



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

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

Growth Programme for England

Minutes of the Growth Programme Board

11:00 27th June 2023

Microsoft Teams

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Progress on Programmes* *Agenda items marked * were*
3. ESF Impact Analysis and *accompanied by Board papers*
Evaluation Update
4. Discussion on Future Role of the
GPB and its Remaining Sub-
Committees*
5. Minutes of March Meeting and
progress on Actions*
6. Items for information*
7. Any other business

Minutes

Item 1: Welcome and introductions

1. **Jenny Dibden** welcomed Board Members and substitutes. She advised that apologies received would be recorded in the minutes. She also advised that the meeting was being recorded and transcribed.
2. **Jenny** asked the board for any conflicts of interest - none were declared. She added that she felt there was nothing on the agenda that would require members to recuse themselves.
3. **Jenny** invited board members to say if they had anything they wished to include under Items for Information. No items were received. She also invited members to put questions in the chat or put their Teams' hand up.
4. **Jenny** then respectfully requested that discussion remained focussed on the European programmes during the meeting. She then introduced the Progress on Programmes item and handed over to David Malpass (DLUHC).

Item 2: Progress of Programmes

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

5. **David Malpass** introduced the ERDF update. He ran through some headlines, including that the programme was now 100% committed (including potential future FI investments), there was just under £0.7bn left to pay out by the end of January 2024 and that potential FOREX gains were forecast (as of the end of May) at £35m.
6. He then ran through the slides, providing more details around the programme performance to date. He also highlighted the significant amount of work that was still to be done by staff within the MA, in particular around collecting in and processing claims.
7. He closed his presentation by flagging that more details around some individual projects and the audit regime were included in the paper which was circulated ahead of the meeting. Questions were then invited.
8. **Alison Gordon** asked if, with the High Streets Fund, there were any early lessons coming out of that which could be shared. **Tom Wood** responded that as part of the National Evaluation, a summative assessment has been completed on the Welcome Back Fund. Currently seeking final approval to publish/share that document.
9. **Guus Muijzers** asked if items showing as red currently on the performance indicators were expected to change to green or if it was felt there would be a bit of cross compensation (i.e. in one category of region the programme will overachieve to compensate for underachievement in another one)? **David** responded that this could be the case in some PAs, for example under PA4 the less developed target could be hard to reach but he expected the programme to over-achieve on the other two categories of region. And in PA5 he expected to exceed the target in Transition areas but will struggle in the others.
10. **Guus** added that while from his point of view there is only a tiny chance, there is a possibility that EU colleagues could, theoretically, hit the England Programme with a financial correction for under-performance for these red 'boxes' and he just wanted to highlight this possibility. He then commented, on the Financial Instrument reporting, that colleagues in the EU had closely scrutinised this and highlighted any issues or gaps to try and ensure there are no issues in the final reporting stages.
11. **James Newman** made the point that there is a long tail to the performance of Financial Instruments (FIs) but asked how they were performing to date and how their performance was being measured. **David Read** responded, stating that the MA have worked very closely with the British Business Bank (BBB) on the FIs that they manage and that additional funding for them had been agreed because of the strength of their investments to date. The MA are also ensuring that they are

getting additional outputs for that funding. There has also been a recognition of the importance, particularly in the current climate, of supporting companies to develop and grow.

12. **Pernille Kousgaard** asked, again on FIs, about what processes were in place to ensure funding initially allocated to certain LEP areas or MCAs were recycled back into those areas. She also stated that the BBB needed to ensure their local investments reflected local needs. **David Read** responded that the push was definitely to ensure that funding initially invested in the Northern Powerhouse area was reinvested back into the Northern Powerhouse region. The MA has also done a lot of work with the BBB to make them think more widely than just investing in the big cities. He added that while the Department can influence at one level, local partners would need to continue to manage things and highlight their local needs.

European Social Fund (ESF)

13. **Pete Long** presented the ESF slides, highlighting some of the programme headlines covered in the more detailed paper which had been shared with GPB members ahead of the meeting.
14. Points highlighted included £2.89bn had been committed, slightly down on last time due to work in resetting projects now being concluded (with financial outcomes likely to be completed across the life of projects). Participant rates are just under 2.2m, over 250,000 people had entered work as a result of the programme and 500,000 people have gained a qualification.
15. The MA had submitted and been paid their first payment application of 2023 – the second was being readied and will be submitted by the end of June. And the error rate remains very low at 0.31% (well below the 2% rate set by the EC). The Annual Implementation Report was submitted to the EC in May following sign off from GPB and the Audit Authority.
16. **Pete** concluded his run-through of programme headlines by highlighting that the Fast-Care call had been launched with a value of £102m and had closed in mid-May. He also mentioned that £6.5m of additional funding had been agreed with 22 projects (enabling delivery through to the end of December 2023) and presented a dashboard sharing the programme performance against delivery KPIs. He then invited questions from members.
17. **Gregorio De Castro** introduced himself as a stand in for Peter Matthijs (DG Emploi), thanked the MA for their presentation/paper and asked what their plans were up to the end of the year and into 2024 on evaluation/beneficiary surveys etc. **Pete** responded that this would be covered under agenda item 3 but that evaluations had both been produced and publicised and were in the process of

