

Consultation on the European Social Fund in England and Gibraltar 2007-2013

30 October 2006



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

department for
education and skills

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

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How to respond

This consultation will end on 22 January 2007. We look forward to receiving your response before that date if at all possible. Please respond using the on-line response form on the ESF website at www.esf.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can use the word document version of the response form on the ESF website. You can send the word document version, as well as any queries, to:

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Copies of this consultation document and the annexes can be found on the ESF website at www.esf.gov.uk.

Ministerial foreword

This document invites comments on the draft European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme for England and Gibraltar in 2007-2013. The programme establishes the priorities for spending ESF in England to support policies to improve employment opportunities and develop human resources.

In line with the Government's agenda to promote opportunity for all, the draft programme proposes a strong focus on people who are unemployed, inactive or disadvantaged in the labour market, and on people without basic skills and qualifications.

The draft programme analyses the labour market challenges that the new programme will address, and sets out the EU, national and regional strategies to which it will add value. It also sets out the indicative activities that may be funded by the programme, and how the programme will be implemented.

Within the programme's national priorities, Regional Skills Partnerships will develop ESF strategies for their regions. These regional strategies will indicate how ESF will address distinctive regional and local needs.

The draft programme has been developed by the Department for Work and Pensions in close co-operation with the Department for Education and Skills and other departments.

I encourage you to respond to the questions raised in this consultation document. The deadline for responses is 22 January 2007. Your views will help to inform the draft version of the programme that we submit to the European Commission.



James Plaskitt
Parliamentary Under Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions

Introduction

1. The new round of European Union (EU) Structural Fund programmes will run from 2007 to 2013.¹ These will include a new European Social Fund programme for England and Gibraltar with a seven-year EU budget of €2.75 billion.² This consultation seeks views on the draft programme. The responses to the consultation will inform the preparation of the programme proposal which is submitted to the European Commission. The programme will be subject to negotiation with the Commission before it is formally approved.
2. The Government wants ESF in England to support its vision of a prosperous economy and inclusive society in which all people are able to fulfil their potential. It believes ESF should contribute to this vision by extending employment opportunities and by developing a skilled and adaptable workforce in every region of England. The programme will establish these as the national priorities for spending ESF in England. Within these priorities, there will be considerable scope for regions to address distinctive regional and local issues and needs.
3. The design of the new programme will need to take account of four important factors: the new strategic approach to EU cohesion policy; reduced resources; its seven-year life; and partnership.

¹ The Structural Funds are the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). There will be separate consultation exercises on the ERDF programmes for the English regions. The Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and Northern Ireland Office will be consulting on ESF and ERDF programmes in their territories.

² 2004 prices.

A new strategic approach

4. The EU has introduced a new strategic approach to align the Structural Funds to the Lisbon agenda for growth and jobs. The Government strongly supports this new strategic approach to EU spending, and will ensure that the ESF programme adds value to the employment and skills strategies set out in the UK's Lisbon National Reform Programme.³ At the same time, ESF will continue to support relevant labour market policies in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. This means focusing ESF funds on two main areas:
 - attracting more people into employment, especially people who are at a disadvantage, or have become inactive, in the labour market; and
 - improving the skills of potential and current workers who do not have the basic skills and qualifications that are needed for individual progression and business growth.

Reduced resources

5. As a result of EU enlargement and the UK's relative prosperity, ESF funding for England will reduce from €6 billion in 2000-2006 to €2.75 billion⁴ in 2007-2013. The Government believes that ESF resources must be focused where they can add value to domestic strategies and resources. This means focusing on those in greatest need of help and on areas of market failure. Priority will therefore be given to unemployed and inactive people who face barriers to work, and to people with no or low qualifications including people with multiple disadvantages. The programme will also contain some scope for higher-level skills activity to support these target groups and to promote the development of small enterprises.

