



Post Project Evaluation

ESF Communication Plan 2017

Organisation	Higher Education and Investment Group
Branch	European Fund Management Managing Authority
Project Title	European Social Fund (ESF) Communication Plan
Project Location	Department for Economy, Adelaide House
Date	1 December 2017

	DATE
Cleared by Economist	4 December 2017
Approved by Programme Monitoring Committee	29 January 2018

Post Project Evaluation

Note

Background

The strategic aim of the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020 in Northern Ireland is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity, and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The EU has strengthened its focus on the results of policy, and the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) now requires the Managing Authority (MA) to undertake evaluation activity in order to assess the impacts and effects of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes. The CPR also requires an Evaluation Plan to be developed for programmes, setting out how evaluations will be organised to provide evidence on the impacts and effects of policy making

The ESF monitoring and evaluation plan details the requirement for effective monitoring and evaluation to support the successful management and delivery of the Programme.

The annual NIESF Communication Plan 2017 was developed by the Programme Managing Authority (MA) as an element of the Communications Strategy for the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020 and will be reviewed annually. The Communication Plan is included in Annex 1.

The aim of the plan was to outline the information and communication activities that would take place during 2017 to support the objectives of the ESF Communication Strategy.

Cost outturn as compared to estimated cost in the business case

A Business Case was not required as the ESF Communications Plan does not have a dedicated budget. The cost of any communication activities are covered by the Department's Communication Team, the Branch's General and Administrative Expenditure and large expenditure will be drawn from the ESF Programme Technical Assistance budget.

Note

Expenditure* for activities within the 2017 Communication Plan are outlined below:

Call 2 Advertising & Promotional Campaign	£15,220
Support for the 1 st World Conference on Supported Learning (Major Event)	£10,000
Production of 2 pull up stands	£440
Production of Programme marketing and promotional materials - branded pens and post-its	£1,650
Provision of ESF case study being translated into French for ESF page on Departmental website	£34
Total ESF expenditure	£27,344

*These costs do not allow for expenditure relating to staff time spent in all ESF communication activities.

Achievement of objectives¹

Of the **15** individual actions for the 2017 Communication Plan, **12** were fully achieved, **2** partially achieved and **1** not achieved.

Action 1 achieved - an area dedicated to ESF on the customer facing NI Direct website was successfully launched. It contains information and contact details on every ESF project, raising awareness of the ESF Programme. In its first 6 months the page received 5,338 views. The MA will continue to request statistics from the NI Direct website manager to monitor how often the ESF page and information is being viewed.

Action 2 achieved - great progress was made in populating the ESF page of the DfE website with up to date information, 5 case studies and all the information for Call 2 of the programme, increasing the transparency of information readily available to the public. In 2017 the web page received 12,503 to 6 October and the publication page received 4,947 views. The MA will continue to request statistics from the DfE website manager to monitor how often the ESF pages and information are being viewed.

Action 3 achieved - the MA worked closely with the Department's Press Office to raise awareness of the new online information through a series of tweets, which is in line with the increase of social media as a means of communication in society in general. In total, 15 tweets were issued to date, generating 35,197 impressions, 104 retweets, 710 engagements and 65 likes.

Action 4 achieved – 4 case studies were made available on the DfE website, helping to raise awareness of how ESF funded projects have impacted on participant's lives. One of these is also available in French, in line with regulations.

Action 5 achieved – 17 ESF Memos and 3 Addendums have issued via email up to 10 October 2017, ensuring timely and effective dissemination of Programme information and guidance to all beneficiaries.

Action 6 not achieved - MA preparation and issue of Press Releases, in conjunction with

¹ The ESF Communication Plan is included in Annex 1 detailing Actions Targets Groups, Output, Outcome Timescales and Monitoring Information.

Note

Private Office, was not achieved. There were no ESF related Press Releases before the suspension of the Assembly on 26 January 2017 and there has been no Ministerial activity since that date.

Action 7 achieved – 2 new ESF pop-up stands help to raise the profile of ESF at public events and are very portable and easy to put up. As well as being used by MA staff at events, the Programme Delivery Branch (PDB) has also made the stands available to organisations arranging local information events for projects funded by ESF; one has been used 5 times and the other 2 times to date.

