc. Such items are fully claimable and should be included under Section 5 of the form.
- **Childcare** - Childcare costs can be included if met from Further Education Section's

Adult Literacy allocation.

- **Travel and Subsistence** costs included in an expenditure return must be substantiated with certified claim forms that indicate clearly the programme to which the travel related, and full details of the vehicle, mileage claimed, mileage rates, claimant details and purpose of travel. The rates applied must not exceed those agreed with the Department of Education and Skills.
- **Repairs to buildings, refurbishment costs, maintenance, and security costs must not** form part of the expenditure return. Routine maintenance and security contracts must not be included e.g. alarm maintenance, pest control, boiler services
- **Insurance Costs/Rates/Service Charges/Overhead Costs etc.**, that are not delineated by building (e. g. in the case of a multiplex by programme within a building) should not be included in a return
- **Capital items** are excluded from the returns (e.g. light fittings, modular furniture as part of a refurbishment, storage heater replacements etc. etc.)
- **Equipment.** Individual items of equipment costing *less than* €1,000 (there is no minimum threshold) may be included in Section 5D of the Expenditure Return Form. Equipment can include such items as, computers, hardware, software, copiers, power tools, small lathes (used for training purposes), office machinery etc. Such items would generally be recorded in stock books etc.

Examples of items not deemed to be equipment would be stationery, class/course materials, consumables, art and craft materials, books, cleaning materials, educational videos, DVDs etc.

- **Interest charges, financial penalties** (including prompt payment charges) cannot be included in an expenditure return.
- **Marketing/Advertising**

All course literature and materials, public advertisements, launches, letterheads, reports, evaluations, information leaflets, etc. must include an acknowledgment the European Social Fund. **Expenditure on marketing/advertising that does not give appropriate acknowledgement to the ESF must not be included in the ESF expenditure return form. Please see <http://www.esf.ie/en/logos.aspx> for appropriate logos.**

- **Treatment of Meal Allowances (if applicable)**

In general, meal allowances payable to trainees are an eligible cost. However, it has been the practice in some VEC's where a meal is provided to trainees, to withhold the meal allowance as a contribution towards the cost of providing meals in the centres. The cost of purchasing the food has also been included in ESF claims by some VEC's together with the gross cost of the meal allowance. This has the effect of overstating the claims by the amount of any allowance withheld. In order to avoid duplicating the costs in respect of meal allowances, any such allowances that are withheld by VEC's for the provision of meals to trainees should be offset against the relevant cost of providing the meals.

- **Back money** that relates to payments under National Pay Agreements, agreed and implemented between 1/1/2007 and 31/12/2013, awards and benchmarking is eligible for ESF aid. Staff concerned must have been working on ESF-aided programmes for the duration covered by the Agreement/Award. If you intend including back money in ESF

expenditure returns, please contact SFU for guidance.

➤ **Honoraria / Discretionary payments**

Qualification and responsibility ‘allowances’, and allowances for teaching services in excess of the normal school year session, are eligible for inclusion in a return. These may be referred to as ‘honoraria’ in Departmental Circulars.

Expenditure on discretionary payments should be excluded from the return.

Allowances paid and included in the return must conform to Department of Education and Skills circulars and the relevant documentation must be retained to support the inclusion of such costs.

- **Networks** Connection to networks for transmitting information and PCs are eligible. Mobile infrastructures, the networks themselves and mainframe computers are not eligible

Pension Costs

Par. 9 Appendix B of the ESF Certifying Authority, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Circular **1/2008** contains the following provision in relation to Pension Costs:

Redundancy and Pension Costs

As a general rule redundancy and pension costs are ineligible, with the exception for Operation’s which have specific approval by the Managing Authority in writing.

The Department of Education and Skills has heretofore regarded Employee Pension costs as being eligible for inclusion in ESF aided claims submitted by VEC’s under the HCIOP on the basis of approval of the Managing Authority subject to the following provision:

The Managing Authority have approved the inclusion of employee pension costs in the ESF 2007-2013 claims for DES activities where these are a real cost (i.e. not notional cost) that has actually been paid out by the beneficiary/project and where a sufficient audit trail exists. An example of real cost in this instance, is where the exact pension costs deducted from all VEC employee pay slips can be traced to the total deduction in grant payments to a VEC (i.e. a deduction of a notional employee pension costs amount from the VEC grant would not be eligible as it could not be reconciled to the total deductions on actual employee pay slips).

