

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 646

An evaluation of European Social Fund information and publicity

Alison Pemberton and Andrew Thomas

A report of research carried out by Insite Research and Consulting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Abbreviations

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
BIS	Business, Innovation and Skills
CFO	Co-financing Organisation
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EC	European Commission
EPMU	European Programmes Management Unit
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESFD	European Social Fund Division
EU	European Union
GO	Government Office
LDA	London Development Agency
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
RDA	Regional Development Agency
TA	Technical assistance

Glossary of terms

Adult Learners' Week	Adult Learners' Week is organised by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education to promote the benefits of learning and celebrate what has been achieved. It is held annually in May and part-funded by the European Social Fund.
Co-financing Organisation	European Social Fund funds are distributed through public agencies such as the Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010), Department for Work and Pensions, London Development Agency and some Regional Development Agencies and local authorities. These agencies are known as 'Co-financing Organisations'. Their role is to bring together European Social Fund and domestic funding for employment and skills so that the European Social Fund complements domestic programmes. The Co-financing Organisations contract with the organisations or 'providers' that deliver European Social Fund projects on the ground.
Convergence Objective	This objective aims to develop areas where the economy is lagging behind the rest of the European Union. In England, only Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly benefit from European Social Fund funding under the Convergence Objective.
Eurobarometer survey	The Eurobarometer survey, undertaken at regular intervals since 1973, tracks and analyses public opinion in all European Member States.

European Social Fund	The European Social Fund is one of the European Union's Structural Funds. It was set up to improve employment opportunities in the European Union and so help raise standards of living. It aims to help people fulfil their potential by giving them better skills and better job prospects.
Managing Authority	The Managing Authority is the European Social Fund Division of the Department for Work and Pensions. Regional level Managing Authority functions are carried out by European Social Fund personnel in eight Government Offices. In London regional functions are carried out by the London Development Agency European Programmes Management Unit acting as an Intermediate Body. The Government of Gibraltar is the Intermediate Body in Gibraltar.
Providers	Organisations that deliver projects under contract to Co-financing Organisations (or contract directly with the Managing Authority in Cornwall and Merseyside).
Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective	This objective covers all areas outside the Convergence Objective. The whole of England is covered by this objective, except Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Within this objective, Merseyside and South Yorkshire benefit from transitional funding as former Objective One regions in 2000-06.
Technical Assistance	Technical assistance funds are available to finance the preparatory, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and control activities of the Operational Programme, together with activities to reinforce the administrative capacity for implementing the funds, at national and regional levels.

Summary

The European Commission (EC) and Managing Authorities are committed to improving the transparency of Structural Fund programmes at European and Member State levels in 2007-13. This is to be achieved through co-operation on specific publicity measures and evaluating the impact of publicity activity and awareness of European Union (EU) support amongst participants on European Social Fund (ESF) supported projects and the general public.

The programme's Managing Authority, European Social Fund Division (ESFD) of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), drew up a Communication Plan for the Operational Programme. A strategic seven-year document, it aims to provide strategic direction and is critical to maintaining a consistent and coherent approach across the regions.

The aim of the evaluation

The aim of this evaluation was to assess progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the Communication Plan, including the visibility and awareness of the Operational Programme and the role played by the Community, during the first half of the Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- assess whether a consistent set of messages on ESF investment in employment and skills was used in publicity and information measures;
- examine progress against the indicators used to measure the achievement of the objectives of the Communication Plan;
- identify good practice to aid the development of future information and publicity;
- identify changes or improvements for the development of information and publicity measures for the second half of the programme.

Evidence from the study will inform the production of information and publicity materials, as well as events and activities, for the remainder of the programme.

The research consisted of three elements:

- initially, an assessment was undertaken of a sample of printed/published materials sourced from all parties delivering the programme;
- alongside the desk assessment exercise, a further source of information was the formal monitoring data which forms part of the required reporting within the programme by both central and regional Managing Authorities and Co-financing Organisations (CFOs);
- within the context set by the desk assessment of materials and the collated monitoring information, a total of 18 face-to-face interviews with stakeholders were undertaken in four study areas across England during October-November 2009.

The study areas consisted of the Convergence region (Region A), two regions covered by the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective (Regions B and D) and one region also benefiting from transitional funding (Region C). The overall objective of the interviews was to explore stakeholder experiences regarding information and publicity activity and to further inform progress against the indicators.

Requirements, implementation and monitoring

The Communication Plan provides a strategic framework for delivery of publicity and information measures including key messages, target audiences and responsibilities. It is also the key monitoring document. A key aim of the plan is to ensure that all publicity and information measures use a consistent set of messages about ESF investment in employment and skills. The Communication Plan envisages the greatest degree of variation in materials to be most likely at the level of CFOs, which are expected to develop specific messages for specific audiences. The plan also recognises that different media will be used to communicate to each audience and that both existing and new media will be used as appropriate.

Understanding of requirements

The stakeholder interviews provided an indication of perception and understanding of the requirements. The key understanding of the need for structured publicity and information requirements is to support the development of a more consistent approach across England, thus ensuring that not just the ESF-funded projects, per se, are publicised, but actually the ESF investment itself. However, this understanding is on two levels: The first, most basic understanding found predominantly amongst providers but also some CFOs, was in terms of the contractual requirements regarding the use of the ESF logo and branding (European Union (EU) flags, supporting statements and images). The second understanding, most common amongst the Managing Authority and CFOs, is based on wider benefits and opportunities which the requirements encourage.

Implementation measures

Several measures were established to aid the implementation of the requirements. At national level a Publicity Strategy Group was established to assist ESFD with the strategic management and delivery of the Communication Plan. At regional level CFOs produced Communication Plans, the structure and content of which varied both between individual CFOs and regions. Some CFOs used the process of developing a Communication Plan to consider what could be provided above and beyond the statutory requirements, including considering different audiences, and these plans therefore contained more detail.

Some regions have established close working links between individual CFOs leading to the production of regional plans. In addition, a number of regions have accessed technical assistance (TA) to fund public relations (PR) agencies and/or organisations to coordinate activity across the region.

The time, commitment and expertise required to effectively manage, or even to simply encourage, activity 'beyond the basics' should not be underestimated. There was clear evidence from the regions that those with marketing backgrounds were able to look at the implementation of the requirements in a more strategic way.

Monitoring roles

Each delivery organisation has different responsibilities in monitoring how requirements are complied with. The stakeholder interviews highlighted a key difference between CFOs in terms of whether they saw their role in monitoring as auditor or facilitator. The former tended to consider reviews as a means to reinforce regulatory aspects of publicity and quality assurance. Whilst not technically incorrect, this may place limitations on how effectively the message about ESF investment is dispersed. On the other hand, those who view their role as facilitators see themselves more as conduits for information and support.

ESF information and publicity activity

A range of materials have been produced and activities undertaken which have been effective in raising awareness of ESF investment. Materials and activities both differ in terms of objective and target audience.

Printed materials

Printed materials at Managing Authority and CFO level include booklets, good practice guides and newsletters. The key messages and branding are clearly evident in printed materials at these levels. At provider level, printed material generally takes the form of leaflets or flyers. These are tailored to provide potential participants and referral agencies with information about the project. Although effective at informing target audiences about projects there are some issues with the effectiveness of such printed material in raising awareness of ESF investment in a meaningful way. The prominence of the ESF logo is one particular issue –

often it is one of many, rendering it indistinguishable. Also, the key messages about ESF investment were often absent at provider level.

Case studies

Case studies are given high prominence throughout the programme due to their suitability in targeting a range of audiences, adaptability to use across most media and the role they play in bringing the ESF story to life. However, some stakeholders expressed concerns over the process of gaining consent and the potential 'overload' of case studies in the media.

Web-based materials

The web is increasingly used as a means of communicating with a variety of audiences both formally through websites and informally through social networking sites. It was recognised that further guidance on the use of new technologies was needed.

Events

A wide range of events have taken place across the programme, with the driving force being the publicity priorities of 2008 and 2009. The key strengths of major events are the additional levels of publicity activity generated and the number of audiences which can be targeted simultaneously. Other specific marketing activities are also undertaken across all delivery organisations. Word of mouth remains a key activity of providers when marketing projects.

Media engagement

Engagement with the media is principally through press releases. The assessment of materials showed that there was a wide range of publications in which ESF news appears. Radio and television are less frequently used but some providers have found innovative ways of securing airtime (e.g. a business quiz on a local radio station).

Integration

The integration of the cross-cutting themes of gender equality and equal opportunities and sustainable development into publicity and information measures has been difficult to implement at provider level. Partly, this was due to inconsistencies in understanding at CFO level about what the themes mean in practice, although good practice guides have been produced by ESFD.

Overall progress and ways forward

Overall, progress has been good in terms of meeting the publicity and information objectives. Progress specifically against the indicators in the Communication Plan (which are assessed annually by ESFD) is variable. The indicators which have been met are:

- providing a range of high quality products;
- publicising activities to the general public;
- communicating with the media;
- complying with EU regulatory requirements.

Indicators which were only partly met are:

- ensuring project providers make their participants aware of ESF throughout the project;
- using a consistent set of messages on ESF investment in employment and skills in all publicity and information measures;
- integrating the cross-cutting themes into publicity and information measures.

Suggested improvements

The evaluation process suggested areas where improvements could be made to strengthen the second half of the programme and facilitate progress against the set of indicators in the Communication Plan:

- there is a need to refine indicators of progress to facilitate ongoing evaluation of progress made. For example, rather than use the number of overall hits on the ESF website as an indicator of the activities being publicised to the general public, more qualitative indicators could be used. The Publicity Network Group is ideally placed to decide on relevant qualitative indicators;
- part of developing the qualitative assessment of measures could be through annual reviews of Communication Plans to pick up the added value of activities;
- evaluations should be undertaken after each key event or publicity priority measure undertaken by the Managing Authority, and the results disseminated through the Publicity Network;
- a continuous dialogue needs to be established between CFOs and all providers (both prime and sub-contractors) to pass back information and good practice from the overall programme. This requires monitoring for effectiveness;
- guidance on the use of new media needs to be established by the Managing Authority in collaboration with those already using it;
- clarification around the transfer of materials across regions from TA-funded projects needs to be made;
- awareness of cross-cutting themes needs to be further developed, particularly at provider level, based on a consistent understanding of what they mean across all levels of the programme.

Conclusion

All of the suggestions for improvement and consolidation in the second half of the programme build on and reinforce the brand of ESF investment. The key messages around ESF investment making a real difference run through many materials and activities, but there are audiences where achievements are not yet being habitually linked to ESF investment. A strong brand, with consistent messages and approach across all levels, would facilitate greater awareness.

1 Introduction

1.1 Policy context

The European Commission (EC) and Managing Authorities are committed to improving the transparency of Structural Fund programmes at European and Member State levels in 2007-2013. This is to be achieved through co-operation on specific publicity measures and evaluating the impact of publicity activity and awareness of European Union (EU) support amongst participants on European Social Fund (ESF)-supported projects and the general public. As the Managing Authority in England and Gibraltar of the ESF Structural Fund, the European Social Fund Division (ESFD) of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for publicity and information. In accordance with Council Regulation 1083/2006, ESFD prepared the Communication Plan for the England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013, which sets out the information and publicity measures that will be taken to promote the transparency of the programme. The Communication Plan establishes how the Managing Authority and other bodies responsible for administering and delivering the ESF programme, will provide information on the Operational Programme and publicise its outcomes and achievements. The plan covers information and publicity measures related to ESF and matched provision.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the evaluation

This qualitative evaluation aims to assess progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the Communication Plan, including the visibility and awareness of the Operational Programme and the role played by the Community, during the first half of the Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- assess whether a consistent set of messages on ESF investment in employment and skills is used in publicity and information measures;
- examine progress against the indicators used to measure the achievement of the objectives of the Communication Plan;

- identify good practice to aid the development of future information and publicity activities;
- identify changes or improvements for the development of information and publicity measures for the second half of the programme.

