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Assembly

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European Funding Streams: Education

1. Introduction

There are two types of European funds:

Non-competitive funding levels are determined during the high level negotiations on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). The MFF determines the overall European Union (EU) budget. Non-competitive funding is allocated to the Member State, which subsequently apportions the funding to its regions.

Over 76% of the EU budget is managed by regional and national authorities. This includes Structural Funds, which play a significant role in Northern Ireland; over £1 billion has been received from Structural Funds alone between 2002 and 2012.¹

Competitive funding (sometimes known as Grants) is not directly allocated from the EU to the Member State or regions within it. The European Commission (EC) centrally manages 22% of the EU budget, which is allocated for competitive programmes in the areas of research, education, health and youth actions.

¹ Scholes, M. (2013) *European Union Competitive Funding in Northern Ireland*: Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Services

This portion of the budget is awarded by the EC via open competition amongst individual organisations. Therefore, Member State drawdown of EU competitive funding is determined only by the success of individual organisations' applications.²

2. Non-competitive Funding Overview

2.1. Structural Funds

European Structural Funds are the main financial instruments of the European Union (EU) regional policy. They are intended to narrow the development disparities among regions and Member States.

There are two Structural Funds:

- the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** is currently the largest. Since 1975 it has provided support for the creation of infrastructure and productive job-creating investment, mainly for businesses;
- the **European Social Fund (ESF)**, set up in 1958, contributes to the integration into working life of the unemployed and disadvantaged sections of the population, mainly by funding training measures.

EU funding allocation to Northern Ireland peaked in 1994 - 1999 and has decreased in both subsequent periods. This is because Northern Ireland is considered relatively more prosperous in the enlarged European Union.³ See appendix 3.

2.2. Cohesion Fund

In order to speed up economic, social and territorial convergence, the European Union set up a Cohesion Fund in 1994. It is intended for countries whose per capita GDP is below 90% of the Community average.

3. Structural Funds in Northern Ireland 2007 - 2013

Responsibility for policy on Structural Funds is a UK reserved matter. The Minister for Finance and Personnel has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of Structural Funds in Northern Ireland. For the funding period 2007-2013 Northern Ireland has benefited from four EU Programmes:⁴

3.1. European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme

This programme supports regional strategy by promoting investment in research and technological development and by encouraging enterprise and entrepreneurship in an

² Scholes, M. (2013) *European Union Competitive Funding in Northern Ireland*: Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Services

³ Europa Legislation: available at http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/structural_cohesion_fund_en.htm

⁴ Department of Finance and Personnel: available at <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance/european-funding.htm>

overall context of sustainable development. The Managing Authority for the Programme is the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI).

3.2. European Social Fund Programme (ESF)

The European Social Fund Programme aims to reduce the level of economic inactivity and increase workforce skills. Approximately £114m of funding has been allocated to the ESF Programme in Northern Ireland. The Managing Authority for the Programme is the Department of Education and Learning (DEL).

3.3. PEACE III Programme

The EU Programme for Peace & Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland is a distinctive European Structural Funds Programme, aimed at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation. It builds upon the key aspects of the previous Peace programmes and provided total funding of €333m. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is the Managing Authority for the Programme.

3.4. Cross Border Territorial Co-Operation Programme (INTERREG IVA)

The Cross Border Territorial Co-operation Programme for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland is designed to strengthen and deepen cross border co-operation. The total funding allocated for this programme was €256m. The SEUPB is the Managing Authority for the Programme.

4. The Future: Structural Funds 2014 – 2020

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) lays down the maximum annual amounts which the EU may spend over a period of no less than 5 years. On 2 December 2013 the European Council adopted the MFF regulation for 2014 – 2020.⁵ Although the Council has adopted the MFF the detail of EU Funding Programmes in Northern Ireland for 2014-2020 has not been finalised.⁶

The PEACE III and INTERREG IVA programmes ended in 2013. A new programme cycle is due to start in January 2014. At the request of the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland, the SEUPB has been asked to help develop the content for two new programmes.

These programmes are:

- EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation 2014 – 2020 (PEACE IV);

⁵ Council of the European Union Press Release 2 December 2013: available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/139831.pdf

⁶Department of Finance and Personnel Website: available at http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/finance/european-funding/content - european_funding-future-funding.htm

- EU Programme for Cross-Border Territorial Cooperation (Ireland / Northern Ireland / Scotland) 2014 -2020 (INTERREG V).