VEC’s are requested to include any superannuation (employee) costs in claims submitted in respect of 2012.

2.4 Sub-Contracting of ESF Aided Measures

Where the delivery of a programme is sub-contracted or devolved by a VEC to another body (including the community and voluntary sector), the VEC must ensure that sufficient reporting and record keeping systems are in place to allow the timely and accurate generation of ESF expenditure returns.

The VEC must also ensure that the body is aware of, and adheres to:

- a) the eligibility criteria for ESF return purposes;
- b) ESF publicity requirements;
- c) the need to maintain supporting documentation until at least 2022;

A sub-contracting body is liable to verification and audit by the VEC, Comptroller & Auditor General, the Department of Education & Skills, ESF Control Unit, European Commission, and the European Court of Auditors. VECs must ensure that sub-contracted bodies are aware of their obligations in this regard.

It is advisable that copies of the contractual arrangements with such outside bodies are readily available for inspection by any competent ESF auditing authority and the Department of Education and Skills. Such contractual arrangements should be kept up to date.

3. Completing the Expenditure Return Forms (ERF)

A completed Expenditure Return Form is required for 2012 in respect of the Adult Literacy Sub-priority. The following notes outline the information required for each section of the form.

The attached information sheet “2012 Grant Amounts” reproduces the actual grants made to your VEC by Further Education Section for 2012. The allocations/budgets should be checked and compared with the total amounts of your 2012 claim. The ESF claim should not usually exceed the annual total and will generally be less, taking into account ineligible items. The exception is when incoming/outgoing surpluses/ deficits are agreed with the Department's Further Education Section and/or where movement of money in/out of the programme is formally agreed and recorded at Committee level and Further Education Section notified. In these cases other Department of Education and Skills funding may be deemed eligible.

Note: All amounts recorded should be correct to the nearest cent.

It is recommended that the ERF and the Adjustments Schedule be completed before proceeding to Section 5 of these Guidelines i.e. ‘Completing the Electronic B1’.

ERF Section 1 - Claimant Details

Confirm that contact details provided are correct. Please notify any changes to iain_maguire@education.gov.ie

ERF Section 2 - Return Summary

Insert total **eligible** amount for 2012. This amount should be transferred from Section 7C of the expenditure return form. It is this amount which is validated by the CEO as being the total eligible expenditure returned for ESF purposes.

ERF Section 3 - Certification

The names in block letters, signatures and dates are required by the certifying official (VEC Staff member who prepared the Return Form) and validating official ie. CEO. All signatures must be originals for audit purposes.

ERF Section 4 - Dedicated Pay Expenditure

Only dedicated programme expenditure relating to the tuition costs, administration and other dedicated staff should be included in this claim. Please refer to ESF CA Circular 1/2012 for guidance on eligibility issues.

Please note that pay related receipts (e.g. overpayments recovered, income received from the Department of Social Protection, etc.) must be deducted at Section 6 of the Expenditure Return Form.

Please note that the **actual** payroll cost to your VEC in respect of each individual tutor/administration staff must be included in the return as appropriate (notional amounts must not be included). If you have any queries please contact Structural Funds Unit.

Relevant documentation/records must be retained to support the inclusion of pay costs.

ERF Section 5 - Dedicated Non Pay Expenditure

Please refer to previous sections in relation to the individual programmes, eligibility issues and apportionment issues which should be read in conjunction with the above Circulars, in particular ESF Certifying Authority Circular 1/2012. Detailed working papers relating to the expenditure claimed need not be routinely submitted with the claim form, but it should be kept in mind that the eligibility of expenditure will be analysed by ledger headings and traced back to invoice level in the event of an audit or transaction verification tests.

ERF Section 6 - Income from other sources

This Section of the expenditure return form facilitates the deduction of any non-Further Education Section income that relates to the ESF expenditure being claim unless already deducted in earlier sections. Please provide detail of the source(s) of the income on the expenditure return form.

