

European Update 31st January 2018, from Network for Europe Cheshire, Cumbria, G Manchester, Lancashire, Liverpool CR

Headlines

Preparing for the second half of the Programme.

ERDF and ESF calls in the future.

EClaims ready

Third Sector representation

Second Half

It would seem that there is a lull in calls before we settle in to the second half of the programme. As in our update on 8th, this is now officially due to run its full course (ie to 2023). More than half of the funds are still to be committed. And EClaims is operational.

Both ESF and ERDF are expecting to hit their N+3 targets, so avoiding the need to return funds to Brussels for the first year. A few of the smaller Priorities within ERDF are giving concern over the commitment to reach the 6% draw down.

ESF seems to be preparing well for the second half. The DWP is the Managing Authority for the ESF Programme in England. Following the restructuring of DWP-ESF staff last year, additional staff are now being recruited (increasing from around 100 to 120). This will speed up calls, appraisals, and claims. The changes for the mid term review should be agreed with Europe soon. EClaims and Jaspersoft are now expected to be working properly very soon, which should allow accurate, timely Management Information and better planning. The Omnibus proposals (mid-term changes to the European Regulations, mainly around Simplification) will soon be in place. The recent Action Note about housing being an eligible ESF cost in certain circumstance could be a pointer for more holistic developments in the future. We look forward to a quicker, simpler, and effective second half.

Calls

Very few calls are currently open.

The rural EAFRD calls have a final deadline of 31st May.

ERDF Calls

Deadlines for the 8th December calls were on 26th January (as in our Update of 8th December).

This included the ones for Cheshire and Warrington, Lancashire, and Cumbria.

There are only nine remaining calls across the whole of England (none in the North West). Four close on 9th February, one in June, while the four remaining SUD Sustainable Urban Development projects close in March.

Although there had been an expectation from some areas for ERDF calls in January, this did not happen. It is now expected that there will be further ERDF calls in March (for Manchester and Liverpool, perhaps others). These may well be early in March to avoid purdah. Other calls are likely later in the year.

ESF Calls

Only three ESF calls are still open. These are not in the North West, but in the Solent, and close on 16th February.

It is not clear when future calls will be made, but it is expected that some will be announced before the first few weeks in March.

Liverpool was once again preparing to announce ESF calls, but this may have been put back by the YEI-ESF announcement.

YEI-ESF Youth Employment Initiative

Our Update of 14th December, reported on the announcement at the Growth Board (Programme Monitoring Committee) that day of further opportunities for continued funding for NEETs through ESF-YEI (in the North West, this just covers Liverpool).

On 4th January, we held a meeting attended by the third sector Liverpool organisations currently running ESF-YEI projects, to bring each other up to date, and discuss issues.

Liverpool Combined Authority will doubtless be taking this forward.

ESF-Co Finance Organisations

Still no official announcements from the four national CFOs (ESFA, DWP, Big Lottery Fund and HMPPS).

However, ESFA has been negotiating at LEP level around extending funding for existing projects until the end of March 2019 (when its match will run out). This of course requires agreement from not just the ESFA but also the local LEP level ESIF committees.

We understand more information is about to be released.

It is not known when the other CFOs will make formal announcements, although discussions have been continuing or some considerable time.

EClaims

After some years of development and testing, it would seem that this online system is now operating properly. This means organisations running projects will directly upload claims (and in the future, responses to calls). This is a big step forward. Instead of a data dump about every three months, we can move to up to date, accurate information, without needing significant staff resources. This will give better information on commitment and spend, as well as outputs and results.

National ESF Representation for the Third Sector

In previous English ESF and ERDF Programmes, Technical Assistance was used to support the involvement of third sector organisations, and Partnership Working. It is a requirement of the European Regulations that the Partners (including the third sector) are engaged at all stages in the Programmes. But of course this needs funding to work effectively, and TA has helped with this.

Network for Europe, as well as other regional infrastructure organisations were directly funded in previous Programmes by Technical Assistance to support the sector's involvement.

TA has been much more difficult in the 2014-20 Programmes, especially with the increased focus on LEP level strategies (the LEPs were created as partnerships between the Private Sector and the Local Authorities, led by the Private Sector). Recently published information is that 2014-20 ESF Technical Assistance directly funded only four Third Sector Organisations (two of which have ended), and no ERDF TA. In some areas, third sector organisations have been involved indirectly through Local Authority/LEP or other bids, but this is not really the same.

A proposal to support the Third Sector's involvement at a national level through ESF-TA is now being agreed. This is likely to focus on ensuring representation at the Growth Board (Programme Monitoring Committee) and on the national sub-committees. This would likely include travel costs, briefings, and reports to the wider third sector (and feedback from the wider sector). Further information is expected to be available shortly, including a request for third sector organisations that would be interested in receiving (and disseminating) information of relevance to the sector, and of ensuring good representation.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

It had been originally thought that there would be a consultation in 2017, looking at a fund in the UK which would in some sense replace ESF (or ESF and ERDF), in particular around inclusion. Currently, Europe provides around £6 thousand million pounds for ESF and ERDF in England over seven years.

Talk is now of the consultation perhaps in the middle of 2018, or possibly later.

Survey closing

A reminder of the survey on Communications for the Programme.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LF6JCTY>

Meetings of the local LEP level ESIF sub-committee

Delays are continuing. Liverpool had just two meetings in 2017, and the January 2018 meeting was postponed. Cheshire and Warrington last met in July 2017, and have postponed their next meeting by a few days to the beginning of March 2018. Manchester last met in July 2017, currently does not have a date for its next meeting.

With such large gaps, Partnership involvement becomes more difficult, and while written procedures can get agreements, they by-pass proper discussion.

ESIF Programme Bulletin

The January update is available (as well as the ESF and ERDF ones). It features a Liverpool ESF project run by Gingerbread, possible future calls, the Communications survey, EClaims, and the new public procurement thresholds. Also some information from the Growth Programme Board (Programme Monitoring Committee) of December, and some useful links.

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