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Government of Ireland

## PMC Meeting 17 June 2019

### Agenda Item 12 Evaluation Update

#### 1. PEIL Evaluation Plan

The ESFMA requests that the PMC approve the revised PEIL 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan. The proposed amendment to the Evaluation Plan is to remove the additional impact evaluation in 2019 (page 14), given that the Mid-Term Evaluation was concluded at the end of 2018 and given the current stage in the programming period.

Article 56 of Regulation 1303/2013 requires that at least once during the programming period, an evaluation is carried out on how support from the ESF has contributed to the objectives of each Priority. The Mid-Term Evaluation had been originally timetabled for 2017. However, as agreed by the Programme Monitoring Committee in May 2018, it was deferred until 2018 with a view to combining it with the second YEI evaluation, to ensure that the evaluation could yield useful information and recommendations.

#### 2. PEIL Mid-Term Evaluation 2018

##### 2.1 Background

As required by Article 56 of Regulation 1303/2013 and Article 19(6) of Regulation 1304/2013, a Mid-Term Evaluation of PEIL, incorporating the Final YEI Impact Evaluation was completed by the end of 2018. The evaluation was overseen by the PEIL Evaluation Steering Group, whose membership is set out in Appendix 1.

Fitzpatrick Associates were appointed in June 2018 to undertake the evaluation. The Final Report of the evaluation was approved by the PEIL Programme Monitoring Committee by written procedure on 24<sup>th</sup> December. The ESF Managing Authority submitted the report to the European Commission on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2018. The report is published on [www.esf.ie](http://www.esf.ie).

##### 2.2 Findings

Overall, the evaluation notes that the PEIL at its mid-term stage is progressing well and contributing significantly to a range of important education, labour market, and social inclusion policy goals and objectives, as Ireland's economic recovery continues its path. The evaluation also notes that this progress has been made in the face of a number of implementation challenges: a changing socio-economic context; extensive institutional reorganisation in the FET sector; operationalising the necessary accountability and reporting systems; integrating ESF and YEI involvement and requirements into a wide range of pre-existing and ongoing schemes and interventions; and specifying its role, planned contribution and appropriate monitoring framework within each strand of activity it supports.

In relation to the YEI element of the Programme, the report finds that YEI support channelled through the Programme has been effectively deployed through targeted schemes activating young people in long-term unemployment, addressing early school leaving, and addressing their personal and employment skills shortages into positive and sustained labour market transitions. While not the only programmes that have sought to, the Programme and the YEI have made central contributions to effecting the positive trends that have occurred in youth employment, unemployment and labour market inactivity since the financial and economic crisis.

The evaluation also found that:

- at the mid-term stage, the Programme was and is likely to continue to meet its objectives quite directly and commendably;
- while it was operating within a socio-economic context that has changed significantly from that in which it was designed and formulated, the Programme remains a framework of interventions and initiatives that in most respects is responsive to what are evidently ongoing labour market, social and educational challenges and policy priorities, and it was maintaining its strategic relevance;
- all Priorities and Activities had progressed well or in the few cases where only beginning, appear likely to;
- the Programme had embraced its two key horizontal principles commendably;
- structures and arrangements for programme management and delivery were generally appropriate and working reasonably well, although it has taken a lot of focused work on the part of the Managing Authority, IBs and beneficiaries to reach this point.

### 2.3 Recommendations

The following table sets out the programme-wide and activity-specific recommendations of the evaluation.

No	Programme Wide Recommendations
1	<p>The programme continues to allocate substantial resources to interventions that directly or indirectly target the unemployed. Given the substantial reduction in the numbers of unemployed over the years since the Programme began, the MA should request IBs and beneficiaries of Activities addressing unemployment to re-assess their objectives, target groups and numbers of anticipated and planned unemployed participants, with a view to avoiding competition for participants and potentially re-redirecting any surplus resources from such actions.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has been requested to provide updated estimates of participation and expenditure for its activities.</p> <p>The eligibility criteria for Springboard+ courses were extended in 2018 so that all courses are now open to people irrespective of their employment status. Returners and those in receipt of certain allowances, including Jobseekers Benefit, continue to be able to access courses free of charge. For employed participants on courses NFQ level 7 – 9, 90% of the course fee is funded by the Government, with participants required to contribute the remaining 10% of the fee. Level 6 courses are free to all participants.</p>

