



European Union

European Structural
and Investment Funds

**European Structural and Investment Funds
2014 - 2020**

Growth Programme for England

ESI Funds Growth Programme Board

Progress on EAFRD Growth Programme

Purpose:

To provide the Board with an update on the current position on the EAFRD part of the EU Growth Programme.

Recommendation(s):

The Board is invited to note the information set out in this paper and to comment on the key issues set out in Annex 2.

Summary:

The total amount of EAFRD funding committed under the 2015 Growth Programme calls now stands at £9.81m. Claims for £1.46m have been paid to date with 2 projects completing all activity.

As at 25 May, the £120m of national calls opened in January 2017 had resulted in the submission of Expressions of Interest requesting funding worth £57.68m. The RPA continues to assess these and has invited projects to submit full applications for support worth £36.54m. Full applications requesting grant funding worth £0.86m had also been received to support food processing and tourism infrastructure activity.

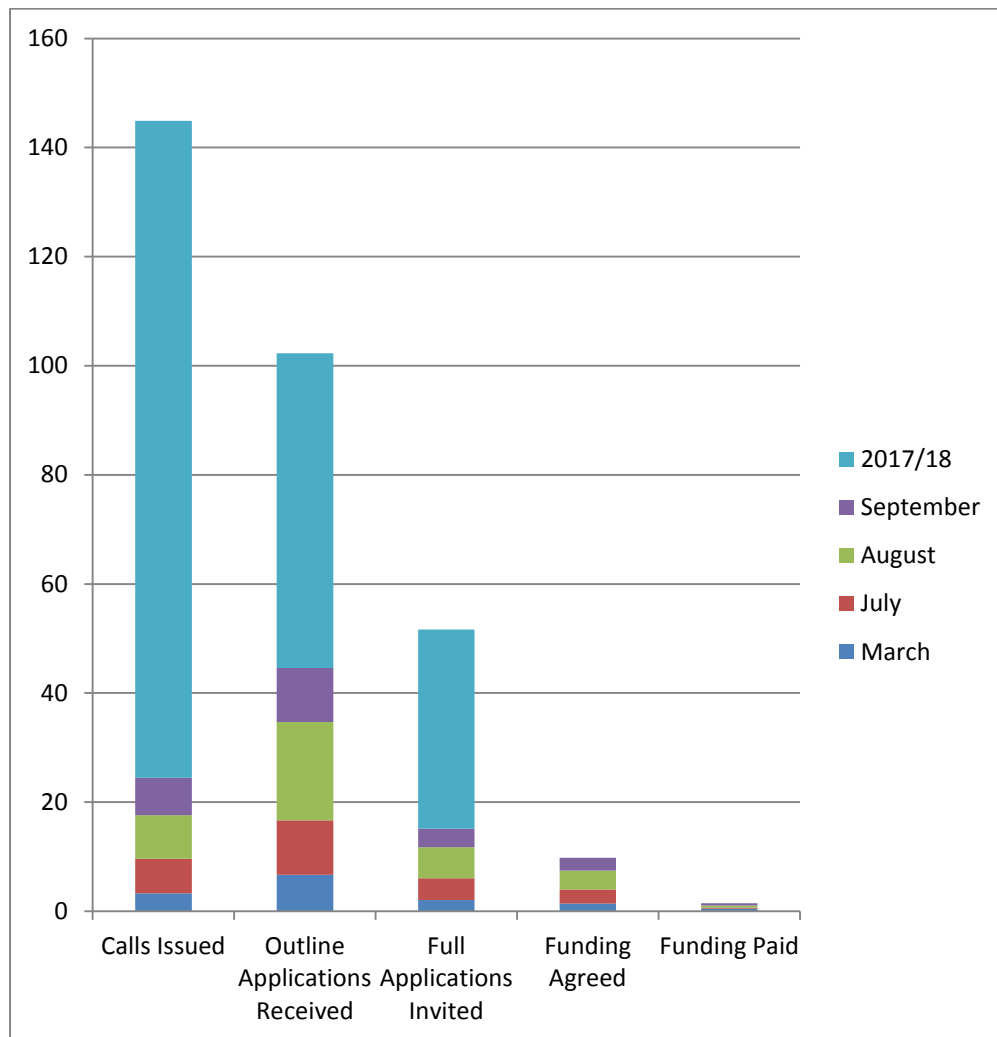
EAFRD GROWTH PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. The tourism, business development and food processing calls issued in 2015 for EAFRD funding resulted in contracts committing £9.81m to 92 projects. The RPA is now monitoring progress on these contracts, with £1.46m paid to beneficiaries who have submitted claims. Projects successful in securing a funding offer under the business development call include a flower packing business which was offered a contribution of £130,000 towards the investment total of £325,000. The investment introduced new technology by the installation of a flower bunching and packing line to the business who secured contracts with major supermarkets, improving the competitiveness of the business whilst cutting costs. The project is expected to deliver 10 new full time jobs and has forecast growth of 20% year on year.
2. The RPA has received over 200 Expressions of Interest (EoI) for the calls issued in January 2017. As of May 2017, the total value of funding requests was £57.68m, with nearly 50% of these requests by value for the food processing call. The RPA has invited projects seeking funding worth £36.54m to submit a Full Application. To date, 1 project has submitted an application under the Food Processing call for £0.12m of grant support. Three full