5. Competitive Funding Overview

Competitive funding is not directly allocated from the EU to the Member State or regions within it. This portion of the budget is awarded by the EC via open competition amongst individual organisations. There are a number of EU educational programmes (administered in the UK by the British Council). Comenius and Erasmus in particular have seen considerable uptake in Northern Ireland.

5.1. The Lifelong Learning Programme

The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 - 2013 (LLP) offered funding for organisations involved in education and training. It provided opportunities for organisations, staff and learners across Europe to work together, learn from each other's expertise, and widen their experience of other cultures and languages.⁷

LLP had a budget of nearly €7 billion for the period 2007 - 2013 and thousands of projects were funded each year in the UK.

Four main programmes were funded under the LLP:

- Comenius (schools);
- Erasmus (higher education);
- Leonardo Da Vinci (vocational education and training); and,
- Grundtvig.(non-vocational adult education).

Schools Specific Funding: Comenius

The Comenius programme was open to the school education community. It provided funding for project-based partnerships and in-service opportunities for education staff.⁸

Amongst other things, Comenius enabled the following:

- Schools could develop sustainable partnerships with schools and colleges in other European countries and then work together on cross-curricular projects.
- Local education authorities in the UK could form strategic partnerships with education authorities in other European countries.
- Teachers and non-teaching staff could participate in courses, conferences and job shadowing in other European countries.

⁷ The Lifelong Programme Website: available at <https://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/>

⁸ Comenius Website: available at <https://www.lifelonglearningprogramme.org.uk/programme/comenius>

- UK schools and colleges could host a trainee teacher from another European country, to work across the curriculum.
- Schools and colleges could use eTwinning to find a partner in another part of Europe and become part of an online community.

Table 1: Comenius Programme Awards to Northern Ireland 2010⁹

Programme Strand	Number of UK awards	Number of awards to NI	Funding range (per award)
School Partnerships	454	37	€ 14,000 - 22,000
In-service Training	290	45	€ 1,510 - 2,049

5.2. Youth in Action

The Youth in Action programme, also funded by the European Commission, offered a range of international activities for young people aged 18 - 30. It ran from 2007 – 2013 and was the EU's mobility and non-formal education programme.

A list of the 2013 beneficiaries can be viewed [here](#).

6. The Future: Erasmus+ 2014 - 2020

Erasmus+ is the new EU funding programme for education, training, youth and sport. It combines and replaces previous funding programmes in the sector including the Lifelong Learning Programme, Youth in Action, Comenius and Erasmus.¹⁰ The European Commission hopes to make their funding programme more efficient and more accessible by bringing together a range of different programmes and initiatives.

The Erasmus+ programme is intended to support activities in education, training, youth and sport. It geared towards learning in Higher Education, Further Education, adult education, schools, and youth activities.

Erasmus+ will be based around five Key Actions:

- Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals involves providing opportunities for individuals to improve their skills and enhance their cultural awareness.
- Key Action 2: Co-operation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices enables organisations to work together in order to improve their provision for learners and share innovative practices.

⁹ British Council Comenius Programme: available at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/comenius-results.htm>

¹⁰ Erasmus+ website: available at <http://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/>

- Key Action 3: Support for Policy Reform covers any type of activity aimed at supporting and facilitating the modernisation of education and training systems.
- Jean Monnet Activities: Jean Monnet Activities involves supporting worldwide excellence in European integration studies.
- Sport: Funding is available under the Sport Action to support grassroots activities.

6.1. Timeline for Application

The Erasmus+ Programme is now available on-line.

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm

Organisations are invited to submit applications on-line from the end of January 2014.

7. Funding secured by the Department of Education

On 14 January 2014 the Minister for Education was asked in Plenary to outline how much EU funding his Department has secured over the past five years (AQO 5295/11-15).¹¹

He responded by saying:

“My Department’s ability to access EU funding is directly linked to the applicability of EU funding streams to the core business of the Department. In the period in question, our main focus has been on maximising the support available from the EU’s Comenius and Youth in Action programmes. The British Council is an agency for those two programmes. The education service here has been able to benefit from a total of £4.2 million drawn down by the British Council during the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 financial years.”