Action 8 achieved - the newly printed posters and leaflets provide a more professional look to any events where ESF is being promoted and have been distributed to all Jobs and Benefit Offices throughout Northern Ireland as well as the six Career Offices. The printed material provides direction on how to access a link to further detail held on line.

Action 9 achieved - the branded pens and post-its are popular publicity merchandise at events and help raise the profile of the ESF Programme. 2,500 pens and 2,500 post-its were produced.

Action 10 achieved – Publicity Guidance is available on the ESF page of the DfE website. An updated version has been drafted and will be published by the end of 2017.

Action 11 partially achieved - there was considerable engagement with DfC management regarding the process to check participant eligibility and the completion of forms. Also, all frontline office staff were provided with ESF information posters & leaflets. However, face to face engagement with frontline staff was not possible due to staffing pressures within EFM Managing Authority. As engagement was aimed at increasing awareness of ESF generally, alternative actions are planned e.g. use of social media, NI Direct etc.

Action 12 achieved – the last Quarterly Forum to provide up to date information and share best practice with beneficiaries was held in February. Further Forums were suspended due to regular engagement with project providers related to ESF Call 2. This format is to change for future engagements.

Action 13 achieved – an ESF stand was present at the First World Conference on Supported Learning held in La Mon Hotel and Country House on 14-16 June 2017. The event was attended by over 400 delegates from all over the world, who saw information promoting the achievements of the ESF Programme.

Action 14 partially achieved – engagement with the actual NEETS and CFSP forums was not possible due to competing pressures on staff time during that period. Ongoing engagement with beneficiaries, who are members of the forums, was maintained throughout the period. However the meetings envisaged, grouped by Investment Priority, did not occur due to the same restraints on resources previously referred to.

Action 15 achieved – an advertising campaign for ESF Call 2 inviting stakeholders to 6 consultation events in June and 2 pre-launch events in September rolled out across 3 national newspapers. The Department also issued a series of tweets to publicise the events and information was placed on the DfE website. This resulted in 1,555 page

Note

views, 839 downloads of the guidance notes, 1250 downloads of the FAQs and 1353 downloads of application forms.

Value for money assessment

The ESF Communication Plan is included in Annex 1 detailing Actions Targets Groups, Output, Outcome Timescales and Monitoring Information. As stated above, of the 15 individual actions for the 2017 Communication Plan, 12 were fully achieved, 1 partially achieved and 2 not achieved.

The cost for ESF generic stands and promotional merchandise can be used to promote ESF for the lifetime of the programme. There was only one print run of the new posters and leaflets in order to support initial publicity and awareness of the new ESF page on NI Direct. Both are available to download on-line so no further print runs are required.

Available expertise was used to create the NI Direct webpage and update the ESF page on the DfE website with no cost to ESF. The MA has monitored the effectiveness of these mediums by obtaining statistical information showing the level of views, interactions and downloads for the ESF web pages. Analysis showed a peak for the first 2 months that the pages became available and another peak in July. The peaks for each month were usually towards the end of each month. There is no direct comparison for the ESF pages but NI Direct felt that, with an average page view of 16.5, they would not have expected much higher, given the nature of the projects. This will be monitored on an ongoing basis. Similar data has been and will continue to be gathered and monitored for ESF Tweets and all information will be used to influence future correspondence.

Overall, the ESF Communication Plan represents good Value For Money as actions greatly increased the availability and promotion of ESF project information to potential customers and stakeholders, in line with Commission regulations.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The aim of the ESF Communication Strategy is to raise public awareness of the role played by ESF and the European Union in supporting and investing in employment and skills policies/programmes and to deliver a consistent message on the benefits of ESF in line with the aims and objectives of the programme.

The Communication Plan provides details of the activities the NIEFM Managing Authority will undertake to deliver the aim and objectives of the strategy, which will be evaluated to assess to what extent the objectives have been achieved.

Going forward, the NI EFM Managing Authority could seek to liaise with other MAs in the INIO and INFORM forums to share best practice. Further engagement with Priority 3 branch managers to raise the profile of their publicity measures should be established so that their activities can maintain a similar profile to those linked to Priorities 1 and 2.

