



Evaluation of Organisations funded under the Emigrant Support Programme

Summary information Note

*In 2013 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned an external evaluation of the work of four Irish Community organisations in Britain who are in receipt of **Emigrant Support Programme (ESP)** funding namely (i) the Federation of Irish Societies, (ii) the London Irish Centre, (iii) Cricklewood Homeless Concern and (iv) NOAH Enterprise in Luton. The report is intended to offer an independent assessment of the work undertaken by the aforementioned organisations since 2009 and was carried out by an independent consultant Peter McEvoy.*

The following is a summary of the main findings of this external evaluation.

August 2013

External Evaluation of Organisations funded under the Emigrant Support Programme: Executive Summary

The Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) provides co-funding to not-for-profit organisations and projects engaged in (a) delivering front-line support to welfare needs of Irish communities overseas, (b) nurturing the heritage and identity of such communities, and (c) facilitating the development of more strategic links between Ireland and the global Irish. Grants are aimed at community and voluntary organisations that help migrants access their rights and entitlements in their host countries, and that promote positive, vibrant and inclusive expressions of Irish culture, heritage and identity by communities abroad. The value of disbursements to grant beneficiaries in Britain, which is the locus of this study, amounted to €7.6m in 2012.

The present external evaluation was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It is intended to offer an independent assessment of the work undertaken since 2009 by four Irish Community organisations in Britain which are in receipt of ESP funding: (i) the Federation of Irish Societies, (ii) the London Irish Centre, (iii) Cricklewood Homeless Concern and (iv) NOAH Enterprise in Luton.

The assignment was informed by desk analysis of a range of key documents provided both by DFAT and the respective agencies, and on-site interviews with agency managers, front-line staff (except in the case of FIS which does not deliver front-line services but is rather a second-tier representative organisation), trustees and service users. The consultations explored the purpose and goal of each, the strategies they have pursued since 2009, and their achievements/strengths and partnerships with the Irish Community and others. A mini Organisational Assessment of each of the above agencies was incorporated into the Study's methodology.

DFAT has done well to keep the ESP at respectable, albeit modestly reduced, levels of funding over recent years when Ireland's public expenditure has been severely curtailed. It reflects well on Ireland as a society that in a period of national stringency it has continued to provide this means of support for citizens living in Britain (and elsewhere) who are at risk of social exclusion. It is also considered important for Ireland as a society to support positive, vibrant and inclusive expressions of Irish culture, heritage and identity by the Irish community in Britain, and thereby engage with the younger, more recent wave of arrivals in particular. The ESP fulfils an important role in this cultural domain also.

Some significant changes were seen to have occurred since 2009 in the 'way of working' of the organisations under review, e.g.:

- Greater focus on outcomes: organisations are implementing systems to track patterns of service usage and to profile the client base more thoroughly. This will over time generate richer evidence of the outcomes of their interventions with individual service users. Furthermore the hope and expectation is that when such individual-based data is aggregated, it will

build up into a more evidence-based depiction of *impact* at organisational and programme level.

- Consistent with the previous point, organisations are showing greater interest in, commitment to and utilisation of research which is relevant to policy and practice in the areas such as identity, welfare support, and advice provision.
- Increased professionalisation of service delivery, evidenced by (i) the successful pursuit of external quality accreditation by all the agencies visited, (ii) the adoption of written statements of internal policy and procedures, for example in regard to protection of vulnerable persons, finance, volunteers, service user protocols.
- Internal reorganisation aimed at cost reduction, efficiency gains and more effective use of information and communications technology.
- Keener awareness of the need to diversify the funding base and to pursue new revenue streams more aggressively.

Although demographic trends point to a decline in absolute numbers of elderly first generation Irish in London, this is not yet translating into lesser caseload or demand for service delivery in the front line. This group's exposure to isolation and risk of social exclusion, arising from natural ageing combined with the adverse effects of the welfare reform agenda, is such that the demands on front-line welfare and support services from the voluntary sector are actually increasing. It may be that this combination of factors produces a peak in the caseload pattern over the next couple of years, and that thereafter a gradual lessening of demand may eventuate. The improvements that agencies are making in their statistical database will be all the more important in utilising the richer monitoring information to track such emerging trends (especially among those of Irish identity) in the period ahead.

