

European Priorities 2011-12 Implementation Report



Winning in Europe



Northern Ireland
Executive

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EUROPEAN PRIORITIES 2011–12 IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Our thematic priorities

- Competitiveness and Employment
- Innovation and Technology
- Climate Change and Energy
- Social Cohesion

Progress against overall objectives

Increase the drawdown of European funding.

Co-ordinate, through the Barroso Task Force Working Group, departmental progress on increasing drawdown of competitive EU funding by 20% over the period to 2015.

The Barroso Task Force Working Group established four cross-departmental thematic sub-groups to increase engagement in European policies, funding programmes and networks. The work of each thematic sub-group is co-ordinated by a senior official from an agreed lead department.

A finance sub-group, with representatives from each department, was established in February 2012 to co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the 20% target across departments. The Sub-group recommended inclusion of the 20% target in the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15.

EU competitive funds include non-structural funds and *INTERREG B* and *C* monies. In 2011/12, £15,826,939 of competitive funding was secured, an increase of £ 4,868,926 from the 2010/11 baseline of £10,958,013.

Increase and enhance the value of European secondments.

Increase the number of officials seconded to Brussels and European Institutions by end March 2012.

A Barroso Task Force Working Group HR sub-group comprising BTWG Thematic sub-group leaders, officials from DFP Central HR and OFMDFM's European Division was established to develop a strategic approach to secondments, including prioritising and exploring opportunities.

A central budget of approximately £500,000 per annum was created to support EU secondments.

As a result, an unprecedented 9 additional NICS officials were posted in Brussels during the year. This includes:

- An official on a two-year secondment in the URBAN/Territorial Unit of DG Regional Policy commencing in October 2011, which was secured as a direct result of Task Force discussions with Commissioner Hahn (DG Regional Policy);
- Four new thematic desk officers posted in the Brussels Office;
- Two Seconded National Experts in Professional Training (5 month placements);
- An official placed in the UK Permanent Representation to the European Union; and
- An official in the Irish Permanent Representation to the European Union.

Place four seconded policy officials in the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels (ONIEB) by end March 2012 to assist with the implementation of the Executive's European Priorities.

Four Thematic Desk Officers were appointed in December 2011 and took up post in March 2012. They will provide dedicated support to departments in delivering the Executive's European objectives.

An event to promote the newly installed Desk Officers to stakeholders and key Brussels contacts was held in ONIEB during the Barroso Task Force Working Group's Brussels engagement Programme in March 2012. Other NI secondees in Brussels also participated. The Desk Officers worked with departments to set up 54 bilateral meetings with European Commission officials and other key Brussels contacts during the programme.

Strengthen the Executive's engagement with Europe.

Deliver a successful inward visit of the Barroso Task Force by end April 2011.

The European Commission's Task Force for Northern Ireland visited the region between 30 March and 1 April 2011. Fifteen European Commission officials from 8 Directorate-Generals and approximately 90 senior NICS officials and stakeholders participated in the three-day visit, which included 2 plenary sessions, 4 Thematic Workshops and a number of presentations and site visits.

The main outcomes included:

- Key contacts and relationships were established between NI and Commission officials;
- Synergies were identified between the Executive's objectives and EU programmes, policies and networks; and

- Opportunities were identified for further European engagement.

Host at least two meetings of the European Commission's Task Force for Northern Ireland in ONIEB, briefing Commission officials on current regional priorities, by end March 2012.

The European Commission's Task Force met in ONIEB on 17 June 2011. An OFMDFM Junior Minister and the Director of the Office met with the group after their formal meeting to discuss enhanced European engagement.

The European Commission's Task Force met with the Barroso Task Force Working Group and officials from all 12 departments on 28 March 2012 in ONIEB to discuss regional priorities for 2012-13.

Offer every new Minister a customised Brussels-based programme to assist them in furthering their European objectives and Executive priorities by 31 December 2011.

In September 2011, each Executive Minister was formally offered a focused Ministerial programme in Brussels based upon their EU priorities. Since the Assembly elections in May 2011, the Executive's Brussels Office has facilitated ten programmes for the Ministers of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Agriculture and Rural Development; Regional Development; Employment and Learning; Environment and Junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Host an induction event in Brussels for the new thematic desk officers by end March 2012, including the Commission's Task Force, the thematic leaders, NI officials, representatives working in Brussels and relevant stakeholders in the programme of events and reception.

OFMDFM Junior Ministers led an outward visit of the Barroso Task Force Working Group and other officials to Brussels between 27-29 March, involving:

- Fifty four bilateral meetings between policy officials and key Brussels contacts to discuss our 2012-13 European objectives and examine opportunities to engage more effectively in EU policies, funding programmes and networks;
- A plenary session with officials from the European Commission's Task Force to take stock of progress and discuss assistance and opportunities for further funding and engagement; and
- A networking event to promote the new thematic Desk Officers and raise our positive profile in Brussels.

COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT

Engagement in Competitive Funding Programmes

PROGRESS

'New Skills for New Jobs' project (VP/2011/010) identified. An application was submitted in July 2011. A decision is pending.

Progress against objectives

Equip young people with the skills and ambition needed to contribute to the economy.

Assist people to improve their workforce skills and seek sustainable employment in 2011/12 using European Social Fund (ESF) Programme monies and through this contribute to the 2007-13 output target of 4,500 'Priority 1' participants aged 16 to 19 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Young people in the region have received training funded by the ESF Programme through 82 projects run by community and voluntary sector partners.

The Prince's Trust organisation successfully applied for funding under Priority 1 of the ESF Programme for the 'Journey to Success' programme, to support 5,200 young people aged 16-30 that have multiple barriers to entering the labour market towards sustainable employment. Unemployed young people are engaged through an extensive outreach and referral network. The Prince's Trust currently has an offer of assistance from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in relation to the project for £453,677 (ESF) and £283,548 (departmental) funding during 2011-12.

DEL's Training for Success Programme, part financed under Priority 1 of the *European Social Fund* programme, provided pre-vocational training to enable participants to progress to higher level training, further education or employment. The programme addresses participants' personal and social development needs, develops occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, 'Essential Skills' training.

Promote the development and use of the European Diploma Supplement by higher education institutions within the region.

An All-Ireland Diploma Supplement Event was held at Queens University in Belfast in November 2011 to promote the use of the Diploma Supplement and Euro-pass portfolio in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Promote participation in ERASMUS.

The Department for Employment and Learning is active in the European Union's flagship educational exchange programme *Erasmus* and other EU policies within the Higher Education Sector.

It has membership of national advisory boards and working groups in relation to Higher Education activities. These include the:

- International and European Strategic Advisory Board;
- European Co-ordinating Group; and
- *Erasmus* Consultative Steering Group.

Erasmus mobility is at the heart of the Commission's strategy to combat youth unemployment by focusing more on skills development. Three hundred and sixty one NI students participated in *Erasmus* outward placements in the last academic year 2010/11, compared to 336 in 2009/10.

Explore opportunities to engage in the roll out of the "Your First Job" initiative.

European Policy and Employment Service officials met with the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Unit in March to explore opportunities to be taken forward in 2012-13 regarding the "Your First Job" initiative.

Create new sustainable and innovative job opportunities.

Draw down European Regional Development Funding from the Competitiveness and Employment Programme to support sustainable enterprise and entrepreneurship.