Note

It is recommended that:

- EFM MA should seek to build on the opportunities to use social media both by Departmental Tweets and the use of the DfE Facebook. Close liaison with Press Office and website managers should be maintained.
- EFM MA should ensure Project Providers under Call 2 are made aware of the various sources of information that are available to them.
- EFM MA should engage with Training Programmes Branch and Youth Policy Division management to discuss ways to increase awareness of Priority 3 activities.

ESF Communication Plan 2017

Action	Target Group	Target	Output	Outcome	Timescale	Achieved	Data
DIGITAL (Including Online, Social Media, E-mail and E-resources)							
MA to develop an ESF webpage on NI Direct.	NI citizens (including potential participants)	To develop and maintain a summary of the ESF Programme, providing relevant information and links.	An ESF Webpage providing Programme information for all NI citizens and which will be monitored and reviewed throughout the year.	Raising awareness of the ESF Programme	31 January 2017	Achieved	ESF Page is now available on NI Direct www.nidirect.gov.uk/esf From 10.4.17 to 30.9.17 there had been 5,338 page views
MA to maintain ESF webpage on DfE website	Beneficiaries Stakeholders Elected representatives (MLAs, MPs, MEPs) NI Third Sector	To continue to provide up-to-date information on the ESF Programme including: Guidance List of Operations Funding information Second Call for Applications	ESF Webpage is maintained and monitored throughout the year with regular updates and new information.	Transparency of information which is readily available to the Public.	Ongoing throughout Year	Achieved	New ESF Memos Case Studies Call 2 information Web page views from 01.01.17 to 6.10.17 was 12,503 ; publication page views was 4,947
Promotion of high level ESF Programme Activity via Social Media	Potential Participants Participants Beneficiaries Stakeholders	To liaise with DfE Communications Team to publicise ESF events, achievements and relevant news stories via the Department's Twitter account.	Issue of a minimum of two 'tweets' annually relating to ESF activity and monitor 'Reach' and 're-tweets'	Promoting ESF events, stories and achievements to raise awareness of Programme.	By 31 December 2017	Achieved	15 ESF tweets issued by Press Office so far generating 35,197 impressions, 104 retweets, 710 engagements and 65 likes
IB to provide the MA with case studies for the NI Direct ESF webpage	NI Citizens (including potential participants)	To provide personalised examples and narratives of an individual's experience on an ESF operation.	At least four case studies to be uploaded to the NI Direct ESF webpage	Improving the visibility of ESF operations, and the benefits of Programme engagement	By 31 December 2017	Achieved	5 case studies are available with one also available in French in line with Regulations, cost £34.40
MA to continue to issue updated guidance and Programme information,	Beneficiaries	To ensure beneficiaries have access to the most up to date Programme guidance and operational information.	Issue of ESF Information Memos via e-mail. Monitoring feedback from beneficiaries	Timely and effective dissemination of Programme information and guidance to all beneficiaries.	Ongoing throughout Year	Achieved	17 ESF Memos & 3 addendums have been issued up to 10.10.17.

from both the MA and IB teams, to beneficiaries via e-Mail			and IB reports on compliance.				
Action	Target Group	Target	Output	Outcome	Timescale		
PRINT MEDIA (Including Press Releases, Print advertisements, Stands, and Print Resources)							
MA, in conjunction with DfE Press Office to prepare and issue press releases.	Potential Participants Participants Beneficiaries Stakeholders MLAs	To ensure media coverage of major Programme activity including ministerial visits.	To have produced four Press Releases relating to ESF Programme Activity	Press coverage that promotes ESF Programme activity and improves the visibility of ESF operations	By 31 December 2017	Not achieved	Minister did not attend any ESF projects and then there has been no activity since suspension of Assembly
MA to commission two stands to promote the ESF Programme.	Potential Participants Participants Beneficiaries Stakeholders MLAs	The production of two ESF penguin stands for use at various events and information days.	Two ESF penguin stands	Raising the profile of the ESF Programme	31 January 2017	Achieved	There are 2 ESF pull -up stands now available for use. (Cost met by DfE Communications Branch). One has been used 5 times so far and the other 2 times.
MA to arrange for the production of ESF Programme posters & leaflets.	Potential Participants Participants	To produce accompanying Programme literature for distribution at information events and DfC local Jobs and Benefits Offices and Jobcentres, and for use by project providers.	200 ESF Programme Posters & 1000 A5 Programme information leaflets in hard copy, also to be available as e-resources (pdf format).	Accessible Programme information for individuals. Raising awareness of the ESF Programme with the targeted participant audience	31 January 2017	Achieved	Posters and leaflets produced and copies issued to all ESF providers, DfC Jobs & Benefit Offices and 6 Career Offices. (cost met by DfE Communications Branch)
MA to arrange for the production of Programme marketing and promotional materials	Potential Participants Participants	To arrange for the production of appropriate ESF promotional materials (e.g. pens), subject to budget constraints	ESF marketing material based on budget constraints.	Raise the profile of the ESF Programme	31 January 2017	Achieved	Both branded pens and post-its were produced 2,500 pens @ £583.40 2,500 post its @ £1,067.50
MA to maintain Branding and Publicity Guidance	IBs Beneficiaries Stakeholders EU	To provide guidance to ESF beneficiaries on EU branding and publicity requirements/regulations.	Updated Branding and Publicity Guidance Implementation will	Compliance with Commission Regulation (EC) No 1303 (Article 115 and Annex XII).	Review in June 2017 as guidance was updated in June 2016	Achieved as current procedures on-line are still	Publicity Guidance is available on ESF page of DfE website, Updated version has

