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Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020: Mid-Term Evaluation Report

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Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020:
Mid-Term Evaluation Report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER)	Member State representatives from Government of Ireland and the national authority in Ireland for ERDF co-financed programmes
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	A European Union fund to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions
European Territorial Cooperation Programme	European Union programmes to promote cooperation between member states on shared challenges and opportunities to support the effective functioning of the single market
Interreg	Another name for the European Territorial Cooperation Programme
Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC)	The committee that monitors the delivery of EU investments for the Ireland Wales programme
Programme Steering Committee (PSC)	The committee that is responsible for the review and approval of all requests for funding for the Ireland Wales programme
Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME)	An enterprise with fewer than 250 employees and either turnover less than or equal to €50 million or a balance sheet total of €43 million
Southern Regional Assembly (SRA)	Programme Partner with responsibility for First Level Control in Ireland
Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO)	Part of the Welsh Government that delivers European Union structural funds in Wales

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 The Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (hereafter the Programme or Ireland Wales Programme) is delivered by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO)—the Managing Authority—in partnership with the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) and the Government of Ireland’s Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The Programme focuses on connecting organisations, businesses and communities in the Irish Sea region that face shared economic, environmental and social challenges.
- 1.2 This report is the main output of the external mid-term evaluation of the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020. The report is structured as follows:
- Section 1 provides an introduction and background to the Ireland Wales Programme and an overview of the evaluation’s objectives and approach.
 - Section 2 presents the findings of the evaluation relating to Programme-level effects, including progress against result indicators, emerging impacts, the nature of the cross-border collaboration and the programme’s contribution to addressing the Cross-Cutting Themes.
 - Sections 3 to 5 present the findings of the evaluation split by its three main Priority Axes. They discuss each Axis’ policy context, need and rationale, projects and their resulting outputs and emerging effects.
 - Section 6 presents the findings of the evaluation relating to the Programme’s delivery processes, including communications, project selection, management and governance and integration of Cross-Cutting Themes.
 - Section 7 presents the evaluation’s conclusions and offers recommendations to the Programme for future delivery.
- 1.3 The evaluation methodology and a list of the organisations consulted as part of the evaluation are contained as Annexes.

Background

- 1.4 The overarching European Union policy driver for the Ireland Wales Programme is European Union Cohesion Policy, which has its legal basis in Articles 174 to 178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions. Cohesion Policy provides the investment framework required to achieve the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union. The Cohesion Policy is delivered through three funds of the European Structural and Investment Funds, which together – including national co-financing – amount to €644 billion. One of these funds is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
- 1.5 The ERDF aims to ‘strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions’. Through ‘thematic concentration, the ERDF focuses its investment on four priority areas. The Ireland Wales Programme is part-funded by the ERDF.
- 1.6 The European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) programme, also known as Interreg, was initially developed by the European Union in 1990 as a community initiative. It has developed and evolved through five phases across 30 years. It includes three strands: Interreg A (cross-border), Interreg B (transnational) and Interreg C (interregional).
- 1.7 In accordance with the design of the European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 and Europe 2020 targets, the ETC programme 2014-2020 includes a budget of €10.1 billion, invested in over 100 cooperation programmes. With a basis of 11 investment priorities, 80 per cent of a cooperation programme’s budget must concentrate on a maximum of four thematic objectives among the eleven priorities.¹ It provides an opportunity for regions to work together and address common challenges of a social, economic and/or environmental nature.

¹ The concept of thematic concentration, in which Member States concentrate support on interventions that bring the greatest added value in relation to various strategies, challenges and recommendations, is described in Article 18 of the European Union’s Common Provision Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013).

Table 1.1: Commitment budget of Interreg programmes, 1990 to 2020

Interreg programme	Commitment budget
Interreg I (1990-1993)	€1.1bn
Interreg II (1994-1999)	€3.8bn
Interreg III (2000-2006)	€5.8bn
Interreg IV (2007-2013)	€8.7bn
Interreg V (2014-2020)	€10.1bn

Source: European Commission

- 1.8 The Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (also known as Interreg V-A) is the fourth round of cross border cooperation for Ireland and Wales, under the fifth phase of ETC / Interreg programme.
- 1.9 The two administrations have been involved in the Interreg cross-border cooperation since 1994. The structure of the Ireland Wales programme has been adapted and developed over past Interreg stages. The first programme established the foundations and each subsequent programme aimed to build upon the achievements whilst also addressing gaps.
- 1.10 The past priorities / sub-programmes for past Ireland Wales programmes included:
- Ireland Wales Interreg II A
 - Sub-programme 1, Marine development
 - Sub-programme 2, General Economic Development
 - Ireland Wales Interreg III A
 - Priority 1, Economic, Social, Technological Development
 - Priority 2, Sustainable Growth
 - Priority 3, Technical Assistance.
 - Ireland Wales Interreg IV A
 - Priority 1, Knowledge, Innovation and Skills for Growth
 - Priority 2, Climate Change and Sustainable Regeneration
 - Priority 3, Technical Assistance

Overview of the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020

- 1.11 The objectives for the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020 are divided into four Priority Axes.
- 1.12 Priority Axis 1 focuses on cross-border innovation and its Specific Objective is to increase the intensity of knowledge transfer collaborations involving research organisations and SMEs in line with the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies. The results the priority seeks to achieve are:
- to identify and address the barriers faced by SMEs including social enterprises
 - to increase the number of cross-border networks between research institutions and SMEs therefore raising the intensity of knowledge transfer through collaboration. The Programme will utilise a wider range of expertise and experience which can be accessed in relation to the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies
 - to bring new innovative products closer to the market as a result of the cross-border collaboration between research organisations and SMEs in relation to the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies
 - to strengthen responses to the smart specialisation strategies and provide opportunities to develop the international competitiveness of SMEs in line with the identified shared priorities.
- 1.13 Priority Axis 2 focuses on the adaptation of the Irish Sea and coastal communities to climate change. Its Specific Objective is to increase capacity and knowledge of Climate Change adaptation for the Irish Sea and coastal communities. The results the priority seeks to achieve are:
- better knowledge within Irish Sea coastal communities to adapt to climate change, improving their security, well-being and health
 - increased knowledge of the impacts of climate change – negative and potentially positive – and greater capacity of adapting them by the use of cross-border strategies and adaptation tools
 - increased acknowledgement and capacity to benefit from the potential positive impacts of climate change (e.g. increase in tourist numbers due to a lengthened tourist season)

- increased capacity to share knowledge of climate change across the Irish Sea and the cross-border region.

1.14 Priority Axis 3 focuses on cultural and natural resources and heritage and its Specific Objective is to sustainably realise the potential of natural and cultural assets in increasing visitor numbers to coastal communities in the Programme area. The results the priority seeks to achieve are:

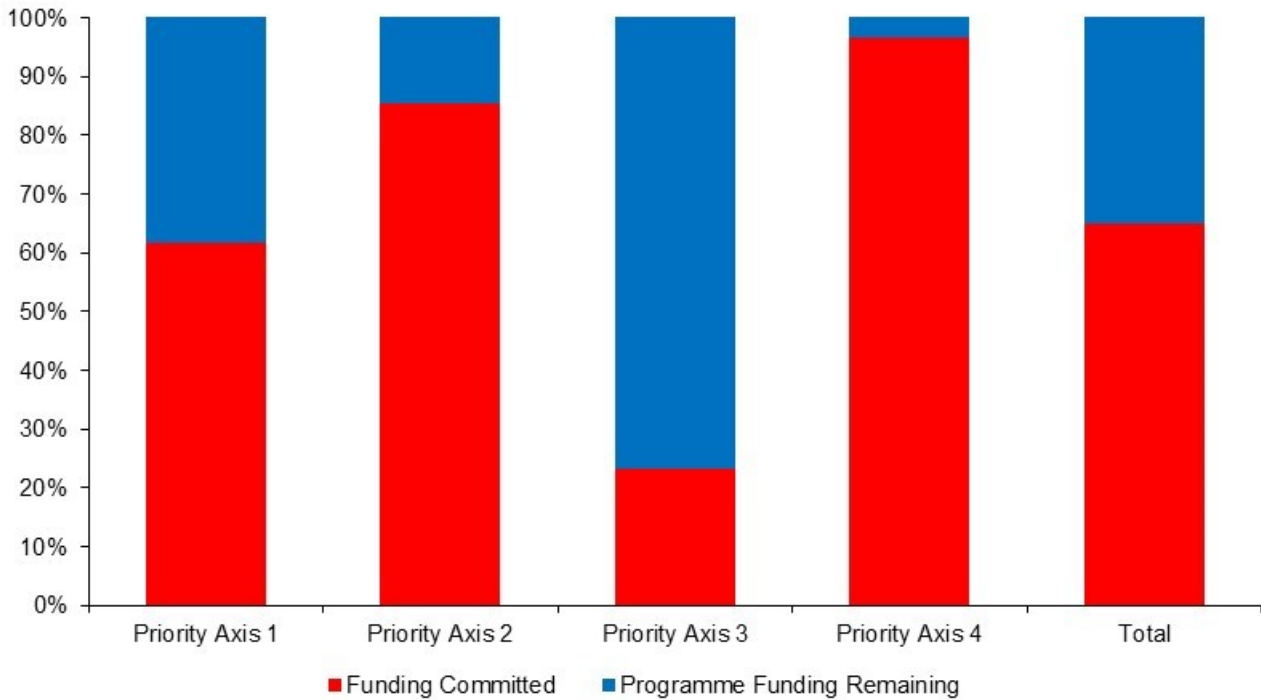
- an increase in the number of visitors to the coastal communities of the cross-border region by sustainably utilising their natural and cultural assets
- an increase in the capacity of coastal communities to utilise their natural and cultural heritage as a driver to economic growth.

