

The 2013 European Social Fund Leavers Survey

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Contents

Highlights of the survey	3
Executive Summary	4
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	7
1.1 Overview of the ESF Leavers Survey	7
1.2 Fieldwork and Response to the 2013 Survey	10
1.3 Structure of the report	10
CHAPTER 2: Who are the participants?	13
2.1 Introduction	13
2.2 Personal characteristics of participants	13
2.3 Labour market circumstances of participants prior to ESF	16
CHAPTER 3: Participating in an ESF project	22
3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 Embarking on an ESF project	22
3.3 Withdrawing from an ESF project	26
CHAPTER 4: ESF and the accumulation of skills	29
4.1 Introduction	29
4.2 Skills acquired from ESF	29
4.3 Educational attainment and ESF	32
CHAPTER 5: Improving participation in the labour market	36
5.1 Introduction	36
5.2 Employment and non-employment following ESF projects	37
5.3 The current economic activity of ESF participants	42
5.4 Assessing the effectiveness of ESF in supporting participation in employment	44
5.5 Characteristics of current employment	49
5.6 Improvements in job characteristics	50
5.7 Transport difficulties	52
CHAPTER 6: Supporting progression in employment	54
6.1 Introduction	54
6.2 Characteristics of current employment	55
6.3 Improvements in job characteristics	57
CHAPTER 7: Lessons for future research	62
CHAPTER 8: Conclusions	65
Annex 1: Survey methodology	70
Annex 2: Summary of Propensity Score Matching Results	72

Highlights of the Survey

The majority of participants who took part in ESF projects developed essential skills in organisation, communication, team working and problem solving. Most feel more confident in their own abilities.

Over half of survey respondents gained a qualification as a result of their participation in ESF training. This is positive given that respondents perceive the benefits of ESF to be higher when they gain any qualification and that perceived benefits are greatest when the qualification gained is at a more advanced level.

For priorities aimed at the unemployed and economically inactive:

- Within 12 months of finishing their training, around 60% of previously unemployed respondents and 20% of previously economically inactive respondents are in employment.
- Comparisons with the wider population suggest that unemployed participants were between 20% and 26% more likely to find a job than unemployed individuals who have not attended ESF training. Economically inactive participants were around 50% more likely to find a job than similar people in the wider population.

For priorities aimed at those in work:

- The majority of participants reported improvements in job satisfaction and improved opportunities for training following their participation in an ESF project. Almost half report having more opportunities for pay and promotion. 7% indicated that improvements in their employment conditions could be directly attributed to their participation in an ESF project.
- Approximately one in six respondents who were employed in a different job from that held prior to their participation in an ESF project report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment.

Executive Summary

- The aim of the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey is to assist in assessing the effectiveness of labour market interventions delivered under ESF. Telephone interviews were conducted with approximately 2,000 people who had left an ESF project delivered under Priorities 2 and 3 of the Convergence Programme and Priorities 1 and 2 of the Competitiveness Programme during 2013.
- In addition, as part of the 2013 Leavers Survey, experimental qualitative research was undertaken with participants from projects targeting particularly vulnerable groups, in order to understand whether their experience of ESF differed from those responding to the telephone survey and to investigate whether such participants were disproportionately less likely to participate in telephone research¹.

Who are the participants?

- On entry to an ESF project, nearly three quarters of respondents to the survey from ESF interventions aimed at increasing participation in the labour market were unemployed. However, 9 out of 10 described their careers since completing full time education as being continuously employed or as being in paid work for most of this time. This is higher than in the Leavers Surveys from previous years. Participants in the qualitative research had much more fractured experience of the labour market.
- The main difficulty in finding work prior to participation in ESF cited by unemployed survey respondents was a lack of jobs in the area in which they lived, reported by 40% of respondents. A lack of qualifications or skills was cited by 14% of unemployed respondents. Again (and reflecting the nature of the projects involved) participants in the qualitative research were much more likely to cite personal factors such as alcohol or drug dependency, health problems or having a criminal record.

Participating in ESF

- Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents were aware that ESF had helped to pay for their participation in an ESF project, somewhat higher than in previous Leavers Surveys.
- The two main reasons given by respondents for participating in an ESF project were to develop a broader range of skills (25%) and to help them get a job (17%).
- Rates of withdrawal from ESF projects are estimated to be approximately 7% based on both survey and monitoring data. However, withdrawal from ESF can reflect positive events such as finding a job, while the qualitative work highlights the fact that some participants may dip in and out of provision.

¹ A separate report on this element of the research is available at: [\[REFERENCE NEEDED\]](#)

ESF and the Accumulation of Skills

- The most commonly cited skills acquired by survey respondents during their ESF project were job specific skills (69%), communication skills (68%), organizational skills (66%), problem solving skills (66%), and team working skills (65%).
- Respondents report that they felt their capabilities and capacities had improved as a result of participating in ESF including feeling more confident about their abilities (85%), feeling better about themselves generally (80%) and feeling that they have improved their career prospects (76%).
- Approximately 77% of respondents report that they gained some form of qualification through ESF.

Improving Participation in the Labour Market

- Among respondents from Priorities aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, 82% were in paid employment at the time of the survey: an increase in their rate of employment of 63 percentage points compared with that observed before their participation.
- Participation in ESF is associated with an increase in the rate of transition into employment among the unemployed (9 percentage points) and those recently made redundant (13 percentage points) compared to similar people within the wider labour market. Proportionately larger effects, though a similar percentage point difference (of seven percentage points), are estimated among the economically inactive, where the rate of transition into employment was 20% compared against 13% of similar people moving into employment in the wider labour market.
- Over a fifth (21%) of those who were in a job at the time of the survey that was not held prior to their participation in ESF, report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment. Among those who remained out of work at the time of the survey, one in four (25%) report that they felt that they had more chance of finding a job in the future as a result of their participation in ESF.
- The proportion of transitions into employment amongst the participants interviewed as part of the qualitative work was broadly in line with that found for economically inactive in the quantitative survey.

Supporting Progression in Employment

- A majority of respondents report experiencing an improvement in their job since participating in ESF. For example, approximately six out of ten respondents report higher levels of job satisfaction and indicate that they have subsequently had more opportunities for training.

- Approximately one in six respondents who were employed in a different job from that held prior to ESF report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment.
- Perceptions of additionality are highest among those who gain qualifications from the ESF intervention that are at a similar or higher level than that which they held prior to participation.

Lessons for the Future

- The experience of the current series of Leavers Surveys and the qualitative research undertaken as part of the current research has highlighted the need for a thorough review of the approach to such research in the context of the 2014 – 2020 Programmes. This should involve assessing how to improve the representativeness of future Surveys (drawing on the findings of the qualitative research), the interface between programme and project-level evaluation, and the potential for greater use of data linking (using both Welsh Government and DWP data sets) and of qualitative research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of the ESF Leavers Survey

The two ESF Operational Programmes which are benefiting Wales for the programming period 2007 – 2013² are together providing over £1.2 billion³ of investment, with around 90% of this channelled through the West Wales and the Valleys Convergence Programme⁴. The Programmes aim to create a high skill, knowledge-driven economy, with full-employment, a skilled and adaptable workforce, responsive businesses, and supporting sustainable development. Key objectives are to improve skill levels, increase employment and tackle economic inactivity.

When initially agreed, the Programmes were expected to provide support to almost 300,000 individual participants – 267,500 under Convergence and 26,600 under Competitiveness – representing around 10% of the Welsh population. As of the 30th November 2014 WEFO data indicates that almost 572,000 participants have been assisted, with over 61,000 entering employment and 189,000 gaining qualifications.

The interventions supported by the Programme are wide-ranging, though all relate to the investment in human capital. They include:

- Active labour market measures for the unemployed and measures to support the employability of the economically inactive (Convergence P2, Theme 1 and Competitiveness P1);
- Measures to reduce the risk of those in employment but with poor health from losing their jobs (Convergence P2, Theme 2);
- Measures to improve the skills of those already in work, with a particular focus on those with low skills but extending also to higher level skills e.g. to support

² Activity under the Programmes can continue until December 2015, although new projects could not be approved after 31 December 2013.

³ At current exchange rates. The Programme allocations are set in Euro. See <http://wefo.wales.gov.uk/programmes/progress/?lang=en> (accessed 6/1/15 data pertains to 30 November 2014)

⁴ Convergence Programme - £1,097 million, Competitiveness £134 million. See Reports to PMC, June 2014

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/wefo/minutes/140620pmcesfconvergencereporten.pdf>
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/wefo/minutes/140620pmcesfcompetitivenessreporten.pdf>
(accessed 6/1/15 data pertains to 15 May 2014)

the knowledge economy, and to help employers identify their skills needs, anticipate potential gaps or shortages (Convergence P3, Theme 1 and 2, Competitiveness P2);

- Measures to tackle the gender pay gap and to promote gender equality (Convergence P3, Theme 3, Competitiveness P2).

Given the scale of the investment, it is essential to evaluate the impact of interventions supported by the Programmes, above all in increasing access to employment for those currently unemployed or economically inactive, in raising skills levels and in increasing the capacity of those in work to add value to their economic contribution. Providing reliable, robust evidence for such an evaluation is the purpose of ESF Leavers Surveys.

The over-arching objective of the survey is to understand the characteristics and outcomes of those who have participated in ESF projects. To achieve this, a telephone survey was conducted during October and November 2014 among a group identified as having left an ESF project during 2013. The survey collected information on: pre-entry characteristics of ESF participants; motivations for participating in an ESF project; skills acquired as a result of the intervention and career details of respondents since completing the project. Also identified were employment outcomes, including 'softer' benefits from learning (such as increased confidence) and entry in to further learning. The interviews included questions to explore participants' perceptions regarding their level of satisfaction with their course, their awareness of ESF and perceptions of additionality; i.e. did participants feel that they would have gained the same employment impact without intervention.

The development of the 2013 Survey built upon the experiences of the four previous surveys (2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 also undertaken by the research team responsible for this report). Particular emphasis has been placed upon maintaining continuity in the design of the surveys over time. This allows data from these surveys to be merged together to facilitate more detailed levels of analysis than that which could be achieved with the data from a single year.

In the 2013 survey the main additions to the questionnaire specifically targeted 'Essential Skills in the Workplace' (ESiW) participants with the inclusion of a number of new questions on confidence in reading, writing, numbers and communicating (the findings from which will be addressed in a separate report). There were further general questions added on earning levels before undertaking an ESF intervention; supervisory responsibilities before and after the intervention; and, for those participants who had found employment after the intervention, whether they felt better off financially as a result of starting work. The findings from these questions are reported in Chapter 6.

As in previous iterations of ESF Leavers survey reports, to understand the impact of ESF provision a Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) has been undertaken. Here the labour market experiences of survey respondents are compared with the experiences of similar, matched groups of people in the wider labour market sourced from the Office for National Statistics 'Annual Population Survey' and identified using propensity score matching (PSM) techniques. This analysis focuses on the transitions into employment made by ESF participants who were unemployed or economically inactive prior to their participation in ESF.

The majority of this report focuses upon findings derived from the 2013 Survey. However, Chapter 5 presents the results of CIE analysis techniques that are based upon data pooled from the each of the five Leavers Surveys. The purpose of this is to benefit from the increased statistical power that can be gained from a larger sample size. This is particularly important in CIE analysis where relatively restrictive criteria have to be used for respondents to be incorporated in the analysis (namely the ability to observe transitions in economic activity over a period of at least 12 months) and the reduced sample sizes that can result. Reflecting the inclusion of data from the earlier surveys in this report, Table 1.1 presents a summary of the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 ESF Surveys.

1.2 Fieldwork and Response to the 2013 Survey

In conducting the 2013 Survey, a file containing the details of approximately 28,300 individuals who left ESF projects during 2013 was provided to the research team by WEFO. This file covered all those for whom participant data were available at the time of the survey and therefore does not cover all those who completed an ESF project during 2013. The aim of the survey was to achieve interviews with 3,000 participants. The total number of records loaded for the main stage of fieldwork was 10,000. This sample yielded 7,014 individuals who had a correct telephone number and were eligible learners (i.e. excluding 'unobtainable/ wrong numbers', 'no recall of learning', 'still on the course [and not ESiW]' or 'still on their first ESiW course'). Interviews were achieved with 3,001 ESF participants from 20 different projects. The estimated response rate to the 2013 survey was 43%, higher than that achieved during the 2012 survey (40%).

The ESF Leavers Surveys and their accompanying reports have always sought to capture the experiences of people who have completed a project during the year covered by the survey. However, to support the evaluation of ESiW, it was agreed that eligibility for inclusion in the current survey could be different. Specifically, as ESiW is regarded as a rolling programme, eligibility for inclusion in to the survey among participants in this programme was 'loosened' so as to include current participants as long as they had previously completed some element of ESiW provision. Clearly, whilst this approach is of benefit to the evaluation of ESiW (i.e. by providing a rich source of data about these participants at marginal cost), the disadvantage of such an approach is that the full survey data set no longer captures the experiences of only those who completed their intervention in 2013. To maintain consistency with previous years, it was agreed with WEFO to exclude from the analysis ESiW participants who did not (fully) complete in 2013 from the reporting (i.e. to exclude any current learners, or those who completed in 2014). However, this reduced the sample size to 1,966 – a figure somewhat below that of recent years.

Table 1.1: Overview of the ESF Survey Population and Achieved Samples

	ESF Leavers Surveys				
	2009 ^a Wave 1	2010	2011	2012	2013 ^b
Fieldwork period	Feb/March 2010	June/July 2011	Sept/Nov 2012	June/July 2013	Oct/Nov 2014
Population	9,672	22,108	21,587	17,196	28,291
Responses (Projects)					
Convergence P2	1,973 (3)	3,182 (7)	2,793 (13)	2,471 (12)	496 (5)
Convergence P3	2,085 (4)	3,502 (7)	2,011 (14)	975 (10)	920 (11) / 1530 (11)
Competitiveness P1	0	57 (3)	751 (3)	576 (4)	212 (1)
Competitiveness P2	0	766 (2)	461 (4)	243 (4)	338 (5) / 763 (5)
Total survey responses	4,058 (7)	7,507 (19)	6,016 (34)	4,270 (30)	1,966 (22) / 3,001 (22)
Response Rates					
(correct number/eligible learner)	60%	50%	48%	40%	43%

^a The 2009 survey was conducted in waves, with respondents to the first wave of interviews being re-contacted approximately 5-6 months later to take part in a shorter follow-up survey. The surveys from 2010 onwards were conducted during a single wave.

