

20 DECEMBER 2006

PURPOSE OF THIS CONSULTATION

This Consultation seeks views on the draft Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness and Employment Programmes for the seven year period 2007 to 2013. The consultation document specifically invites comment on the socio-economic and labour market analysis for the two programmes, the proposed strategy, priorities and expenditure areas to be funded with the focus on Lisbon Competitiveness and Employment priorities, the proposed cross-cutting themes for both programmes and the management and implementation arrangements.

EU Structural & Cohesion Funds are the second largest item of EU expenditure, and are used to promote regional development and employment across the EU Member States. Following a UK-wide public consultation in early 2006 and the publication in October 2006 of the UK National Strategic Reference Framework (<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance.european-funding/eu-future-funding.htm>) for spending EU Competitiveness & Employment funding across the UK, a specific Chapter set out the strategy and priorities for Northern Ireland's programmes expenditure.

This consultation document now provides detailed proposals on how the £325 million EU funding allocated to Northern Ireland's Competitiveness & Employment Programmes could be spent over the next seven years and seeks your views. Your responses to the consultation questions set out below will play an important part in the preparation of the final text of the Operational Programmes. Departmental officials would welcome discussions with social partners or others on the questions raised or to clarify points on the draft programmes.

In addition to this consultation, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) plans to launch separate consultations in January 2007 on an EU Peace & Reconciliation Programme 2007-2013 and a Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013 involving Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland – see SEUPB website www.seupb.org

The details of ‘How you Respond to this Consultation’ on the new Competitiveness & Employment Programmes is given at pages 17 to 19 of this document, with the consultation period and enquiry contacts set out below.

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Respond by: 14 March 2007

Enquiries: For General Enquiries on the Consultation and Specific Enquiries on the Competitiveness Programme contact

Colette FitzGerald,
Department of Finance & Personnel,
European Division,
Annex F, Health Estates,
Stoney Road, Dundonald BT16 1US
Telephone: 02890 523885
Email: EudConsultation.cfg@dfpni.gov.uk
Fax: 02890 523890

For Specific Enquiries on the ESF Employment Programme contact

Rosemary Mulholland
Department for Employment & Learning
European Policy Unit,
Adelaide House,
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8FD
Telephone: 02890 257661
Email: rosemary.mulholland@delni.gov.uk
Fax: 02890 257646