1.15 Priority Axis 4 provides the technical assistance, which aims to capitalise on best practice and learn lessons from evaluation of current procedures to ensure the efficient and effective management of the 2014-2020 Ireland Wales programme.

1.16 The Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020 has a budget of approximately €99 million, sourced and allocated as follows:

- Total €98,998,059
 - EU €79,198,450
 - National: €19,799,609
- ERDF financial allocation:
 - Priority Axis 1: €31,679,380 (40 per cent)
 - Priority Axis 2: €27,719,457 (35 per cent)
 - Priority Axis 3: €15,047,706 (19 per cent)
 - Priority Axis 4: €4,751,907 (six per cent)

Figure 1.1: Proportion of Programme funding committed compared to overall budget: by Priority Axis and total, June 2019



Source: WEFO

1.17 As of the end of June 2019, the Programme has committed 79 per cent of the EU grant allocated to it.

Overview of the evaluation

1.18 In January 2019, Miller Research, in partnership with Fitzpatrick Associates and Penbryn Consulting, were commissioned by the Welsh European Funding Office to conduct the mid-term evaluation of the Ireland Wales Programme.

1.19 The following objectives of the evaluation were set out in the tender specification:

- Objective 1: To investigate whether the cross-border nature of the programme is delivering any added value and if so, to identify the nature of this added value.
- Objective 2: To investigate progress against the result indicators and investigate any further benefits of the programme not captured by the result indicators.

- Objective 3: To investigate whether the projects and schemes provide sufficient coverage of the objectives of the programme, and whether the balance of interventions is appropriate.
- Objective 4: To investigate what has worked well and what has not worked well with regards to Cross Cutting Themes.
- Objective 5: To identify whether improvements can be made in the implementation processes put in place by WEFO for managing the programme.

1.20 A wide range of research activities were undertaken in order to achieve the evaluation objectives, including interviews with stakeholders (members of the Joint Secretariat and Managing Authority; and Programme Monitoring Committee and Programme Steering Committee members), interviews with lead project delivery partners, case studies of six active projects and surveys of enterprises and communities in the programme areas. The full evaluation methodology is set out in Annex A.

2. Programme-Level Effects

2.1 This section of the evaluation report explores the emerging effects of Ireland Wales Programme, including its progress towards its result indicators, assessment of its emerging impact and exploration of the cross-border collaboration it has facilitated and how it has contributed to the Cross-Cutting Themes.

Progress against result indicators

2.2 There is widespread acknowledgement of the difficulties of assessing the impact of Interreg programmes,² given the relatively diverse interventions areas, the breadth of themes and Priority Axes within programmes and the relatively modest scale of funds and associated projects in the context of wide geographical coverage of the programme area.

2.3 Notwithstanding these broad challenges,³ each of the Ireland Wales Programme's Specific Objectives was necessarily assigned a result indicator at the outset of the Programme. These indicators were drawn up by the Managing Authority in consultation with the European Commission. Once the indicators were agreed, the Managing Authority commissioned surveys and conducted analysis to determine the baseline figures, against which target figures were determined.

2.4 As is discussed in more detail below, it is clear that each of the Programme's result indicators (and the baseline and, consequently, midterm data relating to them) are imperfect and problematic for a variety of reasons. This fact is acknowledged by internal Programme stakeholders, including the Managing Authority, but it is clear that, at this stage in the Programme, the indicators are fixed and must be addressed regardless. The analysis that follows should thus be read in the context of these weaknesses with the result indicators.

² For example: [UK Cross-Border and Transnational Cooperation: Experiences, Lessons and Future](#)

³ Annex 3 of the Programme Document.

Table 2.1: Programme result indicators, baseline figure, target figure and progress against targets: by specific objective, June 2019

Specific Objective	Result Indicator	Baseline	Target	Progress
SO1	Levels of investment in R&D and innovation arising from cross-border collaboration in shared priorities as specified in the smart specialisation strategies	Investment of €1,493,498,502 Overall BERD of €2,451,253,000	Additional €21,645,000 by 2023 0.2% by 2023 (Additional €21.65m)	Reduction in investment recorded
SO2	Levels of knowledge of adaptation to climate change amongst communities and businesses	64%	Increase in levels of knowledge	Reduction in levels of knowledge from baseline
SO3	Total number of overseas visitors to the coastal communities of the Programme area	2012 baseline of 6,902,000	7,040,040 by 2023	9,972,657 achieved by 2017

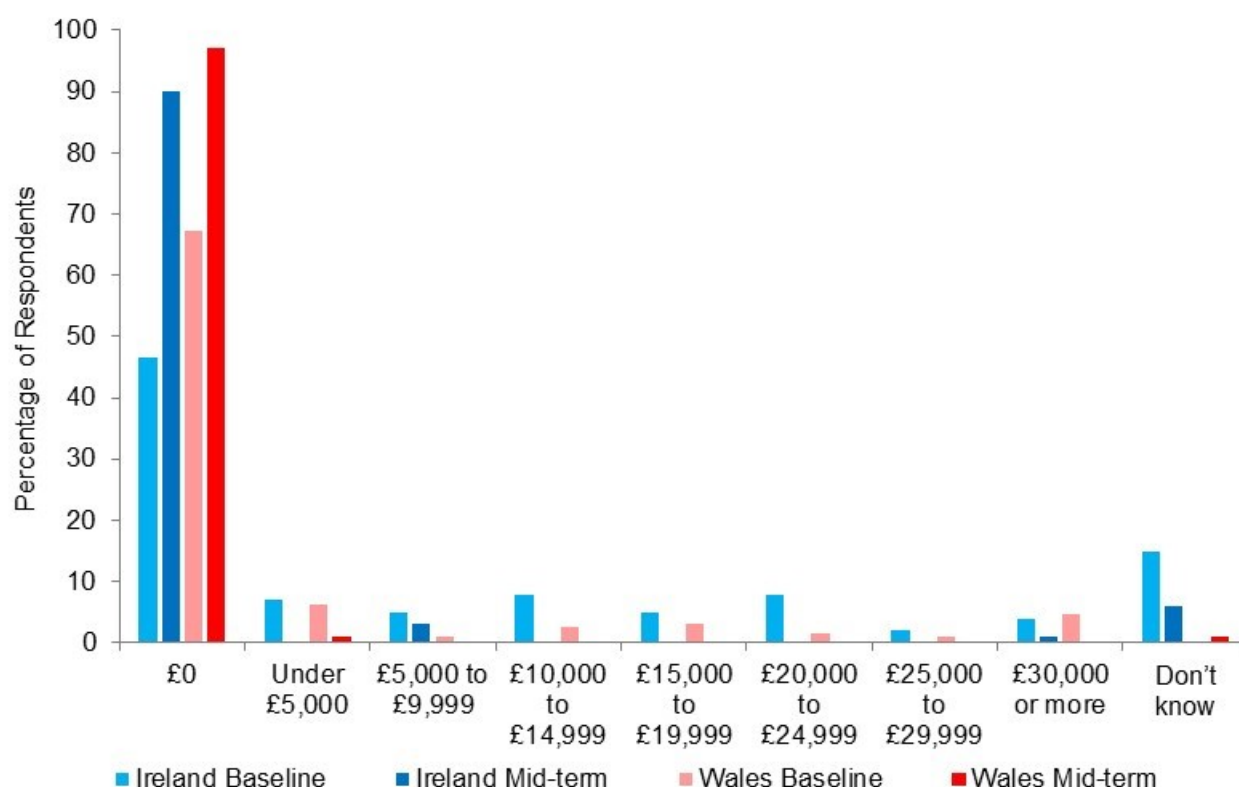
Source: Miller Research analysis of primary and secondary data

Specific Objective 1

2.5 SO1 has an overall result indicator (R101) of: Levels of investment in R&D and innovation arising from cross-border collaboration in shared priorities as specified in the smart specialisation strategies. This is broken down into two (measurable) sub-indicators:

- R101A: The percentage increase in levels of investment arising, as measured by surveys of business decision-makers. A baseline survey was carried out in 2015 and this was updated as part of this evaluation.
- R101B: Percentage increase in overall business spend on R&D, drawn from Eurostat and compared with a baseline value for 2013.

