

## **2013 ESF Leavers Survey: Non-Technical Summary**

### **Background**

The 2013 European Social Fund (ESF) Leavers Survey aimed to assist in assessing the effectiveness of labour market interventions delivered under the ESF Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes. To achieve this, a telephone survey was conducted during the autumn of 2014 among people who had left an ESF project during 2013: interviews were achieved with 1,966 ESF participants from 20 different projects. In addition qualitative, in-depth interviews were undertaken with 46 interviewees drawn from across three ESF projects on the basis that they tended to target vulnerable participants.

### **What were participants doing at the time they started their ESF course?**

Among those interventions aimed at improving participation in the labour market, approximately three-quarters (73%) of quantitative survey participants were unemployed immediately prior to ESF. By contrast, 96% participating in interventions aimed at supporting progression in employment were employed prior to ESF.

### **Why do people undertake ESF supported training?**

Over two-fifths of respondents (42%) participating in projects aimed at improving participation in the labour market undertook the course to help them find work. Among those who were already in work and who took part in interventions aimed at supporting progression in employment, greater emphasis was placed upon wanting to develop a broader range of skills (31%), although it was quite common for these learners to say their main reason for participating in their ESF project was because their employer had requested or required it (17%).

### **What skills and other benefits do people gain from ESF supported training?**

The most commonly cited skills acquired by participants on ESF training courses were job specific skills (69%). Other commonly skills gained / improved include organisational, communication, team working, and problem solving skills. Participants from projects aimed at improving participation in the labour market were more likely to report improvements in job search skills (45%) and CV writing or interview skills (34%). Over a half of respondents (54%) gained a qualification as a result of their participation in ESF training.

The quantitative survey also asked respondents about other perceived benefits of the course. Although often related to skills, many of these benefits point towards how participation in ESF contributed to enhancing the capacity and capabilities of participants, including respondents feeling more confident about their capabilities (85%), better about themselves generally (80%) and feeling that they had improved their employment or career prospects (76%).

Findings of the qualitative research were similar. Many of those interviewed reported that the support had contributed to positive changes within their lives including

changes to their lifestyle, health, welfare and accommodation arrangements. In addition, some reported other more general benefits as a result of their involvement including gaining confidence, developing new skills, obtaining new experiences relating to training or volunteering opportunities, dealing with social settings and an improvement in their personal skills.

### **Do ESF participants think that their training helped?**

In regard to the perceived benefits of participating in ESF:

- Within projects aimed at improving participation in the labour market, among previously unemployed participants that had found work by the time of the survey, a fifth (21%) felt ESF had been vital in them gaining their current job, and among those who had not gained employment by the time of the survey, a quarter (25%) believed they have more chance of finding a job in the future due to ESF.
- Within projects aimed at supporting progression in employment, among participants who were employed prior to ESF but who were employed in a different job at the time of the interview, a sixth (16%) felt ESF had been vital in them gaining their new job.
- Among participants in projects aimed at improving progression in employment 7% reported experiencing an improvement in their jobs that could be directly attributed to their participation in ESF.

### **Is participation in ESF associated with higher rates of transition in to work?**

To estimate the effect of ESF interventions, the employment transitions made by ESF participants who were not in work prior to ESF have been compared to those experienced by people in similar circumstances people from a large, nationally representative survey of UK individuals called the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Among participants in ESF Redundancy Training projects, 78% are observed to gain work over a period of 12 months. This is higher than the 65% of the unemployed recently made redundant in the APS who go on to gain employment in a similar time frame. A higher proportion of the unemployed participating in other types of ESF project gain employment (43%) compared to similar unemployed respondents from the APS (34% gain work).

Participation in ESF is therefore associated with an increase in participation in employment among the unemployed of about a fifth. Proportionately larger effects are estimated among the economically inactive, where subsequent participation in employment among ESF participants (20% gain work) is around 50% higher than observed among the economically inactive from the APS (13% gain work).

It is important to treat the results derived from these techniques with caution. For example, the estimation of positive effects could reflect the relative employability of those people who either chose or who were selected to participate in ESF.