The indicators set out in the Communication Plan, and against which evaluation of the second objective above was carried out, are detailed in Table 1.1.

Evidence from the study will inform the production of information and publicity materials, as well as events and activities, for the remainder of the programme.

1.3 Methodology

The research consisted of three elements: assessment of a sample of printed/published materials; collation of monitoring data from required reporting; and stakeholder interviews in four study areas.

1.3.1 Sampling materials

The sample of materials assessed was sourced from all parties involved in the delivery of the programme:

- the Central Managing Authority (ESFD);
- Regional Managing Authorities (Government Offices (GO) and in London the London Development Agency (LDA));
- the 28 Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) consisting of regional Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), DWP, LDA, some Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and local authorities;¹
- organisations directly contracted to the Managing Authority in Cornwall and Merseyside;
- over 25 individual providers delivering projects.

Contact was initially made with each regional Managing Authority who provided contact details for CFOs in their region. In turn, CFOs gave details of providers. Individual CFO Communication Plans and regional Communication Plans where available, were also collected. Samples were provided of: aide memoirs; booklets; brochures; e-zines/bulletins; flyers; good practice guides; leaflets; marketing products; newsletters; posters; press releases and web-based activities. In addition to collecting materials, information was acquired about the various activities and events which central and regional Managing Authorities, CFOs and providers had undertaken.

Desk analysis was undertaken on all information and publicity materials sampled, with the main criteria for assessment being:

¹ The National Offender Management Service started to operate as a CFO in 2009 and was not included in this evaluation.

- the degree to which the materials presented coherent and consistent messages about ESF investment in employment and skills
- the degree to which the materials incorporated the relevant key messages and key facts; and
- their contribution to the visibility of the Operational Programme and the awareness among target audiences of the role that the EC has played.

Table 1.1 The objectives of the Communication Plan and the indicators used to measure achievement against these (Source: ESF Communication Plan 2007-2013, p13-14)

Objective	Indicator	Frequency
To provide a range of high quality products to publicise the programme by the end of 2007, and to develop the range during the life of the programme.	1. Number and type of products and publications produced.	Annual Implementation Report (AIR)
	2. Number of 'ESF at work' e-zine subscribers and website viewers.	AIR
	3. Number of plaques distributed by the Managing Authority.	AIR
To ensure project providers make their participants aware of ESF throughout their projects.	4. Proportion of participants aware of ESF support.	Follow-up surveys of participants, 2010 and 2013
To ensure the Managing Authority, partners, beneficiaries and project providers publicise activities to the general public.	5. Number of www.esf.gov.uk website hits.	AIR
	6. Awareness of ESF among the general public.	As and when surveys (e.g. Eurobarometer) undertaken
To use a consistent set of messages on ESF investment in employment and skills in all publicity and information measures.	7. Relevant key messages and key facts used in publications.	Assessment by evaluator by 2010
To optimise opportunities to communicate the activities and achievements of the programme in the media at national, regional and local levels.	8. Number of press notices issued (by the Managing Authority).	AIR
	9. Number of articles referring to ESF in national and regional media.	AIR
To comply with EU regulatory requirements on publicity at all stages and all levels of the programme.	10. Verification activity finds compliance with EU regulatory requirements.	AIR
To integrate the cross-cutting themes (gender equality and equal opportunities, and sustainable development) into publicity and information measures.	11. Number of publications produced about, or containing information on, the cross-cutting themes.	AIR

1.3.2 Monitoring data

Alongside the desk assessment exercise, a further source of information was formal monitoring data contained in the AIRs and papers to the Monitoring Committee. This data is part of the required reporting within the programme by both central and regional Managing Authorities and CFOs. In particular, these sources provided data for indicators against the seven objectives of the Communication Plan, where applicable, and qualitative updates on activity across the regions. This data was further supplemented by information from the Eurobarometer survey.

1.3.3 Stakeholder interviews

Within the context set by the desk assessment of materials and the collated monitoring information, a total of 18 face-to-face interviews with stakeholders were undertaken in four study areas across England during October-November 2009. The study areas consisted of the Convergence region (Region A), two regions covered by the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective (Regions B and D) and one region also benefitting from transitional funding (Region C). The regions were chosen based on the materials sampled in the first stage of research, including individual CFO/regional Communication Plans and consideration of additional funding available.

The overall objective of the interviews was to explore stakeholder experiences regarding information and publicity activity and to further inform progress against the indicators. Interviewees included representatives from GO, the main CFOs and some providers (where there was a good case for doing so). A small number of interviews were also undertaken with technical assistance (TA)-funded publicity initiatives. A spread of interviews was undertaken across all delivery organisations across the case study regions to maximise information (Table 1.2). Contact was initially made during the sampling of publicity materials with each regional Managing Authority and then cascaded down to provider level.

Table 1.2 Number of interviewees, by delivery organisation

Delivery organisation	Number of interviewees
Managing Authority	3
CFO	5
Provider	8
Other	2

Semi-structured interview guides were developed for each set of interviews. The interviews with regional Managing Authorities and CFOs sought to explore perceptions of the effectiveness of ESF information and publicity measures and particularly whether there has been a consistent set of messages around ESF investment in employment and skills. The interviews also focused on identifying good practice to inform the development of information and publicity in the second half of the programme.

Provider interviews assessed the views and perceptions of providers on the role of ESF information and publicity measures and how their understanding of measures was developed. Again, good practice and innovative approaches to information and publicity were sought.

Within the interviews, researchers asked for evidence to substantiate the perceptions expressed and people's reasons for their views. Opinions expressed were verified and checked in other interviews by both exploring alternative perceptions and seeking any contradictory evidence before arriving at judgements and conclusions for the evaluation.

1.4 Report structure

The remaining chapters of the report are structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** provides an overview of the information and publicity measures in the Communication Plan for the England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013. This chapter also explores perceptions of why the requirements were strengthened and how they have been implemented and monitored;
- **Chapter 3** looks at information and publicity activity across the regions, describes practical issues and draws out good practice;
- **Chapter 4** pulls together these findings to both examine progress overall against the indicators in the communications plan and identify changes or improvements for the development of information and publicity measures for the second half of the programme;
- **Chapter 5** presents a concluding overview of the main issues arising from the evaluation.

2 Publicity and information requirements, implementation and monitoring

2.1 The Communication Plan

According to Council Regulation 1083/2006 and the European Commission (EC)'s Implementing Regulation the programme's Managing Authority, European Social Fund Division (ESFD) of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), drew up a Communication Plan for the Operational Programme. The Communication Plan is a strategic seven-year document with the aim of providing strategic direction for the regions. The plan was approved by the EC in July 2008.

The Communication Plan includes details of:

- the publicity aims and target groups;
- the strategy and content of the information and publicity measures to be taken aimed at potential applicants and the public;
- the indicative budget for the implementation of the plan;
- bodies responsible for the implementation of information and publicity measures and their respective roles;
- how the information and publicity measures will be evaluated in terms of visibility and awareness of Operational Programmes and the role played by the Community.

2.1.1 Key messages to be promoted

A key aim of the plan is to ensure that all publicity and information measures use a consistent set of messages about European Social Fund (ESF) investment in employment and skills. The key message to be included within materials is stated in the Communication Plan to be that ESF in England and Gibraltar is investing in jobs and skills – especially for people at a disadvantage in the labour market.

Supporting messages are listed as communicating that ESF is:

- transforming the lives of people across the country through better skills and better job prospects;
- adding value to European Union (EU) and national strategies to tackle worklessness and low skills and to promote social inclusion – by funding additional and enhanced employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged people;
- contributing to policies to increase employment by helping more unemployed and economically inactive people to develop their skills and enter sustainable jobs, particularly those at a disadvantage in the labour market;
- contributing to policies to develop a skilled and adaptable workforce, especially by increasing the numbers of participants gaining basic skills, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 and level 3 qualifications, and by enhancing support for disadvantaged learners;
- addressing distinctive regional, sub-regional and local labour market needs, including tackling concentrations of worklessness and sectoral skills gaps;
- mainstreaming equal opportunities and sustainable development at all stages in the delivery of the programme.

Key facts supporting these messages are expected to include that:

- ESF is investing £2 billion which is matched to £2 billion of national funding;²
- the programme will improve the skills and job prospects of 1.8 million people across England and Gibraltar in 2007-13;
- over seven years, Priorities 1 and 4 (extending employment opportunities, and tackling barriers to employment) will help:
 - 200,000 people into jobs;
 - 140,000 of the most disadvantaged people make positive progress towards a job;
 - 80,000 disadvantaged young people into learning or a job;
- Priority 1 will support people who face the biggest barriers to work:
 - at least a quarter of participants will be from ethnic minorities;
 - 22 per cent will be disabled;

² The current sterling value of the programme is £2.5 billion following changes to the planning rate in the light of movements in the euro/sterling exchange rate.

- 12 per cent will be lone parents;
- 18 per cent will be older workers;
- 20 per cent will be young people not in education, employment or training;
- over seven years, Priorities 2 and 5 (developing a skilled and adaptable workforce, and improving the skills of the local workforce) will help:
 - 160,000 employees gain basic skills;
 - 175,000 employees gain qualifications;
- Priority 2 and 5 skills training will target people who are currently least likely to receive training – such as those without NVQ level 2 or 3 qualifications, and part-time women workers.

The plan recognises that messages will vary slightly depending on the target audience.

2.1.2 Target audiences

The Communication Plan envisages the greatest degree of variation in materials is likely to develop specific messages for specific audiences, particularly when publicising tendering opportunities to potential applicants. The plan also recognises that different media will be used to communicate to each audience and that both existing and new media will be used as appropriate. Each delivery organisation has responsibility for engaging with different audiences, so the publicity and information activity varies across them. At the same time it is acknowledged that the general public will become aware of ESF investment through a variety of media which may not be directly targeted at them.

Box 2.1 Potential target audiences

- Individual participants.
- CFOs and other beneficiaries.
- Providers.
- Media and opinion formers at national, regional and local level.
- Policy makers in DWP, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Children, Schools and Families and other relevant Government departments.
- Regional stakeholders including Regional Skills Partnerships and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs).
- Local authorities.
- Sectoral organisations including Sector Skills Councils.
- Social partners (i.e. trades unions and employer organisations).

Continued

- Third sector networks and organisations.
- EC and other EU institutions.
- Providers and professionals involved in employment, education, skills and inclusion.
- Equal opportunities and environmental organisations.
- Members of the public with an interest in ESF, EU funding or employment and training.

