



November 2009

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> regeneration > sustainability > innovation > commitment



## Welcome to the Highlands and Islands Partnership Programme

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... prosperous, inclusive and self-sustaining communities, where the unique cultures, traditions and environments are enhanced ...

As we near the end of 2009, our focus is on the N+2 financial targets and work for the forthcoming Programme Monitoring Committee meeting on 9 December 2009 which will include recommendations on Round 4 applications. This €bulletin also provides an update on the work undertaken by the Highlands & Islands Equality Forum, a highly successful project which started as an ESF funded pilot and is now developing new activities in the field of equal opportunities.

### **N+2**

Previous €bulletins and newsletters have explained the requirement of the Programmes to meet financial targets on an annual basis from 2009 onwards (known as the N+2 targets). Both the ERDF and ESF

targets are challenging and estimates currently indicate a shortfall of around £3.6 million on ERDF and £3.25 million ESF which would lead to a loss of these amounts from the respective programmes. We urgently require applicants to submit their Progress Report and Claim forms timeously and for applicants that are behind to catch up as soon as possible. Clearly it would be extremely disappointing if these targets were not met. The region has successfully met its ERDF and ESF financial targets since their introduction under their 2000-2006 programming period and we clearly would wish to avoid losing funds from the Operational Programmes. We would be grateful if applicants can liaise closely with IAB staff on their submissions and answer any queries on PRCs quickly so these can be resolved in advance of the deadline.

### **Desk Checks**

As previously advised, the IAB is required to undertake Desk Checks on expenditure within submitted Progress Report and Claim forms. These have already started and, as PRCs are approved, we will be notifying applicants which items we require evidence on. At least 20% of expenditure claimed within each PRC needs to be evidenced and checked and this will be across all cost headings. Evidence will be required electronically. Exceptionally, we may check on site if the paperwork is complex. As the transaction list will be the basis for the checks, we will be highlighting each item we require evidence on and would expect copies of invoices (or other appropriate documentation), BACs payments (or similar) and bank statements to show evidence of defrayal. For payroll items, we need applicants to ensure that personal data is removed from the copies we receive (blacked out). Where apportionment systems have been utilised, methodologies will need to be detailed and for staff who are not full time on a project and undertake other work, timesheets are required. Please note that we have already received timesheets which have been incomplete. Timesheets should cover all time worked and not just time on the ESF or ERDF project and be signed and dated by the staff member and then authorised by a manager.

We would be grateful for applicants co-operation in ensuring these take place as smoothly as possible. Further guidance will be issued in due course from the Scottish Government.

### **Highlands & Islands Equality Forum launches the Scottish Rural Equality Network**

The Highlands & Islands Equality Forum (HIEF) is an ESF project to raise awareness of equalities issues in the HIPP area and has (since its inception in 2002) been collecting evidence of the barriers faced by marginalised groups due to rural living. HIEF's work on rural issues came to the attention of the Scottish Government, and the Equality & Human Rights Commission, who has since commissioned HIEF to build a

Scottish Rural Equalities Network (SREN) to facilitate this information sharing and support for local groups. A pilot Online Discussion Forum went live on the 10 November 2009 and is open to public view with registration as a participant offered to anyone whose daily work involves working with equalities issues in a rural environment. You can view the site and register membership at <http://www.scvo.org.uk/srenonline/>

HIEF has been able to track issues that are common to rural identities such as the influences of geography and rural farming and fishing life, but have also proved that a rural identity is not homogenous: There are in fact, factors of local identities which may not be evident until one area is compared with another. The report due out at the beginning of 2010 is expected to make interesting reading for all agencies and will draw out some emerging themes to further develop at the SREN National Conference to be held in Inverness on 18 March 2010.

The Highlands & Islands are blazing a trail in the field of rural equalities that is attracting the attention of many people outside the area, and HIEF is kept busy giving presentations on the SREN at meetings which include key decision makers. The Online Discussion Forum provides the opportunity for the Highlands & Islands to showcase their good practice so that others may learn.

To find out more about the work of HIEF and the SREN, visit <http://www.hief.org.uk/>