2.6 For R101A, the baseline survey was replicated using the Beaufort Research Business Omnibus Survey for Wales (250 businesses in the programme area) and a bespoke telephone survey of 100 businesses in the programme area in Ireland. The specific question for R101A was the level of business research, development or innovation as a result of cross-border collaboration in the last 5 years.

Figure 2.1 Survey data on R&D Investment over last five years: baseline vs mid-term, June 2019

Source: Miller Research analysis of primary data

Table 2.2 Additional data relating to the Specific Objective 1 result indicators, June 2019

	Baseline			Mid-Term		
	Ireland	Wales	Total	Ireland	Wales	Total
Average 5yr investment	15,321	15,513		13,125	7,143	
Adjusted for nil investment	6,948	3,559		559	200	
Active Enterprises	162,070	42,285		168,780	44,485	
Total Investment £	1,126,009,593	150,484,853	1,276,494,446	94,265,426	8,897,000	103,162,426
Total Investment €	1,317,431,224	176,067,278	1,493,498,502	110,290,548	10,409,490	120,700,038
Target (based on 1200 businesses) £	9,192,308	9,307,692	18,500,000	7,875,000	4,285,714	12,160,714
Target (based on 1200 businesses) €	10,755,000	10,890,000	21,645,000	9,213,750	5,014,286	14,228,036
BERD €	2,021,863,000	429,390,000	2,451,253,000	2,777,748,000	534,690,000	3,312,438,000
BERD Target 2023 %	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1

Source: Miller Research analysis of primary data

- 2.7 The result showed a reduction in investment amongst both Irish and Welsh businesses over the baseline figure. Results showed that the propensity to invest in collaborative research and development (R&D) had reduced over the period (in Ireland from £15,321 to £13,125, or £6,948 to £559 adjusted for nil investment; and in Wales from £15,513 to £7,143, or £3,559 to £200), even though the overall investment in business R&D in Ireland and Wales increased by some 35 per cent over the period.
- 2.8 Taking the average investment amongst those who had invested and multiplying this by the total number of active enterprises in the programme area implies a total investment of €1,493 million at baseline, falling to €120 million at the mid-term stage.
- 2.9 R101B looks at the wider change in overall business investment in R&D drawn from the Business Enterprise Research and Development (BERD) measurement within Eurostat. An overall target for increased spending on collaborative R&D was set by multiplying average baseline investment by 1,200 (based on programme support to 1,200 businesses) and expressing this as a proportion of BERD for the programme area for 2013. This suggested a 0.2 per cent increase by 2023, or an additional €21.65 million, whereas there was a decrease in investment recorded.
- 2.10 Drawing on feedback from stakeholders, it is likely that collaborative investment and hence R101 has been substantially affected by uncertainty over Brexit and any positive progress made would be likely to act as mitigation against the wider contextual effects which can again be investigated through case studies and beneficiary surveys. The evidence would support this; with a greater fall in the propensity to collaboratively invest amongst Welsh businesses than their Irish counterparts set against an overall increase in BERD in both nations.
- 2.11 Given the changing context and the difficulties of assigning causality of impact to a relatively modest programme, it might be worth considering the mid-term survey result as a revised baseline, against which to measure impacts amongst beneficiary businesses, drawn from the individual evaluations of projects within the programme. In this way the baseline could work as an effective comparator dataset to inform the counterfactual. Should the targets be adjusted to fit with the 2018 survey results, a revised indicator of 0.1 per cent of BERD by 2023 would result, or

€14.2 million against the 2013 baseline. Hence it is important to see the impact of the programme in terms of mitigating the external negative impacts on industry as a whole, which can again be investigated through case studies and beneficiary surveys.

- 2.12 At the same time, however, the extent of the drop in investment levels between the baseline and mid-term evaluation may call into question the robustness of the survey data,⁴ particularly given the relatively small sample sizes (250 SMEs in Welsh parts of the Programme area and only 110 SMEs in Irish parts of the Programme area) and the fact that only a small proportion of SMEs across all sectors would be expected to invest in R&D and innovation.

Specific Objective 2

- 2.13 SO2 has an overall result indicator (R102) of: Levels of knowledge of adaptation to climate change amongst communities and businesses. Data for this was secured through the updated business survey and a separate YouGov Omnibus survey of 1,152 Irish and 1,001 Welsh residents of the programme areas, utilising similar questions to the baseline survey.

Table 2.3 Specific Objective 2 result indicator data on awareness of initiatives aimed at adapting to the effects of climate change, June 2019

	Baseline	Mid-term
Communities (%)	63	56
Businesses (%)	77	75
Combined (Communities and Businesses; %)	64	58

Source: Miller Research analysis of primary data

- 2.14 The results showed a reduction in the proportion of both businesses and communities who were aware of initiatives aimed at adapting to the effects of climate change from 64 per cent at the baseline to 58 per cent in 2018.
- 2.15 There is no obvious explanation for this reduction in familiarity, although external factors such as increasing unconscious familiarity with measures of adaptation to climate change could explain them. Again, however, the results suggest that the indicator (and the data that is combined to produce it) may be problematic in a

⁴ Commissioned by the Programme’s Managing Authority at the baseline stage and replicated for the Mid-Term Evaluation for reasons of comparability.

variety of ways, not least that the figure is produced by inverting survey results about awareness of a list of specified measures of adaptation to climate change.

Specific Objective 3

- 2.16 SO3 has an overall result indicator (R103) of: Total number of overseas visitors to the coastal communities of the Programme area, measured by statistics from Fáilte Ireland and Welsh Government. Data for 2012 was used as a baseline figure, whilst updated figures for 2017 were obtained for tracking of progress.
- 2.17 Results suggested an increase in the overseas visitors from 6.9 million in 2012 to 9.97 million in 2017 against a target figure of 7.04 million. Whilst this result exceeds the target by 2.9 million visitors, it would be unreasonable to assign causality to the Programme, given its relatively early maturity and the small number of projects under SO3.
- 2.18 There are also a number of potential problems with this indicator and the data that underpin it: firstly, the visitor statistics used for the baseline (and therefore for the mid-term) are based on overseas visitors to the whole Programme area (not just the 'coastal communities' it specifies); secondly, these figures are likely to include double-counting, as it is highly likely that at least some of the overseas visitors visited more than one region in the area and therefore would be counted twice.

Emerging impact

- 2.19 Overall, the lack of recorded progress against the result indicators and the problems inherent in them suggest that it may be more effective to carry out a contribution analysis of the programme in order to understand impact. The contribution analysis approach is useful in situations where attribution is difficult to assess and where there are no opportunities for experimental approaches to construct a control group. In this case, the rapidly changing baseline driven by uncertainties over Brexit, for example (which, it should be remembered, was not widely forecast when the Programme was designed) render it difficult to ascertain what would have happened in the absence of the Programme.
- 2.20 Contribution analysis takes a different approach, based on developing a narrative using a combination of data and case studies to describe how the programme has

driven change within the context of the overall impact objectives. This approach allows relatively low-level interventions to be assessed within the context of substantial external pressures.

- 2.21 In practical terms, contribution analysis sets out the problem to be addressed and assembles a theory of change / risk matrix to map the process. Subsequently, evidence is gathered from a range of sources to assess whether the elements of the theory of change were delivered in practice and this evidence gathering runs through several iterations to establish and refine the narrative. In the case of the Programme, evidence will come from case studies, stakeholder perceptions and individual project evaluations (including, critically, beneficiary outcome data) to ascertain the extent to which the Programme has contributed towards its stated aims effectively, whilst acknowledging that direct measurement of impact is not a realistic proposition.
- 2.22 It will be vital to ensure that any evaluations of projects within the Programme take account of this and secure evidence to demonstrate their individual contributions to the overall Programme outcomes.

