



Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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Follow up Questions to Quarter 2 Commission Work Programme Briefing

1 Introduction

This paper provides a response to questions asked by the Committee for Employment and Learning during a briefing on the European Commission Work Programme.

The paper provides further information on:

- Partnership Agreements for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);
- The Consultative Partnership Group; and
- The previous use of Partnership Agreements.

2 Partnership Agreements

In 2012, each Member State (MS) was provided with an analysis of the main challenges and funding priorities relevant to the ESIF for 2014-2020.¹

¹ European Commission, Draft template and guidelines on the content of the partnership agreement,
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/pdf/preparation/pa_template_guidance_2013_02_26.pdf

These Position Papers, and the ensuing dialogue with the European Commission, are intended to act as a guide in the development of Partnership Agreements, including in its content and presentation of information.

The Position Papers were developed to:

Set out the framework for dialogue between the Commission and the UK on the preparation of the Partnership Agreement.

The UK Position Paper sets out the key challenges for the UK economy at the time of writing and presents the Commission's preliminary views on the main funding priorities for growth enhancing public expenditure.

The paper identified the following UK priorities:²

- Increasing labour market participation through labour market and education policies and reducing the risk of social exclusion;
- Promoting research and development investment and the competitiveness of the business sector; and
- Promoting an environmental friendly and resource efficient economy.

The Partnership Agreements are expected to have the following content:³

- Identification of main development needs and growth potential;
- Thematic objectives and main results expected from each ESIF;
- Financial allocation broken down by objective and fund;
- Application of Horizontal principles and policy objectives for the implementation of the ESIF;
- List of programmes and funding allocation by year;
- Arrangements that ensure coordination between ESIF funds, other Union, national funding instruments and the European Investment Bank;
- Consideration of additionality;
- Assessment methods including organisation/s responsible and timetable;
- Methodology and mechanism to ensure consistency in the functioning of the performance frameworks;
- Any identified support needed for administration bodies;
- Description of the strategy for territorial development;
- Arrangements to ensure an integrated approach to the use of ESIF for territorial development; and

² European Commission, Position of the Commission services on the development of the Partnership agreement and programmes in the United Kingdom for the period 2014-2020,

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/pdf/partnership/uk_position_paper.pdf

³ European Commission, Draft template and guidelines on the content of the partnership agreement,

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/pdf/preparation/pa_template_guidance_2013_02_26.pdf

- Arrangements to ensure efficient implementation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes.

As can be seen above, the requirements for the Partnership Agreement are extensive, including targets for Members States based on their own goals and those of the European Union.

3 DFPNI Consultative Partnership Group

As each of the devolved administrations in the UK are expected to provide their own sections for the Partnership Agreement, the Department for Finance and Personnel established the “Consultative Partnership Group on EU Funding” in 2012 to consider and discuss issues relating to the development of Northern Ireland’s future EU Structural Funds Programmes.⁴

As stated by DFP:

The Group provides a forum through which key stakeholders can have an on-going and meaningful influence on the development and preparation of future ERDF and ESF programmes.

The Group has two main tasks:⁵

- The preparation of the Northern Ireland contribution to the UK Partnership Agreement, which is the key strategic programming document for the UK; and
- The preparation of two operational programmes that will replace the current Competitiveness and Employment Programmes – a European Regional Development Fund Programme that will focus on improving Northern Ireland’s economic growth and a European Social Fund programme that will address employment issues – details of which must feed into the Partnership Agreement.

The group is made up of representatives from:⁶

- Local Government;
- Environment;
- Equality;
- Education;
- Queens University;
- University of Ulster;
- Voluntary and Community;
- Trade Unions;

⁴ Department of Finance and Personnel, Consultative Partnership Group on EU Funding 2014-2020
http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance/european-funding/eu-c-and-e-mon-info/consultative_partnership_group_on_eu_funding_2014-2020.htm

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

- Business;
- Agri- Rural; and
- Energy.

Advisors to the Group consist of representatives from:⁷

- Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI);
- Department of Education and Learning (DEL);
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA);
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD);
- Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB); and
- European Commission.

4 Previous Use of Partnership Agreements

A search of the Register of Commission Documents database found that whilst Partnership Agreements have been used previously by the European Commission, they do not appear to have been used in regards the ESIF.

As stated by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills:⁸

A UK Partnership Agreement is a new EU requirement.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, July 2012, Partnership Agreement: Delivery of structural funds, rural development funds and maritime and fisheries funds in England,
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/70075/12-942-partnership-agreement-delivery-of-structural_funds-rural-development-funds-and-maritime-and-fisheries-funds-in-England-government-response-to-informal-consultation.pdf