WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE

EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014-2020

Date: 12 November 2020

Time: 9.30a.m

Venue: Virtual via MS Teams

AGENDA

1.	Welcome and apologies	09:30 – 09:35	
2.	Minutes of September meeting, actions and other matters arising	09:35 – 09:40	WPMC(20)M21
3.	Update on ESI Funds Progress, including portfolio Development: • RDP • ERDF • ESF	09:40 – 10:00 10:00 – 10:20 10:20 – 10:40	WPMC(20)175
4.	ESF Modification – New Priority for Health and Social Care	10:40 – 11:00	WPMC(20)176
5.	Evaluation Update	11:00 – 11:20	WPMC(20)177
6.	Cross Cutting Themes	11:20 – 11:40	WPMC(20)178
7.	Rural Development Programme Communications Update	11:40 – 12:00	WPMC(20)179
8.	Annual European Structural Funds Communications Plan	12:00 – 12:20	WPMC(20)180
9.	AOB	12:20 – 12:30	

**EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014-2020
WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday 9th September 2020
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams.**

Meeting Notes

ITEM 1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

1. The Chair welcomed Members to the virtual meeting of the Wales Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC), in what continues to be extraordinary and challenging times for all. European Commission (EC) officials were also thanked for their attendance and for their continued engagement.

2. Attendees and apologies are listed at **Annex A**

3. The Chair advised Members of meeting protocols, explaining the approach to be adopted should technology issues/ difficulties arise and therefore Members unable to signify their agreement of the Annual Implementation Reports.

ITEM 2: Minutes of October 2019 meeting, actions and other matters arising

4. The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

ITEM 3: General Update

Overview of Structural Funds:

5. Peter Ryland, WEFO Chief Executive Officer, provided the overall position of the ESI programmes, together with the current status for the ERDF and ESF programmes. The proposed programme modifications to be covered at a later agenda item. Recent developments and future priorities include:
   - Action to further address COVID 19 pandemic;
   - Management and delivery of programme (over-commitments; exchange rate and EC Audit risks)
   - Recent announcements of UK support schemes, e.g. Kickstart and implications for the programmes
   - Latest position on UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and development of the new regional investment model

6. Programmes currently more than 100% committed based on a planning rate of €1:17:£1. At the last PMC commitment figures stood at 95% ERDF and 97% ESF. WEFO would ideally wish to see the planning rate equate to €1.10:£1 as commitment would fall nearer to 100%. Operations approved to date amount to 256, equating to £3.9bn, with £858m of funds spent. Currently 19 operations in business planning stage. Addressing the ERDF and ESF programmes:

    ERDF
    -   145 operations approved, 105 in West Wales & the Valleys (WWV), 40 in East Wales (EW), with a total of £452m spent
    -   N+3 targets for 2020 have been met.
    -   Recent approvals include:
        o   Superfast fibre, £15.6m
        o   Nova Innovation, £1.3m
        o   Pembroke Dock Marine programme, £14.9m
        o   Swansea University SPECIFIC, £6m

    ESF
    -   111 operations approved, 68 in WWV and 43 EW, with a total of £406m spent
    -   N+3 targets met
    -   Recent approvals include:
        o   extension for Chwarae Teg Agile Nation, £6m
        o   Workways Plus (collaboration between Neath Port Talbot, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, £3m)
        o   Circular Economy Innovation Communities, £2m

7. Peter updated Members on developments over the last 6 months, the most overwhelming feature being the COVID-19 pandemic. The following areas were highlighted:

    In addressing COVID-19:

    -   recognition and appreciation extended to Guus and all colleagues within the EC for the speed and depth of reaction to the crisis via the flexibilities afforded to Member States/ Managing Authorities by the introduction of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative
    -   despite the wide range of CRII flexibilities, governance requirements had & will not change as value for money for re-deployed funds remains essential
    -   WEFO will contribute to the Welsh Government COVID-19 fighting fund which is being co-ordinated by a sub-committee of the Cabinet i.e. the Star Chamber. Central co-ordination will ensure that relative needs/ priorities to fight COVID-19 across Wales are maximised with no duplication of effort

- all activities supported by WEFO will adhere to core EU regulatory requirements i.e. eligibility/ audit, together with assurance of attainment of the endorsed operational programmes outputs/ results
- ESF Programme will need to be modified to enable WEFO to award financial support via a new Priority Axis i.e. 'Containing COVID through Capacity' to enhance the capacity of health and social care services to deal with COVID-19

The Future and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF):

- announcement by UK Gov. of the 'UK Internal Market Bill' - conclusions should not be drawn at this point in time as to what this means in terms of powers to allocate/ spend money within devolved administrations (DAs) post 2020
- UK Gov. has always maintained that a UKSPF will be the successor to the structural funds – how this is distributed to DAs and particularly in consideration of our devolution settlement remains an outstanding area to be addressed
- the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, Jeremy Miles MS, will meet with the Minister of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) – to discuss/ raise issues of concern in respect of the successor to the structural funds in Wales.
- Consultation period for Regional Investment Programme ran from February to June 2020, extended due to COVID-19 to provide more opportunity for people to respond. All responses are currently being analysed, with results being published later this month
- Cabinet has been updated on the programme & a Ministerial Working Group has been established, inclusive of PMC Chair and 4 other Ministers. The Group will take key decisions on regionalisation, simplification of rules and processes, transition and impact of COVID-19. A number of stakeholders have been feeding into these key topics via the External Steering Group & it is anticipated that more detailed proposals will be presented to Cabinet, October 2020
- UKSPF, currently awaiting lines, however continue to liaise with other DAs. Ministers met, 1 September, with another meeting scheduled for 22 September
- The OECD report will be launched 17 September 2020. It's a challenging report and following its launch, events will be held at the end of the month in each of the 4 regions to discuss what the recommendations mean for each region and also to look at capacity and how to deliver

8. The Chair thanked Peter & Rachel Garside-Jones for their presentations/ updates, noting that in respect of future programmes further discussion required as well as Ministerial input. The Chair invited questions from Members. In

discussion the following point was raised - the need for an Equalities overview for the programme and also the COVID-19 fund. Members were advised that the Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) will be an agenda item for the next meeting & an in-depth review on how WEFO is performing in terms of the CCT will be provided. Currently, there are no major concerns emerging.

Overview of Rural Development Programme:

9. Tim Render, Director Environment and Rural Affairs Director introduced himself to Members & provided the following update on progress of the Rural Development Programme since the last PMC:
   - Programme continues to make strong progress since its approval, May 2015 with the data published to the end of July 2020
   - overall programme spend to date has increased by over £108m since the last PMC to £451m (of this £320m is EAFRD) and of the total payments to date £174.9m relates to Pillar I transfer payments
   - Project level commitment for the programme stands at £702m, representing 84% commitment against the programme allocation. Current forecasts indicate no issues in achieving the programme in full.

   Since the last PMC meeting a number of Scheme windows have opened, these being:
   - 9th Window of Glastir Woodland Creation
   - 8th Window of Glastir Woodland Restoration
   - 7th Window of the Farm Business Grant
   - 2 x Windows of ENRaW – the Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing Grant Scheme

Responding to Covid-19 and Brexit:

10. Covid-19 has impacted upon RDP plans to be further ahead in terms of commitment of the funds. However, having additional flexibility to commit funds until the end of the programme is welcomed & will assist. RDP will be focussing upon a seamless transition to the successor domestically funded programmes.

11. In terms of Agriculture, the following areas were highlighted to Members:
    - more clarity on the UK position than currently provided for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - with a clear manifesto commitment to maintain the same level of agriculture funding across of all CAP Programmes, which includes Rural Development for the lifetime of the UK Parliament
    - Currently consulting on legislative proposals for the next calendar year to use powers anticipated through the UK Agricultural Bill – providing powers to UK, Ireland and Wales in respect of spending. Legislation should be in place by the end of 2020

12. The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs has made a Written Statement, 8th September, announcing £108m of rural development schemes over the next 3 years, including £53m to fully commit the remainder of the Programme. Many aspects of the rural economy have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Welsh Government is fully aware of these impacts, hence significant investment. Emphasis has been placed upon supporting a green recovery in Wales in the allocation of this funding, so ensuring safeguards for the environment and enabling the rural economy to thrive. The following priorities will be addressed:

- woodland creation and restoration, a key step in tackling climate change
- building resilience into our natural resources and improving biodiversity, which underpin our wellbeing and quality of life.
- supporting farm businesses to enhance their technical and environmental performance, improving their sustainability.
- supporting food businesses, including a focus on business and supply chain productivity improvement and business resilience
- Sustainable Farming and our Land (SFaoL) consultation. Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs made a statement to the Senedd on 8th July, announcing the publication of the Welsh Government's policy response and reaffirming our intention to publish a White Paper before the end of 2020 which will set out the scope of an Agriculture (Wales) Bill to be introduced in the next Senedd term (2021/22). The Bill will be strategic, setting a support framework to accommodate the development of agriculture and forestry within Wales for the next fifteen to twenty years

   As a result of the announcement a Programme modification will be required. Work is currently being undertaken and papers will be circulated to PMC Members, in order to obtain agreement of the modification prior to formal submission to the EC.

13. Members were updated on a recent Audit Wales report, 30 June 2020, which has outlined a number of recommendations for WG to adopt in assessing value for money (VFM) via the RDP programme. The recommendations, in the main, relating to historic RDP projects, have been acknowledged & officials will ensure robust mechanisms are established to ensure VFM moving forward.

AP: Members to be provided with slides setting out how the RDP Programme has contributed to Priorities 2 to 6.

The Chair thanked Tim for his overview and requested comments/ questions from Members. In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members welcomed the update in respect of the audit report and (a) signified their appreciation of the management of the programmes & it's progress with 88.4% commitment and (b) acknowledged the resulting actions being undertaken to address the audit recommendations. Some expressed surprise

that the report had not been brought before the PMC when it had specifically raised concerns around the procedure for direct applications previously.

- A need for Members to be updated/ provided with written RDP reports outlining recent Ministerial announcements i.e. The Rural Economy announcement of £106 million, prior to meetings in order to enable informed discussion. This is of particular importance when considering the number of schemes operated by the Programme and the need for PMC to monitor progress in terms of commitment/ spend.

- A Member asked for a breakdown of the £106m, what was allocate to RDP 2014-2020 and what was allocated to the new programme. It was agreed that this would be dealt with outside of the meeting due to the level of detail. Members were informed that spend and commitment figures contained on the WG website had been updated (latest figures, to 31July 2020) & monthly updates will continue.

- Members questioned if there would be any further announcements expected as the Minister's press release only referenced 3 years, and whilst Members welcomed the reassurances the announcement provided to certain schemes, the statement did not afford similar assurances to Glastir contract holders. A link to the Written Statement made by the Minister on 7 September 2020 was provided.

- A member questioned the basis upon which funds were allocated, specifically raising the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-Being Scheme which had already received a budget allocation of £26m and to date had not spent any of this funding.

- The remainder of the RDP budget & how it should be allocated has been challenging, especially when considering (a) EU priorities, (b) COVID-19 and (c) response to the climate emergency. The schemes/ measures that have been chosen are considered the most appropriate to respond to all these requirements, whilst recognising that the Programme must also address future domestic funding from UK Government for the financial year 2021/ 22

- Schemes will open Autumn/ Winter of this year and are anticipated to run in parallel with securing formal agreement to the fourth Programme modification. This will enable contracts to be signed and spending to commence. Details of all 'opening windows' for Schemes will be published on the website and Members will be notified

The Chair thanked all for their contributions & agreed that Members should be kept informed of programme issues/ announcements via reports/ website updates etc.; in advance of scheduled meetings. However, in acknowledging, the Chair reminded Members that the primary purpose of today's meeting is to agree/ endorse the Annual Implementation Reports in order that they can be submitted to the EC by 30 September 2020. The next meeting, November 2020, will be in its usual format enabling specific programmes/ funds issues to be scrutinised/ addressed.

Item 4: Annual Implementation Report Presentation and Approval

14. Richard Self, WEFO, Head of Research Monitoring and Evaluation directed Members to papers WPMC(20)167, WPMC(20)168, WPMC(20)169, WPMC(20)170 & WPMC(20)171, explaining the draft Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) detail the activities undertaken by the Managing Authority to implement the Programmes during the period 1 January to 31 December 2019. The reports will be submitted to the EC by 30 September (EC extended deadline due to COVID-19), following PMC approval. The format of the reports were outlined to Members prior to presentation of the following 'key' highlights for each programme:

ERDF
- good progress in terms of commitment by end of 2019
- WW&V 97% commitment & EW fully committed by 2019
- key backbone operations approved and moving into delivery stage;
- Performance Reserve targets secured for both ERDF Programmes, except for Priority 3 EW, resulting in a modification being submitted to/ approved by the EC, December 2019 whereby a small amount of funds reallocated to Priority 1

ESF:
- good progress in terms of commitment by end of 2019 - EW commitment at 84% & WW&V fully committed
- Priority 5, proposals in the pipeline with first approvals expected in 2020. As a result a modification was submitted to the EC, October 2019, to reallocate €1m from Priority 5 of each programme to Priority 2

15. Richard outlined the indicator highlights for the ERDF and ESF programmes as noted within the AIRs and provided the following explanations in respect of implementation issues:
- ERDF EW Priority 3 – due to the performance reserve financial target not being achieved funds moved to Priority 1 where full utilisation of funds will be realised
- ESF – Managing Authority will achieve agreed targets by the end of the programme period. This will be assured with regular stakeholder engagement/ review meetings and liaison between beneficiaries and the Managing Authority

RDP:
- Progress against finance issues - by the end of 2019 the total accumulative programme funds was €753m. The highest accumulative commitment was by

Priority 4 with €350m and Priority 6 with €181m, with €222m committed under the remaining priorities

- Highest accumulative commitment by measures were - Measure 10 with €211m, Measure 4 with €181m, Measure 1 with €88m, Measure 16 with €95m and Measure 19 with €59m. There is €119m commitment within the remaining Measures
- Total payments for the reporting period equate to €425m, representing 44% of programme allocation. Of those payments €47m were pillar 1 transfers
- Indicators - outputs 1, 2 &16 have progressed well & details are noted within the AIR
- Measure 4.1, Stainable Production and Farm Business Grants 2,969 holding payments were received (previously 624)
- Measure 4.4 which covers the capital work elements of Glastir and Small Grants Scheme recorded 6,309 operations supported with nearly €47m in payments

16. Members were informed of four pieces of research being completed during 2019. These, together with a brief outline of their findings can be located at Section 2e of the reports. A summary of the 'key' findings being:
- first phase of the Farming Connect mid-term evaluation - support leading to small scale incremental changes over a period of time, delivering outcomes that would not have been achieved and/ or would have taken longer been lower in quantity or less sustainable in the absence of the programme
- Refugee's Employments and Skills Support Study - key barrier to employment lack of alignment between skills of refugees and expectation of employers. No specific barriers presented by rurality, although rurality did exacerbate more generic barriers such as transport, childcare and the weakness of labour markets
- Common Evaluation Question (CEQ) work - programme structure is complex, and while this presents difficulties for evaluation, it is not necessarily an issue for beneficiaries
- Review of the Food Business Investment Scheme - findings were positive and recipients believed the scheme filled a gap due to the lack of suitable funding alternatives. Those that formed part of the research achieved what they expected and four key areas of impact were employment, training, turnover and environmental sustainability

RDP implementation issues:
- Programme control statistics informed a decrease in error rates in the random sample for area based measures, down from 3.25% to 1.86% since the last report

- Welsh Government has increased the rate of on the spot checks for the Integrated Agricultural Control System
- Error rate for investment measures reduced from 0.35% in 2018 to 0.18% in 2019. Welsh Government continues to work with Farmers via Farm Outreach to improve understanding of scheme rules & to minimise irregularities.

17. Members recognised/ acknowledged the good progress for each Programme and thanked the Managing Authority for its effective management. Points of clarification raised by Members in respect of the AIRs, centred upon the following:
    - what response will be undertaken by the ESF Programme to the challenges faced as a result of COVID-19 pandemic – to be addressed at Agenda Item 6
    - RDP, is there evidence to demonstrate improvements have & are being achieved. Members were advised: (a) programme delivery increased considerably in recent years, (b) to date, evidence of impact of the programme has not been available due to the delay between delivery and realisation of outcomes/ impacts. Evaluations are beginning to produce initial findings, which are providing initial impressions of impact. Further evaluation work is ongoing which will assess impacts of the various schemes. The findings will be reported in the near future as part of AIR updates to the PMC where value indicators have decreased there will be a need for the Managing Authority and the EC to discuss outside of the meeting.

    AP: WEFO to discuss with the EC at a bilateral meeting.

18. The Chair (a) thanked Richard, WEFO and RDP colleagues for the work on the reports and for providing clarity to questions raised and (b) requested the Committee consider/ approve the AIRs. PMC Members agreed/ approved each AIRs, namely:
    - West Wales and the Valleys ERDF Annual Implementation Report WPMC(20)167
    - West Wales and the Valleys ESF Annual Implementation Report WPMC(20)168
    - East Wales ERDF Annual Implementation Report WPMC(20)169
    - East Wales ESF Annual Implementation Report WPMC(20)170
    - RDP Annual Implementation Report WPMC(20)171

Item 5: ERDF Modification

19. Sue Price, WEFO Head of Programme Management Division, ERDF, presented the paper & supplementary slides noting the third modification to the ERDF programme. Members were advised of the core EU regulatory requirement that they examine and approve any programme modifications prior to submission to

the EC for endorsement. The need for the modifications were highlighted to Members, namely:

- due to COVID-19, changes required in respect of business finance and business support. Initial review of both ERDF Programmes necessitates reallocation of ERDF across Thematic Objectives & Priority Axes to respond to COVID-19
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) changes, only initial changes at first with an external commissioning for a review of all Priorities KPIs at the end of the financial year. This will inform of any further changes to KPIs
- assessment around two elements – COVID-19 response to Business Finance and Business Support and ongoing support to the Low Carbon Agenda. WW&V & EW activity mirror each other with subtle changes. WW&V Priority 2 is a suite of operations that supports businesses. WG & UK Gov. provided a number of schemes to assist businesses when the pandemic hit, however, recognised a significant gap in the commercial market for possibly structural funds could fill, The ex-ante assessment originally undertaken to establish the gap for the current Financial Instruments found a requirement for debt and equity
- Hatch Regeneris undertook the ex-ante evaluation on behalf of WEFO and its subsequent recommendations/ findings are outlined within paper WPMC(20)172. Sue provided Members with a summary of the proposed ERDF Programme changes for WW&V and EW, outlining (a) revised financial tables at Annex A in euros and (b) proposed changes to KPIs housed at Annex B

20. In discussion, the following areas were highlighted:
- Priority 3 performance and how this will be addressed. Sue advised (a) Priority energy sites now rests at 5 schemes not 2, (b) renewable energy prototype testing target was 8 but is now 6, (c) marine energy very challenging area, with long lead in time when considering development, obtaining necessary consents and funding packages & having to achieve by December 2023
- Financial Instruments (FIs) – Members recognised the importance of the findings of the ex-ante review by Hatch Regeneris, with particular read across to the future Regional Investment Programme i.e. being outcomes based with FIs a favourable mechanism for delivery as opposed to grants. Similarly, for marine energy operations equity investment will be required for the next phase i.e. commercialisation, so potentially FIs to be utilised & being mindful of risks & how to manage the risks associated with this delivery tool
- WEFO should investigate the option to request 100% reimbursement in the coming year and which will put it on an equal footing with other Programmes

- EU will make decision in respect of the proposed modification within a very short timeframe. In light of this, WEFO will address COVID-19 related indicators prior to submission of the modifications to the EU.

AP: Technical issues with the ERDF modification to be clarified prior to submission to the EC.

21. Chair thanked Sue for her comprehensive presentation and formally requested Members for approval of the proposed ERDF modifications. Members accepted/ approved.

Item 6: New ESF Priority for Health and Social Care

22. Geraint Green, WEFO Head of Programme Management ESF & Territorial Cooperation, directed Members to paper WPMC(20)173 and provided an outline of the new priority, 'Containing COVID through Capacity', i.e. it's background via the EU CRII & the ability to be able to support healthcare costs due to COVID-19 pandemic.

23. WEFO recognises that providing support to Health and Social Care will be fundamental to Wales to stem the economic impact of COVID-19 and therefore has taken the opportunity to introduce the new priority. In development, WEFO has considered/ applied advice from respective WG policy areas, in order to ensure a robust/ strategic package of support which will focus upon the areas of most need i.e. recruiting additional staff into health/ social care settings and provision/ costs of personal protective equipment (these two elements forming the results indicators for the new Priority). In addition, the recommendations of the First Minister's BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group will be addressed by the priority.

24. The proposed ESF allocation for the Priority has been forecast at £100m & has been modelled upon anticipated de-commitments within other ESF Priorities & exchange rate fluctuations. Upon approval the initial/ majority of activity to be supported will be retrospective activity, with remaining funds being attributed to subsequent second phase activity. Therefore commitment/ spend levels will be achieved rapidly.

25. The Chair informed Members that there will be an opportunity to look at the new priority in more depth/ detail at the next meeting, however requested interim comments/ observations. Members highlighted the following:
    - Another good example of how to develop and take forward the future Regional Investment Programme, via incremental synergistic outcomes based investment. However, as ESF Programme is fully committed, how will WEFO synchronise the development/ implementation of the priority to ensure 'real' money available. WEFO recognises this and with its vast knowledge/ experience of programme management, it will need to over-commit funds,

whilst ensuring no curtailment or de-commitment applied to other project/ programme activity. Members were assured that in forecasting the allocation for the new priority all these factors have been addressed, together with the realisation that underspend of already approved programme activity generally runs at 10%

- Recognition of how innovative and adaptive the programme can be was acknowledged and welcomed. Assurance sought as to how this will translate into a broader economic benefit for example looking at procurement practice – how to encourage/ ensure/ incentivise/ award good procurement in the health sector. For retrospective activity & the nature of the product (PPE) recognised that as an emergency response the health/ social care sector will have applied standard/ established procurement policies. Moving forward, WEFO will ensure equality & sustainability addressed within complaint procurement practices/ procedures & this will be reflected within the indicative actions for the priority
- Social care sector to be considered/ involved at the early stages of development of the priority. Members informed that this action has occurred however too early a stage at that point in time. WEFO confirmed that it will revisit and will need to manage (a) expectations as to the level of funding available and (b) governance restrictions placed upon the sector

ITEM 7: AOB

26. Members noted the following concern in terms of the RDP:

- if the UK had not decided to leave the EU, extensive consultation/ stakeholder engagement to agree the next RDP, inclusive of plans to for a PMC, would by this point in time have been well established. However, Members of this PMC informed how funds have already been committed on a new programme, via an announcement by the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs on 8 September. Welsh Government will need to consider how this is addressed. Members were advised of (a) two green paper consultations setting out Welsh Government proposals for future Agricultural Support. A White Paper is proposed for the end of 2020 with a view to introducing an Agriculture (Wales) Bill, in the next Senedd term. In the short term, proposals to extend current schemes until the Bill is available are currently being consulted upon, which will address this and (b) the extensive work that has been undertaken in respect of consultation/ engagement with external stakeholders for the replacement Regional Investment Funds, which the Chair of this PMC leads upon via the Regional Investment in Wales Steering Group. This same detailed attention to both RDP and Future Agriculture Food and Farming will need to be addressed and replicated.