2.1.3 Responsibilities within the Communication Plan

Each delivery organisation has different roles and responsibilities with regard to raising awareness of the role, and promoting the benefits of ESF in employment and skills programmes in England in addition to ensuring compliance with EU regulatory requirements on publicity. These are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Roles and responsibilities within the Communication Plan

Delivery organisation	Responsibilities
Central Managing Authority (ESFD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement national Communication Plan: publish website, e-zine, annual report • Provide guidance on requirements, logo and plaques • Publish list of beneficiaries and projects • Report to Monitoring Committee and evaluate publicity • Organise launch and major information activity
Regional Managing Authority (Government Offices (GOs)/London Development Agency (LDA))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support central team • Identify regional and local publicity opportunities • Include publicity in regional technical assistance strategies • Ensure CFOs meet requirements • Check compliance during quarterly CFO monitoring • Inform regional committee of publicity measures
CFOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement Communication Plans • Publicise funding opportunities • Include publicity requirements in provider contracts • Ensure and monitor provider compliance • Display CFO plaque and issue provider plaques/posters • Use logo and acknowledge ESF support on all relevant documents • Produce press releases, good news stories, case studies • Participate in national and regional activities • Help arrange ministerial and VIP visits

Continued

Table 2.1 Continued

Delivery organisation	Responsibilities
Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform participants of ESF support • Use logo and acknowledge ESF support on all documents • Inform public through press releases, websites, events, etc. • Work with CFO on events, publications, etc. • Display plaques and issue plaques to sub-contractors

ESFD is responsible for delivering the national elements of the Communication Plan and providing support and information around the requirements. The regional Managing Authorities are a key link between CFOs and ESFD in terms of connecting national level activity to opportunities at a regional and local level. In turn, CFOs have responsibility for regional and local level activity, both from the aspect of working with the regional Managing Authority and collaboration with regional and local delivery partners, including providers. CFOs were also required to produce individual Communication Plans at the beginning of the programme and in some regions regional plans were produced (see Section 2.3.2). Informing the general public is a common responsibility.

The Communication Plan also forms the basis for technical assistance (TA) publicity measures at both a national and regional level, with responsibility for managing this fund resting with ESFD and GOs/LDA respectively.

2.2 Perception and understanding of requirements

The stakeholder interviews provided an indication of perception and understanding of the requirements. The key understanding of the need for structured publicity and information requirements is to support the development of a more consistent approach across England, thus ensuring that not just the ESF-funded projects, per se, are publicised, but actually the ESF investment itself. It was felt that perhaps the profile of ESF investment in the previous programme had not been as high as it could have been. The requirements were a way to emphasise the importance of publicity and information activity.

However, this understanding is on two levels: The first, most basic understanding, is in terms of the contractual requirements regarding the use of the ESF logo and branding (EU flags, supporting statements and images), whilst the second understanding is based on wider benefits and opportunities which the requirements encourage. The former, based on the measure requiring the use of logos and branding, was the most common understanding amongst smaller providers in particular, but also some staff involved in monitoring contracts. It was also a common level of understanding on projects which were part of organisations through which contracts and marketing were dealt with by central, separate teams within the organisation. Amongst this group there was little awareness of the key messages supporting the measures so that whilst the use of logo and

branding was seen as potentially increasing the visibility of ESF among participants, stakeholders and the public, the only additional benefit perceived was that project participants might see the logo as a 'quality mark' and be reassured about the funding available to them.

In contrast, the understanding of regional Managing Authorities and the majority of CFOs, but also some providers, was based on a greater awareness of the key messages around investment as well as the role logos and branding had to play:

'...it's not just about putting the logo on everything, I mean that's part of it, but that's kind of a bit of lip service to it isn't it...the main requirement is to make sure that people are aware when we're dealing with them, that the reason they're getting this service is because we've got European money.'

(Provider, Region C)

'The fact that it's there to help the hardest to help, to help those most disadvantaged, to create a fairer society, to give people opportunities that previously didn't exist, to give everyone a chance to move up in life.'

(CFO, Region B)

In this group there was also a greater awareness of a second level at which the requirements were needed – to engage the general public over ESF investment – and that it should be given equal prominence to informing participants of the investment:

'The [participants] have got to know that their programme's funded by ESF but equally the general public need to know that this money is being spent wisely to help people.'

(Provider, Region C)

It was felt that the general public was a particularly important target audience for ESF because unlike in physical regeneration initiatives, it was hard to see the investment without being guided to it:

'...because it isn't a big shiny glass and brick, you know, creation in the street that we can point out and say "look we've funded that", it's about someone's individual journey...'

(Provider, Region C)

Overall, in this group, the requirements were seen as strengthening the publicity and information measures in the programme. In particular, they ensured that it was not just the larger organisations or those with a marketing department that undertook publicity and information activity, but that smaller organisations were also given support to carry out their activity and to raise their awareness of how important it could be:

'This way it ensures that every provider sees it as a remit and something they've got to engage with.'

(CFO, Region D)

The requirements are viewed as helpful by those with a more in-depth understanding, although it was also recognised that providers (prime as well as sub-contractors) may not recognise their value and view them more as just a contractual requirement:

'...[the requirements are] valuable because sometimes there's a culture where people think marketing is the least important thing to consider, but actually it's probably one of the most important things because without communication no one actually knows what you're doing and...the services or product that's available to them...'

(Managing Authority, Region B)

The need to build on good practice regarding publicity at national, regional and local levels from the 2000-06 ESF programme was not generally at the forefront of people's thinking. Those who had been undertaking strong publicity and information measures felt that this would have been built on anyway. The requirements were particularly useful for those who did not undertake publicity and information activities beyond the basic level of advertising their project as a matter of course.

2.3 Implementation

Implementing the publicity and information requirements is the responsibility of all delivery organisations, albeit the ultimate responsibility rests with ESFD. The national Communication Plan is therefore critical to maintaining a consistent and coherent approach across the regions. A further means established to aid strategic direction is the formation of a Publicity Strategy Group at national level, whilst at a regional level individual CFO Communication Plans indicate how CFOs will ensure that the requirements are implemented at a regional and local level. New working relationships between CFOs, or a strengthening of those initially formed in the previous programme using TA, have also facilitated implementation. Similarly, there was evidence that specific job roles have been created to ensure requirements are met.

2.3.1 ESFD/National level implementation

The Publicity Strategy Group was established to assist ESFD with the strategic management and delivery of the Communication Plan. Members of the group are drawn from across England from both CFOs and intermediate bodies. It is a forum for discussing forward strategies (including establishing annual publicity priorities), the coordination of activities, including the Publicity Network and links to European and other national level events such as Adult Learners' Week (ALW), and also issues arising around the implementation of publicity and information initiatives. It draws on good practice from the previous programme, ensuring that such elements are carried into the current programme.

2.3.2 CFO Communication Plans

To ensure measures were embedded into programme delivery arrangements each CFO was required to produce a Communication Plan with detailed guidance on this provided by ESFD. These plans were approved by ESFD in September 2008. The plans effectively set out the information and publicity strategy which the CFO planned to undertake within the key measures as detailed in the national Communication Plan. The writing of the plans in itself was a key process by which CFOs gained awareness of regulatory and contractual requirements and the opportunities with regard to developing added value around publicity and information activities.

One CFO representative, experienced in marketing, felt that the detailed guidance provided to ensure consistency across the regions restricted the development of marketing strategies:

'ESF is very prescriptive and I think when it comes to something like marketing and comms [sic] you need to have a bit more freedom...but the plans tend not to let you stray off the path that they have set out, which is difficult.'

(CFO, Region B)

Indeed, a number of plans contained standard paragraphs which were similar to the national plan, but the structure and content of CFO Communication Plans did vary both between individual CFOs and regions. For example, in one plan, within the measure 'informing the public and participants about the assistance provided by EU/ESF funds', rather than simply noting the requirement for providers to send good news stories to the CFO, a requirement was established for prime providers to send good news stories on a specified basis (e.g. monthly or quarterly). A further example was identifying magazines and journals locally and regionally where ESF news could be reported, and in one case analysing the costs and distribution associated with particular titles, rather than simply noting 'submission of news stories'. Other key differences were: including details of how the Communication Plan was developed; listing aims and objectives of the Communication Plan and listing those with lead responsibility for measures and timings of events.

Some CFOs used the process of developing a Communication Plan to consider what could be provided above and beyond the statutory requirements, including considering different audiences, and these plans, therefore, contained more detail. The most accessible and informative plan in this regard contained two sections – the first addressing the specific requirements as outlined by ESFD, focusing on compliance with ESF publicity and information requirements, the second highlighting approaches, tactics planned to embed and integrate ESF alongside mainstream-funded delivery and focusing attention on what ESF was delivering. Other plans which provided more detailed direction included evidence of mapping exercises which had been undertaken to inform the plan of gaps in publicity and information for particular target audiences. A number of plans also considered the added value of activities, for example, how a particular activity could generate case studies to meet another requirement.

All plans contained reference to joint-working across the measures at both national and regional levels. A small number of regions, including those with TA funding used for public relations (PR) agencies, had produced regional Communication Plans or regional frameworks to try and encourage joint-working in promoting the programme through all the CFOs *'so that we recognise the [region's] ESF programme, not individual CFO ESF programmes'* (Managing Authority, Region B), effectively paving the way to creating a regional brand around ESF investment³.

The main practical use of the plans has been as a review mechanism to ensure that publicity and information measures are met. Awareness of Communication Plans in providers was minimal – only one provider was aware of the existence of a plan or had heard the term. This emphasises the key target audience of the Communication Plan – to be used as a strategic tool to help Managing Authorities (at national and regional level) and CFOs meet publicity and information requirements and ensure that providers do too.

2.3.3 Joint (regional) working

As indicated above, some regions have established close working links between individual CFOs leading to the production of regional plans. In Region D this was a direct result of close working relationships in the previous programme and wishing to adopt a strong delivery model to ensure consistency and maximise resources, a 'PR and Communications Board' was formed with representatives from each CFO and the intermediate body *'to streamline all the communication and just make it a lot more understandable for both providers and beneficiaries...'* (CFO, Region D). In addition, the region accessed TA to fund a PR agency which has the remit of coordinating activity across the region according to the strategic direction of the Board. However, even in regions without regional plans or where TA has not been used to fund joint-working, it was recognised that forming partnerships with other CFOs could maximise exposure across a variety of audiences and increase knowledge of provision.

However, to meet its full potential joint-working needs to be approached in the same way by each partner. A common sentiment in the stakeholder interviews was that as a CFO, Jobcentre Plus had not been able to participate in joint-working in as timely and full a manner as other CFOs due to the working structures of the organisation:

'...they are not autonomous to make PR and communication decisions themselves, they have to refer everything back up and clear everything. So the people that have attended our meetings representing Jobcentre Plus are not in the same position as the other people around the table who can speak on behalf of their organisations and agree and clear things. So that has created an extra level of complexity... the PR operation isn't as integrated as it might be because of the DWP element...'

(CFO, Region D)

³ Regional documents, which varied in level of detail, were produced in the North West; East Midlands; West Midlands and London.

This means that joint regional level publicity and information activities may not be as integrated as they could potentially be. This may cause further issues as new media tools are employed through the programme (see Section.3.1.2).

2.3.4 Staffing and resources

Evidence from the regions indicates that some delivery organisations have established specific roles for the delivery of the requirements, acknowledging the amount of time and coordination needed to ensure consistency is maintained across a wide range of materials and activities at regional and local level.

'...there was a need, I think, for someone to do perhaps a role that wasn't being done in the previous programme, although there were people involved, there wasn't someone specific. I'm constantly coordinating with the CFOs, with the convergence office and with ESFD publicity team.'

