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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

**Minutes of the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and
Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020**

12th Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Thursday 15th December, 2022

[online]

Chairperson: Dervila Twamley, Head of ESF Unit, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Attendance and Apologies: See Appendix 1 – Attendance List

1. Introduction and Adoption of the Agenda (for approval)

The Chairperson welcomed the members of the Committee to the twelfth meeting of the PEIL PMC. The Chairperson presented the agenda for adoption and noted that the Commission have asked to include a presentation on the European Year of Skills 2023, which will be dealt with under AOB. As no additional items for inclusion were proposed, the Agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of 11th PMC held on the 21st May, 2021

The Chairperson referred to the minutes circulated to the Committee for adoption. As no amendments were proposed, the minutes were approved.

3. 2021 AIR Report and Citizens Summary

Theresa Ryan, Managing Authority (MA) gave an update on the 2021 AIR and Citizens Summary. Theresa requested that it be formally recorded in the minutes that these documents were approved by the PMC by written procedure in May 2021. The Department of Justice and Pobal had requested minor amendments, which were made in advance of the submission of the documents to the Commission by the regulatory deadline. Both documents were formally accepted by the Commission on 20th June and are available on the www.eufunds.ie website.

4. Financial Update

Cathal Quaid, Certifying Authority (CA) introduced himself and gave an update on the financial progress up to the end of October 2022 highlighting Priority 7 as a new priority, which the PMC approved by written procedure in November, in relation to ReactEU funding for Ukrainian refugees.

The CA went through the agenda item 4 briefing paper, which issued to all PMC members on 2nd December last. As included in the briefing paper, the PMC was advised of the current financial position of the PEIL OP after the application of the following amendments:

- Transfer €60m of the ESF allocation to the ERDF to support the cost of supplying essential Personal Protective Equipment for use in the fight against COVID 19 – as approved by Commission on 18 December 2020;
- Application of 100% co-financing for expenditure declared during the 2020/2021 financial year, and;
- Addition of the two ReactEU priorities (Covid and Ukraine).

The CA advised that in effect, 97% (€534m) of the 2014-2020 ESF and YEI revised allocation (€552m) has been received and distributed with the remaining €18m to be distributed after finalisation of the ongoing audit process and the formal closure process (circa 2025).

The CA further advised that the introduction of the two new ReactEU Priorities will extend the programme out to enable payment applications to be made. The overall gross Programme expenditure is currently projected to be approximately €1.1bn.

Andrew Diggins, ESF MA, commented that there are two elements to the OP amendment. Firstly, the financial reallocation of the €800k (gross), which will have to be reallocated from Priority 5 (Technical Assistance) to Priority 1. Also, as Ireland availed of 100% EU co-financing for payment applications made in 2020/21 accounting year (EU COVID Response), a number of activities were dropped from the PEIL, including YESS in Priority 4 for example. Therefore, the targets associated with such activities will be removed and that revised targets should therefore be above the minimum achievement rate for priority 4. The OP amendment will have to be done relatively quickly and it will be worked on in early 2023.

At this point, the ESF MA/CA noted their thanks to colleagues in the Commission, for their continued support of the ESF Programmes in Ireland.

The CA then provided brief updates around (a) Closure (including preparation for same) and (b) Audit related recommendations. Again, these updates (and acknowledgements) are covered by agenda item 4 briefing paper.

The CA then sought and received the approval of the PMC to update the recorded distributions from the pre-financing amounts to reflect the activities that did not/did proceed (within and between Priorities).

Andrew Diggins, contributed observations in relation to the two ReactEU measures, namely:

- it was hoped to process the two COVID specific ReactEU payments applications in Q1 2023. The Department of Education (DE) will be the Beneficiary for the school capitation grants with DFHERIS the Beneficiary in relation to the laptops; and
- that the Department of Social Protection (DSP) are currently carrying out a scoping exercise in respect of the Ukraine ReactEU measure with a payment application likely to be made later in 2023.

At this point Gregorio de Castro (DG EMPL, European Commission) sought additional details on the DSP scoping exercise. Andrew Diggins advised the PMC attendees that this new measure was only recently added to Programme at short notice. A brief discussion then was then held on the possible design of the Activity with James Boylan providing some additional context on behalf of the DSP. The European Commission asked that more specific details on the final operations is provided once known/available and decided. Finally, Andrew Condon (DPER) thanked colleagues in the PMC and the MA, CA and DSP for facilitating the programming of the €53m FASTCARE ReactEU funds in this way.