European Regional Development Fund claims totalling £34 million were submitted through the *Sustainable Competitiveness Programme* in 2011/12. SMEs in the region were assisted through a range of initiatives including:

- Grant for Research & Development;
- Proof of concept activity;
- Business advice services; and
- Product and process development schemes.

Encourage growth of the SME sector through increased access to innovation and R&D support.

During 2011/12, work has been undertaken to encourage smaller companies to engage more fully with the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) for research, technological development and demonstration activities, including supporting the sector to prepare applications and find partners. The long-term objective is to support product differentiation, increase the competitiveness of the sector and encourage export-led growth through encouraging and supporting businesses that are new to R&D and those engaging in market-led R&D. This will lead to the development of sustainable, innovative job opportunities.

From the launch of FP7 in 2007 until 31 October 2011, SMEs in the region have secured €3.3 million for research and development.

DEL established an EU Framework Support Fund of £80,000 in 2011/12 to encourage increased participation by the universities in the 7th Framework Programme and greater involvement by them of local companies, including SMEs, in Framework proposals.

Reduce poverty and inequality with programmes to increase skills and employment.

Contribute to the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce by improving the qualifications and skills of workers.

Priority Two of the *European Social Fund* Programme, which is part funded by DEL, has an allocation of €67.3 million and a target of attracting 44,000 participants throughout the life of the programme. It is currently on target to meet this objective.

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), using departmental and *European Social Fund* monies, facilitated the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, which offers the opportunity for individuals to train in a chosen occupational area culminating in the attainment of industry-led qualifications and gives employers the chance to develop a highly motivated and committed workforce.

ApprenticeshipsNI is specifically designed for those who are employed and it provides an apprenticeship with "off the job" training on a day release basis with a DEL-contracted training supplier. The training provided can be in a wide range of areas and was designed by the Sector Skills Councils and standard setting bodies to meet the needs of employers and the economy. It leads to recognised and relevant qualifications whilst the employer provides the practical, hands on, experience. ApprenticeshipsNI receives 40% European Social Fund and 60% funding by the department.

Conduct partner searches and identify at least one potential partnership by March 2012 in support of themes in the regional Skills Strategy.

The Department for Employment and Learning, via the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels, engaged with the *Regional Skills Education and Training* (ReSET) network to identify potential partners for future projects in support of themes in the regional Skills Strategy.

In July 2011, after identifying a number of partner searches, DEL joined a partnership in relation to the *PROGRESS* call for proposals 'New Skills for New Jobs' strand. The Department joined the Social Inclusion Regional Group, along with organisations from Sweden, Spain, Belgium and Italy, in a partnership project aimed at activating untapped talent to implement the skills dimension of the flagship initiative 'An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs'.

An application for €462,558 was submitted on 29 July 2011 for a project to bring together experts from several partner countries to exchange different measures and initiatives, such as the promotion of inclusive labour markets through re-skilling of workers, anti-crisis measures for job creation and community coaches for the inclusion of the people who stand furthest from the labour market.

This is the Department's first involvement as a partner in an application to the *PROGRESS* funding stream. Should the application be successful, the Department will develop knowledge and experience of involvement with the *PROGRESS* programme and its requirements which will enhance the capability to increase participation and the frequency of funding applications.

[Identify and reduce the barriers to work for the long-term unemployed, lone parents, and people with disabilities and health conditions.](#)

Contribute to improvement in the employability of those groups experiencing significant employment gaps.

Funding worth £6.3 million was provided by the Department for Employment and Learning to voluntary and community sector organisations in 2011-12 to facilitate the drawdown of European funding to improve employability.

Unemployed and economically inactive people were assisted under Priority 1: 'Helping people into sustainable employment' of the European Social Fund Programme, helping them enter, remain, and make progress in sustained employment.

Stepping Stone (SS), the employability project for East Belfast Mission, secured funding from the European Social Fund to run a 'Jobs4u' programme to engage with unemployed and inactive people to develop and improve their employability and workforce skills through a range of holistic person-centred services. It will equip individuals with the skills, knowledge and confidence

needed to enter the labour market and sustain suitable employment and improve the levels of social inclusion by tackling and preventing worklessness.

DEL and European Social Fund funding was also provided to voluntary and community sector organisations to support people with disabilities and mental health issues into employment:

- Action Mental Health currently has two projects being supported under the programme, the New Horizons Project and the AHM Skills Build Project, with funding for 2011-12 of £886,817 ESF and £554,260 Departmental funding;
- The Cedar Foundation currently has funding for 2011-12 of £710,312 ESF and £443,946 Departmental funding for its Vocational and Employability Service; and
- Mencap currently has funding for 2011-12 of £391,231 ESF and £244,520 Departmental funding.

Optimise European programmes and policies for employment, learning and social inclusion.

Undertake mapping exercise of key EU employment, learning and social inclusion programmes and identify if there are further opportunities within these by March 2012.

A mapping exercise of key EU programmes was carried out in March 2012 to identify potential opportunities to be taken forward during 2012-2013.

Engage with the European Commission to identify potential funding streams.

The DEL Minister met with the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in February 2012 to explore a range of issues, including lessons we can learn from other EU regions on tackling issues such as youth unemployment, how we can share our experience of developing a regional skills strategy and how the region can achieve better access to European funding programmes in the fields of employment and social affairs. Actions to follow up the meeting will be taken forward in 2012-2013.

Participate in at least three events with European partners to share best practice and identify potential partners for funding opportunities.

DEL participated in a *PARtnership between Employment Services (PARES)* conference in Brussels in September 2011. The conference was to launch a discussion between public, private, third sector employment services and

service providers in voluntary and community sectors on the PARES agenda and deliverables.

DEL participated in a contact/networking seminar on 'Matching labour market supply with labour market demands' in Tallinn, Estonia in September 2011 to investigate project ideas and potential partnerships. As a result, contact has been made with a number of other bodies in Europe who are active in the Skills Agenda. We are working with these contacts to determine the feasibility of submitting joint applications for European funding.

As leaders of the European Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion, DEL officials met with partners from Flanders, Spain, Greece, and Sweden three times this year, in Brussels, Dublin and Belfast. The learning network is working to produce tools to help measure empowerment, for use by beneficiaries, employers and intermediary agencies, which will have application across all Member States:

- A beneficiary tool – a questionnaire designed to capture the information necessary to measure the beneficiary's sense of empowerment as they progress through European Social Fund schemes (e.g. measuring their level of confidence about re-engaging with the labour market or movement in other "soft outcomes" like self worth or confidence generally about their own potential); and
- An employer tool – to provide recognition for employers who exhibit an inclusive working environment.

The beneficiary tool has been piloted and is currently being validated. The employer recognition award is currently being piloted.

The Commission invited the ESF Managing Authority, the Department for Employment and Learning, to host a co-ordination meeting of all the learning networks currently being implemented across Europe. This will take place over 29-30 May 2012 at the new Titanic Building in Belfast and will include an exhibition of activities of the NI ESF Projects.

The Minister for Employment and Learning officially opened the *Lifelong Learning: linking policy to practice* conference in Belfast on 23 November 2011. The EU-funded *Lifelong Learning Programme* supports a wide range of education and training activities across Europe and provides opportunities for all stages of lifelong learning. The conference, held for the first time in the region, explored how the programme is supporting our regional Skills Strategy. The region received £2 million from the EU *Lifelong Learning Programme* this year, to fund the *Leonardo*, *Grundtvig* and *Transversal Programmes*.