Seven-year life

6. The programme will run for seven years from 2007 to 2013. It must therefore be sufficiently flexible to respond to policy developments and labour market conditions during that period. In particular the programme will respond to the Leitch Review of the UK's longer-term skills needs, which will report later in 2006. The Review is also looking at the delivery of employment and skills services. The programme must also complement the development of initiatives such as the Cities Strategy.

³ UK National Reform Programme 2005-2008, HMT, October 2005; UK National Reform Programme Update on Progress, HMT, October 2006. National Reform Programmes set out the action that will be taken at national level to achieve the Lisbon goals for growth and jobs.

⁴ 2004 prices.

Partnership

7. The Government is committed to developing and delivering Structural Fund programmes in partnership with stakeholders. Partnership will involve a wide range of organisations including Co-financing Organisations, social partners, Regional Skills Partnerships, Regional Development Agencies, local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, and employment, training and equal opportunities bodies. Voluntary and community organisations will have a particularly important role to play in delivering ESF to people who are disadvantaged in, or excluded from, the labour market.
8. Regional Skills Partnerships will play a leading role in developing regional ESF strategies which will align the national priorities to regional and local needs. The regional strategies will inform the development of ESF Co-financing plans during the course of the programme. In Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Merseyside and South Yorkshire, the programme will build on the knowledge and experience developed within the 2000-2006 Objective 1 programmes.

Context

EU Structural Fund Regulation

9. The England and Gibraltar ESF programme will operate within the framework of regulations and guidelines agreed at EU level. The Structural Fund Regulation for 2007-2013 has introduced significant changes to the rules governing EU funding.⁵
10. There will be three new 'Objectives' for targeting Structural Funds in 2007-2013:

Convergence Objective

The Convergence Objective replaces the current Objective 1. It will support the economic convergence of the poorest Member States and regions. Regions whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head is less than 75% of the EU average will be eligible for Convergence funding from the ESF and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is the only area of England that will qualify for Convergence funding.

Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective

The Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective replaces the current Objectives 2 and 3. It will support projects to increase competitiveness, employment and skills in all areas that are not eligible for the Convergence Objective. Both the ESF and ERDF will operate within the Competitiveness Objective. All of England, outside Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will be eligible to receive funding under the Competitiveness Objective.

⁵ Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999.

Within the Competitiveness Objective, South Yorkshire and Merseyside will qualify for ring-fenced 'phasing-in' funding. This is to provide transitional support for regions that received Objective 1 funding in 2000-2006, but do not qualify for Convergence funding in 2007-2013 because their economies have grown.

Co-operation Objective

The Co-operation Objective replaces the current Interreg Community Initiative and will finance cross-border and transnational cooperation projects. It will be funded from the ERDF only.

11. All programmes will be funded by one Structural Fund only. This means that it is no longer possible to combine ESF and ERDF in a single programme as in the 2000-2006 Objectives 1 and 2. However, there will be arrangements to co-ordinate ESF and ERDF funding within the English regions, so that the two funds complement each other where appropriate.
12. The 2000-2006 Equal Community Initiative, which supported new ways of combating disadvantage and discrimination in the labour market, will not continue. However, there will be some limited scope to support innovative and transnational activities within the ESF programme.
13. As part of the new strategic approach the EU will establish Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion and Member States will prepare National Strategic Reference Frameworks. These are described in paragraphs 17 to 19.
14. Other key Structural Fund rules remain. One of the most important rules is that EU funding is a contribution to the cost of programmes, and that Member States must 'match' EU funds with domestic money. In Convergence areas the EU will normally fund up to 75% of programme costs, and in other areas up to 50%. Another important condition is that Member States must spend their annual allocations within two years (the 'N+2' rule), otherwise unspent EU funds are returned to the EU. There are also detailed rules for the management, monitoring and audit of activities.