(Managing Authority, Region A)

Indeed, the time, commitment and expertise required to effectively manage, or even to simply encourage, activity 'beyond the basics' should not be underestimated. For several interviewees, ESF publicity and information was only one part of their role. One smaller CFO stressed that, with a small team, it was quite difficult to manage the publicity requirements, especially in terms of generating added value:

'...sometimes reading the guidance you get the impression that ideally they'd like a dedicated communications person for the programme to actually do everything that's on the kind of wish list of publicity.'

(CFO, Region B)

There was clear evidence from the regions that those with marketing backgrounds were able to look at the implementation of the requirements in a more strategic way. A minority of regions have used TA funding to pull together activity across the region, by employing specialist PR firms, acknowledging that a regional focus would be very difficult to maintain alongside the other responsibilities employees have.

There are similar issues with staffing at project level, particularly for small providers. This is where the development of activities and material to support providers to meet requirements is particularly important (see below). Some stakeholders interviewed highlighted the fact that larger organisations often have their own marketing departments which can provide support to implement the requirements, but that this can also lead to issues in terms of awareness of support within ESF and the design of marketing materials at actual project level (see Section 3.1.1). An example of good practice, designed to maximise expertise, but spread the responsibility for publicity, stemmed from Region C. A sub-contractor for a range of ESF-funded pathways back to work, the organisation had established a marketing group, consisting of the staff leading on the various projects, which met monthly to discuss marketing methods and additional events. This was deemed necessary to offer a coordinated approach and maintain momentum with publicity but most importantly, to spread the workload so that it was manageable.

2.4 Monitoring arrangements

The Communication Plan is the key monitoring document as it incorporates the regulations. The Managing Authority has overall responsibility to monitor how the plan is implemented and ongoing compliance with the requirements. Monitoring information is detailed in the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) which ESFD produces. In addition to providing an overview of the implementation of the Operational Programme, AIRs contain a section detailing information and publicity measures and how the indicators are being met. Further reports to the Programme Monitoring Committee provide a qualitative overview of activity on a regional basis, with CFOs providing an annual overview on how the implementation of their Communication Plan was monitored during the previous year, with examples of activities undertaken by providers.

Regional Managing Authorities undertake checks on logos and the prominence of ESF messages in materials and maintain a 'watchful eye' through Article 13 visits. This information is then fed back to the Regional Committees which have overall responsibility for monitoring the programme at the regional level.

CFOs are responsible for regularly monitoring providers' adherence to publicity requirements. In addition to monitoring visits, materials are passed to CFOs for verification, principally around the use of the logo and key messages. Some CFOs have also built terms into providers' contracts stipulating the number of case studies to be generated per year. However, the stakeholder interviews highlighted a key difference between CFOs in terms of whether they saw their role in monitoring as auditor or facilitator. The former tended to consider reviews as a means to reinforce regulatory aspects of publicity and quality assurance. Whilst not technically incorrect, this may place limitations on how effectively the message about ESF investment is dispersed. On the other hand, those who view their role as facilitators see themselves more as conduits for information and support. There is, however, a growing awareness of the limitations of a purely auditing role and that a more qualitative assessment has the potential to improve the quality and effectiveness of materials/activity. In areas which use PR agencies, these act as conduits between providers and CFOs, checking materials for prominence of key messages and logos before final checks are undertaken by the CFOs themselves.

Prime providers are responsible for monitoring the activity of their sub-contractors. In practice this means that information about activity at this level is not readily available to CFOs in terms of qualifying information. Indeed, monitoring activity at this level is more focused on outputs with minimal emphasis on publicity focusing on the use of the ESF logo. However, there were examples in the regions of additional monitoring taking place. One prime provider ensured that there were six-weekly meetings with all sub-contractors as a group where publicity and information was one element discussed. Another prime provider was checking that sub-contracting staff knew who was funding their post (as this can change over a period of time) so that they knew who to publicise.

2.5 Summary and key points

- The Communication Plan provides a strategic framework for delivery of publicity and information measures in the 2007-13 ESF programme including key messages, target audiences and responsibilities.
- Specific messages are expected to be developed for different audiences, leading to a variation of materials particularly at CFO level.
- The key perception amongst interviewees of the aim of the structured requirements was to ensure a consistent approach whilst raising the profile of ESF investment.
- However, understanding and awareness of key messages varied significantly.
- Several measures were established to aid the implementation of the requirements that at regional level centred around individual CFO and a small number of regional Communication Plans.
- The role CFOs play in monitoring implementation amongst providers ranged from auditor to facilitator.

3 European Social Fund information and publicity activity

Both the desk-analysis of materials and stakeholder interviews informed the assessment of publicity and information activity and materials. The assessment was structured by the indicators set out in the Communication Plan as well as the specific objectives of the evaluation. The key aims of this activity were to assess:

- the number and types of products/publications available, their quality and the range of media used;
- the target audiences of the products and activities;
- the opportunities taken to engage with the media and the form this engagement took;
- how cross-cutting themes were integrated into publicity and information measures.

And within this, evaluating:

- the consistency of the European Social Fund (ESF) message;
- how successful the targeting of material/activities has been.

3.1 Products, publications and activities

A large range of products and publications had been produced and activities undertaken by all delivery organisations within the programme, as illustrated in Box 3.1. Moreover, each type of material and activity was further differentiated by the target audience and key objective identified. Objectives included:

- providing guidance and support to other delivery organisations to help them meet requirements;
- providing operational information;

- raising awareness of the programme (both in general terms and more specifically in terms of its achievements or as a direct marketing strategy).

The implementation of a number of measures was also directly related to the publicity priorities established by the Publicity Strategy Group on an annual basis.

In 2008 the three main priorities for promoting ESF were:

- publicising the launch of new ESF projects investing in jobs and skills;
- ensuring that Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) and projects understood and implemented the regulatory requirements on publicising ESF; and
- promoting achievements from the 2000-06 ESF programme.

Box 3.1 Examples of publicity and information products, publications and activities

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Information pillars | • Billboards | • Magnetic bookmarks |
| • Community events | • Flickr | • Funders' Fairs |
| • Induction events | • Message boards in GP surgeries | • Twitter |
| • Fridge magnets | • Ministerial visits | • Trolley key rings |
| • Outreach work | • Strip posters on buses | • Provider workshops |
| • Highlighters | • 'PR toolkits' | • Aide memoirs |
| • Pens | • Press releases | • Brochures |
| • Leaflets | • Family fun days | • Conferences |
| • Pads of paper | • Networking groups | • Facebook |
| • Posters | • E-zines/bulletins | • Good practice guides |
| • Flyers | • Television | • Launch events |
| • Booklets | • Radio | • Pop up banners |
| • Bags | • Newsletters | • SlideShare |
| • DVDs | • Plaques | • 'Speed dating' for providers |

The priorities for 2009 were:

- the delivery of the publicity campaign (as annual information activity) in early July;
- the ongoing promotion of ESF success stories;
- supporting providers to meet their ESF publicity requirements.

Overall, both products and activities were more formal in nature at Managing Authority level (both central and regional) and more concerned with regulatory requirements and publicising the whole programme. At provider level the key focus of activity was on recruitment and celebrating success at the end of projects. CFOs tended to cover the greater number of audiences highlighting that they acted as intermediaries between local, regional and national levels of the programme.

3.1.1 Printed materials

Printed material produced by the European Social Fund Division (ESFD) is targeted at a wide audience including the European Commission (EC) and other European Union (EU) institutions, stakeholders and partners at national level, the general public and other ESF delivery partners. Ensuring effective distribution to such a wide audience and supporting the cross-cutting theme of sustainability, the majority of printed materials are available from the ESF website, but materials are also distributed widely through regional Managing Authorities and CFOs. Some of the material is naturally related to the operational delivery of the programme and provides both guidance and support to other delivery organisations such as good practice guides on helping disadvantaged groups back into the labour market, including older workers, women, disabled people and ethnic minorities. Additional booklets report on the progress of the current programme and draw on case studies from across the regions, as does the bi-monthly 'ESF at work' e-zine (see Section 3.1.2). The key messages and branding are clearly evident in printed materials at this level.

Printed materials produced by Regional Managing Authorities and CFOs also show consistent messages about ESF and adopt the branding elements. Booklets and newsletters are key forms of printed material at this level. Booklets are produced detailing the achievements of the programme, with information about ESF investment prominently displayed. Colourful and informative, they are used for a variety of audiences from stakeholders and partners to the general public. Unless related directly to a celebration event such materials tend not to be targeted at participants. Newsletters are an important form of communication both internally (within, for example, the CFO) and regionally (targeted at other delivery organisations, for example, providers within a CFO or regional stakeholders) providing information on how the programme is performing and on events and training available. The majority of newsletters are also available on the web, in line with advice to ensure sustainability, and e-mail shots further ensure effective distribution. Leaflets are less common at this level as CFOs need to communicate with a wider range of audiences and each requires different information.

At provider level, printed material takes the form of leaflets or flyers specifically about projects. These are tailored principally to provide potential participants and referral agencies with information about what the project does, whether the reader is likely to be eligible, and where to find out more information. The distribution of materials is widespread with leaflets and flyers often placed in other agencies and locations around the target community to ensure that the number of potential participants engaged with is maximised. Examples of such targeting was found around lone parents where a CFO reported that one of their providers liaised with a local primary school and placed leaflets in all of the pupils' school bags whilst another placed leaflets and posters in the local Children's Centre.

Box 3.2 Examples of innovative leaflets/flyers

- An English Language Training project leaflet and flyers printed in different languages to be accessible by target audiences (Polish, Lithuanian and Slovakian). Replicated on the website. Very clear information about what the course is and contains the ESF logo.
- Shaped flyers, such as a suitcase and a catchy strap-line 'Time to Escape', encouraging people to pick it up and turn it over to find out what it is about. ESF logo on the back.
- A leaflet with pictures and basic words (two to three per picture) used to describe how the project could help participants. Aimed at people with poor reading skills. ESF logo included.

Some larger providers had produced booklets about their projects and achievements. These had a more diverse audience, because although they provided information (usually through case studies) for potential participants, they also gave more detailed information on the aims and objectives of the project and the organisation itself – useful for partners and other funders.

Although leaflets and flyers are clearly an effective way of informing target audiences about particular projects there are issues around the effectiveness of such printed material (at provider level) in raising awareness of ESF investment in a meaningful way. The prominence of the logo is one particular issue (although the overall assessment of printed material confirmed that inclusion of the logo is exemplary). In the majority of materials the logo was one of several (alongside the provider's own logo, the CFOs' and often logos for other sources of funding) rendering it indistinguishable. This is a particular issue in Region C which, as a phasing-in area, is also subject to more funding streams and is required to place a particularly high number of logos on materials. However, a good practice example from Region A is on flyers from one provider, which whilst receiving funding from a variety of organisations, placed the regional branding and ESF logo at the top of the flyer whilst the remainder were at the bottom, thus ensuring that the logo was clearly distinguishable (this practice was also transferred to contact letters to participants). Another example of good practice in ensuring visibility was putting just the ESF logo on each page of a leaflet whilst any others were included on the last page.

Unlike materials from CFOs and Managing Authorities, those from providers often lacked the key messages about ESF investment. Some materials did make a fleeting reference to ESF investment with a strap line such as:

- 'Business support delivered by Jobcentre Plus and funded by [CFO] and the European Social Fund';
- 'Working in partnership with the European Social Fund';

- 'Public funding has been released from European Social Fund and LSC';
- a handful specifically mentioned that the project was free to participants because the provider was 'working in partnership with the European Social Fund'.

