

European Structural Funds 2014 – 2020 Programmes Consultation

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Voluntary Action Scotland (VAS) is the umbrella body for Scotland's network of 32 Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs). We work with TSIs (unitary agencies and partnerships of Centres for Voluntary Service, Volunteer Centres and Social Enterprise Networks) around three key themes; advocating on their behalf, supporting practice development and co-ordinating with them to help deliver stronger and more resilient communities. An important aspect of the role of VAS is to better inform the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government and the statutory sector of the challenges and opportunities TSIs, the local third sector and local communities face. We aim to work with stakeholders to ensure that TSIs can play their role in supporting communities and deliver a consistent and valued impact across Scotland.

VAS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Government's ESF 2014 – 2020 Programmes Consultation. Whilst we do not have the technical expertise to respond to the individual questions asked in the consultation document we hope you will accept this submission as suitable as we believe there are certain overarching principles that the Scottish Government should adopt.

TSIs fulfil a vital and unique role within communities across Scotland. They have a significant reach across society in terms of providing added value through volunteering, connectivity to community assets, providing links in partnership working, local knowledge and the ability to reach 'seldom heard' groups. All these assets are crucial in maximising the impact of European Structural Funds for communities. Thus, we believe that VAS and TSIs need to be involved in the Governance and Delivery model outlined in the consultation document, in particular we believe the following needs to occur:

- VAS and TSIs are stakeholders in the Scottish Government's thematic objectives and need to be involved at the 'Delivery Partnership' level, both in terms of links to Community Planning Partnerships and overall engagement of the third sector locally.
- TSIs are potentially involved in the 'Delivery Agent' level on two counts 1) through helping to support local third sector delivery through brokering activity in the fashion of RCOP brokered activity and 2) TSIs sometimes delivering elements of a supply chain themselves. This needs to be recognised and resourced accordingly to maximise the added value the third sector can (and often has in the past) bring to the funds
- A greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the provision of technical assistance to third sector organisations, including upskilling the capacity of TSIs to provide assistance on ESF. VAS believe that TSIs can play a significant role in "translating" and rendering accessible aspects of public policy and practice points to potential third sector partners, as well as provide expertise in audit and other technical aspects (as has happened with RCOP and GIRFEC activity for example). A potential way of achieving this would be in partnership with VAS through creating an ESF Third Sector Funding Manager – this would help break down the potentially difficult terminology and provide the requisite expertise to ensure TSIs are

well equipped to provide technical assistance to local third sector organisations. From whatever source this could ensure a strong and impactful role for the third sector. If not through the TSI then Scottish Government should consider how else it can maximise technical support to the third sector in localities.

- Additionally, there is need to build capacity to look at common ways to capture outcomes, via an outcome based framework. The delivery of outcomes is critical and there is a need for a common platform to capture this data.

We believe that TSIs are well placed to provide brokerage in the 'delivery partnership' of the Scottish Government model, through the knowledge and expertise of the TSI they can look to ensure best practice learned from public social partnerships is included and that public benefit opportunities are maximised. There needs to be a focus on local decision making around local need, encompassing a devolution of funding to local level and communities, utilising TSIs as the mechanism to reach this objective. In the past 'Leader' type projects have been successful in ensuring this locality focus. TSIs in other social policy areas are already playing a major brokerage role where third, statutory and private sectors are brought together to effect change. This is notable in the Change Fund activity of Reshaping Care for Older People. TSIs regard the sign off for the third sector built into RCOP change plans as critical and some models include a high degree of devolution to the TSI. This model may include valuable lessons for the Scottish Government in ensuring best value from European funds

VAS believes that the Welsh model raises a constructive point regarding the ringfencing of certain parts of funding key thematic objectives of ESF and ERDF, VAS would support the same targeting in a Scottish context. Equally important though is the need to address scale costs and consider differential zones between rural, very rural, island and urban areas – to take into account higher capital and per-capita costs of delivery in remote/rural areas. VAS also sees the need for smaller organisations to be supported in their involvement in 'supply chain' arrangements where these take place. A localism agenda can provide the most successful delivery model and would utilise strong partnership working arrangements, inherent in this is allowing volunteering in particular to be considered as match funding as this will be critical in making the most of the value added of the sector. The Dundee Partnership demonstrates a strong model for third sector engagement and the Dundee TSI has successfully embedded itself at the top tier in community planning and partnership working. This has led to leveraging in of European Structural Funds and the adoption of a successful 'pipeline model', particularly around employability and utilising volunteering to help get people back to work, allied to the role the TSI plays in brokerage between partners including employers. The TSI role in the Dundee Partnership, and planning around European Structural Funds, is clearly valued and it would be instructive for the Scottish Government to examine this model in greater detail and draw out best practice for engagement of the third sector around this discussion.

In order for the Scottish Government to realise its vision for TSIs and the third sector generally it must seek to ensure that the third sector is a key partner in the decision making and delivery of European Structural Funds throughout the 2014 – 2020 period. This requires at the same time though a very clear expectation on statutory partners at the CPP level of that role for the third sector.