



**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 2022 and Activity Plan for 2023

### **Purpose:**

To provide the Board with an overview of the headline communication activities carried out by DLUHC and DWP during 2022 and to share with the Board the 2023 Communications Activity Plan, as required by EC regulation.

### **Recommendation(s):**

**That the board:**

- (i) **note the communications activities undertaken in 2022; and**
- (ii) **note the 2023 Communications Activity Plan.**

### **Summary:**

DLUHC and DWP are required to deliver a range of communications activities to promote European Programmes and their benefits and impact across England. An overarching communications strategy was approved by the PMC in 2015 and updated in late 2016. 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 2022. It also provides the Board with the proposed communications activity plan for 2023 (Annex A) for information / comments.

During 2022 communications were delivered through a variety of channels with messages and information shared in an effective and timely manner with target audiences ensuring the managing authorities met regulatory requirements.

A summary of headline activities delivered is provided below in the main body of this paper.

## **Programme communications activities 2022**

Programme communications are delivered, wherever possible, on shared platforms and 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.

### **Communications for ERDF and ESF Response to COVID-19**

As Covid restrictions eased in early 2022, the communications response around the ERDF and ESF programmes was also scaled down and concluded with clear final messaging. The covid response pages on GOV.UK had been our main channels for messaging and the specific ESF, ERDF and EAFRD pages containing Q&As were updated and closed independently. Bulletins, which had also been used to share information and updates were also scaled back. A final bulletin relating to the closure of the ERDF Q&A, highlighting final key points and providing a link to the item on GOV.UK, was circulated at the end of March. ESF Grant Recipients were automatically notified of updates to and the closure of the ESF Q&A.

From March, it was communicated that we were entering a more 'steady state' business as usual arrangement for the remainder of the Programmes.

Communications support continued to be provided for initiatives directly addressing COVID-19, such as the ERDF Welcome Back Fund.

### **ERDF and ESF Major Annual Communications Activities**

There is a formal EC requirement for each managing authority to deliver a major annual communication activity.

The ERDF Annual Information Activity is to be delivered in the form of a special bulletin focussing in on project closure and featuring some project case studies. It will be circulated during the first half of December and will provide timely and important information to projects, partners and stakeholders in relation to where we are with the programme and important steps that need to be taken over the coming months. It will also showcase some of the positive work our fund has supported across various sectors in England.

The main ESF Annual Information Activity is the publishing of a 2022 ESF Project booklet on GOV.UK during the first half of December. This will feature a brief update on the Programme's implementation and short project descriptions showcasing the breadth of activity from across the country, with links to project websites. Compared to past years there are more projects, with shorter descriptions.

Two other ESF communication activities have been aligned with the above activity:

- on 17 March ESF Division hosted a national online (Teams) Celebration Event for stakeholders and delivery partners. The event was well attended, with over 530 people dialling in on the day and included presentations and films from LEPs, CFOs and Providers from across the country, plus speakers from DWP: Clare Bonson – Deputy Director, European Social Fund, Tara Smith – Strategic Finance Director and Nick Campbell – Head of the DWP ESF Evaluation team. The event showcased national and local activities and achievements; the positive impact ESF support has in the lives of

individuals, businesses and communities; and featured lessons and effective practice plus a look at priorities for the rest of the Programme. The event was available to view to mid-September.

- following this event, those who registered to attend were invited to submit their project details and links to websites, films and case studies to ESFD, for inclusion in an ESF Programme Project Showcase (pdf) document. There was a good response and in October the showcase, comprising over 70 projects, was circulated to event attendees. It is also available to share more widely with stakeholders, including those developing future programmes.

### **ESIF pages on GOV.UK [www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding](http://www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding)**

This is the official website portal for the programme - required by EC regulation. It is built into the existing GOV.UK website structure and contains important programme documents, guidance and governance information. It's home to the fully searchable 'funding finder' tool where project calls for the ESIF programme have been published and also houses older and current versions of the Annual Implementation Reports, previous project case study booklets, key programme guidance, the list of beneficiaries (updated twice a year) and branding and publicity requirements.

Overall, the pages on GOV.UK have been maintained to ensure they are fit for purpose.

In 2022 the section developed to specifically house COVID-19 response information from all managing authorities has been closed. This has been the central source for our response information and centred around the development of online Question and Answers for each fund. All other communications shared with partners signposted partners back to this section for full details. Links to final Q&A pages – [ERDF](#) and [ESF](#)

The ERDF and ESF List of Beneficiaries has been updated and published on the GOV.UK pages twice in 2022, in line with the requirement on this in the regulations.

