

The Scottish Experience of Preparing and implementing Structural Fund Programmes

September 1999

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**The Scottish Experience of preparing and
implementing Structural Fund Programmes**

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We look forward to hearing from you.

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Abstract

This paper examines the Scottish experience of preparing the new Structural Funds for the 2000-2006 period. The paper provides an overview of the background to the reforms which began through the European Commission's Agenda 2000 process, the Scottish response, an assessment of the new themes which are being addressed in the new programmes, how to achieve coherent strategies and a review of the current practice of programme management and administration in Scotland.

Section A: The Structural Funds Reform Package

The European Commission set out its policy priorities for the next period of European Regional Policy in the document Agenda 2000. This document sets out the European Commission's proposals for the financing of the European Union in the 2000-2006 period. It contains major proposals for the reordering of EU policies and policy instruments such as the Structural Funds and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP); and details the process for starting the negotiations with six of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia) which will lead to the enlargement of the EU from the year 2002 onwards. The Agenda 2000 package was agreed at a meeting of the 15 Heads of State in Berlin on 24th and 25th March 1999. The Agenda 2000 proposals "represent a sophisticated attempt by the European Commission to reconcile the need to support enlargement while at the same time continuing to support economic and social cohesion within the existing 15 Member States and promoting a reduction of regional disparities and solidarity" (Shutt & Colwell; Page 11).

The background to the current Structural Fund reform reflects the new Treaty of Amsterdam and the Agenda 2000 document, both of which concern the preparation of the European Union for the challenges of an enlarged Europe. The Treaty of Amsterdam, agreed in June 1997, (and in force from mid-1999) sets out a number of new or changed competences for the EU which will affect the operation of Structural Fund programmes, in the 2000-2006 period. These Treaty changes include:

- A new Employment Chapter.
- A strengthened Article on Equal Opportunities.
- A strengthened Treaty Article on Sustainable Development.

The European Commission's proposals for reform of the Structural Funds aim to reduce the coverage across the EU from 50% EU Population to 40% by reducing the Objectives from 7 to 3. The new Objectives will comprise:

Objective (1) Less developed regions

Objective (2) Regions with major economic and social restructuring needs

Objective (3) Development of Human Resources

The eligibility criteria for areas are being changed in order that the population coverage is reduced for the new programme period.

For Objective 1 the 75% GDP criteria has been strictly applied, which caused problems for the Highlands and Islands to qualify in its own right. However, at the Berlin Council the Highlands and Islands secured Objective 1 status as a "special case" for 6 years (2000-2005 inclusive).

The new Objective 2 has four strands covering:

- industrial decline
- fishery sector decline
- rural areas in decline
- urban areas in difficulty

The eligibility criteria for Objective 2 designation place a particular emphasis on unemployment (which is likely to significantly disadvantage Scotland, given its relative economic performance at present).

The new Objective 3 will operate outside Objective 1 areas and is intended to:

- link to the new Employment Chapter
- modernise education, training and employment systems
- combat social exclusion.

The new Objective 3 will cover all ESF activities in rural and urban areas, for the training and employment support of both the employed and unemployed.

The European Commission has proposed that a “Safety Net” should be applied to each Member State to limit the reduction of Objective 2 coverage to one third of the 1994-99 level in each Member State. This will limit the drop in Objective 2 coverage across the UK and is expected to be of particular benefit to Scotland which has 85% of its area eligible in the 1994-99 period for Structural Fund coverage. The precise mechanism and distribution of the population coverage is currently a matter of intense debate between the DTI and other Government Departments.

The European Commission has also proposed that areas which lose their previous Objective 1, 2 or 5b status should not see a sudden end to the financial support, but should benefit from a period of “transitional support” or phasing out. At Berlin, it was agreed that a six year period of “transition” would be established for areas losing their former Objective 1, 2 and 5b status. It is important to note that given the limited resources available, the financial allocations to these areas will be relatively small.

The outcome of the Structural Fund negotiations is now clear and provides a basis to commence the planning for new Structural Fund programmes as many parts of Scotland currently eligible for Structural Fund support will continue to do so for a new 7 year programme period (2000-2006). This represents a major increase in the operational period than that made available in the 1994 -1999 period, when Objective 2 areas were required to be reviewed in 1996 effectively producing 2 three year programming periods. Many of the Industrial, Urban, Rural and Fishery areas will continue to be fully eligible, while any area losing full status will continue to have access to Structural Fund support within the regional programmes on a “transitional” basis of six years. Consideration will need to be given as to how programmes will be affected by a region (e.g. East, West Scotland) having both fully eligible and transition areas within it. This differentiation within a programme area will affect the levels of Structural Funds available in different parts of a region and may lead to parts of a region losing their access to EU Structural Fund support for some activities (though not all) during the 2000-2006 period.

For transitional areas the reduction in available Structural Funds may lead to a recognition of the need to prioritise from the range of development priorities in the new Objective 2 SPD. This prioritisation could for example be based on an assessment of the key development opportunities which characterise the area;

the need for consolidation of economic gains and progress or there is a need to tackle continuing structural problems.

It is clear that irrespective of an area qualifying in full or for only “transitional” status, that the task of securing eligibility in 2006 at the next reform and after enlargement has taken place will be very difficult, as the economic indicators are likely to favour the new EU Member States. For Scotland the strategies prepared for the 2000-2006 period should be regarded as “exit strategies” which should plan to fully exploit and maximise their potential to bring about economic recovery. One way of pursuing this objective is to employ the available EU resources for a final funding period, ending in 2006, to build regional capacity. The references to “competitiveness” as a priority of the new SPDs shows forward thinking and accords with the new UK Government’s policy priorities for national regional policy. Integrating the two will be critical to the successful implementation of new programmes.

New regional programmes will need to be prepared and agreed between regional partners for approval by the European Commission as soon as possible after the Structural Fund regulations were agreed in March 1999, and to ensure that there is a minimum delay to the start of new programmes from 1 January 2000 onwards. However, it has to be recognised that the timetable for implementation is unrealistic; major delays are already creeping into the process and likely to result in a funding gap in early 2000 which will have serious implications for the operation of programmes in Scotland. Due to the complexity of EU level negotiations and the national interests which are at stake, it is possible that a prompt start to the new programmes from the 1 January 2000 may not be possible. Programme planning will need to take account of delayed starts and consider the implications which a significant gap between the end of one phase of programmes and the commencement of new programmes in 2000 will present both for programme implementation, project promotion and the organisational capacity of the region to deliver the new strategy.

The new Structural Fund programmes will continue to be governed by programme partnerships which will involve local authorities, FE Colleges, Universities, LECs, NGOs and other bodies which is a welcome confirmation of the commitment of the European Commission to partnership and subsidiarity. Consideration has to be given to the role of the Scottish Parliament in the new period, with its financial and policy responsibilities. It will remain the role of the regional programme partnerships to approve eligible projects for funding. As a commentator has argued, under the Scottish Parliament “..implementation of the Structural Fund programmes should also respect the subsidiarity principle and remain a local/regional matter, based on broad partnerships accountable to local bodies and involving local authorities, LEC’s, voluntary sector and other economic actors”. (Colwell [1997])

The lack of an emphasis on collaboration between regions in the EU and entrant states through the new Structural Fund programmes prior to enlargement could be a serious weakness in helping areas prepare for the period after 2006.

Section B: The Scottish Response - plan preparation

In Scotland the task of preparing new programmes began in 1997 with the establishment of the post 1999 Co-ordination Group. Plan Teams have been set-up by the Scottish Executive in four regions and for Objective 3. The Plan Teams comprise representation from the key partners, including the economic and social partners, while the Programme Executives carry out a co-ordination and secretariat function. The Scottish Executive are in the chair. The partners play a full role in discussing strategy and assisting the Programme Executives with the drafting of parts of the new Programme. The Plan Team members are also expected to consult with other bodies in their sector, in addition to the formal consultation process, which is required under the General Regulation.

The five Plan Teams cover the following areas:

- a) South of Scotland (the current Dumfries & Galloway & Scottish Borders Objective 5b programmes).
- b) Western Scotland (the current Objective 2 programme area).
- c) East of Scotland (the current Eastern Scotland Objective 2, NW Grampian and Rural Stirling and Upland Tayside Objective 5b programmes).
- d) Highlands and Islands “special Objective 1 Programme” (current Objective 1 programme area)
- e) Objective 3 (all Scotland except Highland & Islands).

The Objective 3 programme will be a generic ESF programme incorporating current Objective 2, 3, 4 and 5b ESF funded activities, reflecting the policy content set by the National Employment Action Plan. The East, Western and South of Scotland Programmes are being prepared in anticipation of parts being eligible for Objective 2 status, in full or as areas in transition, using a two stage process:

- preparing an environmental description of the area and a social and economic analysis – i.e. providing the baseline and determining what trends are evident in the local and regional economy.
- consideration of the development priorities for fully eligible areas and areas in transition.

A Scottish Co-ordination Team has also been established, chaired by the Scottish Executive, which includes national agencies such as CoSLA, Scottish Enterprise, SCVO, SEPA, the Social and Economic partners and the Programme Directors. It is the successor to the Post 1999 Co-ordination Group. Its purpose is to provide overall strategic and planning co-ordination between plan teams and promote good practice, ensure consistency and ensure a close relationship is established to Scottish policy priorities as set by the Scottish Executive/Parliament and the other National public bodies. The work of this group has also included examining eligibility statistics, reviewing the content of draft regulations and commencing the process of programme planning.

Guidelines from the European Commission

The role of the guidelines prepared by the European Commission in helping to shape the new programmes is critical. EU-wide priorities for Structural Fund Programmes help to interpret European-wide policies and provide guidance on how these policies and new Treaty competences such as those for Sustainable Development and Equal Opportunities, should be implemented through Structural Fund Programmes.

However, whilst understanding the Commission's justification for this in terms of providing an EU-wide regional policy context for the allocation of the Structural Funds, they will only be workable if flexibility is retained for the regions to tailor, or augment them in accordance with the requirements of their programme areas. Structural Fund Programmes are one way that the various Commission Directorates can ensure that their policies are put in practice.

The European Commission has already given an indication of the format of the new Structural Fund regional strategies and provided detailed guidance on the content of new programmes (European Commission February 1999) to inform the development of new plans.

There are signs of an emerging policy linkage between different EU policy areas, for example linking EU transport objectives, including TransEuropean Networks and Citizen Transport with the Structural Funds. This policy integration is a welcome development, though in some areas it still remains relatively weak, such as for the application of Sustainable Development and Equal Opportunities.

The European Commission has indicated that the content of the new Structural Fund Programmes for 2000-2006 should follow the structure below:

- 1) Quantified description of current economic situation in the region.
 - 2) Description of the strategy to be pursued including detail of:
 - quantified objectives
 - development priorities
 - the geographic areas as whole. (The new regional plans will cover industrial, urban, fishery and rural areas within a single planning framework.)
 - 3) Prior appraisal of what the proposed strategy will achieve, including:
 - economic impacts.
 - environmental impacts (following the strengthened Treaty Article).
 - social impacts, including employment effects (particularly on target social areas).
 - 4) Results of consultations with:
 - competent authorities and bodies (such as local authorities, NGOs, environmental bodies)
 - economic and social partners.
- The new draft regulations require that all partners approve the draft SPD prior to its submission to the European Commission, so it is essential that

there is a focussed and effective programme of consultation at each appropriate stage in the development of the Plan. This will be an iterative process and will provide the opportunity for all concerned parties to participate and contribute to the evolution of the plan.

- 5) Indicative overall financial table;
- 6) Description of measures to provide the framework for intervention and selection criteria. (This will vary between new Objective 1 and 2 areas. e.g. Objective 1 enables health funding. There will be no difference between fully eligible and transitional areas in terms of activities that can be supported, only in terms of the amounts of money available and the more limited time period in which to act).
- 7) Information on the need for:
 - studies (to ensure the strategy continues to address economic needs and trends).
 - demonstration projects (which might promote innovative and new approaches).
 - training for partners to ensure high quality projects and responding to new policy developments.
 - technical assistance to support operations.
- 8) Designation of competent authorities and responsible bodies. (Detailing the role of partner organisations, [local authorities, LECs, NGOs, HE-FE etc] their decision making powers and the responsibilities of partners to preventing fraud, ensure effective monitoring and evaluation and efficient programme systems).
- 9) Provisions to ensure effective implementation in line with the strategic objectives of the SPD, through:
 - monitoring and evaluation.
 - definition of quantified indicators for evaluation.
 - arrangements for financial controls and sanctions.
 - adequate programme publicity.

Section C: New and emerging policy themes for 2000-2006

A number of issues are central to the development of the new Structural Fund programmes to operate in the 2000-2006 programming period. Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, COSLA and the Eastern Scotland European Partnership, formed the steering group for an initiative called “**Drivers for Change**” which began the broad policy analysis which now underpins the preparation of new programmes across Scotland.

The objectives of the initiative were that it should:

- Be strategic and consultative;
- Operate at the all Scotland level;
- Be concerned with contextual discussions which could be used to inform the deliberations and work of SPD Plan Teams;
- Stimulate strategic debate and enable partners to “speak the same language”;
- Deepen and widen “our understanding of key issues”.

An issues paper was drafted, which was based on a series of cross-sectoral interviews which sought to draw out the global/EU/national trends across four themes:

- enterprise
- learning
- infrastructure
- inclusion (with sustainable development emerging as a horizontal theme).

These initial views contained in the issues paper were used to inform the discussions at a series of workshops held across Scotland. These workshops involved members of plan teams, monitoring committees and local partners from the various sectors involved in the current programmes to explore these issues in more detail. The purpose of these workshops was to address economic and social trends, not to cover the regulations, area eligibility, or development priorities. This is the first time that any attempt has been made by all sectors in Scotland to try to identify trends in the economy which Structural Funds should address, before the task of drafting the new plans commenced.

The outcome of these workshops has been used by plan teams as the basis for further analysis in line with the process required by the European Commission. The plan teams have identified in addition a number of strategic development themes and operational issues which the new programmes will need to address. These are detailed below:

Strategic Theme: Enterprise

Both the European Commission and the UK Government have recently stressed their common priority as being to promote regional competitiveness. AGENDA 2000 states “The Structural Funds should aim at fostering competitive development and sustainable and job-creating growth throughout the Union and

the promotion of a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce” (Page 17 – Agenda 2000 published 15 July 1997).

Some indigenous companies lack ambition, marketing and management skills, suffer from under-capitalisation often due to fear of dilution and loss of ownership. Whilst development finance will be an effective response, it needs to be supported by appropriate mentoring and monitoring arrangements in order to achieve the desired growth and longer term benefits.

Development and promotion of entrepreneurship should be continued and should be extended in nature, scope and target groups, and also include the education sector. Entrepreneurial skills and enterprising behaviour are in evidence in excluded and marginalised communities, and the capacity of individuals in these communities to be resourceful, innovative and enterprising, should not be ignored but supported and channelled in ways in which they can actively and openly engage in the local and formal economy.

Productive and continuing relationships between SMEs and the business development network should be promoted and recognition given to the need for tailoring of support mechanisms throughout business life-cycle.

Inward investment is an important component of economic growth, in particular job creation across the UK. However, as the vast majority of inward investors are non-SMEs, there is limited scope for Structural Fund support. There is however, the potential to achieve a policy convergence by strengthening supplier and customer linkages for indigenous SMEs. It is considered that this is a significantly under-exploited opportunity and one which needs to be proactively pursued at the point at which the location decision is made.

Promotion of innovation and its relationship to competitiveness and diversification is crucial. It should however, be counter balanced with support and promotion of tried and tested practices which are successful. Innovation should not be pursued simply for its own sake. A good illustration of this is the relationship between technology and knowledge transfer where a distinction needs to be drawn between the capacity of an SME to adopt new technologies, or instead, to introduce proven technologies and know-how in order to modernise outmoded systems and processes.

Improved co-ordination linkages need to be developed between commercialisation, technology transfer and knowledge transfer activities and generic business development support, in order to ensure that support provision is relevant and focused on the needs of the recipient SME, and to avoid the potential for duplication of effort and confusion.

In both addressing the development needs of growth companies (SMEs) and the ambitious targets set for the creation of new enterprises, the availability and accessibility of risk capital will be a key and crucial factor. Acknowledging that there is likely to be the need for new financial instruments, there is also a requirement for ensuring co-ordination and effective business linkages between the range of existing and proposed risk capital funds, particularly at the lower end of the venture capital market.

Given the considerable range of business development support agencies and the even greater number and range of support activities, there is a need to focus Structural Fund support on added value and employment growth. This should be assisted by developing a more integrated and strategic approach to support provision for SMEs at a regional or sub-regional level. This should also be accompanied by continuing professional development for those individuals who provide professional advice, consultancy and training support to SMEs.

Strategic Theme: Social Inclusion

The key to achieving social inclusion for disadvantaged communities will be to build the capacity within communities to better equip them to both engage in the regeneration effort, and also to assume a greater role and responsibility in developing, managing, and delivering the economic and social regeneration of their community. This will include elements of the local, social and economic infrastructure (hard and soft) where there are gaps and deficiencies. It will also importantly include capacity building where it refers to the development of relevant skills and competencies of residents and community activists. This process of empowerment must be promoted, recognised and legitimised by all the partner bodies and an acknowledged outcome is for the community organisations to be the majority stakeholders. In effect, the public agencies should have a supporting role providing resources, technical input and administrative support.

The promotion and encouragement of learning, where learning can have a very broad and inclusive definition and scope and include inter-generational learning, will be a major factor in fundamentally bringing about inclusion and ownership, and reintegration into the local and mainstream economies. This last aspect can have significant and pervasive benefits in building community cohesion and re-establishing a cultural identity and sense of place. Through this approach to learning young people are more likely to gain an appreciation and respect for their local environment and begin to assume responsibility for themselves and others in their community.

The issue of access constraints and the limited or unsuitable provision of opportunities for all members of the community to participate in learning activities and employment opportunities, has long been recognised as a potential barrier to reintegration. With the increased use and relevance of learner focused approaches, and in particular the pivotal role of information and communication technologies, isolated communities and groups can access learning geared to their individual needs and circumstances. Improved public transport can also help people to better access training and employment opportunities in nearby employment centres, and other essential public services.

Social entrepreneurship needs to be encouraged and promoted as a realistic opportunity as too often the conventional route for entrepreneurial activity in excluded communities is through the community business model. The potential and value of the informal economy in these communities needs to be harnessed and channelled in ways that positively contribute to the local economy.

Community economic development may be more effectively achieved through the development and implementation of an area based strategic development plan or mini-programme rather than a range of discrete and often unconnected projects. This approach would provide the opportunity to build on the development planning, collaboration and local partnership building undertaken under other related regeneration programmes such as SIPs and Community Planning, and to maximise the respective financial resources and synergies. An added benefit of this approach is that financial planning and the construction of financial packages can be more confidently progressed. These mini-programmes would constitute a locally determined re-conversion strategy, which sets out in a coherent manner, a set of well-defined activities designed to bring about a staged and durable recovery.

The extent to which many fragile, remote and marginalised communities have comparatively small populations will tend to limit the potential for such mini-programmes on the grounds that the effort required to develop and manage mini-programmes on such a small scale would not be justified. A more viable basis might involve a grouping or 'archipelago' of adjacent communities.

Perhaps more fundamentally there needs to be the recognition and universal acknowledgement that the intended economic impacts of CED activities must be measured over a longer timeframe, and that every effort should be made to fully reflect the many related and often more diffuse social benefits that are essential to the ultimate achievement of economic targets.

Strategic Theme: Learning

Lifelong learning is now widely acknowledged as the underpinning principle which should shape, inform and drive the learning agenda across all institutions, SMEs, the labour force and all groups in society. Through this approach, key issues of employability, adaptability and equal opportunities in relation to participation in the labour market can be effectively tackled. Participation should also be understood as individuals securing and retaining employment which is meaningful, financially and intellectually rewarding and which provides them with adequate opportunities to exploit their full potential; encourages progression and the ability to respond to changing demands and new challenges. The concept of lifelong learning should be introduced and promoted at an early stage in the education/learning process. Moreover, the definition of lifelong learning should be very widely defined, encompassing formal education, vocational and professional training, and informal learning.

Information and communication technologies have revolutionised the delivery of training. Learners can now access training on-line in a flexible and user friendly manner, and at a pace and time which best suits their needs. This flexibility and accessibility, has been a powerful tool in reaching out to SMEs where traditional modes of provision have in the past proved unsuitable. In addition, training providers have come to understand the imperative of becoming more business orientated and the need to develop new markets. This has resulted in their ability to be more responsive to identified and changing needs, to offer greater choice, to provide a more flexible and customised service, and increasingly to consider and enter into inter-institutional collaborations where this represents

improved coverage and qualitative improvements in the provision of training, both in product choice and product mix.

New firm formation and the growth of existing SMEs are the cornerstones of the Commission's and the Government's enterprise policy agendas. Lifelong learning and the acquisition of skills will play a critical role in SME competitiveness, whilst the promotion of entrepreneurial skills will assist in SME creation. Also, SMEs need to recognise the value of and business benefits which can accrue from employers being encouraged and supported in promoting personal development activities amongst the workforce. The acquisition of relevant skills needs also to extend to managers of SMEs, where successive studies into SME competitiveness have consistently revealed deficiencies in key skills areas of management, including financial management and marketing. With regard to the employment of new employees, businesses increasingly point to the lack of job preparedness amongst new recruits, and are calling for an increased focus on employability skills and core competencies.

The extent to which learning is designed, focused and delivered against the assessed needs of the learner is critical to ensuring positive and lasting benefits. Personal development plans, mentoring and review arrangements can assist, as will the provision of financial support through for example individual learning accounts. What is also important in this regard is the way in which learning is assessed and recognised. This needs to be reviewed in order that informal learning, which may not always be recognised within the formal accreditation system, is appropriately recorded as discrete learning outcomes and valued as part of the overall learning experience.

Strategic Theme: Infrastructure

Whilst the European Commission will maintain the shift in emphasis away from hard infrastructure in new Structural Fund Programmes, economic development agencies will contend that there is a continuing need for the supply of new business sites and premises. This can only be justified where there is clear and independent evidence of market failure and demand. It will also need to be balanced with the opportunity to convert or upgrade the quality of existing stock, again in the light of market demand.

In the context of access to training and employment opportunities consideration should be given to support for public transport and community transport infrastructure. This might for example involve enhancing existing public transport provision or support for the introduction of additional services. Support for community transport provision has the added value and impact of creating new business and employment opportunities for remote and marginalised communities.

Rural and marginalised urban communities present particular problems and require appropriate solutions in respect of economic and social infrastructure. The availability of social and service infrastructure can help to anchor the community and can often provide the capacity to support economic activities. Moreover, local service infrastructure is often under-utilised e.g. mobile libraries,

schools, and its ability to support economic activity frequently goes unrecognised. The provision of economic infrastructure e.g. local workshop units, tourism facilities can be readily justified on their ability to impact positively on the sustainability of the economic base of the local community.

Information and communication technologies can be seen in the context of soft infrastructure and creating minimal impacts on the environment. As indicated under 'Learning', information and communication technologies are having a profound impact on training infrastructure, and the value of on line data transfer and information access is equally impacting on knowledge and technology transfer activities; tourism information services; public transport information provision, and the opportunity for SMEs and HEIs, for example, to develop powerful networks for exchange of ideas, know how and effective collaboration and joint ventures.

With regard to training infrastructure there have been many good examples where both the facilities and the learning environment have been designed around the needs of the learner. Factors such as location and access provision; choice and quality of provision and value for money have and should continue to influence the form and availability of new and upgraded training infrastructure.

Fundamentally, and perhaps with the exception of community social and economic infrastructure, all future infrastructure development will require to be linked to regional strategies and justified in terms of its implications for sustainable development and strategic spatial planning.

Strategic Theme: Equal Opportunities

Equality for men and women is a legal requirement within UK law and also an EU requirement that equal opportunities is incorporated into all policies. It must be fully integrated into Structural Fund programmes using a mainstreaming approach. This involves both efforts to promote equality, and specific activities which take into account at the planning and design stage, their possible effects on the situation of women and men and should include all disadvantaged and discriminated groups.

Strategic Theme: Sustainable Development and the Environment

Sustainable Development can be defined as aligning economic development with social and environmental considerations and that for future programme(s), whilst the core objective of job creation will remain, this can be more effectively achieved if the issues of social inclusion and environmental enhancement are integral considerations throughout the implementation of the programme(s).

The SPD is and remains an economic development programme focussing on the delivery of jobs, training and economic prosperity. Yet economic development does not occur in a social or environmental vacuum. Accordingly, Sustainable Development cannot be considered as a bolt-on, but must be fully integrated as a horizontal and founding principal of economic development programmes. Thus regional economic development must take into account the need to manage the environment wisely and ensure that local communities and

individuals are not excluded or disadvantaged by economic development activities. Fundamentally, Sustainable Development is all about securing improvements in the local economy, in a way which does not undermine the capacity for renewal of environmental resources; makes use of non-renewable resources and tackles economic and social exclusion; minimises any adverse impacts on the environment whilst at the same time providing meaningful and additional employment opportunities for the worst affected areas.

A recent interim evaluation of the Eastern Scotland Objective 2 programme highlighted failings in the implementation of environmental aspects of the current 1997-1999 SPD. It is suspected that this criticism and acknowledged failing can be levelled at many other regional programme areas across the EU. This will be addressed in the new programming period by learning from the progress achieved in developing ways of operationalising Sustainable Development.

Section D: Strategic Coherence and Improved Co-ordination.

The 6 themes of Enterprise, Social Inclusion, Learning, and Infrastructure, together with Equal Opportunities and Sustainable Development show the inter-relationships and cross-overs which are integral to the design of programmes for the 2000-2006 period. This policy synergy should help to ensure the achievement of greater coherence, and assist in producing a simplified and flexible programming framework.

To assist the effectiveness of the resources in the new SPDs, there will be a need for close integration between the goals of regional and national socio-economic strategies, and those which are intended to guide the EU's Structural Funds. This will require co-ordination within a strategic planning framework by all the economic development actors and the anticipation of changes in the regional economy.

The European Commission proposals for establishing the new SPDs include the requirement for formal assent to be given to the SPD by all the regional partners prior to its adoption by the Commission and Member State Government. This requirement will reinforce the need for the regional partners to work together, co-ordinated by the Programme Executives on behalf of the Scottish Executive, to agree on proposals for the contents of programmes, which inevitably will represent compromises between the various organisations. A means by which partnership may be reinforced through the greater participation of communities in the development of strategies and commenting on those of other organisations (LECs, FE colleges, Enterprise Trusts and local authorities) will be required.

There is an understanding that both the European Commission and the UK Government wish to see the development of comprehensive regional strategies. It is therefore in the overall interest of policy coherence that these strategies are established in a way which reinforce and support the activities and objectives proposed in each. "One of the problems of the UK experience of the use of the Structural Funds in the 1988-1998 period has been that EU and UK policies and strategies do not interrelate, frequently conflict and failed to mutually support each others regional policy effort" (Colwell 1999a).

The European Commission's Agenda 2000 document makes reference to the process of developing new Structural Fund programmes as including the preparation of an "integrated strategy for economic diversification" (Volume 1, Page 20). COSLA have previously advocated "that the implementation of the regional strategy through the use of EU Structural Funds should be supported by Programme Management Executives who would assist the regional partners co-ordinate their regeneration strategies" (COSLA [1997]).

Currently there is little evidence that the policy linkages have been forged between strategies such as rural development plans, Social Inclusion Partnerships and the Structural Fund process. At present there are too many strategies which causes considerable confusion on the ground. It is essential that national and EU funding strategies are linked and clear relationships established to maximise effort and limited public resources. Strategies which need to be interlinked to achieve this synergy include, Local Agenda 21

Strategies, Regional Technology Plans, Tourism strategies, LEC strategies and National Planning Policy Guidance.

Community Planning

One means to achieve the level of co-ordination required, is through the use of the new Community Planning model, by which a closer fit between the EU Structural Fund programmes and UK/Scotland policy and funding objectives can be achieved.

Community Planning has evolved out of a shared concern between the Scottish Executive and Local Government to identify means by which Councils and other public bodies might work more closely together in addressing the needs of their local communities. A joint COSLA-Scottish Executive working group reported in 1998 and 5 "pathfinder" Councils began the task of considering how best the recommendations of the report might be put into effect. The lessons obtained from the pathfinders will be used to guide the Community Planning preparation by the remaining 27 local authorities.

The report focused on promoting closer working between public bodies to provide an overarching policy framework document into which other public strategies and partnerships can be integrated. The key to the preparation of the Community Plans is the need to engage communities themselves in the development of the policies that affect them. The report also recognises "that councils must lead the process as the democratically elected representatives of local communities, working in partnership with other bodies and individuals who have their own perspectives and skills to offer" (Colwell [1999b]).

Community Planning represents an attempt to provide a strategic framework for the activities of the range of institutions engaged in community capacity building and regeneration, in order to guide action at a national, regional and local level. Councils are also working with their local partners and communities to prepare and co-ordinate the overlaps between Community Plans, Local Agenda 21 strategies and Rural Development strategies. Social inclusion, health and welfare improvement are also being related to the work of local government and may be incorporated into the Community Planning framework.

There is a perception of a "tangled web" of national and local initiatives, which can cause confusion, competing priorities and initiative fatigue. Many of these initiatives are currently uncoordinated and overlap. Community Planning is seen as a means to address these problems and to establish a framework into which EU, National and local public sector policies and programmes might be placed in a transparent and coherent manner.

As COSLA noted in recent evidence to the House of Lords European Communities Committee (1999), "The timetable for the preparation of Community Plans is slower than the preparation and approval of EU Structural Fund programmes. While the two timetables are not in sync, it is important that the strategic objectives established during the Structural Fund preparations are reflected in the new Community Plans, and that these documents are flexible enough to accommodate the strategic objectives and so help to ensure that scarce public funding is used to maximum effect." In addition, the Community

Planning process presents the possibility of taking account of all new EU policy and funding priorities within a coherent, multi-agency, locally determined framework.

Exit Strategies/Legacy-Realism

It is important to understand the broader context within which European Structural Funds operate. With the prospect of enlargement of the EU, the relative priorities for regional aid will shift, and it is highly unlikely that the UK will receive the same level of financial assistance currently available. The Structural Fund resources for the period 2000-2006 must be used to maximum effect and benefit, and wherever possible, supported activities must be durable and have an economic life beyond Structural Fund assistance. Equally, project sponsors will need to put in place, strategies, which take into account the likelihood of substantially reducing levels of Structural Fund aid. There will be opportunities for improved networking and exchange of experience with other EU regions and pre-accession member states. There is also the opportunity of exploring and exploiting the potential of other EU funds.

Regional Capacity Building and collaboration

This should be seen in the context of supporting activities which are sustainable, and which will have a lasting impact on the regeneration of the economic and social infrastructure of the regional and local economy. This will include measures to develop the capacity and competencies of organisations engaged in the delivery of economic and social development and to encourage the sharing of expertise and best practice between regions.

Collaboration can operate at all levels, but fundamentally needs to take place at the strategic level through formal arrangements involving all interested parties in the pursuit of common goals. Project level collaboration and co-operation between project promoters should be encouraged and promoted wherever possible to generate a number of beneficial impacts over and above the key economic outputs of a project. Including:

- the pooling of resources and expertise
- transfer of knowledge
- creating new capacity and competence at a regional level
- economies of scale and efficiency gains.

Spatial Development and Key Sectors

Future Structural Fund programmes need to be developed and delivered within the context of a strategic planning framework, which will lead to an increase in the role of the structure plan managers in the process. This will for example describe land use, transport infrastructure, strategic development sites, locations and development corridors. The linkage and co-ordination between planning (structure plans) and regional economic development must be cohesive and transparent if we are to maximise economic and social benefits, enhance and protect the environment.

Linked to spatial development is a need to acknowledge the economic potential and significant growth potential represented by key industrial sectors (for example, biotechnology and optoelectronics), where they co-locate and benefit from shared infrastructure and support services. The opportunity to concentrate assistance on these key industry sectors as deliverers of economic development can often be time limited and their ability to substantially contribute to economic regeneration requires careful evaluation.

From Hard to Soft Infrastructure and Large “Strategic” Projects

The Commission argue that increased added value and job creation is generated through productive investment. There is a need to determine and better understand the relationship between hard and soft infrastructure in order to justify support for hard infrastructure. This will be essential in targeting support for key growth sectors where there are gaps in the infrastructure constraining development.

Specific procedures need to be developed to adequately appraise large strategic or cross-border projects to take account of the Commissions’ requirements for a separate appraisal of such large (major) projects.

Public/Private Partnerships

The involvement of the private sector in project financing and implementation is likely to increase as this accords with UK government and EU policy objectives. Private finance is essential for the realisation of significant public interest projects. However, current approaches to investment appraisal, the assessment of risk and of minimum grant intervention requires to be reassessed, and made more robust to protect the “public interest”.

The Retail Sector

Support for the retail sector has been deemed ineligible under Objective 2 Programmes in the past, whilst limited exceptions have been allowed under Objective 5b. One of the major reasons for this has been the significant displacement effects attributed to support for the retail sector. However, the role and value of small, local retail outlets in isolated and marginalised rural communities, should not be underestimated and needs to be addressed within the new Objective 2 programmes.

Synergy With Other Funds, Co-Financing and Modulated Grant Rates

Increasingly, project financing involves a range of financial sponsors, and importantly, other major sources of public funding including Lottery and other European funds e.g. Fifth Framework (R&D), Community Initiatives (EQUAL, INTERREG, LEADER). This is a positive development, but one which requires improved co-ordination and linkages between the funding partners.

The capacity of the key public sector partners to provide the expected levels of match funding/co-financing, will continue to be constrained. Accordingly, it is envisaged that project funding packages will become more complex, involving

not only a multi-agency approach but increasing support from the private sector. This is also likely to adversely impact on smaller organisations.

Whilst grant intervention rates are already modulated to take account of revenue generation, the Commission is expected to seek a greater level of grant modulation, backed by hard evidence in future programmes to reflect the minimum level of grant necessary to allow a project to proceed. ERDF should always be viewed as gap funding and the funder of the last resort.

European Social Fund

What is clear is that **all** ESF resources can be committed only to projects, which conform to the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP). The NEAP will incorporate the 4 pillars of the European Employment Strategy:

- Improving employability
- Developing entrepreneurship
- Encouraging adaptability
- Strengthening equal opportunities

The bulk, if not all of ESF in the 2000-2006 programmes will be delivered through the new Objective 3 programmes, with only a residual amount within the Objective 2 programmes to support ERDF projects. There is a danger of duplication & poor sign-posting, delivery & management of Objective 2 ESF, a need to reach a critical mass for potential Objective 2 ESF programmes in each region and to ensure co-ordination of multi-funded projects with the new Objective 3 programme. Equally, there will be a concern about the cost-effectiveness of Objective 2 ESF development & delivery if there are many small projects. Future focus will be for higher level skills training, innovation and demonstration projects in Objective 2 ESF. ESF support may have an important role in transitional areas as part of the Exit strategy.

Eligible & Transitional Areas.

The new programme areas are expected to have a mix of areas which are fully eligible and areas which are in transition within the new programme boundary. This situation will make the task of programming much more complicated than at present. Different priorities could be adopted between the two types of area, with different intervention rates and time periods for the financial assistance. These differences will cause problems for establishing programme wide projects in business support and tourism and private sector funding contributions will be harder to attract in transitional areas. It will be essential to ensure that projects supported in the transitional areas have outcomes which last beyond the end of the programme. This may, for example, lead to an examination of the possible use of loan funding to increase the life of such projects.

Innovative Actions/Pilot Projects

European Structural Funds are in effect, policy instruments with the overall aim of helping bring about EU policy goals. They are also a means whereby new

ideas, approaches and forms of collaboration, can be tried and tested as pilot projects. Insufficient attention has been paid to this possibility in the past and should be remedied in future when active promotion and possible incentives for innovation should be incorporated into new programmes.

Soft Indicators, Core Indicators, Evaluation and Review (Economic Justification)

Measuring the performance of the programme in terms of its impact on the reconversion/regeneration of the economy of the region, is dependent upon the quality and efficacy of the performance indicators and monitoring arrangements. Considerable improvements have been made in recent years in reviewing and refining indicators. However, further work is required to develop performance indicators (soft indicators), which can adequately measure the economic, social and environmental impact of activities, which do not lead to employment creation in the short term but which nevertheless impact positively on the local economy.

In addition to consolidating good practice in strategic review and thematic evaluation, it is also essential that robust evaluation data is available to inform both strategy development and review. The definition and description of future priorities and measures will require valid and robust economic justification if they are to be included in the next generation of programmes.

Flexibility and Audit Procedures

Flexibility, like simplification, is an aspiration, which has consistently eluded us to date. We should, however, strive to secure a simplified and flexible operational framework that attempts to remove as much of the administrative burden from project applicants as possible, balanced with the need for sound management, accountability, and rigorous monitoring.

Project sponsors must ensure that robust financial management arrangements are in place, and adequate financial records for grant aided projects are maintained and available for inspection by auditors. It is anticipated that as a consequence of Commission desk officers becoming less involved in project decisions, there will be an increased level of activity from Commission auditors.

Community Policy Conflicts

There is the potential for policy conflicts in a number of restricted areas such as local sourcing initiatives and local procurement which might assist local businesses to increase turnover and expand but could have a distorting effect on competition and be considered to be a state aid. Clear advice and unambiguous procedures are essential.

Section E: The Scottish experience of administering Structural Fund programmes

The Scottish experience of administering Structural Fund programmes involves the use of a well-developed partnership model, which reflects the aim and content of the EC Structural Fund regulations. The model has ensured that partnership working is broadly based and has fully reflected the interests and concerns of the Scottish sectors. It is expected that this model will continue to operate in the new programme period 2000-2006.

Inclusive Partnerships, the “Scottish Model”.

Programme partners include representatives drawn from the key agencies involved in a programme area, including: Local Authorities, LEC’s, HE/FE sector, the voluntary sector and in the future the economic and social partners (Trade Unions and Employers Organisations). Unlike the programmes established in England, representation of the local authorities is by officers. However, COSLA have intimated that they wish to secure representation by elected politicians on the Programme Monitoring Committees established for the new programming period, to ensure that the accountability of the process is increased.

The Scottish partnership model involves a four-tier structure including:

- ◆ Programme Monitoring Committees are chaired by the Scottish Executive with all other support functions delegated to Programme Executives. The MC’s role is to oversee the strategic implementation of the programme.
- ◆ Programme Management Committees are chaired by the Scottish Executive and supported by the Programme Executives. The PMC’s role is to consider the recommendations from the Advisory Groups.
- ◆ The Advisory Groups are the engine room of the process in Scotland. Their role is to appraise projects on a priority by priority basis, and come to a judgement about whether projects should be approved or not. Advisory Groups comprise individuals with an expertise in the development theme (for example, technology) against which project sponsors are seeking support for their project. They appraise and score project applications against the criteria set out in the Single Programming Document.
- ◆ Programme Management Executives provide management and administrative support to the Committees and advisory groups and undertake a wide range of support functions to the partnership.

Programme Management Executives and Local Programme Management.

The Scottish Model has developed over 10 years following the establishment of the first Programme Executive in the former Strathclyde Region in 1989. The European Commission acknowledges the Scottish Model to be an effective and efficient approach to programme management and implementation.

There are five Programme Executives in Scotland at present, covering:

- Highlands and Islands Objective 1.

- Eastern Scotland Objective 2.
- Western Scotland Objective 2.
- Lowland Scotland Objective 3.
- Dumfries and Galloway Objective 5b.

Programme Executives were established with the objective of helping to provide the administration of the EU programmes within the eligible programme area itself, based on some of the functions previously performed by the Scottish Executive - civil servants, and to undertake additional functions and provide “added-value” to the programme partnership. The Scottish Executive remains “the implementing or managing authority”, as defined in the Structural Fund Regulations, with the overall responsibility for the effective administration, accounting and audit for the use made of the public finances involved.

The Programme Executives perform the following functions:

- Co-ordinating the preparation of Programme documents.
- Supporting Monitoring and Management Committees.
- Setting up and supporting Advisory Groups.
- Drafting selection criteria.
- Administering the project application and project appraisal system.
- Establishing realistic monitoring indicators.
- Monitoring physical and financial programme implementation.
- Managing the strategic impact and review process.
- Ensuring publicity and promotion.

The funding of the Executives and companies limited by guarantee.

The Programme Executives are funded by a combination of a management fee which is notionally based on a percentage of the total Structural Funds approved for each applicant (though not paid for by the applicant from the Structural Funds), plus a contribution from the EC resources available to the programme known as “Technical Assistance”. The European Commission will only permit use of Technical Assistance for programme management provided that the Executive is not simply performing or replacing functions which would have previously been carried out by a national administration, but is intended to promote best practice, innovation and provide added value. The Programme Monitoring Committees have a role in deciding how such resources are spent. The financing arrangements are to be reviewed for the new Programme period, 2000-2006.

The partnerships have set up the Programme Executives as companies limited by guarantee in Western Scotland, Eastern Scotland and the Objective 3 Partnership in Scotland. This is currently under consideration for the Dumfries and Galloway Objective 5b programme and the Highlands and Islands Objective 1 programme. The Boards of the companies (and where no company exists a Joint Management Board has been established) are responsible for the service quality, funding and personnel issues of the Programme Executives, which allows the partnership a direct role in their management. This makes this aspect of the administration of the Structural Funds more accountable, open to scrutiny, and relevant to the partnership.

The relationship of the Programme Executives to the Scottish Executive.

In Scotland, all programme management functions, with the exception of payments, are delegated from the Scottish Executive to the Programme Executives. It is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive to appoint members of the Programme Monitoring Committees, Management Committees and Advisory Groups. Payment claims are received by the Programme Executives, checked and then sent to the Scottish Executive to make the payments. The Scottish Executive has overall responsibility for programme implementation, audit, compliance and liaison with "lead" UK Government Departments.

The Scottish Executive also has overall responsibility for the evaluation of all Scottish programmes. The Programme Executives carry out the monitoring of project performance.

Scottish Parliament (Scrutiny/Accountability)

The European Committee of the Scottish Parliament will wish to review and assess the arrangements for, and the effectiveness of the management and implementation of Structural Fund Programmes in Scotland. Under their scrutiny, issues such as transparency, consistency, additionality, best use of funds and accountability, will be primary considerations. "This oversight will lead to a need for more monitoring information and....a closer link between the Scottish and EU funding priorities." (Colwell [1999c] Page 4).

Relations with the European Commission and compliance with EU: Policies.

This is part of the responsibility of the Programme Executives, although the Scottish Executive also gets involved in issues of compliance as appropriate. This is an area where training of the Programme Executive staff is expected to increase, in association with other national partners, due to new policy priorities being established at both the Scottish and the EU levels. The development of policy Aide-Memoires developed through the Scottish Co-ordination Team is seen as one means of guiding officials and Plan Team members.

The Programme Executives have day-to-day contact with the European Commission on the issues for which they have delegated responsibility, including project eligibility, implementation arrangements and monitoring. The Scottish Executive liaise with the European Commission on payment issues, compliance and major projects.

Financial Control and Reporting of Irregularities.

Overall, the Scottish Executive has responsibility for financial control. The Programme Executives undertake monitoring visits, and are responsible for advising the Scottish Executive of any problems discovered during monitoring. The Scottish Executive have a Verification and Audit Unit which carries out financial control for ERDF currently, and is likely to assume responsibility for ESF for the next programme period.

Production of Annual Reports and Publicity.

The Programme Executives prepare the final and annual reports on programme implementation. These are submitted to the Programme Monitoring Committee for their opinion and then presented to the European Commission by the Scottish Executive. It is anticipated that the production of the Annual Reports will become a much more significant task than currently, due to the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of the new programmes in connection with the operation of the performance reserve, and to decreasing involvement of the European Commission in the implementation arrangements.

The Programme Executives have delegated responsibility for making sure that all partners give adequate publicity to the Structural Fund contribution to each project in accordance with the requirements of the Structural Fund Regulations. The Programme Executives are also responsible for the overall promotion and publicity of the programmes.

Partner Views.

The views of partners were recently tested during the interim evaluations of the 1997-99 programming periods to how effective the programmes in Western and Eastern Scotland had been in their implementation and administration. Overall the reaction was extremely positive. Partners have views about aspects of the system that could be improved, but generally have faith that it is an objective, open and transparent system. The contrast with the English experience is stark, where the administration of the programmes is based in the Government Regional offices. With a few notable exceptions there is an unfortunate legacy of poor programme delivery, poor spend, insufficient and late advice to programme partners. In England there are continuing complaints about lack of transparency in the decision making process and an over reliance on instructions from the London headquarters of the DETR, DTI and the DfEE.

Section F: Conclusions.

The new Structural Fund Regulations retain the emphasis on programme partnership, require extensive partner consultation in the preparation of the new programmes; strengthens the role of the Programme Monitoring Committees for the new programming period, and places an increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation of the new programmes.

In addition, the new programming period will see a major increase in scrutiny, with a role for the Scottish Executive and the new Scottish Parliament in ensuring that limited public funds are used to best effect. The design and implementation of the new programmes will be complex and require an emphasis on decision-making transparency, clear guidance as to the application process and training for partners. There are a number of new policy issues emerging e.g. Sustainable Development, as well as new processes such as Community Planning, which present a more effective means to achieve a greater level of co-ordination and integration at a local and regional level.

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Gordon McLaren/Eastern Scotland European Partnership

September 1999

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