European Social Fund

15. The EU Council and the European Parliament have adopted a regulation which set the ESF's tasks for 2007-13. The regulation also establishes the scope of ESF support. Article 2 of the regulation says:

*'The ESF shall contribute to the priorities of the Community as regards strengthening economic and social cohesion by improving employment and job opportunities, encouraging a high level of employment and more and better jobs. It shall do so by supporting Member States' policies aiming to achieve full employment and quality and productivity at work, promote social inclusion, including the access of disadvantaged people to employment, and reduce national, regional and local employment disparities.'*⁶

16. The Regulation requires Member States to ensure that ESF programmes are consistent with the European Employment Strategy and that they concentrate support on implementing relevant EU Employment Recommendations. In recent years, the EU Employment Recommendations to the UK have focused on the need to improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged groups, and to tackle skills deficits. ESF should also concentrate support on the EU's relevant employment related objectives in the areas of social inclusion, education and training.

Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion

17. The EU Council has adopted Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion.⁷ These Guidelines provide an indicative framework to inform the development of Structural Fund programmes. The guidelines identify three main priorities:
- improving the attractiveness of Member States, regions and cities by improving accessibility, ensuring adequate quality and level of services, and preserving their environmental potential;
 - encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy by research and innovation capacities, including new information and communication technologies; and
 - creating more and better jobs by attracting more people into employment or entrepreneurial activity, improving adaptability of workers and enterprises, and increasing investment in human capital.

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and the of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999.

⁷ Council Decision of 6 October 2006 on Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion.

18. The third guideline is consistent with the European Employment Strategy and is particularly relevant to the ESF.

National Strategic Reference Framework

19. Each Member State has established a National Strategic Reference Framework which sets out its high-level priorities for spending Structural Funds in 2007-2013. Following a consultation exercise earlier in 2006 on the draft Framework, the Government published the final version of the UK Framework on 23 October.⁸ In the Framework and the Government response on the Framework consultation, the Government has taken a number of decisions on the ESF programme for England. These include:

- There will be a single ESF programme for England and Gibraltar. This programme will cover the whole of England and Gibraltar.
- Within the framework of this programme, the nine English regions, the Convergence area of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and Gibraltar will establish regional ESF strategies. Regional Skills Partnerships will play a leading role in developing the strategies for the English regions.
- The Community funding for the England ESF programme in 2007-13 will be €2.75 billion, of which €174 million is ring-fenced funding for the Convergence area of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, €187 million for the 'phasing-in' area of Merseyside, and €165 million for the 'phasing-in' area of South Yorkshire.⁹ The indicative allocation of the €2,225 million not ring-fenced for these three areas is:¹⁰

East of England €204 million

East Midlands €220 million

Gibraltar €3 million

London €436 million

North East €212 million

North West (excluding Merseyside) €298 million

South East €203 million

South West (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly) €128 million

West Midlands €330 million

Yorkshire and the Humber (excluding South Yorkshire) €191 million

⁸ UK National Strategic Reference Framework, DTI, October 2006

⁹ All figures at 2004 prices and rounded to nearest million.

¹⁰ The allocations include a small amount of technical assistance money which will be administered centrally by DWP.

- The programme will support two main priorities: extending employment opportunities and developing a skilled and adaptable workforce. The Convergence area of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will have similar but separate priorities. There will also be separate technical assistance priorities for Cornwall and for the rest of England.
- ESF funding will be strategically aligned with domestic resources through the ESF Co-financing system, which will provide the required national public match funding.

These points are not the subject of this consultation exercise.

Overview of draft programme

20. The draft programme is at annex 1. The structure and content of the draft programme are designed to meet the requirements of EU Regulations. The draft programme contains six main chapters. The main issues on which views are invited are set out in the questions below.

Chapter 1: Analysis

21. The EU Structural Fund Regulation requires Operational Programmes to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the area or sector covered by the programme. Chapter 1 therefore analyses the strengths and weaknesses of England's labour market, and identifies the challenges that the programme will address. A 'SWOT' analysis summarises strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. There is a separate section on Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, which identifies the specific challenges facing this Convergence area.

