

Consultation on the Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007 – 2013

The following is the response of the Local Strategy Partnership Working Group to the consultation on the Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness and Employment Programme 2007 – 2013, issued in December 2006.

Background to the LSP Working Group

Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs) in Northern Ireland were established in each of the 26 District Council areas to deliver Measures 3.1 'Local Economic Initiatives for Developing the Social Economy' and 3.2 'Locally-based Human Resource, Training and Development Strategies' of The Operational Programme for the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme 2000-2004 and to develop Integrated Local Strategies in each District Council area.

A two year extension was agreed to the Peace Programme, extending it to 2006, and LSPs are delivering one measure under this – Measure 3.1 'Local Economic Initiatives for Developing Local Communities'. This measure has a broader focus than the previous measure and LSPs were asked to focus on key strategic areas as identified within their Integrated Local Strategies.

The Local Strategy Partnership Working Group was established in August 2002. Each of the 26 LSPs in Northern Ireland has nominated two Board Members (one social partner and one governance) and one staff member to represent them. Its role is to undertake research and co-ordination work of a strategic nature in relation to the collaborative opportunities available to LSPs in the context of Peace II. This also involves co-ordination between LSPs in order to take advantage of these opportunities. It also shares information and best practice across all 26 LSPs and with other organisations.

Response

While individual LSPs may also choose to submit a response that reflects their local situation this joint response comments on those issues that are common to all 26 LSPs. Not all the questions posed by the consultation document will be answered and this response will concentrate on those issues that are applicable to LSPs.

Question 1: What are your views on the Socio-Economic Analysis relating to the draft ERDF Competitiveness Programme?

Question 2: What are your views on the Labour Market Analysis relating to the draft ESF Employment Programme?

In relation to the socio-economic analysis and the labour market analysis the LSP Working Group would concur with the findings that there is poor educational achievement amongst older parts of the workforce. The experience of LSPs is that there is a need for 'alternative' interventions with those most marginalised and therefore we would ask the managing

departments/delivery bodies to consider the evaluation findings from previous programmes such as Peace II.

Question 3: What are your views on the proposed strategy, priorities, key areas of expenditure and indicative allocation, with the focus on Lisbon Competitiveness priorities, for the ERDF Competitiveness Programme?

In relation to Priority 2: Promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship, the LSP Working Group is pleased to see that DETI's Developing a Successful Social Economy Strategy is included as one of the initiatives that must be built on. We are also encouraged to see that recognition has been given to the role that social enterprises can play in the development of an entrepreneurial culture at a local level and that they will be encouraged to apply for the funding for both start up and growing businesses. This potential source of funding will be particularly important for those social enterprises which were funded under the Peace II programme through LSPs and who wish to expand or grow but have no further access to finance through Peace funding.

Question 4: What are your views on the proposed strategy, priorities, key areas of expenditure and indicative allocation, with the focus on Lisbon Competitiveness priorities, for the ESF Competitiveness Programme?

In relation to this programme the LSP Working Group is pleased to see that it will include provision for the type of employment and skills activities currently funded under programmes such as Peace II to continue. The LSPs under Measure 3.2 (Locally Based Human Resource, Training and Development) funded a range of projects that had a range of valuable outputs and impacts including engaging marginalised and hard to reach groups, increasing participation of these groups in the labour market, supporting the achievement of recognised qualifications and empowering individuals and communities to develop themselves. The LSP Working Group is hopeful that the funding available under this new programme will allow for the excellent work that has already been achieved to be built on. However there needs to be recognition that there is still work to be done at the 'development' level within communities.

We are also encouraged to see that recognition has been given to the skills and expertise within the community and voluntary sector and their ability to be providers within Priority 1: Helping people into sustained employment and would ask that they also be considered in the provision of activities under Priority 2 : Improving workforce skills and adaptability.

Question 5: What are your views on the proposed cross cutting themes for both Programmes of ensuring equality, promoting good relations and sustainable development, and creating sustainable communities?

The LSP Working Group welcomes the proposed cross cutting themes, in particular we welcome the inclusion of promoting good relations as we are feel that this will allow these programmes to support the work of Peace III and vice versa.