^b For Convergence P3, Competitiveness P2 and the total survey, the first set of figures refer to all interviews achieved, while the second exclude ESiW participants who did not leave the provision in 2013.

Figures in brackets show the number of projects from which interviews were obtained.

Qualitative Research

Reflecting some concerns that previous Leavers Surveys may not have adequately captured the experience of more vulnerable ESF participants supported under the Programmes, due to a lack of availability of contact data for such participants and difficulties in securing responses from those for whom such data were made available, the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey contract also included provision for undertaking qualitative face-to-face interviews with participants and leavers from three ESF projects which aimed at supporting such groups. The full findings of this work are being reported separately⁵, but we reference in this report issues which cast light on the survey results and which have informed our thinking about future Leavers Surveys. It is important to recall, however, that the number of participants in the qualitative research was small (46 in all); that around a quarter of participants were still 'on provision' rather than leavers; and that the projects were sampled purposively, meaning that comparisons between the survey respondents and this group need to be handled with considerable care.

⁵ See 2013 ESF Leavers Survey Qualitative Report - available from the WEFO Website

1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the characteristics of respondents to the ESF survey. Chapter 3 considers the reasons given by respondents for undertaking an ESF course and the characteristics of those who withdraw early from ESF. Chapter 4 details the role of ESF in enhancing the skills of participants. Chapter 5 describes the subsequent careers of respondents who undertook training programmes aimed at increasing participation in the labour market since leaving an ESF project. Chapter 5 also considers the effectiveness of ESF among this group by comparing the career transitions made by respondents to the survey with those reported by a comparable group of people drawn from the Annual Population Survey. Chapter 6 focuses upon the experiences of those respondents who participated in interventions aimed at improving progression in employment. Chapter 7 considers findings from the qualitative work with regard to the propensity of ESF participants to take part in research. Finally, Chapter 8 provides some conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: Who are the participants?

Chapter Summary

- Of those respondents to the survey participating in ESF interventions aimed at increasing participation in the labour market, nearly three quarters (73%) were unemployed on entry to an ESF project. However, a larger proportion also described their careers since completing full time education as being continuously employed or as being in paid work for most of this time (90%).
- Respondents to the survey participating in ESF interventions aimed at increasing progression in the labour market had relatively high levels of educational attainment prior to their ESF intervention, with 58% stating they had attained NQF Level 3 or above.
- The main difficulty in finding work cited by the unemployed is a perceived lack of jobs in the area in which they live, reported by 40% of respondents. A lack of qualifications or skills was cited by 12% of unemployed respondents.

2.1 Introduction

The characteristics of the sample of ESF participants, including their demographics and educational attainment, are analysed in this chapter. The main objective is to present a profile of the sample of 2013 leavers from ESF Convergence and Competitiveness projects in Wales and their experiences prior to their participation in these projects. We summarise their personal characteristics and their prior educational qualifications. We also report their career status – whether or not they were in employment prior to ESF and, where relevant, their occupations, contractual status and hours worked. Reference is also made where relevant to the qualitative research.

2.2 Personal characteristics of participants

An overview of the personal characteristics of respondents is provided in Table 2.1, here distinguishing between those who participated in the different Priorities of the two Programmes. Throughout the report we distinguish between those respondents who participated in interventions aimed at supporting participation in the labour market (Convergence Priority 2, Competitiveness Priority 1) and those respondents who participated in interventions aimed at supporting progression in employment (Convergence Priority 3, Competitiveness Priority 2). Later in this chapter, we put

these characteristics in the context of the overall Welsh working age population (see Section 2.4 below).

Table 2.1: Personal characteristics of participants

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
<i>per cent of respondents</i>							
Gender:							
Male	64.1	54.7	61.3	40.2	61.8	46.0	51.5
Female	35.9	45.3	38.7	59.8	38.2	54.0	48.5
Age: (at time of survey)							
16 -18 years	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.3
19 - 21	2.4	1.4	2.1	2.6	2.1	2.5	2.3
22 - 24	2.6	0.5	2.0	5.3	3.0	4.7	3.7
16 - 24	5.4	1.9	4.4	8.3	5.0	7.4	6.3
25 - 30	9.9	8.0	9.3	13.2	10.7	12.5	11.4
31 - 40	18.2	22.2	19.4	21.9	20.1	21.4	20.7
41 - 54	43.8	43.4	43.6	38.5	45.6	40.4	41.6
55+	22.8	24.5	23.3	18.2	18.6	18.3	20.1
Ethnicity:							
White	97.8	93.9	96.6	92.3	96.8	93.5	94.6
Educational attainment prior to ESF:							
None	7.7	5.2	6.9	3.9	5.9	4.5	5.3
NQF Level 1 or less	6.9	5.2	6.4	5.9	8.0	6.4	6.4
NQF Level 2	12.7	7.1	11.0	8.5	9.5	8.7	9.6
NQF Level 3	16.3	13.2	15.4	18.2	13.0	16.8	16.3
NQF Level 4 or above	27.8	40.1	31.5	41.9	39.1	41.1	37.6
Unspecified level	28.6	29.3	28.8	21.7	24.6	22.5	24.8
Long term limiting illness (at time of survey):							
Yes	24.4	16.5	22.0	15.5	13.6	15.0	17.6
No	75.6	83.5	78.0	84.5	86.4	85.0	82.5
Work limiting illness (at time of survey):							
Yes	13.1	8.5	11.7	7.4	4.4	6.6	8.4
No	86.9	91.5	88.3	92.6	95.6	93.4	91.6
Place of birth:							
Wales	74.2	61.8	70.5	68.8	59.6	66.3	67.8
Elsewhere in the UK	20.6	32.1	24.0	24.1	34.4	26.8	25.8
Outside UK	5.2	6.1	5.5	7.2	5.9	6.9	6.4
English as first language	91.7	92.9	92.1	86.6	94.7	88.8	90.0
Speak Welsh	26.2	13.7	22.5	31.2	18.9	27.9	25.9
<i>Sample size</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

Respondents who were female accounted for nearly half of the overall sample (49%), although women accounted for 54% of respondents from interventions aimed at supporting progression in employment, with the proportion being highest among the respondents from Priority 3 under the Convergence Programme (60%). Respondents from Priority 3 projects under the Convergence Programme are youngest, with approximately one in twelve aged 24 or under at the time they completed their project (8.3%). The age distribution of respondents to the 2013 Survey is older than the 2012 Survey: it can be seen that whilst 6% of respondents to the 2013 Survey are aged 16-24, this group accounted for 16% of respondents to the 2012 survey. By contrast, 20% of respondents to the 2013 survey are aged 55 or over, approximately 5 percentage points higher than that observed among respondents to the 2012 survey. These differences are likely to reflect changes in the composition of the projects included in the survey rather than any changes to the overall profile of ESF participants.

Levels of educational attainment prior to undertaking an ESF project were higher among respondents within the two Priorities where interventions are aimed at supporting progression in employment. Among these Priorities, approximately 58% of respondents had achieved a qualification equivalent to NQF Level 3 or above. This is compared to 47% of respondents from interventions aimed at supporting participation (still relatively high for priorities aimed at the most disadvantaged in the labour market - which may be explained by the prevalence in the sample of respondents on Redundancy Training). Across all Priorities, levels of educational attainment among respondents to the 2013 Survey (54% at NQF Level 3 or above) are also slightly higher than those observed among respondents to the 2012 Survey (48% at NQF Level 3 or above).

Eighteen per cent of respondents reported that they suffered from a long term illness. The overall rate of work limiting illness (a sub-set of long-term illness) was 8%. Rates of ill-health are higher among those Priorities where interventions are primarily aimed at those out of work. Among respondents from projects aimed at supporting participation, 12% report that they suffer from a work-related ill-health condition. This is compared to just 7% of respondents from projects aimed at

supporting progression in employment. In the analysed sample, 5% of respondents are from a non-white background, compared to 3% in the 2012 survey.

Approximately one in four respondents report the ability to speak Welsh, but nine out of ten report English as being their first language.

While the participants in the qualitative research, in common with supporting participation respondents from the quantitative survey, were mostly male and overwhelmingly white, a far higher proportion (around half) reported some sort of work-limiting illness. Respondents to the qualitative research also had a relatively young age profile, with around a third aged 30 or under.

2.3 Labour market circumstances of participants prior to ESF

Many of the differences observed in the personal characteristics of ESF participants by Programme and Priority reflect differences in the groups being targeted and the nature of the interventions. The labour market circumstances of ESF participants immediately prior to their interventions are presented in detail in Table 2.2. The largest difference between those who participated in projects aimed at supporting participation and those in projects aimed at supporting progression in employment is the relatively high proportion of respondents from interventions aimed at supporting progression who were in paid employment prior to participation in their project (96%). This reflects the specific targeting of the employed by these projects. In contrast, 73% of respondents who participated in interventions aimed at supporting participation in the labour market were unemployed prior to their participation.

It should be noted that the definition of unemployment used in this survey is a statistical definition of unemployment that relates to a respondent being out of work and looking for work; generally referred to as the International Labour Organization (ILO) measure of unemployment. The alternative way of defining unemployment is with respect to the receipt of unemployment related benefits, generally referred to as the claimant count measure of unemployment. ESF Programmes define unemployed and economically inactive participants with respect to benefit receipt. Unemployed participants are defined as those claiming Job Seekers Allowance, whilst

economically inactive participants are defined by the Programmes as those out of work but who are not claiming Job Seekers Allowance. The ILO definition of unemployment is preferred for the purposes of the survey as it is the definition that is most widely used in labour market surveys, therefore allowing the information collected from respondents to the Leavers Survey to be compared against other sources of labour market data. However, the use of the ILO definition does mean that respondents to the ESF survey who indicate that they are out of work and looking for work may not be registered as unemployed or in receipt of benefits aimed at the unemployed. Such definitional issues may explain, at least in part, why levels of economic inactivity derived from respondents to the survey (5% among Convergence Priority 2 and 4% among Competitiveness Priority 1) are considerably lower than the targets set out for participation by the economically inactive in these projects. Some of those respondents who are defined as unemployed from the perspective of the survey may actually- and legitimately (using the narrower ESF definition of unemployment) be classified as economically inactive within the monitoring data.

Table 2.2: Labour market characteristics of survey respondents

	<i>per cent of respondents</i>						
	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
Activity prior to ESF:							
Paid employment	17.1	24.1	19.2	94.9	98.8	96.0	68.3
Unemployed	74.4	69.8	73.0	2.8	0.6	2.2	27.7
Education & training	2.8	1.9	2.5	1.2	0.3	1.0	1.5
Inactive	5.2	4.3	4.9	1.0	0.3	0.8	2.3
Not known	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2
Activity since completing compulsory education:							
Continuously in paid employment	47.4	49.5	48.0	55.0	61.5	56.8	53.6
Continuously in education or training	1.4	1.9	1.6	3.2	1.5	2.7	2.3
In paid work for most of this time	41.1	44.3	42.1	34.8	32.0	34.0	36.9
In education or training for most of this time	2.4	3.3	2.7	4.1	4.4	4.2	3.7
Mostly unemployed or out of work	6.5	0.9	4.8	2.4	0.6	1.9	3.0
Continuously out of work	1.0	0.0	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.4
Other	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

As well as asking respondents about their activity status immediately prior to commencing their project, respondents were also invited to give an overview of their working lives since completing full time education. This was intended to provide a more accurate understanding of the career histories of ESF respondents (and therefore their skills and employability), rather than just a 'snap shot' picture of their economic activity immediately prior to participating in an ESF project. Respondents were asked: 'Since leaving compulsory education at age 16, which of the following best describes what you had been doing up to the point when you began your ESF funded course?'

Across all Priorities, 91% of respondents report that they had either been continuously in paid employment or had been in paid work for most of the time since completing full time education. Given that the policy intention of the supporting participation Priorities is principally to support those on inactive benefits or the long term unemployed, it is noteworthy that a majority of respondents even among these projects report that their careers since full time education were typically characterised by being in paid employment. An explanation here is the relatively large number of respondents in the sample who took part in Redundancy Training (e.g. React) - accounting for 27% of all respondents to the 2013 Survey. Individuals on Redundancy Training made up the whole sample of the Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme sample and 63% of responses for the Priority 2 Convergence Programme sample (313 out of 496), in other words 74% of supporting participation respondents. In this context, it is interesting – though unsurprising – that the employment histories of those participating in the qualitative research were far more fractured: around half said they had been out of work or unemployed for most of the time since leaving school whilst a third had been in paid work for most of this time. Nearly half of these respondents were economically inactive before participation.

Table 2.3 presents more detailed survey information on the previous labour market experiences of survey respondents who participated in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market and who were either unemployed or economically inactive prior to their participation. Information is provided on the duration of non-

employment and, for those who have held paid employment at some point, the previous occupation held. Among previously non-employed respondents from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme, two in five (40%) reported that they had been out of work for less than three months. In the same cohort around one in seven (15%) had been out of work for 12 months or more. Among previously non-employed respondents from Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme, a half (50%) reported that they had been out of work for less than three months. As discussed above, comparing the two Priorities, the relative prevalence of respondents with only short spells out of work reflects the high proportion of respondents having undertaken Redundancy Training. These findings do indicate, however, that ESF survey participants across various projects are relatively connected to the labour market.

Over half of the respondents from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme have previously been employed in occupations that are generally characterised by manual occupations (54%), including skilled trades (16%), personal service occupations (4%), process operatives (21%), and elementary occupations (13%). These occupations however only account for 31% of jobs previously held by respondents from Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme who have previously been employed. Among this group of respondents (Comp P1), over half (53%) were previously employed in occupations characterised by relatively high level skills or work experience, namely managerial occupations (23%), professional occupations (7%) and associate professional and technical occupations (23%). These occupations only account for 33% of jobs previously held among respondents from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme.