However, these statements were perceived by some to be of minimal value in terms of engaging people with the ESF message, effectively constituting policy jargon. Some of the printed material produced by larger providers was clearly branded in terms of the organisation without allowance for any ESF branding apart from the logo (which appeared to be there for compliance reasons only). One such leaflet contained a paragraph on the history of the organisation and the range of projects it offered, illustrating that a paragraph on ESF would not have been unfeasible. Part of the issue is that at provider level the majority of material is very much focused on 'getting customers through the door' which to many providers means providing information about the project and the organisation delivering it, with the role of ESF becoming almost invisible at this stage.

Similar issues also arose with regard to case studies. The potential for case studies to raise the profile of ESF investment was frequently adversely affected by the way case studies were structured. The majority of case studies reviewed were structured in terms of the individual's barriers and achievements. These were presented first followed by information about ESF in the last paragraphs. Best practice examples were where ESF was mentioned in the first couple of paragraphs as people are more likely to read the beginning of an article than the end. This immediately focuses attention on the source of funding and it is then kept in mind whilst reading what the funding has achieved. See also Section 3.2.

A particular form of printed material, case studies are perceived to be very effective at encapsulating the messages about what ESF investment can achieve and providing a good narrative around investment:

'...its actually much more effective to stand up and read out a case study than it is to talk about how many millions of pounds you've invested and what it's bought really.'

(CFO, Region A)

For this reason the generation of case studies has been given high prominence throughout the programme. All CFO Communication Plans refer to the need for providers to supply good news stories, which can then be turned into case studies, with some even stipulating a certain number each year. CFOs are required to pass case studies to the Managing Authorities and to support this process, ESFD contracted out, to a freelance journalist, the production of a range of case studies across the programme. However, ultimately, the onus is on providers to produce case studies as they are the delivery organisations who experience, at first hand, the progress made by participants:

'Almost every person that's on an ESF-funded programme, there's some story to tell. The hard bit is getting to those people, and that's why the providers are critical in being that conduit, because they're talking to their beneficiaries on a day-to-day basis, and hearing their stories and then able to feed them up to ourselves to do something with them.'

(CFO, Region D)

The support given to providers to fulfil this role varied widely across the regions, varying from monitoring visits, checking compliance and directing providers, to guidance to provider workshops. This is linked to the CFO's perception of their relationship with providers – on a scale between auditor and facilitator. Best practice was in regions where the relationship was very much based on facilitating, be it due to extra resources available or a strong background in marketing and communications. In these regions comprehensive guidance and support was available to providers and included the production of toolkits and specific events (Box 3.3).

Box 3.3 Good practice example: Working with providers

Providers have little exposure to Communication Plans and so there is a need to both raise awareness of the publicity and information requirements (beyond the information contained in contracts) and support providers to meet them.

A good practice example of this was in Region D where technical assistance (TA) had been used to contract with a public relations (PR) agency who had developed, in liaison with the CFOs in the region, a format for a workshop and supporting document – PR toolkit – targeted at providers (both prime and sub-contractors).

The key objective of this approach was to ensure providers had a good understanding of publicity and information requirements including the benefits of publicity for their project and the region as a whole and were aware that there was ongoing support available, with the emphasis on the latter:

'...how providers can work with [the PR agency] and with the CFOs in a sort of supportive way, rather than it's "you must do this because you're obliged to", it's more of a soft sell around "we have this in place to help you with your PR".'

The workshops were held at regular intervals to meet the needs of providers as they started their projects at different times – they were also held throughout the region, making them accessible to all. Workshops were based around the contents of the toolkit which is very much focused on the importance of case studies in bringing materials to life and the role of providers in producing them. Further guidance was provided on dealing with the media and other forms of publicity. The workshop also prompted providers to think about cross-cutting themes as a way of generating another angle to stories produced.

Continued

'As long as it's not too onerous and too bureaucratic, I think you know providers will want to tell people about the work that they're doing, but they need it to be made easy for them.'

(Provider, Region D)

Feedback evidence indicated that providers appreciated the workshops as they helped them realise what happens on their projects as a matter of course was newsworthy. Smaller providers who did not have PR teams had found it particularly useful, as had providers who relied on marketing teams within their wider organisation which some had found to be an unsatisfactory arrangement: *'Unless they fully understand the ethos of the work and what you're trying to achieve, it doesn't have any meaning to it.'* (Provider). Workshops had an additional benefit in terms of providers networking with each other – reinforcing the idea of regional brand.

Providers received follow-up calls after the workshops to establish if they had any requirements and contact was further maintained through a publicity bulletin sent to all providers – incorporating case studies as well as reinforcing requirements. The aim was ongoing engagement after instigating the publicity agenda and it was recognised that even with the toolkit some providers may struggle to meet publicity requirements:

'...the idea is there is a continual dialogue with the provider, so it's not just put the plaque up and forget about it until the next tender round, they've got to keep talking to us.'

(CFO, Region D)

A key benefit of case studies is that they are suitable for a range of audiences and easily fit into a variety of different media. By telling the stories of ESF participants who have overcome barriers and have moved into, or towards, employment, potential participants have real examples of what people with similar barriers to themselves can achieve:

'They'd say "oh I can go there, I can be quite honest and they're not going to hold my background against me".'

(Provider, Region A)

For stakeholders and partners and the general public, case studies make the achievements of ESF investment clear and for the latter at least give some tangible evidence of what the funding is used for. To ensure effective engagement with a wide audience, case studies were being used in many examples of printed material (including newsletters, leaflets and booklets), submitted to newspapers (see Section 3.2) and were featured on the whole range of websites from the main ESF site to provider level sites where available. Clear evidence of how powerful the case study approach can be in attracting attention was given by one provider who

reiterated how the publication of a case study in a trade magazine led to a visit by a minister, resulting in even more publicity based around the one 'storyline'. There was also evidence from regions that case studies (and press releases) were being approached in a thematic way which could attract the attention of particular audiences (for example, case studies illustrating how individuals or businesses had been helped through redundancy to attract those at risk themselves).

There are however caveats to be made about the widespread reliance on case studies as a marketing tool. A common issue relates to consent. Some CFOs, particularly the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), were concerned about how to ensure consent was obtained from individuals whose case studies were used. However, others viewed it as a straightforward process and almost an integral part of the participant's experience of ESF investment:

'I always say to them, you have benefitted from this, as far as I'm concerned you have a duty to tell people how this has changed your life because it could help change somebody else's life.'

(CFO, Region B)

Ideally, consent should be built into induction and signed agreement obtained at this stage to allay any issues at a later date (good practice should then, of course, entail participants being informed about any case studies relating to them or their business). A standardised approach across the programme would allow for easier joint-working around case studies.

Secondly, concern was expressed about a potential 'overload' of case studies, with one interviewee noting that the media were becoming slightly cynical about 'human aspect' stories due to their prevalence:

'... some of the time what you perceive to be a great story about an individual might not necessarily be what a local paper perceives to be a good story or they think "oh we ran one last week very similar to that type of thing".'

(CFO, Region B)

The suggestion in this case was that perhaps it was time to consider new ways of presenting case studies, moving away from the written form. This relates to the discussion on web-based media in Section 3.1.2, with the key benefit of the evocative story of ESF in action told by the individual it has helped:

'...it's more accessible now than ever, you know the likes of YouTube, Facebook...But I think when you can put a face to a story and you can hear that person telling their own story, it's much more powerful...because it helps others in those situations relate.'

(CFO, Region B)

3.1.2 Web-based materials

The importance of the web as a tool for providing up-to-date information, key messages and engaging with a wide audience is highlighted in the Communication Plan. Indeed, the general migration of audiences towards on-line resources has led to the development of a number of measures which are 'new' to this programme.

The ESF website is the focal point of web-based activity for ESFD and this draws on publicity and information materials produced by regional Managing Authorities, CFOs and providers.⁴ The comprehensive content on the website (including funding opportunities, achievements of ESF projects, regional details, general programme information, ESF activity across Europe and information from the previous programme) signifies that it is targeted at the full potential audience range. Indeed, the number of hits on the website is one of the publicity indicators. However, evidence from the interviews highlights that although a source of the most up-to-date information (in addition to Action Notes), the ESF website is not used as a matter of course by all delivery organisations. At provider level, whilst some consulted it for guidance with contractual and operational issues, a significant proportion of providers were not aware of the existence of the site. Furthermore, no providers had thought of looking at it specifically for help with publicity.

The number of 'ESF at work' e-zine subscribers and website viewers is also a publicity indicator in the Communication Plan. The e-zine is a very good example of material produced at this level of delivery which is positioned to be accessible and informative to the whole range of potential audiences – material is presented in short articles with hyperlinks provided if the reader requires more detailed information. Again, however, awareness, amongst those providers interviewed, of the e-zine was very poor. In comparison, providers have a higher level of awareness of their CFO websites, primarily accessing these for operational information. One example of good practice in ensuring such information was easily accessible to providers was the provision of a 'Document Suite' by one CFO containing operational material such as: the PR toolkit; marketing and communications templates; cross-cutting themes guidance, and documents from the previous tendering round.

A further web-based initiative, 'ESF-Works', was launched in July 2009 as part of Publicity Week which was one of the publicity priorities of 2009.⁵ The original aim of this website was to promote policy and practice lessons from the programme, with the target audience being ESF and other professionals in life-long learning and employment. A TA project, it is managed by Tribal Education Ltd and provides information from each region. As a matter of course CFOs are linked into this activity through ESF-Works regional co-ordinators; however, some CFOs expressed concerns over the focus of activity. Principally, they felt that there was duplication of activity with what the more proactive regions were already doing in terms of

⁴ www.esf.gov.uk

⁵ www.esf-works.com

establishing good interactive networks, sharing good practice and showcasing good news stories. At the same time, there was a recognition that the duplication existed because some regions themselves were doing so well:

'...[for others] the Tribal contract is filling the vacuum, whereas the vacuum isn't here in [this region].'

(CFO, Region D)

These concerns were noted by ESFD and an ESF-Works refocus paper was issued at the end of 2009 (see Section 4.2) to place greater emphasis on thematic lessons.

Alongside standard websites more informal web communication is being developed across CFOs and providers. Such forms of communication are viewed as particularly important means of engaging with younger people, both in terms of participants and the general public. Although Facebook is not seen as appropriate at programme level, at project level there was evidence that it was being used to encourage interaction between participants. For example, the PR agency in Region D had recently launched a Facebook page targeting beneficiaries of projects across the region with the aim of initiating discussion and training in the region and seeing if any gaps in provision might be identified. This type of interaction was also viewed as a good way of promoting the success of ESF-funded projects.

A further example of the use of social networking was Twitter, a real-time information network. There were examples of two different audiences targeted through the use of Twitter from the stakeholder interviews – project participants and the general public. An example of the former was a provider using Twitter so that participants who were signed up could receive up-to-date information on current and upcoming training events, spaces available, the latest news and job alerts. An example of the latter was found in Region A, where tweets were posted linking current news and items of interest to details about ESF:

'...It's increasingly used for comment on the news and pointing and nudging people about things. By following trends on Twitter we can determine what people are interested in and post tweets accordingly.'