being completed and published. **Gregorio** also raised the £30m which was currently unspent under the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). **Pete** highlighted the specific constraints around this particular funding and that it wasn't unspent for the want of trying. **Clare Bonson** added that it might be worth a conversation between the MA and the EC to explore any potential ways of unlocking this funding. **Gregorio** agreed to this.

18. **Alison Gordon** asked if there was anything the MA could say (and members could share externally) on Fast-Care. **James Newman** added a specific query on how much of the funding available to Fast-Care had been applied for. He also asked about any plans the MA had to publicise the programme. And **Pernille Kousgaard** queried what lessons we could learn from the Fast-Care – how many local authorities have applied (and what is the best geographical level to apply to different types of fund)? **Pete** responded that, although the closing date was 15 May, it was taking slightly longer than expected to work through. He did highlight that applications were from both individual local authorities and consortia. On Pernille's point/query, **Clare** said this work was in development but that there was someone tasked with looking at the legacy of ESF and that lessons learned are gathered and disseminated. And the MA are in the early planning stages of pulling something together to celebrate the achievements of the programme.

ACTION 0627/01: ESF MA to discuss options around spending remaining YEI funds with EC

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

19. **Emma Friend** presented the EAFRD item, providing an update on programme progress. To date a total of £155.5m has been awarded to 970 projects with just under £150m spent (with a small amount of claims outstanding).
20. **Emma** went on to say that while all projects were contracted to complete and claim by at the end of last year, extensions had been given to a small number of projects – these continue to be monitored as they come to a close.
21. The programme has so far created 4,888 jobs, an increase of 132 since the December update (exceeding the target of just over 4,000).
22. **Jan Thornton** asked if the MA were confident of achieving a further spend of £6m and achieve the outputs by the end of the programme. **Emma** responded that she was confident of achieving the outputs. On the spend of £6m, she was reasonably confident although it would depend on the grant recipients themselves getting their projects over the line and getting their bills in. The Rural Payments Agency do have a good handle on what is still needed and which projects are still out there and are in almost constant contact with them.

European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)

23. **Jenny** stated that there was no one available from the EMFF MA to attend the meeting but that members had been sent the update paper and accompanying slides provided by the MA. She invited any questions to be submitted in writing – these will be passed onto the MA who in-turn will respond. There were no further comments relating to this item.

Item 3: ESF Impact Analysis and Evaluation Update

24. **Nick Campbell** and **Thea D'ambra** presented some results from the ESF impact analysis, highlighting that some members would already have heard this presentation at the Performance National Sub-Committee meeting held in earlier in June. **Nick** introduced the item, mentioning that these findings represented the most scientific and robust analysis on how effective and what impact the programme has had. He also flagged that outside experts were being brought in to assure the evaluation and that they were using DWP's data lab to do some individual project level analysis.
25. **Thea** then took members through the analysis, delving into the process involved and initial findings. She highlighted that the analysis only looked at participants who were previously claiming benefits, roughly 30% of participants (the slides supporting this item were shared with members immediately after the meeting).
26. The next steps include looking to extend this analysis to all participants – DWP are hopeful of being able to roll that out soon. They would also like to incorporate education data so that educational outcomes can be monitored – and they would also like to add/assess earnings data. The MA will be looking to publish this information once Ministerial approval had been received.
27. **Alison Gordon** asked how likely they were to be able to access some earnings data. **Thea** responded that less than a year ago it looked less likely but given that this appears to be the hot topic currently with lots of teams rolling it into their analysis, and with the quality of the data getting better it does look more of a possibility (although perhaps not in the immediate future).
28. **James Newman** observed that one of the early slides highlighted that people supported through the scheme were more likely to be claiming benefits than when the scheme started and asked if this was a positive or negative. **Thea** explained that claiming benefits is not always a negative. It might be that people have moved into education and they're using benefits to support themselves while they gain further qualifications or people initially stay on benefits while they look for work, which is potentially higher paid. So while it can be a negative, there are a lot of reasons that make it a positive.