Table 2.3: Duration of non-employment and previous occupation held prior to participation in an ESF project (projects supporting participation)

per cent of non-employed respondents

	Con P2	Comp P1	Total
Duration of non-employment:			
Less than 3 months	39.6	50.3	42.7
3-6 months	26.3	33.8	28.5
6-12 months	17.7	12.1	16.1
1-2 years	5.9	1.9	4.7
2-3 years	2.6	1.3	2.2
3+ years	6.1	0.6	4.6
Don't know	1.8	0.0	1.3
Total	100%	100%	100%
<i>Sample</i>	<i>391</i>	<i>157</i>	<i>548</i>
Previous Occupation (among those who have previously worked):			
1. Managers & senior officials	13.9	23.1	16.5
2. Professional	5.7	7.1	6.1
3. Associate professional & technical	13.4	23.1	16.2
4. Admin and secretarial	8.7	9.0	8.8
5. Skilled trades	16.2	11.5	14.9
6. Personal service	3.6	1.9	3.1
7. Sales and customer service	4.4	6.4	5.0
8. Process, plant and machine	21.3	10.3	18.2
9. Elementary	12.9	7.7	11.4
Total	100%	100%	100%
<i>Sample</i>	<i>389</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>545</i>

The reasons why respondents faced difficulties in finding work prior to their participation in an ESF project are presented in Table 2.4. Respondents to the survey who were out of work prior to their participation were asked why they had experienced difficulties in finding work. The causes most frequently cited by previously unemployed respondents were a perceived lack of appropriate jobs in the area where they lived (60%), their lack of qualifications (32%), their age (27%) and their lack of relevant work experience (26%).

The small sample sizes associated with the economically inactive means that these results should be treated with caution. Nonetheless, consistently with previous surveys, the economically inactive tend to place greater emphasis on caring

responsibilities and ill-health as reasons for why they find it difficult to find work. In line with this, the most commonly cited reason amongst the participants to the qualitative research for not being able to find work (both prior to intervention and at the time of interview) related to alcohol or other drug dependency issues, health related problems and having a criminal record. A majority of these interviewees had led very chaotic lives which restricted their ability to find work or engage in any other voluntary or training programmes.

Table 2.4: Difficulties associated with finding work among those unemployed or economically inactive at the time of starting ESF provision (prompted)

per cent of respondents

	All Reasons			Main Reason		
	Unemployed	Inactive	Total	Unemployed	Inactive	Total
Lack of appropriate jobs where you live	59.8	31.6	58.0	39.6	13.2	37.9
A lack of qualifications or skills	32.3	21.1	31.6	12.3	5.3	11.8
Lack of relevant work experience	26.2	31.6	26.6	7.7	7.9	7.7
Age (too old/young)	27.0	13.2	26.1	11.4	2.6	10.8
Transport difficulties / hard to get appropriate work	13.6	18.4	13.9	3.3	2.6	3.3
Only wanting to work part time	10.5	13.2	10.6	2.9	0.0	2.7
Having caring responsibilities	8.6	21.1	9.4	1.5	13.2	2.2
Medical/health issues	8.3	21.1	9.1	4.0	13.2	4.6
Believing would not be better off financially in work	5.7	13.2	6.2	1.1	5.3	1.4
Lack of affordable childcare	3.5	18.4	4.5	0.9	5.3	1.2
The recession/economic climate	1.7	0.0	1.5	0.6	0.0	0.5
Having a criminal record	1.5	2.6	1.5	0.4	0.0	0.3
Alcohol or drug dependency	1.1	2.6	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Sample</i>	<i>545</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>583</i>	<i>545</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>583</i>

Additionally, the survey respondents were asked what they perceived to be the **main** difficulty that they faced in finding work. The reason most frequently cited by previously unemployed respondents was ‘a lack of appropriate jobs where they lived’, with two out of five of these respondents (40%) reporting this as the main reason for them being unable to find work. A lack of qualifications or skills was cited by 12% of previously unemployed respondents, while age was the main factor for 11% - predominantly older respondents. Again the sample size for those who were economically inactive prior to ESF was prohibitively small to draw robust conclusions.

CHAPTER 3: Participating in an ESF project

Chapter Summary

- Approximately 74% of respondents were aware that ESF had helped to pay for their participation in an ESF project.
- The two main reasons given by respondents for taking part in an ESF project were to develop a broader range of skills (25%) and to help them get a job (17%).
- Rates of withdrawal from an ESF project are estimated to be approximately 6.4% (based on survey data).
- Reasons for withdrawal are multifaceted and do not necessarily reflect dissatisfaction among participants. The most common reason cited by survey respondents was finding a job, which accounted for just over a quarter of early withdrawals from ESF interventions.

3.1 Introduction

The nature of the interventions that ESF participants who responded to the survey took part in are explored in this chapter. The section describes where and when respondents undertook their ESF interventions; the main reasons given by respondents for choosing to participate in an ESF project; and looks at incidences of early withdrawal from ESF projects, and the factors that influence participants' decisions to withdraw.

3.2 Embarking on an ESF project

Chapter 2 outlined how differences in the characteristics of survey respondents under the two ESF Priorities reflected differences in the groups that were being targeted. This section illustrates that the distinct nature of these interventions is also reflected in the way they are delivered. Approximately a half of respondents who participated in projects aimed at supporting progression undertook these interventions at the workplace (48%) (see Table 3.1). In comparison, around four fifths of respondents from projects aimed at supporting participation undertook these interventions at a training centre (64%), community centre (6%) or college (11%). Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents were aware that the project was funded by ESF, an increase compared with 69% in the 2012 Leavers Survey, with levels of

awareness being higher among respondents from projects aimed at supporting progression (75%) compared to those aimed at supporting participation (71%).

Table 3.1: Characteristics of ESF Projects *Per cent of respondents*

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
Location of delivery:							
College	11.3	10.9	11.2	12.7	3.9	10.3	10.6
Community centre	7.1	1.9	5.5	8.3	0.9	6.3	6.0
Training centre	61.7	70.3	64.3	18.6	23.4	19.9	35.9
At home	1.0	1.4	1.1	1.4	2.7	1.8	1.5
Workplace	7.3	4.3	6.4	42.4	61.8	47.6	32.8
School	11.7	11.3	11.6	16.6	7.4	14.2	13.2
Duration:							
Less than 1 month	62.3	65.6	63.3	27.6	39.4	30.8	42.5
1 to 6 months	24.4	26.4	25.0	49.1	40.8	46.9	39.0
6 to 12 months	5.7	4.3	5.2	10.3	11.2	10.6	8.7
12 to 24 months	2.2	0.5	1.7	3.2	1.2	2.6	2.3
24 months+	0.4	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3
Don't know	5.0	3.3	4.5	9.6	7.1	8.9	7.3
Hours spent per week on the course or project:							
0-4 hours	18.2	3.8	13.8	26.7	35.8	29.2	23.7
5-9 hours	18.6	22.6	19.8	30.8	27.8	30.0	26.3
10-15 hours	12.1	12.3	12.2	19.5	8.3	16.5	14.9
16-24 hours	13.5	19.8	15.4	8.4	8.3	8.4	10.9
25 hours or more	33.3	37.3	34.5	10.9	15.4	12.1	20.1
Don't know	4.4	4.3	4.4	3.8	4.4	4.0	4.1
Took course on evenings/weekends:							
Yes	8.9	8.5	8.8	11.1	4.7	9.4	9.2
Took course during the working week:							
Yes	93.7	96.7	94.6	93.1	97.3	94.3	94.4
No	6.3	3.3	5.4	6.9	2.7	5.7	5.6
Aware that ESF helped pay:							
Yes	70.6	72.6	71.2	76.2	71.3	74.9	73.6
No	26.6	25.5	26.3	21.4	26.0	22.7	24.0
Unsure	2.8	1.9	2.5	2.4	2.7	2.5	2.5
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

The duration and intensity of ESF interventions differ considerably between respondents from the different Priorities. Among respondents who participated in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, 63% reported that their interventions lasted less than a month. This is compared to 31% among those in projects aimed at supporting progression in employment. Furthermore, half of respondents in projects aimed at supporting participation (50%) reported that their involvement meant spending more than 15 hours a week on the course, with just over a third (35%) spending 25 hours or more a week on the course. A number of these interventions provide short term help with job search activities, which is reflected in the survey findings of relatively short duration but high intensity (hours per week). Indeed, given the very high proportion of ReAct project participants in this part of the sample, this represents short term, intense training to reskill for a new job. The duration of ESF interventions is typically longer among respondents who took part in projects aimed at supporting progression in employment. Approximately 13% of such interventions last longer than 6 months, compared to 7% of interventions supporting participation. The duration of interventions aimed at supporting progression are of a similar time to last year's survey (2012) but are considerably shorter than in the 2011 survey, where 33% of such interventions lasted longer than 6 months.

In line with the survey evidence suggesting that supporting participation projects tend to provide more intensive support, many of the participants in the qualitative research had received intense support, in many cases over a long period. The support provided included personal support which was geared to helping participants overcome and move on from specific health, welfare and dependency issues as well as support geared to supporting participants to become employable via the delivery of volunteering, training and job searching related activity

Survey respondents were prompted to provide information on all reasons why they embarked on an ESF project, and their single main reason. The most commonly cited reasons across the four Priorities are reported in Table 3.2. With respondents from projects aimed at supporting participation the three main reasons provided for involvement were to help them get a job (42%), to improve or widen their career

options (23%) and to develop a broader range of skills (14%). These in large part reflect the labour market position of the participants.

Respondents from projects aimed at supporting progression in employment placed greater emphasis on the importance of developing a broader range of skills (31%). Approximately one in six respondents (17%) from projects aimed at supporting progression indicated that their main reason for involvement was that their employer had requested, or required, their involvement in the scheme. This figure increases to one in five respondents (20%) from Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme. Although the main focus of ESF interventions relates to the employability and progression of individuals, some projects do operate at the level of the workplace and begin with a diagnosis of the employers' training and development needs. It is not surprising that, in these circumstances, the impetus for training may arise from the employer rather than the individual.

Table 3.2: Reasons for undertaking an ESF project (prompted)

per cent of respondents

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
All reasons:							
Develop a broader range of skills	89.3	95.3	91.1	93.4	93.8	93.5	92.6
Improve or widen career options	95.0	97.6	95.8	74.5	72.2	73.8	81.7
Develop more specialist skills	81.7	84.0	82.3	76.8	77.5	77.0	78.9
Learn something new for personal interest	63.1	59.0	61.9	65.1	56.5	62.8	62.5
Improve pay, promotion or other prospect	53.0	49.1	51.8	52.2	45.0	50.2	50.8
Help get a job	92.5	93.9	92.9	25.2	20.4	23.9	48.8
An adviser recommended it	52.8	42.5	49.7	44.2	48.2	45.3	46.9
Employer requested or required it	10.9	5.7	9.3	46.3	65.4	51.4	36.3
Help progress to another education, training or learning course	35.5	25.5	32.5	37.1	28.1	34.7	33.9
Main reason:							
Develop a broader range of skills	15.1	9.9	13.6	28.0	37.9	30.7	24.5
Help get a job	42.3	42.5	42.4	3.2	0.6	2.5	16.8
Improve or widen career options	20.8	27.8	22.9	13.2	8.6	11.9	15.9
Develop more specialist skills	8.1	11.8	9.2	15.5	14.5	15.3	13.1
Employer requested or required it	1.2	0.9	1.1	15.7	20.1	16.9	11.2
Learn something new for personal interest	1.6	1.9	1.7	6.3	4.4	5.8	4.3
Improve pay, promotion or other prospect	2.2	0.0	1.6	5.8	4.7	5.5	4.1
An adviser recommended it	1.8	0.5	1.4	2.4	2.1	2.3	2.0
Help progress to another education, training or learning course	1.2	0.5	1.0	2.3	1.8	2.2	1.7
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

3.3 Withdrawing from an ESF project

Both the monitoring data supplied by WEFO for ESF participants who took part in the survey and the survey dataset provide information on early withdrawal from ESF projects. The completion status from these two sources is presented in Table 3.3.

This suggests that there are significant inconsistencies between the information held on monitoring data and the information supplied by participants regarding whether or not they completed the course. Rates of withdrawal derived from both sources are

low. Based upon monitoring data, 147 of the participants who responded to the survey withdrew from ESF; a withdrawal rate of 7.5%, a rate similar to that obtained from the survey data (6.4% or 125 participants). However, only 46 respondents (2.3%) are consistently recorded as having withdrawn from ESF based upon both their responses to the survey data and their monitoring data.

Table 3.3: Withdrawal from ESF projects

number of respondents

	Administrative Data		
	Completed	Withdrew	Total
Survey Data			
Completed	1,726	100	1,826
Withdrew	79	46	125
Don't know	14	1	15
Total	1,819	147	1,966

The reasons given by respondents for leaving an ESF project early (as defined by responses to the survey) are presented in Table 3.4. Here, the most commonly cited reason was having left to start a new job (27%) - illustrating that an early withdrawal may in fact signal a positive outcome. However, one in five respondents who had left early cited a lack of time/ they were too busy (20%) and approximately one in six stated that their reason for leaving early was that course had not met their expectations (17%).

The qualitative research also highlighted the fact that participation in projects supporting the most vulnerable may not be linear, and that identifying 'leavers' may be problematic since in some cases, participants tended to 'dip in and out' of projects as and when they needed support.

Table 3.4: Reasons for not completing an ESF project
per cent of withdrawers

Withdrawal Rate	7.5
Left to start a job	27.2
Family / personal circumstances	9.6
Lack of time / too busy	20.0
Ill health / disability	11.2
Course did not meet expectations	16.8
Lack of support / help	4.0
Changed job or made redundant	6.4
Problems accessing course e.g. travel problems	0.8
Course cancelled / closed down	6.4
Course too advanced / too hard	8.0
Course too easy	4.0
<i>Sample</i>	<i>125</i>

CHAPTER 4: ESF and the accumulation of Skills

Chapter Summary

- The most commonly cited skills acquired by respondents during their ESF project were job specific skills (69%), communication skills (68%), organizational skills (66%), problem solving skills (66%), and team working skills (65%).
- The vast majority of respondents report that they felt their capabilities and capacities have improved as a result of participating in ESF including feeling more confident about their abilities (85%), feeling better about themselves generally (80%) and feeling that they have improved their career prospects (76%).
- Approximately 77% of respondents report that they gained some form of qualification through ESF.

4.1 Introduction

Survey data on the contribution of ESF to the development of skills is presented in this chapter. It firstly explores the type of skills that respondents report they have acquired as a result of their ESF project, and then considers the contribution of ESF, and of further study and training following the completion of their intervention, upon levels of educational attainment.

