

Newsletter 35: 15th February 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

SKILLS v 'EMPLOYABILITY' – Vivienne Rayner FSB

The importance of 'employability'

When businesses first started to refer to 'employability' as an issue, many people in the public sector seemed surprised. It was thought enough that a candidate had the necessary skills to fulfil a task. But employers disagreed and kept on disagreeing until they were listened to and their comments taken on board. Now the concept of 'employability' and its importance is generally accepted even though its definition can vary significantly.

What is 'employability'?

Small businesses have a very basic definition of employability. They are looking for people who have achieved certain basic standards of literacy, numeracy, of communication and of general knowledge and who have learnt the discipline of turning up on time clean and suitably dressed. They include the ability to work unsupervised, to communicate politely with customers, colleagues and superiors and to be able to accept criticism and learn from it.

Role of schools

Clearly some of these issues are parenting matters as much as issues of schooling. However, schools can be influenced and parents cannot. Both groups need reminding that the core activity of a business is to provide a product or service, not to make up for the shortcomings of home or school. And people think of schools as, sadly, these problems are most often encountered with young people.

Issues

When businesses describe problems encountered with young job applicants or staff, they are angry that young people have been so badly served and as a result are unlikely to achieve their full potential.

Positive feedback

But it doesn't have to be like that. One retailer described the lad with learning difficulties who did work experience in a shop:

"He was a pleasure to have in the shop, polite and always willing to help, and supported well by the school."

Attitude and aptitude

Given the right attitude and aptitude, businesses can and will train staff in the necessary skills – and ‘employability’ is a good description of ‘the right attitude and aptitude’.

Vivienne Rayner
South West Policy Development Officer
Federation of Small Businesses

UPDATE FROM THE MANAGING AGENT

SOUTH WEST INPUT INTO THE POST 2013 AGENDA

Dear Colleague

Cohesion Policy

European Cohesion Policy has been a key part of South West England's economic development framework and has had a positive transformational impact. This impact has included the partnership arrangements we have put in place and which continue to guide our inclusive approach to sustainable growth and development.

Key messages

The key messages on future Cohesion Policy (post 2014) that the South West has highlighted to the European Commission in the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy are:

Economic development policies

- Cohesion Policy should remain an economic policy of the European Union assisting European regions not just by redistributing resources across the European Union but primarily in shaping their economic development policies.

Employment and environmental agendas

- Any future Cohesion Policy should continue to explicitly link the renewed Lisbon Agenda on more and better jobs and the Gothenburg agenda for environmental sustainability.

Driving force

- European Cohesion Policy should be seen as the vehicle and the driving force of a range of EU policies which have an impact at regional and local levels. Regional policy is the only policy that addresses all of the Union's policies at territorial level and that is its added value.

Phil McVey
Director of European Programmes
South West Regional Development Agency

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CONVERGENCE

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 (an average for 2000-2002) 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 funding?	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 the workforce's 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 projects will be delivered by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Work and Pensions (Jobcentre Plus) who will contract organisations to run specific projects. The tendering process to identify these organisations is currently underway. Organisations who have been successful in the first round of the LSC tendering process are expected to be announced soon, and the new call for tenders to provide graduate placement schemes will be made available at www.gosw.gov.uk and www.objectiveone.com under 'Convergence'. The results of the Department for Work and Pensions' tendering process should be available during April 2008.

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

ESF newsletter More information about the ESF Programme for England and Gibraltar can also be found in the e-zine, 'ESF at Work', at www.esf.gov.uk/news/e-zine/.

European investment in the Convergence Programmes The table below summarises European investment in the ERDF and ESF Convergence Programmes. There is a 70:30 split between ERDF and ESF funding.

	£	€
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

Launch of the Rural Programme in the South West The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) was launched in the South West on 4 February 2008. It allocates Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly c. £55m (EU investment plus UK match-funding) for the socio-economic parts of the Programme, which will be delivered by the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

Rural investment themes The Rural Programme will focus investment on skills development, social enterprise, business support, supply chain and adding value, resource management, sustainable tourism, biodiversity and landscape and community-led development. Further details can be found in the Regional Implementation Plan at www.southwestrda.org.uk.

Access to funding in the Rural Programme Funding 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/erdp/rdp07_13/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/erdp/rdp07_13/index.htm.

European Fisheries Fund Programme The UK's National Strategic Plan (NSP), outlining objectives and priorities for UK fisheries 2007-13, has been submitted to the European Commission for discussions. It can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/marine/fisheries/grants.htm.

Budget for Fisheries Programme The Fisheries Programme has allocated £26.42 million to England and £7.3 million to Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

The detail of the Fisheries Programme Work is underway in the Marine and Fisheries Agency (MFA) to develop a European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Operational Programme which will outline investment priorities. It will be subject to public consultation before approval by the European Commission. For further information please see www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/policy/european-prog/european-programmes.shtm and www.mfa.gov.uk/.

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.