The next meeting of the PMC is arranged for 12 November 2020. The format of the meeting will depend upon the COVID-19 situation, however for the time

being will be arranged via Microsoft Teams. The Secretariat will contact Members if the situation changes.

27. Dates of future meetings are as follows, however will need to be confirmed and are subject to change:

      12th February 2021
      7th May 2021
      10thSeptember 2021

28. The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting, stating that it was tricky enough doing this work however doing it virtually is doubly difficult both for committee Members and as well as officials and EC attendees. The Chair thanked all for their comments and continued engagement.

PMC Secretariat September 2020

ANNEX A
EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014-2020 WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 9 September 2020
Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

Chair – Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Members nominated on a representative basis, from partners and statutory bodies:

Tom Whyatt	Business and Enterprise (Industry Wales)
Lowri Owain	LEADER
Lowri Gwilym	Alternate for Cllr Rob Stewart & Cyng. Dyfrig Siencyn, Local Government (WLGA)
Charlotte Priddy	Farming Union Wales (FUW)
Rachel Lewis-Davies	National Farmers Union (NFU)
Huw Bryer	Welsh Government Economy, Skills & Natural Resources
Matthew Brown	Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)
David Blaney	HEFCW
Scott Morgan	Welsh Government
Rhian Jardine	Natural Resources Wales
Ceri Jones	Alternate for Prof. Steve Wilkes, Swansea University
Iestyn Davies	Further Education
Nigel Hollett	CLA
Alison Parken	Equality and Human Rights Commission

Members selected via the Public appointments process:
Beth Winkley
Sian Price
Grahame Guilford
Dai Davies

Advisors:

Guus Muijzers	European Commission, DG Regio
Susan Fleming	European Commission, DG Employ
Marek Beran	European Commission, DG Agri
Sacha Bartovic	European Commission, DG Agri

Programme Managing Authorities:

Peter Ryland	Chief Executive, WEFO
Tim Render	Head of Managing Authority RDP
Sue Price	Head of EDRF Programmes, WEFO
Geraint Green	Head of ESF Programmes, WEFO
Jon Mercer	Senior Evidence Manager, WEFO
Richard Self	Head of Research, Monitoring and Evaluation, WEFO
James Burgess	Deputy Head RDP Managing Authority
Cath Cleaton	Secretariat
Michelle Rolls	Secretariat
Vanessa Crew	Secretariat
Kellie Ward	Secretariat

Apologies:

Derek Walker	Business and Enterprise: Social Enterprises (Third Sector)
Cyng. Dyfrig Siencyn	WLGA
Helen Matthews	DWP
Prof. Steve Wilkes	Further Education
Cllr Rob Stewart	WLGA

WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE, EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014 – 2020:

Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020

1. Overall RDP Programme Update

Welsh Government continues to make good progress in programme delivery. Based on a planning exchange rate of £1:€1.176, the current policy level commitment for the Programme is £835m (£557m EU funding) which is just over 100% of the Programme. As at September 2020 project level commitment stands at £707m, representing 84.7% commitment in funds, the total value of the programme is £834,816,280. Overall, Programme spend to date has increased by over £3m since the last PMC to £454m (£322m EAFRD), of this £175m relates to Pillar I transfer payments.

Monitoring Data is published on the Welsh Government website [here](#).

£ Millions

Allocation[1]		Committed[2]				Spend[2]			
TOTAL	EAFRD	TOTAL		EAFRD		TOTAL		EAFRD	
835	557	707	(85%)	491	(88%)	454	(54%)	322	(58%)

Source: WEFO, 30-09-2020

[1] Based on a planning exchange rate of £1:€1.176
  2   Percentages show share of allocation

2. **Programme Amendment (Modification)**

The European Commission approved the third Programme Amendment on the 13th December 2019. The Welsh Government is currently preparing the content for a proposed fourth Programme Amendment, to support farmers, landowners and the rural economy through a green recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs made a Written Statement on Tuesday 8th September giving details of the proposed schemes to fully commit the remainder of the Programme, highlighting the priority given to:

- Woodland creation and restoration, a key step in tackling climate change.
- Building resilience into our natural resources and improving biodiversity, which underpin our wellbeing and quality of life.
- Supporting farm businesses to enhance their technical and environmental performance, improving their sustainability.
- Supporting food businesses, including a focus on business and supply chain productivity improvement and business resilience.
A technical meeting will take place with the EC in November following which a paper will be circulated to PMC Members to outline the content of the proposed Amendment and seek their opinion, by written procedure, prior to formal submission to the European Commission.

3. **Scheme Update**

European Innovation Partnership (EIP)
Delivery of the EIP in Wales to date has been successful, encouraging participation by farmers coming together as Operational Groups (OGs), as of 31 August 2020 with 223 farmer members in total across 46 approved OGs. A total of £1,799,785 has been awarded between the 46 groups, at an average of £39,350 per group (the maximum eligible support is £40k).

Knowledge Transfer & Innovation (KT&I)
The enhanced KT&I programme is continuing to provide support in transforming the business prospects of thousands of farmers and foresters. As at 31 August 2020 a total of 11,126 Businesses with 23,112 individuals registered and engaged with the programme. More information on Farming Connect programme delivery can be found here.

Rural Business Advisory Service (RBAS)
RBAS provides expert, independent, confidential and bespoke advice to registered Farming Connect businesses. As of 31 August 2020 a total of 4,471 businesses have benefitted from business support and/or technical advice, tailored to their business needs. There has been a significant increase in group based advisory service with 2,538 individuals supported through engagement with 690 groups.

Food Business Investment Scheme (FBIS)

FBIS has resulted in over £137m of new capital investments into Wales to date and continues to attract new and exciting investments within the sector, to help aid and support the agri food sector.

Timber Business Investment Scheme (TBIS)
The Welsh Government has delivered 4 successful rounds of TBIS over the past 5 years, with a further round due to open in 2021. This scheme has enabled private forest owners, local authorities or other public sector forest owners to make capital investments that add value to the forests in Wales through woodland management activities, timber harvesting and/or timber processing.

Farm Business Grant (FBG)
Farm Business Grants of between £3,000 and £12,000 are available and allow farmers to make important investments in their businesses to support production efficiencies and improve productivity and on-farm sustainability. The grant provides funding towards the cost of a wide range of equipment, from handling systems and technology for precision farming, to equipment for more efficient use of resources. As the industry enters a critical period of change, businesses need to take this opportunity to ensure any investment they make supports them to become more sustainable, prosperous and resilient for the future.

The seventh round of the FBG opened on 2 March 2020 and closed on 10 April. 415 FBG contracts were offered in the first selection and a further 36 in the second selection. 400 have accepted the contract offer. Of this round, to date, a total of 310 claims have been submitted and 255 claims have been processed for payment worth £925,000

Glastir Small Grants:
RPW have written to all Glastir Small Grants (GSG) contract holders to explain the claim deadline had been extended to 30 September as a result of the floods at the beginning of the year, followed by the Covid-19 outbreak. All other 2020 capital works claim deadlines remain unchanged, however, officials will keep deadlines under review as the Covid-19 regulations and measures are updated. 766 claims have been received and 76% have been processed for payment worth £888,300.

The GSG Water 2020 EOI window closed on 4 September 2020. 3,322 contracts have now been issued to farm businesses, worth over £2.8m. Those who accept their contracts will have until 31 March 2021 to complete their capital works and submit a claim and supporting geo-tagged photographs.

Sustainable Production Grant (SPG)
Grants range from £12,000 to £50,000 as a maximum 40% contribution to project costs. The items supported include, amongst other things, covered and uncovered slurry storage and management equipment. This will give more farmers the opportunity to take the lead in tackling agri-pollution to improve water, soil and air quality. The level of interest in most rounds of the SPG has demonstrated farmers are willing to invest in their businesses to become more sustainable, prosperous and resilient.

Over 290 claims for SPG windows 1-3 have been processed for payment, worth over £12.50m. Only 4 claims remain outstanding. 100 claims have been received for SPG windows 4 - 6, of which 66% have been processed for payment, worth £511,604. Every effort is being made to process the outstanding claims as quickly as possible. SPG claims are often complex and require further information from the claimant or the completion of an in-situ administrative check before payment can be made.

Glastir Woodland Creation (GWC)
Successful applicants under GWC Window 7 have until 31 March 2021 to complete and until the 30 April 2021 to submit a claim their projects. Successful applicants under GWC Window 8 window have until 31st March 2022 to complete and until the 30 April 2022 to claim their projects. The 9th GWC Expression of Interest (EOI) window closing date was extended from 12 June to 31 July 2020. The budget for this window had a fourfold increase from the previous round to £8m. EOIs could only be submitted by a registered Glastir woodland planner.

The offer and acceptance process was changed for GWC9. Offer of selection was to be followed by offer of contract, if acceptance received by RPW. To shorten the process further, RPW have now combined the offer of selection and contract into one document, referred to as the contract. Customers are being invited to accept or decline their contract. When accepting, customers need to confirm their Claim Year of either 2021/22 or 2022/23 and give an indication of the area of planting to be undertaken in a planting season.

The first tranche of GWC9 contract offers was communicated to successful applicants on the 30 September 2020. 247 successful EOIs were given the opportunity to accept or decline the offer of contract and submit a Plan for verification. These 247 EoI applications amount to 1,840ha worth of planting at a planting cost of £7,114,813.

There is no set closing date for submitting plans for GWC9. However, applicants must ensure that they factor enough time to allow the verification process to be carried out in order for the new woodland to be established before the final claim date.   Successful applicants under GWC Window 9 who have chosen to be funded under claim year 1 have until 31st March 2022 to complete and until the 30 April 2022 to claim their projects. Applicants who have chosen to be funded under claim year 2 have until 31st March 2023 to complete and until the 30 April 2023 to claim their projects.

Glastir Woodland Restoration (GWR)
An eighth GWR EOI window opened on 16 March 2020 and closed on 24 April, with a budget of £2m. Successful applicants under GWR8 who have chosen to be funded under claim year 1 have until 31st March 2022 to complete and until the 30 April 2022 to claim their projects. Applicants who have chosen to be funded under claim year 2 have until 31st March 2023 to complete and until the 30 April 2023 to claim their projects. Successful applicants under GWR7 have until 31 March 2021 to complete and until the 30 April 2021 to claim their projects. A ninth GWR EOI window has been announced and will open on 18 May 2021 and close on 25 June 2021, with a budget of £1m.

Glastir Advanced
Glastir Advanced contract holders whose initial 5 year contract is due to end on 31 December 2020 will be offered a renewal, whilst those whose contract has previously been renewed will be offered an extension, both until 31 December 2021. RPW intends to issue 1,233 contracts worth £17.3m.

Glastir Commons
132 Glastir Commons contract holders whose existing contract is due to end on 31 December 2020 will be offered an extension until 31 December 2021. The extended contracts are worth £4m.

Glastir Organics
499 Glastir Organic contract holders whose existing contract is due to end on 31 December 2020 will be offered an extension until 31 December 2021. The extended contracts are worth just under £3.4m.

Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS)
The fifth SMS window opened 21 May 2019 – 8 August 2019 with an allocation of £3m available. Decision notifications were sent out on or after the 8 October 2019. All 8 project sponsors met the deadline of 8 April 2020 to submit a full application despite the unprecedented situation of Covid-19. Currently there are 19 projects in appraisal over the 5 windows and 31 approved. The SMS evaluation is in its second phase with interviews being held with stakeholders. The outputs and outcomes are being collated by the SMS team and a portfolio of material will published as the first window of projects come to an end alongside a virtual stakeholder event being run by Wales Rural Network in November 2020.

Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (ENRaW)
ENRaW supports the development of collaborations and the delivery of actions through pilot projects to improve the environment and biodiversity of the land around us as well as the wellbeing and mental health of the communities and businesses who utilise and enjoy them. Actions will be undertaken to improve infrastructure and access to local facilities. These projects also bring a broad range of economic, social and cultural benefits.

The first ENRaW-RDP EOI window closed on 22 November 2019. A total of 20 Expressions of Interest were received. Following assessment, five projects were invited to develop full applications to the scheme at a value of £14.4m. The full applications for these projects are currently under appraisal. The second funding window closed in March 2020 and received 29 Expressions of Interest. Decisions relating to these expressions of interest were delayed as a result of Covid-19. Following moderation, twenty of the proposed projects, requesting £16.8M of grant support, have been invited to develop and submit full applications by December 2020 with a view to full applications being assessed and decisions letters processed by 31 March 2021.

LEADER
Welsh LEADER Local Action Groups are playing an active role in supporting their rural communities at this time of unprecedented challenge. LEADER has proven

itself to be is a useful socio-economic tool in the immediate response to the Covid-19 emergency, actions included:

- securing and distributing food and medical supplies to all, including the most rurally/socially isolated
- identifying local resources including co-ordinating volunteers and supporting short supply chains
- networking and collaborating to ensure an informed and appropriate approach to meet local needs

The Welsh Government's Wales Rural Network Support Unit has been gathering case studies and examples of best practice. Please see: https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/news-events-and-case-studies/news/wales-rural-network-covid-19-leader-activities-review

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs has approved the repurposing of the LEADER Scheme to continue to support rural communities through the recovery process.

Section 1: ERDF Programmes: Commitment

1. This section gives details of current financial progress under the ERDF Programmes, including an overview of the Programmes and information at Priority-level.
2. Table 1 shows the number and amount of EU Grant committed to approved Operations under the West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales ERDF Programmes.
3. Progress data for finance and indicators is published monthly on the WEFO Website at https://gov.wales/progress-programmes-eu-structural-funds-2014-2020

Table 1: EU Grant Commitment by Programme and Priority: Approved Operations

£ Millions

Priority	Operations	Allocation		Committed				Spend			
		Total¹	EU Grant¹	Total²		EU Grant²		Total³		EU Grant³	
West Wales and the Valleys ERDF											
1	34	406.7	270.2	477.5	(117%)	290.2	(107%)	211.6	(52%)	133.5	(49%)
2	8	291.0	183.3	329.2	(113%)	195.2	(106%)	277.0	(95%)	144.4	(79%)
3	16	221.2	153.8	171.2	(77%)	112.1	(73%)	71.2	(32%)	43.9	(29%)
4	41	689.1	453.0	787.7	(114%)	437.8	(97%)	143.7	(21%)	77.6	(17%)
5	7	28.8	21.5	30.1	(105%)	22.6	(105%)	14.0	(49%)	10.2	(47%)
Total	**106**	**1,636.7**	**1,081.7**	**1,795.6**	**(110%)**	**1,057.9**	**(98%)**	**717.5**	**(44%)**	**409.6**	**(38%)**
East Wales ERDF											
1	19	180.8	90.8	195.9	(108%)	89.2	(98%)	61.1	(34%)	26.7	(29%)
2	8	78.9	39.8	89.4	(113%)	42.5	(107%)	82.5	(105%)	37.9	(95%)
3	1	8.2	4.1	7.1	(86%)	3.6	(86%)	3.0	(36%)	1.5	(36%)
4	6	86.4	43.2	78.2	(91%)	39.1	(91%)	19.5	(23%)	9.7	(23%)
5	6	7.3	3.6	7.9	(109%)	3.4	(94%)	2.7	(38%)	1.3	(34%)
Total	**40**	**361.6**	**181.5**	**378.5**	**(105%)**	**177.8**	**(98%)**	**168.8**	**(47%)**	**77.0**	**(42%)**
Total ERDF	**146**	**1,998.3**	**1,263.2**	**2,174.2**	**(109%)**	**1,235.7**	**(98%)**	**886.3**	**(44%)**	**486.6**	**(39%)**

Source: WEFO, 30/09/2020

¹ Based on a conversion rate of £1:€1.10
² Percentages show committed as share of allocation
³ Percentages show spend as share of allocation

Overall Programme

4. The two ERDF Programmes continue to make good progress with 146 operations approved committing over £1,236 million grant representing 98% of the programme values (98% West Wales and the Valleys and 98% East Wales). These commitment figures have dropped slightly due to the change in the WEFO planning rate from 1.17/£ to 1.10/£. However when you take into account those last few remaining operations in business planning and the re-purposing of ERDF the commitment levels increase to 105% WWV and

102% EW. These are in line with previous programme over commitment levels and is a manageable risk to ensure we are able to maximise the draw-down of EU funds at final claim stage.

5. For the purpose of this update, the programme modifications have not been reflected in the above table, as the changes need to be ratified by the EU. However, the commentary in the update does reflect the proposed changes.

6. So far nearly £410m (38% WWV) and £77m (42% EW) has been paid out to ERDF project sponsors. Currently there are ERDF payments awaiting authorisation by WEFO amounting to £42m and £3m for WWV and EW respectively; taking these into account the payments to sponsors rise to £452m (42%) in WWV and £68m (35%) in EW.

7. These ERDF spend figures have translated into a draw-down of funds from the European Commission of 38% of the grant allocation in WWV and 45% of the grant allocation in EW which is above the EU average of 39%.

8. Both the EW and WWV Programmes have met their 2020 N+3 targets and are making good progress to meeting the 2021 targets.

Section 2: Progress by Priority Axis

Priority 1: Research and Innovation

Approvals Since the last PMC

9. There have been no new approvals since the last PMC.

10. The priority is fully committed in East Wales and West Wales and the Valleys. There continues to be high demand for the funds available for Research and Innovation led by the strategic importance of smart specialisation.

11. The Research and Innovation portfolio is led by the smart specialisation agenda, which is reflected in the backbone operations approved alongside the individual niche operations. The portfolio is made up of 53 approved operations a number of which are pan-wales, have been very technical in nature to approve, 1 proposal remains in development.

12. Taking into account updated evidence from current approvals and forecast assumptions, key indicators targets will be met and, in the following areas targets will be exceeded:

- Amount of research funding secured;
- Number of partners co-operating in research projects;
- Number of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities;
- Number of improved research infrastructure facilities.

Any changes to other P1 indicators for both Programmes will be considered as part of the externally commissioned review, which will also consider the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. The review will look at:

- Number of new researchers in supported entities;
- Number of enterprises support to introduce new to market products;
- Number of enterprises receiving grants;
- Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support;
- Number of new enterprises supported;
- Employment Increase;
- Number of patents registered for products.

13. On 13th March 2020 the European Commission launched the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) in order to mitigate the significant impact of the COVID 19 public health emergency on members' states. These ERDF regulations allows for specific interventions including 'investment in products and services necessary for fostering the crisis response capacities in health services'.

No additional funds was available to support these interventions, however a few operations have carried out activity, by re-purposing small amounts of their existing budget to aid the Covid response. For example:

- SPECIFIC 2 purchased chemicals and materials to produce volumes of hand sanitiser for the NHS;
- Centre for Photonics Expertise made use of their existing equipment and facilities to manufacture 3D CAD designs; body temperature detection using thermal images; and optical modelling;
- Supercomputing redeployed researchers;
- Data Innovation Accelerator redeployed researchers;
- Future Foods built a website to create and promote nutritious/affordable meal plans.

The basic governance requirements continued to be observed, including:

- Operating within the geographical limits of West Wales & the Valleys and the East Wales programmes;
- Operations will still need clear objectives, which will help define whether expenditure is a reasonable expense in pursuit of the appropriate indicators;
- Clear audit trails including agreement from the Covid Panel.

Priority 2: SME Competitiveness

Approvals since the last PMC

14. No new approvals since the last PMC update but new grant following the ex-ante has been awarded to the Business Wales Fund.

15. Following an ex ante assessment on the state-of-play of market gaps due to COVID, and as part of the £64m repurposed ERDF package, £15m ERDF has been added to the Wales Business Fund's as proposed in the modification paper presented to PMC at its last meeting. This brings the approval amounts of the WWV part of the Wales Business Fund to:

80806	2.1 Debt	£103.4
	2.1 Equity (Growth Capital)	£11.3
80908	2.5 Equity (Early Stage)	£25.9
	Total	**£140.5**

16. One of the key risks for this portfolio is the investment of significant levels of funding into a close family of operations. Whilst this strategically makes perfect sense, it does mean there is a very close alignment between operations in terms of delivery, keeping to budget and spending the funds available. As a result operations have developed closer ways of working, for example a cross referral process between the business support provided by the SME Support operations in EW and WWV and the Development Bank of Wales who provide financial support via the Wales Business fund.

17. WWV is fully committed, but the plans to repurpose ERDF in response to business needs due to the COVID pandemic would increase the level of over commitment for P2 whilst still keeping the overall Programme overcommitment level at 105%.

18. Whilst EW *was* fully committed, the change of the WEFO planning rate to 1.10/£ has reduced the level of commitment at programme level to 97.83% which equates to a £4.5m under commitment figure. WEFO's Programme Project Board has agreed to operate the EW Programme at an overcommitment level of 102% (smaller Programme, more difficult to recover significant overcommitment) which adds a further £3.6m to the pot to be committed. The proposal is to allocate this additional funding to the Wales Business Fund, £8.1m in total.

19. Taking into account updated evidence from current approvals and forecast assumptions, key indicators targets will be met and, in the following areas targets will be exceeded:

   o Investment in enterprises

- o Private investment matching public support to SMEs
- o Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
- o Employment increase in supported enterprises
- o Increase in level of export

Changes to a number of indicators under both Programmes will be considered as part of the external review including:

- o Enterprises adopting or improving sustainable development strategies
- o Enterprises adopting or improving diversity strategies

This externally commissioned review will consider the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic has had on indicators not least the situation we are experiencing that the current business growth direction of P2 has had to be adapted to business survival and which is likely to lead to the inclusion for the business support operations a new key indicator: jobs safeguarded.

Priority 3: Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

Approvals since the last PMC

	West Wales and the Valleys		East Wales	
	Total	EU Grant	Total	EU Grant
Penderry Energy Project	£4.85m	£3.34m		
Ynys Enlli Tidal Array	£1.81m	£1.22m		

20. As indicated in the above table one further Marine Energy operation and one Community Scale Energy operation have been approved in West Wales since the PMC was last updated, resulting in commitment for WWV now standing at 73%. While there is, still some way to go for full commitment progress is being made in this challenging portfolio.

