



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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# EU Competitive funding

## Introduction

In response to a request from the Committee for the Environment (the Committee) this paper addresses competitive EU funding drawdown by the Department of the Environment (the Department).

The paper draws on information provided by the Department to the Committee and gives a brief explanation of the funding identified by the Department and the role the Department takes in securing such funding. It also highlights some areas where the Committee may wish to seek further clarification from the Department.

## Competitive Funding

The Executive's Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-2015 sets a target under Commitment 26, for a 20% increase in the drawdown of competitive EU funding since the baseline of £11m for year 2010-11 (the baseline figure was set for the 2010-11 financial year following an interdepartmental consultation exercise<sup>1</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> RaISe. (2013) *European Union Competitive Funding in Northern Ireland*: Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Services

The March 2012 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) delivery plan for the PfG Commitment 26 provides the following definitive explanation of competitive funding in Northern Ireland:

*The baseline for EU competitive funds will be the sum of EU non-Structural Funds and INTERREG B and C monies. Any EU programme outside the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) is considered to be an EU competitive fund.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Further Considerations:**

While the Department has provided information in briefings to the Environment Committee, it may be useful to explore through which programmes, and to what extent, the Department has contributed to achieving this target.

## Identified funding

Through correspondence to the Committee<sup>3</sup>, the Department identified three funds it is currently focusing on:

### **1. INTERREG IV (B&C)**

INTERREG IV is the European Territorial Co-operation Objective which is divided into three different strands: cross-border (INTERREG IV A), transnational (INTERREG IV B) and interregional co-operation (INTERREG IV C).

**INTERREG IV B** aims to promote greater territorial integration with sustainable, harmonious and balanced development across the EU with candidate and neighbouring countries. There are 13 programme zones; three which are relevant to Northern Ireland: Northern Periphery Programme, North West Europe Programme and Atlantic Area Programme. Key areas of focus include: Innovation, Environment, Accessibility and Sustainable Urban Environment.<sup>4</sup>

**INTERREG IV C** (inter-regional co-operation) focuses on identification, analysis and dissemination of good practices by public authorities, with the aim to improve the effectiveness of regional and local policies. Co-operation projects are eligible across all 27 EU states, plus Norway and Switzerland.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Programme for Government Delivery Plan (Commitment 26), OFMDFM 28 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> DOE letter to Environment Committee (Jan 2014)

<sup>4</sup> SEUPB, *INTERREG IVB/C*. Available online at <http://www.seupb.eu/programmes2007-2013/interreg-overview.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

## Horizon 2020

Horizon 2020 is a competitive EU funding programme targeted at looking for new solutions in research and innovation and bringing products to market. The entire Horizon 2020 fund (70 bn euro) is divided across three pillars. The area of interest is Societal Challenge 5: Climate Action, resource efficiency and raw materials under the Better Society Pillar, which has around 2.7bn euro available.<sup>6</sup>

Challenge 5 funds research and innovation with the following objectives:

- to achieve a resource – and water - efficient and climate change resilient economy and society;
- the protection and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems; and
- a sustainable supply and use of raw materials, in order to meet the needs of a growing global population within the sustainable limits of the planet's natural resources and eco-systems.<sup>7</sup>

## LIFE

Life 2014-2020 is also a competitive funding stream providing support for nature, conservation and climate action projects and NGOs. There are two sub groups: Climate Action (0.9bn euro) and Environment (2.7bn euro). Under the programme there are two funding periods: 2014-17 and 2018-2020, both co-financed by providing a proportion of the overall costs (e.g. under Climate, 60% up to year four and 55% after). It is open to public and private sector applications from one Member state or involves trans-national cooperation from a number of Member states.<sup>8</sup>

## Further programmes

The EC Directorate General for the Environment makes funding available through two programmes. One of the projects is the LIFE fund, which has been mentioned by the Department, however, the second fund is the Eco-Innovation and Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme which supports projects in eco-innovation. It also offers operating grants to environmental NGOs. There are other funding opportunities

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<sup>6</sup> DOE correspondence to Environment Committee, *Climate Change and Energy – EU Funding Opportunities*' (10 December.2013).

<sup>7</sup> EC, *Horizon 2020: Climate Action, Environment, Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials*. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/climate-action-environment-resource-efficiency-and-raw-materials>

<sup>8</sup> DOE LIFE Programme. Available at [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect\\_the\\_environment/natural\\_environment/life.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect_the_environment/natural_environment/life.htm)

offered by other Directorate Generals that may be of relevance, but it has not been possible to explore these due to the timescale for preparation of this paper.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that the Department explained that some potential funding streams may not be progressed by the Department itself due to their low value, funds being closed/closing, or because the Department and projects aren't eligible as they do not meet call criteria. However, the Department states that while it may not be eligible to drawdown particular funds; it gives support to other partners and stakeholders who are eligible.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Further Considerations:**

It may be useful to know the actions that the Department is taking to identify all further potential relevant competitive EU funds.