Question 1: What are your views on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the English labour market and/or the labour market in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly?

Chapter 2: Strategy

22. The EU Structural Fund Regulation requires Operational Programmes to set out the strategy that will respond to the analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Programmes are also required to justify their priorities in terms of the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion, the National Strategic Reference Framework and the ex-ante evaluation.
23. The ESF Regulation contains additional requirements to show how ESF programmes are consistent with and contribute to the European Employment Strategy, and how they promote this Strategy within the framework of Lisbon National Reform Programmes and National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. ESF programmes must also show how they are concentrating

support in line with relevant EU Employment Recommendations and the relevant employment related EU objectives in the areas of social inclusion, education and training.

24. Chapter 2 therefore sets out the strategy that responds to the challenges identified in Chapter 1, and describes how the programme's priorities will address the relevant EU, national and regional strategies. It also includes the main findings of the ex-ante evaluation.

Question 2: What are your views on the strategy for using the England ESF programme to support the relevant EU, national and regional objectives and policies?

Chapter 3: Priorities

25. Chapter 3 fulfils the requirement in the Structural Fund Regulation to describe the programme's priorities. There are six priorities based on the priorities identified in the National Strategic Reference Framework. Each priority contains proposals for indicative activities and for indicators to measure performance.

26. There are three priorities for the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective. These three priorities cover the whole of England and Gibraltar except Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The three priorities are:

- 1** extending employment opportunities
- 2** developing a skilled and adaptable workforce
- 3** technical assistance (to support the delivery of the programme)

Within these priorities, the phasing-in areas of Merseyside and South Yorkshire will be able to complete activities from their 2000-2006 Objective 1 programmes that continue to be eligible for funding.

27. The other three priorities are for the Convergence Objective area of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly only. These are:

- 4** tackling barriers to employment
- 5** improving the skills of the local workforce
- 6** technical assistance

These priorities contain the same activities and indicators as priorities 1 to 3. They also contain some additional activities reflecting the wider range of activities that are eligible within the Convergence Objective.

28. Within Priorities 1, 2, 4 and 5, there will be a limited amount of funding available to support a small range of innovative activities. Innovative activity will add value to the programme's objectives of extending employment opportunities and developing a skilled and adaptable workforce. In view of the significant reduction in ESF funding for England, the funding available for these activities will be far smaller than under the Equal Community Initiative.

Question 3: What are your views on the proposed indicative activities and indicators for each of the six priority areas?

- a** Priority 1 - extending employment opportunities (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- b** Priority 2 - developing a skilled and adaptable workforce (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- c** Priority 3 - technical assistance (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- d** Priority 4 - tackling barriers to employment (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)
- e** Priority 5 - improving the skills of the local workforce (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)
- f** Priority 6 - technical assistance (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)

Question 4: In view of the limited funding available, what do you think should be the themes for innovative activity to extend employment opportunities and develop a skilled and adaptable workforce?

Chapter 4: Implementation

29. Chapter 4 fulfils the requirement in the Structural Fund regulation to describe how the programme will be implemented. The programme's Managing Authority will be the European Social Fund Division of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Division will also be the Certifying Authority which is responsible for submitting payment applications to the Commission. The Audit Authority will be the Risk Assurance Division of DWP. At national level the programme will be overseen by a Programme Monitoring Committee which will be chaired by a representative of the Managing Authority.
30. Most of the delivery of the programme will take place at regional level. The Managing Authority may delegate certain tasks to Intermediate Bodies. In Gibraltar, the Government of Gibraltar will be the Intermediate Body.