21. Covid -19 has led to some delays in delivery in the Marine Energy portfolio presenting some risks but these are being closely monitored and all current operations remain on track to deliver to timetable .

22. Delivery of energy efficiency in housing picked up momentum at the start of the year and was delivering at pace, however both flooding and COVID have had an impact on delivery more recently. The lead department is considering options for extending the project.

23. The Withdrawal Agreement from the EU allowed more flexibility to pursue the development of operations in both marine energy and community energy. WEFO has reviewed those operations in the pipeline and determined those that can demonstrate the ability to deliver in full by end of 2023 to ensure funds are to be used to the best effect for the programme and sector.

24. The outcome of the review has played into the Programme Modification presented to the PMC in September 2020 where we proposed an increase to the number of Energy Site Preparation Schemes from 2 to 5, and to reduce the number of renewable energy prototypes tested from 8 to 6. The reduction in the latter is principally due to the challenges such emerging technologies are facing in raising sufficient finance to take projects forward. While there remain challenges and some uncertainties we are confident the priority will deliver on its objectives.

25. No other operations are foreseen in the EW priority and commitment remains at 86%. As no community energy schemes emerged following a call for proposals in 2017 it is proposed to remove this indicator in East Wales.

Priority 4: Connectivity and Urban Development

Approvals since the last PMC

26. There have been 2 new approvals in West Wales and the Valleys since the last PMC:

	West Wales and the Valleys	
	Total	EU Grant
Cross Hands East Gateway	£6.5m	£3.25m
Llangefni Gateway Phase 2	£4.9m	£2.3m

27. Priority 4 WWV is 97% committed having invested £134 million ERDF on Metro, £91m on TEN-T roads, £44m on Broadband and £57 million on 21 regionally prioritised Sites and Premises operations. The latter has been boosted by the approval of the two new operations above together with additional allocations to further deliver on a number of existing operations as prioritised by the RETs (£8.7m in total). The Backbone Tourism Attractor Destination operation has witnessed an additional allocation of £3m to incorporate a fourteenth project. All £30.7 million ERDF available to this operation has now been fully committed and all projects are now in delivery with some already complete. Equally the backbone Building for the Future operation continues to progress with all £38m ERDF now committed to 25 projects. WEFO is aware that progress on a few of these has been impacted as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and that a small number might be lost to the programme. The Building for the Future team is looking at options for reallocating any de-committed monies.

28. The challenges for this portfolio going forward will be to keep all operations on track in terms of delivery, budget and spend especially in light of Covid 19. There is limited opportunity for operations to slip in their timetable for delivery which is a risk for infrastructure operations as all operations will need to be fully completed by the end of 2023. WEFO is paying particular close attention to the Welsh Government Road and Metro projects in this respect.

29. East Wales is 91% committed with some £31.5m ERDF allocated to the Metro. As with WWV, the priority going forward will be to ensure delivery stays on track, to budget and operations spend the funds available. The Metro operations in East Wales are not due to complete until May/June 2023 so have very little opportunity for slippage.

30. The relatively long lead in time associated with infrastructure investments supported under P4 means that, with the exception of the completed broadband operations, we will only witness significant progress against output targets in the latter part of the programme period once operations reach completion stage. The priority is however on track to meet all its targets with the exception of the total length of reconstructed or upgraded railway line in East Wales. The East Wales programme has generated more station, and less track, improvements than originally envisaged and this will need to be reflected in a progamme modification next year.

Priority 5: Technical Assistance

Approvals since the last PMC

31. No new approvals since the previous PMC.

32. All TA operations are approved and in delivery. No particular issues have been raised and the Regional Engagement Teams continue to help WEFO in certain fields of prioritisation.

Section 1: ESF Programmes: Commitment

1. This section gives details of current financial progress under the ESF Programmes, including an overview of the Programmes and information at Priority-level.

2. Table 1 shows the number and amount of EU Grant committed to approved Operations under the West Wales and the Valleys and East Wales ESF Programmes.

3. Progress data for finance and indicators is published monthly on the WEFO Website at https://gov.wales/progress-programmes-eu-structural-funds-2014-2020

Table 1: EU Grant Commitment by Programme and Priority: Approved Operations

£ Millions

Priority	Operations	Allocation		Committed				Spend			
		Total[1]	EU Grant[1]	Total[2]		EU Grant[2]		Total[3]		EU Grant[3]	
West Wales and the Valleys ESF											
1	18	212.5	168.2	233.5	(110%)	171.7	(102%)	97.1	(46%)	67.1	(40%)
2	22	416.2	301.7	683.1	(164%)	292.4	(97%)	351.8	(85%)	159.2	(53%)
3	20	293.0	218.5	330.6	(113%)	227.3	(104%)	180.6	(62%)	115.9	(53%)
4	6	19.0	14.2	26.6	(140%)	15.4	(108%)	13.7	(72%)	7.4	(52%)
5	2	19.8	14.9	6.5	(33%)	3.4	(23%)	0.0	(0%)	0.0	(0%)
Total	**68**	**960.5**	**717.5**	**1,280.3**	**(133%)**	**710.1**	**(99%)**	**643.2**	**(67%)**	**349.6**	**(49%)**
East Wales ESF											
1	9	57.6	28.8	46.9	(81%)	23.5	(82%)	21.3	(37%)	11.6	(40%)
2	15	156.3	77.2	286.4	(183%)	71.0	(92%)	172.6	(110%)	35.8	(46%)
3	12	117.4	58.7	145.9	(124%)	54.2	(92%)	66.9	(57%)	24.9	(42%)
4	5	7.2	3.6	5.8	(81%)	2.9	(81%)	3.3	(45%)	1.4	(39%)
5	2	28.2	13.8	3.0	(11%)	1.5	(11%)	0.0	(0%)	0.0	(0%)
Total	**43**	**366.7**	**182.1**	**488.0**	**(133%)**	**153.0**	**(84%)**	**264.2**	**(72%)**	**73.7**	**(40%)**
Total ESF	**111**	**1,327.1**	**899.6**	**1,768.3**	**(133%)**	**863.2**	**(96%)**	**907.4**	**(68%)**	**423.3**	**(47%)**

Source: WEFO, 30/09/2020

[1] Based on a conversion rate of £1:€1.10
[2] Percentages show committed as share of allocation
[3] Percentages show spend as share of allocation

Overall Programme Update

4. Commitment now stands at 99% in WWV and 84% in EW (96% overall), meaning that a total of £863m has now been committed to beneficiaries. Seven new operations have been approved since the last PMC meeting as well as a number of extensions to existing operations to deliver more impact.

5. Funds paid out to beneficiaries stand at £349m in WWV and £74m in EW – a total of £423m which represents 47% of the programme funds. This has translated into a declaration of grant to the European Commission of 50% of the grant allocation in West Wales and the Valleys and 52% of the grant allocation in East Wales which is well above the EU average of 39% and the UK average of 32%.

6. All 2019 N+3 targets were met, along with the targets for 2020 and 2021. Agreement was received from the European Commission for WEFO's proposal to reallocate the performance reserve from Priority 5 to the gender equality specific objective in Priority 2.

7. The Covid-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on operations from March 2020 onwards. Much delivery of face to face activities with participants has

had to be curtailed, although many operations have increasingly found ways to deliver activities remotely/online instead. It is still too early to judge the impact of the epidemic on participant numbers and outcomes. Prior to Covid-19, delivery by operations of support to participants had been progressing well. More than 259,000 participants have so far been recorded (60% of the final programme target). Over 110,000 participants have gained qualifications and over 25,000 have been supported into employment or self-employment.

Section 2: Progress by Priority

Priority 1: Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment

8. Three new operations have been approved in this Priority since the last PMC, all in WW&V.

9. £3m ESF was awarded to ***Workways Plus - Short Term Unemployed***, led by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, to boost the employability of those aged 25+ seeking work but with no or low skills or a work-limiting health condition or disability.

10. £0.5m ESF was approved for ***Tackling In Work Poverty Pembrokeshire***, led by Pembrokeshire County Council, to increase employment opportunities, reduce underemployment and improve absence rates for employees with barriers to full employment or work-limiting health conditions or disability.

11. £1.2m ESF was approved for ***Swansea Working - Short Term Unemployed***, led by Swansea Council, to support a coordinated approach to the engagement and provision of intensive employment mentoring and job matching support as part of the 'Swansea Working' umbrella programme.

12. The Priority is now 102% committed in WW&V and 82% in EW.

13. Overall performance for this Priority remains encouraging with over 60,000 participants supported to date across Wales. Approved operations forecast helping over 136,000 people (153% of Operational Programme targets).

14. Performance highlights to date includes helping 23% of economically inactive participants into work in WW&V (25% in EW). For those impacted by redundancy in WW&V, 62% of participants have gained a qualification to boost their employability and open up work opportunities.

15. A number of other indicators are lower than operations forecasted because of delays to the start of delivery due to underestimating the time needed to mobilise and prepare for delivery. Other reasons for slower than forecasted progress include longer than expected duration of support needed to achieve a positive outcome when working with individuals with multiple and entrenched barriers to work and therefore furthest from the labour market.

16. Prior to Covid-19, the generally improving labour market position and low level of unemployment and redundancies also meant that some operations struggled to reach their anticipated levels of participant recruitment. It also meant that the ESF programmes were increasingly working with those who

were the very furthest from the labour market, often having been economically inactive for many years and needing intensive levels of support – longer and more costly - before they were ready to consider employment as a viable option.

Priority 2: Skills for Growth

17. There have been no new approvals in this Priority since the last PMC meeting.

18. Additional ESF of £6.2m (WW&V) was awarded to extend *Agile Nation 2*, led by Chwarae Teg, to promote gender equality, career advancement and support 1,050 more women to improve their position in the workforce.

19. Additional ESF of £2.1m was awarded to extend *Leading Business Growth (WWV)*, led by Swansea University, to support a further 359 participants to develop high level leadership skills.

20. In addition, a number of operations in this Priority have been awarded some additional ESF as a result of the temporary flexibility introduced by WEFO due to the economic impact of COVID-19. Under this flexibility, operations could opt to relax their arrangements for employers to contribute in cash towards the cost of training for their employees.

21. This takes the commitment levels for the Priority to 97% in WWV and 92% in EW, with total EU funds of £363m already committed and only £16m remaining to be allocated.

22. The position on performance for this priority remains very encouraging. Over 115,000 participants have already been reported and achievement against most indicators is running fairly close to profile. Participants on training at level 3 and above (SO2) are outnumbering those on foundation and intermediate level courses (SO1), which appears indicative of rising skills needs in the workplace. Female participants are slightly outnumbering males, due particularly to the category of participants with an upper secondary education where the anticipated total number of females to the end of the programme has already been exceeded.

Priority 3: Youth Employment and Attainment

23. There have been no new operations approved in this Priority since the last PMC.

24. Additional ESF of £1.2m was awarded to *Inspire to Achieve*, led by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, to add a new regional delivery partner - Caerphilly County Borough Council - and support 550 additional participants in the Caerphilly area.

25. Additional ESF of £0.5m (£0.4m in WW&V and £0.1m in EW) was awarded to extend *Achieve through Work Experience*, led by the Higher Education Council for Wales, to support a further 120 students at significant risk of being not in education, employment and training (NEET) on leaving Higher Education.

26. Additional ESF of £1m (£0.8m in WW&V and £0.3m in EW) was awarded to extend the Welsh Government led *Healthy Working Wales - Out of Work Services 16-24*, to help a further 1,404 NEET participants affected by substance misuse and/or mental health issues, move into education or employment.

27. Additional ESF of £0.8m (EW) was awarded to *Cynnydd*, led by Powys County Council, to support a further 179 young people most at risk of disengaging from education and by association, at highest risk of becoming NEET.

28. The Priority is now 104% committed in WW&V and 92% in EW.

29. Overall performance for this Priority remains encouraging with over 83,000 young people supported to date, across both programmes. Approved projects forecast helping over 147,000 people (93% of Operational Programme targets).

30. Performance highlights to date include helping 30% of NEET into employment in WW&V (28% in EW) and 27% to gain qualifications in WW&V (30% EW).

31. Following the approval of three STEM projects (SO 3.3) in 2018, 29% of young male participants (11-19 years of age) and 18% of young female participants (11-19 years of age) in WWV are completing training in Maths, Science, Engineering and Technology.

Priority 4: Technical Assistance

32. No approvals since previous PMC.

33. The four Regional Engagement Teams continue to help implement the 2014-20 ESF Programmes by working with the Regional Skills Partnerships in relation to regional proofing of proposed operations and the integration of approved operations.

34. The other approved TA operations include revenue for the WCVA to deliver their comprehensive aid schemes, and also for WEFO in implementing the Programmes as Managing Authority. No further commitment is anticipated.

Priority 5: Public services reform and regional working

35. Following agreement of this new Priority in September 2018 as part of the Programme Modification, there have been four new approvals.

36. £1.9m ESF (£1.4m in WW&V and £0.5m in EW) was awarded to *Circular Economy Innovation Communities*, led by Swansea University in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University, to develop new regional service solutions using circular economy principles.

37. £2.9m ESF (£1.9m in WW&V & £1m in EW) was awarded to *North Wales Regional Growth Vision Enabler*, led by Gwynedd County Council, to establish a Programme Office to facilitate regional collaborative working in North Wales.

38. The portfolio is making good progress in general, and a further six operations are in development.

WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE, EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014 – 2020:

Amendment to the 2014-2020 ESF Programmes

Issue

1. In line with Article 110 of Regulation EU 1303/2013, there is a requirement for the PMC to examine and approve any proposal to amend the Operational Programmes proposed by the Managing Authority.

Recommendation

2. The PMC is asked to give approval for programme modification proposals, reflecting the changes set out in this paper and annexes, to be submitted to the EC for Approval. These programmes are:

- 2014UK05SFOP001 – United Kingdom - ESF West Wales and The Valleys
- 2014UK05SFOP002 – United Kingdom - ESF East Wales

Background

3. Paper WPMC (20)172 set out outline changes to the Operational Programmes which the PMC discussed at its 9 September meeting. This paper provides draft Justification papers which will need to be submitted to the EC.

Next steps

4. PMC agreement will allow for these modification proposals to be sent via the EU online system and enter a period of formal consultation across the European Commission services.

5. This modification is solely concerned with creating a new Priority Axis and consequential changes to other priorities. It assumes that existing employment, skills and public services activities across the ESF programme will continue to be delivered broadly in line with approved Business Plans. WEFO believes it is still too early to judge what the ultimate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on delivery of ESF projects will be. However, this is being kept under review and if other programme changes are judged necessary then further proposals may be brought to the PMC at a later date.

WEFO Lead Official: Michael Parkinson
Approved by: Geraint Green

MODIFICATION PROPOSALS

ESF East Wales 2014-20 Operational Programme
ESF West Wales and the Valleys 2014-20 Operational Programme

Summary of changes proposed
1. The proposed amendments relate to:

- Reallocation of funding from Priority 1 (Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment), Priority 2 (Skills for Growth), Priority 3 (Youth Employment and Attainment) and Priority 5 (Public Services Reform and Regional Working). Revised financial tables reflecting this and the rationale for the reallocations are included at **Annex A**.

- The introduction of a new Priority Axis entitled 'Containing Covid through Capacity' in both programmes, in response to the EU's Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII). Information about the proposed Priority is at **Annex B**.

- Some downward adjustments to indicators and targets, consequential on the reallocation of funds to the new Priority Axis. The focus on results is maintained, as are the original intervention logics. The rationale for the proposed changes showing how the adjustments are proportionate to reductions in priority allocations is at **Annex C**.

Alignment with Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative

2. The scope of the new Priority Axis corresponds to area 1 ('*Reinforcing the capacity of health care services during the crisis*') of the Commission's 'Typology of Indicative Measures under the ESF and YEI' guidance document. The proposed output indicator (CV33) and two of the three proposed result indicators (CV1 and CV6) have been selected from list of indicators proposed by the Commission in the Non Paper dated 12 May.

European Pillar of Social Rights

3. The proposed amendments have been considered against the categories and principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The proposals for a new Priority Axis are considered to address most directly Chapter III and specifically Principle 16: '*Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality.*' and Principle 18: '*Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services*'.

4. As the proposals also involve a reduction in funding allocations to other Priority Axes and in some cases to indicator targets, there will be some reduction in the

activity within the ESF programmes which addresses Chapters I and II of the European Pillar. However it should be noted that over 80% of programme funding will remain allocated to priority Axes 1, 2 and 3 which between them directly address Principles 1 (education, training and lifelong learning), Principle 2 (gender equality) and Principle 4 (active support to employment). The Managing Authority has sought to strike an appropriate balance in deploying Wales' ESF programmes to make a contribution to the immediate health and social care response to the Covid-19 pandemic whilst also safeguarding their longer term contribution to economic recovery.

Thematic Concentration and Earmarking targets

5. The proposals set out within this document ensure that all earmarking and thematic concentration targets are still met. There is no requirement to update the UK Partnership Agreement that ensures overall UK targets remain within thresholds because, to enable a redirection of resources to the areas most impacted by the current crisis, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative+ exempts Member States (and the UK) from the need to comply with thematic concentration requirements and with the requirement to amend Partnership Agreements for the remainder of the programming period.

Strategic Environmental and Equality Impact Assessment

6. The original Operational Programme documents were subject to Strategic Environmental screening and Equality Impact assessment. Paper WPMC (20)172 also set out the range of existing assessments that have been carried out in the area of health and social care. WEFO has begun the process for an Equality Impact Assessment and Integrated Impact Assessment for the new Priority and intends to procure an external contractor to complete the work. This is an unusual situation, reflecting the nature of the crisis, in that the assessments will be concurrent with the activities being funded rather than preceding them as is normal. However, it is hoped that the assessments will allow lessons learned from activities during the early months of the pandemic to be captured and applied as the implementation of the Priority proceeds.

ANNEX A
FINANCIAL TABLES (Shown in Euros)
Table 1: Proposed reallocation of funding at Priority and Thematic Objective-level
East Wales Programme

Priority	Thematic Objective	Current			Reallocations		Proposed		
		Union support	National counterpart	Total funding	Union Support	National counterpart	Union Support	National counterpart	Total funding
1	9	**32,084,989**	**32,084,989**	**64,169,978**	**-7,000,000**	**-7,000,000**	**25,084,989**	**25,084,989**	**50,169,978**
2		**87,055,129**	**92,694,209**	**179,749,338**	**-13,000,000**	**-13,000,000**	**74,055,129**	**79,694,209**	**153,749,338**
	8	5,861,546	5,901,067	11,762,613			5,861,546	5,901,067	11,762,613
	10	81,193,583	86,793,142	167,986,725	-13,000,000	-13,000,000	68,193,583	73,793,142	141,986,725
3		**65,827,115**	**65,827,115**	**131,654,230**	**-12,000,000**	**-12,000,000**	**53,827,115**	**53,827,115**	**107,654,230**
	8	44,982,836	44,982,836	89,965,672	-10,000,000	-10,000,000	34,982,836	34,982,836	69,965,672
	10	20,844,279	20,844,279	41,688,558	-2,000,000	-2,000,000	18,844,279	18,844,279	37,688,558
4	N/A	**4,066,245**	**4,066,245**	**8,132,490**			**4,066,245**	**4,066,245**	**8,132,490**
5	11	**14,278,776**	**14,884,772**	**29,163,548**	**-9,000,000**	**-9,000,000**	**5,278,776**	**5,884,772**	**11,163,548**
6	9	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**+41,000,000**	**+41,000,000**	**41,000,000**	**41,000,000**	**82,000,000**
TOTAL		**203,312,254**	**209,557,330**	**412,869,584**			**203,312,254**	**209,557,330**	**412,869,584**

Rationale for Financial Reallocations in East Wales

- The new Priority Axis requires Total Funding of €82m with ESF of €41m at a 50% intervention rate. The new Priority Axis will therefore constitute 20% of the East Wales programme (19.9% of total funding and 20.2% of ESF) post-modification.

- A blanket financial reduction of 20% could therefore have been applied to other priorities in order to fund this new Priority Axis. However instead of this the Managing Authority has reviewed existing commitment levels and likely underspends by approved projects in order to arrive at reallocations which can best ensure that existing funded activities do not need to be curtailed. Where possible, evidence of the expected increase or decrease in demand for project services during and after the crisis has also been taken into account.

- The resulting reductions in total funding equate to -22% in Priority 1, -14.5% in Priority 2, -19% in Priority 3, no change in Priority 4 (technical assistance) and -62% in Priority 5.

- Whilst there are reductions across the priorities, the largest reallocation amount in cash terms (-£26m) is from the Skills for Growth priority axis and the largest percentage reduction in total funding (-62%) is in the Public Services Reform and Regional Working priority axis.

- The Managing Authority considers that the reallocations are well distributed and represent a balance between maintaining funding for existing approved activity and achieving the reductions needed to finance the new Priority Axis.

FINANCIAL TABLES (Shown in Euros)
Table 2: Proposed reallocation of funding at Priority and Thematic Objective-level
West Wales and the Valleys Programme

Priority	Thematic Objective	Current			Reallocations		Proposed		
		Union support	National counterpart	Total funding	Union Support	National counterpart	Union Support	National counterpart	Total funding
1	9	**187,774,437**	**50,022,762**	**237,797,199**	**-19,000,000**	**-5,000,000**	**168,774,437**	**45,022,762**	**213,797,199**
2		**340,642,584**	**131,676,243**	**472,318,827**	**-32,000,000**	**-13,000,000**	**308,642,584**	**118,676,243**	**427,318,827**
	8	22,425,318	7,715,416	30,140,734			22,425,318	7,715,416	30,140,734
	10	318,217,266	123,960,827	442,178,093	-32,000,000	-13,000,000	286,217,266	110,960,827	397,178,093
3		**244,713,791**	**84,379,527**	**329,093,318**	**-23,000,000**	**-8,000,000**	**221,713,791**	**76,379,527**	**298,093,318**
	8	134,592,585	46,408,740	181,001,325	-5,000,000	-2,000,000	129,592,585	44,408,740	174,001,325
	10	110,121,206	37,970,787	148,091,993	-18,000,000	-6,000,000	92,121,206	31,970,787	124,091,993
4	N/A	**16,046,806**	**5,533,084**	**21,579,890**			**16,046,806**	**5,533,084**	**21,579,890**
5	11	**15,377,168**	**5,043,295**	**20,420,463**	**-6,000,000**	**-2,000,000**	**9,377,168**	**3,043,295**	**12,420,463**
6	9	**N/A**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**+80,000,000**	**+28,000,000**	**80,000,000**	**28,000,000**	**108,000,000**
TOTAL		**804,554,786**	**276,654,911**	**1,081,209,697**			**804,554,786**	**276,654,911**	**1,081,209,697**

Rational for Financial Reallocations in West Wales and the Valleys

- The new Priority Axis requires Total Funding of €108m with ESF of €80m at a 74% intervention rate. The new Priority Axis will therefore constitute 10% of the West Wales and the Valleys programme (10.0% of total funding and 9.9% of ESF) post-modification.