applications have been received under the Business Development call requesting funding worth £0.75m. The RPA has implemented a streamlined assessment process for these applications which supports their aim to give a final decision on funding to applicants within 60 days.

3. The introduction of revised documentation and processes by the RPA for the calls opened in 2017 is working well with a positive response from customers and the ESIF sub committees. As a direct result of the revised EoI form, the introduction of technical support through applicant workshops and the development of the call handbook as the single source of information for applicants, over 80% of EOIs received by the RPA are complete upon submission, The improved quality of the submissions and revision of the EoI assessment process has resulted in the RPA issuing responses to over 90% of applicants within 30 days of receipt of their EoI. This has been supported by introducing bespoke arrangements for consultation with each ESIF subcommittee on a monthly basis.
4. The RPA has introduced applicant workshops in each region which offer support to applicants at each stage of the process, including the implementation of the project. An RPA review of the applicant workshops has found that the quality of an application is improved if an applicant has attended at least one workshop.
5. The LEPS, collaborating with the RPA, have completed the first round of workshops to promote the Growth Programme calls launched in January. The RPA and the Managing Authority have reviewed the attendance, content and impact of these workshops to identify any areas for improvement. Following this review, the RPA is working with the LEPs to encourage more small rural businesses and farmers to attend future workshops. Plans to offer workshops to specific interest groups such as agents are also being examined with the ambition of running further promotional events over through the summer and autumn. The Managing Authority is looking to offer funding through the National Rural Network to support this activity. The RPA has also attended regional agricultural shows and other stakeholder events to promote the Programme.
6. The RPA and Defra are studying a number of options to encourage and accelerate spend in the Growth Programme. Decisions on how to use Growth Programme funds will be for new Ministers.
7. Additional resources have been brought in by the RPA to support the increase in delivery activity to ensure that customers continue to receive support whilst the opportunities to maximise spend are met.
8. Details of current scheme progress are shown in **Annex 1**, while **Annex 2** sets out some key issues for Programme Board consideration.

Andrew Robinson
June 2017

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Progress on Programmes – Key Issues

- Our current 'top challenge(s)' and how we are addressing them:
 - Maximising EAFRD spend and getting all funding offered in calls:
 - Building quick consensus with LEPs on any new calls once new Ministers' views are known.
 - Generating more interest in current calls through promotional activity.
- Challenges in different areas of the country?
 - Variation in scheme uptake and possible correlation with size of LEP area allocation.
 - Variation in rural focus between LEP areas and possible impact on scheme take up.
- Can we learn from delivery in different areas?
 - Benefits of good promotion - Level of interest higher in areas which strongly promote funding through workshops and social/print media campaigns. Benefits of continual promotion campaigns, e.g. in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.
 - Benefits of targeting - LEPs who targeted funding on key business activity in their area received significant interest e.g. New Anglia and Greater Lincolnshire through food processing calls.
 - Benefits of rural networks - LEPs that have developed good rural area networks better able to promote EAFRD funding.