

13 August 2010

Our ref: R00226

RE: Freedom of Information request - Distribution of ESF Funding in support of disability equality

Introduction

Thank you for your request dated 17th June 2010 made under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Your request is:

Article 16 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 states: "The Member States and the Commission shall take appropriate steps to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the various stages of implementation of the Funds and, in particular, in the access to them. In particular, accessibility for disabled persons shall be one of the criteria to be observed in defining operations co-financed by the Funds and to be taken into account during the various stages of implementation".

Please advise how the South East Regional Development Agency has met this obligation with regard to disabled people in your locality. With particular reference to the involvement of disabled individuals and organizations led by disabled people in distribution of ESF funding and whether ESF funding in your RDA region has been given to organisations led by disabled people and the amounts given.

Information requested

Please note that SEEDA is one of several organisations that co-finance the European Social Fund (ESF) budget for the South East. To get a full picture of the involvement of people with disabilities in the programme you should consider contacting the other regional ESF co-financing organisations (Job Centre Plus, Skills Funding Agency and National Offender Management Service) who would hold information on their ESF funded projects. Alternatively the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) retains an overview of the regional ESF programme and may be able to provide information on overall progress towards equalities targets.

SEEDA's Disability Equality Scheme is published on our website and provides information on how we aim to ensure equality of access to funds for disabled people.

http://www.seeda.co.uk/documentbank/Disability_Equality_Scheme_2006_2009.pdf



SEEDA's ESF Team manage the programme in line with this policy and all staff working on the programme have undertaken equalities training. The ESF Team includes a specialist in equality and diversity issues; who attends a GOSE led Equalities Group.

Equal opportunities is a cross cutting theme throughout all ESF activity and forms part of the national ESF Operational Programme for 2007-13 (section 4.0).

http://www.esf.gov.uk/info_for_cfo_and_projects/operational_programme.asp

This is reflected in the South East ESF Framework which sets out regional spending priorities and targets for the period 2007-10 (section 4.1). In addition targets were set within the programme for the participation of people with disabilities. These targets are 22% for Priority 1 and 15% for Priority 2.

<http://www.esf.gov.uk/docs/frameworks/south-east.pdf>.

All providers and their partners are required to have in place an appropriate operational equal opportunities policy at tender stage. SEEDA also requires providers to demonstrate that they have sufficiently robust processes in place to monitor and evaluate their projects' contribution to equal opportunities, with reviews taking place during monitoring visits undertaken by the ESF team.

SEEDA requires all providers to produce an 'Equality of Access Project Plan'. This details how equal opportunities considerations will be integrated into project design and delivery, sets specific targets to support equality of access and states how these will be monitored and evaluated. The targets must be both quantitative and qualitative. Towards the end of their project, the provider is required to produce an impact assessment of their plan, assessing progress on implementing the plan and stating achievement against targets. The impact assessment also identifies any difficulties experienced in implementing the plan and identifies good practice that can be disseminated.

SEEDA do not have any information on whether our contracted ESF providers or any organisations within their partnerships are led by people with a disability.