- A blanket financial reduction of 10% could therefore have been applied to other priorities in order to fund this new Priority Axis. However instead of this the Managing Authority has reviewed existing commitment levels and likely underspends by approved projects in order to arrive at reallocations which can best ensure that existing funded activities do not need to be curtailed. Where possible, evidence of the expected increase or decrease in demand for project services during and after the crisis has also been taken into account.

- The resulting reductions in total funding equate to -10% in Priority 1, -9.5% in Priority 2, -9.5% in Priority 3, no change in Priority 4 (technical assistance) and -39% in Priority 5.

- Whilst there are reductions across the priorities, the largest reallocation amount in cash terms (-£45m) is from the Skills for Growth priority axis and the largest percentage reduction in total funding (-39%) is in the Public Services Reform and Regional Working priority axis.

- The Managing Authority considers that the reallocations are well distributed and represent a balance between maintaining funding for existing approved activity and achieving the reductions needed to finance the new Priority Axis.

ANNEX B
Priority Axis 6: Containing Covid through Capacity

Investment Priority: Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest

ID of the priority axis	
Title of the priority axis	Containing Covid through Capacity

☐ The entire Priority axis will be implemented solely through Financial instruments	n/a
☐ The entire Priority axis will be implemented solely through Financial instruments set up at Union level	n/a
☐ The entire Priority axis will be implemented through community-led local development	n/a
☐ For the ESF: the entire Priority axis is dedicated to social innovation, or to transnational Cooperation, or both	n/a

2.1.A.2 Justification for the establishment of a Priority axis covering more than one category of region, thematic objective or Fund (where applicable)

This Priority Axis covers one category of region, but will be closely coordinated with an identical Priority under the other Wales ESF programme (different category of region). It only covers one thematic objective and one Fund.
The first identified case of SARS-COV-2 in Wales was confirmed on 28 February 2020 in a person who had recently returned to the Swansea area from Italy. The first death from Covid-19 was reported on 16 March in Wrexham.
By the 4 October 2020 there had been 25,852 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Wales and 1,630 deaths had been confirmed. Separate data from the Office of National Statistics showed that up to that point Covid-19 had been mentioned on the death certificate of 2,571 people in Wales[1].

At an early stage in the pandemic, the Welsh Government identified the harms that Covid-19 could cause to the people of Wales as being in four key areas:

- firstly, through direct harm to individuals from SARS-CoV2 infection and complications including for those who develop severe disease and in some cases sadly die as a result;

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[1] Public Health Wales dashboard, 4 Oct 2020

- secondly, the harm caused if services including the NHS became overwhelmed due to any sudden large spike in demand from patients with COVID-19 on hospitals, critical care facilities and other key services;
- thirdly, harms from non-COVID illness, for example if individuals do not seek medical attention for their illness early and their condition worsens, or more broadly from the necessary changes in NHS service delivery made during the pandemic in Wales to pause non-essential activity;
- fourthly, socioeconomic and other societal harms such as the economic impact on certain socioeconomic groups of not being able to work, impacts on businesses of being closed or facing falling customer demand, psychological harms to the public of social distancing and many others[2].

This Priority Axis aims to help the health and social care response in Wales to the Covid-19 outbreak, by supporting organisations engaged in this response to enhance their capacity to respond.

As the analysis of the four key areas above shows, this health and social care response is necessary to meet the needs of those who are ill with Covid-19, but also to avoid services being overwhelmed with consequential harms to those needing care for other conditions, and also to help prevent or mitigate wider socioeconomic and societal harms.

The COVID pandemic has significantly increased the required levels of staff and Personal Protective Equipment necessary within health and care systems to provide access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services. This impact does not only affect those responding to COVID-19. Health and care workers working in other wards, social care settings, and in the public domain may also need additional PPE and without action there is risk that there would be shortages and a significant reduction in the quality of equipment. In addition, if services are overwhelmed, there is a risk of many treatments and specialties adjacent to the pathway of treatment for COVID, for example mental health and physiotherapy, becoming less available which risks exacerbating health problems. Moreover it is becoming clear that some individuals experience 'long Covid' involving a range of symptoms which can persist for many weeks and require ongoing support and treatment.

The Priority Axis will also support the wider delivery of ESIF programmes in Wales because the most effective economic intervention in the face of the epidemic is to minimise the negative health impact in order to enable the return of economic activity. Failure to limit the spread of COVID-19 would threaten the achievement of all of the other economic and social deliverables of the 2014-20 ERDF and ESF programmes in Wales.

Evidence of the need to enhance capacity through additional staff became clear from the start of the epidemic. As early as 21 March, the Welsh Health Minister proposed that final year medical students, nurses and midwives would need to be fast-tracked into the service and the Welsh Government wrote to 5,000 retired health care professionals inviting them to return to service.

There is likewise clear empirical evidence that the need to obtain and distribute suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) to the health and social care sectors has become very large since the start of the epidemic. Between 9 March 2020 and 27 September 2020 (when this investment priority was being finalised) just under 356 million items of PPE had already been issued by NHS Wales Shared Services to

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[2] Leading Wales out of the Coronavirus Pandemic, Welsh Government, April 2020

the health and social care sectors in Wales[3]. It is clear that there will continue to be a significant need for PPE across health and social care services for as long as the Covid-19 epidemic continues.

Wales is well placed to deploy ESF funding in this area because Health and Social Care are a devolved competence of the Welsh Government. Health services are provided by seven Local Health Boards (LHBs). There is a Chief Executive of the NHS within Wales overseeing the health boards and providing advice to Welsh Ministers. Other NHS component organisations include Public Health Wales, the unified Public Health organisation in Wales, and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust, the national ambulance service for Wales.

Regarding Social Care, Local Authorities hold a statutory duty for planning and commissioning social work, and have a duty to safeguard individuals. National policy is set by the Welsh Government, but the actual provision is provided by a mixture of private, third sector and local authority-managed services. The private sector makes up the majority of the market, with political appetite for local authorities to provide more care and support themselves. Moving forwards, the intention is for the provision of care and support to be planned regionally based on a cycle of population needs assessment, regional planning and reporting, supervised Regional Partnership Boards bringing together local government, the third sector and the NHS to drive strategic regional delivery of social care in close collaboration with healthcare.

The current Welsh Government initiated a Parliamentary Review into Health and Social Care, which made a number of recommendations towards the creation of a seamless health and social care system in Wales. In response, Welsh Government launched 'A Healthier Wales' in 2018, advocating a whole system approach to health and social care based on the Quadruple Aim designed to shift services from hospitals to communities, along with a transformation plan.

All public bodies in Wales are obligated to follow the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires them to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

2.1.A..3 Fund, category of region and calculation basis for Union Support

	West Wales & The Valleys	East Wales
Fund	ESF	ESF
Category of region	Less developed	More developed
Calculation basis (total eligible expenditure or eligible public expenditure)	Total eligible expenditure €108,000,000 (ESF = €80,000,000)	Total eligible expenditure €82,000,000 (ESF = €41,000,000)
Category of region for outermost regions and Northern sparsely	n/a	n/a

[3] Statistical Bulletin: Personal Protective Items issued: up to 27 September 2020, Welsh Government

populated regions (where applicable)		

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The results that the Member State seeks to achieve with Union Support

To enhance the capacity of the health and social care sectors to respond to the Covid-19 epidemic

The UK ceased to be a Member State on 31 January 2020 but article 138 of the Withdrawal Agreement provides for the remaining implementation of the UK's programmes to be carried out in the same way as for the programmes of EU member states.

The result indicators selected for the Priority Axis take account of Commission guidance on suitable indicators for activity linked to Coronavirus ('*List of programme specific indicators related to the cohesion policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic*' 12 May 2020) and two of the three result indicators proposed for this Priority Axis are drawn from the voluntary indicators suggested by the Commission (Indicators CV1 and CV6).

The Priority aims to enhance the capacity of the health and social care sectors to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and to help prevent services from being overwhelmed. Result indicators have therefore been selected to measure key capacity enhancements which are expected to result from supported activities. These key capacity enhancements are the recruitment of additional health or social care staff and the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE).

The baseline values have been set at zero, as Covid-19 is an unprecedented public health emergency which will require wholly new capacity and infrastructure to be established.

Table 4: Common result indicators for which a target value has been set and programme specific result indicators corresponding to the specific objective (by investment priority and category of region): Investment Priority Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest.

ID	Indicator	Category of Region	Measurement unit for indicator	Baseline value	Measurement unit for baseline and target	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
	Additional health or social care staff recruited	Less developed	Number	0	Number	2020	2,400	Monitoring data	Quarterly
		More developed	Number	0	Number	2020	1,800	Monitoring data	Quarterly
	CV1: Value of personal protective equipment purchased (total public cost)	Less developed	Cost in EUR	0	Cost in EUR	2020	€39,000,000	Monitoring data	Quarterly
		More developed	Cost in EUR	0	Cost in EUR	2020	€30,000,000	Monitoring data	Quarterly
	CV6: Personal protective equipment (PPE) (including disposable masks, eye protection, coveralls, etc.)	Less developed	Number	0	Number	2020	36m items	Monitoring data	Quarterly
		More developed	Number	0	Number	2020	27m items	Monitoring data	Quarterly

2.3.A.6(i) Actions to be supported under the investment priority
Investment Priority: *Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest*

Description of the type and examples of actions to be supported and their expected contribution to the specific objectives including, where appropriate, the identification of main target groups, specific territories targeted and types of beneficiaries

Delivering the results will require targeted investments in the capacity of health and social care services to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, deal with increased numbers of patients requiring treatment and avoid services becoming overwhelmed. Investments are likely to cover a range of services and settings, including in contexts such as ambulance services, hospitals and intensive care services, care settings and services which support the longer term recovery of Covid-19 patients. This may also extend to new services introduced in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, such as test, trace and protect services and field hospitals. Investments will be focussed on the human personnel and equipment needed to enhance capacity in the system and will not support the construction of new facilities.

Priority will be given to investments which target the whole territory of the programme area, as the Covid-19 outbreak presents challenges for services right across the programme areas and is not limited only to specific local areas.

Indicative actions which could be undertaken under this Priority Axis may include (but are not limited to):

- Re-engaging staff who have recently retired or left the healthcare or social care sectors to return to service temporarily to help expand capacity to deal with Covid-19
- Bringing forward or accelerating the recruitment into healthcare or social care of students in medical schools or other relevant training institutions
- Workforce initiatives to recruit additional staff to fill temporary roles required to support the response to Covid-19
- Training for health and social care staff related to skills, knowledge and protocols for dealing with Covid-19
- Procurement and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) required to ensure safe working and infection control within health or social care settings

Operations will be expected to identify precise and specific activities within the above areas of action. These activities should be designed to meet the specific needs of the operation's identified target setting(s) and the results sought. Evidence should be presented to prove the efficacy and applicability of these specific activities.

Beneficiaries of funding under this Priority Axis may include the public sector (local health boards, health service trusts, Welsh Government, local authorities) NGOs and the private sector.

The guiding principles for the selection of Operations
The following common principles guide the selection of operations across all Investment Priorities in the Welsh ESF programmes:

- An unequivocal focus on supporting sustainable jobs, productivity, employment and growth and operations which facilitate the role of the third sector and private sector in the delivery of public services;

- Interventions should seek to integrate economic, social and environmental outcomes, consistent with the central organising principle of sustainable development and contributing to the outcomes of the cross cutting themes;

- Opportunities to achieve greater leverage from the deployment of EU funds, particularly with the private and third sector; and also more collaborative investments where these can add value and achieve outcomes;

- Clear added value, when compared with other ways of supporting and delivering policy, based on sound evidence;

- Evidence of opportunity will form the foundation of the design and delivery of operations with investments building on existing and emerging expertise, with human capital delivering to future needs;

- Prioritisation of key strategic operations that underpin the Specific Objectives and which deliver significant outcomes, will be a core part of a portfolio management approach to programme delivery; and

- Clear exit strategies need to be in place at the outset which fully consider the role of the third sector and private sector, build social resilience and tackle poverty within communities, promote equality, and achieve legacy effects.

- Operations will need to consider a range of targeting mechanisms to provide a focus for investment. The degree of targeting will vary according to the intervention and, where appropriate, should reflect:

- Clear identification of the specific target groups, their needs and how actions will address these needs at a national, regional or local level as appropriate;

- Growth sectors (e.g. specifically the Welsh Government identified National Thematic and Foundation sectors, Grand Challenge areas in Science for Wales and the areas of specialisation in Innovation Wales); and

- Areas of specific geographical opportunity (e.g. City region or other regional opportunity, regional skills needs, Rural or Regeneration Area).

Additional principles relevant to the specific Investment Priority
- Evidence should be presented to show how operations have taken account of health inequalities and other inequalities which may be exacerbated by Covid-19, both for the users of health and social care services and for staff. In particular, operations should show how they will implement the recommendations of the First Minister's BAME Covid-19 Advisory Group (published June 2020) where relevant to them.

In accordance with the provisions of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative and Regulation (EU) 2020/558, operations approved under this Investment Priority will be eligible for support retrospectively for response actions to Covid-19 from 1 February 2020 onwards.

The planned use of financial instruments
It is not proposed to utilise Financial Instruments in the delivery of the proposed actions.

The planned use of major projects

This is not applicable for ESF.

Table 5: Common and programme specific output indicators for the ESF by European Commission Investment priority: Enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest.

ID	Indicator	Measurement Unit	Fund	Category of Region	Target Value (2023)	Source of Data	Frequency of Reporting
	Number of entities supported in combating or counteracting the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic	Number	ESF	Less developed	7	Monitoring data	Quarterly
				More developed	6	Monitoring data	Quarterly

ANNEX C
Rationale and Methodology for changes to indicators in other Priority Axes, consequential on establishment of new Priority Axis 6

<u>**EAST WALES PROGRAMME**</u>

Priority 1: Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment
1. In the East Wales programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **22%** from €64.17m to €50.17m. The whole of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 9.
2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €50m.
3. In relation to physical indicators**,** the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and <u>no change</u> is therefore proposed to any outputs or results indicators in this Priority Axis.
4. The proposed single change to the Performance Framework is shown in the table below.

East Wales Priority 1: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
1	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	13	64	No change	**50**
1	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over), not in education or training, who have complex barriers to employment	3,239	12,700	No change	No change
1	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment	969	3,800	No change	No change

Priority 2: Skills for Growth
1. In the East Wales programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **14.5%** from €179.75m to €153.75m. The whole of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 10, with no reduction for Thematic Objective 8.
2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €153m.
3. In relation to physical output indicators, there are 10 output indicators for this Priority. For 6 of these indicators, the Managing Authority is confident at this stage

that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to these 6 indicators. However there are 4 output indicators where further operations or extensions to current operations would have needed to be selected for funding in order to reach the target values and this will not now be possible as funds will be reallocated to the new Priority Axis. It is therefore proposed to reduce these 4 output indicators by 14.5% in line with the reduction in Total Funding for this Priority. The 4 indicators where 14.5% reductions are proposed are:

- Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Male
- Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education - Female
- Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) – Male
- Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) - Female

4. These indicators relate to training actions for people in employment, much of which takes place in the workplace. Delivery of this is inevitably being impacted negatively by Covid-19 restrictions and difficult trading conditions for businesses. The modest reductions proposed here are not seen as detrimental, given the challenges that would face operations if seeking to increase training activity in workplaces much above existing planned levels in the current circumstances.

5. The 4 output indicators listed above relate to activity under Thematic Objective 10. No targets will be reduced relating to activity under Thematic Objective 8.

6. The 4 output indicators listed above are included in the Performance Framework and therefore the 2023 target values for these will also change as a consequence.

7. Results indicators in this Priority are set as percentage values of output indicators. There is therefore no need to reduce results indicators and the Managing Authority is confident that the existing values are achievable.

8. Proposed changes to indicators are shown in the tables which follow.

East Wales Priority 2: Skills for Growth

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Male	10,888	**9,309**
	Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Female	12,650	**10,816**
	Employed including self employed participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving – Male	72%	No change
SO 2.1 To increase the skills levels, including work relevant skills, of those in the workforce with no or low skills	Employed including self employed participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving – Female	72%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving – Male	72%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving - Female	72%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) - Male	9,372	**8,013**

	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) – Female	11,309	**9,669**
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above – Male	7,796	No change
SO 2.2 To increase the number of people in the workforce with technical and job specific skills, at an intermediate and higher level	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above – Female	8,785	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification upon leaving at upper secondary (CQFW 3) level or above – Male	60%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification upon leaving at upper secondary (CQFW 3) level or above - Female	60%	No change
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification at or above upper secondary (CQFW 3) level upon leaving - Male	60%	No change
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification at or above upper secondary (CQFW 3) level upon leaving - Female	60%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Number of supported micro small and medium-sized enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)	300	No change
	Employed including self-employed	1500	No change
SO 2.3 To improve the position of women in the workforce	Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving	73%	No change
	Supported Enterprises having adopted or improved equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems	50%	No change

	Participants with an improved labour market situation upon leaving	40%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification upon leaving at upper secondary (CQFW 3) level or above - Female	60%	No change
SO 2.4 To increase the number of people with graduate degrees or equivalent undertaking research and innovation activities with enterprise	Participants with graduate degree or equivalent - Male	125	No change
	Participants with graduate degree or equivalent - Female	125	No change
	Number of enterprises collaborating with learning providers	n/a	No change
	Participants with a graduate degree or equivalent gaining a qualification upon leaving at Masters (CQFW 7) or Doctoral (CQFW 8) level – Male	63%	No change
	Participants with a graduate degree or equivalent gaining a qualification upon leaving at Masters (CQFW 7) or Doctoral (CQFW 8) level – Female	63%	No change
	Participants with graduate degree or equivalent in employment upon leaving – male	52%	No change
	Participants with graduate degree or equivalent in employment upon leaving - female	52%	No change

East Wales Priority 2: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
2	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	60	178	No change	**153**
2	Employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education - Male	5,380	10,888	No change	**9,309**
2		4,898	12,650	No change	**10,816**

Employed participants with qualifications up to and including a
lower secondary education - Female

2	Employed participants with lower secondary education -Male	1,642	9,372	No change	**8,013**
2	Employed participants with lower secondary education – Female	1,495	11,309	No change	**9,669**

Priority 3: Youth Employment and Attainment

1. In the East Wales programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **19%** from €131.65m to €107.65m. Most of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 8 (reduction of €20m total funding including €10m ESF) with a smaller reduction for Thematic Objective 10 (reduction of €4m total funding including €2m ESF).

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €107m.

3. In relation to physical output indicators, there are 2 output indicators for this Priority. For 1 of these indicators (NEET participants), the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to this indicator. However, for the other indicator (Participants at risk of becoming NEET), further operations or extensions to current operations would have needed to be selected for funding in order to reach the target values and this will not now be possible as funds will be reallocated to the new Priority Axis. It is therefore proposed to reduce this indicator by 19% in line with the reduction in Total Funding for this Priority:

    *   Participants at Risk of becoming NEET (11-24)

4. This indicator relates to interventions with young people, much of which takes place in education settings and the youth service. Delivery of this is inevitably being impacted negatively by Covid-19 restrictions. The modest reductions proposed here are not seen as detrimental, given the challenges that would face operations if seeking to increase interventions in this area much above existing planned levels in the current circumstances.

5. This indicator relates to activity under Thematic Objective 10. No targets will be reduced relating to activity under Thematic Objective 8. This indicator is not included in the Performance Framework.

6. Results indicators in this Priority are set as percentage values of output indicators. There is therefore no need to reduce results indicators and the Managing Authority is confident that the existing values are achievable.

7. Proposed changes to indicators are shown in the tables which follow.

East Wales Priority 3: Youth Employment and Attainment

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age)	21,200	No change
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) gaining qualifications upon leaving – with primary or lower secondary education	20%	No change
SO 3.1 To reduce the number of 16-24 year olds who are Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET)	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) in education/training upon leaving	17%	No change
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) entering employment upon leaving	28%	No change
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24)	18,072	**14,638**
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24 years of age) gaining qualifications upon leaving – with primary (CQFW1) or lower secondary (CQFW2) education	27%	No change
SO 3.2 To reduce the number of those at risk of becoming NEET, amongst 11-24 year olds	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24) into education/training upon leaving	18%	No change
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24) at reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving	-	No change

East Wales Priority 3: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
3	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	31	132	No change	**107**
3	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age)	5,407	21,200	No change	No change

Priority 5: Public Services Reform and Regional Working

1. In the East Wales programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **62%** from €29.16m to €11.16m. All of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 9.

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €11m.

3. In relation to physical indicators, the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to any outputs or results indicators in this Priority Axis.

4. The reduced level of funding in this Priority will still mean that existing approved and pipeline operations can be supported. A coherent portfolio of operations, led by local government and higher education, is taking shape in this Priority but overall the demand for funding has been lower than anticipated and the reduced funding allocation proposed here is now considered realistic, given the limited time now remaining for new activities to mobilise and be delivered.

5. The proposed single change to the Performance Framework is shown in the table below.

East Wales Priority 5: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
3	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	-	29	No change	**11**
3	Number of projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level	1	4	No change	No change

<u>WEST WALES AND THE VALLEYS PROGRAMME</u>

Priority 1: Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment

1. In the West Wales and the Valleys programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **10%** from €237.8m to €213.8m. The whole of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 9.

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €213m.

3. In relation to physical output indicators, there are 8 output indicators for this Priority. For 7 of these indicators, the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to this indicator. However, for one indicator (Underemployed participants), further operations or extensions to current operations would have needed to be selected for funding in order to reach the target values and this will not now be possible as funds will be reallocated to the new Priority Axis. It is therefore proposed to reduce this indicator by 10% in line with the reduction in Total Funding for this Priority:

- Underemployed participants with barriers to full employment

4. This indicator relates to activity under Thematic Objective 9. This indicator is not included in the Performance Framework.

6. Results indicators in this Priority are set as percentage values of output indicators. There is therefore no need to reduce results indicators and the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that the existing values are achievable.

