

**European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 – 2020 Programmes,  
Consultation response from Voluntary Action Scotland  
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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 Councils for Voluntary Services, 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 ESIF 2014 – 2020 Programmes Consultation. We contributed a response to the previous consultation on this topic and believe it is vitally important for third sector voices to be heard when discussing the future of ESIF. The points raised in our previous response are still pertinent and we do not feel they are adequately reflected in the ESIF proposals at present. In particular there is concern amongst TSIs about the potential centralisation of funds which could have knock on effects for smaller third sector organisations currently carrying out specific projects in their locality. Ultimately, this could be to the detriment of local communities.

We share a number of concerns with third sector colleagues about the direction of travel for the ESIF and believe there are a number of missed opportunities in the proposals at present, particularly regarding the role of the third sector. In order to ensure the ESIF is not a wasted opportunity for Scotland there are a number of issues we wish to raise and would like to see addressed as the proposals progress:

- The current proposals do not give adequate credence to the role of the third sector, particularly in terms of its potential to contribute to EU2020 outcomes and employability. We believe that TSIs can have a crucial role to play in ensuring ESIF are a success, this is due to TSIs proximity to communities and the brokerage role they play between the third, public and independent sectors.
- The third sector has a strong history in supporting employability yet this is not reflected in the proposals. Volunteering has long played a role in employability and the third sector has built up a great amount of expertise and dynamic approaches in this field. The third sector must be given a lead role within the employability strand to ensure this expertise is not lost. We should be looking at how best to work together, in a whole systems approach, and inherent in this is including the third sector wherever it is practical.

- As the current programme draws to a close there needs to be significant thought given to transition funding. The current programme has allowed growth of organisational capacity, increased knowledge and experience, and has developed ongoing services which reach and support some of the most challenging client groups. The risks associated with loss of key experience and knowledge following a gap in available finance can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the support provided. These risks can be particularly acute in remote and rural areas where replacing extensive knowledge and skill sets quickly can be challenging. Action to address these risks could have a positive impact on the early success of the new programmes and their ability to deliver effectively during their early stages.
- The potential inclusion of CPPs as lead organisation for proposal number 10 needs to be considered in the broader context of community planning reform. In their current form CPPs do not display the necessary consistency across Scotland and this needs to be addressed. They do not at present represent communities effectively nor are their outcomes sufficiently community led. If CPPs are going to be partly tasked with the portfolio of achieving local development and social inclusion then consideration must be given to how CPPs can be better structured to fully involve the third sector and local communities. VAS would commend to the consultation team our response to the Scottish Governments Community Empowerment Bill consultation which deals extensively with community planning. More immediately in terms of these proposals we would urge consideration of how the TSIs can play a role in ensuring sufficient local third sector lead action.
- VAS welcomes the indication that the delivery of the 'Poverty and Social Inclusion' strand should include a significant role for the third sector. However, we do not believe that the third sector should be limited to purely a delivery role in this particular strand, we can certainly see a role for the third sector in delivering on a number of the priorities throughout the proposals. Nor do we believe the sector should be limited to only being involved in delivery. We believe that the third sector infrastructure bodies such as VAS and the TSIs can play a significant role in leading and delivering on this agenda, perhaps in consortia with other third sector bodies or locally playing a connecting, enabling and developing role to grow third sector lead action. This would allow ESIF the access to a whole range of skills and experience which can add significant value to the management and delivery of the funds.
- As VAS has previously argued, we believe it is essential that the third sector have equal access to the Technical Assistance money available to Scotland. This will allow the sector to influence strategy, to support and improve the quality of proposals and project delivery, and to ensure that relevant and useful information and advice is provided to participating third sector organisations.

The above points cover some of the key issues VAS has with the current proposals, again we would reiterate that a number of the points raised in our initial consultation response are still pertinent. Whilst they don't fit narrowly into the consultation questions we felt it was important to look beyond this to the wider context and the impact the ESIF will have upon the third sector, and the potential for TSIs to play a greater role in supporting third sector lead action arising from ESIF funds. We look forward to continuing engagement with the Scottish Government on this matter.