

Newsletter 38: 28th March 2008

This is part of a fortnightly series of newsletters that will help explain the process and progression towards the Convergence Programmes for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The newsletters will contain the most up to date information about Convergence as it evolves over the coming months. **Updated information will appear in bold blue type.**

PARTNERS' PERSPECTIVE

Continuing our series in which partners reflect on key topics for Convergence, Geoff Hale of the Trades Union Congress discusses how the skills agenda is at the heart of the new economy – a competitive and productive economy cannot thrive without skilled people.

Wanted: Cornwall Skills Revolution – Geoff Hale, Trades Union Congress

Strong record in learning and skills

“The trade unions working with unionlearn (the TUC’s learning and skills organisation) have a strong record in encouraging people to get back to learning. In Cornwall we have a network of nearly 200 trained Union Learning Reps who are volunteers in workplaces encouraging their work colleagues to get back into learning. There are plans for this network to grow considerably.

Overcoming obstacles to learning

“For most people, getting back into learning is really difficult. We all have worries about our previous educational experiences, the time commitment, family pressures, the cost of learning and our fear about making ourselves look an idiot. These all get in the way of progress and many people lack the confidence to take the first step.

Adapting to survive

“But the world and Cornwall are changing. We need people to improve their skills to get on at work, improve their employability, get on in life and increase the competitiveness of the local economy.

Encouraging employers

“A lot of effort is going into encouraging employers to invest more in training and that is much needed. We need all employers to give a much higher priority to supporting the skills needs of their workforce at all levels and signing the Skills Pledge is one way they can publicly demonstrate their commitment to improving skills.

- Developing skills in the workforce** “But just supporting employers will never be enough. It is a scandal that in 2008 65,000 people in Cornwall do not have a level 2 qualification or equivalent and 60,000 lack functional literacy and numeracy skills. Delivering those skills to the workforce is a real challenge and we will need the support of all sides of business. The trade unions have a vital role to play.
- Inspiring a learning culture** “Individuals and employers need inspiring. They need their perceptions about training transformed. Cornwall needs to create a learning culture in every workplace.
- Cornwall competes** “Cornwall should be aiming to achieve the 2020 targets set out in the Leitch Review by 2013 to give us a competitive edge.
- “Cornwall needs a skills revolution. Are you ready to join in?”
- Geoff Hale**
Regional Development Worker
Trades Union Congress

UPDATE FROM THE MANAGING AGENT

- Commemorating co-financing** “At the 28 March 2008 Joint Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) Convergence Programmes for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, both the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus (Department of Work and Pensions) were presented with plaques by Jon Bright, chair of the PMC, to highlight their roles as co-financing organisations for the European Social Fund.
- Major training contracts** “Over the coming months both the Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus will be confirming major contracts for the delivery of training packages to help people into work and to increase the skills of people already in work.
- Higher Education framework approved** “The Joint PMC also approved the framework for the delivery of the Higher Education and higher level skills (HE framework) of the ESF Programme. Direct bids to the ESF Programme for the delivery of this activity will be called for over the coming months. The HE framework will be made available on the Convergence section of the website www.objectiveone.com and calls for proposals will also be made available here.”
- Phil McVey**
Director of European Programmes
South West Regional Development Agency