The Department for Employment and Learning's Skills and Industry Division worked with Dr Risto Raivio, Head of DG Education and Culture's Vocational Education and Training Unit in support of a research project examining the role of the Community College system in supporting economic and workforce

development in the region. Departmental officials were able to provide Dr Raivio with a number of contacts in the region in support of this work. Dr Raivio's report: "Skills for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - Community colleges and local skills development: lessons from North Carolina" will soon be published. The support offered to DG Education and Culture has been beneficial in building contacts and relationships between the Department and the Directorate-General.

Optimise European programmes and policies for economic development.

Facilitate Ministerial visit(s) to Brussels during 2011-12 to engage with Europe on transport policy and the importance of accounting for regional variance in order to improve cohesion and access to the internal market.

The Minister for Regional Development made two visits to Brussels in 2011-12 to discuss and prepare for the proposed *Trans-European Transport Network* (TEN-T) regulations and *Connecting Europe Facility* (CEF). He met with the Chef De Cabinet for the Transport Commissioner in October 2011 and the Chair of the Transport Committee in December 2011.

The purpose of these visits was to influence the co-decision process for the proposed TEN-T and CEF regulations and to make a case for regional variance to be taken into account.

As a result of this engagement, a revision to the Danish Presidency's version of the TEN-T Regulation has been secured. This provides for an exemption from certain infrastructure standards for 'isolated rail networks'. If this revision makes its way through the co-decision process, it will potentially have saved unnecessary expenditure of approximately €1.5 billion on the region's rail network.

Engage in transport funding programmes and submit at least one application by April 2012 for funding towards a project to improve transport infrastructure and therefore access to the internal market.

The Department for Regional Development submitted an application for *INTERREG* funding for the upgrade of Portadown Railway Station in February 2012. If successful, this application will attract approximately £2 million of ERDF grant funding.

Officials attended the Trans-European Transport Network annual call on 31 January in Brussels, following which work has commenced on TEN-T funding applications that were submitted in March 2012 for:

- £1 million in funding towards a feasibility study on developing the design of the York Street Inter-change; and
- Approximately £4 million of funding towards the Coleraine to Derry/Londonderry Rail Line Relay project.

Engage early with the Commission to secure the maximum possible Structural Funds allocation for economic infrastructure for the period 2014 – 2020.

A *European Regional Development Fund* (ERDF) Technical Working Group was set up in December 2011 to specifically look at ERDF issues. Through this group DRD, hope to secure:

- An increased transport related allocation to tie in with the Commission's proposals for the ERDF to fund works on the 'comprehensive' Trans-European Transport Network; and
- The provision for the ERDF to fund activities such as cross-border transport projects and water industry projects.
- DRD officials have met with officials from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation and DG Regional Policy to discuss the link between the ERDF, TEN-T and the CEF and how this could adversely affect the region.

Undertake mapping exercise of key EU economic development programmes (including the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and FP7) and identify if there are further opportunities within these by March 2012.

A mapping exercise of key EU economic development programmes was completed in December 2011. Structural Funds (*Competitiveness and INTERREG*), the *7th Framework Programme* and from 2014-2020, *Horizon 2020, Programme for the Competitiveness of enterprises and SMEs (COSME)* and the *Connecting Europe Facility* were identified as the EU programmes offering the most significant opportunity for increasing the drawdown of EU funds in support of the region's economic development objectives.

An Action Plan for maximising our drawdown during the remaining period of FP7 and *Horizon 2020* when it is launched in 2014 has been agreed across all departments.

In preparation for *Horizon 2020*, and to ensure that regional business interests are considered, Invest NI participates in the UK's H2020 Steering and Working Group and is playing an active role in the negotiations on the future programme including inputting to sub-groups on Rules of Participation, Synergies with Structural Funds and Societal Challenges.

Over the past year, Invest NI's Collaborative R&D Support Service, has actively encouraged companies and research bodies to engage more fully with the 7th Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities:

- Supporting universities and other research bodies to prepare applications and find business and international partners, through the introduction of a mentoring scheme; and
- Providing almost £90,000 for proposal preparation for Framework applications.

In the period 31 October 2010 to 31 October 2011, NI-based researchers (in private companies, academia and other) secured €11.5 million from the 7th Framework Programme.

Participate in at least four events or networks to promote the region's research capabilities and share best practice.

Invest NI engaged directly with EU counterparts through membership of networks such as the *European Regions Research and Innovation Network* (ERRIN), which facilitates knowledge exchange, joint action and project partnerships between its members with the aim of strengthening their research and innovation capacities.

To help build the profile of NI's research capability, Invest NI and DETI have participated in and hosted 4 EU workshops to exchange best practice and identify learning/funding opportunities in areas such as Smart Specialisation and Horizon 2020.

Invest NI hosted 2 brokerage events for businesses and researchers and 7 local events promoting collaborative R&D opportunities. They have also prepared 12 FP7 case studies, including business testimonials.

In the period from January 2011, Invest NI has secured £355,000 from the EU *Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme* (CIP) (Entrepreneurship and Innovation Strand) to support the Enterprise Europe Network in the region.

Improve the business environment, especially for SMEs, to promote enterprise.

Launch a suite of European Regional Development funded Venture Capital and Loan Funds to improve SME access to finance by March 2012.

Through its *Access to Finance Initiative*, Invest NI has put in place a range of new mechanisms to support SMEs. The £16 million *Co-investment Fund*,

able to make investments of £250,000 to £450,000, was launched in July 2011 and has made its first investment. A fund manager has been appointed for the *Growth Loan Fund* which will provide loans of £50,000 to £500,000 for SMEs with strong growth potential. Invest NI has secured approval to establish a £5 million *Small Business Loan Fund* able to provide lending from £1,000-£50,000 to Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME). This is expected to be operational mid-2012. In addition, a fund manager has been appointed for a larger *Development Fund* which will use mixed public and private equity to provide longer term investment of £450,000 to £2 million to support growing businesses. A *Development Fund* manager has been appointed who is currently working to raise £30 million of private investment. This is proving extremely difficult given the current economic climate.

Discussions are ongoing with the European Commission in an attempt to ensure European Regional Development Funding can be used to part finance these important SME finance initiatives.

DETI joined the UK European Regional Development Fund Programme Delivery Group, Financial Engineering Group and Technical Policy Group to access experience of other regions and share best practice. Involvement in these groups has alerted us to issues and provided access to important United Kingdom/ European Commission negotiations.

INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Engagement in Competitive Funding Programmes

FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME 7 (FP7)

A total of €36.4 million has been secured by NI applicants between the start of the 7th Framework Programme in 2007 and 31 October 2011. In the period 31 October 2010 to 31 October 2011, NI-based researchers (in private companies, academia and other) secured €11.54 million from this source.

COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

A total of £355,152 was awarded to NI applicants in 2011-12, a significant increase from the £167,000 drawdown secured in 2010-11.