Cross-border collaboration

- 2.23 The Ireland Wales Programme is facilitating cross-border collaboration at multiple levels, including between delivery partners (Programme beneficiaries), between delivery partners and collaborating enterprises or other stakeholders, and between the collaborating enterprises or other stakeholders themselves.
- 2.24 Between the delivery partners, the Programme is both fostering new partnerships and collaborations, such as that between Bangor University's School of Ocean Sciences and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (Ireland's Seafood Development Agency) through the Irish Sea Portal Pilot and Bluefish projects, and helping to strengthen existing partnerships, such as that between University College Dublin and Swansea University through the CALIN project. Feedback from the project delivery partners suggests that, without exception, these partnerships are highly valuable and bringing together complementary skillsets. Although some of these partnerships are relatively young, there is evidence emerging of cross-border collaboration between

partners outside of the Programme through, for example, the submission of joint applications for other funding sources.

- 2.25 The cross-border collaboration between delivery partners and collaborating enterprises or other stakeholders is also occurring through the projects themselves (as is built into the design of many of the projects, such as Catalyst) and continuing outside of the projects in some cases, for example between a life sciences enterprise and researchers at the National University of Ireland Galway in the case of the CALIN project.
- 2.26 Finally, there is emerging evidence of further cross-border collaboration between enterprises or stakeholders that were brought together by the Ireland Wales Programme project. For example, Irish Water and Dŵr Cymru have signed a Memorandum of Understanding as a result of the partnership-working facilitated by the Dŵr Uisce project.
- 2.27 At all levels, cross-border collaboration is providing benefits including knowledge-sharing (through informal and formal mechanisms) and the transfer of best-practice, relationships that are deeper than those created by larger programmes such as Erasmus, and the leveraging of complementary skills and expertise, for example through the More Than A Club project, which brought together the Football Association of Ireland's programme development skills and Viability's social enterprise development skills. The collaborations are also beginning to deliver context-specific benefits such as, for example, the development of joint Welsh-Irish standards for the monitoring of coastal heritage impacts of climate change through the CHERISH project.
- 2.28 The emerging effect of these cross-border collaborations on end-beneficiaries – the communities of the Ireland Wales programme area – should be qualitatively explored in the project-level summative evaluations and further analysed in the final evaluation of the Programme. The cross-border collaboration facilitated by the Programme is further discussed in the context of each Priority Axis in sections 3, 4 and 5.

Cross-Cutting Themes contribution

- 2.29 The Cross-Cutting Themes (CCTs) or horizontal themes are issues that relate to general principles such as equality, sustainability and good governance. They aim to improve the quality and legacy from operations ('projects' in the Ireland Wales Programme) supported by European Union structural funds and add value to programmes. They require action in multiple fields and must be embedded into the design and delivery of all operations (WEFO, 2018: 3).
- 2.30 The Ireland Wales Programme aims to integrate two CCTs into its activity.
- The Sustainable Development CCT aims to ensure that programmes and operations/projects work to meet social, economic and environmental objectives simultaneously (WEFO, 2018: 6).
 - The Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming CCT aims to reduce injustice and promote social cohesion by providing the opportunity for all eligible beneficiaries to participate (WEFO, 2018: 5). In Wales, this Theme includes promotion of and support for speakers of the Welsh language.
- 2.31 The Ireland Wales Programme appears to be making a significant contribution towards the Sustainable Development CCT. This is most clear with Priority Axis 2, Adaptation of the Irish Sea and Coastal Communities to Climate Change, as the projects funded under this Axis have the principles of sustainable development at their core. For example, the Ecostructure project is working to develop eco-engineering solutions that provide coastal defences against the effects of climate change, but to do this it is adopting an interdisciplinary approach and along with the environmental impacts it is also considering the social dimension of these defences. As such, it is supporting the sustainable development principle of simultaneously working to address social, economic and environmental objectives.
- 2.32 Projects funded through the other Priority Axes are also contributing to the Sustainable Development CCT, most often by taking actions as set out in the guidance provided by the CCT Matrix, such as the development and promotion of an Eco-code and appointment of a Sustainable Development Champion.
- 2.33 Some projects and delivery partners have also been able to access the advice and resources of other parts of their institutions with expertise in related areas. For example, the projects led by Bangor University's School of Ocean Sciences, Irish

Sea Portal Pilot and Bluefish, have been able to work with the University's Sustainability Lab to help develop its approach to integrating the CCTs.

- 2.34 The Programme is also contributing towards the Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming CCT. There does not appear to be a significant difference in how this Theme is being addressed by projects funded through the different Priority Axes. Some projects have set a target for the gender balance of research teams, boards and committees, and these are largely being met. For example, the Acclimatize project has a fieldwork team that is 70 per cent female. Projects have also appointed Equality Officers and signed up for the Athena SWAN Charter recognising advancement of gender equality. Some of the projects have also launched trilingual (English, Welsh and Irish) websites, which they believe to be unusual, particularly in the scientific community.
- 2.35 As many of the projects funded through the Programme are only part-way through their delivery, their effects are only beginning to emerge and are largely unknown at this point in time (as discussed in the Priority Axes sections below). As a result, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the Programme and its projects' effects will contribute towards the Cross-Cutting Themes, and so these should be a focus of the project-level evaluation, thereby providing evidence for the final Programme-level evaluation.
- 2.36 The means by and extent to which the CCTs are integrated into the Programme's delivery and processes are further discussed in section 6.

3. Priority Axis 1 – Cross-Border Innovation

- 3.1 This section presents the findings of the evaluation relating to Priority Axis 1.
- 3.2 Priority Axis 1 focuses on increasing innovation within SMEs (including social enterprises) within the cross-border area. To do this, it aims to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing between Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Further Education Institutions (FEI) and other public sector organisations and SMEs, which will result in the translation of research and innovation processes into new and improved commercial products, processes and services.
- 3.3 Whilst inclusive in scope, it has a particular focus on three sectors that are aligned with the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies in Ireland and Wales: Marine and Environmental Sciences (including renewable energy), Food and Drink, and Life Sciences.
- 3.4 The Priority includes one Thematic Objective (strengthening of research, technological development and innovation) and one Investment Priority. As discussed above, the Specific Objective that the Priority aims to achieve is ‘to increase the intensity of knowledge transfer collaborations involving research organisations and SMEs in line with the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies’ (WEFO, 2014b: 25-26). Examples of the types of cross-border actions to be supported under this Specific Objective include:
- transferring knowledge between academia and SMEs to support business innovation
 - piloting of initiatives to test innovative products, processes or services, based on Key Enabling Technologies and the S3s, in areas with commercial potential
 - cross-border demonstration, testing and marketing of new products, processes and services
 - creation of cross-border innovation clusters or networks
 - joint cross-border design of innovative solutions, including piloting, testing or findings ways to overcome barriers to innovation particularly those faced by SMEs and social enterprises

- cooperation platforms which develop the concept of the citizen scientist working innovatively with HEIs and other research organisations
- linking academia and SMEs to develop and transfer models of best practice (WEFO, 2014a: 31).

3.5 The ex-ante evaluation of the Programme stressed the importance for the Programme's appraisal process to 'give considerable weight to the extent of cross-border added value offered by individual projects', given the potential for overlap with innovation interventions funded through other European Structural Investment Fund Programmes in Wales and Ireland (Old Bell 3, 2014: 29).

Need and rationale

3.6 The need and rationale for investment through Priority Axis 1 was identified through the joint socio-economic analysis and SWOT analysis of the Programme area conducted as part of the drafting of the Cooperation Programme. This Priority Axis most directly addresses two challenges identified through this analysis.

- Challenge 2: increasing and streamlining the flow of knowledge and expertise between key stakeholders in the Programme area, thereby contributing to an innovation environment in which users, firms, universities and public authorities cooperate to produce innovations (WEFO, 2014a: 10).
- Challenge 3: Improving SMEs' innovative capabilities by addressing barriers facing them to support the Programme area to realise the commercial benefits of innovation (WEFO, 2014a: 12).
- The Priority Axis seeks to build on the success of the Innovation and Competitiveness theme under the 2007-13 Programme.

Policy context

3.7 The Priority Axis was designed to align with the shared priorities of the Smart Specialisation Strategies in Ireland and Wales, set out in Welsh Government's Science for Wales (2012) and Innovation Wales (2012) policies and the Government of Ireland's Research Prioritisation Strategy (2012).

3.8 The objectives of Priority Axis 1 remain broadly consistent with policy developments in Ireland since the beginning of the Ireland Wales Programme.

