

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

In accordance with the Statutory Rule 2004 No 280, the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004, a determination of whether the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme is likely to have significant environmental effects was conducted and a screening report was passed for consultation to Northern Ireland's designated consultation body, the Department of the Environment's Environment and Heritage Service, on 21 November 2006.

This report was based on the Environment and Heritage Service pro-forma and the criteria specified in Schedule 1 of the Regulations.

The responsible authority, the Department of Finance and Personnel as the Member State, is of the opinion that the Northern Ireland ESF Programme should be screened out as there are no significant effects on the environment for the following reasons:

- The programme is closely aligned to the Lisbon agenda and over 75% of the programme funding will be earmarked for activity to help reduce economic inactivity and increase workforce skills.
- Given the nature of the ESF, focusing on immaterial operations related to Human Resources Development, the Northern Ireland ESF operational programme does not set the framework for operations likely to have significant environmental effects, such as infrastructure projects, especially the ones listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC.
- The ESF Programme is based on Departmental programme spend and any major project will be subject to Statutory Rule 2004 No280, Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Northern Ireland 2004).
- All projects applying for funding will be subject to selection criteria and one prerequisite will be the allocation of a Developmental Path Analysis (DPA) score which the selection panel must consider.

Consequently, the Managing Authority, the Department for Employment and Learning considered that there was no need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment of this operational programme under the Directive 2001/42/EC.

The Environment and Heritage Service concurs with the responsible authority's opinion therefore a full environmental assessment in accordance with Part III is not required.