HORIZON 2020 (2014-20)

To help shape and prepare for the *Horizon 2020* programme:

- Invest NI is playing an active role in the UK's negotiations with the Commission;
- DARD has provided comments to Defra on *Horizon 2020* thematic priorities, particularly on the Food Security and Climate Action draft programmes within the societal challenges priority; and
- Invest NI is represented on the UK's *Horizon 2020* Steering Group, as well as the *Horizon 2020* working group and various sub-groups including: Rules of participation, Synergies with Structural Funds, Societal challenges and Review of support system for EU funding programmes.

Progress against objectives

Increase NI engagement in the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

Encourage and increase NI participation in the 7th Framework Programme (FP7).

Invest NI's Collaborative R&D Support Service has:

- Actively supported 13 applications for transnational R&D funding providing £90,000 of financial support for proposal preparation;
- Held 181 meetings with local stakeholders to discuss Collaborative R&D opportunities;
- Hosted 7 local events promoting Collaborative R&D opportunities and presented at 6 sector-based events;
- Hosted 4 Brussels-based events including 2 brokerage events; and
- Prepared 12 FP7 case studies with feedback from participants.

Increase applications with NI and ROI partners by 50% by 2013.

Three North/South applications to Regions of Knowledge have been submitted since April 2011. Invest NI provided financial support for project definitions as well as advice and guidance and applicants were also supported by InterTradeIreland. Prior to April 2011, there had been a total of 2 Regions of Knowledge applications involving partners from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

To promote further applications, InterTradeIreland has:

- Initiated a series of 'Focus on' events where key researchers from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were brought together around a specific FP7 sub-theme (eg. Cancer research) with the objective of identifying collaborative application opportunities. Thus far, 1 event has taken place with a further 2 planned;
- Set up an EU notice board for those seeking call-specific project partners with particular expertise; and
- Promoted the InterTradeIreland cross-border collaboration voucher, helping researchers with the costs associated with exploring the potential of joint Framework Programme applications.

Encourage universities, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the public and private Health and Life Sciences sectors to increase their applications to the Framework Programme on an ongoing basis.

A European Framework Support Fund was introduced to the universities by DEL in academic year 2011/12 to encourage increased participation in FP7. Its overall aim is to develop the in-house expertise of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster in the preparation of Framework proposals. It is anticipated that this fund will continue until 2015.

As a result of three meetings held with AFBI this year to explore proposals for supporting further AFBI applications to the Framework Programme and other relevant EU research funding programmes:

- A mechanism for securing continued DARD match-funding for AFBI's EU projects is expected to be agreed in 2012/13; and
- AFBI plan to showcase their expertise at the European Innovation Partnership's Water and Agriculture event during EU Green Week in May 2012.

Health and Social Care (HSC) R&D staff continued to encourage the universities and health sector to develop applications to the Framework Programme. They will provide support and information to potential applicants

within the sector to align with the new call for health R&D proposals which are imminent.

Interactions have been facilitated among the HSC Trust Directors of Research and the emerging Connected Health sector that includes universities and companies. This linkage will continue to be supported and applications to R&D programmes of the European Union and others are encouraged. Additional resource within HSC R&D is now focused on dissemination of information within health; improving links and information exchange with stakeholders in academia, industry, DETI, Invest NI; and helping to identify potential partners in health for academia and industry in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Programmes associated with the *European Innovation Programme: Active Ageing Platform* will be specifically targeted.

Increase the number of assessors from the region on Framework 'calls' by 2013.

An assessment of key researchers within the region who actively assess for the Framework Programme was carried out during 2011. Interested parties were identified and shared with Invest NI to allow a targeted approach. As a result, Invest NI are now aware of specific named individuals who have expressed an interest in being active in evaluation, as opposed to appealing to all research active businesses and research performers. This allows them to target events and specifically invite research performers to re-enforce the need to be a part of the evaluation process. It is too early to gauge any outcome in terms of impact as yet. Evaluators are only sought to coincide with competitive calls, the next of which is not due until July 2012.

Separately, InterTradeIreland included specific advice on its website in late 2011 for people interested in becoming assessors.

Organise an all island Framework Conference to share learning and identify best practice by June 2011.

An all-island Framework Conference was held on 30 June 2011, attended by 210 delegates from industry, academia and government. The conference was opened by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and included a keynote address by the Head of the Framework Programme and Simplification Unit within DG Research and Innovation. Speakers from other EU regions shared best practice in relation to support mechanisms for increased Framework engagement.

Introduce an Invest NI FP7 'mentoring' scheme to support potential applicants by September 2011.

A Pilot Mentoring Scheme was introduced in September 2011 to support applications from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, University of Ulster and Queens University Belfast. To date, there has been a limited uptake, but greater interest is anticipated for the calls to be announced in July 2012. Invest NI is in discussions with the South East Health Trust with a view to providing mentoring support to increase EU applications. The mentoring scheme has been extended to enable academics to use the support to find partners of best fit and attend brokerage events before starting the process of writing the application.

Invest NI to submit at least one 'Regions of Knowledge' application by January 2012.

NI partners submitted 3 applications to Regions of Knowledge by 31 January 2012. Invest NI partnered with CSIT (Queens University Belfast (QUB)) and Momentum on a Digital Agenda project and with Questor (QUB), AgriAd Ltd and B9 Energy on a Resource Efficiency project. C-TRIC, itself a triple helix, submitted a separate project on the Digital Agenda. Results are expected in the autumn. Invest NI provided financial assistance to Questor and CSIT for their part in writing the applications.

Increase participation in the Framework Programme by SMEs by 25% by 2014.

Invest NI encouraged SMEs to participate in FP7 by providing tailored events and financial support to prepare applications. From the outset of the 7th Framework Programme, 11 NI SMEs have been successful in attracting support. In the 2011/12 year, Invest NI have provided Project Definition Assistance of £98,000 towards 8 project definitions which include 10 SMEs. Results for these applications are expected in official statistics likely to be released in October 2012 or April 2013.

Encourage universities and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to increase the involvement of our SMEs in Framework applications.

The European Framework Support Fund, introduced to the universities in academic year 2011-12 to encourage increased participation in FP7, also put in place support to encourage increased involvement by the universities of local companies, particularly SMEs, in proposals going forward.

Through the Research Challenge Fund, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is helping build capacity for SME-led research projects that could lead to future involvement in Framework applications. The Fund is currently providing match funding for 4 projects involving farmer representative organisations and AFBI. A further tranche of the Fund was

launched in November 2011 and successful projects will be announced in Spring 2012.

Facilitate access to European funding (structural funds, rural development funds and R&D framework programmes) to support innovation.

Develop a Framework Programme Action Plan with specific actions and deliverables by November 2011.

A Framework Action Plan was developed by a steering group made up of a wide range of stakeholder representatives and was agreed in November 2011. The Plan is focused on increasing engagement between research performing organisations within the Framework Programme and gearing up for *Horizon 2020*. Recommendations from this action plan are now being implemented and this work will continue over the 2012-13 period.

The NI Sustainable Competitiveness Programme has earmarked approximately £271 million for supporting innovation under its Priority 1 over the 2007-13 period.

Some 80 applications have been received for the re-opened Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG) which supports investment by agri-food companies in new processing facilities and/or the purchase of new plant and equipment and is part-financed through the *Rural Development Programme 2007-13*. Eligible applications will be assessed in the summer 2012.

Since 2008, DARD has committed PMG of £12.5 million to 50 capital investment projects by agri-food processors. This support will result in a total investment of more than £31.5 million by the companies involved.