- Irish policy remains committed to facilitating collaboration between enterprises and academia. For example, Ireland's national strategy to become a global leader in innovation, Innovation 2020, contains a continued commitment to investing in innovation in enterprise and prioritises 'fruitful collaboration' between enterprises and research organisations as being essential. This commitment to collaboration between enterprises and research organisations is reiterated in Ireland's national enterprise policy, Enterprise 2025, and the National Policy Statement on Entrepreneurship in Ireland. Finally, Ireland's national capital investment plan for long-term economic, environmental and social progress, the National Development Plan 2018-2027, identifies the need for collaboration, knowledge transfer and commercialisation of research, including between SMEs and research organisations, through initiatives such as the regional sectoral clustering and public-private research centres.
- The three sectors targeted under this Priority Axis also remain broadly incorporated within the refreshed priority research themes and research areas for the 2018-23 period in the Research Priority Areas 2018-2023 report by the Research Prioritisation Steering Group.

3.9 Similarly, developments in policy in Wales since the beginning of the Ireland Wales Programme mean that the objectives of Priority Axis 1 remained highly relevant.

- Welsh policy remains focused on supporting research and innovation. For example, Welsh Government's Prosperity for all: economic action plan highlights the need for business to develop and innovate and the important supporting role played by universities in driving this (Welsh Government, 2017: 11). The Welsh Smart Specialisation Strategy remains as set out in the Science for Wales and Innovation Wales documents.

Activity

3.10 Activity under Priority Axis 1 is progressing well. To date, seven projects have been approved and a further project approval is in progress. The total of €19.5 million in

EU funding committed to these projects represents 62 per cent of the Priority Axis budget of €31.7 million.

Table 3.1: Projects approved under Priority Axis 1, June 2019

Project	No. of partners	EU funds (€ million)	Summary description
Dŵr Uisce	2	2.7	Aims build the capacity for innovation in the water industry by investigating how new practices can meet the challenges faced in Wales and Ireland due to environmental and climate change.
CALIN	6	9.3	Supports research and development programmes for small and medium-sized businesses in the life science sector.
Irish Sea Portal Pilot	2	1.1	Drive innovation by providing a platform; the ISP Portal that can meet the requirement for knowledge flow in order to generate growth in fisheries and aquaculture
BUCANIER	6	2.2	Seeks to increase innovation capacity within SMEs and social enterprises by collaborating with Higher Education (HE) institutions and other public bodies to improve the innovation dividend through increased productivity across Ireland Wales area
More than a Club	2	1.0	Work with local professional football clubs in Ireland and Wales to help them set up stand-alone social enterprises which will address social needs within disadvantaged communities.
pISCES	4	1.8	To reduce the costs and carbon footprint for the fish processing industry by developing and testing a new 'smart grid' electricity network.
Catalyst	5	1.4	To drive innovation within Welsh and Irish businesses in the life science and food and drink sectors.

Source: WEFO data

- 3.11 The Managing Authority's data on indicative financial commitments suggest that projects in the process of being approved and proposals in the business planning stage, should they receive approval, will take the percentage of budget for the Priority Axis committed to around 92 per cent.
- 3.12 Expenditure of EU grant aid to date by projects funded through the Priority Axis amount to €5.3 million, around 27 per cent of the total aid committed to date and 17 per cent of the total aid allocated. The figure reflects the fact that a number of the projects funded under the Priority Axis are about half-way through their delivery, whilst the largest project, CALIN, which accounts for around half the EU grant aid committed under the Priority Axis, has just undergone a financial reprofile.

3.13 The projects in progress are currently largely on schedule with delivery with regards to delivery stage and progress against output indicators, although some report being behind on expenditure. Several of the projects reported experiencing delays in recruitment at some point in time, often due to unanticipated delays resulting from institutional procedures around human resources. Generally, however, projects did not identify any significant barriers to delivery that were specific to the type of activity conducted under or sectors related targeted by this Priority Axis.

Alignment of projects against objectives

3.14 The seven projects underway or completed under Priority Axis 1 align closely with its objectives. For example, all of the projects deliver in at least one of the sectors that it targets, with some, like Catalyst, working across two target sectors. Similarly, the projects fit well with the indicative actions identified in the Cooperation Agreement.

- Dŵr Uisce involves the transferring of knowledge between academia and industry and the cross-border design of innovative solutions, in this case how to make water supply more efficient.
- The Irish Sea Portal Pilot involved academia and SMEs across the Programme area working together to pilot a means by which barriers to innovation and growth in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors could be overcome.
- Catalyst is a pilot scheme to drive innovation related to sustainability amongst enterprises in the food and drink and life sciences sectors.

Outputs and effects

Table 3.2: Progress towards output indicators under Priority Axis 1: by indicator, June 2019

Indicator	Target	Project forecasts	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	1200	588	281	105
Employment increase in supported enterprises	35	57	18	12
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	70	50	22	62
Private investment matching public support in innovation or R&D projects (€)	791,984	558,000	109,203	9,203
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	30	21	8	5
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	600	156	23	8
Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	50	56	16	62
Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	45	20	17	17
Number of new or enhanced cross-border innovation networks	6	7	2	3
Number of pilot projects completed	3	2	1	-

Source: WEFO

- 3.15 With regards to the Programme output indicators for Priority Axis 1 and taking into account the reported progress of the projects, the forecast outputs currently present a mixed picture. The projects currently approved under Priority Axis 1 are set to surpass targets related to employment increase and new or enhanced cross-border innovation networks, but as things stand the Programme will fall short of its targets relating to the number of enterprises receiving support and cooperating with research institutions and related indicators such as the number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market/firm products and private investment matching public support. This suggests that, as much as possible, projects in the business planning stage should target addressing these shortfalls.
- 3.16 The figures relating to progress to date and outputs profiled to date also present a mixed picture, showing that in some regards, for example relating to the number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects, the Programme's projects have achieved and claimed more than expected

at this point in time and almost as much as the target figure. The reasons for this were not entirely evident to the project partners, but some attributed it to a greater than expected enthusiasm from some SMEs for collaboration. In other respects, however, such as with number of enterprises support to introduce new to the firm products, the projects approved under the Priority Axis are behind profile on delivery of outputs. Qualitative feedback from project delivery partners suggests, however, that they are confident of reaching their output indicator targets and that the underachievement to date is more a result of mis-profiling rather than a result of delivery problems.

Cross-border collaboration

- 3.17 The seven projects approved under Priority Axis 1 involve a total of 19 different partners, ten of which are from Ireland and nine from Wales. Two organisations – Bangor University and Bord Iascaigh Mhara – are involved in three projects under the Priority, but a majority (13) are involved in one project. Positively, all the lead partners engaged with as part of the evaluation were satisfied that the other partners in their project provided skills that were complementary to their own. One delivery partner also highlighted the relatively small scale of the Programme, suggesting that it allowed the relationships developed between partners to become much deeper, in comparison to larger programmes like Erasmus or the Interreg North-West Europe Programme.
- 3.18 Positively, stakeholders report that cross-border collaboration is emerging at multiple levels through projects under this Priority Axis. For example, both the CALIN and CATALYST projects report emerging collaboration at partner to partner, partner to collaboration enterprise, and enterprise to enterprise-levels.
- 3.19 The cross-border collaboration through Priority Axis 1 appears to be delivering positive effects for the partners involved. The projects are providing opportunities for the exchange of knowledge, skills and ideas, and best practice between delivery partners. Some projects have created specific means by which this can take place. More Than A Club, for example, held a workshop early on in its delivery for delivery staff to share ideas. Others, however, have allowed this to occur more organically through the delivery and management of the project.

3.20 Feedback from delivery partners strongly suggests that this cross-border collaboration resulting from the projects would not have occurred without the Ireland Wales Programme, and those who suggested it might have occurred otherwise stated that it would likely have been much slower: ‘without the Programme [the collaboration] would have been slow and happenstance would be needed’ (Project Manager).

3.21 Looking forward, there was much uncertainty amongst delivery partners about the prospects for sustaining the collaboration following the completion of the project. Some suggested that, despite the desire being there, the prospect of continued collaboration was very unlikely in the absence of public funding, due to budget pressures. Others suggested that, on a case-by-case basis, certain aspects of the project may continue if alternative funding can be found, but the activity would almost certainly be on a smaller scale.

Effects and emerging impacts

3.22 The effects of the projects funded under Priority Axis 1 are varied and in many respects best explored through project-level evaluations.

3.23 Projects are certainly permitting the sharing of knowledge and best practice between delivery partners and wider stakeholders. The Dŵr Uisce project, for example, facilitated the sharing of ideas between stakeholders in the water sectors in Ireland and Wales both through and outside of the project. One result of this was a Memorandum of Understanding between Dŵr Cymru and Irish Water.