5. Non-financial Update

Ruairí Smyth, ESF MA, introduced himself and gave an update on the Non-Financial indicators and ICT systems.

Data was collected for over 384k participants in the PEIL round, from over 15 activities across four Priorities. 85% of the non-financial data for these participants has been received. The remaining 15% is almost entirely due to missing result indicators from the old ETB legacy system. All output indicators were collected, and of all the data collected to date in excess of 90% passes the

completeness tests. There is also an ongoing exercise to remove c. 23k duplicate records across four ETB activities from the legacy system.

There have been seven Non-Financial audits undertaken by the AA over the lifetime of the PEIL and three of them are pending closure while four remain outstanding.

With respect to the new EIST 2021-27 round, it is intended to issue provisional Non-Financial guidelines to the IBs and Beneficiaries in the coming days¹. The interim guidelines previously issued were based on the information available, and as the new system is not going live until c. Q3, the MA is not in a position to receive declarations until then. However, the guidance should allow IBs and Beneficiaries to align their systems in order to gather the required ESF+ data.

A breakdown of the various schemes under each Priority was presented. Priorities 1 to 3 have achieved a high success rate. Priority 4 is lower than expected compared to target numbers due to numerous reasons, such as a much improved labour market for the under 25s resulting in a lesser uptake in the Schemes. Other contributing factors are the removal of certain schemes (i.e. YESS, Jobsbridge, Tús and Momentum) and the non-reporting of three CTCs for 2019, which are all contributing factors to the targets, which were not achieved. The MA intends to submit a revised OP with the revised Performance Framework figures (targets and actual) in Q1 2023 as noted previously.

In relation to the existing IT System eCohesion, some patches and updates were applied to the existing system resulting from recommendations following a Mazars security audit. The system contract is due to expire in April 2023 and plans are being made to wind it down. Functionality to cover document retention and other outstanding audit requirements will be maintained. These and other outstanding requirements will be given consideration under the wind down plan. Based on an ICT consultant's recommendation, an alternative solution to meet our specific ESF+ requirements is being advanced at the moment. The recommended new ICT system is a Microsoft Dynamics CRM. We have engaged a CRM Vendor and development is being advanced. A detailed Business Requirements Document is finalised and we are currently at the Discovery and Design Phase of the CRM solution, which includes a series of workshops. At the end of the workshops, development of a functional specification document will be completed. The build stage will then commence.

¹ Issued to all IBs on 19 December 2022

Joanna Gawrylczyk-Malesa, DG EMPL, asked about the performance of Priority 4 and the timeframe to submit the modification request and also the level of the correction and how much achievement rate on Priority 4 is expected to improve.

6. Communications Update

Theresa Ryan, ESF MA, presented the Communications update (item no. 6). The ESF MA sponsored an AONTAS Star Award for ESF co-funded projects. This year the star awards ceremony was held online on the 7th March; the awards celebrate the positive contribution of adult learning initiatives to adult learners, local communities and wider society. Five ESF co-funded projects were shortlisted for the award. The overall winner of the ESF award was the SICAP Foundation4Life programme. The programme provides education, life skills and job activation for young people and was developed by the South West Mayo Development Company in partnership with the Western Region Drugs and Alcohol Task Force.

The ESF MA continue to update and develop the EU Funds website in partnership with colleagues from the other EU funds. A key aspect of the website is the stories section, which highlights some of the stories and experiences of people who have benefited from support in Ireland. The website is currently being updated to include the latest information about the EIST 2021-27 ESF+ programme. From January to November this year, the website had nearly 11,000 visitors and 30,000 page views. To mark Europe day 2022, the ESF MA collaborated with the other Managing Authorities to produce a special supplement in the Sunday Independent. The supplement included contributions from MEP Mairead McGuinness and Minister Michael McGrath, and stories from those supported by the funds. In September, the ESF MA joined colleagues from other EU funds, as part of the European Commission representation marquee at the National Ploughing Championships. The championships are Europe's largest outdoor event and there were 277,000 visitors over three days. It provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the general public about ESF funding in Ireland.

The ESF MA welcomed EU Commissioner Nicolas Schmit (Jobs and Social Rights) and EU Commissioner Elisa Ferreira (Cohesion and Reforms) in 2022. Commissioner Schmit visited the ESF co-funded Clondalkin Youthreach Centre and met with Minister Simon Harris to discuss Ireland's approach to skills. Commissioner Elisa Ferreira (Cohesion and Reforms) visited Youthreach Centres in Waterford and Swords and two SICAP projects in Dublin: the Robert Emmet Community Development Project and the South Inner City Community Development Association.

