



**Response to the Scottish Executive Consultation:
Future European Structural Funds
Programmes in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland 2007-2013**

Association of Scotland's Colleges

08 January 2007

ASC has some fundamental concerns about the new plans for ERDF and ESF in Lowlands and Uplands Scotland.

Partnership

The planning for the new 2007-13 programme has been much less inclusive and participatory than it was for the 2000-06 programme. As a result the basis of partnership is now less clear and the degree of involvement of the sectors and project sponsors is much reduced. This is greatly to be deplored.

The new programme relies too much on intermediary bodies remote from delivery of capital projects and of training and lifelong learning. In particular, it is not appropriate or acceptable that there is no representation of Colleges in the Forum at which strategy is discussed. The Scottish Funding Council is merely a funding agency of government and has no expertise in design and delivery of programmes or of collaboration at local level. SFC is not representative of the College sector.

Since the levels of funding of ESF and ERDF for the new programme period will be much reduced, it is all the more important that EU grant money is used wisely and well in conjunction with mainstream programmes in Scotland. The top-down and fragmented approach proposed for 2007-13 will make this much harder to achieve.

ASC would like to see a much broader and more meaningful partnership for the new Lowlands Scotland programmes, and a more open and less exclusive approach by Scottish Executive officials.

Involvement of Colleges

Colleges are comprehensives of lifelong learning which provide core capacity not just for their own projects but to match fund and support those of employers and voluntary sector and public service partners. The central role and major contribution of Colleges is not sufficiently recognised or taken up in the new plans.

There needs to be a review of the structures proposed to ensure that sectors and their representative bodies can contribute more to the programmes.

Client Focus

The ESF plan is wordy and obscure. It needs a much clearer focus on the main client groups eg

- Priority 1 – those who have never worked and NEETs;
- Priority 2 – those in low-paid, casual employment with few or no qualifications and training opportunities.

The distinction between Priorities 1 and 2 needs to be made clearer. At many points the wording for priority 2 suggests that it is targeting the same people who will be targets under Priority 1.

Too often, “training” schemes offer only a revolving door and leave many individuals back where they started after a brief experience of placement or work experience. Progress to or in lifetime employability frequently requires intensive education in fundamentals such as literacy, numeracy, and basic IT which employers cannot supply or sustain. More of the available ESF funding should go to those adults who need basic education most.

Question 1: Are there any additional socio-economic factors to be considered – and which Structural Funds can address – in assessing the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of Lowlands & Uplands Scotland?

One of the major socio-economic/demographic factors at work in Scotland is the aging of the population. The implications of this will be far-reaching, with a large number of people re-skilling to take on new or different jobs. This aging population has the potential to be a great asset for Scotland if they are able to access the education and training they need to continue to engage productively in the economy.

In addition, there are large numbers of migrant workers from EU accession countries who are coming to work in Scotland. While many of them have basic employability skills, they may require further education in language and communication skills, as well as training in some job-specific skills. Again, migrant workers have the potential to be a valuable asset to the Scottish economy, but will need appropriate educational support in order to become so.

Question 2: Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland address the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the region?

Question 3: Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ERDF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland show appropriate coherence and concentration?

Question 4: Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ESF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland address the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the region?

As in Question 1 above, it is necessary to consider demographic changes such as an aging workforce and high numbers of migrant workers when considering priorities for the 2007-13 programme. Both of these groups present Scotland with opportunities and may become real strengths if they are able to access education and training that is appropriate to the needs of individuals. However, if they are unable to access such training, they could turn into weaknesses for Scotland. It is therefore essential that everything possible is done to extend opportunities to these groups.

Question 5: Do the proposed priorities for the 2007-2013 ESF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland show appropriate coherence and concentration?

Priorities are not sufficiently distinct or focussed (see above).

Question 6: What are your views on the proposed balance of funding between priorities for the future ERDF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland?

Question 7: What are your views on the proposed balance of funding between priorities for the future ESF programme in Lowlands & Uplands Scotland?

While each of the priorities is important, more funding should be targeted to Priority 3 to enable those who need education most to get suitably customised provision. These may also be the people likely to need education longest, as they may currently be furthest from education or employability. Their needs will be diverse and specific, so attention on provision of education suited to the particular needs of individuals is crucial if we want to ensure that all people have access to lifelong learning, regardless of their starting point.

Question 8: Do the proposed priorities outlined in the draft Operational Programmes focus sufficiently on the right priorities in Scottish domestic policy?

As in Question 7, it is essential that the priority of social inclusion is not neglected, but this will require targeting of funding on those who may be furthest from education and employability. Getting these groups into lifelong learning must therefore be a key priority of the Operational Programmes in line with Scottish Executive policy.

Question 9: What are your views on how the principle of environmental sustainability has been integrated into the Operational Programmes?

These horizontal themes are deliverable only if economic contribution and social inclusion are achieved first. The Operational Programmes should reflect this.

Question 10: What are your views on how the principle of equal opportunities has been integrated into the Operational Programmes?

These horizontal themes are deliverable only if economic contribution and social inclusion are achieved first. The Operational Programmes should reflect this.

Question 11: What are your views on how the Operational Programmes will ensure complementarity between Structural Funds and other EU funding streams?

These horizontal themes are deliverable only if economic contribution and social inclusion are achieved first. The Operational Programmes should reflect this.

Question 12: How can the challenge-fund approach be improved to make it more effective in delivering outcomes and more efficient in operation?

“Challenge funding” is inherently wasteful (because of the high cost and nugatory effort which goes into unsuccessful bids) and focuses on applications (presentation) rather than project design or track record (delivery). This will be accentuated by the reduction in funding and increased threshold of size for bids to qualify,

Question 13: What would be the most effective approach to using Community Planning Partnerships and other local partnerships for the delivery of elements of the programmes?

Question 14: What are your views on spatial targeting for community regeneration under ERDF Priority 2 and ESF Priority 1?

Question 15: What are your views on spatial targeting for rural development under ERDF Priority 3?

Question 16: Do you have any additional comments on the draft Structural Funds Operational Programmes for Lowlands & Uplands Scotland?