3.24 The BUCANIER project, meanwhile, reports that it is facilitating the development of joint marketing and trade deals emerging from their trade events. One example of this is a partnership between an Irish producer of pork crackling products and a food distributor in Wales, whilst the project is also supporting the development of a seaweed food and drink cluster.

3.25 Whilst it is too early to identify emerging impacts arising from projects funded through Priority Axis 1, the projects report receiving highly positive feedback from the people they have worked with and stakeholders. For example, the More Than A Club project’s Run the Club programme, which introduces people to the commercial management of sports clubs whilst supporting them to make a positive difference to their local community as volunteers of the future, reports that it has been praised by

schools, and feedback such as this should be further explored in the project-level evaluation.

Case Study 1 – CALIN, Priority Axis 1

Timescale

3.26 December 2016 to November 2020

Budget

3.27 Total project budget of €11.96 million, including an Ireland Wales Programme contribution of €9.33 million and match-funding of €2.62 million.

Project partners

3.28 The project partners are Swansea University, Cardiff University and Bangor University in Wales; and University College Dublin, National University of Ireland, Galway and Tyndall National Institute in Ireland. Swansea University is the lead partner.

3.29 Some of the partners had experience of collaborating previously. For example, Swansea University and University College Dublin were partners on the Celtic Alliance for Nanohealth project funded under Priority One of the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-13. Other partners had pre-existing relationships outside of Ireland Wales projects.

Background, aims and activities

3.30 Both Wales and Ireland are home to fast-growing life sciences sectors. In Wales, the life sciences sector is expected to add £1 billion in Gross Value Added by 2022 (Life Sciences Industrial Strategy Board, 2017: 42). Meanwhile, Ireland is the seventh-largest exporter of medicinal and pharmaceutical products in the world (IDA Ireland).

3.31 CALIN aims to increase the intensity of knowledge transfer collaborations between centres of excellence in six HEIs and SMEs in Ireland and Wales. This will strengthen SMEs' capacity for R&D, technological development and innovation, and therefore facilitate sustainable business growth.

3.32 To do this, CALIN is facilitating the development of an advanced life sciences network by organising conferences and webinars, as well as supporting and part-funding the undertaking of collaborative research projects by academic researchers and SMEs.

3.33 For further information about CALIN, visit its website: <http://www.calin.wales/>

Progress and outputs

Table 3.3: Case Study 1 CALIN output indicators, June 2019

Indicator	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Achieved to date
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	300	179	44
Employment increase in supported enterprises (FTE)	21	4	1
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	36	12	12
Private investment matching public support in innovation or R&D projects (€)	558,000	109,203	9,203
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	9	3	1
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	72	10	4
Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	36	12	12
Number of new or enhanced cross-border innovation networks	12	11	11

Source: WEFO

- 3.34 The project reports that it is progressing well in both its technical and scientific elements and is just past the halfway point in its delivery timetable. Stakeholders are confident that it will achieve its output indicator targets, despite monitoring data suggesting that the project is some way behind its profile for some indicators, including number of enterprises receiving non-financial support and private investment matching public support in innovation or R&D projects. This is somewhat explained by the current level of project expenditure.
- 3.35 At the end of June 2019, project expenditure of grant funding stood at around €1,790,000, equivalent to 19 per cent of the EU grant funding. To address the project's underspend against profile, the project recently underwent a financial reprofiling. As discussed above, the output indicator targets were not altered.
- 3.36 The longer than anticipated time taken for universities to review and accept detailed agreement around intellectual property was identified as an early impediment to the project's progress, although stakeholders reported that this has largely been resolved now.
- 3.37 The project also experienced some delays in recruitment early in its delivery – stakeholders attributed this to common minor issues involved in recruitment within large organisations such as universities.

- 3.38 Stakeholders also reported that uncertainty related to Brexit and the parameters of the future relationship between Ireland and Wales is also affecting the confidence that companies have in starting projects and short-term staff have in engaging in projects, as well as potentially threatening the extent to which the project will create a successful network. The project delivery team was, however, complimentary about the Programme management's support on this issue and efforts to keep them informed about recent developments.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

- 3.39 The project has integrated monitoring of the CCTs into its processes, allowing it to report CCT-related data in its claims to the Managing Authority. For example, the project collects and stores significant amounts of information on each company it works with, and this includes data relating to CCTs, such as a company's workforce gender balance. It also adopts institutional policies and processes where relevant and works to build relationships with other projects in different institutions and refer enquiries on to them, where appropriate.
- 3.40 The project and its delivery team are particularly interested in the concept of sustainability, and state that, in terms of collaboration with companies, the flexibility permitted through the Ireland Wales Programme and CALIN (compared to Horizon 2020, for example) permits the project more freedom to undertake projects addressing sustainability – although it is not clear why this is the case.

Cross-border collaboration

- 3.41 The project is delivering collaboration at three levels: between the delivery partners, between the delivery partners and enterprises within a research project, and between SMEs at CALIN events. There have been no significant challenges to the collaboration between the delivery partners to date, and stakeholders report that the project is benefiting from a natural synergy between partners and their complementary skills.
- 3.42 The cross-border collaboration is delivering benefits at various levels. For the delivery partners, it allows them to engage intimately with companies and gives them more space to innovate and take risks through this collaboration than in other programmes (for example, Horizon 2020). The collaboration between delivery partners and enterprises through CALIN is also acting as a launchpad for other

collaboration, although mainly at a national level at this point in time. For example, collaboration with one partner company through a CALIN project led to two successful bids for Marie Curie and Enterprise Ireland grant funding for one of the project partners.

- 3.43 Without the project, one Irish partner was also clear that they would never have had the opportunity to engage with some of the Welsh enterprises they have worked with and introduced to several Irish partners through CALIN.
- 3.44 The delivery partners report that, in the absence of future grant funding, the sustainability of the individual collaborations with enterprises is likely to depend on whether it develops a successful output or whether other means of funding can be found. There is an impetus amongst the delivery partners to ensure the sustainability of the partnership going forward, but some concern about how this can be achieved if the machinery for funding cross-border working is disrupted.

Effects

- 3.45 Stakeholders are confident that CALIN is fulfilling a strong need amongst enterprises. Evidence for this is the demand amongst enterprises in this sector for working with the delivery partners through CALIN, as stakeholders report the level of demand being even greater than anticipated, to the extent that the project has had to decline some enquiries.
- 3.46 The project is also providing research opportunities for young people in the delivery partner institutions – one research collaboration involving Irish and Welsh partners and started in CALIN may lead to the publication of a paper in a major international journal.
- 3.47 In terms of unexpected effects, the project has provided delivery partners with an insight into a type of market that they didn't previously understand.

Case Study 2 – BUCANIER, Priority Axis 1

Timescale

3.48 March 2017 to August 2020.

Budget

3.49 Total project budget of approximately €2.9 million with an Ireland Wales Programme ERDF contribution of € 2.3 million, matched by partner funding of €0.6 million.

3.50 BUCANIER is approximately halfway through its expected project duration but is estimated to be 40 per cent behind its initial financial profile with a reprofiling exercise agreed by WEFO. The reprofile exercise took time out of the project delivery but has meant that the BUCANIER project is back on track, however it has decommitted circa €0.2million compared to its original approved budget.

Project partners

3.51 The project is led by Pembrokeshire County Council with a total budget allocation of € 0.7million. Other partners include Carmarthenshire County Council and Swansea University in Wales, whilst Irish partners include the Institute of Technology of Carlow, Wexford County Council and Bord lascaigh Mhara with total budget allocations ranging from €0.32 million to €0.52 million.

3.52 BUCANIER is broadly based on the experiences of two of the partners in delivering the INSPIRE project between 2012 and 2015,⁵ however new partners have been introduced into the BUCANIER project partnership. For example, while ITT Carlow and Pembrokeshire County Council were previously involved in INSPIRE, Carmarthenshire County Council, Swansea University, Wexford CC and Bord lascaigh Mhara are newly integrated partners.

3.53 The BUCANIER project manager was previously the project manager for INSPIRE also and therefore is fully conversant with the lead partners, the general area of topic and themes and the Interreg processes.

⁵ INSPIRE (Initiating Pathways for Innovators, Researchers and Entrepreneurs) was an Interreg IVA project that ran from 1 Feb 2012 to 30 Jun 2015. The Welsh and lead partner was Pembrokeshire County Council, the Irish Partner was the Institute of Technology Carlow.