ERDF project final reports and the Interim Impact Evaluation Report for the programme (plus appendices) have been published on the dedicated [ERDF Evaluation page](#)

From January to the end of October 2022, these pages received 87,343 page views which is in line with expectations at this stage of programme.

### **Partner Bulletins and Notifications – ESIF, ERDF and ESF**

Direct branded email bulletins have been used to share programme updates. The ESIF Partner Bulletin which covers all funds was used for COVID-19 updates. In addition, separate fund bulletins are produced including the ERDF Practitioner Network Bulletin; and ESF Action Notes about specific guidance and other delivery related issues are also circulated to a mailing list of ESF project/partner subscribers.

The ESIF Partner Bulletin mailing list has again been used this year to notify partners about COVID-19 Response updates and changes. In March 2022 a special edition of the Bulletin was issued. This informed recipients that as the main focus of the Programme is on the remaining delivery of individual funds, the regular issues of the Bulletin about the Programme overall will cease. Programme specific bulletins and notifications continued to be circulated when necessary to their respective stakeholders; and going forward these will be the main way that ESIF stakeholders will be updated on the different funds.

The ERDF Practitioner Bulletin has been used during the year to support messages on Summative Assessment/Evaluation and Closure, as well as updating ERDF partners on programme details and developments.

### **Evaluation Communications – ERDF**

DLUHC have worked hard over the course of 2022 to support projects in the completion of their evaluation/summative assessment through various communications and to publicise the evaluation of the ERDF programme as it is drawn to a conclusion. Much of the publicity centres around and points to our dedicated GOV.UK ERDF [evaluation page](#). The Final Evaluation documentation, which is being submitted to the European Commission shortly, will be published on this page in the coming weeks.

A partner bulletin featuring summative assessment was circulated in March and internally workshops were held to support and inform contract managers in this area of work. Around 80 final reports have been published on our dedicated evaluation page on GOV.UK, as has the phase 2 'Interim Impact Evaluation Report' along with two appendices.

### **Evaluation communications – ESF**

We published a trio of evaluation reports on GOV.UK in March 2022 accompanied by an [ESF Action Note 076/22](#). These were:

- [European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative Leavers Survey Report 2016-2019](#)
- [Youth Employment Initiative – Impact Evaluation](#)
- [Evaluation of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 Programme in England: qualitative case study research](#)

### **Internal Communications Activities**

Managing Authorities use a broad range of internal communications activities to ensure staff are kept informed of programme developments, messages communicated externally and broader Department news.

For ERDF staff, the managing authority has used a variety of tools to keep staff updated and informed. Case studies, intranet articles, direct emails, calls and use of the DLUHC Hub 'intranet' site were among some of the tools used. Fortnightly business process calls take place within the ERDF network to highlight any programme developments that staff need to be aware of. A weekly directorate call highlights examples and case studies of funding delivery and a number of ERDF projects have been presented in 2022

For ESF staff the managing authority use an internal ESF 'iBoard', Teams and SharePoint based 'intranet' that incorporates links to all internal and external documents and supporting information to support delivery of the programme. It also keeps colleagues updated on latest news and information. Newsflashes and regular Newsletters/Blogs are posted on the ESF iBoard where there is important information to communicate directly.

ESFD staff also attend regular All colleague 'Teams' calls that address all aspects of Programme management and implementation; plus HR and wellbeing related matters and good news stories and films from projects, including participant journeys.

## **Reports and Papers**

Progress reports and project case studies provided for the Annual Implementation Report. Additionally, from July 2022 a programme of 6 monthly reporting to Local ESIF Committee members commenced. Local reports covering ERDF and ESF (for each LEP area) were compiled and distributed to local members. This process will continue into 2023, with work on the compilation of the January local reports commencing in December.

## **ERDF and ESF Communications National Sub-Committee**

Given the stage we are at with the programme and the steady state nature of our communications, it was not felt necessary to convene a meeting of this Sub-Committee during the early part of the year. As part of the broader review of ESIF National Sub-Committees, the Communications National Sub-Committee was formally closed in June 2022.

## **December 2022**

**Rob Martell and James Ritchie**

Annex A – Communications annual activity plan for 2023 (attached as separate document)