The ESF MA also contributed to the recent publication on Youth from the European Commission Representation in Ireland. The publication was inspired by the European Year of Youth 2022 to highlight opportunities for young people in Ireland, including a feature on Youthreach and former participant's experience.

The ESF MA continued to actively participate in the INFORMEU network meetings and the National EU Funds Communications Committee during 2022, and will continue to work closely with the other MAs to explore coordination and cooperation opportunities. In addition, the ESF MA is working closely with the Wheel on their Access Europe programme, which included attending their EU Funding Expo in Croke Park on 1 December.

Thanks were expressed to all ESF IBs, Beneficiaries and Projects for their continued support for and work on ESF communications. Thanks were also expressed for the work of Catherine Ormsby who has moved on from the MA and Nicola Finnegan who will be moving on in the New Year.

7. Evaluation Update

Theresa Ryan, ESF MA, presented an Evaluation update on the current position on the evaluations since the last meeting.

A revised Evaluation Plan was circulated for approval before the meeting. The main revisions to the plan are the inclusion of an evaluation on the use of ReactEU resources and an update to the list of evaluations undertaken by Intermediate Bodies and Beneficiaries. In the absence of any comments, the plan was deemed approved.

Theresa then provided an overview of recently published PEIL evaluations.

The Ability evaluation was a three year evaluation that ran from 2018 to 2021. The evaluation found that the programme assisted young people with disabilities to develop their confidence and independence with three quarters of participants being found to improve their soft skills. The programme was also found to have supported participants to access education and employment with a third of participants progressing on to education and/or training and a quarter obtaining paid employment.

In addition, providers were found to be implementing good practice in their engagement with employers and education providers. 88% of participating employers reported being more likely to hire people with disabilities in the future as a result of participating in the programme. The evaluation also sought to understand which types of interventions and services increase the likelihood of participants achieving successful outcomes and it found a range of key success factors, for example, providing a case management approach, increase the likelihood of participants, improving their soft skills or gaining a qualification. Providing paid work experience for participants, increased the likelihood of them getting paid employment after the programme.

Links to this evaluation and all other evaluations discussed are available on the EU Funds website.

Theresa then spoke about the evaluation of Specific Skills Training (SST), which is one part of the ETB Training for the Unemployed activity. The evaluation found that learners, training centre managers and employers all report strong benefits to learners. In addition, they found that the cost per participant is relatively low compared to other comparable programmes. The evaluation included a counterfactual impact assessment element, which looked at the labour market outcomes after 12 months following course completion. It compared the labour market outcomes for programme participants to those of a matched control group of similar non-participants, and the results indicated a positive impact of SST, with the probability of employment, increasing from 3.5% to 5.6%. While it appeared to have an impact on all categories of participants, the results suggested that it had the largest impact for those who had spent the lowest percentage of time on the live register in the previous 5 years.

Pobal has published a series of learning briefs relating to the work of SICAP and Theresa spoke about two. The first is the role of SICAP supporting new communities. New communities make up a high proportion of SICAP clients. Each new community group has different socio economic characteristics. The learning brief identifies that the local development companies use multiple approaches to engage individual members of the new communities, recognising that factors like nationality and cultural background play an important role. Finally, the report finds that collaborative and coordinated approaches with partner organisations, such as the local employment services and the ETBs, ensured that members of the new communities could access numerous supports.

The second brief, compared men and women supported by SICAP and highlighted that while there is an equal proportion of male and female participants within the programme there are some key

differences in the characteristics of the participants. For example, male clients tend to be younger, while female clients tend to have higher levels of education and tend to be more economically active. The report also found key differences in how men and women engage and progress within the programme. For example, female clients are more likely to look for and receive personal skills and wellbeing support. While male clients are more likely to get labour market supports and self-employment supports and this again highlights the importance of a person centred approach. The report makes recommendations for ways that SICAP could explore addressing some of the gender norms identified.

Thanks were given to all the implementing bodies for undertaking the pieces of research.

Brid O'Brien, the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, commented that the findings were interesting, in particular, the importance of person-centred provision and how that needs to be appreciated more. The gender norms are not surprising. Brid commented on the ongoing challenge of course effectiveness and long-term unemployment. We need to ensure that supports are in place to best meet the needs of those most distant from the labour market.