Strengthen our targeted research performance and research base to create a stronger push towards knowledge transfer / exchange.

Raise awareness of opportunities for support from EU funding streams.

On 14 July 2011, Invest NI and the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels hosted an event to highlight the region's capability in the area of Sustainable Energy, providing an opportunity to seek suitable transnational partners for applications to the Regions of Knowledge 2012 call under FP7's Capacities strand. Over 35 participants from across the European Union attended, listening to presentations from the European Commission, Questor (NI), Queens University Belfast, Poland and Turkey and networking with potential partners to discuss future project development. The event arose as a direct consequence of the Commissioner for Research, Innovation and

Science, Marie Geoghegan-Quinn's, visit to the region in November 2010 and was fully supported by members of the Commissioner's cabinet.

As a direct result, a Regions of Knowledge application under the Resource Efficiency theme was submitted on the 31 January 2012, involving 19 partners from across Europe.

Raise the profile of our capacity for clinical trials through participation in emerging EU infrastructure networks during 2011-12, and thereby attract investment from multi-national pharmaceutical companies by March 2012.

The Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network competed successfully for membership of the European Cystic Fibrosis Society Clinical Trials Network in June 2011, achieving the highest possible score against the selection criteria. Participation in this network has enabled Belfast-based clinical researchers to be involved in the strategic development of this important European initiative and to benefit from funding provided for training and development. In recent years, the Belfast group has attracted £110,000 in funding for 3 separate European clinical trials in cystic fibrosis and lung cancer.

To date, almost 20,000 patients with a wide range of illnesses have been facilitated to access potentially beneficial new treatments through the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (NICRN) and Northern Ireland Cancer Clinical Trials Network (NICTN). The networks enable clinical researchers to compete for funding to undertake trials of potential new treatments.

Stimulate interactions between the Health & Life Sciences research base, health services and the private sector to deliver EU applications by March 2012.

Interactions have been facilitated among the HSC Trust Directors of Research and the emerging Connected Health sector that includes universities and companies. This linkage will continue to be supported and applications to all relevant R&D programmes will be encouraged. Additional resource within HSC R&D is now focused on dissemination of information within health, improving links and information exchange with stakeholders in academia, industry, DETI, Invest NI, and helping to identify potential partners in health for academia and industry in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Programmes associated with the *European Innovation Programme: Active Ageing Platform* will be specifically targeted.

Enhance STEM initiatives to fuel the emergence of creative people and creative businesses.

Promote STEM subjects to young people through creative and inspirational initiatives which can involve industry, academia and government by March 2012.

The Armagh Observatory participated in EU-UNAWA (*EU Universe Awareness*), an international astronomy outreach programme funded by FP7 to inspire young children and encourage interest in science and technology. Partner countries include Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and South Africa. In September 2011, a UK Project Manager was appointed at Armagh Observatory. Outreach activities took place throughout the year. In January 2012, Armagh Observatory staff joined international EU-UNAWA colleagues from the Arcetri Observatory in Italy to provide a special series of local activities for schools in association with the BBC's Stargazing LIVE events.

Develop a strategy to encourage a focus on STEM.

The Executive's STEM Strategy – "Success Through STEM" was launched in March 2011. It highlights three priority actions:

- Co-ordinate business links;
- Manage STEM sector attractiveness; and
- Facilitate STEM continuous professional development.

A STEM Champion has been appointed to support business taking the lead in promoting STEM.

Establish a smart specialisation platform.

Host a Smart Specialisation seminar as part of DG Regio Open Days programme in October 2011 to raise our profile amongst key European Commission influencers.

A Smart Specialisation Seminar was held in ONIEB on 12 October 2011 as part of the European Commission's 'Open Days' event. Over 120 delegates from across Europe attended this event which was jointly organised by ONIEB and Invest NI. The seminar was chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and the keynote speaker was Danuta Hubner, MEP, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development and former Commissioner for Regional Policy. This event increased the region's visibility and credibility at EU level, with David Harmon (EU Cabinet for Research and Innovation) publicly referring to 'a region really upping its game'.

In February 2012, DETI appointed a Smart Specialisation Co-ordinator to lead the production of a smart specialisation strategy for the region.

Stimulate growth of the creative industries by nurturing creative talent and creative enterprises and by encouraging innovative, cross-sectoral collaborations.

Arrange a seminar to raise the profile of the region's creative industries sector by March 2012.

The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure supported a Value Ageing seminar on "Ageing Creatively on the Island of Ireland, Europe and USA" in March 2012. Value Ageing is a Marie Curie Industry-Academia Partnership and Pathways Action, funded by FP7. Its multidisciplinary approach to educate a new generation of researchers in the field of ICT for ageing will pave the way for longer-term programmes based on joint research partnerships between academia and industry. Partners include Queens University Belfast, Dundalk Institute of Technology and other EU academic institutions. The seminar, which included EU and other international speakers:

- Strengthened the profile of innovative and creative approaches to ageing related research, policy and practice currently led by people based in the region, and
- Fostered collaborative research networks/partnerships that will work together to attract further EU/international funding.

Establish funding mechanisms to support innovative projects by the creative industries by March 2012.

The Creative Industries Innovation Fund was re-launched in July 2011. Its priorities are export focused growth, cross-sectoral collaborations, and harnessing the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of the region's culture and arts base.

'Culture Tech' was launched as part of the Digital Derry initiative and provides funding for innovative new projects combining cultural and artistic output with digital technology.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

Engagement in Competitive Funding Programmes

TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORKS

The Beech Hill to Clogoghue project received £2.9 million.

Two applications for funding were submitted in March 2012:

- £4 million for the Coleraine to Derry/Londonderry railway Relay project; and
- Approximately £1 million for studies on developing the design of the York Street Inter-change.

Progress against objectives

Maximise drawdown and source match funding for delivery of the 2010 Strategic Energy Framework actions, specifically targeting key infrastructure projects to facilitate an increasing amount of energy and heat from renewable sources by 2020.

Undertake investigation to source match funding for the infrastructure elements of the Strategic Energy Framework relevant to 2011/12.

The Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) are working towards identifying opportunities in relation to gas and electricity grids, the Renewable Energy Directive and the UK Energy Efficiency Plan. Energy and Climate Change interns, along with the thematic Desk Officer will continue to input to this work.

EU match funding of £10 million is already being sought by DETI to enhance our electricity grid to accommodate electricity generation from additional renewable sources.

The Department of the Environment (DOE) is currently supporting Belfast City Councils' scoping project worth £1 million on energy, which was submitted in December 2011 under the EU Smart Cities Fund.

DOE is providing support for the Action Renewables, SECRE project, worth €1.74 million, on the applicability of social renewable energy enterprises.

DETI are also working on a further possible INTERREG proposal, ISLES II, aimed at planning and preparing for future implementation of an offshore electricity grid in the waters of Western Scotland, Western Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Sea.

Contribute to the UK Energy Efficiency Action Plan across all sectors.

Consult on potential for incorporating an energy efficiency measure within a new DETI Energy Bill.

A policy paper is being prepared and currently with DETI's Minister for consideration.

Seek to communicate more effectively with the public on sustainable energy and climate change issues through increased engagement.

By 31 October 2011, have in place an advertising campaign aimed at delivering a unified Executive message on sustainable energy.

A single marketing agency was appointed to design, deliver and implement the new 'Energy Wise' marketing campaign launched in October 2011. DETI and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) have already commenced media work using the brand.