7. Proposed changes to indicators are shown in the tables which follow.

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 1: Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Short term unemployed with no / low skills or a work limiting health condition or disability	5,999	No change
	Individuals impacted by redundancy	12,001	No change
	Short term unemployed participants with low skills or a work limiting health condition or disability in employment upon leaving	33%	No change
SO1.1 To increase the employability of those closest to the labour market at most risk of poverty	Short term unemployed participants with low skills or a work limiting health condition or disability gaining a qualification upon leaving	50%	No change
	Individuals impacted by redundancy in employment upon leaving	55%	No change
	Individuals impacted by redundancy gaining a qualification upon leaving	70%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
SO1.2 To increase the employability of Economically Inactive and Long Term Unemployed people aged 25 and over, who have complex barriers to employment	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over) not in education or training who have complex barriers to employment	36,000	No change
	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment	10,800	No change
	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over) not in education or training who have complex barriers to employment entering employment including self-employment upon leaving	20%	No change
	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over) not in education or training who have complex barriers to employment engaged in job search upon leaving	25%	No change
	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over) not in education or training who have complex barriers to employment gaining a qualification or work relevant certification upon leaving	50%	No change
	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over) not in education or training who have complex barriers to employment increasing employability through completing work experience placement or volunteering opportunity	54%	No change
	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment entering employment including self-employment upon leaving	25%	No change
	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment gaining a qualification or work relevant certification upon leaving	50%	No change
	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment increasing employability through completing work experience placement or volunteering opportunity	54%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target

	Participants Employed including self-employed with work-limiting health condition or disability	4,000	No change
	Underemployed participants with barriers to full employment	4,000	**3,600**
	Number of micro small and medium-sized enterprises supported	2,000	No change
	Workplace health programmes	300	No change
SO1.3 To reduce under-employment or absence rates for employed individuals with work limiting health conditions and / or other barriers to sustainable engagement with the labour market	Supported enterprises having adopted or improved equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems	50%	No change
	Employed including self employed participants with work limiting health condition or disability returning to work after a period of absence	50%	No change
	Employed including self Employed Participants with Work limiting health condition or disability with an improved labour market situation upon leaving	50%	No change
	Underemployed participants with an improved labour market situation upon leaving such as increased hours permanent contract	40%	No change

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 1: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
1	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	53	238	No change	**213**
1	Economically inactive (aged 25 and over), not in education or training, who have complex barriers to employment	9,182	36,000	No change	No change
1	Long-term unemployed (aged 25 and over) who have complex barriers to employment	2,755	10,800	No change	No change

Priority 2: Skills for Growth

1. In the West Wales and the Valleys programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **9.5%** from €472.32m to €427.32m. The whole of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 10, with no reduction in funding for Thematic Objective 8

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €427m.

3. In relation to physical output indicators, there are 10 output indicators for this Priority. For 6 of these indicators, the Managing Authority is confident that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to these 6 indicators. However there are 4 output indicators where further operations or extensions to current operations would have needed to be selected for funding in order to reach the target values and this will not now be possible as funds will be reallocated to the new Priority Axis. It is therefore proposed to reduce these 4 output indicators by 9.5% in line with the reduction in Total Funding for this Priority. The 4 indicators where 9.5% reductions are proposed are:

  - Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Male
  - Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education - Female
  - Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) – Male
  - Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) - Female

4. These indicators relate to training actions for people in employment, much of which takes place in the workplace. Delivery of this is inevitably being impacted negatively by Covid-19 restrictions and difficult trading conditions for businesses. The modest reductions proposed here are not seen as detrimental, given the challenges that would face operations if seeking to increase training activity in workplaces much above existing planned levels in the current circumstances.

5. The 4 output indicators listed above relate to activity under Thematic Objective. No targets will therefore be reduced relating to activity under Thematic Objective 8.

6. The 4 output indicators listed above are included in the Performance Framework and therefore the 2023 target values for these will also change as a consequence.

7. Results indicators in this Priority are set as percentage values of output indicators. There is therefore no need to reduce results indicators and the Managing Authority is confident that the existing values are achievable.

8. Proposed changes to indicators are shown in the tables which follow.

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 2: Skills for Growth

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Male	26,841	**24,291**
	Employed including self-employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Female	31,692	**28,681**
	Employed including self employed participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving – Male	72%	No change
SO 2.1 To increase the skills levels, including work relevant skills, of those in the workforce with no or low skills	Employed including self employed participants with no formal qualifications gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification upon leaving – Female	72%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving – Male	72%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with up to and including a lower secondary education gaining an essential skills or technical or job specific qualification at lower secondary level upon leaving - Female	72%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) - Male	20,693	**18,727**
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) – Female	23,874	**21,606**
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above – Male	10,731	No change
SO 2.2 To increase the number of people in the workforce with technical and job specific skills, at an intermediate and higher level	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above – Female	9,769	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification upon leaving at upper secondary (CQFW 3) level or above – Male	60%	No change
	Employed including self-employed participants with lower secondary education (CQFW 2) gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification upon leaving at upper secondary (CQFW 3) level or above - Female	60%	No change
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification at or above upper secondary (CQFW 3) level upon leaving - Male	60%	No change
	Employed including self employed participants with upper secondary (CQFW 3) education or above gaining a technical or job specific vocational qualification at or above upper secondary (CQFW 3) level upon leaving - Female	60%	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	Number of supported micro small and medium-sized enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)	800	No change
	Employed including self-employed	4,400	No change
SO 2.4 To improve the position of women in the workforce	Participants gaining a qualification upon leaving	75%	No change
	Supported Enterprises having adopted or improved equality and diversity strategies and monitoring systems	50%	No change

Participants with an improved labour market situation upon leaving	40%	No change

Participants with graduate degree or equivalent - Male	780	No change
Participants with graduate degree or equivalent - Female	720	No change
Number of enterprises collaborating with learning providers	750	No change
Participants with a graduate degree or equivalent gaining a qualification upon leaving at Masters (CQFW 7) or Doctoral (CQFW 8) level – Male	63%	No change
Participants with a graduate degree or equivalent gaining a qualification upon leaving at Masters (CQFW 7) or Doctoral (CQFW 8) level – Female	63%	No change
Participants with graduate degree or equivalent in employment upon leaving – male	52%	No change
Participants with graduate degree or equivalent in employment upon leaving - female	52%	No change

SO 2.3 To increase the number of people with graduate degrees or equivalent undertaking research and innovation activities with enterprise

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 2: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
2	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	133	471	No change	**427**
2	Employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Male	9,666	26,841	No change	**24,291**

2	Employed participants with qualifications up to and including a lower secondary education – Female	8,801	31,692	No change	**28,681**
2	Employed participants with lower secondary education –Male	4,099	20,693	No change	**18,727**
2	Employed participants with lower secondary education – Female	3,732	23,874	No change	**21,606**

Priority 3: Youth Employment and Attainment

1. In the West Wales and the Valleys programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **9.5%** from €329.09m to €298.09m. The reduction in Total Funding is split between Thematic Objective 8 (reduction of €7m total funding including €5m ESF) and Thematic Objective 10 (reduction of €24m total funding including €18m ESF). This split will enable existing funded activities to remain in place and avoid the need for any to be curtailed.

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €298m.

3. In relation to physical output indicators, there are 6 output indicators for this Priority. For 1 of these indicators (NEET Participants), the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and no change is therefore proposed to this indicator. However there are 5 output indicators where further operations or extensions to current operations would have needed to be selected for funding in order to reach the target values and this will not now be possible as funds will be reallocated to the new Priority Axis. It is therefore proposed to reduce these 5 output indicators by 9.5% in line with the reduction in Total Funding for this Priority. The indicators where 9.5% reductions are proposed are:

- Participants at Risk of becoming NEET (11-24)
- Young people 11 to 19 years – male
- Young people 11 to 19 years – female
- Employed including self-employed participants from early years and childcare sector - Male
- Employed including self-employed participants from early years and childcare sector - Female

4. These indicators relate to interventions with young people and with the early years workforce. Much of this work takes place in education settings and the youth service, and in early years settings. Delivery of these activities is inevitably being impacted negatively by Covid-19 restrictions. The modest reductions proposed here are not seen as detrimental, given the challenges that would face operations if seeking to increase interventions in this area much above existing planned levels in the current circumstances.

5. These 5 indicators relate to activity under Thematic Objective 10. No targets will be reduced relating to activity under Thematic Objective 8. These indicators are not included in the Performance Framework.

6. Results indicators in this Priority are set as percentage values of output indicators. There is therefore no need to reduce results indicators and the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that the existing values are achievable.

7. Proposed changes to indicators are shown in the tables which follow.

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 3: Youth Employment and Attainment

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age)	42,700	No change
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) gaining qualifications upon leaving – with primary or lower secondary education	20%	No change
SO 3.1 To reduce the number of 16-24 year olds who are Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET)	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) in education/training upon leaving	17%	No change
	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age) entering employment upon leaving	28%	No change
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24)	49,700	**44,978**
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24 years of age) gaining qualifications upon leaving – with primary (CQFW1) or lower secondary (CQFW2) education	7%	No change
SO 3.2 To reduce the number of those at risk of becoming NEET, amongst 11-24 year olds	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24) into education/training upon leaving	19%	No change
	Participants at risk of becoming NEET (11-24) at reduced risk of becoming NEET upon leaving	-	No change

Specific Objective	Outputs	Target	Revised Target
SO 3.3 To increase the take up of and attainment levels in STEM subjects amongst 11-19 year olds	Young People 11-19 years of age - Male	8,400	**7,602**
	Young People 11-19 years of age - Female	15,000	**13,575**
	Young People 11-19 years of age completing training in Maths Science Engineering and Technology - Male	55%	No change
	Young People 11-19 years of age completing training in Maths Science Engineering and Technology - Female	55%	No change
	11-19 years of age participants who continue to study a Maths Science Engineering and Technology subject post 16 - Male	45%	No change
	11-19 years of age participants who continue to study a Maths Science Engineering and Technology subject post 16 - Female	45%	No change
SO 3.4 To increase the skills of the Early Years and Childcare workforce	Employed including self-employed Participants from early years and childcare sector - male	300	**272**
	Employed including self-employed Participants from early years and childcare sector - Female	2,700	**2,444**
	Employed including self employed Participants from early years and childcare sector gaining qualifications upon leaving - Male	77%	No change
	Employed including self employed Participants from early years and childcare sector gaining qualifications upon leaving - Female	77%	No change

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 3: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
3	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	84	329	No change	**298**
3	NEET Participants (16-24 years of age)	10,891	42,700	No change	No change

Priority 5: Public Services Reform and Regional Working

1. In the West Wales and the Valleys programme, Total Funding for this Priority Axis will reduce by **39%** from €20.42m to €12.42m. All of the reduction in Total Funding applies to Thematic Objective 9.

2. A change to the eligible expenditure indicator in the Performance Framework is therefore proposed, reducing this target to €12m.

3. In relation to physical indicators**,** the Managing Authority is confident at this stage that existing approved projects will be able to deliver the existing target values and <u>no change</u> is therefore proposed to any outputs or results indicators in this Priority Axis.

4. The reduced level of funding in this Priority will still mean that existing approved and pipeline operations can be supported. A coherent portfolio of operations, led by local government and higher education, is taking shape in this Priority but overall the demand for funding has been lower than anticipated and the reduced funding allocation proposed here is now considered realistic, given the limited time now remaining for new activities to mobilise and be delivered.

5. The proposed single change to the Performance Framework is shown in the table below.

West Wales and the Valleys Priority 5: Performance Framework

Priority	Indicator	Current		Revised	
		Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023	Milestone target to end 2018	Final target to end 2023
3	Eligible Expenditure (€M)	-	20	No change	**12**
3	Number of projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level	1	4	No change	No change

WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE, EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014 – 2020:

Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy –Progress Update

Subject

1.   The purpose of this paper is to update Members on progress with implementing the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds.

Recommendation

2.   Members are asked to note and comment on the progress made.

Background

3.   Article 110(1) of the Common Provisions Regulations states that the PMC shall examine progress made in implementation of the evaluation plan[4] and the follow-up given to findings of evaluations.   An update on progress in the last 12 months is also given below. The Strategy Team leads on monitoring and evaluation of the ESI funds.

Progress Update

Fieldwork of the first contracted **ESF Participants Survey** has been completed by our contractors IFF research, with a number of 12,018 interviews achieved with participants who left their ESF operation at least 12 months prior to the survey. IFF have produced a technical report and OB3 have drafted a qualitative report on the face to face element of the data collection which has been published on the Welsh Government website

The aim of the survey was to collect data to help us evaluate the effectiveness of support funded by ESF. The survey also collected data for the longer-term result indicators that WEFO has to report to the European Commission in next year's Annual Implementation Reports.

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[4] In Wales, the evaluation plan is referred to as the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

The RME team have shared the operation-level datasets from the survey with the contractors undertaking the evaluations of Apprenticeships, ReAct, Traineeships and Jobs Growth Wales. Further analysis is being undertaken; a counterfactual impact evaluation using the data is currently ongoing.

The **Evaluation of ERDF Infrastructure** was awarded to Hatch Regeneris and the contract is now in its third phase. The first evaluation report has been published on the Welsh Government website.

Hatch Regeneris have prepared a plan on the approaches to the user and general surveys for the next stage of the ERDF Infrastructure Evaluation. This will be supplemented by consultations with local and strategic stakeholders, economic partnerships, sector bodies and community groups from the cluster areas identified by Hatch Regeneris.

Beauford Research who are conducting the surveys on behalf of Hatch Regeneris have begun survey work with residents from these areas, achieving 476 interviews to date. They are beginning the interviews with businesses from these areas next.

The early stages of the evaluation have involved Regeneris reviewing project and programme documents and data and stakeholder consultations. On the basis of this work, Regeneris has identified 50 projects across the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 programmes to be reviewed in detail.

This evaluation has three aims:

> 1.   to investigate the usage and maintenance of the new/improved infrastructure;
>
> 2.   to investigate whether, and if so how, new and improved infrastructure within the three regions of Wales (North Wales, South West and Mid Wales, and South East Wales) work together, for the benefit of the region in terms of the local economy, residents, and businesses; and
>
> 3.   to consider the feasibility of undertaking an impact evaluation of infrastructure and set out recommended methods.

The types of infrastructure covered by the evaluation are:

- **Broadband:** Upgrades to broadband infrastructure in areas not covered by commercial superfast broadband rollout plans.
- **Road and rail:** The construction of and improvements to roads, railway lines and railway stations.
- **Sites and premises:** The construction of and improvements made to sites and premises for businesses. This also includes town centre regeneration projects.
- **FE campuses:** The construction of learning centres for students aged 16 and over.

- **Innovation campuses:** The construction of centres for research and development, often at higher education institutions (HEIs). Building capacity for firms and HEIs to take up and deliver improved and new products, processes, and services.
- **Tourism:** Activities to improve tourist sites and attractions.

The **Evaluation of Regional Engagement Teams (RETs)** conducted by OB3 final report has been published on the Welsh Government website. The aim of the evaluation was firstly to assess the progress made by RETs towards their overall objective of maximising the benefits of the European Structural Investment (ESI) programmes to each region of Wales and secondly to provide recommendations for RET activities for the remainder of the programming period and for approaches to regional engagement in Regional Investment in Wales after Brexit.

The **Evaluation of the Third Sector European Team (3-SET)** has been awarded to Wavehill and they have been working with WCVA and WEFO to prepare this. Wavehill are currently in the middle of interviewing stakeholders and beneficiaries. This evaluation seeks to assess the progress made towards meeting the 3-SET objectives by the end of the operation period in 2023. The delivery of past and current activity should inform progress to date, with recommendations given for improved delivery in the remainder of the programming period and post-Brexit. It is expected that the redistribution of resources within 3-SET owing to Brexit is appropriately considered when undertaking the evaluation.

The ERDF Business Survey's specification is being currently developed by the RME team. The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of ERDF support for businesses, with a particular focus on the Enterprise, Business Finance, R&D and Innovation, ICT Infrastructure and Community Economic Development areas of the Programme activity and looking at Objectives focussed on assisting businesses

The fieldwork for the first annual phase of the **Evaluation of the RDP Farming connect service** has been completed and a report covering this phase of research was published in February 2020. The fieldwork for this phase consisted of a review of programme documentation and monitoring data, 18 interviews with management and delivery staff, four regional focus groups with farmers, a series of 13 in depth case studies and consultations with 10 wider stakeholders.

In the early part of 2020, the second stage of fieldwork commenced, which sought to revisit some of the research undertaken as part of the first phase to assess the longer term contributions of the Farming Connect offer. It was also hoped that this phase would provide some early and tentative assessments of perceptions to the farming connect refresh that took place in late 2019 however this was not possible. The majority of this work was able to be completed prior to fieldwork restrictions required as part of social distancing measures. The second stage report has been drafted and is currently being reviewed. It is expected that the full report will be published in late 2020.

The fieldwork for the **Refugee Employment Support Scoping Study** was completed, which consisted of a literature review of existing evidence, 454 interviews with refugees and asylum seekers and interviews with support provides and sector employment bodies as well as a stakeholder workshop. A draft version of the report was received in early 2019 with a final report provided in September 2019. Due to publication restrictions related to the general election in late 2019, the publication date was delayed from autumn 2019, and the report was published in March 2020.

The WG has commissioned an evaluation of the **RDP Sustainable Management Scheme.** The evaluation will be a long term piece of research that aims to assess the implementation of the scheme, its delivery and its outcomes and impact. It is particularly interested in understanding the nature and value of collaborative activity, the contribution of the scheme to more effective land management practices, and the wider economic and social benefits that such approaches may lead to. The work advertised in December 2018 but received no bids and a result work was done to refine the bid prior to advertising the work in August 2019. Bids were reviewed in late 2019 with the contract awarded to a consortium bid of OB3 Research and Bro Partnership in December 2019. An inception meeting was held in January 2020 and the first phase of fieldwork commenced in Summer 2020, following some slight delays associated with COVID 19. The first phase of fieldwork consists of reviewing existing monitoring data and material, stakeholder interviews with WG staff and individuals involved in project delivery, a survey of projects participating in the SMS, and case studies of selected projects. In an effort to ensure the provision of information to inform decision on an ongoing basis the evaluation involves the delivery of annual reports to provide ongoing evidence to inform future delivery. The first of these is expected in late 2020.

The RME team have commissioned the **Farm Business Grant Survey** which aims to look at the uptake of the Farm Business Grant amongst Farmers, the role and effectiveness of the Farming for the future workshops as a mechanism for accessing the grant and the effects of the grant more broadly on participating businesses. In particular the work will look at farmer perceptions of the workshop, the grant itself and what changes they might have made as a result of attending the workshop and/or receiving the grant. The work was advertised in August 2019 and bids were assessed in Autumn 2019 with Wavehill being awarded the contract in December 2019. An inception meeting was held in December 2019 to agree to proposed approach. Fieldwork will involve a combination of interviews and surveys with both workshop attendees who did not take up the Farm Business grant offer and with those who did access the grant. Focus groups are also to be used to inform the survey design, but also post survey to discuss the survey findings. The research was due to commence in Spring 2020, however this was slightly delayed to Summer 2020 due to COVID 19. A pilot of the survey was administered in early October 2020, prior to roll of the full survey in late October. It is hoped that the findings of this work will be reported in early 2021.

The RME team have commissioned a **Midterm Evaluation of LEADER**. The evaluation aims to look at the implementation of LEADER in Wales as well the impact of LEADER as a mechanism for supporting rural communities. Following guidance from the European commission the evaluation will look at the impact of

LEADER in terms of its contribution to improved governance arrangements and decision making and its ability to lead to enhanced outcomes and impacts. To help assess this, the evaluation will look to include a longitudinal element to help assess the longer term value of the LEADER approach. The specification was advertised in Spring 2020 with tenders assessed in May 2020. The contract was awarded to Wavehill in June 2020 with an inception meeting in early July. The scoping stage of the fieldwork began in September 2020 in which interviews are being conducted with LAG managers and members, welsh government staff and key national stakeholders. As part of this phase a literature review of CLLD is also being conducted to help inform the main phase of fieldwork. It is expected that the majority of fieldwork will take place over the course of Autumn/Winter with a reported expected in Spring 2021.

The RME team contributed to an **Evaluation of the Wales Rural Network** being developed by the WRN. The evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the activities of the WRN in meeting the requirements of the European Commission, facilitating networking activities and co-ordinating services to stimulate the exchange of ideas and experience. The fieldwork will entail interviews with key stakeholders, including Welsh Government staff and engagement with beneficiaries of RDP funding from across the programme as well as some social media analysis. The work was advertised in summer 2020 and was awarded to Miller in September 2020. The contract is currently in its early stages of fieldwork and aims to report in late 2020 / early 2021.

The RME team have been developing an evaluation of the **European Innovation Partnership.** The evaluation will look primarily look at
- the engagement process of farmers into the EIP,
- the process of delivery and the role of the innovation brokers as an intermediary between the farm and academic sectors,
- the impact of the projects, and in turn, the scheme with a particular focus on the nature and scale of innovation achieved and how effectively they findings are disseminated more broadly into the sector.

The methods and timescales to be used are still to be agreed but projects have been funded up until 2023 so it is likely the evaluation will take place until late 2022. As with other evaluations and to ensure availability of evidence moving forward it is expected that interim reports will be provided to ensure the timely provision of evidence to inform future decisions.

The RME team are considering options to better assess the **impact of RDP interventions on the agriculture sector**. The recommended approach by the Commission for looking at this includes linking data on supported farms to data collected as part of members states' Farm Business Surveys (which in turn inform FADN database). In Wales this is not possible due to the data collection processes in place for the Wales Farm Business Survey. Accordingly there is a need to consider alternative approaches that are considerate to concerns around survey burden with the farming population. The RME are team are looking at the feasibility of using existing datasets linked with participation data with RDP support to assess the impact of RDP interventions on the sector. If that is not possible, it is anticipated

that there will be a need to consider primary survey work while trying to mitigate concerns around over surveying farmers.

The RME have started initial discussions around developing the evaluation of the **Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing (EnRaW) scheme.** As the development of the specification is still in very early stages the scope and approach to the evaluation is still being developed. It is anticipated that the evaluation will look at the process of administration and delivery of the programme and the support infrastructure as well as the impact of the scheme, both in terms of the direct impact of the grants but also the wider benefits that the grants may be able to lead to. Given the delivery profile of EnRaW it is expected that the evaluation will run until early 2023.

The RME team had been working on a specification for a **Tourism Support Evaluation** looking at the suite of Tourism schemes offered under the RDP, including the Micro Small Business fund, the Tourism Amenity Investment Scheme and the Regional Tourism Network and Marketing Support scheme. It is hoped that by taking a sectoral approach to this evaluation, it will be possible to assess the complementarity of the schemes and the cumulative effect of the schemes on the sector as a whole. The evaluation aimed to look at how the schemes contributed to the Welsh Governments Tourism strategy and how this in turn supported the Tourism industry in rural Wales and therefore the rural economy more broadly. The specification was in its final stages of development and was planned to be in advertised in Spring 2020 however due to the impact of COVID 19 on the tourism sector the timing and focus of this research has had to be reconsidered to take into account the current challenges faced by the sector.

WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE, EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT (ESI) FUNDS 2014 – 2020:

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CROSS CUTTING THEMES: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, EQUAL OPPORTUNTIES & GENDER MAINSTREAMING, TACKLING POVERTY & SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Issue

1. This paper provides an overview of progress with implementation of all three Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) in the ERDF and ESF European Structural and Investment (ESI) Fund Programmes 2014 – 2020, from October 2019 until September 2020.

Recommendation

2. Members are invited to note the content of the report and to provide comments.

Background

3. There are three Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) in the 2014-2020 Structural Funds (SF) Programmes, Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming, Sustainable Development and Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion.

4. The first two of these themes are mandatory and are governed by the EU General Regulations, Article 7 Promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination (in Wales this includes the Welsh Language) and Article 8 Sustainable Development. In addition, Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion is a Wales specific CCT in line with the EU Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative) and as a key commitment of the Welsh Government.

5. As set out below, the CCTs require action in multiple fields and are integrated into all areas of the ESI programmes.

Indicators

6. The CCT indicators agreed with the European Commission for the current ERDF and ESF Operational Programmes are:

- Enterprises adopting or improving sustainable development strategies and monitoring systems
- Enterprises adopting or improving equality strategies and monitoring systems

- Operations integrating sustainable development into awareness raising, education and training programmes (ESF only)

7. The projects which are contributing to these indicators are shown at **Annex 1**. The consequences of Covid 19 and the impact on many projects, has meant that even with an extension and a concerted effort to 'catch up', some will struggle with achieving their original outcome targets. We are doing our best through the review meetings, to let sponsors know they can get in touch with us and access additional CCT support to help with this and other areas of concern.

The Cross Cutting Theme Project Level Indicators

8. The inclusion of a formal target is an important driver to encourage projects to address the CCTs. It also enables the monitoring of progress to take place systematically over the life of the programme.

9. However, as highlighted to members previously, formal targets have limitations when it comes to validating the wide range of related activity being undertaken. For that purpose, the information contained in **Annex 2** gives an indication of the kind of activity which is supporting the CCTs. The data provided includes a comparison with that included in the annual CCT reports to PMC in 2019, demonstrating the progress made over the period.

10. We continue to receive positive feedback from stakeholders on the inclusion of this mechanism which enables them to demonstrate the contribution they are making, through their activities, to the CCTs. The case studies we receive showcase the excellent work which many projects are delivering and also how some are using innovative ways of bring the CCT elements together as demonstrated later in the report with the ERDF Reduce Industrial Carbon Emissions (RICE) project.

Welsh Speakers Data

11. Information on Welsh language status is collected through the participant database and the breakdown for participants across both ESF Programmes is as follows:

Welsh Language	WW&V	East Wales
Preferred Language for Communication - Welsh	7%	2%
Understand Welsh	16%	5%
Speak Welsh	15%	6%
Read Welsh	13%	4%
Write Welsh	12%	4%
Received provision in Welsh, either 'partially' or 'fully'	12%	5%

Project examples

12. The model used to build the CCTs into the programmes embraces both vertical and horizontal measures. Vertical measures provide an opportunity to tackle particular issues related to one or other of the CCTs, while horizontal measures raise the profile and encourage a learning process across a diverse range of organisations and activities. The following are some examples of projects which are significantly contributing to the CCTs through their activity:

13. **ERDF - Tŷ Du Strategic Development Site**, is delivered by Caerphilly County Borough Council. The project will deliver the construction of high quality business and employment units at a regionally prioritised site, comprising up to 20,000 sq. ft. of starter units, complemented by associated infrastructure, drainage, servicing and landscaping works.

14. In addition to the capital construction works, the operation will seek to deliver complementary interventions of enterprise facilitation and training provision to help support long-term SME growth and create new employment opportunities for those most in need. This project is delivering the following sustainable development CCT project level indicators:

- Working towards BREEAM Excellent and Passiv Haus design;
- Encouragement of various sustainable transport options;
- Local supply chain use;
- Various resource efficiency measures;
- Green infrastructure will be developed on site as part of the public open space/landscaping and garden village concept;
- Sustainable Urban Drainage concepts will be utilised;
- Retention of existing woodland;
- Utilising a brownfield site for redevelopment.
- Cross Cutting Themes Champion

15. **ERDF - Reduce Industrial Carbon Emissions (RICE)** is being led by Swansea University in partnership with University of South Wales. RICE combines established expertise, in algae conversion and hydrogen generation, with emerging expertise in heat-to-electricity, CO_2 capture, and chemical waste. The focus is on innovative processes to reduce Wales' CO_2 emissions and decrease Welsh Heavy Industry's energy & raw material consumption. It aims to stimulate growth in Wales and achieve a global impact through a coordinated programme of transnational activities and drive cooperation with research institutions through cutting edge research. The project is delivering the following CCT project level indicators:

- Develop an Eco-code
- Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives
- Resource efficiency measures
- Female Participation in STEM
- Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh Language
- Cross Cutting Themes Champion

16. In March RICE researcher Dr Jennifer Rudd participated in Super Science Swansea 2020 at the Waterfront Museum in partnership with Oriel Science, as part of British Science Week and International Women's Day. The event included talks on a range of topics. The talk '*From Trash to Cash: An interactive workshop'* was based around reducing plastic waste by transforming old objects into something new live on stage. Also tackled was the question 'what do we do with carbon dioxide?' Dr Rudd used large inflated pilates balls to illustrate carbon dioxide, and invited audience members to participate in the demonstration.

17. Oriel Science reported that over 3,200 individuals attended the event, many of these were children of school age, enthused by what they saw and exposing them to a variety of STEM subjects.

18. RICE has also undertaken a study to establish the diversity of people working across the project. This involved inviting the project team to complete a questionnaire detailing their nationality, languages spoken and their gender. The information was gathered from across project partners at the Energy Safety Research Institute, Sustainable Environment Research Centre and the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling at the University of South Wales

19. The information gathered was used to produce an infographic – a visual representation of the equality and diversity within the project team.
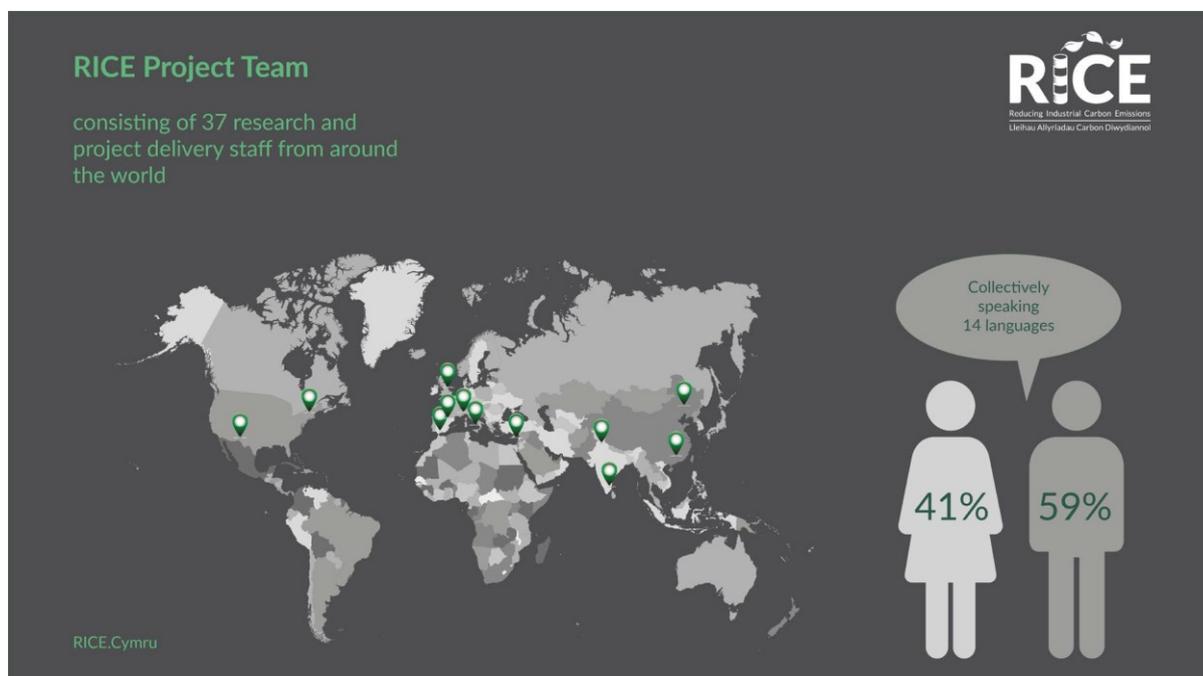
ESF - Progress for Success

20. Led by the Welsh Government's Department for Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning and Department for Local Government and Communities, Progress for Success operates across West Wales and the Valleys area. The aim is to raise the quality of the Early Years, Childcare and Play workforce by increasing the levels of relevant childcare qualifications held by the existing workforce within both the maintained and non-maintained sectors. The main focus is to up-skill Childcare and Play sector workers up to the proposed 'ideal benchmark' of Level 3 and a smaller proportion of childcare workers will be up-skilled to Levels 5 and/or 6.

21. A toolkit has been developed for all Work Based Learning providers, including those delivering the Progress for Success operation. It contains a range of resources and useful information including guidance; tips; worksheets; informative videos, web-links and social media links. It aims to assist them to increase their confidence to practically apply their knowledge and understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within the Work Based Learning environment. The toolkit is available by clicking on the attached link: https://gov.wales/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-toolkit-work-based-learning-wbl-providers

22. The project is delivering the following CCT project level indicators:

- Positive Action Measures for disabled people
- Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh Language
- Local supply chain development
- Resource efficiency measures
- Mentoring / Advocacy activity
- Peer to peer support
- Cross Cutting Themes Champion

23. Part of the operation's delivery is a 'Pathway to Welsh Medium', which aims to encourage and support practitioners within the existing workforce to upskill either in the Welsh language or bilingually and enable more childcare workers to have the confidence to use their Welsh language skills more frequently and widely within both Welsh and English medium settings, creating more Welsh speakers. This element of delivery will directly contribute to the Welsh Government's national strategy 'Cymraeg 2050 - A million Welsh speakers'. The 'Pathway to Welsh Medium' delivery was meant to have started in early 2020 but has been delayed due to Covid 19 issues. Activity is expected to commence this autumn.

Wider CCT Work - Environmental Good Practice

24. In 2019, the UK was informed that the EU Directorate General for Environment had launched a study on 'Integration of environment considerations in the selection of projects supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) - Review of practices and recommendations'. The goal of the study is to give an overview of the guiding principles, experiences, and good practices for integrating environmental considerations in the selection of projects in the context of the ESIF (in particular the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund) in the 2014-2020 period.

25. The study aims to assist Managing Authorities by providing a set of practical and operational recommendations for a better integration of the environment in the selection of the projects to be supported by ESIF when preparing the Operational Programmes for the next period 2021-2027.

26. The contract for the study was awarded to a consortium of COWI A/S and Milieu and in October (2019) WEFO was contacted by the researchers. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy of the UK had suggested to the EU Commission that Wales might be a suitable case study. In addition, the Cross Cutting Themes Team gave a presentation to DG Environment in 2016 on the good practice being delivered through the programme on sustainable development / environmental sustainability in Wales. These factors, alongside desk research carried out by the consortium, has resulted in DG Environment selecting the West Wales and the Valleys Operational Programme for more in-depth case study analysis.

27. The Cross Cutting Themes Team have been working with the researchers since November 2019 and a draft copy of the Welsh case study was received for comment in April 2020. It was anticipated the final EU Commission Guide would be published this summer 2020 but there has been a delay in the final publication. The Cross Cutting Themes Team will ensure that, when published, the document is shared with the PMC and also with the relevant staff and external subgroups working on the development of the Future Regional Investment Programmes.

Ongoing work and Future Regional Investment Programmes

28. Work across the CCT area has continued, interaction with sponsors and colleagues taking place via Microsoft Teams. While it is not always ideal to meet virtually, the reduction in travel time, both to the office and to project meetings on site, has meant that, as a small team (significantly reduced through temporary Covid redeployment and maternity leave over the past six months), we have been able to maintain the individual support we provide to sponsors.

29. The team continue to support the development of the new Framework for Regional Investment, ensuring that the cross-cutting themes (horizontal themes) continue to be a key element of the future programme.

Next Steps

30. The 'Integration of environment considerations in the selection of projects supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) - Review of practices and recommendations' report will be made available to the PMC when published.

31. Future reports will demonstrate the progress on both the programme CCT indicators and additional project level indicators, alongside examples of specific projects and the contribution they are making.

Drafted by: Chriss O'Connell WEFO
Approved by: Rachel Garside-Jones WEFO
Date: 05 October 2020

Annex 1:

Projects contributing to the Equal Opportunities CCT programme indicator:
'number of enterprises adopting or improving their equality strategies including monitoring system'.

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Priority	Forecast	May 2019	Achieved to date
Entrepreneurship Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science & Transport	East Wales ERDF	2	185	95	152
SME Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	East Wales ERDF	2	830	234	376
Social Business Wales	Wales Co-operative Centre	East Wales ERDF	2	50	34	34
Social Business Wales New Start	Wales Co-operative Centre	East Wales ERDF	2	25	N/A	4
Agile Nation 2	Chwarae Teg	East Wales ESF	2	193	97	184
Entrepreneurship Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	WW&V ERDF	2	475	190	320
SME Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	WW&V ERDF	2	2113	506	811
Social Business Wales	Wales Co-operative Centre	WW&V ERDF	2	250	113	113
Social Business Wales New Start	Wales Co-operative Centre	WW&V ERDF	2	100	N/A	18

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Priority	Forecast	May 2019	Achieved to date
Together for a Healthy Working Wales (In-Work Service)	WG - Department for Health and Social Services	WW&V ESF	1	700	2	62
Agile Nation 2	Chwarae Teg	WW&V ESF	2	554	268	373
Better Jobs, Better…..for Women in Employment	Gower College Swansea	WW&V ESF	2	18	0	0
Better Jobs, Better Futures...for the Underemployed	Gower College Swansea	WW&V ESF	1	50	N/A	0
Nurture Equip Thrive	Torfean CBC	WW&V ESF	1	75	0	3
Staying Well at Work	Rhondda Cynon Taff	WW&V ESF	1	139	0	13
Expanding Mons Horizons	Cymunedau Ymlaen Mon Communities Forward	WW&V ESF	1	188	0	46

Annex 1

Operations contributing to the ERDF Sustainable Development CCT programme indicator:
'number of enterprises adopting or improving their sustainable development strategies and monitoring systems'.

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achieved to August 2019	Achievement to date
Entrepreneurship Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	East Wales	185	95	236
SME Support - Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	East Wales	830	234	396
Social Business Wales	Wales Co-operative Centre	East Wales	50	40	40
Social Business Wales New Start	Wales Co-operative Centre	East Wales	25	N/A	4
SME Support Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	West Wales and the Valleys	2113	506	779
Entrepreneurship Support Business Wales	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	West Wales and the Valleys	475	190	435
Social Business Wales	Wales Co-operative Centre	West Wales and the Valleys	250	129	129
Social Business Wales New Start	Wales Co-operative Centre	West Wales and the Valleys	100	N/A	17

Annex 1

Operations contributing to the ESF Sustainable Development CCT programme indicator:
'operations integrating sustainable development into awareness raising, education and training programmes'

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achievement to-date
KESS II	Bangor University	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Materials and Manufacturing Academy	Swansea University	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Skills for Employers and Employees SO 1	Coleg Cambria	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Skills for Employers and Employees SO 2	Coleg Cambria	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Skills for Industry 2 SO1	Gower College Swansea	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Skills for Industry 2 SO 2	Gower College Swansea	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Achieve through Work Experience	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Inspire 2 Achieve	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
METAL 2	Swansea University	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Growing Workforces Through Learning and Development (GWLAD)	University of Wales Trinity Saint David	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achievement to-date
Apprenticeships	WG: Dept for Education and Skills	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
ReAct 3	WG: Dept for Education and Skills	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Traineeships	WG: Dept for Education and Skills	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Active Inclusion	Wales Council for Voluntary Action	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Active Inclusion Youth	Wales Council for Voluntary Action	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Agile Nation 2	Chwarae Teg	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
TRAC 11-24	Denbighshire County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Apprenticeships Skills Enhancement	WG: Dept for Education and Skills	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Inspire 2 Work	Blaenau Gwent County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Cynnydd	Pembrokeshire County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Cam Nesa	Pembrokeshire County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Leading Business Growth	Swansea University	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Workways II	Neath Port Talbot County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
North Wales Business Academy	Grwp Llandrillo-Menai	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
ADTRAC	Grwp Llandrillo-Menai	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achievement to-date
Nurture Equip Thrive	Torfaen County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Trio-Sci Cymru	WG - Department for Economy, Science and Transport	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Upskilling for Industry	University of Wales Trinity Saint David	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Better Jobs, Better Futures - For the over 25s	Gower College Swansea	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Better Jobs, Better Futures - Young people at risk of NEET	Gower College Swansea	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Welsh BioInnovation	Aberystwyth University	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
International Innovation Masters (IIM)	University of Wales Trinity Saint David	West Wales and the Valleys	1	1
Staying Well at Work	RCT County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Tackling in-work poverty Pembrokeshire	Pembrokeshire County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Expanding Mon's Horizons	Cymunedau Ymlaen Mon Communities Forward	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Swansea Working Short-Term unemployed	City & Council of Swansea	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0
Workways Plus Short-Term unemployed Over 25s	Neath Port Talbot County Council	West Wales and the Valleys	1	0

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achievement to-date
Skills for Employers and Employees SO1	Coleg Cambria	East Wales	1	1
Skills for Employers and Employees SO 2	Coleg Cambria	East Wales	1	1
Welsh Financial Services Graduate Programme	Welsh Contact Centre Forum Ltd	East Wales	1	1
Cynnydd	Powys County Council	East Wales	1	1
Achieve through Work Experience	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	East Wales	1	1
Workways Plus Powys	Powys County Council	East Wales	1	1
Apprenticeships	WG - Department for Education and Skills	East Wales	1	0
Traineeships	WG - Department for Education and Skills	East Wales	1	0
Active Inclusion	Wales Council for Voluntary Action	East Wales	1	1
Active Inclusion Youth	Wales Council for Voluntary Action	East Wales	1	1
Agile Nation 2	Chwarae Teg	East Wales	1	0
TRAC 11-24	Denbighshire County Council	East Wales	1	0
Apprenticeships Skills Enhancement	WG - Department for Education and Skills	East Wales	1	0
Skills at Work	Newport City Council	East Wales	1	0
North Wales Business Academy	Grwp Llandrillo-Menai	East Wales	1	1

Operation Title	Lead Beneficiary	Programme	Forecast	Achievement to-date
Growing Spaces - Learning to Grow	Growing Space	East Wales	1	0
Upskilling for Industry	University of Wales Trinity Saint David	East Wales	1	0
METAL 2	Swansea University	East Wales	1	0
Welsh BioInnovation	Aberystwyth University	East Wales	1	1
KESS 2	Bangor University	East Wales	1	0

Annex 2

ERDF Sustainable Development	August 2019	Sept 2020
Develop an Eco-code	24	32
Local supply chain development	40	47
Integration of green Infrastructure	14	15
Integration of blue infrastructure	7	9
Support for bio-diversity activity on a site funded through Structural Fund's	9	10
Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives	39	47
Resource efficiency measures	49	60
Site environmental management plans	19	19
BREEAM excellent where applicable	7	8
Attainment of CEQUALL for construction activity	8	8
Use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) where applicable	11	12

ESF Sustainable Development	August 2019	Sept 2020
Develop an Eco-code	35	37
Local supply chain development	15	18
Support for bio-diversity activity on a site funded through Structural Fund's	0	1
Development of an organisational travel plan and sustainable transport initiatives	27	29
Resource efficiency measures	50	60

ESF Equal Opportunities	March 2019	Sept 2020
Positive action measures - women	31	36
Positive action measure - BME people	17	22
Positive action measure - young people	17	21
Positive action measure - older people	13	16
Positive action measure - disabled people	29	42
Positive action measure - other	14	21
Occupational Segregation activity	44	56
Equal Pay activity	5	5
Female participation in STEM	27	31
Activity promoting the Welsh Language	18	18
Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh Language	36	36
Disability Access Group engagement	4	5
Childcare provision	17	22
Other care provision	9	9

ERDF Equal Opportunities	March 2019	Sept 2020
Positive action measures - women	21	32
Positive action measure - BME people	8	11
Positive action measure - young people	8	12
Positive action measure - older people	8	13
Positive action measure - disabled people	8	14
Positive action measure - other	4	3
Equal Pay activity	0	2
Female participation in STEM	22	36
Activity promoting the Welsh Language	5	14
Activity supporting speakers of the Welsh Language	22	43
Disability Access Group engagement	14	17
Childcare provision	0	5
Other care provision	0	1

ESF Cross Cutting Themes General	August 2019	Sept 2020
Stakeholder engagement good practice activity	7	10
Developing / engaging CCT champions	63	92
Integration of social clauses	18	20
CCT toolkit, base line mechanism, App development	2	2
CCT training package developed.	10	10
CCT staff training programme introduced.	0	13
Activity supporting CCT indicators (in Priorities / Objectives where the indicators aren't present)	11	14

ERDF Cross Cutting Themes General	August 2019	Sept 2020
Stakeholder engagement good practice activity	26	26
Developing / engaging CCT champions	79	91
Integration of social clauses	39	44
CCT toolkit, base line mechanism, App development	5	6
CCT training package developed.	5	5
CCT staff training programme introduced.	11	12
Activity supporting CCT indicators (in Priorities / Objectives where the indicators aren't present)	5	7

ESF Tackling Poverty*	Sept 2020
Community skill building activity	9
Mentoring / advocacy activity	68
Peer support activity	15
Volunteering schemes	29
Organisations paying the living wage	6

ERDF Tackling Poverty*	Sept 2020
Community skill building activity	33
Mentoring / advocacy activity	15
Peer support activity	1
Volunteering schemes	20
Organisations paying the living wage	18

*A comparison has not been made because the data was not reported in 2019

Wales Rural Network (WRN) Workplan 2020

Introduction

The Wales Rural Network's annual Workplan aims to promote best practise, networking opportunities and engagement for the Wales Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

The governance, planning and delivery arrangements for the WRN, dictates that the WRN Workplan is to be developed and approved by the WRN Steering Group on an annual basis.

