

Newsletter 37: 14th 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 Richard Glover, Chief Executive of the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society, discusses the breadth of the business creativity and innovation agenda that is at the heart of the most successful economies around the world today.

ON CREATIVITY – Richard Glover, Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society

Innovation and creativity

“When talking about Convergence it doesn't take long for the words 'innovation' and 'creativity' to crop up. If we are to take on the challenge of further growing the Cornish economy in the face of global competition we will need to continue to demonstrate resourcefulness.

Polytechnic established

“This was true in 1833 when the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society was established. It was the first ever use of the term 'polytechnic' in the UK and the idea came from two teenage girls from the Fox family. They owned Perran Foundry and it was clear that some workers were developing products and processes in ingenious ways. The suggestion was that by celebrating such achievement one could encourage others, improving both society and the bottom line.

Broad membership

“Within a very short time the Society had a membership that embraced engineering, botany, fishing, agriculture, fine arts, architecture - in fact, any endeavour in Cornwall that was keen to find new ways of doing things. The breakdown of economic sub-sector strategy, if such things existed, did not come into it; this was a celebration of invention in its many eclectic forms.

“That 'cross discipline approach' is needed now too.

Business creativity

“In seeking to encourage innovation and ingenuity some look to 'the Creative Industries' in Cornwall to fulfil that aim. It is easy to overlook the fact that in the best cases opening a business - any business - is a creative act.

Convergence “Let’s hope that Convergence can ‘buy’ time for SMEs (Small and Medium sized Enterprises) to remember that spark and invest in research and development so that we can all celebrate new ideas from Cornwall in the coming generation.”

Richard Glover
Chief Executive
Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society

UPDATE FROM THE MANAGING AGENT

Key areas of investment As part of the ongoing drive to implement the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Convergence Programme the Partnership Delivery Board (PDB) recently agreed the next steps to catalyse three key areas of investment in the Programme - digital infrastructure, enterprise and investment, and support for sector organisations.

Broadband Work in assessing a range of ways in which faster, cutting edge broadband could be delivered in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to help businesses communicate and compete has been undertaken. The preparation of a call for tenders for IT infrastructure was agreed and it was decided that Cornwall County Council would manage the procurement process. The PDB has put the demand stimulation work on hold until the outcome of the tender process is known.

Enterprise and investment Work on the Enterprise and Investment strand of the ERDF Convergence Programme - which aims to boost high growth businesses and help all enterprises improve productivity - has identified thirteen business support themes. The PDB will consider which themes are suitable for Convergence support and where themes can be amalgamated. Once more detailed proposals have been developed they will consider what to commission and report to the Programme Monitoring Committee.

Business sector networks The PDB has also endorsed the commissioning of investment to support business sector networks during the transition from Objective One to the new, simplified business support structure being developed by Government.

Updates As more investments are developed in the coming months we will keep you up to date via this newsletter and the Convergence section of www.objectiveone.com.

Phil McVey
Director of European Programmes
South West Regional Development Agency

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

Territorial Co-operation Programmes

The Territorial Co-operation Programmes (2007-2013) replace INTERREG (2000-2006), and complement the Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes. They aim to help reduce disparities between European Union regions through projects which address common challenges across national boundaries. Parts of the South West will be eligible to participate in these Programmes and 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. Economic growth since then means it is unlikely that Cornwall will qualify for this level of funding again, so it is essential to maximise the impact of Convergence investments.

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 in the national ESF Operational Programme and the ESF Convergence Framework for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly which are available from 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 will be made available at www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence'. Organisations have been invited tender to deliver ESF investments and the results of this process are expected soon.

Call for proposals for graduate placements A new 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 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.

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/eafnd/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), outlining objectives and priorities for UK fisheries 2007-2013, 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, which will outline investment priorities, began on 7 March 2008 and closes on 4 April 2008. Responses received will help shape the EFF Operational Programme for the UK. All documents can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/eufishfund/index.htm. The second phase of the consultation 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.