Exploit any available opportunities to engage with domestic retrofit programmes, where there is added value.

Improve the domestic energy efficiency of the region's housing stock beyond the 9,000 homes currently targeted through domestic programmes, with emphasis on vulnerable households, if European funding is available.

DOE officials are working with colleagues in DETI, the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Housing Executive to identify potential EU funding opportunities.

A number of key funding streams have been identified in the area of energy efficiency and retrofitting for further consideration by DSD.

DOE officials have also liaised with non-government organisations to discuss a list of potential funding streams which may help to provide funding to allow for retrofitting of private dwellings to improve energy efficiency.

Support the water industry's uptake of EU funding to improve resource efficiency, energy efficiency, increased use of renewable energy and sustainability.

Provide investment priorities for the water industry.

NI Water has participated in the Agricultural Need for Sustainable Willow Effluent Recycling (ANSWER); and the Advanced Technologies for Water Resource Management (ATWARM) projects.

The ANSWER project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (*INTERREG IVA Programme*) with a total project budget of over £2 million, which includes a NI Water element of over £400,000. ANSWER is a cross-border project examining the potential of using Short Rotation Coppice (SRC) willow for the bioremediation of effluents and leachates.

ATWARM is a Marie Curie Initial Training Network funded by the 7th *Framework Programme* for Research and Development People Programme. The objective of the project is to enhance the career prospects of 16 young researchers by providing them with technical knowledge, multidisciplinary skills and business aptitudes that will contribute to the security of water quality and quantity for future generations within the European Union. Through this initiative, NI Water has secured a post-PhD Student to work in the area of carbon accounting and management for a three-year period. The value of the grant is £147,500.

[Source funding for key rail projects designed to reduce congestion and emissions.](#)

Identify funding sources by 31 December 2011.

The TEN-T programme has been identified as a source of potential funding for a key rail project. Following the Commission's call for TEN-T applications in January 2012, an application for TEN-T funding in the region of £4 million towards the Coleraine to Derry/Londonderry Relay project, was submitted in March 2012 to upgrade approximately 13 miles of existing track.

In February 2012, an *INTERREG IVA* funding application was submitted towards the costs of the redevelopment of Portadown Railway Station. If successful this will attract approximately £2 million of funding from the European Regional Development Fund.

[Obtain support for a feasibility study for the Belfast / Dublin rail upgrade.](#)

Agree Terms of Reference and table proposal for consideration by NSMC Transport Sectoral meeting by 31 March 2012.

NI Railways and Irish Rail have developed a long-term vision for a significantly enhanced service and journey time, but it is now recognised that this requires updating in light of budgetary and other constraints. In relation to a long-term objective to upgrade the Belfast to Dublin railway line, Translink has been

asked to undertake a feasibility study to establish options and potential costs. Upon receipt of a project initiation document, officials will consider what EU funding opportunities are available to fund the completion of a feasibility study for this project. The Minister for Regional Development discussed the upgrade of the Belfast to Dublin railway line with the Irish Transport Minister during the European Transport council meeting in December.

[Seek Trans-European Transport Network \(TEN-T\) and INTERREG funding to enhance the road network and share best practice.](#)

Respond to consultation on TEN-T Guidelines and ensure NI's position and requirements are considered.

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has contributed to the Commission's consultation process on the TEN-T policy proposals. As these issues are 'reserved matters', the Department continues to feed into the UK's consultation and negotiation processes. To ensure that sufficient consideration is given to our position, Departmental officials have engaged with officials from the Department for Transport in London, Transport Scotland, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in Dublin and colleagues in the Executive's Office in Brussels. Furthermore, the Minister for Regional Development, mindful of the potential negative implications that the Commission's TEN-T proposals could have for the region, has taken a keen interest in the consultation and negotiation processes. The Minister has travelled to Brussels and met with key players involved in the negotiations, including the Chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee, the UK's Secretary of State for Transport, the Irish Transport Minister and the Transport Commissioner's Chef de Cabinet. The Minister also attended the Transport Council meeting in December 2011 and he has been liaising with our MEPs on this matter.

Identify schemes for inclusion on TEN-T network by March 2012 and revise, as appropriate, following publication of final TEN-T guidelines.

Following the Commission's January 2012 call for TEN-T funding applications, in March DRD submitted an application for TEN-T funding towards studies on developing the design of the York Street Inter-change. If successful, the application could deliver approximately £1 million in TEN-T funding.

There may be a multi-annual call for TEN-T funding in 2012-13. The total budget for this call will be between £500 million and £1.2 billion. If the call criteria are suitable, applications for further funding will be submitted. The Department hopes to apply for funding towards the construction of the A8 road dualling between Ballyrickard and Coleman's Corner, however, this will be dependent on the call criteria.

DRD has also been pressing the European Commission and the Department for Transport (DfT) for the inclusion of Derry/Londonderry as part of the Core Network.

Identify small road improvement schemes for application under INTERREG IVA Programme depending on focus of call by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

DRD initially identified a number of schemes which could have potentially attracted *INTERREG* funding, however, Roads Service's Southern partner for this application, Donegal County Council, is not in a position to make an application at the moment due to a lack of finance. As a result, DRD is currently unable to submit applications for *INTERREG* funding for road projects.

Identify schemes and consider opportunities to submit applications following announcement of call for funding on multi-annual call 2012-14.

An initial scoping study of the full range of EU funding programmes to identify those most relevant to our priorities under Climate Change and Energy was completed in February 2012. A matrix of potential relevant funding streams, along with the details of the remaining monies and call dates, has been compiled.

A scoping study to identify current and future potential projects for submission for EU funding is ongoing. The projects identified are at different stages of preparation with some in development and others with applications submitted.

Some of the projects identified include:

- Biomass Materials with DARD and AFBI research into the development of crops for bio fuels or further bio refining to high value products and developing a database for agriculture commercial use to allow comparison of nutrient levels for more efficient growth conditions;
- QUESTOR's Biogas INCREASE project for which DOE has provided a letter of support to draw down FP7 Regions of Knowledge funding. The project focuses on the potential for producing biogas from wastes and a possible agricultural 'energy crops', including grass. It will analyse policies in participating regions, seek to share knowledge and best practice and will investigate the needs of local companies wishing to undertake research and deliver innovative solutions in this area.

In addition, DRD received £2,973,000 of TEN-T funding from the Department for Transport in October 2011 as the final claim for Beech Hill to Clogoghue project. They are also investigating projects relating to Marco Polo funding and considering the use of the ELENA funding scheme in relation to a potential rapid transport system.

DRD is investigating the feasibility of liaising with Belfast and Derry City Councils on a potential link up for a CIVITAS project.

DRD and ROI's Electricity Supply Board are working on and intend to submit an application for TEN-T funding to expand the electric vehicle charging infrastructure to compliment the e-car project in April 2012.

DOE have been liaising with Belfast City Council and Derry City Council on the development of potential projects in relation to the redevelopment of the North Foreshore in Belfast and the ILEX site in Derry / Londonderry. They have also been working with Belfast City Council and Derry City Council on developing an engagement process with the European Commission to promote the two projects.

SOCIAL COHESION

Engagement in Competitive Funding Programmes

FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME 7 (FP7)

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) were successful as the lead partner in bidding for funding from FP7 for the HOMER (Home made explosives and recipes characterisation) Project. The project was awarded funding of €3.5 million with €685,000 going directly to the PSNI.