29. **Pernille** asked if these finding just showed that ESF is moving a lot of inactive people closer to the labour market and unemployed people into low skilled and low waged jobs and is that what we want from the programme? She then asked if we had done enough with ESF around supporting those in employment? And finally she asked, if this programme has been so successful at helping people to be less likely to be inactive or less likely to be unemployed, how are we sharing that with programmes going forward? In response, **Thea** stated that on the first two points, the key is the education data and to keep on doing this kind of analysis. It has been difficult to show the benefit for employed people because that education and earnings data hasn't been available but it is something DWP are really pushing for. On the final point, **Nick** highlighted a qualitative study which the MA have published on GOV.UK which he said, along with some other related studies and evaluation, he would share with members. He also stated that they had been and would continue to share their knowledge around what the ESF projects do that is different and what works with other domestic and DWP contracted programmes.
30. **Jenny** closed the item by just stating that it did seem that at a future GPB meeting, possibly March 2024, there would be interest in hearing from the MA on how far they have managed to get with the education and earnings data.

Item 4: Discussion on Future Role of the GPB and its Remaining Sub-Committees

31. **David Malpass** introduced this item, highlighting the paper which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. In summary, given where we are in the lifecycle of the ERDF and ESF programmes and given that both have agreed strategies in place for the final allocation of the funds, the paper proposed that this June GPB would be the last in 2023 and that the next one would be in March 2024. He added that MI information on the programmes would be shared in writing with members in September and December of 2023 and that a few technical elements around the Annual Implementation Reports would still need to be consulted on.
32. **David** continued by highlighting that this proposal was discussed and broadly approved of at the most recent Performance National Sub-Committee (PNSC) meeting in early June. **Clare Bonson** added that she was completely in agreement with David and this proposal, adding that the March 2024 meeting would be a really important point in the programme but in the intervening months the MA are keen to concentrate on delivering those last bits and ensuring the best possible value out of the programme that is possible.
33. **James Newman** confirmed that the proposal had been discussed at the PNSC earlier in June and that the firm consensus was that this was a sensible approach. He highlighted the importance of the continued information flow and also requested that the date for the March meeting is fixed as early as possible. He also welcomed the plan to include a discussion around communications and promotion of programme achievements.

34. **Alison Gordon** concurred, and also briefly reflected on what the GPB had achieved/overseen over the years. Many interesting and challenging conversations but a firm sense that members were listened to and that it did allow us to iron out some challenges and drive changes when they were needed. Something that could work well for new domestic programmes.
35. **Pernille** was in agreement with both James and Alison's comments and added that members have been listened to with MAs meeting some of these concerns. It has been a positive experience sitting around the table with Government and the EC to actually talk and take things forward. Although members may have been difficult at times we really have got these programmes to a good position. Members have welcomed the opportunity to work together.
36. **Helen Millne** reinforced what colleagues had said, stating that being able to contribute to discussions and to feedback to her sector has felt fully inclusive. She requested that the third sector was not forgotten in any future partnerships.
37. **Richard Powell** agreed with what had been said and stated that from the perspective of being a chair of one of the local committees, it had been incredibly useful to be a part of GPB.
38. **James Newman** came back in to ask what was going to happen with the Local ESIF Committees now? **Tom Wood** confirmed that they would remain closed down as per the terms of reference changes agreed in 2022 but that the six monthly updates former members receive would continue, with the next ones set for July 2023.
39. **Jenny** thanked everyone for their comments and observations and confirmed the proposal as approved.

ACTION 0627/02: GPB secretariat to circulate date/invite for March 2024 GPB as soon as possible and to include items on Communications and an update on the ESF impact analysis within the agenda.

Item 5: Minutes of December meeting and progress on Actions

40. **Rob Martell** ran through the actions from the previous minutes, all of which had been completed (with the exception of 2209/01) – see actions on page 9. He then asked if everyone was happy to agree the draft minutes circulated with papers as a true record of the December GPB meeting. The minutes were agreed.

Standing Items 6: Items for Information

National Sub-Committee Report

41. **Rob Martell** stated that the Performance National Sub-Committee (PNSC) had met once since the last GPB on Thursday 8 June and provided a brief update on areas covered. The Evaluation National Sub Committee (ENSC) had not met since the last GPB. He then highlighted that both NSCs would be impacted by the decision agreed under item 4 of this meeting and would be notified in writing of that decision/impact.

