

The European Social Fund, through its Objective 3, paid out more than £2 million to the Welsh voluntary sector in 1994. Ymlaen looks at how your organisation can go after its share.

The European Social Fund (ESF) aims to help improve *job* opportunities in the European Union by providing financial support for the running costs of vocational training schemes and employment measures run by a variety of organisations.

It does this through 'Objective 3' which seeks to combat long-term unemployment and to help young people and excluded groups enter the labour market. Objective 3 has a number of priorities for action, known as 'pathways*'. There are four of these:

Pathways to employment - helping people of all ages who have been unemployed for six months or more to compete more effectively in the labour market, with a particular emphasis on those unemployed for more than 12 months.

Pathways to a good start in working life - helping unemployed young people aged 16-24 compete more effectively in the labour market.

Pathways to integration - helping unemployed people facing particular disadvan-

Tapping the European Social Fund

tages ('excluded groups') in competing effectively in the labour market. The following are eligible: people with disabilities; single parents and others with care responsibilities; people whose first language is not English and those who need training in Welsh as a second language; people living in inner cities or peripheral estates; people in isolated rural areas; people in areas exposed to large-scale redundancies; offenders and ex-offenders; and homeless people, particularly the young homeless.

Pathways for equal opportunities for men and women - this provides assistance to men and women returning to the labour market after a period of family and care responsibilities, and to develop opportunities in occupations in which they are traditionally under-represented.

ESF exists to fund mainly vocational training, although it will also fund pre-training and basic training. There is also money available for vocational guidance and counselling and for job cre-

ation and wage subsidy schemes.

ESF funds are provided on a matched basis, 45 per cent from the ESF matched by 55 per cent from a public body or charitable trust. A change for 1995 is that volun-

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tary organisations receiving enough public funds can be their own match-funder. However, ESF works on a calendar year rather than financial year basis, and this can create difficulties with matched funding.

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has overall responsibility for ESF in the UK, but it is assisted by sector managers with key management and co-ordination roles. In Wales, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action is the co-ordinator for the voluntary sector and administers the

Welsh budget and application process. Dewi Llwyd Evans, European Officer for the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), has recently urged the voluntary youth sector to think about applying for ESF funds.

Dewi says, "During 1995 there was an underspend on the pathway for young people, yet many voluntary youth organisations could be working with young people in ways which fall within the scope of ESF Objective 3. If your project is working with the young unemployed it may be worth checking out your eligibility."

However, applying for ESF funds is extremely time-consuming and there are, of course, no guarantees of success. Even successful applicants may not be informed until after the planned start date of their project. Cashflows are also difficult as the money is paid in three installments. The final payment is not made until after the project has finished.

Expert advice is essential - and it's available from the WCVA's European team. Dewi Llwyd Evans says, "WCVA can help guide applicants through the bureaucratic maze and give advice on completing application forms. They also represent applicants' interests at relevant committees and organise training events on European funding."

The application round for 1996 is now underway. For further information, contact Ingela Mann, Administrator, European Office, WCVA, Park Lane House, 7 High Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7JP. Tel: 01938 552379. Additional advice and support for the voluntary sector can be obtained in Mid and North Wales from Dewi Llwyd Evans at the Welshpool address above, or in South Wales from Sarah Stephens, ESF Officer, WCVA, Llŷs Ifor, Crescent Road, Caerphilly, Mid Glam CF8 1XL. Tel: 01222 869224.