The work plan will be delivered under the management of the Head of the Wales Rural Network. The agreed programme of activity will be led by the WRN Support Unit, Steering Group Members or other identified groups/individuals as appropriate. The Workplan can be amended if necessary in agreement with the Chair of the WRN steering group.

This Workplan supports the Communication and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans. It also forms a vital part of the Wales RDP Communications Strategy, playing a key role in co-ordinating the communications, information and publicity activities for the Wales RDP and its associated schemes.

Background

WRN activities are driven by EU/UK regulatory or policy requirements and also by stakeholder needs identified through representation by the Steering Group or stakeholder consultations.

WPMC(20)179 Annex 1 - WRN Workplan Outputs - 2019 - 2020

Networking 2019

Aim /task	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	WRN Activities 2019	Outputs to Date
Involve Stakeholders	Encourage transnational co-operation among LAGS businesses and projects.	Encourage and facilitate inter-territorial co-operation among LAGS, businesses and projects.	LAGs have been divided and are managed geographically between all WRNSU managers.	Ongoing management and regular contact with individual areas.
			Attend meetings – 1-2 LAG meetings in respective areas LAG area Officers Meetings (Quarterly)	Attendance at quarterly meetings for each of the 18 LAGs.
	Monitor activity and liaise with other Networks	Attend ENRD Network Meetings	WRN Representative to attend Thematic & Network Meetings	11th & 12th April - NetworX, Brussels; 21st February - 13th NRN Meeting, Athlone, Ireland; 19th September - 15th NRN Meeting, France
		Attend Regular UKNRN Meetings	Regular meetings with England; NI & Scotand	WRN organised the UK NRN Event on 18th & 19th November in Chester. Fortnightly teleconferences took place. UK Rural Policy Exchange, Newtown 5th & 6th September.

Stakeholder Engagement	Share Best Practice	Collate and Share Case Studies	Upload Case studies to website and promote via newsletter & Social Media	31 Case studies have been written and shared in the period Jan - Aug 2020
	Share Best Practice; Share and promote news and EoI Windows; Share and promote Partner Activities	Newsletters	WRN Newsletter	24 newsletters (12 English; 12 Welsh) have been sent out in 2019.
			Scheme Window Contributions in Gwlad Newsletter	42 newsletters (21 English; 21 Welsh) have been sent out in 2019.
			Scheme Window Contributions in Natural Resources Newsletter	4 newsletters (2 English; 2 Welsh) have been sent out in 2019.
		Website	Share News stories; Case Studies; Funding Windows; Projects	At least 2 pieces of information are added to the website on a daily basis. There were 102,111 website hits from 1st January - 31st December 2019. The website had 1,319 projects on the directory in 2019 from across the RDP.

		Social Media	Share WRN Website Content and re-tweet relevant stories	Twitter had a great increase in followers during 2019 from 1,427 followers in January to 1,617 followers in December. Facebook saw a steady increase in followers, having 75 in January up to 103 by the end of December 2019.
Events	Organisation / Facilitation of Workshops / Events	Organisation / Facilitation of Thematic & Training Workshops / Events	To manage and facilitate Training & Thematic events & Workshops in conjunction with Policy Leads & LAGs	1st March - LEADER Co-operation event run in conjunction with Scottish Rural Network
				14th & 15th October - 2x Timber passporting events
				17th October - PMC Study Visits
				1st November - Cywain Supply Chain Workshop
				1st November - Women in Entrepreneurship Workshop
				18th & 19th November - UK NRN Event and Study Visits

Networking 2020

Aim /task	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	WRN Activities 2020	Outputs to Date
Involve Stakeholders	Encourage transnational co-operation among LAGS businesses and projects.	Encourage and facilitate inter-territorial co-operation among LAGS, businesses and projects.	LAGs have been divided and are managed geographically between all WRNSU managers.	Ongoing management of individual areas, regular contact with areas and outputs gathered on a quarterly basis
			Attend meetings – 1-2 LAG meetings in respective areas LAG area Officers Meetings (Quarterly)	Minimum of 1 physical and 1 virtual LAG meeting attended for each area; 1 physical and 1 virtual officers meeting attended (South West Wales & South East Wales only)
	Support partner searches for Art. 35 (EU Regs 1305/2013 - Co-operation) measures	Support partner searches for Art. 35 (EU Regs 1305/2013 - Co-operation) measures	Facilitate Transnational Co-operation enquiries through the ENRD Contact Point	4 projects currently in progress

			Facilitate Welsh Co-operation enquiries between areas	11 projects currently in progress. (A further 12 projects due to complete in 2020 may experience delays & extensions due to COVID-19)
	Monitor activity and liaise with other Networks	Attend ENRD Network Meetings	WRN Representative to attend Thematic & Network Meetings	Attended - International & Cross Border Sub-Group Meeting (Jan 2020) Decision taken by WG not to attend meetings due to Brexit
		Attend Regular UKNRN Meetings	Regular meetings with England; NI & Scotand	The First meeting of the UKNRNs due to take place in Belfast had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. Fortnightly teleconference calls between the 4 regions are taking place
Stakeholder Engagement	Share Best Practice	Collate and Share Case Studies	Upload Case studies to website and promote via newsletter & Social Media	88 Case studies have been written and shared in the period Jan - Aug 2020
	Share Best Practice; Share and promote news and EoI Windows; Share and promote Partner Activities	Newsletters	WRN Newsletter	18 newsletters (9 English; 9 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020

			Scheme Window Contributions in Gwlad Newsletter	24 newsletters (12 English; 12 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020
			Scheme Window Contributions in EU Funds in Wales Newsletter	14 newsletters (7 English; 7 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020
			Scheme Window Contributions in Natural Resources Newsletter	12 newsletters (6 English; 6 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020
			Promotional link to WRN in Food & Drink Newsletter	2 newsletters (1 English; 1 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020
			Promotional link to WRN in Tourism Newsletter	4 newsletters (2 English; 2 Welsh) have been sent out between Jan - Sept 2020
		Website	Share News stories; Case Studies; Funding Windows; Projects	At least 2 pieces of information are added to the website on a daily basis. There have been 107,048 website hits from Jan - August 2020 The website currently has 1,344 projects on the directory from across the RDP

		Social Media	Share WRN Website Content and re-tweet relevant stories	Twitter has seen a steady increase in followers during 2020 from 1,632 followers in Jan to 1,699 followers in Aug Facebook has also seen a steady increase from 134 followers in Jan to 168 in Aug
Events	Organisation / Facilitation of Workshops / Events	Organisation / Facilitation of Thematic & Training Workshops / Events	To manage and facilitate Training & Thematic events & Workshops in conjunction with Policy Leads & LAGs	**Feb 2020 -** Rural Economy – Supply Chains - Physical Workshop - 21 Wool / Textile Stakeholders attended
				Sept 2020 - National Forest Plan Workshop 2020 - Virtual Workshop - 51 Forestry Stakeholders attended
				Sept 2020 - Rural Economy – Supply Chains - Virtual Workshop - 32 Wool / Textile Stakeholders attended
				Forward look
				Oct 2020 - 2nd National Forest Plan Workshop 2020 - Virtual Workshop
				Nov 2020 - SMS - Virtual Workshop
				Nov 2020 - Rural Economy – Supply Chains

				Wool / Textiles - Virtual Workshop

WPMC(20)179 Annex 2 - WRN Comms Review 2019 - English - Web

Wales Rural Network

Annual Communications Review 2019

The Wales Rural Network Support Unit

"Supporting Rural Communities and Businesses; ensuring that natural resources are used sustainably"

Our role is to:

- Communicate, share and exchange information and news
- organise and promote free events and initiatives
- showcase funded projects examples and case studies
- Communicate and promote funding opportunities
- arrange study visits encouraging co-operation and sharing of knowledge
- connect businesses, community groups, and others, interested in Rural Development
- share best practices and EU supporting information.

Connect With Us...

We communicate with our audience through a variety of channels, which include:

Facebook
December 2019:
228 followers
Oct – Dec 2019:
3.5% growth

Twitter
December 2019:
1,617 followers
Oct – Dec 2019:
1.7% growth

Newsletter
December 2018:
English 6,123, Welsh 332
December 2019:
English 6,892, Welsh 344

Old Website
Jan 2018 to Dec 2018:
26,248 views

New Website
www.businesswales.gov.
wales/walesruralnetwork
Jan 2019 to Dec 2019
105,248 views

WPMC(20)179 Annex 3 - Wales Rural Network - COVID - 19 LEADER activities Review 2020

Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014–2020

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Wales Rural Network
COVID-19 LEADER Activities Review

DIOGELU CYMRU
KEEP WALES SAFE

The LEADER Scheme can be a useful socio-economic tool in both the immediate response to the emergency in rural areas and the longer-term recovery process. Welsh Local Action Groups (LAG's) have identified immediate priorities on the ground. These include:
- Securing and distributing food and medical supplies to all including the most rurally/socially isolated
- Identifying local resources including co-ordinating volunteers and supporting short supply chains
- Networking and collaborating to ensure an informed and appropriate approach to meet local needs.

Many LEADER Local Action Groups and their Administrative Bodies in Wales have adapted their expertise and applied the LEADER approach to assist businesses and communities during the immediate response to the coronavirus pandemic.
This review captures some good examples of how Local Action Groups in Wales are pro-actively supporting their rural communities during the pandemic.

Getting key workers and communities on-line - GWYNEDD & ANGLESEY.

With access to the internet and technology more important than ever, a new scheme in Gwynedd and Anglesey is getting key workers and community centres on-line for free. The project, co-ordinated by Menter Môn with the support of Welsh Government, provides internet access via 4G routers in rural areas where there is no reliable connection.

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020

WRNSU Communications and Stakeholder Engagement 2019 & 2020

1. Introduction

This Plan outlines the approach to publicising the Schemes funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-20 (WGRC-RDP) for the 2019 & 2020 period. It has been developed to cover this specific period but sits alongside the broader Information and Publicity Strategy for the whole Programme.

It is essential to provide continuity to stakeholders to allow them to plan and make best use of Programme funding.

2. Aims and Objectives:

- Communicate the programme Pan Wales by continuing to promote the delivery and benefits of EU Funds in Wales.
- Work with sponsors and stakeholders using a number of communication channels to publicise progress, achievements and impact.
- Encourage via the above communication methods, participation of all people living in and working in community areas to unlock the potential in our rural economy.
- Encourage a wide range of stakeholders to submit ideas and solutions to boost communities and the economy.
- Demonstrate how the funds support the creation of rural economy, encouraging the agricultural industry and rural communities to develop their business now and for future generations.
- Demonstrate the positive role that RDP Funding has played and is playing in improving local economies, by publicising approved projects on the project database.
- Demonstrate the role RDP Funding has directly achieved to support the lives of those living and working in rural areas, by utilising new technology and digital channels, production of digital footage to publicise visually key messages and project case studies.

3. Key Messages

At Programme level the following goals and messages for communication and engagement remain relatively unchanged:

This seven year investment of some £745 million by the Welsh Government and EU in rural Wales will boost our rural economy by providing over twenty avenues of funding to support everything from developing better rural childcare options to community energy creation to better land management.

Below Programme level, a range of messages appropriate to the various stakeholder segments concerned are being developed. Given that we expect the greatest pressure from the agriculture sector our handling proposals are outlined below.

4. Wales Rural Network (WRN) Communication - Land based and Socio-economic Schemes

In accordance with EU regulations, WRNSU has been established to organise networking, training and information exchange opportunities to support the implementation and delivery of the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The WRNSU provide networking support and communication via the following channels:

Newsletters: Contribute fortnightly / monthly to update partners and stakeholders on key developments via GWLAD / WRN Newsletter.

E-Bulletin: Leading up to the scheme opening and on the day externally promote a bilingual update via the WRN Stakeholders.

Website WRN / RDP: Ensure Web content is written correctly and compliant with WG guidelines.

Social media: WRN Twitter / Facebook – updates during window via the official WG channels, promoting and sharing news / EU updates.

Events: Arrange and manage business events to promote all opportunities. Since April 2020 and with the **COVID19** restrictions in place the WRNSU have arranged and managed virtual events through Microsoft Teams.

Case studies: Work with Policy team / Project beneficiaries to obtain information on all approved projects. Obtain detailed funding info, project description and images, these will be created as individual documents and published on the WRN Web pages, further promoted in GWLAD / WRN Newsletter, LEADER Local Action Groups across Wales and via Wales / UK and EU as exemplary examples of Funding.

Management of Scheme Documentation: In line with EU Regulation, manage the publication of scheme documentation to support scheme windows which includes Welsh translation EOI Criteria and Application and Guidance.

Information & Publicity Guidelines: Manage the Information and Publicity across all RDP Schemes, inform and support project beneficiary's ensuring compliancy of EU requirements via: Branding and Logos, Plaques and Press and Public Relations.

Manage all Media engagement to include:

- Ministerial announcements, written statements and visits / Press notices and project visits
- Front line staff lines to take / intranet articles, news stories, publication of events and projects.

5. WRN Web / IT Development

Following the Welsh Government decision to move all content to a black and white beta .govsite the WRN procured the build of a purpose built network site on the Business Wales Platform : https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/

- This has enabled the WRNSU to continue to improve methods, practices and processes for external communication.
- WRNSU continue to work on improving the Website and external Local Action Groups will have publishing responsibilities for project examples.
- The new build consists of two interactive maps, visually promoting all funding awarded to date with details on the relevant projects.
- The news section contains all EU funding, scheme opening dates and key supporting information.
- The web pages are linked to our social media channels supporting external communication via other channels.
- Procured, ten short films, showcasing projects, these have been published on YouTube and will be promoted via the WRN Webpages.
- There are over 1300 projects (including LEADER) published on the new interactive Project pages, numerous now contain links to live web pages.
- Re-tweets with quotes and promotional tweets / Facebook posts regarding scheme windows daily

6. Participation at ENRD (European Network for Rural Development) / EU Events

WRNSU has been very active in participating and contributing to ENRD activities in order to improve the quality of RDP implementation. Restrictions have now been put in place by UK Government to cancel some EU activities between the UK and EU due to Brexit. Attending ENRD activities has fallen into this category.

Wales Rural Network (WRN) Work Plan 2019/2020

Introduction

The Wales Rural Network's annual Work plan aims to promote best practise, networking opportunities and engagement for the Wales Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020.

The governance, planning and delivery arrangements for the WRN, dictates that the WRN Work Plan is to be developed and approved by the WRN Steering Group on an annual basis. The Work Plan will be delivered under the management of the Head of the Wales Rural Network. The agreed programme of activity will be led by the WRN Support Unit, Steering Group Members or other identified groups/individuals as appropriate. The Work Plan can be amended if necessary in agreement with the Chair of the WRN Steering Group.

This Work Plan supports the Communication and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans. It also forms a vital part of the Wales RDP Communications Strategy, playing a key role in co-ordinating the communications, information and publicity activities for the Wales RDP and its associated schemes.

Background

WRN activities are driven by EU/UK regulatory or policy requirements and also by stakeholder needs identified through representation by the Steering Group or stakeholder consultations.

Aim /task	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	Activities 2020	Risk – Non-compliance with REGULATION (EU) No 1305/2013 - This Regulation lays down rules for the implementation of Regulation as regards the presentation of rural development programmes, procedures and timetables for approval and amendment of rural development programmes and national frameworks, the content of national frameworks, information and publicity for rural development programmes, implementation of certain rural development measures, monitoring and evaluation and reporting. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF Non-compliance could result in claims not being paid.
Networking				

Involve Stakeholders	Encourage transnational co-operation among LAGS businesses and projects. Support partner searches for Art. 35 measures. Monitor activity and liaise with other networks	Arrange consultation, training and networking events in accordance with demand from Scheme leads, stakeholders, Steering Group and LAGs. Encourage and facilitate inter-territorial co-operation among LAGs, businesses and projects. Monitor and support networking activity by other organisations	LAGs have divided management geographically between all WRNSU managers. Attend meeting – • 1-2 LAG meetings in respective areas • LAG area Officers Meetings Provide regular WRN Newsletter providing newsletters circulating news/case studies/good practice and updates from Wales/The UK/Europe (every 2-4 weeks). Collate and publish Good Practice/Case Studies and publish to the WRN website. Circulate and advise on partner searches at all levels.	Stakeholder Involvement forms an integral part of - Community-led local development (LEADER) (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Articles 43 and 44 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013) & Article 35 – co-operation. **Action Taken** • Events • Promotion and liaison regarding co-operation • Newsletter • Social Media posts • Online case studies • Video case studies • Funding Fairs • Thematic workshops • Joint working with other regions **See Annex1**

			Attend UKNRN events and ensure interterritorial co-operation is on agendas. Contribute news, activities and atendance at events and meetings on the shared portal for the UKNRN. Attend and support networking activity by other programme partners and relevant stakeholders eg ERIAFF. Support and encourage the production of UK co-operation guidance. Encourage the adoption of a common approach to co-operation among UK Managing Authorities/Networks. Support formation of UK / Ireland cluster	

ENRD Activity	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	Activities 2020	**See annex 1**

Improve the quality of RDP implementation and integration with existing development policies	Participate in and contribute to ENRD activities.	Collect examples of projects covering all RDP priorities. Facilitate thematic and analytical exchanges between stakeholders as required by Steering Group and MA. Share and disseminate best practice and monitoring and evaluation findings Participate and contribute to the UK NRN's activities	Ensure appropriate WRN representation at ENRD Events Represent Wales/present and participate at ENRD/ELARD events as required. Promote the use of ENRD resources by LAGs/FLAGs through newsletters and website and forward news onto relevant stakeholders. Upload case study/best practice material from last RDP etc. to ENRD website. Maintain the profile and influence of Wales with ENRD and the wider EU networking community. UKNRN meetings to be held in each region in turn and incorporate successful scheme visits.	Wales as a region must involve itself in key European events and meetings to ensure it adheres to **(ART. 54 3B(VII) OF REG. 1305/2013).** **Actions Taken** • Complete online RDP Project Directory • Collation and sharing of case studies • Use of good practice examples at events • Newsletter • Social Media posts • Online case studies • Video case studies • Funding Fairs • Thematic workshops • Joint working with other regions • Attendance at UKNRN meetings • Involvement in European events • Sharing of EU news and events via newsletter • Providing relevant information for other newsletters • Arrange project visits **See Annex1**

			Wales Rural Network to commence secretariat responsibilities – Jan 20 – Jan 21	

Communications	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	Activities 2020	

Inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries	Organise RDP information and publicity activities Develop communication tools to inform broader public and stakeholders about RDP activity Share and disseminate monitoring and evaluation findings via ENRD	Produce publicity and information materials concerning the RDP aimed at the broader public. Provide information and communication activities aimed at beneficiaries and the broader public. Share and disseminate monitoring and evaluation findings via UKNRN. Keep abreast of WG and Ministerial comms priorities Publicise scheme opening and application windows	Organise events, seminars conferences, field trips, study visits etc., to inform the public and potential beneficiaries about the RDP and the activities it supports. Organise and support RDP Royal Welsh Show presence and all campaigns – ongoing. Monitor email inbox for WRNSU Maintain and continuously update website, social media accounts and document library. Facebook now added to the WRNSU portfolio. **Covid 19 response** **The LEADER Scheme can be a useful socio-economic tool in both**	**Steps must be taken to ensure that the programme is publicised (Article 13 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014) – non compliance may affect claims** **https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0808&from=en** **Actions Taken** • Production of promotional materials • Production of Scheme Factsheets • Newsletter • Information sharing with other NRN • Provision of plaques to beneficiaries • New website including interactive map • Social media • Liaison with scheme leads and comms • News stories and updates relating to scheme windows • Gain ministerial quotes for specific news stories • Arrange project visits See Annex 1 & 2

		Work with external Comms Teams to maximise RDP communications opportunities	**the immediate response to the emergency in rural areas and the longer-term recovery process. Welsh Local Action Groups (LAG's) have identified immediate priorities on the ground. These include:** • **Securing and distributing food and medical supplies to all including the most rurally/socially isolated** • **Identifying local resources including co-ordinating volunteers, supporting short supply chains** • **Networking and collaborating to ensure an informed and appropriate**	**See Annex 4 -** COVID 19 Newsletter and Webpages for evidence of response for the recovery process in Wales.

			approach to meet local needs Add new Social Media platforms to the portfolio – • Instagram • You Tube • Continue to update content on the website – Add news stories on a daily basis • Add regular case studies • Add new approved projects on a quarterly basis Provide further functionalities for the WRN Website. Planned additions for 2020 are – • A new 'Innovation' area to incorporate 'Smart Villages'	**See Annex 3** – provides strong evidence to support the importance of could communication channels for our RDP stakeholders. Continued development on WRNSU webpages to reflect the current situation to make sure our stakeholders are receiving up to date information. One stop portal for stakeholders to search for information on RDP and other communication channels. https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/wrn-support-unit

		and 'EIP' case studies • A new area for Video Case Studies • Add new page to carry EOI information Work with Web team and Gwlad, Glastir etc. to ensure schemes and application windows are publicised via appropriate channels Address MA and steering Group priorities via comms activities - ongoing Update RDP comms and promotional materials to reflect policy priorities and RDP opportunities including producing infographics and an RDP summary booklet Organise and distribute plaques for Programme beneficiaries	

MA Communications			Work with Ministers' offices, Natural resources, WEFO and ESNR comms teams to agree internal WG communications protocols and channels	Regular meetings with comms leads in NR, EST & WEFO Ensure schemes and application windows are publicised via appropriate channels internally Chair regular bi-monthly comms forum for Scheme leads and programme contributors Lead where appropriate and contribute to internal comms efforts especially on Programme issues. Maximise opportunities for Ministers to publicise RDP -ongoing	**Steps must be taken to ensure that the programme is publicised (Article 13 of Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 808/2014) – https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0808&from=en** **<u>Actions Taken</u>** • Delegation of geographical areas for LEADER to individual WRN Managers to forge relationships with LAGs and facilitate activies and events • Delegation of Socio-Economic Schemes to individual WRN Managers to forge relationships with scheme leads and facilitate activies and events

Foster Innovation	Monitor work of EIP contact point	Monitor work of Farming Connect EIP Scheme Support networking activities for advisors and innovation support services if required.	Organise networking events for innovation support services brokers according to demand Advise and input on the establishment of innovation operational groups and organisation of events as necessary Meet with Farming Connect, Menter a Busnes and Lantra regularly Disseminate findings as necessary Meet with Farming Connect etc to discuss operation of innovation support package	**(ART. 54 3B(IV) OF REG. 1305/2013) - https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0487:0548:en:PDF** **The Farming Connect and EIP Wales programmes must foster innovation and provide networking; brokerage; training and mentoring to remain compliant** **Actions Taken** • Individual WRN manager formed relationships and monitored these programmes • Case study Videos • Sharing of news stories • Sharing of events https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/innovation
Wales Priorities	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	Activities 2020	

Support delivery of cross cutting themes		Promote Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming, Sustainable Development and Tackling Poverty within RDP as required by Steering Group and MA.	Undertake agreed activities. Regular meetings with WEFO to agree joint promotion opportunities.	Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013) & Article 35 – co-operation. Consider how changes in staff in WRN can affect relationships with partners and stakeholders resulting in a loss of communications between LAGs and other NRNs. **Actions Taken** • Individual WRN Manager responsible for all cross-cutting and co-operation schemes • All wales workshops • Joint workshop with Scotland • Co-operation section in newsletter
Support integration with other ESI Funds			Act on any ESI PMC recommendations. Monitor PMC discussions. Seek opportunities for joint activities Support Steering Group members liaison with PMC	Consider how Brexit may change links with these funds and the availability of Domestic Funding for such activities. **Actions Taken** • Attentance at PMC meetings • Arrange project visits for PMC and EU desk officers

Help embed the Future Generations Act within programme implementation		Ensure activities embody the sustainable development principle in line with policy Link thematic events to well-being goals	Increase WRNSU knowledge of the Future Generations Act Explore opportunities to embed the Act in programme implementations with internal and external partners Apply approach in all events and activities	**Actions Taken** • Ensure FGA is key to all schemes and activities • Promotion and sharing of specific schemes that embody FGA - ENRaW and SMS schemes • Events
Facilitate CLLD		Arrange LAG events etc. as required	Work with LAGs and Leader scheme leads to identify and promote opportunities	**Actions Taken** • Delegation of geographical areas for LEADER to individual WRN Managers to forge relationships with LAGs and facilitate activities and events
Administration	EU level key work areas	Wales level key work areas	Activities 2020	

Wales Rural Network Secretariat role	Establish WRN Steering Group by April 2016	Develop and maintain WRN Work Plan	Organise 3- 4 steering group meetings per year Provide secretariat and full support for meetings Agree Work Plan with steering group Deliver activities in Work Plan	• SG Group meeting 3 x year • Provide and review Work Plan annually • UKNRN Secretariat duties
Wales Rural Network Project Management	Provide NSU	Manage the WRN project	Submit quarterly project claims on time Ensure control and audit compliance Maintain adequate staffing and resources to deliver Work Plan	Project managed by WRN Finance Manager and signed off by Head of Wales Rural Network.
	AIR reporting	ESI PMC reporting	Submit AIR and PMC reports by deadlines.	Annual report submitted to EU and PMC

WALES PROGRAMME MONITORING COMMITTEE, EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS 2014 – 2020:

Annual European Structural Funds Communications Plan for 2020 - 2021

Issue

1. The paper sets out the Communications Plan for 2020 and to the first quarter of 2021 for the ERDF and ESF Structural Funds programmes 2014–2020. It provides an update of communication activity, sets out the main information and publicity priorities and measures for this period, and how they will be delivered.