	<p>SOLAS's policy framework <i>Supporting Working Lives and Enterprise Growth in Ireland: 2018-2021 further education and training policy framework for skills development of people in employment</i> was launched in 2018. The policy framework is being promoted as the <i>Skills to Advance</i> initiative. The initiative will enable targeted support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce, particularly those who have lower skill levels and who need more opportunities to advance in their working lives. The policy also supports small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who need assistance to invest in and develop their workforce.</p>
2	<p>The DEASP has initiated a process to update the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion for the period 2018-2021. When published, the MA should assess any potential role for the PEIL Programme in supporting a renewed national focus on addressing social inclusion and poverty objectives, in light of the further progress required to meet Ireland's targets in this area under the Europe 2020 Strategy.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has advised that the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion will be for a six year period covering 2019-2025 and not the three year period 2018-2021. It is anticipated that the Action Plan will be published in the coming weeks. The Managing Authority will review any potential role for the PEIL on its publication.</p>
3	<p>The MA should complete the process of operationalising, validating, gathering and reporting all output and result indicators, along with final agreed milestones and targets across all Priorities and Activities as soon as possible, and a paper detailing all aspects of what is then to be the overall data and reporting system presented to the PMC.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> Paper tabled for PMC.</p>
4	<p>The MA should revise the Evaluation Plan setting out in more specific detail (a) evaluations that will take place over the course of the remainder of the programme (b) their intended timetable and sequence, and (c) revised output and result indicators and data that will then be available to inform such evaluations.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Managing Authority has proposed an amendment to the Evaluation Plan to remove the additional impact evaluation in 2019, given that the Mid-Term Evaluation was concluded at the end of 2018 and given the current stage in the programming period.</p>
5	<p>A number of specific Activities are priority candidates for independent evaluations or reviews, including ETB Training for the Unemployed (or components of it), GYPD, YPP, BTEI, Adult Literacy, while evaluation lessons from others would be beneficial after sufficient implementation progress has been made (including Integration and Employment of Migrants, Gender Equality, SICAP and YESS). In addition consideration should be given to evaluating "clusters" of initiatives targeting the same or similar participants in distinct settings (e.g. BTEI, Adult Literacy). This latter might be approached at individual ETB level.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Department of Justice and Equality plans to commission an external evaluation of the Garda Youth Diversion Projects in 2019. This evaluation is at the planning stage and it is</p>

	<p>anticipated that it will be completed in the first half of 2020. The Managing Authority will be represented on the Steering Group for the evaluation.</p> <p>An evaluation of Specific Skills Training (part of ETB Training for the Unemployed) and the Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme as a single exercise is underway. SOLAS has appointed Indecon International Economic Consultants to undertake the evaluation. The final report is due to be published in Q3 2019. The Managing Authority is a member of the Advisory Group for the evaluation.</p> <p>Pobal has appointed Quality Matters to undertake an external evaluation of the Ability Programme. The evaluation is being conducted over the duration of the programme and it will conclude in June 2020. The Managing Authority is represented on the Steering Group for the evaluation.</p>
6	<p>The MA should decide how best to use TNC resources within the Programme and commence planning them.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> Due to competing resource commitments, the Managing Authority has not yet addressed this recommendation. The Managing Authority will review the scope to use TNC resources within the Programme and make a decision in that regard this year.</p>
7	<p>The input and involvement in Programme management and monitoring of officials with policy and programming responsibilities, as well as those with financial management and control, should be maintained across the spectrum of Programme interventions.</p> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Managing Authority is liaising with relevant colleagues in relation to this recommendation.</p>
<b>Post 2020 Planning Recommendations</b>	
8	<p>There may be merit in Ireland re-defining and articulating its policy objectives and goals for all EU structural and investment funding ahead of the next round, which considers issues such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the optimal strategic role, alignment and relationships between EU-supported and exchequer only-funded investment in the key policy arenas;</li> <li>b. the appropriate focus of EU supports on long-established national programmes or more recent or new interventions;</li> <li>c. the costs, risks and administrative ease of EU funding compliance and absorption;</li> <li>d. the non-resource role of EU funding (e.g. where and in what ways does EU funding add value and how can that be maximised);</li> <li>e. the role of ESF, ESIF and other funds, and of Ireland's interface with these, in wider post-Brexit policy regarding our increasingly important relationship with the EU and its institutions.</li> </ol>
9	<p>Planning for the 2020-2027 round of ESF programming in Ireland should begin as early as possible. As well as ensuring systems are in place early to avoid delays and risks associated with financial management, control and claim processes, the remaining implementation period of the current OP may offer opportunities for to explore innovative approaches, carry-out new research, and develop pilot initiatives appropriate for emerging shared EU and national priorities, needs and challenges.</p>

