

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

Question 1 – Are there other areas you think the Partnership Agreement should address?

RNIB Scotland's key concerns relate to the difficulties of becoming involved in the process and these are outlined further below.

Question 2 – Do you think these thematic objectives will best address Scotland's short-term and long-term challenges?

RNIB Scotland's key concerns relate to the difficulties of becoming involved in the process and these are outlined further below.

Question 3 – Do you think there are any other thematic objectives which should be addressed?

RNIB Scotland's key concerns relate to the difficulties of becoming involved in the process and these are outlined further below.

Question 4 – Do you think the Scottish Themed Funds will address Scotland's key challenges?

The Scottish Themed Funds contain very relevant areas. Competitiveness, Innovation and Jobs and Social Inclusion and Local Development are the two most relevant funds for RNIB Scotland. At present, around 35,000 people in Scotland are formally registered as blind or partially sighted, with an estimated 8,500 of working age. A further 188,000 are living with significant sight loss. (RNIB Scotland 2012). RNIB Scotland is the leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people in Scotland with the mission and key challenge of supporting them to lead full and independent lives.

Question 5 – How do you think the governance and delivery arrangements will impact on your sector?

Other third sector organisations are likely to share some of RNIB Scotland's general concerns. In terms of the vision sector, helping blind and partially sighted people into employment is vital given an unemployment rate of over 70% among working age adults with visual impairment. (RNIB Scotland 2012). Yet, for example, a project may help around ten people find a job. This is significant in terms of helping blind and partially sighted people into work but the figures may not be high enough to appeal to potential partners. The key is how to work in partnerships to get funding. RNIB Scotland is struggling to get to the table.

Question 6 – How do you think the governance and delivery arrangements will impact on your organisation?

RNIB Scotland is seriously interested in exploring funding opportunities within the structural funds. However, difficulties to overcome include engagement with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), match funding and capacity within our own organisation. Previously the applicant organisation had to contact each individual CPP where they wished to deliver project outcomes. Sight loss is not geographically based and our service users are spread across the whole of Scotland. A simplified process of engaging with CPPs would be helpful. Dealing with match funding of up to 60% for both ESF and ERDF funds, the use of "paid for outcomes" models and minimum grant thresholds are addressed below.

Question 7 – Are there any unidentified governance or delivery arrangements that could aid simplification of the future programmes and ensure that the Structural Funds complement each other?

RNIB Scotland asks the Scottish Government to consider the following:
Will there be a simplified process for engaging with the CPPs?
What kind of co-financing will be acceptable? RNIB invests in a professionally recruited and supported volunteer structure with a pool of expert volunteers; will offsetting volunteer time contributions or non-direct staff costs within match funding will be acceptable?
Will "paid for outcomes" models be developed? If so, applicants may have to meet the operating costs of the project from their match funding before ESF funding for outcomes can be made. This will be high risk for all members of the third sector.
Will minimum grant thresholds be set for the new ESF programme? RNIB Scotland projects may be considered too small scale due to beneficiary numbers.

Question 8 – What other delivery options do you think would be feasible for delivering youth employment initiatives?

RNIB and RNIB Scotland have found that paid work and longer term work experience works. RNIB runs the Trainee Grade Scheme (TGS), a UK-wide programme, which offers paid on-the-job work experience to unemployed blind and partially sighted people. TGS provides a range of tailored training and support that addresses the individual needs and career aspirations of blind and partially sighted people, while continuing to raise external awareness of sight loss and challenging misconceptions of employers by working in partnership. 70% of those on the scheme have gone on to find work. RNIB Scotland would be happy to provide information on the TGS model.

Question 9 – What other measures could be taken to reduce the audit and control pressures?

The aim to simplify is good, especially for small organisations. However, many of the forms are not accessible and present difficulties if you have got blind and partially sighted people employed on the projects. Accessible formats should be available.

Question 10 – Do you have any further comments on the proposals?

As stated, RNIB Scotland is seriously interested in exploring funding opportunities within the structural funds. RNIB Scotland pursues a wide-ranging field of interests on behalf of blind and partially sighted people. Within the Scottish Themed Funds this might include training & support for hardest to reach groups; promoting uptake and usage of digital technology; digital inclusion and rural/community digital infrastructure; promoting digital literacy, uptake and usage; using digital technology for business innovation, competitiveness and collaboration; and promoting digital skills, capacity and capability. RNIB Scotland has a focus on delivery, what works and how difficult it is to be involved. Our responses to this consultation have given our perspective on engagement with Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), match funding of up to 60% for both ESF and ERDF funds, the use of "paid for outcomes" models and minimum grant thresholds. We would also like to see a mechanism to encourage third sector involvement alongside a weighting system to allow more scope for projects on disabilities with monitoring and equalities assessments on the use of the funds to establish how many disabled people took part in projects.

Last but not least, there are an estimated 8,500 people of working age in Scotland who are visually impaired. Prevailing health trends, especially the increase in diabetes, ensure that this figure will rise in future years. People with sight loss are amongst the most disadvantaged groups in society when it comes to employment. While the employment rate of disabled people in general continues to increase, the position of blind and partially sighted people has remained almost static with over 70% unemployed. (RNIB Scotland 2012). Recent RNIB research underlines that with the right support and specialist interventions in key areas people with sight loss can progress towards employment. (RNIB, 2013). Previous priority groups were young people, people with long unemployment and people with disabilities. RNIB Scotland urges the Scottish Government to ensure that the new programme priorities allow for the inclusion of blind and partially sighted people.

Sources

RNIB Scotland, 2012. Finding a way forward: how Scotland's councils can support people with sight loss. RNIB Scotland's manifesto for the 2012 Scottish local authority elections.

RNIB, 2013. Alex Saunders, Employment Assessment toolkit and research reports Enabler report and toolkit.