4.2 Skills acquired from ESF

Respondents to the survey were asked to provide a list of skills they had acquired during their ESF project. Table 4.1 indicates that the most commonly cited skills acquired were job-specific skills (69%). These skills were among the most commonly cited in interventions aimed both at supporting participation in the labour market and at supporting progression in employment (the relatively large number of individuals who had undertaken Redundancy Training in the 2013 survey is likely to be important in explaining this finding, where support is often tailored to helping the participants gain employment within a particular area of work). Other commonly cited skills gained include communication (68%), organisational skills (66%), problem solving (66%), and team working skills (65%). Participants from projects supporting participation in the labour market were unsurprisingly more likely to report improvements in job search skills (45%, compared with 28% for supporting

progression) and CV writing or interview skills (34%, compared with 24% for supporting progression). Around two-fifths of all participants reported that they had improved literacy (39%) and numeracy skills (38%) as a result of the intervention.

Table 4.1: Skills Acquired from an ESF project (prompted)

per cent of respondents

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
Job-specific skills related to a specific occupation	69.0	78.7	71.9	66.0	68.6	66.7	68.6
Communication skills	60.7	57.6	59.8	74.3	69.2	73.0	68.2
Problem solving skills	62.3	61.3	62.0	67.7	68.3	67.9	65.7
Organisational skills	61.9	57.3	60.5	69.9	63.7	68.3	65.5
Team working skills	58.5	53.3	56.9	70.7	64.7	69.1	64.7
Leadership and/or strategic management skills	32.2	35.8	33.3	55.8	51.0	54.5	46.9
IT skills	44.0	48.1	45.3	46.6	42.4	45.5	45.4
Literacy skills	36.7	34.0	35.9	41.8	35.8	40.2	38.6
Numeracy skills	39.8	38.4	39.4	38.7	32.6	37.1	37.9
Job search skills	47.3	39.2	44.8	29.3	23.1	27.6	33.8
English language skills	32.5	22.2	29.4	31.5	24.9	29.7	29.6
CV writing or interview skills	36.6	27.4	33.8	25.8	17.8	23.6	27.3
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

Respondents were asked to detail other perceived benefits beyond the acquisition of generic and specific skills (as reported in Table 4.1) arising from their involvement in ESF intervention projects. Here the focus was on how involvement in ESF projects contributed to enhancing the capacity and capabilities of participants. Table 4.2 shows the benefits most commonly cited were: respondents feeling more confident about their capabilities (85%); feeling better about themselves generally (80%); and having improved their employment or career prospects (76%). A higher proportion of respondents from interventions aimed at supporting participation in employment reported that they made new friends as a result of the course (59% compared to 43%), and that they felt more healthy (56% compared to 49%). Over three-quarters of respondents from supporting participation projects indicated that they were clearer about what they wanted to do in their life as a result of the intervention (77%).

Table 4.2: Outcomes from ESF projects (prompted)*per cent of respondents*

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
More confident about your abilities	84.7	87.1	85.4	84.6	84.3	84.5	84.8
Feeling better about yourself generally	83.2	84.7	83.7	80.3	72.5	78.2	80.2
Clearer about the range of opportunities open to you	80.0	76.6	79.0	74.8	73.7	74.5	76.1
Feeling you have improved employment or career prospects	77.5	86.3	80.1	74.8	71.2	73.9	76.1
More enthusiastic about learning	74.7	73.1	74.3	70.1	68.8	69.8	71.4
Clearer about what you want to do in your life	77.2	75.0	76.6	68.4	66.7	68.0	71.1
Feeling more healthy	56.6	54.9	56.1	50.1	44.9	48.7	51.3
Making new friends as a result of the course	60.9	55.0	59.1	46.4	33.1	42.8	48.7
Taking part in more voluntary or community activities	26.3	30.3	27.5	28.3	22.8	26.8	27.1
Thinking about setting up your own business or working self-employed	19.4	14.0	17.8	14.9	10.8	13.7	15.2
Taken up new hobbies or interests	9.5	10.4	9.8	11.3	6.2	9.9	9.9
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

The qualitative interviews revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction with the support provided across the projects included within the fieldwork. It would appear that those most removed from the labour market were the ones most likely to report that intervention had proved to be a life changing experience. Many of those interviewed also reported that the support provided had contributed to positive changes within their lives including changes to their lifestyle, health, welfare and accommodation arrangements. In addition some of these participants were reporting other more general benefits from having been involved with the project including gaining confidence, developing new skills, obtaining new experiences relating to training or volunteering opportunities, and dealing with social settings and an improvement in their personal skills.

4.3 Educational attainment and ESF

Table 4.3 outlines how the educational attainment of survey respondents develops both as a result of ESF and as a result of further education and training undertaken after their participation on an ESF project. Respondents were asked in the survey about their level of educational attainment prior to their participation in ESF (previously reported in Table 2.1 but repeated here for ease of exposition). It was not possible to allocate the prior educational attainment of all respondents to an NQF category because of the complexities involved in collecting information on qualifications held, especially with respondents who may have completed full time education several decades earlier. As such, 25% of respondents are recorded as having a qualification level classified as 'other or unspecified'. Approximately one in twenty respondents (5.3%) did not possess any qualifications prior to their participation. This figure is higher among respondents from projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market (6.9%) than among respondents from supporting progression projects (4.5%).

Data on the qualifications held at the time of the survey are reported in the second panel of Table 4.3. The educational attainment of a respondent at the time of the survey is derived from information provided about the qualifications that they held prior to ESF combined with information about qualifications achieved either as a result of their ESF intervention or those achieved subsequently. Where respondents did not provide sufficient detail for these qualifications to be allocated to an NQF level the highest level of educational attainment was recorded as the highest 'known' qualification for that individual. This level could relate to qualifications held either before ESF, as a result of ESF or from training undertaken since ESF. By the time of the survey, the proportion of respondents who do not possess any qualifications is 4%, a decline of one percentage point, while the proportion holding qualifications at Level 3 and above had increased by a little over two percentage points.

Proportionately, there is a larger impact on those who are furthest from the labour market in terms of their education - the 1 percentage point fall in ESF respondents with no qualification represents around a fifth of the total before ESF training.

Table 4.3: Qualification Levels and ESF*per cent of respondents*

	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
Qualifications held before course							
None	7.7	5.2	6.9	3.9	5.9	4.5	5.3
NQF Level 1 or less	6.9	5.2	6.4	5.9	8.0	6.4	6.4
NQF Level 2	12.7	7.1	11.0	8.5	9.5	8.7	9.6
NQF Level 3	16.3	13.2	15.4	18.2	13.0	16.8	16.3
NQF Level 4 or above	27.8	40.1	31.5	41.9	39.1	41.1	37.6
Unspecified, other	28.6	29.3	28.8	21.7	24.6	22.5	24.8
Qualifications held at time of survey							
None	6.1	5.2	5.8	2.6	4.4	3.1	4.1
NQF Level 1 or less	5.4	3.8	4.9	4.4	6.5	4.9	4.9
NQF Level 2	13.5	6.6	11.4	8.9	10.7	9.4	10.1
NQF Level 3	17.1	14.6	16.4	17.2	13.6	16.2	16.3
NQF Level 4 or above	29.2	40.6	32.6	45.2	40.2	43.9	39.8
Unspecified, other	28.6	29.3	28.8	21.7	24.6	22.5	24.8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sample	496	212	708	920	338	1,258	1,966

Table 4.4 considers transitions in individual educational attainment that occur as a result of participation in ESF (i.e. excluding any qualifications that may have been gained subsequently). Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine how educational attainment changes for an individual in approximately half of all cases (49%). This will occur in situations where educational attainment prior to ESF is unknown, or where the level of qualification achieved via ESF is unknown. In both cases, it is not possible to determine whether the additional qualification is at a higher or lower level than that previously held. Overall 23% of respondents indicated that their project did not result in a qualification. Approximately one in ten respondents (9%) undertook projects that resulted in a qualification at the same level as the highest qualification which they held prior to the intervention (as classified by the National Qualification Framework). A further 14% of respondents participated in a project that resulted in a lower level qualification and 4% of respondents undertook a qualification that was at a higher level: this figure is significantly lower than recorded in previous surveys, where in aggregate around 13% of participants acquired a qualification at a higher

level than the highest previously held. While this may simply be a feature of the 'mix' of projects in the 2013 Leavers Survey, it perhaps merits further investigation.

Analysing the transitions for 2013 ESF Leavers as a whole there is relatively little change in the distributions of qualifications held following participation in ESF.

Table 4.4: Qualification Transitions and ESF

	<i>per cent of respondents</i>						
	Supporting Participation			Supporting Progression			All
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total	Con P3	Comp P2	Total	
Qualification transitions							
Lower qualifications	9.7	10.4	9.9	20.5	5.9	16.6	14.2
No qualifications	28.2	18.4	25.3	21.6	23.7	22.2	23.3
Same qualifications	7.3	8.5	7.6	11.0	8.6	10.3	9.4
Higher qualifications	4.6	1.9	3.8	4.7	3.6	4.4	4.2
Qualification transition not determined	50.2	60.9	53.4	42.2	58.3	46.5	49.0
Transitions excluding not determined							
Lower qualifications	19.4	26.5	21.2	35.5	14.2	31.1	27.8
No qualifications	56.7	47.0	54.2	37.4	56.7	41.5	45.7
Same qualifications	14.6	21.7	16.4	19.0	20.6	19.3	18.3
Higher qualifications	9.3	4.8	8.2	8.1	8.5	8.2	8.2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Sample</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>920</i>	<i>338</i>	<i>1,258</i>	<i>1,966</i>

Due to the varying proportions of respondents for whom qualification transitions cannot be determined, making meaningful, fair comparisons here between Priorities can be difficult. For respondents who were engaged in a supporting participation project over a half (53%) had qualification transitions that could not be determined. The comparative figure for respondents on a supporting progression project was 47%. To overcome these difficulties, the lower panel of Table 4.4 shows the percentage of respondents experiencing qualification transitions, excluding those for whom no transition data is available. The analysis here indicates that participants in interventions aimed at supporting progression are more likely to achieve a qualification (59%) than participants in interventions aimed at supporting participation (46%). A relatively high proportion (63%) of participants in projects under Priority 3 of the Convergence Programme achieved a qualification, while 57% of participants in

both the Priority 2 Convergence Programme (supporting participation) and the Priority 2 Competitiveness Programme (supporting progression) did not gain a qualification from their participation in ESF.

The qualitative research suggested that qualifications did not play a major role in the minds of the most vulnerable participants, although in a significant minority of cases qualifications had been achieved. Since many (but by no means all) of the participants had no or only very low prior qualifications, participation in the project did lead to positive qualification transitions.

CHAPTER 5: Improving Participation in the labour market

Chapter Summary

- A majority of transitions out of unemployment and inactivity among respondents from supporting participation in the labour market themes occur either during or immediately following their participation in an ESF project.
- Among respondents from Priorities aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, 82% were in paid employment at the time of the survey: an increase in their rate of employment of 63 percentage points compared with that observed before their participation. Of this increase in employment, approximately 90% can be accounted for by people moving out of unemployment and into paid work.
- Participation in ESF is associated with an increase in the rate of transition into employment among the unemployed (9 percentage points), those recently made redundant (13 percentage points) and the economically inactive (7 percentage points) compared to similar people within the wider labour market. Proportionately, the effect of participation on the economically inactive is larger than for the unemployed. The qualitative research also provides evidence of positive transitions among formerly inactive participants.
- Just over one in five (21%) of those who were in a job at the time of the survey that was not held prior to their participation in ESF, report that their project was vital to them gaining their current employment. Among those who remained out of work at the time of the survey, one in four (25%) report that they felt that they had more chance of finding a job in the future as a result of their participation.
- Respondents perceive the benefits of ESF to be higher when they gain any qualification, although perceived benefits are greatest when the qualification gained is at a higher level than that which they previously held.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the labour market experiences of survey respondents following the completion of their ESF intervention. Section 5.2 uses survey data from the 2013 Leavers Survey combined with that from earlier Leavers Surveys to provide a picture of the main activities respondents had engaged in for the 12 months following the completion of their ESF intervention. A majority of respondents were able to provide an account of their labour market experiences for a period of at least 12 months following the completion of their interventions. Such a longitudinal

perspective enables us to consider evolving patterns of participation in the labour market following ESF. To supplement the career history data, which in itself is only able to provide relatively limited information about participation status, Section 5.3 provides a more detailed account of the economic activity of 2013 Leavers at the time of the survey. In Section 5.4 we turn to our Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) to place the data on transitions in the broader context of 'typical' transitions within the wider labour market.

In Sections 5.5 and 5.6, we look at the characteristics of the employment achieved by formerly unemployed and inactive participants. Section 5.7 considers specifically the issue of transport as a barrier to finding employment.

The career profiles of respondents participating in projects aimed primarily at those in employment exhibit a fair degree of continuity. By definition, respondents in projects under Priority 3 of the Convergence Programme and Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme reveal high rates of employment both before and after the intervention. This continuity reflects the targeting of these interventions on the employed population and that the objectives of these interventions are concerned with progression in employment. Whilst these interventions may indirectly affect labour market status insofar as they improve the chances of participants remaining in employment, the effects are expected to be much smaller than those observed among participants in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market. This chapter therefore focuses on the career profiles of respondents from projects under the supporting participation in the labour market theme of ESF (Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme and Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme).

5.2 Employment and non-employment following ESF projects

The situation of those respondents who were unemployed immediately prior to their participation is highlighted in Figure 5.1. Sixty per cent of participants who were unemployed prior to their intervention were either unemployed or inactive upon the completion of their intervention (i.e. at zero months following ESF). The proportion that remains unemployed or inactive falls to 39% by the end of the 12 month follow-up period. This 21 percentage points decline in the proportion of unemployed or

inactive respondents is accounted for by a corresponding increase in the proportion of respondents in employment (from 37% to 58%). Figure 5.2 shows the situation of male respondents who were unemployed prior to their participation in an ESF project. Immediately following their interventions, 61% of males were unemployed or inactive but by the end of the follow-up period this proportion had decreased to 38%. There had been a counteracting increase in the proportion of respondents in employment from 36% to 60%.

