

Autumn 2016

Welcome to the South East Wales Regional Engagement Team

We are delighted to bring you our first South East European Structural Investment funds (ESI) newsletter, which you will receive regularly in future to update you on new developments, best practice and the latest news from across the region!

The new team consists of (photo from left):

- ▶ Natalie Curtis – Regional Engagement Officer
- ▶ Lisa Jones – Regional Engagement Team Manager
- ▶ Amy Ryall – Regional Engagement Officer
- ▶ Jan Harris – Finance and Information Officer

We are based in Bridgend but work with all sectors across the South East to:

- ▶ Ensure operations fit with the strategic priorities of the region
- ▶ Provide information, guidance and updates to key strategic partnerships
- ▶ Ensure operations work collaboratively while in development and during delivery to avoid duplication and maximise the impact of EU funds
- ▶ Identify opportunities for new projects
- ▶ Support the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes across the region



Call for Research & Innovation proposals

At their annual information event on the 20th October WEFO announced a call for new Research and Innovation proposals under ERDF Priority 1 Specific Objective 1.2.

WEFO is looking for innovative, niche proposals that complement existing operations. Proposals should involve the successful translation of research and innovation processes into new and improved commercial products, processes and services. Organisations should generally plan for their projects to be no more than three years long.

WEFO aims to commit most of the remaining funds for Research and Innovation through this call for proposals i.e. £35 million for West Wales and the Valleys and £10 million for East Wales. As usual, WEFO will be unable to support 100% of the costs of proposed activity, so there will be an expectation that match funding is identified by applicants.

The deadline for submitting proposals to WEFO is the 31st January 2017 and applicants can expect to have a decision on or before the 31st March 2017. Full details can be found on the WEFO website here: <http://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/161018-prioritisation-exercise.pdf>

EU transition update

The Chancellor, Philip Hammond, announced on the 3rd October that the UK Government will guarantee expenditure for all European Structural and Investment funds projects that are approved before the UK leaves the EU.

Theresa May, on the 2nd October, announced that she intends to invoke Article 50 before the end of March 2017 which implies that the UK will leave the EU by the end of March 2019, but the trigger of Article 50 is currently subject to High Court and Supreme Court rulings.

The First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, welcomed the UK Government's Structural Funds announcement: <http://gov.wales/newsroom/firstminister/2016/58646153/?skip=1&lang=en>

In summary, we have more clarity now regarding the possible outcomes and impacts for European Funded projects in Wales than we did in the summer, but projects are advised to stay in touch with developments. In the meantime we have to prioritise all our efforts on delivering as close to delivery and expenditure profile as possible and maximising the money available to the region.

Participant eligibility guidance updated

WEFO has confirmed that participants who have been claiming ESA but are then moved to JSA prior to engagement by a project are now eligible for support. They have formally updated their eligibility guidance to take account of this. The full document can be found here <http://gov.wales/docs/wefo/publications/161025-poverty-indicators.pdf>.

This change will allow projects to support participants who otherwise seemed to be falling through the gaps in provision and so will be welcomed by the region as it will address an issue that many people have been raising.

Regional Employment and Skills Plan

The 2016 Regional Employment and Skills Plan was launched on the 13th October 2016 by Julie James, Minister for Skills and Science. The Regional Engagement Team will be working with the Employment and Skills board co-ordination team to ensure projects support the nine key priorities of the plan. This will also help to ensure that the future direction of skills strategies reflect the ongoing needs of South East Wales thanks to evidence from operations on the ground.

The strategic regional priorities and cross-cutting themes identified are:

1. Economic development
2. Employer engagement
3. Mittelstand and specialisation
4. Flexible pathways to specialist delivery and accreditation
5. Entrepreneurs
6. Careers, schools and opportunities
7. Investment, supply chains and local employment
8. Supporting inclusion
9. Supporting best practice projects as examples for a succession strategy

A copy of the plan is available at <http://www.lskip.wales/> along with copies of presentations from the launch event.

Horizon 2020

At €77 billion (around £60 billion), Horizon 2020 is the largest ever EU research and innovation programme, and is one of many programmes directly managed by the EC (i.e. applications are submitted to and approved by the EC).

Horizon 2020 focuses on excellence in science, industrial leadership and tackling societal challenges. Its goal is to ensure EU nations produce world-class science, remove barriers to innovation and make it easier for public and private sectors across the EU to work together in the area of research and innovation.

Having already secured in excess of €50m, Horizon 2020 is providing real opportunities for Welsh businesses and universities to be at the forefront of research and innovation, and to collaborate with leading organisations across Europe.

Horizon 2020 is 'open for business', with awards made whilst we are in the EU guaranteed by the UK Treasury. The European Commission have also made it very clear that Welsh organisations will not be discriminated against in any way.

The Welsh Government's Horizon 2020 Unit is available to support all Welsh organisations applying or considering applying for research and innovation funding from the EU. It works closely with partners at Welsh, UK and EU level to co-ordinate and facilitate the wide range of support and advice available for the benefit of Welsh organisations.

Further information can be found on the Unit's website (<http://gov.wales/funding/eu-funds/horizon2020/?lang=en>) including examples of projects supported under Horizon 2020 and how you can get funding for the costs involved in developing a bid (SCoRE Cymru scheme).

Upcoming events

- ▶ The next ESF Priority 1 meeting will be on the 15th December
- ▶ 3SET will be holding regional events in December and the South East event will be held on the 12th December at Llanhilleth Miners Institute. Further information can be found here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/employability-and-skills-in-wales-south-wales-regional-event-tickets-29014268458>
- ▶ The next PMC meeting will be on the 2nd December
- ▶ Cardiff Capital Region City Deal – the Growth and Competitiveness Commission is due to publish its report in December 16.