

**COMPETITIVENESS & EMPLOYMENT MONITORING COMMITTEE
INNOVATION AND MAINSTREAMING WORKING GROUP**

Note of Meeting held on 15 April 2008 in Adelaide House

In Attendance: Trevor Connolly (Interim Chair, Head of Finance & EU Division, DEL)
Dr Audrey McKeown (Southern Regional College)
John Doran (Belfast International Airport)
Richard Millen (Queen's University Belfast)
Councillor Cathal Mullaghan (Belfast City Council)
Rosemary Mulholland (ESF Managing Authority, DEL)
John Neill (European Unit DEL)
Declan Reilly (European Unit DEL)
Gerard Colgan (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency)
Peter Millen (European Division, DFP)

Not in Attendance: Alderman Arnold Hatch (Craigavon Borough Council)
Malachy McAleer (South West College)
Councillor Robin Newton MLA (Belfast City Council)

Apologies: Margaret Connolly (Queen's University Belfast)

Secretariat: Ian Getgood (ESF Managing Authority, DEL)

1.0 Welcome

1.1 The Interim Chair, Trevor Connolly, opened the meeting by welcoming the Working Group members and thanking them for their attendance. Trevor briefly outlined the purpose of the Innovation and Mainstreaming Working Group and the order of business, to elect the Chair and Deputy Chair, to give the membership some background on innovation and mainstreaming under the NI ESF Programme and to agree the draft Terms of Reference.

2.0 Election of Chair and Deputy Chair

- 2.1 Trevor Connolly explained that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Working Group must be a member or deputy member of the Competitiveness and Employment Monitoring Committee. Trevor highlighted that the main focus of the Group would be on innovative activity under Priority 1 of the NI ESF Programme which would be delivered by organisations external to central Government.
- 2.2 Following a brief discussion it was proposed and agreed that Richard Millen would take the role of Chair and John Doran the role of Deputy Chair of the Working Group.

3.0 Innovation and Mainstreaming from EQUAL

- 3.1 John Neill, Head of European Unit and Managing Authority for the NI EQUAL Programme 2000-2006 provided a comprehensive and detailed account of innovative and mainstreaming activity under the EQUAL Programme. John explained that projects engaging in innovative activity provided them with the opportunity to “think outside the box” and to come up with new ways of helping people (particularly those at a disadvantage in the labour market) into employment. John outlined the process of Mainstreaming and the ultimate goal of enabling the project’s policy or activity to be adopted or funded by central, regional or local Government.
- 3.2 John gave the example of a project administered by NIACRO under EQUAL which had reduced re-offending rates of Prisoners by improving the process of re-integration into society due to increased interaction between the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Northern Ireland Office and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. NIACRO have also had transnational partners for this project Latvia and the Republic of Ireland.

3.3 John advised that a number of Member States defined mainstreaming as the dissemination of new ideas and it was recognised that there were weaknesses in this area. However, innovation has been enshrined in the new ESF Regulation and this puts a requirement on Managing Authorities to put in place an effective system for the identification of innovative projects for mainstreaming.

3.4 John provided Members with a list of successful projects (see attached excel spreadsheet) under the first call for Priority 1 of the NI ESF Programme and explained that approximately £31M ESF had been approved at 40%, DEL were making a contribution of £19M at 25% and the projects were required to find the remaining 35% match funding from the Public Sector. Of the 76 successful projects, 3 had indicated on the application form that they intended to engage in dedicated innovative activity. These are:

- NIACRO who will address the gaps in current labour market interventions in relation to offenders and discharged prisoners including engagement with employers and the development of legislation to enshrine social inclusion.
- TRIAX who will focus on the process of helping the long-term unemployed and economically inactive into employment by tackling the specific barriers faced by this target group e.g. confidence issues and take them to a point where they can actively seek employment themselves.
- North Belfast Employment Centre who will set up “Job Cafes” where the unemployed can meet in a comfortable social environment and discuss the steps to help them towards employment.