## Facilitation Role

The Department has informed the Committee that it pro-actively engages with other Departments, Councils, Universities, and Further Education Colleges, research organisations e.g. Queens QUESTOR and CASE, and AFBI, businesses and other organisations such as Wrightbus, McLaughlin & Harvey, Action Renewables and WRAP, in relation to raising awareness of possible EU funding opportunities. One of its actions is to obtain advance information received from the European Commission (EC) and Barrosa Desk Officer in relation to details of EC calls for projects – this information is disseminated electronically to stakeholders and in face to face briefings including stakeholder workshops.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Example:**

The Department held two stakeholder workshops in March 2013 and October 2013 on "Heads up on Horizon 2020". The focus was to inform stakeholders on call deadlines by linking them to a live web stream of a Commission Horizon 2020 "infoday" on 2014 calls for projects on Climate Action, Environment, Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see: *EC, Funding Opportunities – Environment*. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/funding/intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/funding/intro_en.htm)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> DOE correspondence to Environment Committee *Climate Change and Energy – EU Funding Opportunities* (10 December 2013)

<sup>12</sup> DOE correspondence to Environment Committee *Climate Change and Energy – EU Funding Opportunities* (10 December 2013). Also [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect\\_the\\_environment/climate\\_change/barroso\\_task\\_force\\_working\\_group/barroso\\_task\\_force\\_heads-up-on-horizon-2020.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect_the_environment/climate_change/barroso_task_force_working_group/barroso_task_force_heads-up-on-horizon-2020.htm)

**Further Considerations:**

- How does the Department identify stakeholders to engage with?
- What resources/staff are invested in engagement on raising awareness on funding opportunities?
- What have been the outcomes of engagement so far?
- Does the Department gauge or monitor the progress of stakeholders so as to assess the effectiveness of its approach?
- Are there any more developments in the Department's approaches?

In December 2013, the Department informed the Committee that it was in talks with other UK devolved administrations, and the Republic of Ireland, on how to access the LIFE Integrated Project funding stream.

**Further Considerations:**

LIFE is open to joint bids which include trans-boundary cooperation. It may be useful to find out whether there are any developments on potential joint cross-border bids.

## Department Targets

The Department's Business Plan 2014-15:

*represents the third year of the DOE Corporate Plan 2012-15 which set out the strategic objectives for the Department over the period, including the Department's commitments contained within the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15<sup>13</sup>*

The overall PfG target is a 20% increase in the drawdown of competitive EU funding since the baseline year 2010-11. However, the Business Plan does not make any direct reference to contributing to this target, both drawing down funding directly or providing a supportive role to other organisations to enable them to do so. In fact the only reference to EU funding states:

<sup>13</sup> DOE, *Business Plan 2014-2015*. (p.3) Available at <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recent-releases/publications-class-results.htm?category=Cat%203%20-%20What%20are%20our%20priorities%20and%20how%20we%20are%20doing&class=Strategic%20and%20business%20plans>

*By March 2015 have in place an action plan to implement the Biodiversity Strategy to include a range of proposals/measures to draw down EU funding for the period 2015-2020.<sup>14</sup>*

Considering a number of other department's business plans for comparison (note: not all Northern Ireland Department's business plans were looked at due to time constraints):

- DRD's Business Plan 2014-2015 mentions achieving the PfG target in its key commitments<sup>15</sup>.
- DARD's Business Plan for 2013-2014 highlights commitments in obtaining funding relation to specific areas e.g. for support for rural border communities. It also mentions what it plans to do with funding received under the EU Rural Development and European Fisheries Programmes.<sup>16</sup>
- DCAL highlights its commitments in both achieving funding and providing a supportive role to delivery bodies and other organisations.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Further Considerations**

- Does the Department set itself specific targets in relation to competitive EU funding drawdown?
- How does the Department monitor its contribution to the overall PfG target, and any Departmental targets so as to measure its performance and effectiveness?

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.10.

<sup>15</sup> DRD, Business Plan 2014-2015 (p.27 and p.17).

<sup>16</sup> DARD, Business Plan 2013-2014.

<sup>17</sup> DCAL. *Business Plan 2014-2015*. p.28