ESF ‘Developing Scotland’s Workforce’ programme

COVID-19 Q&A

1. Would it be acceptable for ESF Participant Forms to be completed online or electronically and would this have implications evidence-wise?

SFC is happy to accept ESF Participant Forms that have been completed electronically but a hard copy should be printed and signed at a later date. We understand that gaining a signature is likely to take longer than under ordinary circumstances. The participant will remain eligible if the signature is collected within the academic year. A ‘wet’ signature is required because it allows SFC (and the Managing Authority) to verify the authenticity of the information contained on the Participant Form.

2. Can the ESF Participant Form be altered to make it easier to complete online?

The Participant Form has been designed to ensure compliance in terms of collecting all the necessary information from the individual to assess their eligibility, to capture key reporting criteria and to ensure that the EU rules on logo size/colour are adhered to.

SFC therefore advise that the Participant Form remains unaltered – it can be circulated in MS Word/PDF format for completion electronically or for return by post.

3. Because of lockdown, we are unable to gather original supporting evidence form participants (e.g. passports, birth certificates). Can we accept electronic copies in the meantime?

Copies can be accepted as an interim measure but colleges and universities will need to see the original source documents to certify them and verify their authenticity. We therefore recommend that the college/university implements a process to physically gather and verify the authenticity of hard copy eligibility documents and collect signatures on participant forms (per Q1). Eligibility documents should be gathered as soon as is practically possible under the
current circumstances. If this evidence is not in place, the participant is not eligible for funding.

4. **How do colleges/universities account for participants who do not complete in the expected timeframe due to COVID-19?**

Only completed activity can be included under the ESF programme – this has not changed. Individuals who have therefore not completed their course as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions should be recorded as such, and only the completed activity (pass or fail) included.

Whilst this will impact on the number of successful results that SFC can log, results can be updated in the EUMIS claims system at a later date (once the participant has completed their course). Colleges/universities should notify the ESF team of any change to results where a 2019-20 ESF participant has returned to complete their course in 2020-21.

5. **Where participants are not physically present in colleges/universities how should attendance be evidenced?**

Attendance registers have been used to record physical attendance in the college setting for the purpose of showing that an ESF participant is engaged with learning. Where records of physical attendance are not available, due to the pandemic, colleges can use the participant’s achievement report (actual credits) to show that individual participants have not become disengaged.

In both college and university settings, evidence of achievement or withdrawal should be used to show engagement with learning.

We will work with colleges and universities to ensure that the evidence they provide meets audit expectations.

6. **Where evidence collection is delayed due to lockdown restrictions is there any leeway?**

In respect of evidence of ‘Right to Live/Work’, original birth certificates, passports, etc. need to be supplied before the individual can be classed as
eligible. The evidence can be collected during the AY but **must be valid at the course start date**.

7. **If course provision has to change because of COVID-19, can there be flexibility in course options for ESF?**

SFC must ensure that the courses being delivered are still in line with programme guidance criteria and that the skills participants gain from their course are relevant to skills needs for each area of Scotland. Where there is a need for provision to deviate from what delivery agents set out prior to the start of the AY in their Regional Skills Plans, this should be discussed with SFC who will seek to agree this with the Managing Authority.

For further information please contact:

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