Figure 5.1: Career profiles of previously unemployed respondents (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=6,364)

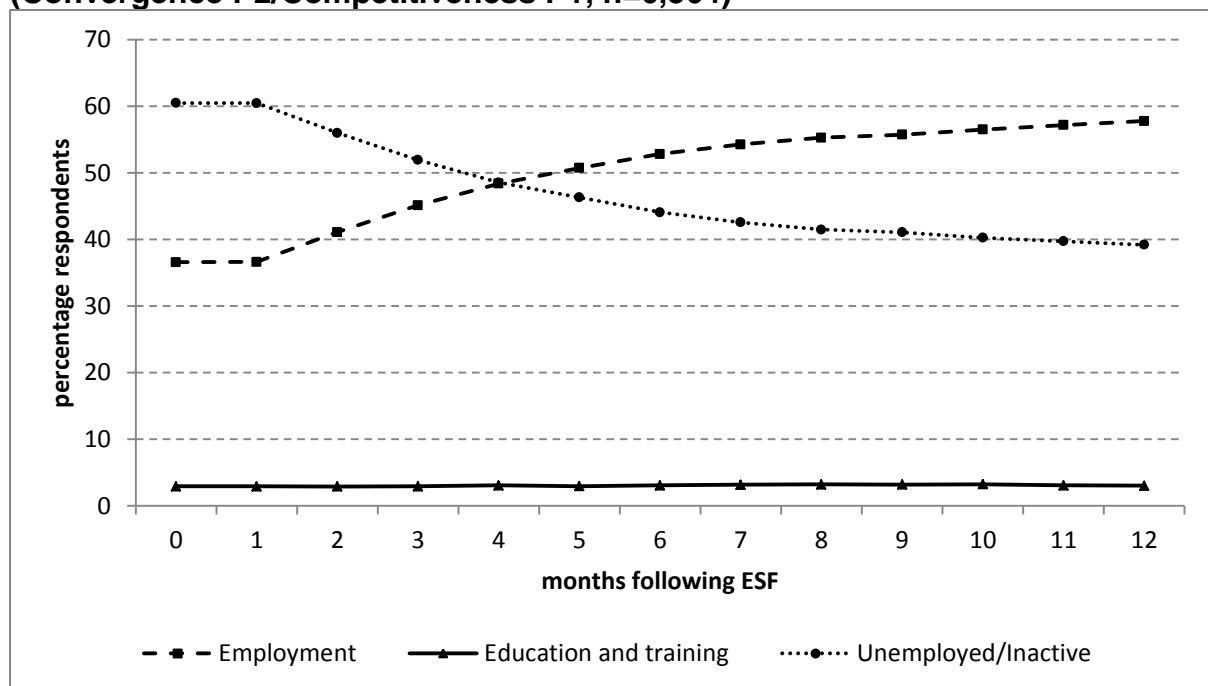


Figure 5.2: Career profiles of previously unemployed male respondents (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=4,021)

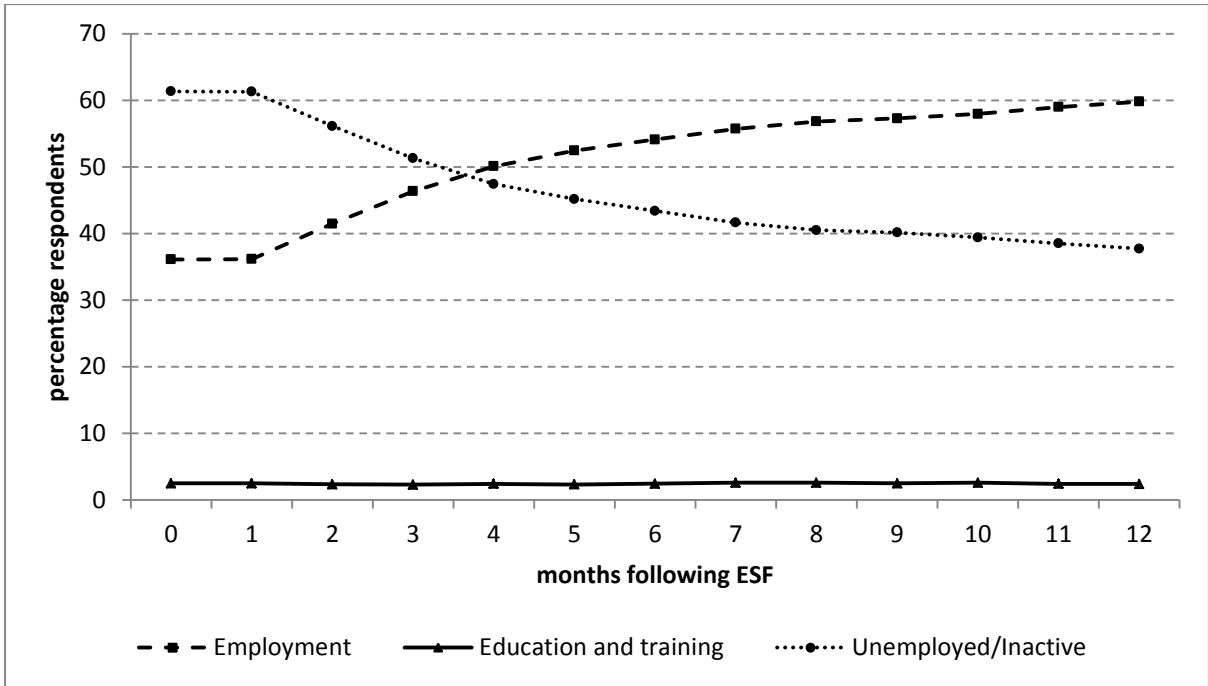


Figure 5.3 illustrates the corresponding situation of female respondents who were unemployed prior to their participation in an ESF project. In this group the proportion unemployed or inactive immediately after their intervention was 59%. By the end of the follow-up period this proportion had fallen to 42% (a decrease of 17 percentage points for females, where 21 percentage points had occurred in the corresponding male cohort).

Figure 5.3: Career profiles of previously unemployed female respondents (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=2,343)

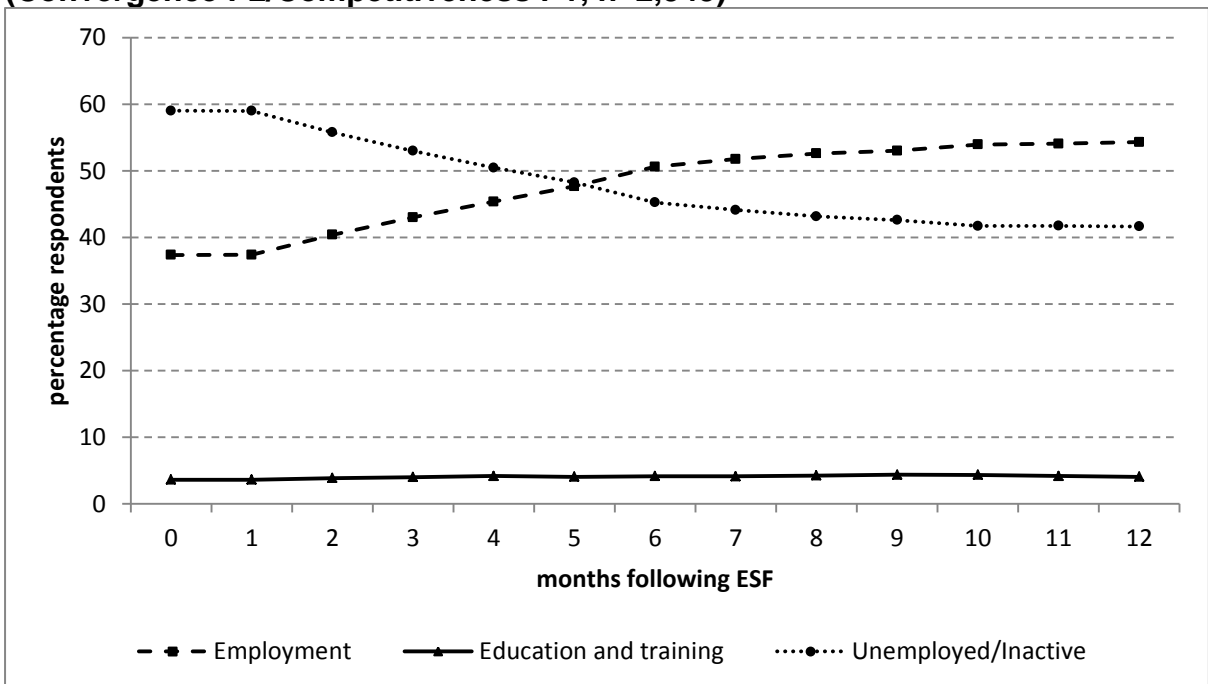
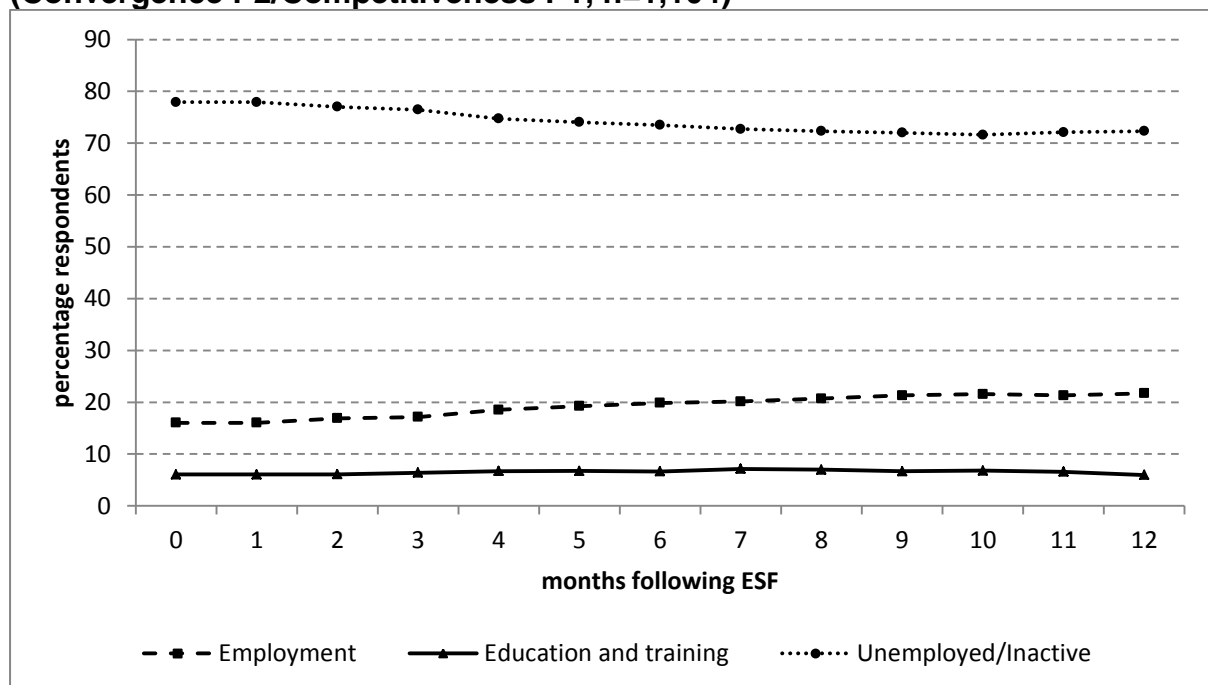


Figure 5.4 considers the situation of respondents who were economically inactive prior to their participation in an ESF project. Rates of employment are much lower among this group compared with those who were unemployed prior to their project. Immediately following their interventions, 16% have gained employment and a further 6% have moved into education and training. There is a gradual, slow improvement in the proportion employed during the remainder of the follow-up period. By the end of the follow-up period, 22% of respondents who were economically inactive prior to their participation are in employment.

Figure 5.4: Career profiles of previously inactive respondents (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=1,104)



Figures 5.5 and 5.6 highlight the situation of respondents who were economically inactive prior to their participation in an ESF project broken down by male and female respondents respectively. Figure 5.5 shows that for males the proportion in employment increased by 5 percentage points from immediately after their intervention to the end of the follow-up period (21% to 26% in employment).

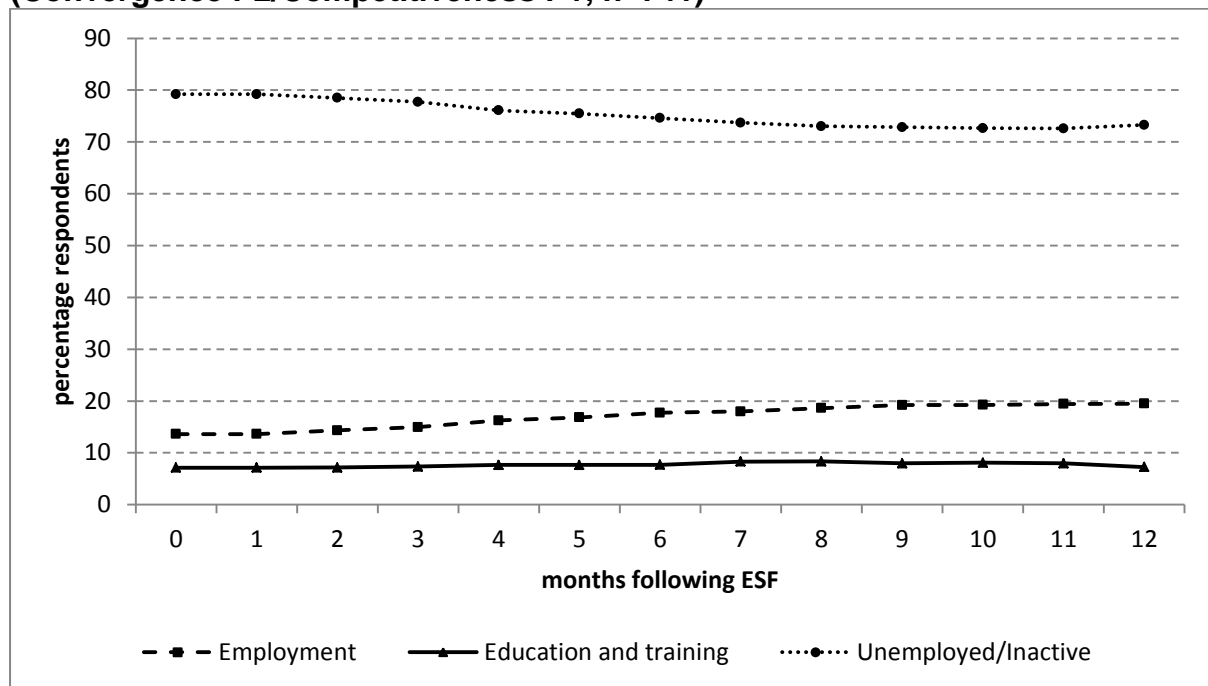
Figure 5.5: Career profiles of previously inactive males respondents

(Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=363)



Figure 5.6 shows that the female cohort experienced an increase of 6 percentage points in the proportion employed when comparing the proportion immediately following their intervention with that at the end of the follow-up period. However, the proportion of females in employment remained around 6 percentage points below that of males over the whole of this period. Part of this discrepancy may be explained by the fact that females (who were economically inactive prior to participation in an ESF programme) were more likely to have moved into education after completing their intervention (7%) compared to males (3%).