Background, aims and activities

- 3.54 BUCANIER aims to increase innovation capacity and productivity within SMEs and social enterprises across the Ireland Wales Programme area. By applying design-based innovation techniques BUCANIER invests in ideas for the design, development, testing and delivery of new products, processes and services that will bring new product/service ideas closer to the commercial market and contribute to increased productivity.
- 3.55 By collaborating with Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and other public bodies BUCANIER is increasing the number of cross-border collaborative research, development and innovation clusters and build new networks between research institutions and SMEs. The focus of BUCANIER is SMEs, social enterprises and researchers working in the renewable energy, food and drink and life science sectors in both Wales and Ireland.
- 3.56 The project is delivered through the sharing of knowledge and expertise involving a series of interlinked activities including:
- cross-border working to generate ideas and to stimulate entrepreneurial creativity and to create new products and services
 - co-investment in design, development and testing including market testing of new ideas for products and services
 - commercialisation of market tested products and services that have the potential to reach the market as new to market or new to firm (that is, existing market) products and services
 - creation of new and enhancement of existing clusters and networks both intra- and inter-sector as well as within and across the borders to create new market opportunities.
- 3.57 BUCANIER aims to 'Help businesses develop ideas into a product'. In so doing it will encompass a number of operational aims including to:
- increase cross border innovation capacity within SMEs and social enterprises by collaborating with Higher Education (HE) institutions and other public bodies

- increase the number of cross-border collaborative research, development and innovation (RD&I) clusters and networks between research institutions and SMEs.
- assist SMEs and social enterprises by applying innovation processes to realise ideas for the design, development, testing and delivery of new products, processes and services bringing them closer to the commercial market.
- increase employment in supported enterprises in terms of new full-time equivalents.

3.58 For more information about [BUCANIER, visit its website.](#)

Progress and outputs

Table 3.4: Case Study 2 BUCANIER output indicators, June 2019

Indicator	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	120	33	8
Employment increase in supported enterprises	15	3	0
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	6	1	0
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	60	9	
New or enhanced cross-border innovation networks	2	0	0

Source: WEFO

3.59 The BUCANIER project manager is confident that the project output targets will be met, although how to most effectively and accurately claim against some of the target indicators requires further clarification.

3.60 The indicators being used in BUCANIER are described by the Project Manager as 'soft', meaning that they are seen by the project partners as not particularly challenging. It is, however, considered by the project partners that the different areas of the region will not have an equal distribution of achievement due to the sectoral focus and different patterns of economic activity across the partner areas.

3.61 The Project Manager for BUCANIER is confident that the target regarding the number of new or enhanced cross border networks will be met in the course of the project. In particular, the potential of an emerging 'seaweed food and drink' cluster is anticipated to hold great promise and will represent unanticipated added value from the project. Ireland currently processes seaweeds which are imported from

Asia and work is underway to establish whether seaweed stocks in the Irish Sea can be harvested from Wales or on a cross-border basis to provide added value import substitution for Irish processing. A further spin off is anticipated to be new investor businesses and spin offs from Irish companies locating in the Pembrokeshire Bridge Innovation centre.

- 3.62 As part of the project delivery an additional output has been achieved through the joint, cross-border development and publication of a BUCANIER 'Ideation manual'. Titled 'An Innovation Mindset', the manual is a practical guide to the innovation process covering:
- Innovation Process
 - Design thinking
 - Commercialisation
 - Clusters and Networks.
- 3.63 Each chapter in the manual is presented through 7 steps: Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver, Top Tips, Masterclass and Initiating Pathways. The manual is further used as the core framework for many of BUCANIER's support activities for SMEs and social enterprises including delivery of masterclasses and workshops around other cross border events.
- 3.64 Latterly, BUCANIER is beginning to see some examples of joint marketing and trade deals emerging from joint BUCANIER-led Trade events. For example, at a Pembrokeshire Tourism Trade Event hosted by BUCANIER and the lead partner in February 2018, Irish SMEs were invited to participate in the event to meet buyers and suppliers as appropriate and to take part in one-to-one meetings and site visits. One outcome has been a new partnership between an Irish producer and distributor of Pork Crackling products, The Skibbereen Food Company, and Pembrokeshire Farm Food distributor Upton Farm.
- 3.65 There have been a number of internal barriers that BUCANIER has had to overcome and that has been resolved largely through the decommissioning of a share of the overall project budget as reported above. Unavoidable changes in the lead partners staffing arrangements meant that there was, for a short while at the beginning of the project, a hiatus in leadership that was swiftly resolved.

3.66 Other potential barriers have been encountered largely stemming from some additional aspects and foci for BUCANIER that appeared through the project development process. For example, the initial concept was that BUCANIER would not be sectoral-focused but should be available to all SMEs and social enterprises in the region's areas. However, during project development and approval the partners were encouraged by the Joint Technical Secretariat to be more focussed and to select activities in sectors where both Wales and Ireland have identified emerging strengths and focus – life sciences, marine renewables and food and drink. It remains to be seen whether the selection of a limited number of sectors will hamper delivery and achievement of targets. The BUCANIER Project Manager noted that the partners found 'some overlap and duplications evident' and consequently, the project partners are aware that the project 'could be having a greater effect if the applied sectors focus had not been implemented'.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

3.67 As a regular participant in ERDF and ESF programmes over many years, the lead partner has been 'comfortable' with both the need to integrate the Cross-Cutting Themes into the project activities and outputs as well as the importance of adequately capturing and systemising the data capture processes.

3.68 In this respect, it appears that the Irish partners have similarly accepted and embraced the capturing of the CCT data. Each partner has appointed a designated Sustainable Development (SD) Champion within their teams and the BUCANIER project has published its own 'Eco-code' with accompanying materials to promote the relevance of the themes across all project activities. This is alongside practical arrangements such as extensive use of video conferencing, use of car sharing and public transport wherever practical.

3.69 Regarding the Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming Theme, again the partners each has an appointed 'champion' with training, materials and support provided to ensure maximum compliance in the important areas of language, gender balance and discrimination.

Cross-border collaboration

3.70 The lead partner believes that it is still too early to assess the extent to which cross border collaborations will be strong and whether they will persist. However, the

earlier track record of successful collaboration and the good start that has been made with BUCANIER activities and delivery suggest strongly that there are grounds for optimism in respect of cross border collaboration having an impact.

- 3.71 However, even with now long-standing collaborations in place, without Interreg funding, it is not clear whether the collaborations will be sustainable or as frequent as they currently are. It is clear that when EU funding ends there may be significantly less incentive for partners, with the Project Manager noting that 'BUCANIER's drive is to get the relationships in place before EU funding ends'.

Case Study 3 – piSCES, Priority Axis 1

Timescale

3.72 January 2017 to September 2020.

Budget

3.73 Total project budget of nearly €2.3 million, including an Ireland Wales Programme contribution of over €1.8 million and match-funding of more than €450,000.

Project partners

3.74 The project partners are Waterford Institute of Technology, Cardiff University, Milford Haven Port Authority and Bord Iascaigh Mhara. WIT is the lead partner, receiving over €960,000 in ERDF funding, with Cardiff University receiving nearly €520,000, Milford Haven Port Authority receiving nearly €210,000 and Bord Iascaigh Mhara receiving nearly €140,000. This is the first time that the four partners involved have worked together on a project.

Background, aims and activities

3.75 The fish processing industry, by definition, is generally centred around coastal fishing ports which are remote and isolated by their nature. For many such businesses, their coastal or rural location can impose inherent competitive disadvantages compared to other similar producers who are located close to large urban centres, for example in terms of access to infrastructure and scale economies. Moreover, as with many businesses, improving efficiencies and controlling cost bases are often crucial to projects. Allied to this, energy costs represent a significant portion of the cost base for fish processors, due to the nature of the business, and in particular the cost of freezing, chilling and production processes.

3.76 The energy industry, however, is increasingly moving away from a model that depends on large centralised power generation to one that adopts smart grid ideals, whereby supply and demand for energy are more balanced via the use of variable and intermittent renewable energies in a more localised manner. Moving to such a model, however, requires intelligent systems to predict scenarios that satisfy energy demand within particular peaks and troughs of the market.

