

SUMMARY

Aim of the assignment A number of products¹ devoted to education of individuals and improvement of education and science institutions have been financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) in Lithuania since 2004. The aim of this assignment is to perform the classification and evaluation of such products in the area of education and science.

Objectives of the assignment Objectives of the assignment

1. To classify the products created or being created in the area of education and science during the two periods of the EU structural support - 2004–2006 and 2007–2013;
2. To evaluate the usage of the products, their need in the period of 2014-2020 and the possibilities and (or) obstacles existing in the system of structural funds to improve the quality of these products;
3. To provide useful, well-timed and practical recommendations for the period 2014-2020 with the purpose of safeguarding the usage of created products, high quality of the products and accessibility of information about these products for all interested individuals and organisations.

Outline of the assignment In methodological terms the assignment consisted of two stages. During the *first stage* of the assignment the database of ESF products financed by SPD measures 2.4 and 2.5 of the period 2004-2006 and Priorities 2 and 3 of Human resources development operational programme of the period 2007-2013 was created. Almost 3000 products have been included in this database: training and methodical material, study and educational programmes, measures dedicated to improvement of management of educational and science institutions, information systems, research papers, etc. The products have been described using the following structure: product name, type, target group, accomplished or not, organisations using the product, code of qualification improvement programme and event register (only for programmes and training material), code in the Register of study and training programmes (only for programmes and training material), grade and subject (only for programmes and training material), accessibility to target groups of product in a digital form, source of information about a product, key words, links with other products and additional information about project and implementing institution.

During the *second stage* of the assignment the evaluation of ESF products has been carried out. The main evaluation questions are the following: Are the created products being used after the end of the project? Are created products used in organisations other than project implementing institution or its partner? Are products accessible on the Internet? What products are relevant for the structural support programming period of 2014-2020? What are the opportunities and obstacles for ensuring quality of products? What are the new ways to ensuring quality?

¹ Material or intellectual object created in the course of project implementation, which can be used by its intended target groups beyond the duration of the project (such as text-book, training material, training programme or module, internet portal, etc.).

Three surveys of project implementing organisations were carried out: one opinion survey of organisations that implemented projects financed by SPD measures 2.4 and 2.5 in the 2004-2006 programming period, one opinion survey of those that implemented projects financed under Priorities 2 and 3 of Human resources development operational programme 2007-2013 and finally a census of all project promoters for the registration of products created under both programming periods. 11 case studies were carried out aiming to provide in-depth analysis for the evaluation of particular types of products. A number of interviews were carried out with the representatives of education and science institutions. The findings of the evaluation were discussed in a focus group with the representatives of project implementing organisations.

Key findings

Summarising the characteristics of created products, it should be noted that the greatest share of ESF projects were devoted to producing training material. The important group of products is also study and training programmes. The share of projects that developed management improvement and quality assurance products for education and science institutions increased during the period of 2007-2012. This means that more resources were invested in the systems and structures of education and science. The main consumers of ESF products were school children, students, teachers and lecturers. More than 2/5 of products were being used by a single institution. This means that many products were either not intended for wider use or not used in other institutions.

Good opportunities have been created for project implementing organisations to ensure product quality, especially during implementation of projects in 2009-2012. Referring to analysis of guidelines for applicants, limited quality requirements have been applied, but favourable conditions have been created for the implementation of activities within ESF projects, which could help ensure product quality. The following quality measures have often been financed: consultations with target groups and experts, expert evaluation and scrutiny of a product, piloting of a product and improvement of qualifications of those who developed products. However project implementing organisations have not been subjected to independent scrutiny and pressure to improve the quality and usage of products –many products were not subject to any external control system, which could help ensure their quality and usage. The main focus of EU structural funds management system has been on the correct procedural and financial implementation of project activities according to the grant contract, but not on the subject of product quality and usage. Therefore only these projects implementing organisations have been able to use good opportunities for quality assurance, which have clear product quality standards and motivation to create good quality and widely used products. Thus Managing Authority should consider alleviating administrative burden associated with financial and procedural control of project activities, and devoting more attention should to delivering good quality products and achievement of results. This could be done in two different ways: firstly, by applying good quality monitoring indicators; secondly, by encouraging cooperation with target groups during creation of products.

Key recommendations

It is recommended to produce a finite list of product types and product descriptions (the data base of ESF products and its classification, created during this evaluation, could serve as a methodological basis). On the basis of this list project implementing organisations should in a standardized manner calculate physical indicators of project implementation. The application of single methodology for monitoring indicators would provide an

opportunity to aggregate project data at programme level, to compare project productivity, effectiveness and efficiency, and also to alleviate administrative burden associated with non-standardised description of individual products. The monitoring of ESF-funded services could be improved in similar manner, i.e. by preparing a standardized list of types of ESF services (training, guidance and counselling, etc.). On the basis of this list project implementing organisations should be able to calculate and report the physical indicators of project activities in a standardized manner.

It is also recommended on a project level to apply good quality monitoring indicators, which could track the usage and distribution of ESF products and services among the intended target groups. As the EU common indicators are compulsory for the ESF projects and reflect well the number of individuals who received project services (products), it is recommended to additionally calculate organisations, which received project services (products) according to the type of organisation. This is relevant when when product is created for organisations and not for individuals (so called management products). It is important to explain well to project implementing organisations all indicators applied to projects and apply them in a methodologically consistent manner.

It is recommended to encourage project management oriented at the target groups of projects. It is also recommended to foresee in the guidelines for applicants and other relevant documents the requirement to project implementing organisations to define in a detailed way the types and numbers of target groups already in the application stage (for products the typology presented in this report could serve as a basis). It is also recommended to prioritise projects, which plan special communication measures with potential beneficiaries or involvement of representatives of target groups in project activities (i.e. consultations, piloting of products). The purpose of this recommendation is to improve the dissemination of information about products among potential beneficiaries and to enhance product quality in line with the needs of target group. The provisions which enhance the importance of target groups during implementation of projects could be foreseen in the digest of documents for project implementing organisations developed by the ESF Agency.

In the new programming period it is recommended to ensure more freedom for project implementing organisations in choosing products, but to control the attainment of project objectives and results. In order to implement this recommendation, it is important to clearly formulate the aims of ESF projects and develop good quality monitoring indicators.

Expected benefits

It is possible to ensure better dissemination and usage of ESF products through application of appropriate product and result indicators, by planning in advance the target groups of products and by encouraging wider cooperation with target groups in creating ESF products.

By applying good quality monitoring indicators, by defining in precise way project results, by planning users of products in advance and by encouraging wider cooperation with target groups in creation of ESF products, it is possible to ensure: (1) better dissemination and usage of ESF products, (2) greater satisfaction of project target groups with created ESF products, (3) more flexibility and innovation in attaining the aims and objectives of ESF projects, (4) better access to data necessary for evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency of ESF.