(Convergence Office, Region A)

Application sites on the web were also being employed to maximise publicity. Flickr, the online photo management and sharing application, was used at programme level in Region A as it was seen as particularly appealing to a younger demographic and a proactive way of storing photographs from the programme. Another example was Slideshare, the business media site where it is possible to share presentations and documents. This was used by one provider in Region A to market a project in the weeks preceding an information event. A web link was provided on the leaflet to the presentation which gave more detailed information about the project, making it useful to both those who were referring and potential participants. This is a very cost-effective means of providing more detailed information beyond an initial flyer or leaflet and has the added benefit

that presentations can be provided for different audiences. Unfortunately this project experienced issues with Jobcentre Plus staff not being able to access the site and so had to send the information in an alternative format to them.

Indeed, the issue of access to social networking sites and other applications is a pertinent concern. Government organisations and some other agencies have established policies that do not allow access to social networking sites and where there has been a regional strategy around, this has been because TA-funded organisations have taken the lead in establishing it (albeit at the behest of CFOs). The prohibition of access by some organisations also compounds the sentiment expressed in some interviews that the flow of information and publicity must be controlled by them to be effective and positive and that this is unattainable on social networking sites. However, a less concerned viewpoint expressed by some interviewees was that whichever form of medium was used, negative press or backlashes were inevitable at times and that this could be countered by effective management once the need arose.

3.1.3 Events

A wide range of events have taken place across the programme with the driving force being the publicity priorities of 2008 and 2009 (in particular, promoting achievements from the 2000-06 programme, publicising the launch of new ESF projects in 2008 and the ongoing promotion of ESF success stories in 2009). Likewise, the Communication Plan established that there would be at least one major information activity each year undertaken by ESFD to promote the achievements of the programme. The main launch event for the programme was in October 2007 in London with keynote speakers, presentations by individuals who had benefitted from ESF investment and panel discussions of priorities for the 2007-13 programme. This generated substantial additional publicity activity including a web cast, press notices and radio station interviews. The major event in 2009 was Publicity Week held in July, with the focus on the launch of ESF-Works. This further illustrated how one event (be it a standalone event or a 'running' event) could generate other activities and engage more people.

Indeed, it is both the level of additional activity and the way events can be targeted at a number of audiences simultaneously which are the strengths of this approach. For example, there was evidence that celebration events were particularly effective at engaging different audiences: providers and participants in terms of celebrating success; policy-makers and stakeholders in terms of exemplifying what ESF investment is achieving and, through press coverage, creating a more general awareness among the public of the role of European funding.

Representatives from specific audiences can also be targeted through specialised events. In Region A, a conference was held aimed at partners, stakeholders, businesses and support agencies to show them the totality of the investment activity to date. A further example from this area was an event organised around mental health which highlighted support available from ESF projects. As well as such events generating press releases in local newspapers, coverage is also likely

to appear in subject-specific periodicals.

Participation at other events also raised the profile of ESF investment, although the extent to which providers are aware of these and participate in them varied. The key national event which ESF continues to sponsor is Adult Learners' Week (ALW). Both national and regional ESF winners take part in celebration events. However, some CFOs suggested that as more regions initiate annual awards events, there would be value in putting provision in place so providers do not have duplicate nomination forms to complete.

A key advantage of events is that where project participants are involved, their awareness of the role of ESF throughout the project is reinforced. This is particularly important given that the proportion of participants aware of ESF is an indicator in the Communication Plan, but it is recognised as an ongoing issue (Box 3.4). Both providers and CFOs highlighted the opportunity events provide in showing participants 'the bigger picture', both at a regional and national level, and that it is the whole experience and the opportunity to speak to other people involved in the programme which helps them to understand what ESF investment is about, rather than logos on printed materials:

'So if you've got time to chat to them about Europe...then they'll take it in, but they won't get that from a logo on a time sheet.'

(Provider, Region A)

Box 3.4 Good practice examples: Raising participants' awareness of ESF

As an indicator in the Communication Plan, ensuring project participants have an awareness of ESF is a priority of all delivery organisations, with the main responsibility resting with providers. Evidence from the interviews confirms that providers routinely inform participants at induction who is funding their place and contract sheets and information materials given all contain the ESF logo. However, the majority of providers feel that the information is not really taken in:

'I always mention ESF and how we're funded and why we're funded as well, which is very, very important. And so I do get the message across. Where it goes after that, I don't know.'

(Provider, Region A)

'It's a very difficult one in a sense because what people want to know is what you can do for them and if I'm really honest, they're less bothered about how it's funded...it's a bit of an amorphous concept to most people really.'

(Provider, Region C)

Continued

Box 3.4 Continued

Although typical, those responses highlight where action needs to be taken to ensure awareness is maintained and that the concept of ESF investment is understood and there is some evidence that good practice is evolving.

Examples from induction activities include one provider in Region A indicating how the event is started with the words *'Well done guys, you've secured some Convergence funding' adding 'and you kind of see the lights go on around the room, because generally people say, "well what's convergence done for us?"'* In Region B a CFO has provided trolley key rings as a 'subliminal reminder' to them of ESF funding. Feedback from providers has shown that the key rings have been very effective as people find them useful (they include a coin to use in trolleys) and that other people ask them where they got them from. Furthermore, one of the CFO Communication Plans in Region A outlined plans to undertake focus groups with participants and/or distribute questionnaires which although principally about their experience of the ESF-funded project, would also cover recognition of the ESF logo and awareness of the source of funding.

Support in developing awareness has also been provided by ESFD in the form of DVDs telling the stories of participants (produced both for the launch of the programme and in 2009). The aim was for these to be used as an introduction to ESF for new participants (further DVDs are tailored to a wider audience). Currently, the use of the DVD is not monitored, although one CFO did indicate that in future it would be. Indeed, awareness of the DVD is low amongst providers and those who are aware may find that it is not ideal for how they recruit participants:

'It doesn't really take into account how these organisations work...quite often that's kind of peripatetic kind of work so that you know they're not going to take a laptop with them and stick a DVD in and say "oh, by the way whilst we're here do you want to watch this!".'

(CFO, Region B)

Other CFOs posited that the DVDs are more suitable to stakeholders and policy-makers and that DVDs with a more local nuance may be more relevant. To that end some CFOs and providers are producing their own films.

3.1.4 Additional marketing activities

Aside from the marketing undertaken through printed materials, web-based activities and events, other specific activities have been developed. In the main these are based on face-to-face interaction, targeted at specific audiences to help them assimilate information about ESF quickly. These activities can also tackle the issue of 'missed audiences' by improving accessibility to information:

'Case studies are great if you can read...[but] a lot of people that we try and help have got basic skills issues...I think they're more targeted towards EPMU [European Programmes Management Unit], ESFD and Europe itself... I'm sure they do inspire people to come on the courses, but for me it's a much more engaging process when you've got somebody's face there, somebody talking to you.'

(CFO, Region B)

The most basic marketing tool – word of mouth – was highlighted in the interviews as particularly important in engaging hard-to-reach groups in the population, especially in terms of raising awareness of training available through ESF. Box 3.5 exemplifies an innovative and structured approach to this through the concept of 'street marketing'. One CFO in Region B felt, however, that even informally, word of mouth remained the key marketing strategy of smaller, voluntary organisations and just as valuable:

'...less tangible and less measurable and possibly less visible than you know a slick kind of publicity campaign! But equally as effective.'

(CFO, Region B)

Another simple but effective marketing strategy based on face-to-face contact was door-knocking. This can be a difficult way to engage a person if they have no indication of what the visit is about and some providers approached this in different ways to increase its effectiveness. For example, one provider first undertook a leaflet drop with a card and photograph of the worker who would call at the property so that when they returned the following day people knew who was coming to speak to them:

'They find that quite an effective way of breaking down some of the barriers; it's quite a personal way of engaging with participants.'

(CFO, Region B)

Another provider confirmed that a pre-visit leaflet drop, even without the 'calling card', made it easier to start a conversation with the person:

'...we'll go back and give them a knock and say "have you had a chance to look at the leaflet?" And you'd be surprised what a difference that makes... it actually works giving people a chance to read stuff...'

(Provider, Region C)

Face-to-face strategies also had good results with partners and providers reinforcing the ESF message and establishing working relationships (Box 3.6).

Box 3.5 Good practice example: Street marketing

The role of a CFO was very important in facilitating an innovative street marketing activity in study area B, providing benefits to both the provider and participants of another project. The concept was to provide direct marketing through word of mouth – *'much more effective than an A5 leaflet'* – to encourage potential participants to attend the provider's open days. It was recognised that to be effective the marketing had to be tailored to the local community and delivered by people who could talk from experience about the benefits of being part of an ESF-funded project.

Long-term unemployed people were given marketing training as part of their ESF project so that they were able to deliver the street marketing initiative:

'You had local people talking to people that they knew or they'd seen, talking to them in their own...speech patterns, who knew the areas, who knew where people would be, at what times. And they had experience of ESF so they were able to share at first hand [what it was like].'

(Provider)

'... you've got people who are the best salesmen in the world because they're talking about their own experience...'

(CFO)

The marketing was successful both in attracting participants to the open days (effectively this technique is an oral case study) and in giving the trainees valuable training and work experience.

Support throughout was provided by the CFO in terms of working with the projects in looking for ways in which meeting publicity requirements could benefit participants directly (rather than simply explaining requirements and then only discussing activity at a contract review). A form of working relationship which can only have benefits for the programme as a whole:

'The providers don't just see the funders as bureaucrats that come and audit them, there needs to be a partnership between the two to make it work, to make the programme perform.'

(Managing Authority)

Box 3.6 Good practice example: Engaging with partners

In Region A a 'speed dating' event was targeted at a range of internal and external stakeholders and partners who were invited to come and meet providers.

In this trendily named, but nonetheless structured event, small groups of five to six invitees spend ten minutes with each provider. The provider gives a short presentation about their project and the types of participants they are looking to attract, gives out printed material and answers any questions. At the ring of the bell, the groups move onto the next provider.

The first event coincided with the launch of the programme while a second maintained the working relationship and added value through case studies and discussion of delivery issues.

Stakeholders and partners come away from the event with a good working knowledge of each provider's project. The concept was developed in response to requests for support in ensuring referrals to projects were appropriate and has been successful in achieving this. Indeed the events have worked so well there has been little need for direct marketing with partners in this region.

3.1.5 Networking activity

Networking activity plays a supporting role in planning, delivery and reviewing of publicity and information measures across the programme. National and regional networking takes place predominantly through the regional Publicity Network established in March 2008. The network's members are drawn from CFOs and central and regional Managing Authorities with the aim of raising the profile of ESF investment in jobs and skills; sharing best practice and promoting consistency across regions and ensuring that the regulatory requirements on publicity are understood and implemented. The network operates both virtually and by meetings twice a year and it was considered a valuable tool by regional managing authorities and CFOs, all of whom were aware of how the network supported the implementation of publicity and information measures. National networking activity is further supported by collaborative actions at regional and local levels, many of which stem from TA projects (see Section 2.33). For example, a recent initiative in Region D is the establishment of a regional Publicity Network where both CFOs and providers can coordinate activity with each other

Providers are also encouraged within the Communication Plan to undertake networking. Some larger providers have a Partnership Coordinator or similar to lead on networking activity with partners and stakeholders or have their own marketing departments and so tend to have established links outside the local area. Such organisations also use their internal newsletters or intranet to publicise the achievements of the project throughout their organisation. Often, participants take part in the organisation's generic awards events which is important in developing an understanding of being part of a wider network.