ERF Section 7 - Summary of ESF Return

The summary (pay and non-pay expenditure, less income) declared in Section 7C should be brought forward to Section 2. It is this amount which is certified by the CEO as being the total eligible expenditure returned for ESF purposes.

ERF Section 8 - Summary of Previously Undeclared Expenditure (if applicable)

Section 8 is the total eligible expenditure not previously declared for claims commencing from 1/1/2007. Previously referred to as a positive adjustment, this amount should be the total of all positive amounts detailed in Section A of the Adjustment Schedule.

ERF Section 9 - Summary of Negative Adjustments (if applicable)

Section 9 is the total amount of negative adjustments in relation to expenditure declared for previous claims commencing from 1/1/2007. This amount should be the total of all negative amounts detailed on Section B of the Adjustment Schedule.

4. Adjustment Schedule

Where an adjustment is to be made on a B1 Declaration, an Adjustment Schedule must be completed for each programme as relevant. **All adjustments must be recorded separately** on the Adjustment Schedule which must be completed and signed off by the CEO and returned to the SFU. The Adjustment Schedule has 2 sections:

Section A – Previously Undeclared Expenditure for Prior Periods (Positive adjustments). Undeclared expenditure from previous claims must be declared. The total amount is to be recorded in Section 8 of the ERF.

Section B -Negative Adjustments. Expenditure claimed incorrectly (ineligible expenditure) on previous claims must be declared. The total amount is to be recorded in Section 9 of the ERF.

Completing the Adjustment Schedule:

Measure/Sub Measure Title

Project title	Refer to page 1 of the Expenditure Return Form for each programme
Area of Activity Number	<i>(Pre-printed on all forms)</i>
Amount of adjustment	Insert amount for each individual adjustment. The Total Adjustment should correspond with Section 9 of the Expenditure Return Form.
Prior B1 period subject to adjustment	Adjustments should be prepared relevant to the original claim period.
Reason for adjustment	An explanation is required for each individual adjustment amount.
Irregularity Report required ³ (yes/no)	If any adjustments are being made please contact the NDP/SFU Section who will advise if an Irregularity Report is required.

5. Completing the Electronic B1 - 2012

In addition to the Expenditure Return Form an Electronic B1 form must be completed for each programme for 2012.

- **Note:** All amounts recorded should be correct to the nearest cent.

³ A copy of the EU Commission Regulation No 2035/2005 covering irregularity reporting has been forwarded to all VECs.

• Please refer to Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment, ESF 2007-2013, EUSF IT System User Manual, Level-1 Public Beneficiary Body Draft 5.1 26/02/2010 which was issued to all VEC's on 4th April, 2012.

6. Action required following the completion of the VEC's annual accounts

Due to drawdown deadlines it is frequently necessary for VECs to produce completed expenditure return forms *prior* to the final audit and submission of the V15 to the Department of Education and Skills. In view of this, VEC procedures should ensure that any adjustments required to the final V15 are cross-checked against previous ESF returns made (e.g. if any miscoding is found, the relevant ESF returns for the year/measure in question must be reviewed and any relevant adjustment required notified immediately to the SFU).

7. Publicity and Publicity File

The publicity requirements for the HCI-OP 2007-2013 are contained in EU Regulation 1828 of 2006.

Organisations are required under Article 8 of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1828/2006 to publicise the fact that the project was part financed by the European Social Fund. In accordance with Article 9 of Commission Regulation (EC) No.1828/2006 requires the following to be included:

- ❑ the emblem of the European Union (EU Flag)
- ❑ the wording “European Social Fund” and
- ❑ the statement “Investing in your future”

Failure to adequately publicise that projects were part-financed by the European Social Fund may lead to a minimum flat rate correction of 5%.

The assistance of the ESF should be acknowledged in all material relating to the Adult Literacy Sub-priority.

This includes reports, evaluations, press releases, information leaflets, etc. Trainees on ESF-aided programmes should be aware that the programme is in receipt of EU aid. ESF aid should be acknowledged both at VEC Head Office and in ‘centres’ by way of posters and plaques.