3.5 John advised that while three projects would engage in dedicated innovative activity it was likely that a number of the other 73 successful projects would engage in innovative activity but had not identified this on their application form. Engagement with the DEL case officers should help to identify where this is the case. John also highlighted that the Monitoring Committee had not set up a separate group to look at transnational activity and that the Working Group may

wish to consider this area within its remit as it traditionally goes hand in hand with innovation and that there will be 27 Projects engaging in transnational activity (including NIACRO and TRIAX).

- 3.6 John provided further papers on the outcomes from the EQUAL Initiative across Europe including details on a successful Estonian Project under EQUAL which he talked through ([Reinventing a future for compulsive gamblers in Estonia](#)) and a glossary of ESF terminology ([Innovation @ ESF live Glossary](#)). John also advised that the European Commission had an overarching Working Group (Community of Practice) on Innovation and Mainstreaming of which NI was a member and invited any interested member to attend a meeting of the Group (costs to be covered from Technical Assistance).
- 3.7 Trevor Connolly advised that the key principle of Innovation was to seek specific solutions to specific problems and to acknowledge that there was no 'one-size-fits-all' answer. While the Department had programmes which dealt with the needs of the majority of the unemployed (e.g. New Deal, Steps to Work) we needed to identify projects for mainstreaming to help those who needed extra help to move closer to or enter the labour market.
- 3.8 Audrey McKeown asked what weightings had been given to innovative activity in the selection process. John Neill explained that there was a scoring question on the ESF application focused on innovative activity and that projects were scored on their proposals for inherent or dedicated innovative activity.
- 3.9 Richard Millen asked if there were any incentives for Projects to undertake innovative activity. John Neill advised that the incentive would be to maximise project outcomes but that there would be no general incentives.
- 3.10 Declan Reilly added that the [EQUALNI](#) website was a source of detailed information on innovation and mainstreaming within the NI EQUAL programme.

4.0 Draft Terms of Reference

- 4.1 Trevor Connolly asked the Working Group if they had any comments on or issues with the draft Terms of Reference which had been circulated on 20 March 2008. Trevor clarified that the theme for the first call of the programme could not be changed as the project applications had been approved under the employability theme but under the second call in 2010 there would be opportunity for the Working Group to influence the theme(s).
- 4.2 Audrey McKeown felt that the reference to 'relevant policy makers' in paragraph 2.4. was vague. Trevor Connolly explained at this stage it would be difficult to be more specific as until activity commenced it would be impossible to identify who the relevant policy makers are.
- 4.3 Audrey McKeown stated that in paragraph 2.5 it would be preferable that Dedicated Innovative projects engage with two or more Member States rather than one or more as stated. Experience had shown that it was feasible that one partnership could fall for a variety of reasons, but that at least two should secure transnational working through the life of the project. John Neill confirmed that Audrey's proposal was in line with the principles of EQUAL. The Working Group agreed to make the proposed change.
- 4.4 John Doran queried the reference to the work programme and budget in paragraph 5.1. Trevor Connolly advised that a draft work programme for the Group would be produced by the Secretariat as directed by the Chair and presented to the Working Group for discussion and approval the budget for the work of the Group would come from Technical Assistance.

**Action Point 1: Secretariat to produce
draft Work Programme**

- 4.5 The remainder of the Terms of Reference were accepted by the Working Group. Trevor Connolly advised that the appropriate amendment will be made by the Secretariat and issued to members for final consideration before being placed before the Monitoring Committee for approval on 24 April 2008.

Action Point 2: Secretariat to amend the ToR and re-issue to all members for consideration

- 4.5 Cathal Mullaghan highlighted to Members that innovative activity must be needs based as evidenced in local labour markets issues. Cathal outlined a number of barriers to employment that restricted employment opportunities. Audrey also shared an example of a British Council project, Training Bridge that focused on getting trainees into non traditional occupations; however it was no longer receiving funding.

5.0 Any Other Business

- 5.1 There was no further business.

6.0 Date and venue of next meeting

- 6.1 It was agreed that the next meeting would be held in September to fit in with the cycle of the Monitoring Committee. It was proposed that the meeting would be held at one of the Dedicated Innovative Activity projects to allow the Working Group the opportunity to see a project in action. The Secretariat will liaise with the Chair and agree the exact date and venue as well as the content of the agenda for the next meeting.

Action point 3: Secretariat to liaise with Chair on arrangements for next meeting