Smaller sub-contractors tend to be even more local in their focus and may team up with local organisations, for example, Children's Centres if targeting lone parents. There was evidence of a multi-agency approach to marketing through one provider teaming up with local Housing Officers for cold-calling as the officers had information on people who might have benefited from the project.

3.2 Communicating with the media

The Communication Plan recognises that measures to engage with the media are likely to be based around specific events or activities, and predominantly based on press releases – the number issued constituting one of the indicators (see Section 3.1.1). Indeed, examples of spikes in media activity around events were identified (in terms of increases in radio and newspaper coverage)⁶. The assessment of press releases provided for the initial desk-review of materials showed that there is a wide spread of publications in which ESF news appears (either as a press release or an advert for a project) from national to local level, so reaching a range of audiences.

Good practice related to engaging the media is dealt with through a variety of channels including the ESF website, networking activity and PR toolkits (where available). Nonetheless, a number of pertinent issues were identified in the stakeholder interviews with the first issue relating to press notices concerning the prominence of ESF. As discussed in Section 3.1.1, information about ESF and key messages is often given secondary importance in articles. For example, some providers' press releases contained information about their own organisations with either minimal information about ESF in the release or added in an editor's note. Alerting providers to this issue is important as often press releases are edited down using what is seen as the key information at the beginning:

'So what you often get with, especially if you've got a big provider, with their press releases, it mentions a company 26 times in the first three paragraphs, but actually ESF comes down the bottom, so it's about turning that around and getting ESF investment up front so there is actually a chance of it getting in the papers.'

(CFO, Region B)

Similarly, the lack of control over the editing of television interviews was highlighted by another CFO, when one provider who had been asked to do an interview had prepared for it with the CFO to ensure the role of ESF came out but felt that the risk of having the information about ESF edited out was still high.

⁶ Region A noted that following an awards event in May 2009 there was increased media coverage both on the day (news website) and in three of the weekly papers in the following week; and a launch event for two of their innovation and transnationality projects, held in November 2009, produced increased coverage on the day (local BBC radio) and over the following week in the local Sunday paper and in one of the weeklies.

A second issue coming out of the interviews was a fear of bad press. However, more proactive engagers with the media saw criticism as an additional marketing opportunity not a threat:

'You have to realise that there's a story there, and if you've got somebody criticising it, of course they're going to cover it...'

(Convergence Office, Region A)

Engagement with the media does not take place solely through press releases. One TA-funded project collaborated with an individual newspaper to write longer articles around a particular theme (e.g. mental health) to be used when the newspaper had spare capacity. Although published in only one newspaper, such articles have the benefit of interesting a range of people through the adoption of a theme, including the general public, third sector organisations and other providers and professionals.

A further form of engaging with the media is through the use of radio, although this is not a common form of publicity due to cost constraints. Related to the cost and subsequent length of airtime is that key ESF messages often take second place to providers' priorities in getting across key messages about the actual project with the aim of generating a reaction to the advert (those who had used radio highlighted that the response to the advertisement peaked shortly after airing). However, an innovative way of engaging with radio which gave greater opportunity to get messages about ESF across to the audience was exemplified in Region A where a provider was involved in a radio quiz which pitched two businesses against each other over a series of days. Although not directly related to the project or ESF the provider used this opportunity to advertise both:

'We've been able to get the story out in some way, shape or form to a huge audience.'

(Provider, Region A)

3.3 Cross cutting themes

The integration of the cross cutting themes of gender equality and equal opportunities and sustainable development into publicity and information measures (either specifically about the themes or containing information on them), is an indicator in the Communication Plan. Good practice guides have been produced in the form of booklets by ESFD to aid awareness but the stakeholder interviews highlighted that there remain inconsistencies in understanding across CFOs about what the themes mean. For example, sustainability was understood by some CFOs to mean the use of recycled paper or if a leaflet had been inadvertently produced without the logo ordering stickers instead of ordering a new batch of leaflets. Certainly, a number of measures supported the theme of sustainable development in the way they were implemented (using information technology and web-based forms of distribution rather than paper-based). Other interviewees understood

sustainability in economic terms – a sustainable local economy with long-term employment options.

Similar levels of disparity existed amongst providers although some regions specifically talked about the themes at induction events. CFOs reported that the cross-cutting themes had been difficult to implement in practice:

'It's difficult enough to get providers to do the publicity let alone say when you do the publicity you have to also include something about the cross cutting themes!'

(CFO, Region B)

Ironically, the cross-cutting themes are integral to many projects and as initiatives such as the PR toolkit have encouraged providers to see what they do as newsworthy where previously they may not have done, so could good practice around the themes be raised in profile. However, for this to happen a consistent understanding amongst CFOs is required.

3.4 Summary and key points

- A large range of media is employed in publicity and information measures and activity is further differentiated by target audience and objective.
- Printed materials at managing authority and CFO level consistently use ESF branding and key messages. There are some issues with the prominence of ESF investment at provider level.
- Case studies are given high prominence throughout the programme due to their suitability in targeting a range of audiences, adaptability to use across most media and the role they play in bringing the ESF story to life.
- The web is increasingly used as a means of communicating with a variety of audiences, both formally through websites and informally through social networking sites.
- The key strengths of major events are the additional levels of publicity activity generated and the number of audiences which can be targeted simultaneously.
- Word of mouth remains a key activity of providers when marketing projects.
- Engagement with the media is principally through press releases. Radio and television are less frequently used.
- The integration of cross-cutting themes into publicity and information measures has been difficult to implement at provider level, partly due to inconsistencies in understanding at CFO level.

4 Overall progress and ways forward

Progress against the indicators in the Communication Plan is assessed annually by European Social Fund Division (ESFD) and forms part of the Annual Implementation Report (AIR). The indicator data is further supplemented by a qualitative assessment of information and publicity measures both at national and regional level. Combining the information from such formal monitoring with the assessment of materials and stakeholder interviews forms a rich base of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. This aids a balanced assessment of the progress made towards achieving the objectives set out in the Communication Plan. Together they also facilitate identification of changes and/or improvements to strengthen information and publicity measures in the second half of the programme.

4.1 Overall progress against the indicators

4.1.1 Providing a range of high quality products

The first objective in the Communication Plan was 'to provide a range of high quality products to publicise the programme by the end of 2007, and to develop the range during the life of the programme'. The first indicator for this objective was 'the number and type of products and publications produced'. The assessment of publicity samples and the interviews confirmed that the objective had been met through a large number of products which were continually developed to meet changing objectives as the programme itself developed (e.g. providing information on tendering opportunities; marketing projects; celebrating achievements). Product development added value to basic materials such as European Social Fund (ESF) plaques. Qualitative assessments in the AIR confirmed this development.

The information on the remaining two indicators related to this objective is shown in Table 4.1. The increasing number of subscribers to 'ESF at work' indicates that awareness of this e-zine is increasing. However, the stakeholder interviews highlighted that at provider level, in particular, awareness of the e-zine was poor.

Table 4.1 Measurement of indicators related to the objective of providing high quality products

Indicator	2007 Output	2008 Output	2009 Output
Number and type of products and publications produced	Qualitative assessment – initial range developed	Qualitative assessment – continual development	Qualitative assessment – continual development
Number of 'ESF at work' e-zine subscribers and website viewers	1,600 combined subscribers and website views in November/December	1,159 subscribers and approximately 6,990 website views	1,251 subscribers and 7,525 website views
Number of plaques distributed by the Managing Authority	Co-financing Organisation (CFO) plaques distributed to all 28 CFOs	CFO plaques issued to all 28 CFOs 7,000 plaques issued to providers	6, 033 plaques distributed

4.1.2 Ensuring project participants are aware of ESF

The indicator for the objective 'ensuring project providers make their participants aware of ESF throughout their projects' has not been quantified during the period 2007-09. However, this information will be forthcoming in the planned follow-up surveys of participants in 2010 and 2013.

An indication of progress towards meeting this objective was given in the stakeholder interviews. Project providers were indeed making their participants aware of ESF at induction (see Box 3.4) and there was some good practice around this. In addition it was reported that participants involved in ESF events were also more likely to be aware of ESF support. However, the general consensus was that despite emphasising the role of ESF at induction there was little meaningful awareness amongst participants as a whole and that new strategies would need to be put in place beyond the use of the ESF logo and branding. Initiatives which had been developed to support raising awareness, such as ESF DVDs, were often not employed, which apart from some practical issues, was chiefly due to lack of awareness of the DVD amongst providers.

4.1.3 Publicising activities to the general public

The indicators used to measure progress against the objective of 'ensuring the Managing Authority, partners and beneficiaries and project providers publicise activities to the general public' are: the number of hits on the national ESF website and awareness of ESF amongst the general public (Table 4.2).

The assessment of materials and stakeholder interviews showed that there was a large range of activities undertaken through which the general public were made aware of ESF. This was either by delivery organisations targeting the general public directly (such as the use of billboards or advertising on buses) or indirectly, through coverage of events in the media. The national ESF website, the hits on which are

an indicator, is targeted at the whole range of potential audiences which include the general public. Thus, although the number of hits rose inexorably between 2007 and 2009, this number is not a true indication of the general public's use of the website.

Stakeholders were more hopeful than certain that awareness of ESF had increased among the general public over the course of the programme so far. Stakeholders recognised the particularly important role publicity and information activity had in raising people's awareness, especially in comparison to European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) projects where the signs of improvement were usually physical and so visible. The development of materials and activities so far over the programme, including the use of the web and national publicity campaigns (i.e. July 2009), would certainly lead to the expectation that awareness would increase over time. In light of this, the results of the 2009 Eurobarometer survey of ESF awareness which showed that awareness stood at 27 per cent in the UK – below the European Union (EU) average and down -3 percentage points since 2006 – may not be a reliable indicator. More reliable would be a survey with a larger sample size (the sample in the Eurobarometer survey was 1,317 people). Undertaking such a survey after key publicity events (this was undertaken prior to the main 2009 campaign) would also be more useful to enable impact and reach to be assessed.

Overall, awareness is a difficult concept to capture in quantitative terms which these indicators show. One solution would be a survey assessing levels of awareness about ESF investment as a whole and then the constituent parts of delivery, and evaluating how such awareness came about.

Table 4.2 Measurement of indicators related to the objective of publicising activities to the general public

Indicator	2007 Output	2008 Output	2009 Output
Number of www.esf.gov.uk website hits	316,000 new website hits	1.8 million new website hits	2.2 million new website hits
Awareness of ESF among the general public	Not applicable	Not applicable	27% (Eurobarometer)

4.1.4 Use of a consistent set of messages

The assessment of materials highlighted that relevant key messages and key facts (the indicator of this objective) were not used consistently in publications at all levels. Managing authorities at both national and regional level were consistent in this but at provider level few key messages and facts were visible. If they could be said to exist in provider leaflets for example, it was through using broad terms similar in meaning to ESF specific terms. For example the leaflet might state:

- '[Project] offers those not currently in employment, fully funded advice and training, helping women [in this region] realise their full potential'.

which could tentatively be said to match the ESF message of:

- 'transforming the lives of people across the country through better skills and better job prospects'.

Combined with the issues related to placement of the ESF logo and ordering of facts in articles/press releases, discussed in Section 3.1.1, there is a clear need to support providers in using the key messages and facts as much as is realistically possible.