2. Unless otherwise stated, updates in this paper cover the period between September 2019 and September 2020.

Recommendation

3. To note and agree the Communications Plan for 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.

Background

4. The Communications Plan has been prepared by the programmes' Managing Authority, the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO). It has been informed by and supplements the overarching Communication Plan for 2014–2020, which was agreed by the Wales Programme Monitoring Committee in June 2015.

Context

5. Wales continues to be in transition until the end of the year, with increased uncertainty whether the UK will leave the EU with 'a deal' or 'no deal', therefore we will continue to provide assurances to existing and potential stakeholders and sponsors that we remain committed to delivering the programmes, investing the full allocation of funding. Communicating the benefits and achievements of EU funds in Wales remains a key priority of our communications activities.

6. Through our ongoing publicity of EU funds achievements and benefits to our businesses, communities and people we are continuing to make a strong case to the UK Government for replacement funding and for the autonomy to develop and deliver successor arrangements in Wales.

7. Working with our sponsors and stakeholders, we are using a number of communication channels to publicise progress, achievements and impact: press / media notices, social media such as Twitter, YouTube, the e-newsletter, and website measures, which continue to attract a growing following and reach among stakeholders and the general public.

8. Since the last annual communications update to the PMC in October 2019, we have achieved 99% average of positive coverage of EU funds in press / media. In addition, the number of subscribers to our bimonthly e-newsletter has increased

by 42.8% from 7,500 to 10,712, while the number of Twitter followers has also increased from 4,032 to 4,456.

9. Certain events have impacted on our delivery of communication activities and messages on EU funds over the last 12 month period, these are:

Pre-election period for the UK General Election on 12 December 2019
Whilst the Welsh Government pre-election guidance allowed for more flexibility on business as usual events and announcements, a number of pre-planned visits and events were postponed or cancelled at this time.

COVID 19:
With the emergence of COVID 19 and the subsequent UK national lockdown restrictions put in place at the end of March 2020, this significantly affected any pre-planned visits and events, which were postponed or cancelled.

The focus of Welsh Government communication activity was solely on COVID 19 messages to the public. Likewise, WEFO communications activity at this time focussed on re-assuring beneficiaries and project leads about any new processes or arrangements for projects in light of the pandemic.

All standard communication activities such as Ministerial announcements or pro-active social media activity was postponed for a prolonged period of time (12 weeks).

This also had an impact on our usual publicity activity marking Europe Day (9 May) however we did communicate with our sponsors and advised them to take their own approach to Europe Day as we were unable to deliver a campaign they could support.

Taking into consideration the EU publicity requirements for both WEFO as a Managing Authority and the Welsh Government as a beneficiary, we sought Ministerial agreement in July to put in place a more nuanced approach to announcing EU funded projects via social media. This new process is now in place, we have worked through the backlog of project funding announcements over the past few months.

Following the previous PMC meeting in October, our Research, Monitoring and Evaluation team established monthly meetings with SE RET team to scope the work required to produce more accessible reports on the benefits and impact of EU funding in the regions. This work was postponed due to the pandemic, with both WEFO and Local Authorities now working on more pressing priorities. However, we will look to evolve and develop for the future programmes, subject to funding.

Following the transition of the Welsh Government website to a new content management system, we encountered some technical issues with developing a new project database on the new page. We were looking at solutions to this with

the central website team, however this work was also postponed due to the pandemic.

At time of writing, we continue to have national and local lockdown restrictions in place, however we are starting to see the emergence of online events and we are now looking at opportunities for Ministers to participate either live at the events or via a recorded video.

10. We continue to work closely with the Regional Investment in Wales team to ensure all publicity and communications take into account, where and if appropriate, key messages on future regional investment fund development, including key messages around post-Covid economic recovery.

11. Given the shifting focus on the development of a new regional investment in Wales model for 2021, we have taken the decision not to hold an annual information event this year purely focussed on the achievements of EU funds. We will be taking an approach akin to Managing Authorities in England and Scotland who either produce a booklet on the achievements throughout the year or a develop a social media campaign, by producing instead a legacy document which will focus on the impact and benefits to Wales of EU funding through the current 2014 – 2020 programming period. As there are a number of proposed events on the new regional investment model that will be taking place at the end of the year, we will take the opportunity to promote and distribute this document at the events as well as promoting this via the website and social media.

Information and Publicity priorities for 2020 and early 2021

12. The key information and publicity priorities to promote the ERDF and ESF programmes at national and regional levels will be as follows:

- to promote the delivery and benefits of EU funds in Wales, with a stronger consensus around the importance of EU funds to Wales' prosperity especially around post COVID 19 recovery, simplifying messages, and achieving a 'plain English' readability score;
- ensure delivery project sponsors, partners and stakeholders, including the Regional Engagement Teams, continue to understand and comply with regulatory requirements on publicising the programmes so that EU funds are not put at risk;
- ensure existing and potential beneficiaries are kept informed about any COVID 19 arrangements or any impact of COVID 19 restrictions on projects and delivery;
- use the impact of EU funds to continue to influence UK decisions on replacement funding for Wales to address post-COVID 19 economic recovery, other long-term challenges, and ensure stakeholders, sponsors, and the general public are kept informed of developments on the future regional economic policy and investment in Wales;
- continue to mark the significance of Europe Day (9 May) working with project sponsors to promote the benefits of EU projects and the programmes;
- continue to increase the profile of cross-cutting themes and the wider value

being generated by projects in these areas, maximising key opportunities such as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

- develop publicity to create awareness and interest in any new funding calls to support the delivery of ESF and ERDF programmes in Wales;
- develop, publish and promote a legacy document celebrating the achievements of the programmes for the current 2014-2020 programming round;
- create PR opportunities for Welsh Ministers to continue to raise the ongoing impact of EU-funded projects;
- maximise the potential of new digital / social media technologies, where appropriate;
- continue to integrate opportunities and successes with other EU funding programmes such as the European Territorial and Co-operation and rural development programmes, and those directly managed by the European Commission, such as Horizon 2020, particularly as we believe Wales should continue to benefit from access to them outside of the EU; and
- evaluate the effectiveness of key publicity activities and content to inform future communications.

Measures

13. How these priorities can be taken forward in 2020/2021 is set out in the main publicity measures in **Annex A**. This includes delivery arrangements and the timetable for implementation.

Major information activity for 2020 / early 2021

14. We are now in the last period of the 2014-2020 programmes, with over 100% commitment of EU funds planned for and approved projects delivering benefits and achieving significant milestones. While publicity around funding announcements will continue, there are increasing opportunities to showcase the real-life impact of these projects on people, communities, businesses, and the resultant impact on helping to improve prosperity and labour market conditions in Wales.

15. Measures to promote project activities will continue to link with activities to promote the achievements of the programmes overall also the work being undertaken to develop a future regional policy and investment model for Wales as well as post-Covid economic recovery.

16. WEFO will continue to work with RETs / 3-SET to help with the effective delivery of the 2014-2020 Communication strategy and annual plans, as they continue to play an important role in helping to promote the programmes and projects at regional and local levels.

17. Given the shifting focus on future regional investment in the Welsh policy, work with both the regional investment in Wales team and the Welsh Government

central communication team on key messages and future communication requirements.

Progress so far in 2020

18. The following is a snapshot of communications activities so far:

- Substantial mainstream media, online and social media coverage of EU funding project announcements including:
- £1.3million ESF awarded to Learning to Grow project which will support people facing complex barriers to employment compounded by mental ill health across Newport, Monmouthshire, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.
- £0.7m ERDF awarded to Social Business Wales New Start East Wales - to support the creation of new social businesses in East Wales.
- £3.4m ERDF to support major project to transform Port Talbot's Plaza Cinema into community hub with café, gym, office space, conference area, digital recording studio and shops.
- £14.9m ERDF to support further development of the marine energy industry in Wales through the Pembroke Dock Marine programme:
  - 4 projects - the Marine Energy Engineering Centre of Excellence (MEECE), Pembrokeshire Demonstration Zone - Consent and Development, Pembroke Dock Building Adaptations and Pembroke Dock Marine Access Infrastructure.
- £0.5m ESF to support the Tackling Poverty Pembrokeshire project, led by Pembrokeshire County Council, to improve employment outcomes for people who have a disability or are experiencing absence from employment due to long term sick.
- £1.9m ESF to support Circular Economy Innovation Communities (CEIC) WWV and EW –a collaborative project between Swansea University and Cardiff Metropolitan University to support public service organizations to develop 6 new methods, processes and tools and support 17 entities participating in programmes targeting public services at national and regional level.

Details of media / press coverage of these and other projects have been included in our monitoring bulletins, which are emailed bi-monthly. Over the last year, PR generated by WEFO has achieved 99% positive media coverage.

- Created Ministerial PR opportunities to mark project announcements, achievements and milestones, for example:
  - The Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language officially opening the Venue Cymru re-development, backed by £3m EU funds (via the Tourism Attractor Destination programme) in Llandudno;

- o The Deputy Minister for Economy & Transport launching the Digital Signal Processing (DSP) Centre of Excellence project, backed by £3.9m EU funds, at Menai Science Park;
- o The First Minister launching Swansea Univeristy's IMPACT (Innovative Materials, Processing and Numerical Technologies) project, backed by £17.4m EU funds.

- Publicity created to promote key success and milestones of projects including: Welsh BioInnovation, The Materials and Manufacturing Education Training and Learning (METaL) project, Aberystwyth Innovation and Enterprise Campus, ION Leadership and BEACON.

- We continued with a cross cutting themes (CCTs) focus especially on social media, linking CCT activity of Welsh projects for events such as World Mental Health Day, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, International Women's Day, White Ribbon Day, International Women's Science Day, Dyslexia Awareness Week, Employability Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. These tweets always perform well on our twitter page.

   For example, a tweet issued about the METal project (a project which addresses the skills gap in the materials and manufacturing industry), linked to encouraging women and girls in Wales to engage with science for International Women's Science Day @WomenScienceDay, gained 4,040 impressions (i.e. number of times people saw a tweet on Twitter) – one of the highest performing tweets of that month.

- Our fortnightly EU funds newsletter has successfully achieved 10,712 subscribers – an increase of over 3,200 subscribers in the last year;

- Some 270 tweets were posted and our Twitter channel @wefowales / @wefocymru has gained over 4,456 followers. Whilst the number of tweets is lower than the previous year, due to pause on all communication activities for 12 weeks, we still gained an average number of impressions per month (i.e. the number of times people saw a tweet on Twitter) of 45,000 (just over 1,480 impressions per day);

- PR opportunities on the regional funding programmes and projects are also being co-ordinated with other EU funding programmes such as Horizon 2020; here, success stories are being communicated through the regular Horizon 2020 e-newsletter and Twitter.

Decision

19. To approve the Annual Communications Plan for 2020 / 2021.

Next Steps

20. The Communications branch to deliver to the priorities set out in the Communications plan and provide an update of progress to the PMC in Spring 2021.

WEFO
Lead: Jo Binding, WEFO Communications and Briefing Branch
Approved by: Sue Price, Head of Programme Management (ERDF)
Date: November 2020

Main Information and Publicity Measures for 2020 / early 2021

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
Priority 1: Publicising the impact and benefits of the EU funding programmes investing in sustainable growth and jobs, including via the approval, launches and achievements of projects, Europe Day, and integration of the Cross Cutting Themes	<u>**Target group**</u> **– mainly national, regional and local media, delivery and strategic partners, the European Commission and the general public**	**WEFO Communications**	**Ongoing actions throughout the year**
1.1 Issue to media good news stories on progress of projects and programme milestones for print and online coverage, achieving over 90% positive media coverage.	Specific publicity measures to include: – issue press releases, editorials about project approvals and milestones, and general progress of programmes to newspapers, online news channels, and the Welsh Government website – provide Ministerial quotes containing key strategic messages to press releases developed by project sponsors/partners	WEFO Communications, in liaison with press office, project sponsors, RETs / 3-SET etc	Ongoing actions throughout the year
1.2 Positively influence media reporting of stories involving EU funds and EU funded projects	Specific measures include: – provide comprehensive and timely responses to media queries including background context, key facts, statistics, and Welsh Government quotes	WEFO Communications in liaison with project sponsors, and press office	Ongoing actions throughout the year
1.3 Utilise new technology and digital channels as key communications tools, including production of digital footage to publicise key messages, impact of programmes, and project case studies and milestones	For publication on You Tube, Twitter and use at events. In particular, prepare and disseminate video clips of projects, participants and develop graphics of interesting facts to maximise impact of publicity	WEFO Communications, in liaison with project sponsors, RETs, 3-SET etc.	Ongoing actions throughout the year

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
1.4 Arrange Ministerial visits to projects across Wales – to mark funding announcements, launches and delivery milestones.	Specific publicity measures to include: – arrange publicity about the impact and benefits of projects (with a focus on human interest case studies), as well as the wider progress of the programmes via issue of press releases, tweets, EU funds web pages, e-newsletter etc. Post live tweets and photos during visits and events to engage further with a wide audience If we continue to be in national and / or local lockdown restrictions: - arrange Ministerial participation in online events and co-ordinate publicity of these events as above.	WEFO Communications, in liaison with WG press office, project sponsors, RETs / 3-SET etc	Ongoing actions throughout the year
1.5 Draft and circulate e-newsletter to more than 6,000 subscribers including stakeholders, project sponsors, and general public.	– Highlighting latest developments and achievements of programmes and projects, upcoming events, and information and guidance on delivery of 2014–2020 programmes, including any funding calls for certain priorities of the programme – Integrate developments with other EU funding programmes, including Horizon 2020 and European Territorial Co-operation programmes	WEFO Communications	Fortnightly
1.6 Proactively seek opportunities to demonstrate the positive impact of EU funds/regional policy in Wales	Prepare case studies / success stories highlighting the achievements of projects and participants using a range of channels, including those of sponsors and other stakeholders to convey key messages widely e.g. Valleys Taskforce, City Regions etc.	WEFO Communications	Ongoing
1.7 Publicise Europe Day (9 May) in accordance with Article 7 of European Regulation	Publicity measures to include: – Work in collaboration with project sponsors and stakeholders to promote positive messages around the impact of EU funds and projects in Wales	WEFO Communications, in liaison with project sponsors and stakeholders, including RETs and 3-SET	9 May

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
	– issue special Europe Day EU funds newsletter during week of Europe Day		
1.8 Participate in EU led campaigns and initiatives such as EU in my Region, EYCH, RegioStars and other EU communication activities to showcase Welsh success in delivery of EU programmes on an EU platform.	– keep in close contact with European Commission and UK communication representatives. – Maximise publicity at Wales level of achievements resulting from participation such as publicising Wales' EYCH and RegioStars achievements through press notices, Twitter etc.	WEFO Communications, in liaison with EC offices in Brussels, Cardiff and London	Ongoing
1.9 Continue to develop promotional items for use at events and other publicity channels	– Develop new branding for pop-up stands etc., representing regional and thematic areas – Continue to develop promotional items as appropriate.	WEFO Communications	Ongoing
2.0 Build on library of photos, case studies and digital footage of projects and beneficiaries for use in publicity etc	Build on library of photos and case studies for use in press releases, publications, advertorials, events, presentations and social media.	WEFO Communications, in liaison with project sponsors and stakeholders	Ongoing actions throughout the year
Priority 2: continue to ensure project sponsors, partners and stakeholders, including the Regional Engagement Teams, understand and comply with regulatory requirements on publicising the ERDF and ESF programmes	**Target group – project sponsors and beneficiaries, RETs / 3-SET.** **The main action is the Information and Publicity Guidelines (incorporating EU regulatory requirements) for project sponsors (published on the Welsh Government website), holding seminars on the regulatory requirements for WEFO staff, the RETs / 3-SET, and project sponsors establishing appropriate communication channels between WEFO and the RETs / 3-SET.**	**WEFO, in liaison with the RETs / 3-SET**	**Ongoing actions throughout the year**
2.1 Review and implement best practice on Information and Publicity Guidelines (incorporating EU regulatory	– ensure information and publicity measures are fully integrated into project delivery and are monitored by WEFO to ensure compliance;	WEFO, in liaison with project sponsors and the RETs / 3-SET	Guidance published on WG web pages and undertake

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
requirements) for project sponsors and beneficiaries	– respond promptly and effectively to communications queries from WEFO staff and sponsors.		ongoing review to cover best practice
2.2 Review opportunities for refresher seminars on information and publicity guidelines and requirements for sponsors, and share best practice	Refresher seminars to cover EU regulatory and Managing Authority contractual requirements, information and publicity priorities, best practice, and forward planning and monitoring at national and regional levels; tailored to meet needs of RETs, 3-SET, WEFO staff and project sponsors.	WEFO	Ongoing actions throughout the year
2.3 Participate in regular project reviews with sponsors, and meet with project communication officers where appropriate	– Ensure project communications activities, best practice and PR opportunities are addressed at project review meetings – Review and provide editorial contributions for RETs regional newsletters, where appropriate – Participate in WEFO meetings with RET teams to provide updates on communications activities and best practice	WEFO Communications in liaison with PMD, RETs, 3-SET, and project sponsors	Ongoing actions throughout the year
2.4 Distribute free commemorative plaques and posters for all sponsors that have been approved funding under 2014–2020 programmes (in line with Article 8 of European Regulations)	– Free commemorative plaques and posters, displaying respective EU funds logo to be distributed to all project sponsors regardless of grant value. – Design, draft text, and distribute A3 posters to projects for display	WEFO Communications	Ongoing actions throughout the year
Priority 3: Organise annual event to publicise the achievements of the programmes	**Target group – mainly national, regional and local stakeholders and potential sponsors, the European Commission, the media, and the general public.**	WEFO Communications Team	**Winter**
3.1 Arrange annual event for the programmes involving key stakeholders and beneficiaries, including recognition of programme achievements.	– Given the current political context, produce a legacy document focussing on the impact and benefits to Wales of EU funding through the current 2014 – 2020 programming period.	WEFO Communications Team	Winter

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
	– promote and distribute the legacy document at future regional investment in Wales engagement events taking place at the end of the year as well as via the website and social media. - Opportunity at events to also re-assure stakeholders and beneficiaries of commitment to deliver programmes in a post-Brexit context		
Priority 4: Maintenance and update of bilingual EU funds section of the Welsh Government website	**Target group – mainly national, regional and local stakeholders and potential sponsors, the European Commission, other EU managing authorities, the media and the general public.**	**WEFO Communications Team**	**Ongoing actions throughout the year**
4.1. Ensure website section is easy to navigate and is customer-friendly, and content is up-to-date	Review content regularly to meet core business functions, including access to WEFO Online, through online surveys, feedback etc	WEFO Communications Team	Ongoing actions throughout the year
4.2. Develop search engine database for approved projects (in line with Article 7 of European Regulations)	Technical issues with new WG website content management, work postponed due to COVID 19. - Continue to publish Excel spreadsheet of EU funded projects and business planning proposals monthly on our web pages, exceeding EU regulatory requirements.	WEFO Communications Team in liaison with WG Central Web Team	Ongoing actions throughout the year
Priority 5: Evaluate the effectiveness of key publicity activities and content to inform future communications	**Target group – mainly for internal purposes, but sharing best practice and lessons learned with national, regional and local stakeholders, and the European Commission.**	WEFO Communications	Ongoing
5.1 Campaign evaluation to be carried out using UK wide recognised evaluation model	Ensure OASIS evaluation model is undertaken to review and evaluate activities such as annual event and Europe Day social media campaign.	WEFO Communications	Ongoing
5.2 Ongoing evaluation of social media, web and press to review	Monthly evaluation reports created and shared and template adapted to keep up with changing of channel priorities	WEFO Communications	Monthly

Measure	Additional Information	Lead Responsibility	Timetable for Implementation
and adapt effectiveness of content			