Gregorio de Castro, DG EMPL, commented that the findings and stories will be important for the European Year of Skills and will be welcomed by the Commission and will highlight the good work undertaken in Ireland by the ESF 2014-2020.

8. AOB

Joanna Gawrylczyk-Malesa, DG EMPL shared a presentation on the European Year of Skills, which will run from May 2023 to the end of May 2024. The idea of a “European Year of...” dates back to 1983, with the objective of giving more visibility to certain topics. “The European Year of Skills” was announced by the Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen to draw attention to the shortage of key skills in the EU. There is a need to show businesses and EU citizens how much Member States (MSs) and the EU are doing to support skills development.

The Commission will offer support in the form of a platform, to MSs efforts when organising certain events and activities to support skills development on an EU level. The Commission’s European Year of Skills proposal is currently being discussed in the Council and the European Parliament.

There is no separate budget, the reliance will be on promotional events already planned, and funded under current resources. There will also be other events organised later in 2023 and further details on these will be provided at a later date.

There will be engagement with a wide number of stakeholders and partners/agencies. It is planned to have a national coordinator in each MS, who will be a contact point for all activities organised under the umbrella of the European Year of Skills.

Where MSs are organising any events where skills are an important topic, the Commission will help to promote these through EU communication channels and MSs are urged to contact the DG EMPL Geodesk for information on what help can be provided.

Dervila Twamley asked for further information on the national coordinator role and who is envisaged to be undertaking those roles. Gregorio de Castro stated that a request has issued by the Skills Taskforce to each MS to nominate a person by the beginning of 2023. This person should be somebody who works in the field of skills or a policy maker from an organisation such as Skillnet Ireland, which is a forum that represents different interests around the issue of skills. DG EMPL will continue to update on the European Year of Skills until the launch date.

APPENDIX 1 – Attendance

	NAME	ORGANISATION
1	Dervila Twamley	ESF Managing Authority
2	Andrew Diggins	ESF Managing Authority
3	Ruairi Smyth	ESF Managing Authority
4	Theresa Ryan	ESF Managing Authority
5	Nicola Finnegan	ESF Managing Authority
6	Winnie Ryan	ESF Managing Authority
7	Edel Bluett	ESF Managing Authority
8	Patrick Costello	ESF Managing Authority
9	Padraig Creed	ESF Managing Authority
10	Geraldine Ruane	ESF Managing Authority
11	Catherine Dolan	ESF Managing Authority
12	Iain Maguire	ESF Managing Authority
13	Ruth Shannon	ESF Certifying Authority
14	Ailbhe Murphy	ESF Managing Authority
15	Ann-Marie Doyle	ESF Managing Authority
16	Ashling Abbott	ESF Managing Authority
17	Cathal Quaid	ESF Certifying Authority
18	Therese Callery	ESF Managing Authority
19	Patrick Cahir	ESF Managing Authority
20	Máire O'Mahony	EU Audit Authority
21	John Collins	EU Audit Authority
22	Gregorio de Castro	European Commission
23	Joanna Gawrylczyk-Malesa	European Commission
24	Andrea Valova	HEA
25	Andrew Condon	DPER
26	Cora Lane	DPER
27	Ruth McGrath	DPER
28	Keith Kelleher	DAFM
29	Carron Hodson	DSP
30	Grace Saunders	DSP
31	James Boylan	DSP

32	Roshin Sen	DSP
33	Joseph Keane	Probation Service
34	Simon Cornish	Probation Service
35	Ronan McCabe	DCEDIY
36	Mary Colhoun	DCEDIY
37	Gerry Browne	D/Justice
38	Tom Sheeran	D/Justice
39	Eoin Kinane	D/Defence
40	Brendan Horgan	SOLAS
41	Rod Tierney	SOLAS
42	Deirdre Casey	Pobal
43	Bernie Bradley	IHREC
44	Bríd O'Brien	INOUE
45	Enda Hogan	Southern Regional Assembly
46	Jacqueline Healy	IHREC
47	Meadhbh Costello	IBEC
	Apologies	
	Eve McKay	ESF Management Authority
	Aidan G O'Brien	D/Justice
	Rory O'Rua	D/Justice
	Laure Antoniotti	EMRA
	Jim Conway	EMRA
	Karen Coughlan	Southern Regional Assembly
	Dominic Greene	WWETB
	Gerard Gasparro	SOLAS
	Eithne Ui Fhoghlu	DPER
	Amanda Taylor	CMETB