



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

**European Structural and Investment Funds
2014 - 2020**

Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

Programme Communications Activities 2016 and Activity Plan for 2017

Purpose:

To provide the Board with an overview of the communications activities carried out by DCLG and DWP during 2016 and to share with the Board the 2017 Communications Activity Plan, as required by EC regulation.

Recommendation(s):

That the Board:

- (i) notes the communications activities undertaken in 2016; and
- (ii) notes the 2017 Communications Activity Plan.

Summary:

DCLG and DWP are required to deliver a range of communications activities to promote (and help others to promote) European Programmes and their benefits across England. An overarching communications strategy was approved by the PMC in 2015 - annual communications activity plans should be viewed by the PMC every year.

This paper summarises the key communications activities carried out by the managing authorities during 2016. It also provides the Board with the proposed communications activity plan for 2017 (Annex 1) for information / comments.

Extended periods of sensitivity, arising as a result of local elections and the build up to / result of the referendum, heavily restricted external communications related to European Structural Funds from April through to the end of the Summer. This led to the Annual Activity Plan needing to be revised. The managing authorities (working with the national communications sub-committee) undertook a partial re-draft of the 2016 Annual Activity Plan in late Summer / early Autumn and gained PMC approval for this revised document in early October.

Although restricted, external communications were delivered on a number of fronts, ensuring the managing authorities met regulatory requirements. A summary of these activities can be found in the main body of this paper.

Programme communications activities 2016

Programme communications are delivered, wherever possible, as joint activities across ERDF and ESF. The annual communications activity plan is also a joint document, although itemised and in some cases specific to each programme

Ongoing development and promotion of ESIF pages on GOV.UK

www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding

- the official website portal for the programme, required by EC regulation
- built into the existing GOV.UK website structure - contains important programme documents, guidance and governance information
- also home to the bespoke, fully searchable 'funding finder' tool where project calls for the ESIF programme are located
- hosts programme list of beneficiaries as well as project case studies
- from January to end of October, has received over 420,000 page views

Continued development and rollout of publicity requirements document and programme communications toolkit (including logos, poster templates etc.)

- developed to support partners and projects in the delivery of compliant communications
- ESIF branding and publicity requirements available on GOV.UK website
- flagged with projects and publicised further in programme bulletins / practitioner network bulletins and updated in light of further EC guidance during course of year

ESIF monthly programme bulletins

- distributed monthly (other than during periods of sensitivity) to database / partner list of around 2,000
- carries latest news on ESIF programmes including latest government announcements, call updates, word on key events, project case studies and latest programme guidance.

ESF official programme launch – January 2016

- took place in January at Clink Restaurant in the grounds of Styal Prison, Cheshire (venue for a National Offender Management Service project)
- conducted by the Right Honourable Priti Patel MP (then Minister of State for Employment) – European Commission (DG Emploi) were in attendance.
- Well attended event, supported by press and social media activity

Ministerial / senior government official project visits

- multiple senior government official visits to ERDF projects took place – including the Director of European Programmes at DCLG at WICED, Liverpool
- Ministers and MPs visited several ESIF projects during the course of the year, particularly in the weeks before the EU referendum

Media activity

- supported stories publicising the benefits of EU funding in specific local areas during first half of year
- issued press notices regarding the future of EU funding in England / UK following brexit. Included specific examples of projects previously and currently funded by ESIF money
- supported local and national delivery partners and projects in the production of localised press activity

Social media activity

- regular updates and news shared (other than during periods of sensitivity through Twitter -
- tweeted around 200 times this year, currently have 862 followers and following 983
- more extensive use of images in tweets following sub-committee and survey feedback
- continued building of content on dedicated ESIF YouTube channel highlighting successful projects from the previous programme.

Internal Communications Activities

- a broad range of internal communications activities took place in both managing authority departments
- staff spotlights, blogs, performance wall displays, presentations to other directorates/ Government Departments, upgrading and regular updating of intranet presence and 'talking heads' videos were among some of the tools / measures adopted to improve awareness of the ESIF programmes within departments and across Government

Formal Communications Partner Survey

- carried out in January / February 2016
- used to further shape communications activities undertaken during 2016
- 2017 survey will contain same questions where possible / relevant in order to enable comparisons and assess progress

List of Beneficiaries

- two versions published on GOV.UK website in 2016 – initially published in April and an updated version published in October
- full list covers both the ERDF and ESF programmes and is fully searchable

ERDF and ESF Communications Sub-Committee

- established in early 2016, made up of communications practitioners from across broad range of programme partner groups
- chaired by DCLG external communications lead and has 13 members
- supports managing authorities in devising and delivery of annual communications activity plans

- met twice in 2016 – March and October – and were in regular contact throughout the year
- next meeting April 2017

Developing/participating in key partner communications networks

- launched the ERDF Practitioners network with November bulletin - has growing membership, currently numbering just over 500
- other networks include ESIF UK Communications Network, INFORM and INIO (EC led communications groups spanning all member states for ERDF and ESF)
- continued to develop relationships with LEP communication leads and TA project leads across England, as well as the pan-department Cities and Local Growth Unit

ESF major annual communications activity - Skills Show, November

- the Skills Show is the nation's largest skills and careers event and took place at Birmingham NEC in November. Over 72,000 people attended.
- provided an opportunity to promote ESF, particularly its skills and employment support for young people, to a wide audience including young people and the general public – through a range of information and communication measures
- ESF and six ESF funded projects staff were available in a dedicated ESF zone throughout the 3 days of the event to provide information on the role of ESF and how the funding is being used.
- Dr Catherine Blair, Head of ESF Managing Authority, co-hosted a workshop session and an awards ceremony, the latter with Christian Aagaard, UK Programme Manager for the ESF at the European Commission
- Extensive media, twitter and YouTube activity supported / promoted ESF's presence at the event

ERDF major annual communications activity – Development and Distribution / Publicising of programme case study book 'Supporting Local Growth'

- contains over 25 2014-2020 project case studies / visuals, highlighting significant role ERDF funding plays in supporting local growth and local businesses
- to be published and widely distributed / publicised in December 2016
- will continue to be used as a publicity tool in 2017

Formal evaluation of Communications activities carried out in 2016 in support of ESIF 2014-2020 will take place in early 2017

Rob Martell, DCLG
25 November 2016

Annex 1 – Communications Annual Activity Plan for 2017