The four focal agencies were assessed with reference to the criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, and the principal findings were as follows:

Relevance: With regard to the three agencies engaged in direct service delivery (Cricklewood Homeless Concern, London Irish Centre, and NOAH Enterprise) the relevance of their work is attested by (i) the systematic client feedback being undertaken by all; (ii) testimonials provided by the statutory agencies with whom they work, and (iii) success of all three in competitive tendering for contracted service delivery on behalf of public authorities. The relevance of the work of the Federation of Irish Societies is borne out in membership surveys, in the media coverage which it has managed to generate, and in the topicality of its choice of campaigning issues, e.g. around optimising the Irish community's participation in the 2011 Census of England & Wales.

Efficiency: In all four cases, the Consultant found evidence that agencies are proving to be resourceful in managing to ‘achieve more with less’. The processes of re-organisation that all four have undertaken in the recent past have made them leaner, fitter for purpose, better able to be responsive to need. They demonstrate day by day an ability to cope with the proven rise in demand for advice and support in the front line. The Consultant found no evidence of duplication of service delivery as between ESP-supported voluntary initiatives and UK exchequer-funded mainstream provision; on the contrary, the ESP-funded interventions were seen to be leveraging uptake of unclaimed benefits and entitlements for distressed clients.

Effectiveness: All the agencies studied had subjected themselves to external quality assurance since 2009 (or were in the process of doing so). Agency staff were seen consistently to show a client-centred approach and to bring to their work qualities of dedication and commitment (and good humour, despite the often challenging working environments). Numerous documented case studies point to successful outcomes having been achieved, backed up by corroborative data which had begun to be captured through more sophisticated database capability.

Since the ESP’s budget is derived from the Irish exchequer, the guidelines of the scheme include a requirement that grantees are expected to be “servicing a significant number of Irish people”. On the basis of the analysis undertaken, the Consultant found no anomaly between the percentage of agencies’ client base whose background is Irish and the share of agencies’ total income derived from ESP; however this is a matter that will merit systematic monitoring into the future.

Sustainability: All four agencies maintain reserves at least sufficient to meet four months’ funding requirement, as a buffer against short-term cash flow difficulties. Diversification of income sources for the medium term is high on the agenda of all: in one way or another, all were seen to be active in pursuing new streams of income to enhance sustainability. The report calls for these efforts to be intensified. It also identifies any risks specific to each of the four focal agencies which the Consultant picked up during the fieldwork, and stresses that monitoring and management of risk continues to be of utmost importance. Regular review and updating of risk registers is a responsibility of trustees, with guidance and information from management.

Finally, the Consultant forms the view that, overall, the Emigrant Support Programme is both efficient and effective. He then goes on to make ten recommendations:

1. *All four of the agencies examined in this Evaluation are considered worthy of continued support from the ESP (subject to continued compliance with standard conditions of the ESP).*
2. *The case for continued investment by the Government of Ireland in the Emigrant Support Programme is as compelling now as it ever was. Continuation of this form of support is justifiable in terms of value for money and in terms of*

respecting the state's obligations to Irish citizens abroad, especially those in vulnerable circumstances.

3. *Organisations in receipt of ESP funding should accurately and systematically record, monitor and report the percentage of users of front-line welfare services who are of Irish identity.*

4. *There is need to streamline the ESP's statements of aims and objectives, to make them clearer: they should be re-cast into a more logically structured statement of high-level core objectives, complemented by more specific requirements. This revised framework could also serve as the checklist for assessment of future applications.*

5. *Should DFAT consider that the ESP's strategic objectives could be best met through having a smaller number of stronger organisations as partners, a competition-based Challenge Fund might be created to which prospective merger candidates could apply, in order to incentivise the merger process.*

6. *London Irish Centre should write up and disseminate the recent 'merger journey' as a case study for the benefit of other groups within the Irish community in Britain which may contemplate a similar move now or in the future.*

7. *When reporting on ESP funding received, beneficiary organisations should as a general rule bring all the elements of their funded activity into a single report, highlighting the outcomes and impact of the totality of their efforts. DFAT should examine the design of the reporting template with this in mind. DFAT should also look at the feasibility of replacing paper-based reporting with on-line reporting.*

8. *All organisations in receipt of ESP funding support should take care to expressly show their ESP grant as a separate entry in the annual accounts statements, and to give full acknowledgement of DFAT's funding support, by including DFAT's logo in all their published material and on their websites.*

9. *FIS should explore the feasibility of greater involvement in social enterprise by its member organisations, and assist in building members' capacity in this area.*

10. *FIS could play a valuable role in convening and servicing a grouping of Heads of Welfare and Outreach of ESP-supported agencies in Greater London.*

A copy of the full evaluation report can be had on request by emailing the following address eau.queries@dfat.ie.