for the ESF Programme	Commission		be monitored through verification checks.			applicable. Any changes relate to process of gaining approval rather than actual requirements.	been drafted but cannot replace current one on website until MOU with IB has been agreed.
Action	Target Group	Target	Output	Outcome	Timescale		
FACE TO FACE (Including Quarterly Forum, Awareness Seminars)							
Interdepartmental Engagement with DfC	DfC staff including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional, District and Office Managers Frontline Personal Advisers Decision Makers 	To produce an ESF awareness presentation and deliver at least 1 Programme seminar within each of the three operational regions.	ESF awareness seminars and accompanying presentation for DfC staff.	Raising awareness and improving understanding of the ESF Programme amongst key DfC staff and seeking feedback to inform any improvements required	30 June 2017	Achieved to a point	There was plenty of engagement with DfC regarding process to check participant eligibility and the completing of forms. Face to Face engagement with frontline staff was not possible due to pressure in staffing.
MA to hold ESF Quarterly Forums throughout the year	Beneficiaries Stakeholders	To continue to engage with ESF beneficiaries for P1 and P2 operations on a regular basis, and address main policy/operational concerns	ESF forums being held quarterly To provide up to date information and share best practice.	MA/PDB awareness of issues pertaining to operational delivery. Improved stakeholder relations	Next Quarterly Forum planned for February 2017	Achieved	Last Quarterly Forum held in February. Further forums suspend because of regular engagement with project providers relating to Call 2. This format is to change for future engagements.
MA to organise a major information event/activity	Potential Participants Participants Beneficiaries Stakeholders Elected representatives (MLAs, MPs, MEPs)	To arrange one major activity during the year to promote the ESF Programme	One major information/publicity activity promoting the achievements of the ESF Programme.	Presenting the achievements of the Programme to date, in accordance with CPR 1303/13 (Article 115) as well as raising the profile of the ESF Programme.	31 March 2017	Achieved	ESF Stand at the First World Conference on Supported Learning held in La Mon Hotel & Country House 14-16 June 2017 . Over 400 delegates from all over the world attended.
MA to engage	Beneficiaries	To develop and	To have attended a	Opportunity to share	To have engaged	Not achieved	Due to re-organisation

with forums/groups for beneficiaries across each investment priority	Stakeholders	disseminate Programme information and guidance specific to the investment priority.	meeting of each Forum at least once in the year.	best practice and improve engagement with beneficiaries	with NEETs and CFSP forums by March 2017. To schedule to meet beneficiaries throughout the year as Branch priorities allow.		in the Division and unexpected staffing pressure, this was not possible.
Advertising Campaign for Call 2	Will be arranged as part of Call 2 Work Plan					Achieved	An advertisement was placed in 3 national papers to invite potential stakeholders to 6 consultation events in June. A further advertisement were place in the 3 papers to invite stakeholders to two pre-launch events in September. The Department also issued a series of tweets to publicise the events and information was placed on the ESF page of the DfE website. Call 2 application forms & guidance – 1,555 page views; guidance notes - 839 downloads; FAQs – 1250 downloads; App forms – 1353 downloads