A properly maintained and updated “publicity file” is required in each VEC. The publicity file should include copies of speeches, press releases, advertisements, reports and publications relating to ESF-aided measures. The file is required as supporting documentation to demonstrate that appropriate recognition of the European Social Fund has been given and the appropriate logos have been highlighted.

Information on ESF publicity requirements and publicity material can be sought from:

ESF Managing Authority, Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1

Tel: 01 889 2078

Website: www.esf.ie

Website: www.eustructuralfunds.ie

8. Procedures Manual

It is a requirement that a written procedures manual is kept in each VEC. The manual should document how the ESF returns are collated and provide details of the personnel involved in the process outlining each job holder's role and function in the process. This should specify the creator and counter-signature control levels for certification on to the EUSF IT system.

The manual should detail the preparation for the claims and demonstrate what procedures, checklists or other steps are in place to ensure accurate certification and validation of each return. As part of the Procedures Manual, projects should describe the controls they have in place to ensure that funding from other EU sources is not included in claims.

The manual should be updated regularly at least annually in line with any regulatory amendments and any guidance updates (e.g. this Information Circular).

9. Document Retention

VEC's are reminded of the requirement to retain all documentation relating to the Adult Literacy sub-priority.

VEC projects should be reminded that there is a requirement under Article 90 of Council Regulation (EC) No.1083/2006 and Article 19 of Commission Regulation (EC) No.1828/2006 to retain all ESF documentation for a period of three years following the closure or partial closure of an Operational Programme as defined by Article 89(3).

The ESF Financial Control Unit (Audit Authority) has requested that electronic copies of all claims and supporting schedules be retained together with the hardcopies of the claims and supporting documentation.

Failure to retain the necessary supporting documentation will result in the claim becoming ineligible for ESF support.

Original source documentation from which expenditure returns are made must be retained until at least the end of 2022. No documents should be disposed without the instruction of the ESF Managing Authority (via Structural Funds Unit). Procedures Manuals should be updated to reflect this position.

10. Public Procurement Regulations

The Department and bodies who implement EU aided programmes are obliged to ensure that the expenditure declared is fully compliant with the National Public Procurement Guidelines which apply to all expenditure co-financed through the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013.

A copy of the Public Procurement Guidelines 2004 published by the Department of Finance has been included in claims pack previously issued to each VEC. Public Procurement threshold values have since been revised in the Competitive Process document 22-11-10. All latest update on the public procurement requirements is available on the www.etenders.gov.ie website

Please note that in addition to the documentation submitted by your VEC to the Structural Funds Unit, all background papers and VEC accounts are subject to examination and audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office, the Department of Education and Skills, the ESF Financial Control Unit, the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors. Verification checks across all measures will be carried out regularly.

VECs must notify SFU of recommendations made, by any Audit agency, including the VSSU/Internal Audit, which relates to, or effects in any way, the preparation of ESF returns and outline the actions taken on foot of the recommendations.

11. Audit Requirements and Control Issues

The ESF Financial Control Unit (Audit Authority) has recommended that VEC's maintain a record of how figures reported in the ESF expenditure returns relate to their V15 and expenditure analysis records. The record should also note adjustments to the V15 and ESF returns, and the reason for any adjustments. Excel worksheets containing ESF claim workings may be appended as an attachment to the electronic B1 return.

The ESF Financial Control Unit (Audit Authority) has also recommended that an improvement be made to the audit trail by each VEC maintaining a schedule of expenditure in electronic format (excel spreadsheet or equivalent): the total of this schedule should match exactly the total amount submitted in the ESF claim.

VEC's are reminded of the importance of part-time staff submitting time sheets promptly at the end of each month in order to provide proper management and control and monitoring of budgets. Timesheets and invoices should be stamped to identify separate programmes. VEC's are also reminded of their obligations regarding Public Procurement procedures.

12. Contacting the Structural Funds Unit

If you require any further clarification on the Information Circular or the eligibility of expenditure, please contact **Mr. Patrick Costello**: Tel. **01 889 6445**, email: patrick_costello@education.gov.ie, or **Mr. Iain Maguire**: Tel **01 889 6592**, email: iain_maguire@education.gov.ie.

Structural Funds Unit, 22nd April 2013
Department of Education and Skills