Progress against objectives

Establish linkages with other thematic strategies (eg Competitiveness and Climate Change).

Develop early linkages with other thematic groups and key stakeholders, including councils, government departments and NI-CO by March 2012.

Linkages have been established with the Barroso Task Force Competitiveness and Employment Thematic Group. As a result:

- Key cross-sectoral issues have been identified, including youth unemployment;
- *PROGRESS* has been identified as a potential source of funding;
- The Social Cohesion Thematic Group is now working to identify *PROGRESS* funding and suitable delivery partners to drawdown additional funds; and
- The Social Cohesion Thematic Group is now committed to work with the Competitiveness and Employment Thematic Group on a project which uses European assistance, financial or otherwise, to address youth unemployment.

Working across the Competitiveness and Employment and Social Cohesion Thematic Groups, the Department for Employment and Learning joined a partnership which has applied for funds under the *PROGRESS* Programme 'Regional Partnerships activating untapped talent to deliver New Skills for New Jobs,' which seeks to contribute to the work of both groups.

Officials met with Northern Ireland Co-operation Overseas (NI-CO), which has 20 years experience in securing European funding and a wide range of relevant contacts, in January 2012 to discuss a potential partnership. As a result of the meeting NI-CO attended the Social Cohesion workshop where their expertise in European funding mechanisms was highlighted.

In February 2012, officials joined the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum, set up by Belfast City Council to provide a strategic platform for

collaboration on EU policy and funding. The Forum has members from both the public and voluntary sectors.

Establish stakeholder / cross-departmental council to maximise expertise and share outcomes on economic and social issues by March 2012.

The Social Cohesion Thematic Group has worked closely with the Northern Ireland European Regional Forum to identify best practice on economic and social issues.

The objectives of the Forum are to:

- Maximise EU funding opportunities; and
- Shape EU policy to the benefit of the region (eg, helping to reduce or avoid EU fines or to enhance funding opportunities).

Forum members come from the private, public and voluntary sectors and meet 4 times each year to:

- Collaborate to identify suitable funding opportunities, to support bid development and project implementation;
- Share information they have available on EU policy and utilising EU contacts and networks such as Eurocities to influence relevant EU policy development;
- Promote our region in Europe, demonstrating local good practice in a European context to attract new business/investment opportunities;
- Promote best practice from other European cities in areas such as security, employment, housing, health and social services, education and economic regeneration to achieve maximum effect within the region;
- Facilitate information exchanges between local people, professionals and politicians by hosting inward visits and showcasing our region in Europe; and
- Co-ordinate and share resources and information on current and future EU related activities.

The Northern Ireland European Regional Forum liaises closely with the Barroso Task Force, the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, the Assembly Advisory Panel on Europe, the Northern Ireland Executive Office in Brussels and the European Commission office in Belfast to enrich and support its work.

Engage in communities (the ‘other’ perspective).

Hold discussions with key stakeholders’ organisations by March 2012 to identify how European assistance can be facilitated to benefit communities in the region.

A Social Cohesion Workshop was held on 6 March 2012 to promote the role of the Social Cohesion Thematic Group, discuss strategic objectives and key linkages and identify opportunities for potential partnerships and collaborative working. The overall aim is to develop a work programme which identifies European programmes of benefit to communities in the region.

Over 40 delegates attended, including representatives from the public sector, local government and the voluntary sector. Delegates were introduced to the Social Cohesion Thematic Group and advised about the help available to them in bidding for European funding and were asked to provide their strategic objectives and funding applications to allow cross organisational working relationships to develop. As a result of the workshop:

- A network of stakeholders has been established and will be used to promote and develop the Social Cohesion theme;
- Potential partnerships for joint-working have been identified;
- The role of the Social Cohesion Thematic Group, and the assistance it can provide, is known to a much wider audience; and
- The requirements of key stakeholder groups have been identified.

Work is now underway to follow up on funding programmes that meet the requirements of key stakeholder groups in the region.

Work with stakeholder groups to engage in at least one European event which promotes European engagement to meet social cohesion objectives.

The Minister for Social Development opened the 'Opportunity Europe and Beyond' fair and exhibition in Belfast on 19 October, marking the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Along with workshops and exhibitions on anti-poverty and diversity, the event showcased opportunities to study, work and travel in Europe.

Supported by Belfast City Council and the European Commission, the event is held annually, attracting around 2,000 school children as well as the general public. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister joined with partners from the European Commission, Belfast City Council, the NI Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (NICiLT), the British Council, Volunteer Now, the NI Council of the European Movement and Belfast Metropolitan College to plan and deliver the event.

Plans are underway to deliver an Opportunity Europe 2012 event, which will promote the European Year of Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations.

Build on and share our experience of conflict resolution (peace-keeping, peace-building and peace-making) with other regions.

Promote the role of the PEACE Programme in peace and reconciliation in the region throughout 2011-12, contributing to the work to secure further Peace funding for 2014-20.

As a direct result of the Barroso Task Force, Commissioner for Regional Development, Johannes Hahn, visited the region to officially open the PEACE Bridge in Derry/Londonderry on 25 June 2011.

The Bridge was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (£14.6 million) under the *PEACE III Programme* administered by the Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy. The Bridge was designed to link the two sides of the city, both physically and metaphorically, delivering cultural, social and economic benefits.

The First and deputy First Ministers presented the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, with the Executive's 2011-12 European Priorities during the visit and widespread media coverage was secured which highlighted the positive impact of EU programmes within the region.

During the event, Commissioner Hahn met with a number of groups whose projects were supported under the EU's Peace III Programme. As a result of these presentations, organised by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the Commissioner suggested that an event be organised in Brussels to highlight the work of these projects and the PEACE Programme. Plans are now underway for a Brussels-based event to:

- Highlight the impact of the contribution from the European Commission and what has been achieved through the PEACE Programmes;
- Help the region raise its positive profile;
- Outline the range of different peace building methodologies/ techniques which have been developed and supported under the PEACE Programmes; and
- Provide a platform to explore how the PEACE Programmes approach can be adapted to other relevant situations throughout Europe and beyond.

The new draft Structural Fund Regulations for the next programming period 2014-20 were issued by the Commission in October 2011. As a result of engagement with the United Kingdom, as Member State, and the European Commission; the draft Regulations allow for a future PEACE IV Programme:

“In the case of any cross-border Programme between Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland in support of peace and reconciliation, the ERDF shall also contribute to promoting social and economic stability in the regions concerned, notably by actions to

promote cohesion between communities” (Draft Territorial Co-operation Reg COM(2011) 611 final/2.).

Progress developments and promote Maze Long Kesh site for reconciliation in line with the Programme for Government 2012–15 commitments.

An application for *PEACE III* funding for a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre (PBCRC) at the Maze Long Kesh site was submitted in January 2010. The SEUPB economic appraisal in respect of the EU funding application was submitted to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in September 2011 and approved by Ministers and the Department of Finance and Personnel in November 2011. A *PEACE III* Letter of Offer for £18 million towards the proposed PBCRC was accepted in March 2012 and initial work on the project is underway.

Facilitate the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s work to engage in European programmes.

The PSNI have engaged in bidding for European funding with partner organisations in Europe that builds on and shares our experience of conflict resolution.