31. At regional level, ESF will seek to work with existing regional partnership structures rather than create new ones. The objective will be to ensure that ESF is able to support regional employment and skills priorities within the structure of a national England ESF programme. The Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs)¹¹ will have a leading role in the development of regional ESF strategies. They will also review and update regional ESF strategies to ensure their continued relevance to regional priorities.
32. Regional ESF strategies will provide the framework, along with the Operational Programme, for Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) to develop detailed ESF delivery plans. CFOs will have responsibility for bringing together ESF and the required domestic match funding, and for contracting with providers.
33. Regional Skills Partnerships may be assisted by regional ESF committees. The committees may be responsible for endorsing CFO plans and monitoring performance against the plans. They may report to their Regional Skills Partnerships on how the CFOs are contributing to the regional strategy. Regions will be encouraged to operate joint ESF and ERDF regional committees.
34. The Convergence area of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly will have its own strategy and committee. The regional strategies and committees in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber will take account of the specific needs of the phasing-in areas of Merseyside and South Yorkshire. Partners from the Merseyside and South Yorkshire Objective 1 programmes will be engaged in the development of the programme to ensure that its design and implementation reflects the needs of their areas.
35. The programme will contain two cross-cutting themes: gender equality and equal opportunities; and sustainable development including environmental sustainability. These themes will build on good practice developed in 2000-2006. All activities will be expected to address these themes.
36. Chapter 4 also outlines the arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and publicising the programme, for delivering innovative and transnational activity, and for co-ordination with ERDF and other EU programmes.

¹¹ The Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs) have been established to address skills and employment priorities within each region. The RSPs bring together, at senior level, the key partners responsible for employment and skills provision at regional level. They are therefore well placed to ensure that priorities for employment and skills provision are developed within the context of the Regional Economic Strategy and can contribute to its delivery.

Question 5: What are your views on the proposed roles of Regional Skills Partnerships and Regional ESF Strategies?

Question 6: What are your views on how the equal opportunities cross-cutting theme should be implemented?

Question 7: What are your views on how the sustainable development (including environmental sustainability) cross-cutting theme should be implemented?

Question 8: Do you have any views on the proposed implementation arrangements?

Chapter 5: Financial tables

37. The final version of the Operational Programme will contain two financial tables which show the breakdown of EU funding by year and the total funding by priority. The annual breakdown of funds will be determined by profiles established by the EU, and will show the money that is ring-fenced for the Convergence and phasing-in areas.

Chapter 6: Gibraltar

38. The programme also covers Gibraltar. Gibraltar will receive funding within Priorities 1, 2 and 3. Chapter 6, which has been prepared by the Government of Gibraltar, contains information specific to Gibraltar.

Question 9: Do you have any comments on the ESF strategy for Gibraltar under Priorities 1, 2 and 3?

Annexes to the Operational Programme

39. The annexes to the Operational Programme are contained in a separate document and can also be found on the ESF website, at www.esf.gov.uk. The annexes include: a table of the main EU regulatory requirements on the content of Operational Programme; the draft ex-ante evaluation report; the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening report; and the draft equality screening report.
40. The purpose of the ex-ante evaluation is to optimise the allocation of resources and improve the quality of the programme. The ex-ante evaluation identifies and appraises the relevance of the programme to its labour market and policy context. It also examines the expected results of the programme, the added value of Community funding and the implementation arrangements. The draft ex-ante evaluation has been prepared by the ESF Evaluation Team in DWP. It will be updated in the light of this consultation exercise and the final draft of the Operational Programme.

41. The SEA screening report concludes that a full SEA is not required. The screening report and the draft programme were sent to the following consultative bodies in May 2006: the Environment Agency; the Countryside Agency; English Nature; and English Heritage. The consultative bodies are content that a full SEA is not required.
42. The draft equality screening report follows the structure of the DWP screening report and impact assessment template. The report concludes that the draft new programme is likely to have a positive impact on the equality groups targeted and that a full impact assessment is not necessary. The Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and Disability Rights Commission have been invited to comment on the draft report. The screening report will be updated when the final draft of the programme is prepared, and will be regularly reviewed during the life of the programme.

