

ESF CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME 2007-2013: WEST WALES AND THE VALLEYS

Overview of Proposals for Trans-national and Inter-regional Co-operation

1. The new regulatory framework provides for the mainstreaming of trans-national and inter-regional co-operation. This allows an exciting opportunity to add value to the implementation of the ESF Convergence programme by facilitating collaboration in areas of mutual interest with other European regions.

2. While projects involving partners from across the European Union will be considered, particular emphasis will be given to activities with Member States and regions with which the Welsh Assembly Government has formal co-operation agreements. These include Latvia, Brittany, Catalonia, Upper Silesia and Baden-Württemberg. It will also be possible to build upon successful transnational co-operation arrangements established under the EQUAL initiative and with regions that are members of EARLALL, which has already has significant experience of facilitating transnational working among its members.

3. In line with the provision in Article 3(6) and Article 8 of the European Social Fund Regulation [1081/2006], the ESF in West Wales and the Valleys will support innovative and high quality transnational and inter-regional activities across all relevant programme priorities. These will be delivered in line with the following themes:

- increasing and improving adaptability, including for example action to support lifelong learning, entrepreneurship and restructuring;
- supporting the integration of job-seekers and inactive persons, for example including action to promote age management, youth unemployment (in the context of the European Youth Pact) work-life balance and migrants;
- supporting integration of disadvantaged groups and combating discrimination, including for example action to support persons with disabilities, ex-offenders, ethnic minorities and people with caring responsibilities; and
- enhancing human capital including for example action strengthening systems for the validation of skills.

4. Arrangements will be put in place to ensure that transnational activities supported through the ESF convergence programme do not overlap with those supported through other Community programmes, notably the vocational education and training (VET) and adult education strands within the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, namely the Leonardo and Grundtvig sub-programmes, together with the VET projects within the Erasmus sub-programme, and the policy development and information and dissemination strands of the transversal sub-programme. To take this forward, we will co-operate closely with the UK national agencies responsible for the Lifelong

Learning programme (British Council and ECOTEC) to ensure that there is no double funding, and that projects are complementary.

Priorities within the ESF Convergence Programme

5. The structure of the West Wales and the Valleys ESF Convergence programme is based around 4 key priorities. There is a separate priority for technical assistance.

- **ESF Priority 1: Equipping Young People with the Skills Needed for Employment** focuses on helping young people acquire the range of skills needed for employment by ensuring they remain engaged with education and training and obtain the range of skills needed to enter sustainable employment.
- **ESF Priority 2: Increasing employment and tackling economic inactivity** - focuses on increasing employment and promoting social inclusion by developing co-ordinated action to overcome barriers e.g. childcare, and disincentives to work, reducing the risk of people moving from work into unemployment and long term economic inactivity, promoting healthier lifestyles and equal opportunities.
- **ESF Priority 3: Improving skill levels and improving the adaptability of the work-force** - focuses on modernising and developing the economy through development of the skills and adaptability of enterprises and workers, improving basic skills, address skills gaps and shortages, higher level skills and support progression in employment.
- **ESF Priority 4: Making the Connections: modernising and improving the quality of our public services** - will support targeted investments in public services in both the public and voluntary sectors making services more accessible, coherent, effective and efficient, and responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and communities. It will include support for developing the skills of public service managers, develop and expand electronic access, and improve dialogue and co-operation.

Implementation Arrangements for the Programme

6. It is proposed to seek more strategic approaches in directing project activity across the various priorities in the next round. One important device for achieving the necessary improvements will be the development of *Strategic Frameworks*. These will be fully developed plans designed to achieve a particular strategic purpose by means of a number of project interventions that are strategically linked. They will help ensure that project activity focused on a particular strategic aim is well co-ordinated, does not involve duplication of effort and delivers efficiently against Programme and Priority objectives. They will also help to ensure balanced implementation of each of the Programme Priorities. Frameworks for relevant programme priorities will be expected to identify future potential transnational action.

Lessons from 2000-2006 Programmes

7. In addition, trans-national and inter-regional projects supported through ESF will take account of integrating the lessons learnt from the EQUAL Community Initiative. Wales has been very successful in securing funding under the Great Britain EQUAL programme 2000–2006. Four Development Partnerships operated during the first round, receiving ESF funding of £1.6 million. This increased to 15 Development Partnerships during the second round, with ESF funding of £15 million. Projects such as 'Healthy Minds at Work', have helped to increase understanding of the links between economic inactivity and mental health in the workplace. In addition to learning valuable policy lessons, the EQUAL approach to implementation through development partnerships has proved very successful in building understanding and partnership into all aspects of the projects, and facilitating mainstreaming of policy and operational lessons.

8. The experience of EQUAL will be taken forward under the new ESF Convergence programme in developing arrangements for supporting both innovative actions, and trans-national co-operation.

**WELSH EUROPEAN FUNDING OFFICE
JANUARY 2007**