Figure 5.6: Career profiles of previously inactive female respondents (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1, n=741)



The charts above for both those who were unemployed and those who were inactive prior to their participation in an intervention indicate that a majority of transitions out of unemployment and inactivity among these respondents occur either during or immediately following their participation in an ESF project.

5.3 The current activity of ESF participants

Having outlined a broad overview of the labour market status of participants for 12 months following the completion of their project in the previous section, we now go on to provide a more detailed analysis of the labour market characteristics of 2013 Leavers Survey respondents, measured at the time of the survey. Table 5.1 highlights labour market transitions among respondents from projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, contrasting their main labour market activity immediately before their ESF project with their situation at the time of the survey. Prior to their participation, 19% of these respondents reported that they were in employment (although many of these are likely to have been under notice of redundancy given the large proportion of ReAct participants [nearly three-quarters of the respondents in this particular analysis]). By the time of the survey, 82% were in employment. This 63 percentage point increase in employment is largely accounted

for by a movement out of unemployment into paid work, (60% of respondents make this transition).

Therefore approximately four-fifths of those who were unemployed prior to ESF gain employment by the time of the survey.

Table 5.1: Current activity compared with main activity prior to ESF intervention: (Convergence P2/Competitiveness P1 respondents)⁶

per cent of respondents

Main activity before attending course	Current main activity				
	Paid employment	Education and training	Unemployed	Economically inactive	Total
Paid employment	17.3	0.4	0.7	1.0	19.4
Education and training	1.7	0.3	0.3	0.3	2.6
Unemployed	59.8	0.7	7.6	5.1	73.2
Economically inactive	2.7	0.3	0.4	1.4	4.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>81.5</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>9.0</i>	<i>7.9</i>	<i>(n=701)</i>

Note: For ease of exposition, respondents who replied don't know have been removed from this transition matrix

By comparison transitions experienced among those who were previously economically inactive are relatively small by comparison. Nearly 3% of all respondents made a transition from economic inactivity to paid employment (55% of those who were economically inactive)⁷, reflecting the relatively small proportion of the respondents who were classified as inactive prior to ESF. At the time of the survey, the overall proportion of respondents who were economically inactive had increased from 5% prior to ESF participation to 8%. This is largely due to 5% of respondents making a transition from unemployed prior to ESF to economically inactive following ESF. This group accounts for the single largest 'negative' transition in economic activity.

The qualitative research with participants provided evidence of transitions broadly in line with the quantitative survey, with around a fifth of these generally vulnerable

⁶ Many of those participants who reported that they were in employment before attending the course are likely to have been under formal notice of redundancy as three quarters of the respondents from projects aimed at improving participation were from the ReAct project.

⁷ This figure is higher than that shown in Figure 5.4. However, that analysis is only based on a subset of survey respondents who are able to provide 12 months' worth of career history data. The analysis of Table 5.1 does not impose that restriction.

participants transitioning from unemployment or economic inactivity to employment, and with a similar reduction in the proportion of the participants who were economically inactive.

5.4⁸ Assessing the effectiveness of ESF in supporting participation in employment

This section presents the results of Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) techniques, where the labour market experiences of ESF survey respondents were compared with the experiences of similar groups of people in the wider labour market. Using Propensity Score Matching (PSM) techniques, respondents to the ESF survey are matched with respondents to the Annual Population Survey. The analysis focusses upon the transitions into employment made by ESF participants who were either unemployed or economically inactive prior to their participation in ESF. These transitions are compared with those made by otherwise comparable people identified in the APS who are assumed to act as a control group so that an assessment of the potential impact of ESF on labour market participation can be made. The methodology developed to use the APS as a source of longitudinal data, including the particular measures used to derive a control group for participants in Redundancy Training, is detailed in the report of the combined analysis of the 2009 and 2010 ESF Leavers Surveys⁹. The analysis is based upon combined data from the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 ESF Leavers Surveys. The CIE analysis requires respondents to the ESF survey to be observed for a period of at least 12 months following the commencement of the ESF intervention. Combining data across five surveys is important to maximise the number of observations that can be included within this type of analysis.

Table 5.2 reveals that among respondents to the ESF Surveys, the unemployed exhibit a 12 month transition rate into paid employment of 56%, approximately 19 percentage points higher than that estimated from the APS. However, this differential is being driven by the particularly high rates of transition exhibited by

⁸ This chapter incorporates data from the Annual Population Survey which is produced by the ONS and is accessed via special licence from the UK Data Archive, University of Essex, Colchester. None of these organisations bears any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation undertaken here.

⁹ Available from the WEFO website.

those participating in Redundancy Training, where approximately three quarters (76%) of participants are in paid employment 12 months after participating in their project. Those unemployed who are participating in other types of ESF intervention exhibit broadly similar – though marginally higher - rates of transition in to paid employment (43%) than those in the wider population (37%). Excluding those participating in Redundancy Training, rates of transition in to paid employment over a period of 12 months appear to be lower for participants in ESF who are aged 18-20 or 56-65, suffer from a work limiting illness, have lower levels of educational attainment or who have been out of work for longer compared with the average for all ESF non-Redundancy training participants. Among participants in Redundancy Training, it can be seen that there is less difference in transition rates among different population sub-groups, although participants aged 56 and over and those with a work limiting illness still exhibit lower rates of transition in to employment. The absence of any strong relationship with respect to levels of educational attainment would suggest that the overriding characteristic of this group is their high employability having relatively recently been engaged in paid employment.

The final two columns of Table 5.2 present comparisons of employment transition rates for the economically inactive. A large majority of the non-employed respondents to the ESF survey in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market are unemployed rather than economically inactive¹⁰. In contrast, the economically inactive represent approximately three quarters of the non-employed wider population. Whilst the unemployed are relatively homogenous in terms of their situation and attitudes towards finding work (out of work, looking for work and available to start work), the economically inactive are far more varied in their circumstances and preferences for work. As a result, it is more difficult to make 'like for like' comparisons in employment transitions among this group. By participating in ESF, economically inactive participants would appear to be expressing a preference for gaining employment.

¹⁰ As based upon the ILO definition of economic inactivity and not necessarily with reference to the type of benefits received by participants.

Table 5.2: Comparing Employment Transition Rates Among the Non-Employed Population

	<i>per cent respondents</i>					
	Unemployed				Economically Inactive	
	Other Courses	Redundancy Training	All ESF	APS ^a	ESF	APS
Gender:						
Male	43.8	76.1	57.3	36.5	20.9	9.7
Female	41.4	75.9	52.5	38.1	16.6	12.4
Age:						
18-20 years	34.6	75.0	35.5	37.9	15.6	23.6
21-25	44.2	88.9	49.9	41.0	25.6	16.3
26-35	44.4	75.9	55.9	37.0	22.4	14.8
36-45	45.9	83.1	62.3	39.6	17.0	13.5
46-55	47.6	76.9	62.7	37.8	21.0	9.4
56-65	33.2	59.6	46.5	26.3	9.7	6.2
Work Limiting Illness:						
No	47.1	77.7	59.6	40.4	24.1	18.9
Yes	21.3	54.0	28.3	24.2	9.0	4.9
Educational Attainment:						
NQF Level 4+	62.2	78.4	72.0	50.2	23.9	19.4
NQF Level 3	45.7	75.2	58.1	42.8	26.6	15.0
NQF Level 2	41.7	77.4	52.3	37.3	16.9	13.8
NQF < Level 2	33.8	77.1	43.7	32.9	18.4	9.6
None	34.5	68.5	41.8	21.3	10.1	5.3
Other	46.9	71.7	59.6	35.3	26.8	9.7
Duration of non-employment:						
<1 year	55.1	76.8	66.4	45.6	38.1	21.3
1-3 years	32.4	54.8	33.5	23.5	22.0	14.6
3 years+	22.1	33.3	22.2	11.2	10.9	6.3
Total	42.8	76.0	55.5	37.2	17.9	11.3

^a Annual Population Survey

Among economically inactive respondents to the ESF survey, approximately 18% gain work during the 12 months following their participation in an ESF project. The APS provides information on the attitudes of the economically inactive about gaining employment. It is possible to exclude economically inactive APS respondents who indicate that they are not looking for work and do not want work from contributing to the control group. Among the remaining inactive APS respondents, the rate of

transition in to paid employment is estimated to be 11%; seven percentage points lower (or approximately a third lower) than the rate observed among economically inactive ESF participants.

Among respondents to the APS, rates of transition in to paid employment for the economically inactive population are higher among women, the young, those who do not suffer from a work related illness and those with higher levels of educational attainment. The likelihood with which the economically inactive enter work is also related to their duration of non-employment. These patterns are generally repeated among respondents to the ESF surveys, although it must be noted that the economically inactive represent a relatively small proportion of the non-employed sample within the ESF surveys and so estimates for particular population sub-groups will be subject to sampling variability.

To estimate the effect of ESF interventions on the likelihood that those out of work prior to participation gain employment following ESF, statistical matching has been undertaken utilising Propensity Score Matching to make 'like for like' comparisons between the ESF and APS samples. The variables used for the purposes of statistical matching are gender, age, educational attainment, family status, ethnicity, work limiting illness, local area employment rates and unemployment duration. The aim of PSM is to match each ESF participant to someone from the wider population who is most similar in terms of their probability of being an ESF participant. Once a comparison group is formed, the effect of the ESF intervention is estimated by simply comparing differences in outcome measures between the two groups. A more detailed description of Propensity Score Matching is provided in the report of the 2010 Leavers Survey and in the report of the combined analysis of the 2009 and 2010 surveys.

There are a number of different PSM techniques and detailed results based upon eight different estimation specifications are presented in Annex 2. The results derived from the different methods are very similar. Summarizing these findings by taking the average of the results estimated by the different PSM techniques, participation in non-Redundancy Training projects among the unemployed is

associated with an average increase in the rate of transition into employment of 9 percentage points (43% among ESF participants compared with 34% among respondents from the APS). Among the unemployed who have recently been made redundant, participation in Redundancy Training projects is associated with an average increase in the rate of transition into employment of 13 percentage points (78% among ESF participants compared with 65% among APS respondents). It is important to note that although the absolute size of the estimated differential in employment transitions is higher among participants in Redundancy Training, proportionately the effect of Redundancy Training (a 20% increase in employment) is smaller than that observed among other forms of interventions (26%). Finally, among the economically inactive, participation in ESF is associated with an average increase in the rate of transition into employment of 7 percentage points (20% among ESF participants compared with 13% among APS respondents). This is equivalent to a 51% increase in employment amongst this group compared to the control group.

It is important to treat the results derived from these techniques with caution. It is not possible for statistical matching techniques to control for the effects of selection on to the projects. It is possible that the positive effects associated with participation in ESF interventions on moving into employment could simply reflect the relative employability of those people who either chose or who were selected to participate in the interventions. This is of particular importance among the economically inactive among whom it is most likely to be the case that those who participate in ESF are particularly unrepresentative of the wider economically inactive population. Those who gained employment following ESF may also have been more likely to respond to the survey, thereby inflating the rates of transition in to employment among ESF participants. Nonetheless, estimated results for both the unemployed and the economically inactive are broadly comparable with results produced by Ainsworth and Marlow (2011)¹¹ based upon their counterfactual impact evaluation of the net impacts of the 2007-2013 ESF Programme in England undertaken by DWP using administrative data on benefit recipients combined with ESF monitoring data. Despite the different methodology used, the results presented here provide a useful

11 http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/ihr_abstracts/ihr_003.asp

'ball-park' figure to frame the discussion surrounding the effects of ESF upon labour market outcomes.

5.5 Characteristics of current employment

Information on the employment characteristics at the time of the survey of 2013 Leavers Survey respondents from supporting participation projects are shown in Table 5.3. As highlighted above, a significant proportion of respondents from projects that aim to improve participation in the labour market moved into employment following their training. Approximately three in ten (31%) of the participants from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme gained employment in either process or elementary occupations (indicating a concentration towards relatively low skilled occupations). This is compared to just over two in 10 who participated in projects under Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme (22%). Among this latter group, 47% gained employment in managerial, professional or associate professional occupations (around 17 percentage points higher than among respondents from Convergence Priority 2 interventions).

For both Priorities, over three-quarters of respondents who find work are employed in permanent positions and four-fifths (80%) work 30 hours or more per week. Female participants from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme earn approximately £56/week less than respondents from Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme; their male counterparts earn £32/week less than Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme.

Respondents from projects under Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme were exclusively from Redundancy Training courses and their consequent relatively high skills and labour market experience are main factors in explaining the higher skilled occupations, higher levels of earnings and higher prevalence of permanent contracts when compared with participants from Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme. Indeed the contrast between the different Programmes' groups of participants in terms of employment outcomes reflects differences in their prior employment history (Table 2.3).

Worthy of note is that among both groups approximately 85% of respondents indicate that overall they are either satisfied or highly satisfied with their present jobs.