In response to a supplementary question which asked the Minister to detail how often his officials engage with European colleagues to explore the potential for EU investment in local education projects, the Minister responded:

“My Department has been proactively exploring the possibility of attracting EU structural funds in respect of the 2014-2020 funding round to build capacity in our pupil enhancement and enrichment intervention activities in relation to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business education. Exploratory work concluded that the objectives of the European Social Fund’s investment for growth and jobs programme provided the best fit for the Department’s STEM and business evaluation programmes. We are also exploring which other programmes, under the potential Peace IV, my Department could benefit from.”

¹¹Official Report (Hansard): available at

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-13-14/14-January-2014/#AQO%205295/11-15>

Appendix 1: EU Funded Programme Example

Project Title: Regional Schools for a Second Chance (ER2C)

Country: France (Languedoc-Roussillon)

It is estimated that about 5,000 young people leave the school system each year without a diploma in the Languedoc Roussillon region. Regional schools for a second chance (ER2C) is a project of vocational training, employment and social inclusion intended to increase the social and professional inclusion of young people in the this region.

The 9 participating schools have developed innovative teaching methods which are tailor-made according to the profiles of the individual students. Teaching methods are based on an individualised learning approach.

The ER2C project takes in 18 to 25 year olds who have been out of the national school system for at least six months and are registered with an employment centre. These young people, who are generally without a professional diploma and are unskilled, often also have real social problems.

The objectives of the 9 regional schools for a second chance are to:

- develop or update basic knowledge and skills to enable students to be able to join a company;
- develop their social and behavioural skills so that they can become fully functioning citizens;
- provide them with customised coaching to help increase their self-motivation;
- help develop professional goals, through apprenticeships.

The only selection criteria to being accepted onto the programme, is motivation. Applications are proposed and encouraged to enter the scheme through the local employment centre and other regional institutional structures.

64% of the students who took part in the programme went into employment (subsidised contracts, apprenticeship contracts, training contracts), to a training qualification or diploma, or a returned to training.

Technical information

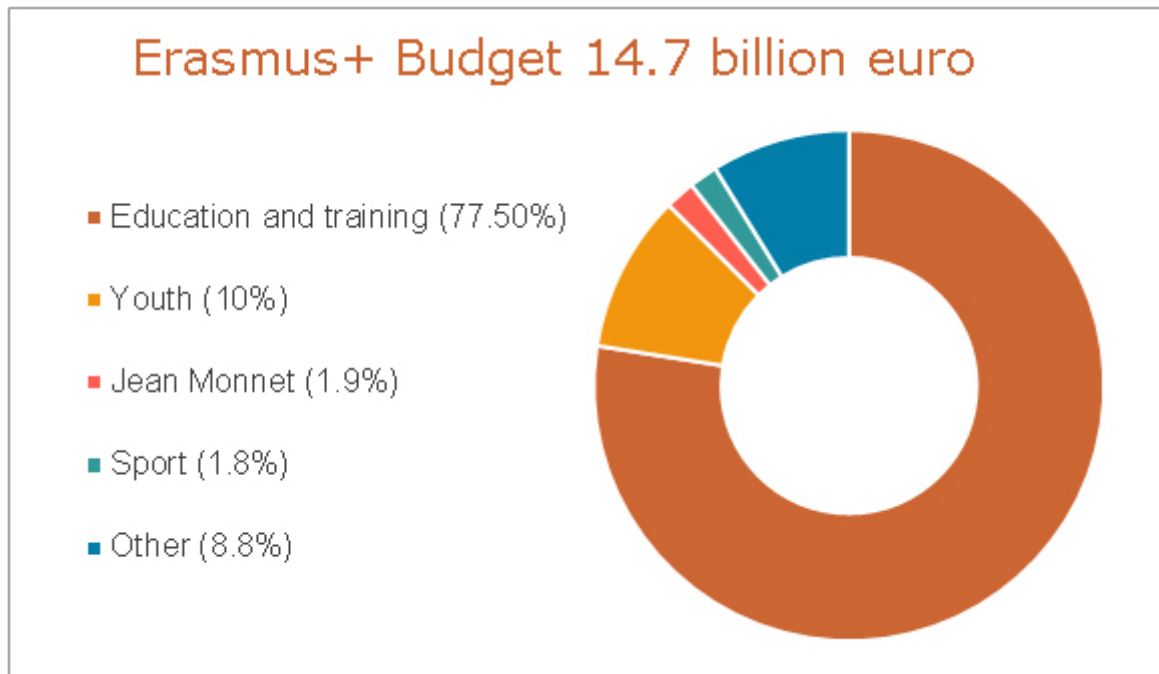
Funding Program: European Social Fund 2007 to 2013