ACTION 0627/03: NSC chairs to contact PNSC and ENSC members to notify them of GPB decision on future meetings and the impact this will have on NSCs.

Item 7: Any Other Business

42. **Jenny** highlighted that Guus was retiring and this would be his last GPB. She thanked him for his hard work, support and good humour during his several years on the GPB. **Guus** thanked Jenny and stated that it had been a pleasure and that his handover will highlight that excellent work has been done on the England ERDF programme.
43. There were no other items raised under AOB – **Jenny** confirmed that the next meeting will be held in March 2024 (date to be confirmed asap) and the first of the top-level MI packs would be circulated in late September.

Meeting closed: 13:00

Annex A

List of agreed actions from June 2023 Growth Programme Board meeting

No.	Action	Assigned to:
0627/01	Discussion to be held around options around spending remaining YEI allocation (Completed - ESF MA met with the Commission in July to discuss the YEI position and are following up on the outcome.)	DWP/EC
0627/02	Circulate date/invite for March 2024 GPB as soon as possible and to include items on Communications and an update on the ESF impact analysis within the agenda (Completed – meeting set for Tuesday 19 March 2024)	GPB secretariat
0627/03	Contact PNSC and ENSC members to notify them of GPB decision on future meetings and the impact this will have on NSCs (Completed – messages circulated w/c 17 July 2023)	NSC Chairs via NSC secretariats

Actions from March 2023 Growth Programme Board meeting

No.	Action	Completed
0321/01	ERDF MA to review their position on project extensions relating to revenue projects (completed – position not changed with GPB members notified in writing)	Yes
0321/02	EMFF MA to provide GPB members with a geographical breakdown of programme projects and spend (completed)	Yes

Carried over from previous meetings

No.	Action	Assigned to:
2209/01	Welcome Back Fund case studies to be published online (Ongoing – will now be tied in with broader publishing of ERDF final evaluation)	Rob Martell, DLUHC



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Growth Programme for England

Chair:

	Sector/Organisation Representing	Attending (Y/N)	Substitute For
Jenny Dibden Director, Community Investment and Funding Services	DLUHC	Y	

Board Members (full and advisory):

	Sector/Organisation Representing	Attending (Y/N)	Substitute For
David Malpass Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Y	
Helen Millne The Women's Organisation	Voluntary/Community Sector	Y	
Jo Dobson Coventry University	Higher Education	Y	John Lathom
James Newman Sheffield City Region	LEPs	Y	
Carol Botten Network for Europe	Voluntary/Community Sector	Y	
Alison Gordon Greater Manchester Combined Authority	LEPs	Y	Simon Nokes
Natasha Waller LEP Network	LEPs	Y	
Dr Huw Edwards Thames Valley Berkshire	LEPs	Y	
Pernille Kousgaard Liverpool City Region	SUD	Y	
Guus Muijzers European Commission	EC	Y	

Gregorio De Castro European Commission	EC	Y	Peter Matthijs
Janet Thornton Rural and Farming Network	Rural	Y	
Richard Powell Chair Wild Anglia	Local Nature Partnerships	Y	
Emily Kent Cornwall Council	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	Y	
Richard Powell EU Funds	Department for Energy, Security and New Zero	Y	
Clare Bonson ESF Division	DWP	Y	
Pete Long ESF Division	DWP	Y	
Mark Burns ESF Division	DWP	Y	
Mark Leonardo European Programmes	GLA	Y	Alex Conway
Emma Friend EAFRD Division	DEFRA	Y	

Additional Attendees / Observers:

Name	Sector/Organisation	
Rob Martell Growth Programme Board Secretariat	DLUHC	Growth Programme Board Secretariat/Presenter
Sean Hughes Growth Programme Board Secretariat	DLUHC	Growth Programme Board Secretariat
Nicholas Campbell ESF Division	DWP	Presenter
Thea D'ambra ESF Analysis	DWP	Presenter
David Read Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Observer

Tom Wood Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	Observer
Joanna Henderson ESF Division	DWP	Observer
Carolyn Hyde ESF Division	DWP	Observer
Rachel Sylvester ESF Division	DWP	Observer

Apologies:

	Sector/Organisation	Sending a Substitute?
Simon Nokes Greater Manchester Combined Authority	LEPs	Yes, Alison Gordon
John Lathom Coventry University	Higher Education	Yes, Jo Dobson
Alex Conway European Programmes	GLA	Yes, Mark Leonardo
Harry Stirk EMFF Team	MMO	No
Peter Matthijs European Commission	EC	Yes, Gregorio De Castro
Simon Jones Communities and European Programmes	DLUHC	No