4.1.5 Communicating with the media

The objective of 'optimising opportunities to communicate activities and achievements of the programme in the media at national, local and regional levels' is key to increasing awareness of ESF. CFOs play a key role in supporting providers to raise the profile of their projects and in turn, ESF, by engaging with the media. The development of the 'PR toolkit' and its subsequent transfer to other regions is a good example of this type of support (see Box 3.3).

The indicators used to assess this activity are detailed in Table 4.3 and the figures show that the number of articles is consistently increasing. A further monthly breakdown of articles referring to ESF in national and regional media per month in 2009 is shown in Table 4.5. There is a significant increase in July attributed to the annual information activity and Regional Ministerial visits. The September increase shows the value of ensuring the press release is of current interest across a region (a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) press release in London on support for people at risk of redundancy was published in over 40 regional publications).

Table 4.3 Measurement of indicators related to measuring the objective of communicating with the media

Indicator	2007 Output	2008 Output	2009 Output
Number of press notices issued (by Managing Authority)	10	20	15
Number of articles referring to ESF in national and regional media	177 from October to December 2007	October 2008 – 48 November 2008 – 65 December 2008 – 46 Quarter total –159	979 across the year (for comparison 191 October-December quarter total)

Table 4.4 Number of articles relating to ESF per month in 2009

Month	Number of ESF related articles
January	71
February	58
March	83
April	88
May	91
June	66
July	107
August	91
September	133
October	71
November	48
December	72
Total	979

4.1.6 Complying with EU regulatory requirements

A key objective of the central and individual Co-financing Organisation (CFO) Communication Plans was to provide a strategic framework to meet the objective of 'to comply with EU regulatory requirements on publicity at all stages and all levels of the programme'. Verification activity undertaken to assess progress on this objective has found no problems with compliance to date with the stakeholder interviews and assessment of materials confirming this.

4.1.7 Integrating the cross-cutting themes into the measures

The number of publications produced about, or containing information on the two cross-cutting themes (gender equality and equal opportunities, and sustainable development) is an indicator of how the themes have been integrated into publicity and information measures. As indicated in Section 3.3, there is little integration of the themes at provider level, although many projects practice gender equality and equal opportunities on a daily basis. As Table 4.5 shows the main output occurs at ESFD level and includes good practice guides and web-pages. Although no specific publications on the themes were produced in 2009, the four good practice guides were still available. An indication of a movement towards the natural integration of the themes in a variety of articles rather than stand-alone pieces is representative of good progress made at national level. For example, the cross-cutting themes were built into the 2009 DVD containing two films – 'ESF and You' and 'ESF – Investing in jobs and skills'.

The Managing Authority plans to introduce equal opportunities and sustainable development good practice awards in 2010, which will help to promote the cross-cutting themes.

Table 4.5 The integration of cross-cutting themes into publicity and information measures

Indicator	Output 2007	Output 2008	Output 2009
To integrate the cross-cutting themes into publicity and information measures	Disability good practice guide; 2 articles in ESF News magazine; 1 article in 'ESF at work' e-zine; pages on the ESF website	Gender equality and equal opportunities – six articles in 'ESF at work' e-zine; ESF Equality and Diversity Good Practice Guides produced for Age, Gender and Ethnic Minority Communities Sustainable Development – 3 articles in the 'ESF at work' e-zine. Pages on the ESF website.	Integration of themes in e-zine articles. Pages on ESF website

4.2 Strengthening the second half of the programme

The evaluation process has suggested areas where improvements can be made to strengthen the second half of the programme. Many of these relate to the development of the ESF brand both nationally and regionally. The Communication Plan effectively establishes the steps needed to create an ESF brand which is transparent and visible in its activities and achievements. The key messages establish the brand values. With branding the ultimate aim is for target audiences to recognise the brand and know what it stands for. Although significant progress has been made, the branding exercise is difficult for ESF given the number of strategic and operational interfaces where ESF is visible (hence the identification of a large number of target audiences). Communication needs to be consistent across all interfaces to reinforce the brand.

The strong links between the managing authorities and CFOs established through the Publicity Strategy Group and the Publicity Network have been fundamental in establishing support and resources to meet publicity requirements. The Publicity Network was unanimously seen as good practice. This was not just for the opportunity to share ideas but also the proactive relationship it builds between the managing authority and the regions: *'...it does give a lot of shared ownership of the agenda as well'* (CFO, Region D). The frequency was seen as ideal as it gave time to implement new ideas between events and assess progress made.

ESF-Works is an additional resource to support and develop learning around publicity. The re-focusing of this technical assistance (TA) project carries the potential to strongly complement the Publicity Network over the second half of the programme. The move towards themes rather than a focus on individual

case studies avoids duplicating activity already undertaken at regional level. The thematic approach also increases the relevance of the site to providers, amongst whom awareness was minimal. For example, a provider delivering a project to unemployed older people would find support and information under the theme “‘Fifty plus”: what future for older workers?’ in an easily accessible format. Moreover, the emphasis on linking with other stakeholders to provide evidence, insight and relevance from both within and beyond the ESF programme is an important source of external validation.

Other TA-funded projects such as the Convergence Partnership Office and public relations (PR) agencies are creating strong regional identities and clearly linking providers and CFOs together through information activities and materials. Evaluation evidence from the stakeholder interviews and assessment of materials shows that joint-working across regions facilitates the brand development. However, there are concerns about how empowered Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff are in terms of responding quickly to joint initiatives.

Developing a more structured and continuous approach to supporting providers was recognised as a key priority. Not just to ensure providers are aware of the requirements but also to develop an understanding of the ESF brand as a whole. This is particularly true for larger providers who have their own PR teams and are competent in publicising the project and their own organisation, but not the ESF investment behind it.

Crucially, this must include sub-contractors as well as prime providers, so that the ESF story is cascaded through all levels in a consistent way. Involving all providers consolidates the ESF brand by creating a narrative around all activity and giving a sense of direction of where funding is helping the region get to. One example of good practice was the PR toolkit and accompanying workshops. Originally developed through a TA project with a PR agency, this has been transferred across several regions. The content of the toolkit is very similar but is tailored to each region through the examples provided.

Clarification needs to be made over the use and availability of social networking sites. Although the use of new media is recognised in the Communication Plan as a means to maximise the reach and impact of publicity measures, several concerns were expressed by stakeholders: First, there is the blocking of access by some organisations and secondly, there is a lack of expertise in using the sites and managing information through them:

‘I think more and more social media is going to be really important to communicate our message...they’re powerful but there’s nervousness around how you communicate the message. So some guidance on that would be great.’

(CFO, Region C)

A final area of development is the integration of cross-cutting themes. Approaching their integration from a different angle may help here. Developing events around

the themes and show-casing achievements from projects within this has the potential to raise awareness amongst providers and CFOs alike that they are often doing good practice around them but perhaps not realising it.

4.3 Suggestions to take publicity forward

The following suggestions are drawn from the discussion of progress made and areas to strengthen:

- There is a need to refine indicators of progress to facilitate ongoing evaluation of progress made. For example, rather than use the number of overall hits on the ESF website as an indicator of the activities being publicised to the general public more qualitative indicators could be used. The Publicity Network Group is ideally placed to decide on relevant qualitative indicators.
- Part of developing the qualitative assessment of measures could be through annual reviews of Communication Plans to pick up the added value of activities.
- There was evidence that some evaluations have been undertaken after regional events but there is little dissemination of the findings. Evaluations should be undertaken after each key event or publicity priority and the results disseminated through the Publicity Network.
- A continuous dialogue needs to be established between CFOs and all providers (both prime and sub-contractors) to pass back information and good practice from the overall programme. This requires monitoring for effectiveness.
- Guidance on the use of new media needs to be established by the Managing Authority in collaboration with those already using it.
- Clarification around the transfer of materials across regions from TA-funded projects needs to be made.
- Awareness of cross-cutting themes needs to be developed based on a consistent understanding of what they mean across all levels.

5 Conclusion

Halfway through the 2007-13 European Social Fund (ESF) programme progress has generally been good in terms of meeting the publicity and information objectives. Strong strategic frameworks, shaped by the Communication Plan, have been put in place. Because of the requirement to develop their own Communication Plans, awareness of the requirements around publicity is high amongst Co-financing Organisations (CFOs). Provider awareness is also high in terms of the use of the logo and the need for case studies and good news stories. A range of materials has been produced and activities undertaken which have been effective at reaching their target audience and raising awareness of ESF investment. The adoption of more non-traditional forms of communication such as social networking, is recognised as vital in maintaining the reach of the ESF message and needs to be supported across all organisations.

The majority of indicators have been met. The indicators where it is difficult to judge success using current surveys (the general public's and project participants' awareness of ESF) may need more targeted effort. Part of the issue here is the extent of recognition of the need to go beyond the use of the ESF logo and build up the brand of ESF investment. This recognition is less likely at provider level than at CFO and Managing Authority levels. There remains a need for a shift in perception as to what constitutes successful programme publicity. Currently, it is taken to mean that projects have managed to recruit their targeted number of participants and to deliver job outcomes and referrals. More emphasis is required on how successful publicity has developed an understanding of the role of ESF investment across all target audiences.

The Publicity Network Group was seen as a particularly valuable tool, both for transferring good practice and reinforcing the key messages around ESF. The re-focused ESF-Works complements and supports the Publicity Network Group. In particular, ESF-Works' interaction with policy-makers and stakeholders in the field of labour markets and learning outside the ESF programme will increase the programme's visibility.

A key area that was perceived to require extra resources and focus was establishing and maintaining a dialogue with all providers (both prime and sub-contractors). Cascading the ESF story down to sub-contractors will further consolidate the brand and give greater consistency in approach. Proactive support from CFOs rather than a purely auditing approach is likely to reap benefits. To that end the continued transfer of good practice such as the 'PR toolkits' needs to be encouraged and supported.

Although evident at Managing Authority level, the integration of cross-cutting themes into publicity needs further development at both CFO and provider levels. Many providers may already be doing good practice around them but this is not being picked up on in publicity measures. Part of the issue is that CFOs themselves have different understandings of what the themes really mean or do not know how to encourage providers to integrate them. The transfer of good practice around this would be very useful.

All of the suggestions for improvement and consolidation in the second half of the programme build on and reinforce the brand of ESF investment. The key messages around ESF investment making a real difference run through many materials and activities, but there are audiences where achievements are not yet being habitually linked to ESF investment. A strong brand, with consistent messages and approach across all levels, would facilitate greater awareness.

Appendix

Co-financing Organisations for the Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013

Table A.1 Co-financing Organisations for the Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013

Region	Co-financing Organisations
Cornwall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • Department for Work and Pensions • National Offender Management Service
East of England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedfordshire County Council • Department for Work and Pensions • East of England Development Agency • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • Luton Borough Council • National Offender Management Service
East Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • Local authorities in the East Midlands Consortium • National Offender Management Service

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Region	Co-financing Organisations
London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • London Councils • London Development Agency • National Offender Management Service
North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • National Offender Management Service
North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • National Offender Management Service
South East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • National Offender Management Service • South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)
West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • National Offender Management Service
Yorkshire and the Humber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for Work and Pensions • Learning and Skills Council (Skills Funding Agency from 1 April 2010) • National Offender Management Service

References

England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013 (2007UK05UP001) Commission Decision C (2007) 3909 of 9 August 2007.

England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007-2013: Communication Plan, revised edition 3 June 2008 (2007UK05UPO001).