Summary of questions

43. The questions on which we would welcome your responses are:

Question 1: What are your views on the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the English labour market and/or the labour market in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly?

Question 2: What are your views on the strategy for using the England ESF programme to support the relevant EU, national and regional objectives and policies?

Question 3: What are your views on the proposed indicative activities and indicators for each of the six priority areas?

- a** Priority 1 - extending employment opportunities (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- b** Priority 2 - developing a skilled and adaptable workforce (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- c** Priority 3 - technical assistance (excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly)
- d** Priority 4 - tackling barriers to employment (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)
- e** Priority 5 - improving the skills of the local workforce (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)
- f** Priority 6 - technical assistance (Cornwall and Isles of Scilly only)

Question 4: In view of the limited funding available, what do you think should be the themes for innovative activity to extend employment opportunities and develop a skilled and adaptable workforce?

Question 5: What are your views on the proposed roles of Regional Skills Partnerships and Regional ESF Strategies?

Question 6: What are your views on how the equal opportunities cross-cutting theme should be implemented?

Question 7: What are your views on how the sustainable development (including environmental sustainability) cross-cutting theme should be implemented?

Question 8: Do you have any views on the proposed implementation arrangements?

Question 9: Do you have any comments on the ESF strategy for Gibraltar under Priorities 1, 2 and 3?

How to respond

44. You may respond to some or all of the questions. Please respond using the on-line response form on the ESF website at www.esf.gov.uk. When you have completed the form on the ESF website, it can be e-mailed directly to us.
45. Alternatively you may download a word document version of the response form from the ESF website at www.esf.gov.uk. If you use this version, it should be sent by letter or e-mail to:

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Email: esf.feedback@dfes.gsi.gov.uk
46. The deadline for responses is 22 January 2007. A copy of the response form is at annex 2 for information.
47. When responding please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If responding on behalf of an organisation please make clear whom the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled. A list of those contacted directly is attached at annex 3. If you have any suggestions of others who may wish to be involved in this process please contact us.
48. The information you send us may need to be passed to colleagues within the Department for Work and Pensions and published in a summary of responses received in response to this consultation along with a response from the Government.

49. Because of the Freedom of Information Act (2000), all information contained in your response, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure. By providing personal information for the purposes of the public consultation exercise, it is understood that you consent to its disclosure and publication. If this is not the case, you should limit any personal information that is provided, or remove it completely. If you want the information in your response to the consultation be kept confidential, you should explain why as part of your response, although we cannot guarantee to do this. We cannot guarantee confidentiality even if your IT system claims it automatically. The contact point for queries is Tony McMahon as indicated at paragraph 45. More information about the Freedom of Information Act can be found on the website of the Department for Constitutional Affairs at <http://www.dca.gov.uk/foi/guidance/exguide/index.htm>.
50. You may make additional copies of this document and the annexes without seeking permission.
51. If you have any queries, please contact Tony McMahon, as indicated at paragraph 45.
52. DWP values feedback on how well it consults. If you have any comments on the process of this consultation (as opposed to the issues raised) please contact the DWP Consultation Co-ordinator. In particular, please tell us if you feel that the consultation does not satisfy the consultation criteria. Please also make any suggestions as to how the process of consultation could be improved further. Please contact:

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Code of practice on consultation

53. The consultation is being conducted in line with the Code of Practice on Consultation. The Criteria are listed below. The full version can be accessed at <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Code.htm>.

The Six Consultation Criteria

- 1** Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
- 2** Be clear about who may be affected, what questions are being asked, and the timescale for responses.
- 3** Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
- 4** Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
- 5** Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated Consultation Co-ordinator.
- 6** Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Next steps

54. We will publish all non-confidential responses on the ESF website after the consultation closes. We will aim to publish a response to the consultation within three months following the close of the consultation. This will include a summary of responses, a statement of the Government's position on the issues raised in the light of the responses, and the draft of the Operational Programme that is submitted to the European Commission.

