

European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020)
Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

GPB 2015/12/16 Item 7

Programme Communications Activities 2015 and Activity Plan for 2016

Purpose:

To provide the Board with an overview of the communications activities carried out by DCLG and DWP during 2015 and to seek approval from the Board for the 2016 Communications Activity Plan, as required by EC regulation.

Recommendations:

That the board:

- (i) note the communications activities undertaken in 2015; and
- (ii) approve the 2016 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. A communications strategy and then an annual communications activity plan should be approved by the PMC. *(The communications strategy for the programmes and the 2015 communications activity plan are with you for approval by written procedure following Commission comments after the last GPB meeting).*

This paper summarises the key communications activities carried out by the managing authorities during 2015. It also provides the Board with the proposed communications activity plan for 2016 (Annex 1) for which we seek the Board's approval.

We launched the programme in March and published a first round of project calls alongside a written ministerial statement and web story. The official ERDF launch by James Wharton was in Bristol in August, supported by local press releases across the country and Ministerial project visits. We have issued monthly partner ESIF programme bulletins, undertaken press and social media activity and developed the programme pages on the GOV.UK website. The webpages, including the 'funding finder' tool have received over half a million page views. We have published branding and publicity requirements and promoted over 200 project calls. We propose a similar approach to launch the ESF programme and are currently working with DWP Minister's Office and press office to make the necessary arrangements. Once confirmed we will ensure GPB members are made aware of arrangements.

Programme communications activities 2015

1. Programme communications are delivered, wherever possible, as joint activities across ERDF and ESF. The annual communications activity plans are also joint documents, although itemised and in some cases specific to each programme.
2. Formal communications activities commenced in March when 'in principle' agreement of the programme documents by the European Commission was in place. Formal adoption of the operational programmes in June (ERDF) and September (ESF) enabled the commencement of more extensive external programme communications – these are also outlined below.

Drafting of communications strategy and annual activity plan for 2015

- agreed by the (shadow) Growth Programme Board in December 2014
- refined recently to meet requests from European Commission
- submitted to GPB for formal approval by written procedure

Development and promotion of ESIF pages on GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/england-2014-to-2020-european-structural-and-investment-funds>

- 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 newly developed and searchable 'funding finder' tool where project calls for the ESIF programme can be located
- will host programme list of beneficiaries as well as project case studies (as projects begin to contract)
- between the launch of these pages in March and the end of October, they have received over 500,000 page views

Development 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
- signed off by the Growth Programme Board and distributed to LEP area partners/ ESF Co-financing Organisations in Spring of 2015
- available on GOV.UK website and updated in October 2015
- to be flagged with projects and publicised further as grant funding agreements start to be signed

ESIF monthly partner updates/programme bulletins

- monthly partner updates commenced mid-2014 and ran through to July 2015 (when it was replaced by the monthly programme bulletin)
- circulated to a database of contacts which grew from 1,000 to almost 2,000
- carried latest news around the development of the ESIF Programmes
- programme bulletin distributed monthly, since August, to database / partner list of around 2,000
- carries latest news on ESIF programmes including call updates, word on key events and latest programme guidance

ERDF programme soft launch – March 2015

- took place following ‘in principle’ agreement of ERDF and ESF OPs
- actioned just prior to ‘pre-election period’ across UK
- consisted of written ministerial statement issued in house of commons, web story published on GOV.UK website and circulation of a special partner update
- timed to coincide with publishing of first ERDF programme calls on funding finder
- speakers provided to LEP/locally lead launch events across the country

Official ERDF programme launch – August 2015

- took place in Bristol following the formal adoption of the ERDF Operational Programme in June
- main focal point was DCLG European Programmes Minister James Wharton project visit and press call at National Composites Centre and in Bristol City Centre
- supported by a national press notice and local versions covering whole of England
- published on the GOV.UK website
- 35 local press and media articles resulted from above press activity
- also supported by widespread social media activity, a Ministerial letter, a special programme bulletin, a further wave of project calls

Further Ministerial project visits

- James Wharton embarked on ERDF project visits in Middlesbrough, Cheshire and Darlington
- all resulted in publicity for ERDF 2014-2020 programme online and in local press

Media activity

- designed to raise awareness of programmes aims, projects supported etc.
- so far in 2015 has been focussed around ERDF launch activity and ministerial visits
- further activity in December will again be localised and focus on value of applications received and initial grant funding agreements

Social media activity

- regular updates and news shared through Twitter (tweeted around 100 times since programme launch, currently have 565 followers and following over 700)
- building content all the time on dedicated ESIF YouTube channel highlighting successful projects from the previous programme.

Developing/participating key partner communications networks

- including an ESIF UK Communications Network, INFORM and INIO (EC led communications groups spanning all member states for ERDF and ESF)
- starting to build up an ERDF Practitioners network
- developing relationships with LEP communication leads across England

ESF at the Skills Show

- the Skills Show is the nation’s largest skills and careers event and took place at Birmingham NEC in November. Around 80,000 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 staff were available at a dedicated stand throughout the 3 days of the event to provide information on the role of ESF and how the funding is being used.
- Angus Gray, Head of ESF Managing Authority, introduced a skills focused meeting for LEPs at the event and was interviewed for a short film which will be available on the ESIF YouTube channel in due course
- News from the event and photos tweeted and photos are available on flickr

Formal evaluation of Communications activities carried out in 2015 in support of ESIF 2014-2020 will take place in early 2016

27th November 2015

Rob Martell, DCLG

Annex 1 – Communications annual activity plan for 2016 – is provided separately to this paper