Total Investment: € 3,000,000

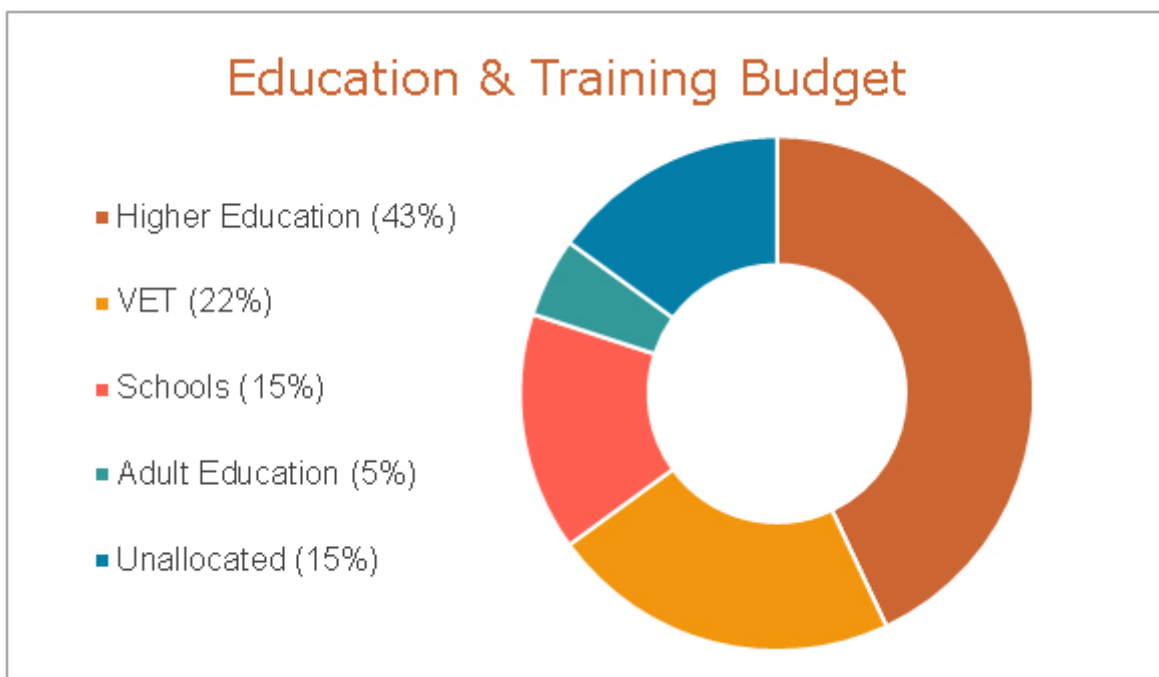
EU contribution: € 1,500,000

Appendix 2: Erasmus+ Funding

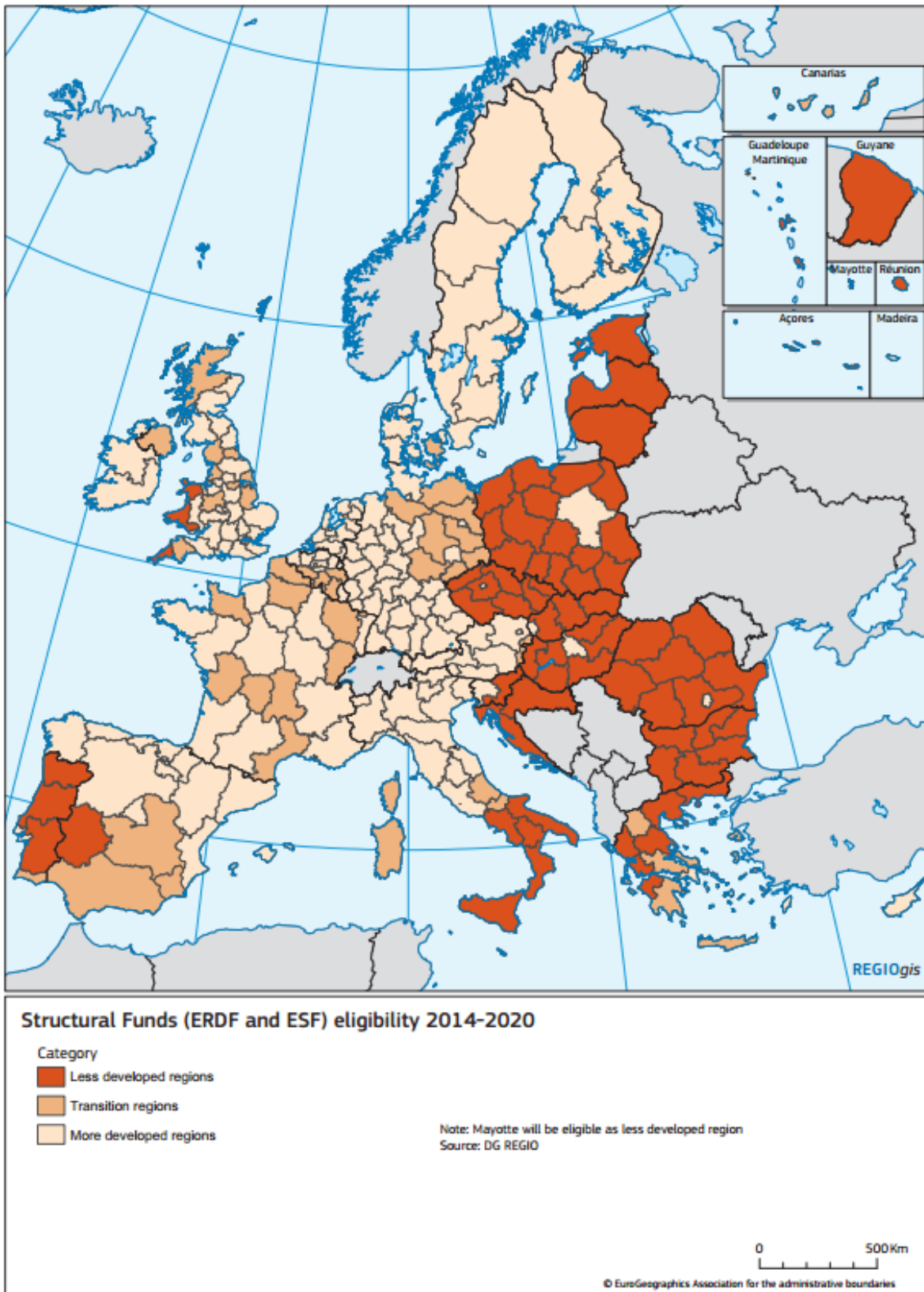
The Erasmus+ programme has been allocated an overall budget of €14.7 billion for the period 2014 – 2020. This is divided between education and training (77.50%), youth (10%), sport (1.8%), Jean Monnet Activities (1.9%) and other costs (8.8%).



The education and training budget is then further allocated between educational fields as follows: Higher education (43%), Vocational Education Training (22%), Schools (15%), Adult education (5%) and 15% is unallocated. NB these percentages are minimum budget allocations.



Appendix 3: Structural Funds Eligibility 2014-2020¹²



¹² Available at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/future/eligibility/index_en.cfm

Appendix 4:**Example of Structural Fund project with an educational component in Northern Ireland**

Organisation: WAVE Trauma Centre
Project Title: 'Back to the Future' project
Assistance: €300,000

Offered to young people aged 5-25 years who have been affected by the conflict.

Trauma counselling, educational support and citizenship training was offered on a cross community basis.

The project involved a group of 12-18 year old young people working over 16 months to produce two dramatic performances. The performances were scripted and directed by the group and based on their own stories of 'the Troubles'. The performances played in venues around Belfast.¹³

¹³ Wave Trauma Centre Website : <http://www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk>