

## **West Wales and the Valleys ESF: 2015 Annual Implementation Report**

### **Citizen's Summary**

#### **Overview**

Wales is benefiting from around €2.4bn of EU Funding under the four Structural Funds Programmes for the period 2014-2020, including around €800m under the West Wales and the Valleys ESF Programme<sup>1</sup>. These Programmes will deliver a coherent programme enables economic growth through promoting high levels of sustainable employment, developing a skilled and responsive Welsh workforce now and for the future.

This is the first Annual Implementation Report for the West Wales and the Valleys ESF Programme, covering the reporting years of 2014 and 2015. The year 2014 focussed mainly on planning and negotiating with the new Operational Programmes with the European Commission. 2014 was also used to put implementation arrangements in place. The West Wales and the Valleys ESF Programme was approved on 04 December 2014.

#### **Key achievements over 2014/2015 reporting years**

- By the end of 2015 €273m of EU Grant has been committed to 19 operations which, together with match funding, represents €487m of investment.
- A Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) was formally constituted on 05 December 2014 and met four times during 2015. The PMC has strategic oversight of all European Structural and Investment Funds in Wales.
- The PMC formally agreed for the Structural Fund Programmes in 2015 the:
  - assessment and selection criteria for operations
  - Monitoring and Evaluation strategy
  - Communications plan

These documents and the minutes of the PMC can be found on the European Funds pages of the Welsh Government website.

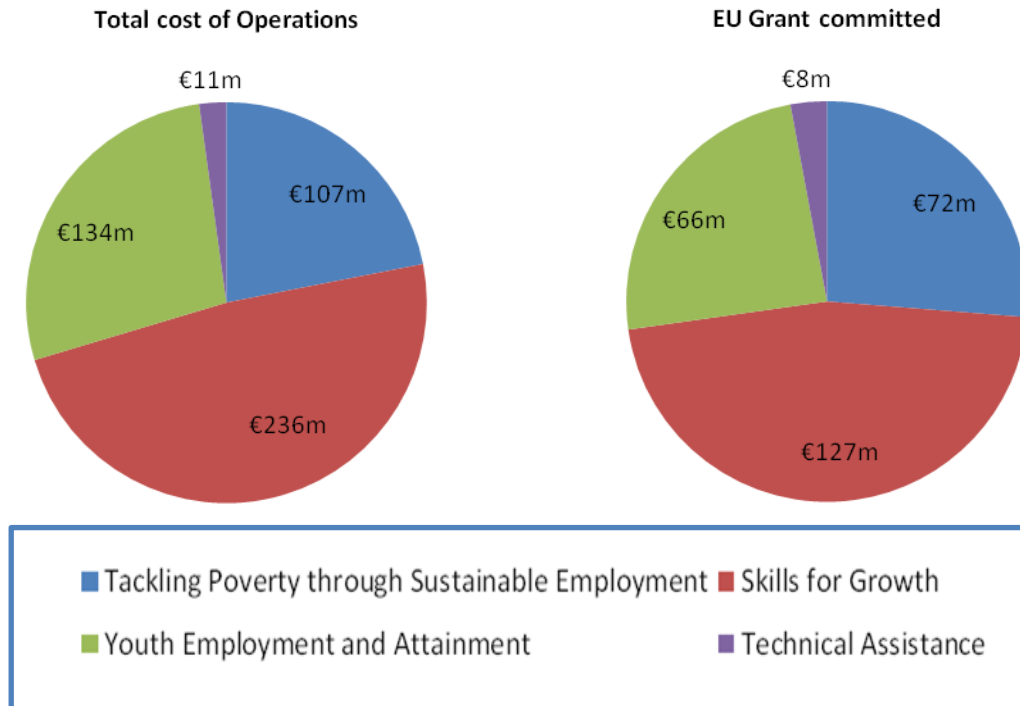
- Systems have been put in place to manage the Programme and a suite of guidance has been produced and published for organisations wishing to access funds.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures for EU Grant allocation

## Financial progress

The following charts show the amount of commitment (total and EU Grant) broken down by Priority axis:



### Operations approved up to the end of 2015

Descriptions of operations approved under each Programme Priority are provided below. Case studies of approved operations can be found on the Welsh Government website at [www.gov.wales/eu-funding](http://www.gov.wales/eu-funding)

#### Priority 1 – Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment

Seven operations had been approved under this Priority axis. Implementation of the first Specific Objective is focused around the approved Welsh Government *ReACT* operation, supporting individuals impacted by redundancy. An additional skills support operation for short term unemployed individuals with no or low skills is being developed by the Welsh Government which is likely to be approved in 2016. Other support, specifically for short term unemployed individuals with work limiting health conditions or disabilities, is likely to be more appropriately addressed through smaller scale niche activity. WEFO is keeping this potential gap in provision under review.

Implementation of the second Specific Objective is being developed around a mixed portfolio of geographically and cohort-group focused operations, with national, pan-Wales operations such as the approved Welsh Government *Communities for Work* initiatives and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)-led *Active Inclusion*

operations. These operations are complemented by regional operations, such as the approved collaborative Local Authority-led *Bridges 2 Work* operation across the South East of the West Wales and the Valleys area.

Implementation of the third Specific Objective is centred on *Healthy Working Wales* pan-programme backbone proposal by the Welsh Government to support those individuals who are at risk of dropping out of employment due to a work limiting health condition. WEFO is also encouraging proposals for delivering support to those who are 'underemployed' due to a work limiting health condition. There is an emerging gap in this area in addressing the 'underemployed' cohort. WEFO will keep this under review.

### **Priority 2 – Skills for Growth**

Six operations had been approved under this Priority axis. The portfolio of operations for the first two Specific Objectives (lower level and intermediate/advanced level skills development) of the Priority will be implemented around the approved Welsh Government *Apprenticeship* operations. These operations introduce an explicit focus on 16-24 year olds and higher apprenticeships, responding to the opportunities emerging with the economy and the needs of business. Regional provision of essential, technical and job-specific skills, led in most cases by the FE sector, will sit alongside these Operations with a number of these at the 'Business Planning' stage.

Under the third Specific Objective (research and innovation skills), with specific focus on supporting collaborative research with enterprise focused on the Science for Wales 'Grand Challenge' areas, one operation has been approved. Led by Swansea University the operation will support Engineering Doctorate and Research Masters in the field of advanced materials and manufacturing. A further operation in development during 2015 is a Bangor University-led proposal focusing on increasing research and innovation within SMEs, including micro companies.

Under the fourth Specific Objective (improving the position of women in the workforce) the Chwarae Teg-led *Agile Nation 2* operation has been approved which will deliver skills support and mentoring for women in employment, focusing on women in growth sectors where they are under-represented in the workforce and in senior management roles, as well as working with employers to promote diversity and tackle gender disadvantage in the workforce.

### **Priority 3 – Youth Employment and Attainment**

Five operations had been approved under this Priority axis. Under the first Specific Objective, implementation is underway with the approved Welsh Government *Jobs Growth Wales* operation, which is focusing on supporting unemployed 16-24 year olds who are otherwise work-ready into work on leaving, and *Traineeships* operation, which is focusing on supporting 16-18 year olds who have left compulsory education, who are undecided on a post-16 learning opportunity and/or do not have the skills

and aptitudes to secure employment. Further proposals, including Welsh Government pan-programme operations and Welsh Local Authority-led collaborative regional operations, were also under development during 2015.

A number of Operations were in development under the second Specific Objective during 2015. Provision is being developed through a portfolio of regionally based operations, targeting young people (11-19) who are at highest risk of becoming NEET, with the intention to re-engage them with education and reduce their risk of becoming NEET. This is being complemented by smaller scale and niche activity to support those in the FE and HE sector between ages 19-24 who are at highest risk of becoming NEET.

Under the third Specific Objective the emerging portfolio is centred on the *STEM Cymru II* operation approved during 2015. This operation will target young people at key decision and transition points during secondary and tertiary education, with attention given to female take-up and, attainment levels in STEM subjects.

The fourth Specific Objective is being delivered through a single Welsh Government-led operation approved toward the end of 2015 focus on upskilling the early years and childcare workforce.

#### **Priority 4 – Technical Assistance**

One operation had been approved under this Priority axis. A number of operations are in the 'Business Planning' stage, with several also in 'Pre-Planning'. Several of these are expected to be approved by later summer 2016. Investments include the approved operation covering revenue costs for Intermediary Bodies (IB) aid schemes managed by Welsh Government and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), and planned investments also include a suite of four Regional Engagement operations across Wales.