Table 5.3: Nature of current employment

	<i>per cent of employed respondents</i>		
	Con P2	Comp P1	Total
Occupation:			
Managers & senior officials	8.4	19.5	12.1
Professional	5.8	11.1	7.5
Associate prof & tech	15.5	16.3	15.8
Admin and secretarial	11.6	16.8	13.3
Skilled trades	15.8	7.4	13.0
Personal service	9.0	2.6	6.8
Sales and customer service	2.9	4.7	3.5
Process, plant and machine	18.7	13.2	16.8
Elementary	11.8	8.4	10.7
Contractual Status:			
Permanent	75.9	79.1	76.9
Hours worked per week:			
Less than 16 hours	3.7	4.8	4.0
16-29 hours	15.7	14.4	15.3
30+ hours	80.6	80.9	80.7
Earnings (Gross Weekly Earnings)			
Male	£389	£421	£400
Female	£285	£341	£306
All	£352	£388	£364
Satisfied/very satisfied with their present job	84.3	85.8	84.8
<i>Sample</i>	383	190	573

5.6 Improvements in job characteristics

Respondents from supporting participation projects who were employed at the time of the survey and who were either not in employment prior to participating in an ESF project, or employed in a different job, were asked to what extent they thought that the course helped them get their current job. For respondents who participated in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, these are generally the perceptions of those who were out of work (predominantly unemployed) prior to

their participation. Table 5.4 shows that 21% of respondents report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment. Among respondents from interventions aimed at supporting participation in the labour market, who remained out of work at the time of the survey, approximately one in four (25%) report feeling that they had more chance of finding a job in the future as a result of their participation in an ESF intervention. Around half of the Cyrenians leavers in the qualitative research reported that one of the main benefits of their intervention had been to either secure work or develop their job-searching capabilities, particularly through the use of on-line sites, and developing a more professional CV.

Respondents were asked whether, with the value of hindsight, they would do the course again. Just over three quarters of respondents report that they would do the course again (76%), indicating that overall levels of satisfaction with ESF are high. Finally, Table 5.4 presents the analysis from a new question added in the 2013 survey looking at perceptions of financial well-being. Respondents who were employed at the time of the survey and who were not in employment prior to participating in an ESF project were asked “Do you feel better off financially as a result of having started work?” The final column of Table 5.4 shows that 86% of respondents here feel better off better financially.

Table 5.4: Perceived Benefits of ESF

	<i>per cent</i>			
	Vital in gaining current job	More chance of finding job in the future	Would do the course again	Feel better off financially
	All those in a job that was not held prior to participation in ESF	All those not in work at the time of the survey	All	All those now working who were not working prior to the course
No qualification	14.3	15.9	65.4	79.8
Lower Level	30.2	33.3	75.7	81.8
Same Level	14.0	50.0	81.5	91.7
Higher Level	19.0	40.0	77.8	100.0
Not determined	22.2	28.3	80.7	87.7
Total	20.7	25.2	76.3	86.2
<i>Sample</i>	<i>545</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>708</i>	<i>450</i>

Analysis of how these self-reported measures of additionality vary among different groups of respondents (classified according to the nature of qualifications gained as a result of their participation) is also shown in Table 5.4. The perceived benefits are generally lowest among those who gain no qualification from ESF, and are highest among those who gain a qualification at the same or higher level of attainment than that held prior to their participation. The most noteworthy differences are the lower levels of perceived benefits among those who gain no qualification from ESF compared to those who gain any form of qualification, irrespective of its level. This highlights the significance of the relatively high proportion of respondents stating that they did not get a qualification from their ESF intervention.

Respondents in the 'not determined' category also gained a qualification, but their effect on levels of educational attainment could not be determined. Among this group levels of satisfaction are generally similar to those who gain qualifications at the same or lower level. The analysis therefore indicates that respondents perceive the benefits of ESF to be higher when they gain a qualification (at any level) and that perceived benefits are greatest when the qualification gained is at a more advanced level. These perceptions are comparable to those reported in previous ESF Leavers Surveys from 2009 to 2012.

5.7 Transport difficulties

In Chapter 2 (Table 2.4) it was reported that 14% of respondents who were not employed prior to their participation in ESF stated that transport difficulties, and it being hard to get to appropriate jobs, were a barrier to them gaining employment. Among respondents who were out of work at the time of the survey 20% cited transport difficulties as a barrier to gaining employment. Respondents who reported difficulties with transport as a barrier to finding employment since leaving the course were asked to elaborate further about the type of problems with transport that they faced. Although the sample size here was very restrictive (only 34 people provided responses), the responses to these questions were broadly in line with those given in the 2012 survey. The transport difficulties most cited as a barrier to employment were: inadequate public transport; job was too far away; the unavailability of a car;

and the inability to drive. Approximately one in four indicated that transport difficulties had curtailed their job search and selection activities in some way.

CHAPTER 6: Supporting progression in employment

Chapter Summary

- Two fifths of respondents who undertook projects aimed at improving progression in employment reported that their pay rate, salary or income had increased at the time of the survey compared with before their intervention.
- Participants who undertook projects aimed at improving progression in employment are concentrated towards relatively high skilled occupations at the upper end of the occupational distribution. Over half are employed in managerial, professional or associate professional occupations.
- Approximately 90% of such respondents are employed in permanent positions, with a similar proportion working more than 30 hours per week. Approximately nine out of ten respondents who were in employment at the time of the survey report that they are either satisfied or highly satisfied with their jobs.
- Just over 7% of respondents in work both before their ESF intervention and at the time of the survey report experiencing an improvement in their job (whether they are in the same job or in a new job) that could be directly attributed to their participation in ESF.
- Approximately one in six respondents who were employed in a different job from that held prior to ESF report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment.
- Levels of perceived additionality in the 2013 Survey are lower than in the 2012 Survey but consistent with previous Surveys. Perceptions of additionality are higher among those who gain qualifications from ESF that are at a higher level than that which they held prior to ESF.

6.1 Introduction

The labour market experiences of survey respondents who participated in ESF interventions aimed at supporting progression in employment are analysed in this chapter. The nature of the employment held by these respondents is outlined, including type of occupation, hours worked, contractual status, earnings and job satisfaction. Then consideration is given to the perceptions of respondents regarding any improvements that they have experienced in their jobs since participation in an ESF intervention, and whether these improvements can be

attributed directly to ESF. Participants in supporting progression interventions exhibit high rates of employment both before and after the intervention. While these projects may improve participation in the labour market insofar as they improve the chances of participants remaining in employment, the effects of these interventions on labour market status are expected to be much smaller than those observed among participants in projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market and employment.

6.2 Characteristics of current employment

Table 6.1 presents information on the nature of employment held by respondents who had participated in supporting progression projects at the time of the survey. Employment for both Convergence and Competitiveness respondents is concentrated towards relatively high skilled occupations at the upper end of the occupational distribution. Approximately three in ten respondents from both Priority 3 of the Convergence Programme (29%) and Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme (31%) are employed in managerial occupations. In the former group 58% of respondents are employed in managerial, professional or associate professional occupations; with the comparative figure for the participants from the Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme being 56%.

Over nine in ten respondents are employed in permanent positions, with the figure among respondents from Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme at 95% – here reflecting the relative concentration of this group of respondents in managerial occupations. Ninety-four per cent of this group also report working 30 hours or longer per week, again higher than that reported among respondents from Priority 3 of the Convergence Programme (84%). Earnings among respondents involved in interventions aimed at improving progression are considerably higher than those achieved among respondents who participated in interventions aimed at supporting participation in the labour market. Earnings are higher among participants in projects under Competitiveness Priority 2 (£435/week) than participants in projects under Convergence Priority 3 (£398/week). Gross weekly earnings for women are approximately 25% lower than those received by men for participants in Convergence Priority 3, and 20% lower under Competitiveness Priority 2. An extra

question was added to the survey in 2013 seeking to capture earnings for respondents in the job they were employed in prior to undertaking an ESF course. Comparing average earnings data pre-intervention with information on earnings at the time of the survey showed an average increase in earnings of 3.6%.

Approximately nine out of ten respondents who were in employment at the time of the survey reported being satisfied, or highly satisfied, with their jobs. Despite the above differences in the characteristics held by respondents, levels of satisfaction did not vary between participants from the Convergence and Competitiveness areas.

Table 6.1: Nature of current employment

per cent of respondents employed at the time of the survey

	Con P3	Comp P2	Total
Occupation:			
Managers & senior officials	28.5	31.0	29.2
Professional	10.9	7.0	9.8
Associate prof & tech	18.4	18.0	18.3
Admin and secretarial	7.7	7.0	7.5
Skilled trades	5.6	10.8	7.0
Personal service	15.8	6.7	13.3
Sales and customer service	3.6	2.9	3.4
Process, plant and machine	6.8	12.4	8.3
Elementary	2.9	4.1	3.2
Contractual Status:			
Permanent	93.3	95.1	93.8
Hours worked per week:			
Less than 16 hours	3.9	1.2	3.2
16-29 hours	12.7	5.3	10.6
30+ hours	83.5	93.5	86.2
Earnings (Gross Weekly Earnings):			
Male	£466	£471	£467
Female	£351	£374	£355
All	£398	£435	£408
All % change (before course and after)	4.2	2.1	3.6
Satisfied/very satisfied with their present job	88.3	89.2	88.5
<i>Sample</i>	<i>855</i>	<i>323</i>	<i>1,178</i>

6.3 Improvements in job characteristics

Respondents to the survey who had participated in supporting progression projects and who were in employment both prior to participation and at the time of the survey were asked to consider whether changes had occurred in the nature of their employment and whether they felt that any of these changes happened because of their participation. These questions were asked of both those who, at the time of the survey, were in the same job and of those who were in a different job to the one they held prior to the intervention. However, 89% of respondents from Priorities aimed at progression in employment hold the same job at the time of the ESF survey as they held prior to their participation in an ESF project.

Perceived changes by respondents in the nature of their employment are highlighted in Table 6.2. Among those respondents employed in the same jobs that they held prior to ESF, the most commonly reported improvements in job conditions were having had more training opportunities (59%), getting more job satisfaction (55%), and improvements in future pay and promotion prospects (48%). One in five (20%) of such respondents reported that they had been promoted following their participation in ESF. Respondents who were in a different job from that which they held prior to participating in an ESF project were more likely to report a variety of improvements in their jobs. The most commonly reported improvements in job conditions in this group were getting more job satisfaction (76%), having more opportunities for training (also 76%), and improvements in future pay and promotion prospects (74%).

Table 6.2: ESF and improvements in current job

	<i>per cent respondents employed at the time of the survey</i>		
	In the same job	In a new job	All Jobs
More opportunities for training	59.4	75.6	61.2
More job satisfaction	55.4	76.4	57.8
Improved pay and promotion prospects	47.5	73.6	50.4
Pay rate, salary or income increased	40.2	64.8	43.0
Better job security	34.7	59.4	37.5
Promotion/new job is at a higher level	19.7	61.6	24.4
Improvements directly related to ESF	7.1	7.8	7.2
<i>Sample</i>	<i>1013</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>1,141</i>

The biggest differences in the nature of improvement reported by these two groups of respondents were having received a promotion or the job being at a higher level (62% for those in a new job, compared with 20% for those in the same job). This is perhaps to be expected as people who change jobs, particularly among those who quit their jobs voluntarily, are likely to do so in order to gain a job that is at a higher level. Respondents were also asked whether they felt the changes happened because of their participation in the intervention. Just over 7% reported that an improvement in their jobs (whether in the same job or in a new job) could be directly attributed to their participation in ESF: this was somewhat lower than in the 2012 Survey (10%) but the same level as found in the 2011 Survey.

From the analysis presented above it can be concluded that many respondents who undertook ESF projects aimed at supporting progression in employment report that they have experienced some form of improvement in their conditions of employment, although only a small minority directly attribute these improvements to their participation in ESF. The analysis in Table 6.2 provided details of respondent's subjective assessment of job improvements. Table 6.3 aims to identify whether any changes in more 'objective' characteristics of employment occurred among those who were employed both before and after their participation in ESF. The analysis reveals that there is no difference observed in terms of the proportion of participants working in a low paid occupation, the average hours worked or the proportion of respondents employed on permanent contracts.

In the 2013 survey respondents in employment were further questioned on whether they had formal responsibility for supervising the work of other employees (prior to the survey, and this then compared to the situation at the time of the survey). The purpose of this was to explore more detailed measures of employment relations to 'objectively' capture the improvements in employment conditions reported by respondents. However, the analysis revealed that there is also no difference observed in terms of supervisory responsibilities.

Some larger differences emerge for particular population sub-groups (particularly younger workers who experience the largest reductions of employment in low paid

occupations and temporary contracts, and increase in supervisory responsibilities) but these are based on relatively small samples.

Table 6.3: ESF and changes in job characteristics
per cent of supporting progression respondents employed at the time of the survey

n=1,141	Prior to ESF	Time of survey	Change
Working in a low paid occupation (%)			
Gender			
Male	8.6	8.6	0.0
Female	28.9	27.5	-1.4
Age			
16-24 years	40.6	34.9	-5.7
24+ years	18.3	18.0	-0.3
All	19.6	19.0	-0.6
Average weekly hours (mean hours)			
Gender			
Male	41.0	41.0	0.0
Female	34.5	34.4	-0.1
Age			
16-24 years	36.3	36.9	0.6
24+ years	37.5	37.5	0.0
All	37.5	37.4	-0.1
Employed on a permanent contract (%)			
Gender			
Male	95.8	94.7	-1.1
Female	92.9	93.6	0.7
Age			
16-24 years	75.0	85.9	10.9
24+ years	95.5	94.6	-0.9
All	94.3	94.1	-0.2
Supervisory responsibilities (%)			
Gender			
Male	57.3	56.3	-1.0
Female	48.3	50.7	2.4
Age			
16-24 years	31.3	43.8	12.5
24+ years	53.6	53.8	0.2
All	52.4	53.3	0.9

Respondents who, at the time of the survey, were employed in a different job from that held prior to ESF were asked to what extent they thought that the course helped them get their current job. Table 6.4 shows that around one in six (16%) report that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment: this is below the level reported in the previous two Surveys (21% in 2011 and 20% in 2012). Also, approximately three out of four of all employed respondents (77%) who participated in projects aimed at supporting progression in employment report that, with the value of hindsight, they would do the course again.

As noted above in relation to Table 6.2, approximately 7% reported that an improvement in their jobs (whether in the same job or in a new job) could be directly attributed to their participation in ESF. Given the apparent importance of attaining additional qualifications from ESF to the assessments of respondents regarding additionality, Table 6.4 also considers how these three self-reported measures vary among different groups of respondents classified according to the transitions in education attainment gained as a result of their participation. In common with the analysis of those who undertook projects aimed at supporting participation in the labour market (see Table 5.4), it can be seen that the perceived benefits of ESF are lowest among those who do not gain a qualification and are generally higher among those who gain a qualification at the same or higher level to that which they held prior to their participation in ESF.