	<p><b>ESFMA Response:</b>  A round table meeting of the Irish European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds authorities and relevant policy areas was held on 17 May. The purpose of the meeting was to enable the Funds, including the ESF and ERDF, to share information on their activities in the context of preparing for the 2021-2027 round of European funding and to hear from policy experts on issues of particular relevance to the Funds, particularly those issues which have been identified by the European Commission through the Semester Process.</p> <p>Additional resources are being assigned to the ESFMA for planning for the 2021-2027 round of European funding.</p>
	<p><b>Activity-Specific Recommendations:</b></p>
	<p><b>ETB Training for the Unemployed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The exclusive or non-exclusive focus of the “ETB Training for the Unemployed” Activity on the unemployed should be clarified and the Activity re-named and/or re-branded as appropriate. The implications of any widening of its focus beyond job-seekers only, for milestones and targets in the Performance Framework should be addressed.</li> <li>• Any remaining issues involved in reconciling SOLAS/ETB performance data system (PLSS) pre-2017 data with OP data requirements under this Activity (or others overseen by SOLAS) should be addressed urgently.</li> <li>• Consider continued validity of low certification levels in elements of provision.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b>  An evaluation of Specific Skills Training (part of ETB Training for the Unemployed) is currently underway. The final report is due to be published in Q3 2019. The purpose of the evaluation is to generate policy-relevant knowledge concerning the appropriateness, conduct and impacts of Specific Skills Training provision and to examine the appropriateness and effectiveness of current policy on such provision. SOLAS has advised that it expects that the issue of certification will be referred to in the report. The Managing Authority will review any potential implications of the evaluation’s findings for PEIL on its publication.</p> <p>The MA has been provided with all “pre-PLSS” data for the four SOLAS/ETB activities (the CTC activity only commenced under PEIL on 1/1/17 and all relevant data is reported through the PLSS system), and all of this data is held on eCohesion.</p>
	<p><b>Springboard</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy rationale for Springboard may need to be re-articulated in the much improved economic and labour market conditions that have emerged.</li> <li>• The scope for multi-annual funding of the Activity should be considered, in light of the timescale required by HEIs to design new programmes in response to changing sectoral skill needs.</li> <li>• The profile of courses being offered needs to be continually reviewed and adapted in the light of emerging skills gaps, with increased focus on sector-specific provision.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The HEA have recently completed an Evaluation of Springboard+ Courses Inputs, Outputs, and Outcomes 2011 – 2018 which is due to be published shortly. The Managing Authority will review any potential implications of the evaluation’s findings for PEIL on its publication.</p>
	<p><b>ICT Skills Conversion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The scope to seek a greater financial contribution from employers towards tuition fees should be examined.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> ICT Skills Conversion is funded nationally through the National Training Fund. There are no plans to seek a greater financial contribution from employers towards tuition fees.</p>
	<p><b>Intra-EU Mobility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The participant indicator could be expanded to better capture work placements facilitated under the EURES programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The MA is liaising with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to this recommendation.</p>
	<p><b>Youthreach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The implications for the remainder of PEIL co-financing should be considered on foot of the evaluation of Youthreach due to be completed shortly.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Youthreach evaluation has concluded and the report is due to be published in June 2019. Overall the evaluation found that there is a clear ongoing need for a programme for young people at risk of exclusion, like Youthreach / CTCs, to offer them a pathway into formal education and training and employment and it should continue to be a major strand of FET provision by ETBs. The evaluation also raised some issues around demand, geographic distribution and governance to be addressed. SOLAS has developed a series of recommendations in response to the evaluation, together with a timeline for delivery.</p>
	<p><b>GYDPs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revisions to the GYDP mission, organisational structure, geographical and financial scope should be finalised and communicated as soon as possible, and an evaluation undertaken.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The Reform and Development programme in relation to the Garda Youth Diversion Projects is a multi-annual process. Current elements for conclusion in 2020/2021 include Phase 1 of an Action Research Project in partnership with the University of Limerick and 15 selected local projects to further develop best practice understanding and standards for staff, assessment of the role of specialised interventions to reach harder-to-engage young people and their extension (subject to a positive evaluation), and enhancement of the preventative and family support work of GYDPs. A new Youth Justice Strategy is currently being developed, which inter alia, will address the need for reform and consolidation of a range of community-based interventions focussed on children and young people at risk</p>

	<p>and their families and put more coherent local delivery structures in place. The Strategy will be finalised in the first half of 2020.</p>
	<p><b>Gender Equality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A decision should be taken soon on whether to launch another Call for Proposals under the Activity.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> A further Call for Proposal was launched on the 16 April 2019, providing further funding of €5.5 million. Applications closed on the 28 May 2019.</p>
	<p><b>Third Level Access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of the revised funding allocation models within the SAF and FSD need to be kept under review in light of anticipated growth in demand for support under both schemes.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> The HEA is responsible for the management of the SAF and FSD funding allocation models. Recent changes to funding allocations mechanisms have been discussed with the implementation groups for the SAF and FSD that were set up following publication of the respective reviews. The membership of the implementation groups include representatives from the HEA, Department of Education and Skills, higher education institutions and USI as well as others. Issues and developments relating to each fund's funding model and arrangements are the subject of ongoing discussions with sectoral representatives including formal meetings of each group (usually 2-3 times a year).</p>
	<p><b>Adult Literacy/BTEI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence independent evaluations of provision.</li> <li>• Consider continued validity of low certification levels.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> SOLAS is currently engaged in a tendering process for an evaluation of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). SOLAS has advised that it expects that the issue of certification will be referred to in the report.</p> <p>Initial and Ongoing Assessment of Adult Literacy and Numeracy at NFQ levels 1-3 Guidelines, Toolkit and Research Report was published in March 2018</p>
	<p><b>Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revised output target should be revised upwards if two courses for 2019 are confirmed.</li> <li>• The financial allocation to the Activity may however need revision if only one course is run in 2019.</li> </ul> <p><b>ESFMA Response:</b> Only one course will operate in 2019.</p>



**Appendix 1:**

**Evaluation Steering Group Membership**

<b>Member Organisation</b>
ESF Managing Authority
Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service
Department of Justice and Equality
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
Higher Education Authority
European Social Fund Committee