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06 December 2017

Letter from Head of ESF to Growth Programme Board members

Dear colleagues,

We wrote to you in October with the proposed revisions to the ESF Operational Programme (OP). The Board were asked to examine and approve proposed amendments by written procedure under Article 110 of the Common Provisions Regulations.

I would like to thank everyone for their input and continued support. We have received approval as well as a number of helpful comments.

The UK submitted updated financial tables in the light of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). These tables reflected the additional funding allocated through the MFF, but did not at the time reflect the other proposed changes to the ESF and ERDF programmes.

In the light of time pressures to complete the MFF-related amendments, the response from the European Commission was to propose a two staged approach which we have accepted.

“Stage 1” of the approach involved a submission by the Managing Authority of programme modifications which would only entail an adjustment to reflect the additional allocation of funding to the ESF programme. We have submitted these modifications to the Commission and are awaiting the Commission Decision.

For “Stage 2”, the Managing Authority (MA) will submit the fully revised OP in early 2018 alongside newly revised UK financial tables that will reflect the corresponding changes for both ESF and ERDF in England. This submission will reflect the policy and principles which the MA applied in its draft document submitted to you in October. It will be updated in the light of new guidance on decommitment issued by the European Commission at the end of November which now will allow the Youth Employment Initiative to be disbursed beyond 2018 so long as the England

Programme as a whole fulfils its N+3 targets. This is a very welcome development and will mean that support for young people in England will be able to continue at pace. The LEP leads will be in touch with the respective areas to discuss next steps.

Let me now move from process to the content of the proposed full OP changes and the comments received on this.

We received approval and are grateful for words of support expressed.

Where additional comments were made, I take the opportunity to react to these.

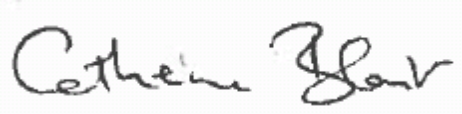
I acknowledge the desire for early communication and direct engagement with LEP areas and Intermediary Bodies (IBs). The OP review reflects what ESF should be delivering at national (England) in line with what LEPs have been working towards from the outset. We are using the existing LEP lead network to communicate directly about what implications this may have for individual LEP areas, but welcome additional dialogue if required.

We considered a proposal to introduce new and additional indicators to report on softer outcomes and outcomes immediately after leaving projects. Whilst these proposals carry a lot of merit particularly to ensure that the value of the programme can be fully quantified, we felt that it would not be sensible at this stage in the programme to increase the reporting burden. However, we have logged this proposal for a potential successor programme post EU exit.

Finally, a comment was made on the slight increase in participant numbers for the programme. We are committed to driving value for money in the programme and have based revised targets on an updated set of assumptions and the experience of the first half of the programme.

We will keep our lines of communication open as these steps develop and look forward to working with you to ensure the programme continues to deliver.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Blair

Head of European Social Fund Division