Table 6.4: Perceived Benefits of ESF by Educational Attainment

per cent of supporting progression respondents employed at the time of the survey

	Vital in gaining current job	Improvements in jobs directly related to ESF	Would do the course again
	All those in a job that was not held prior to participation in ESF	Those employed at time of survey	All
Qualification transition			
No qualification	15.8	2.8	67.4
Lower Level	6.3	10.8	79.9
Same Level	45.5	10.3	88.5
Higher Level	25.0	13.7	83.6
Not determined	11.0	6.7	78.1
Total	16.2	7.3	77.3
<i>Sample</i>	173	1,141	1,258

CHAPTER 7: Lessons for Future Research

In this chapter, we briefly consider the lessons from the qualitative work with vulnerable participants for future surveys¹².

In this and previous Leavers Surveys, the data made available by WEFO for supporting participation leavers was restricted to a relatively limited number of projects for which good contact data was available. Thus, for the current survey, data from six supporting participation projects (five in Convergence, only one in Competitiveness) was available, compared to 35 funded projects (25 in Convergence and 10 in Competitiveness)¹³. Even in 2011, when data from the largest number of projects in the Leavers Survey series was made available, participants from less than half of the total number of projects were involved (13 from Convergence and three from Competitiveness).

Moreover, a small number of large projects – most notably related to Redundancy Training – have accounted for a significant proportion of the potential respondents, with two projects accounting for 27% of all supporting participation respondents to the 2009 – 2012 Surveys¹⁴, with this rising to 74% of the current Survey respondents. Although for the most part, the heavy representation of these projects in the survey data has reflected the make-up of the sample provided by WEFO, experience in the 2011 Survey also highlighted particular issues in generating responses from one project in particular which was targeted at vulnerable participants.

At the same time, successive Surveys have suggested that supporting participation projects appear to be targeting those closer to the labour market than was intended.

The qualitative work was therefore intended to respond to concerns that the most vulnerable participants might have been under-represented in the quantitative

¹² 2013 ESF Leavers Survey Qualitative Report is available on the WEFO Website

¹³ Programme Monitoring Committee papers, June 2014

¹⁴ See the Combined Report on the 2009 – 2012 Leavers Surveys available on the WEFO Website

surveys, to shed some light on their experiences of ESF, and, critically, to investigate ways in which this potential bias might be overcome in future.

The research suggested that using project providers as a conduit to approach interviewees proved particularly effective in terms of engaging people, especially current participants. While the inclusion of current participants would not be compatible with the approach required for the Leavers Surveys, it nevertheless provided a very effective way of gathering data on the personal circumstances, the ESF experience and to some extent the outcomes of participation for these vulnerable participants whose engagement with projects was frequently not linear.

However, the research also highlighted that the use of both ESF project and programme level surveys and research can result in a duplication of effort to obtain feedback from participants as well as creating reluctance amongst project providers to share data for the purposes of undertaking the Leavers Survey.

In this context, one of the biggest challenges encountered was the exceptionally low response rate obtained when attempting to make initial contact by telephone with project leavers in a random manner. This was due to a range of factors, including frequent changes to mobile phone numbers and an unwillingness of this group of participants to answer calls from an unknown number. Had the same interviewees been targeted with a quantitative telephone survey then it seems clear that far fewer completed interviews would have been achieved.

Despite this a large number of leavers would have been prepared to complete a telephone survey had their contact details been provided for the survey. However, the majority of the leavers we spoke to preferred a face to face qualitative interview which clearly offered them an opportunity to open up more about their background than they would have done so via a scripted phone survey. Many difficulties were identified by interviewees with regard to undertaking phone surveys including their own lack of confidence, issues of mistrust and poor telephone conversational skills.

Many interviewees suggested practical ways for improving the response rate and quality of responses to any future research and these suggestions covered methods

of making initial contact (for example, texting in advance of calls to explain the purpose), collaboration with project providers, ensuring clarity about the purpose of the discussion, and the timing of contact and the interview.

CHAPTER 8 Conclusions

The results of the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey build on the evidence base developed through earlier surveys, though allowance must clearly be made for the different composition of the projects included, with a stronger focus on supporting progression projects and a more limited representation of supporting participation projects than previous years.

As in previous years, the survey highlights some very positive findings about:

- the strong satisfaction of ESF participants with the support which they have received, with over three-quarters saying they would do the same course again;
- the conviction of participants that the provision has enhanced a wide range of skills, with more than two-thirds reporting improvements in job-specific occupational skills, problem-solving skills, organisational skills, communication skills and team-working;
- the impact of ESF interventions on confidence and softer skills, with 85% of respondents reporting that participation had increased their confidence in their abilities, and more than three-quarters (76%) saying they felt it had improved their employment or career prospects.

The strong satisfaction from participation in ESF was also echoed by the qualitative work with the most vulnerable participants.

In addition, some 74% of survey respondents recognised that ESF had funded the intervention - significantly higher than for previous surveys, suggesting that projects have improved their communications in this regard.

Turning to outcomes, the evidence of the survey suggests participants on provision funded under Priority 2 of the Convergence Programme and Priority 1 of the Competitiveness Programme (i.e. interventions targeted at participants who are not in work) generally show positive transitions after ESF intervention. Although the proportion of respondents who were economically inactive (using the Labour Force

Survey definition, rather than the Benefits-related definition used for Programme management) was very low (at 5% of all supporting participation respondents or 35 individuals), with the results therefore needing to be handled with caution, the labour market outcomes for this group were significantly higher than for previous years. More than half of the economically inactive participants made the transition into paid employment; while 60% of those who were unemployed made the same transition. The qualitative fieldwork also suggested that even for the more vulnerable ESF participants, a significant minority do achieve the transition to employment after participation.

These are clearly positive findings, as is the fact that more than a quarter (27%) of those who identify themselves as 'early leavers' left the provision to enter employment. While the very different views of the administrative records and survey responses as to who is an 'early leaver' clouds this issue somewhat, this finding raises issues about using completion rates as a success measure for interventions targeting the unemployed or inactive, and conversely for counting 'early leavers' as failures.

In terms of perceptions, as with previous Leavers Surveys, unemployed and inactive participants are significantly more likely to attribute actual and potential positive employment outcomes (finding work and being likely to find work for those still unemployed) and to say that they would have undertaken the same course again where they have gained qualifications. This is true even where those qualifications are at a lower level than ones they previously held, though the most positive results are associated with participants who have gained qualifications at a higher level. This key finding flags up the importance *for participants* of achieving qualifications, something which has not always been strongly recognised.

We have once again undertaken a Counterfactual Impact Evaluation (CIE) to compare the employment transitions of previously unemployed or inactive participants (from all five of the ESF Leavers Surveys in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013) with a comparable group of people drawn from the broader population of individuals in the labour market. The results of this CIE suggest that the impact of ESF interventions on the unemployed (defined in the LFS' terms) is relatively

modest. Excluding Redundancy Training, participation appears to increase transitions to employment from approximately 34% to 43%. In other words, around 9% of those who participate in these interventions find work who would not have been expected to in the absence of ESF. This represents an increase in the proportion who gain employment of 26%. Comparing those participating in Redundancy Training, almost three-quarters (78%) find employment. This compares with 65% of the matched participants in the APS. Therefore, around 13% of those who participate in Redundancy Training find work who would not have been expected to in the absence of ESF. This represents an increase in the proportion who gain employment of 20%.

For formerly inactive participants, the CIE suggests higher levels of additionality, albeit that the overall proportion of participants making successful transitions is much lower. Thus 20% of inactive ESF participants found work compared with 13% of the matched group, suggesting that just over half of the job-entries achieved by formerly inactive ESF participants might be in addition to what would otherwise have been achieved. Caution is needed, given the scale of the samples, but this is in line with the findings of DWP research that greater net impact is associated with interventions supporting those least attached to the labour market.

However, there are important caveats associated with the CIE analysis that are particularly pertinent to the analysis of the economically inactive. Most significantly, the CIE analysis is not able to control for otherwise unobservable characteristics that might be associated with selection on to the scheme (e.g. motivation).

In previous Leavers Surveys, we have noted that the evidence suggests that projects aimed at supporting participation appear to have engaged less with those furthest from the labour market than might have been expected. As already noted, the representation of the economically inactive in the 2013 Survey was particularly small, reflecting in large part the strong bias within the sample provided by WEFO to participants in Redundancy Training. Given this, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the 2013 leavers' data about these issues. The qualitative research has confirmed, however, that some projects have indeed succeeded in targeting the most vulnerable.

The survey also considers the experience and outcomes of those employed participants in interventions funded under Priority 3 of the Convergence Programme and Priority 2 of the Competitiveness Programme; i.e. those aimed at supporting progression in employment. The findings suggest that although many leavers report positive changes in their work – in terms of job satisfaction, the prospect of pay or promotion, more opportunities for training, and (in two-fifths of cases) pay increases - only around 7% of participants attribute progression in employment directly to their ESF intervention (a figure which is lower than the 10% found in the 2012 Survey but similar to that found with 2011 leavers). Again, those achieving qualifications are more likely to do so than those who do not. Respondents who move jobs after ESF support are also more likely to attribute positive changes to the ESF intervention than those who stay within the same job, with around 16% who change jobs reporting that their ESF project was vital to them gaining their current employment (though this figure is lower than in previous Leavers Surveys).

In reality, the findings of the 2013 Leavers Survey generally echo those from the previous surveys, particularly those of the last two years. This perhaps suggests that the surveys have reached a mature phase and that the returns from future similar surveys may be of diminishing value (though it needs to be recognised that with the significant change to ESF interventions in the new 2014 – 2020 Programmes, some comparable research will undoubtedly be needed).

There is therefore a strong case for a thorough review of the methodology of future ESF Leavers Surveys, in particular to ensure that questions over the representativeness of the respondents for whom contact data are available is minimised.

In the current series of surveys, the design, coverage and implementation of the survey for each appears to have led to a situation where the most vulnerable groups are under-represented by the survey. While the qualitative research has cast some light on this issue, the factors that contribute to the under-representation of disadvantaged groups should be assessed in advance of commissioning the next round of Leavers Surveys.

Such a review should assess what can be done to ensure contact data are available from the full range of supported projects (we understand that this should be easier as a result of new European Commission requirements on managing authorities to hold participant data centrally); to address lower response rates from more vulnerable groups (including perhaps greater use of project staff to forewarn participants, using text messages in advance of calls and minimising duplication between surveys commissioned by project sponsors and the Leavers Surveys); and to minimise any confusion caused by trying to merge project-specific evaluation requirements with those central to the Leavers Survey itself.

The review should also assess whether alternative methods or sources of data may be better placed to assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed at those who face the greatest difficulties in the labour market. For example, there would appear to be much greater potential to use administrative data to support research, through linking WEFO data to DWP records to improve CIE analysis and potentially also, through linking WEFO data to Welsh Government learning records on the National Pupil Database and LLWR to examine the interaction between ESF and educational attainment. While putting place the necessary procedures might be complex, using such data would overcome many of the problems which arise from the construction of sampling frames and from response bias from the hardest-to-reach groups.

The review should also consider the role of qualitative research (either at a programme or at a project level) in increasing the understanding of the ESF experience, particularly in the case of vulnerable groups. While the qualitative research has suggested some ways in which the participation of individuals from such groups in quantitative surveys might be increased, it has also suggested the benefits of a more qualitative approach.

Annex 1: Quantitative Survey Methodology

A sample file of 28,291 learners who left ESF funded courses or learning in 2013 in Wales was provided by WEFO. The sample was checked in detail and 1,531 records were found to be duplicates. In addition a total of 6,300 records did not have a valid telephone number (either no number or an incorrect number of digits). This left a usable sample of 20,460 records. A total of 10,000 records (all with valid phone numbers) were loaded for the survey. The 10,000 loaded records included 4,078 from Essential Skills in Workplace (ESiW) records in order to achieve a target of 1,000. The remaining 5,922 records fell across remaining projects.

A small scale pilot was undertaken on 29th-30th September 2014, for which 15 interviews were conducted. Fieldwork ran from 2nd October until 18th November 2014. Interviews were conducted by telephone using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). All interviewing took place from IFF's telephone centre in London. No quotas were set for the interviewing.

In total, 3,001 interviews were achieved in the fieldwork period (39 of these were conducted in Welsh). The average interview length was just over 22 minutes. The complete breakdown of sample outcomes is shown in Table A1.1. In total 1,318 people refused or were unwilling to participate (13% of the sample loaded). A further 1,058 did not recall their course or learning (of these, 892 had the specific name of the course included in the sample and 166 did not). In total 27 people (non-ESiW respondents) were still on the course at the time of the survey and a further 95 ESiW learners were still on their first ESiW course (i.e. they had not yet completed any ESiW provision). These two groups of learners were ineligible for the survey. Overall, a 43% response rate was achieved for records with the correct telephone number for an eligible learner.

Table A1.1: Developing a sample of leavers from ESF projects

Sample used (i.e. with an initial telephone number)	10,000
Of which:	
Unobtainable / wrong number	1,806
Called 9 or more times and no definite outcome	2,695
Refusals	1,318
No recall of learning, still on course, don't know if completed/left early	1,180
Completed interviews	3,001
Response rates (response rates excluding the low response project are included in the parentheses)	
Sample loaded i.e. with an initial telephone number	30%
Sample with a correct telephone number - i.e. excluding unobtainable numbers or wrong numbers	37%
Sample with the correct telephone number and an eligible learner i.e. excluding 'unobtainable / wrong numbers', 'no recall of learning' and 'still on course / don't know if completed or left early'	43%

Annex 2: Propensity Score Matching Results

Table A2.1: Overview of Propensity Score Matching Results

Calliper	Pooled 2009-2013 ESF Data		
	None	0.001	0.0001
Non Redundancy Training - Unemployed			
One to One	0.092417	0.091863	0.075068
No replacement	2,954	2,765	2,198
One to One	0.097156	0.097693	0.099886
With replacement	2,954	2,948	2,623
Radius		0.08726	0.087269
		2,948	2,623
Redundancy Training - Unemployed			
One to One	0.120166	0.128205	0.205761
No replacement	724	351	243
One to One	0.124559	0.118376	0.128
With replacement	1,702	1,453	625
Radius		0.105524	0.127867
		1,453	625
Economically Inactive – All Interventions			
One to One	0.071563	0.076446	0.069054
No replacement	531	484	391
One to One	0.050847	0.055336	0.050971
With replacement	531	506	412
Radius		0.091985	0.079457
		506	412