In November 2011, the PSNI, lead partner in a group of 8 participating countries, submitted a 3-year project application under the EU’s *Home Made Explosives and Recipes* (HOMER) programme to develop innovative approaches to the prevention of the use of home-made explosives. ONIEB provided support for the application. This has been successful and will provide the PSNI with assistance worth €685,000. The PSNI will be the first EU police force to lead a project in this particular field.

Explore best practice for tackling disadvantage in other regions.

Engage in European policy during 2011 to promote the positive role of Older People in our community in preparation for the European Year 2012.

The region appointed its first Commissioner for Older People, Claire Keatinge, in October 2011. The Commissioner for Older People has been given a wide range of promotional, advisory, education and general investigatory functions, duties and powers to be deployed in the interest of older people both generally and individually.

OFMDFM Junior Ministers met with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment in Brussels in October 2011 to discuss how the Executive can contribute to, and benefit from, the forthcoming European Year of Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations 2012, particularly given the role of our new Commissioner for Older Persons. As a result of this meeting, the European Commission has launched a Generations@School Project, which will take place around the European Day of Solidarity between Generations on 29 April 2012. All schools in Europe are invited to open the doors of their classrooms to older generations to explore how the dialogue between generations can contribute to a better education and a better understanding of each other, an idea borne out of discussions with OFMDFM's Junior Ministers.

The overall aim for the European Year 2012 is to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of the rapidly growing population in their late 50s and over, across Europe. The year will provide a framework for policy development and concrete action to enable the European Union, Member States and stakeholders at all levels to develop and share innovative solutions, policies and long-term strategies related to active ageing and intergenerational solidarity.

Officials met with the Head of Unit for Active Ageing, Pensions, Healthcare and Social Services in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion on 27 March 2012 to discuss further engagement opportunities.

By December 2011, second an official to the European Commission to work on policy important to the region.

An official was seconded to the European Commission for a two-year placement in the URBAN/Territorial Unit of DG Regional Policy in October. This was a direct result of engagement with the Commission, in particular an offer to OFMDFM Ministers by Commissioner Hahn in 2010. The secondee's responsibilities include drawing up the provisions for community-led local development and sustainable urban development, areas of particular interest to the region.

[Source economic support for tackling poverty and disadvantage.](#)

Investigate sources of additional European funding and agree priority needs to be addressed by March 2012.

The Department of Justice organised a seminar in November 2011 to explore possible EU funding opportunities in the areas covered by the newly-established Directorates-General for Justice and Home affairs. There are many programmes of interest in fields such as combating human trafficking,

security issues, probation, protection of vulnerable people and criminal justice. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Policing Board, the NI Probation Service, the NI Courts, the Safer Communities Directorate, Queens University Belfast and OFMDFM. Participants were provided with information on potential EU policies, programmes and details of EU networks in their areas of interest. As a result of the seminar, the possibility of applying for funds to support victims to access information is being explored.

During a Social Cohesion workshop hosted by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in March 2012, strategic objectives of the public and voluntary sector and local government representatives in attendance were collated for the new Social Cohesion Desk Officer in Brussels. The Desk Officer took up post in March 2012 and is utilising these strategic objectives to source European funding and potential partner organisations to tackle poverty and disadvantage. The Northern Ireland European Regional Forum also now provides an avenue for funding partners to communicate and address issues such as deprivation, good relating and community building.

[Align with the Europe2020 Flagship initiative Youth on the Move.](#)

Identify Northern Ireland Departments' priorities and work with best fit for 'Youth on the Move' by end March 2012.

A significant portion of the discussions during the Social Cohesion workshop held in March 2012 focused on youth issues and the salient strategic objectives of the organisations in attendance were collated. As a result of the workshop, a network of organisations with similar objectives have been identified.

Youth on the Move is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives on education and employment for young people in Europe. Launched in 2010, it is part of the *Europe 2020 strategy* for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. *Youth on the Move* aims to improve young people's education and employability, to reduce high rates of youth unemployment. This fits well with regional priorities to support people (with an emphasis on young people) into employment by providing skills and training. As a result of work in year, the Social Cohesion Thematic Group is now committed to work with the Competitiveness and Employment Thematic Group on a project which uses European assistance, financial or otherwise, to address youth unemployment.

[Align with the Europe2020 Flagship initiative The Platform Against Poverty.](#)

Identify Northern Ireland Departmental priorities and work with best fit for the Platform Against Poverty by end March 2012.

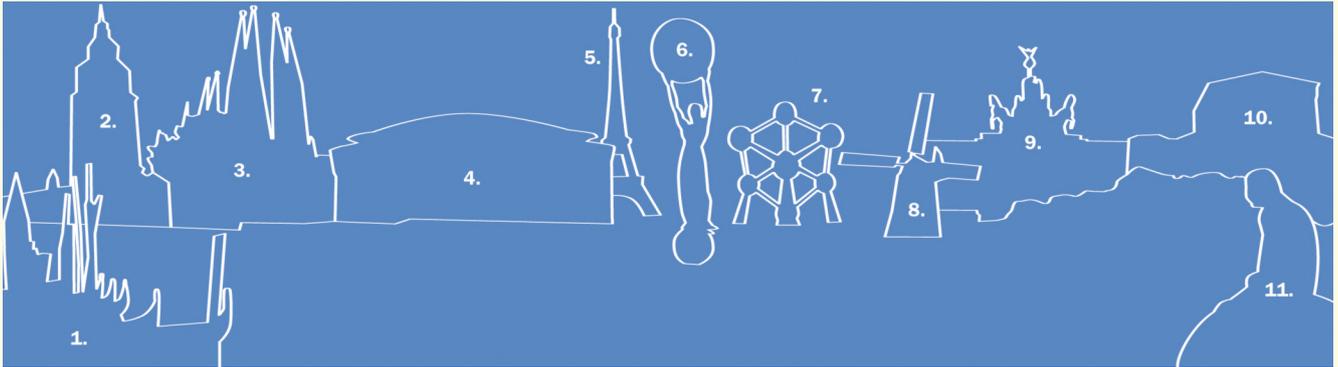
A list of strategic objectives that takes account of the *Platform Against Poverty* has been collated, in consultation with officials from 8 government departments.

The proposed £80 million Social Investment Fund which was issued for public consultation at the start of November 2011 is now complete. This is well aligned with Europe 2020's Anti-Poverty Platform and could also offer opportunities to explore experiences with other regions.

Build on exemplar strategies and delivery mechanisms (ie the Child Poverty Strategy).

By March 2012, identify cross-departmental initiatives to assist in securing additional European funding to boost their impact to citizens until March 2015.

A broad range of strategic objectives and exemplar strategies of public and voluntary sector organisations and local government have been collated. The desk officer for the Social Cohesion Thematic Group is utilising these objectives to identify funding opportunities for groups to avail of.



Cover Key:

1. Gondolas, Venice; 2. Town Hall, Krakow; 3. Sagrada Família, Barcelona; 4. Waterfront Hall, Belfast;
5. Eiffel Tower, Paris; 6. Circle of Thanksgiving, Belfast; 7. Atomium, Heysel, Brussels; 8. Windmill, Netherlands;
9. Brandenburg Gate, Berlin; 10. The Parthenon, Athens; 11. The Little Mermaid, Copenhagen.

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