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

Call for Grant Administration Services	The South West Regional Development Agency is currently advertising for an organisation to provide Grant Administration Services for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in the South West. Grant Administration Services will carry out appraisals, recommend approvals, liaise with the South West RDA on claims and carry out post-implementation spot checks. The advertisement for organisations wishing to provide Grant Administration Services can be found in the Official Journal of the European Union and at www.southwestrda.org.uk . The closing date for expressions of interest is April 23 2008.
Territorial Co-operation Programmes	The Territorial Co-operation Programmes (2007-2013) complement the Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes with projects that address common challenges across national boundaries. Further information can be found at www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/policy/european-prog/territorial-co-opera.shtm .
Why did Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly qualify for Convergence?	Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were awarded Convergence status when the European Union's budget for 2007-2013 was decided. At that time the most up to date figures showed that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly's Gross Domestic Product (GDP, a measure of wealth creation) was less than 75% of the European Union average, allowing this area to qualify for Convergence.
Focus of ERDF Convergence Programme	The ERDF Convergence Programme, which began in January 2008, will focus on business support, modern economic infrastructure and increasing innovation and research and development.
What activities will be eligible for ERDF investment?	Details of activities which will be supported can be found in Section 6 of the ERDF Convergence Operational Programme which can be found at www.objectiveone.com/O1htm/01-convergence/recentnews.htm under '14 December 2007'.
How can I apply for ERDF Convergence investment?	The majority of activity in this Programme will be commissioned, so there will be very limited opportunities for people to bid into the Programme. If opportunities arise they will be publicised through www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence'.
Commissioning	Commissioning teams have begun to identify and develop investments which partners believe have the potential to transform the economy of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Once proposals have been tested and agreed the Programme will commission activity to implement them.
ESF Programme for England	The national ESF (European Social Fund) Operational Programme, which will invest in skills and employment, includes a ring-fenced allocation of c. £133m of European investment and specific priorities for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It can be found at www.esf.gov.uk .
What activities will be eligible for ESF investment?	ESF investment will focus on tackling barriers to work, improving workforce skills, and research and graduate activity. Further details can be found at www.esf.gov.uk and www.swrsp.org.uk respectively.

ESF Co-Financing, tendering and procurement ESF investments will be guided by the Learning and Skills Council and the Department for Work and Pensions (Jobcentre Plus) Co-Financing Plans which are available at www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence, Emerging Structures'. Organisations Tenders have been invited to tender to deliver ESF investments and the results of this process are expected soon.

Call for proposals for graduate placements A call for proposals to provide graduate placement schemes for the ESF Convergence Programme is now available at www.gosw.gov.uk and at www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence, Recent News'.

Further details Further information about tendering can be found at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/provider-procurement/esf-procurement/ and www.dwp.gov.uk/supplyingdwp/what_we_buy/european_social_fund.asp.

ESF newsletter An e-zine, 'ESF at Work', is available at www.esf.gov.uk/news/e-zine/.

European investment in the Convergence Programmes European investment in the ERDF and ESF Convergence Programmes:

	£	€
ERDF	c. £311.4 m	c. €458 m
ESF	c. £133.3 m	c. €196 m
Total investment	c. £444.7 m	c. €654 m

Rural Programme in the South West The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) allocates Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly c. £55m (EU investment plus UK match-funding) for the socio-economic parts of the Programme. Further details can be found in the Regional Implementation Plan at www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/rdpe-delivery.shtm.

Access to funding from the Rural Programme Investment is being made available in two ways: groups, organisations and businesses will be able to ask for help through a Rural Development Gateway, and the South West RDA will commission larger projects and services.

Further information The approved RDPE Programme Document can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/progdoc.htm. Additional information can be found at www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence', www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/introduction.shtm and www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/index.htm.

European Fisheries Fund Programme The European Fisheries Fund Programme has allocated £26.42 million to England and £7.3 million to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The UK's National Strategic Plan (NSP), has been submitted to the European Commission and can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/marine/fisheries/grants.htm.

First phase of consultation begins The first phase of the consultation on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Operational Programme began on 7 March 2008 and closes on 4 April 2008. All documents can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/eufishfund/index.htm. The second phase is expected to take place in April 2008, followed by submission to the European Commission.

Further information For further information about the Fisheries Programme please see www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/policy/european-prog/european-programmes.shtm and www.mfa.gov.uk/.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

The detail of the Fisheries Programme Work is underway in the Marine and Fisheries Agency (MFA) to develop the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Operational Programme.

More detailed information about Convergence, links to key organisations and websites can be found in the 'Convergence' section of the Objective One website www.objectiveone.com.