- 3.77 In this regard, fish processing can avail of opportunities, as its energy usage tends to have a degree of flexibility, while rural locations can be more feasible to install on-site renewable technologies as they are less densely built-up and therefore can accommodate renewable installations. Incorporating renewable energy within individual sites can bring many advantages, including cost reduction, improved security of supply, reduced carbon footprint etc.
- 3.78 The Smart Cluster Energy System for Fish Processing Industry project (piSCES), therefore, is using smart grid technologies to try to show firms in the marine and fish processing industries how they can improve flexibility and optimisation in their energy usage. Among the four partners, Cardiff University provides expertise in predictive modelling for energy loads in marine and fish processing firms, that is, knowing how much energy is needed, and at what times energy is needed, while WIT provides expertise in the use of renewable energies and in the development of platforms and technologies to optimise energy usage. Bord Iascaigh Mhara and Milford Haven Port, as industry partners, facilitate the projects' access to firms in order to trial platforms and technologies.
- 3.79 The ultimate aim of the piSCES project is to show how the costs and carbon footprint associated with energy networks in the fish processing industry can be reduced through the use of smart grid technologies. By doing this, it hopes to encourage the take up of such products and processes by partners and associated SMEs across both regions.
- 3.80 For more information about [piSCES, visit its website](#).

Progress and outputs

Table 3.5: Case Study 3 piSCES output indicators, June 2019

Indicator	Project forecast	Profile to date	Progress to date
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	4	0	0
Number of enterprises co-operating with research institutions	4	0	1
Number of enterprises participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	4	0	1
Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or interregional research projects	2	2	2

Source: WEFO

- 3.81 The project reports that activity is generally progressing well, and it is now at a stage where on-site implementation of smart grid technologies has commenced at a couple of fish processing sites (one in Ireland and one in Wales). It also still expects to achieve its targeted outputs, while possibly also exceeding its target for number of firms engaged (total of four, two in Ireland and two in Wales).
- 3.82 Expenditure of EU grant aid to date, as at end June 2019, is about €780,000, equivalent to about 43 per cent of total EU funding, which would also suggest that reasonable progress is being made in line with the project's timeframe.
- 3.83 There have been no major barriers to the delivery of the project, and it has experienced only minor issues around recruitment and administration that haven't really impeded project progress. Finding the right companies to implement this type of project can also take time, as there can be a need to establish trust between the project partners and participating firms, and to educate firms about the benefits of the project. 'Firms can take time to give their trust', according to the promoters, as they can have 'a lot to lose if something goes wrong (e.g. loss of fish)'. When firms see the value of the project, however, they can be very co-operative. In addition, there is a huge amount of data to be gathered from the participating sites, so getting the required data from firms can take time.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

- 3.84 By its nature, the piSCES project is closely aligned with the Ireland Wales Programme's wider sustainable development objectives and the Sustainable Development CCT, as it seeks to promote more sustainable energy usage with associated advantages for reduced carbon footprint. In addition, the project's planned activities also strive to adopt other commonly used sustainable development practices where possible, through its adoption of an eco-code for use during the general day-to-day activities of the project.
- 3.85 Regarding the other CCT (Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming), the project has a gender balance target for male-female staffing of 60:40, which it is close to achieving, while each partner organisation also has wider equal opportunities policies.

Cross-border collaboration

- 3.86 The project collaboration is perceived to be working very well, particularly given that it brings together academic and applied research partners (Cardiff and WIT) with industry partners that are at the 'coalface' of the fish processing industry (BIM and Milford Haven Port Authority). There have been no major weaknesses or challenges encountered in the collaboration to date. According to the lead partner, while there can be some challenges involved in managing such a dichotomy of partners, particularly where both academic and industry partners are involved, this is not a unique challenge for cross-border collaboration, as it is no different in any academic-industry partnership.
- 3.87 The project promoters believe that such a collaboration wouldn't have happened under any funding programme other than the Ireland Wales programme. The lead promoter also believes that there may be potential for further cross-border collaboration on smart grid technologies into the future, though it is anticipated that some form of funding would have to be involved.

Effects

- 3.88 According to the lead promoter, feedback at some of the fish processor sites has also been very positive, with a high level of engagement and interaction being created. There have been no unexpected effects identified within the project at this stage.

4. Priority Axis 2 - Adaptation of the Irish Sea and Coastal Communities to Climate Change

4.1 This section presents the findings of the evaluation relating to Priority Axis 2.

Need and rationale

4.2 A key goal of the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-20 is to preserve and enhance the marine and coastal environment, building on perceived added value from co-operating on the issue on a cross-border basis. Priority Axis 2, therefore, supports activity aimed at reducing knowledge gaps and transferring knowledge regarding climate change adaptation.

4.3 As discussed above, the Specific Objective of Priority Axis 2 is to increase capacity and knowledge of climate change adaptation for the Irish Sea and coastal communities. Underlying this Specific Objective are some examples of indicative types of cross-border actions to be supported under the Priority Axis, which include:

- providing mechanisms and platforms for the sharing of knowledge about risks and opportunities from climate change between stakeholders in Ireland and Wales
- jointly commissioned research, where there are clear gaps in the evidence, based on shared climate change impacts on the Irish Sea and coastal communities
- developing assessment tools which assess the impact, risk and vulnerability of the Irish Sea and coastal communities to climate change, and which can increase the knowledge basis and support the decision-making processes of public sector bodies and the general public
- transferring knowledge, expertise and best practice on adaptation measures between the two regions of the Programme area, e.g. through 'how to' guides, best practice databases, workshops, seminars, web portals
- developing further knowledge and understanding of the environment of the Irish Sea including its biodiversity, habitats and species, and its vulnerability to climate change, utilising shared marine- and science-based expertise within HE/FE institutions to develop adaptation strategies/models

- joint development of tools to stimulate the cross-border exchange of knowledge and best practices regarding climate change adaptation amongst coastal communities to influence behavioural change (e.g. web portals, newsletters, reports, seminars, conferences, guides)
- development of cross-border pilot projects to raise awareness and share knowledge of climate change adaptation
- transferring knowledge, expertise and best practices on nature-based solutions to adapt to climate change (WEFO, 2014a: 42-46).

4.4 The need and rationale for investment under Priority Axis 2 focuses on addressing two main challenges that were identified by the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-20, that is:

- Challenge 4: addressing vulnerability to climate change through increased understanding of the effects of climate change on the Irish Sea and coastal communities, and better adaptation to its effects through cooperation (WEFO, 2014a: 14-17).
- Challenge 1: utilising the potential of the Irish Sea through sharing knowledge and approaches to protecting coastal and marine environments (WEFO, 2014a: 8-10).

4.5 The coastal nature of the Programme area means that it is already experiencing the effects of climate change, through phenomena such as coastal erosion, increased flooding and rises in sea levels, which in turn affect coastal ecosystems, biodiversity, and water quality. The Programme also points to limited research being available on the specific climate change adaptation challenges faced by the Irish Sea. Thus, it seeks to provide added value by commissioning research, sharing existing knowledge and expertise, monitoring impacts, and increasing capacity and knowledge of climate change adaptation, raising awareness on a cross-border basis, with a focus on the Irish Sea and the region's coastal communities.

4.6 In this regard, it also strives to build on investment in the Climate Change and Sustainable Development theme under the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-13.

Policy context

4.7 When the programme was first launched, planned activities under Priority Axis 2 were aligned with the prevailing national and European policy context at that time, with the Priority Axis being designed to complement the aims and objectives of the following key policies and strategies:

- The Welsh Government's 'Climate Change Strategy for Wales' (2010)
- The Government of Ireland's 'National Climate Change Adaptation Framework' (2012)
- The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (adopted by the European Commission in April 2013)

4.8 Moreover, the objectives of Priority Axis 2 remain broadly consistent with policy developments in both national and EU contexts since the beginning of the Ireland Wales programme. For example,

- it remains broadly consistent with the 'National Adaptation Framework' (2018), Ireland's new national strategy to reduce vulnerability to the negative effects of climate change. This strategy sets out a series of adaptation measures for application in different sectors and by local authorities in their administrative areas. Of particular relevance, as an input to climate change adaptation planning, the framework seeks to build on progress already made in advancing an adaptation research agenda in Ireland, while also enhancing this by targeting specific policy areas and also new areas of research. In this regard, the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-20 is explicitly highlighted for its contribution to research on climate change impacts, risks and vulnerabilities, with specific reference being made to projects funded under Priority Axis 2
- it is consistent with the newly published (June 2019) Climate Action Plan for Ireland, which sets out the national commitment and course of action to address the impacts of climate disruption and achieve associated decarbonisation targets. To do this, the new plan has outlined over 180 actions covering carbon pricing, electricity, transport, agriculture, enterprise, the built environment, waste management, public sector and public governance, and citizen engagement and community leadership, and adaptation

- in addition, climate change adaptation is identified as a priority in Ireland’s recent National Development Plan for the 2018-27 period. National Strategic Outcome 8 in the NDP, for example, is focused on promoting investment towards a low-carbon and climate resilient society, with commitments being made to prioritise and accelerate Ireland’s response to global climate change over the lifetime of the plan (Government of Ireland, 2018)
- in the Welsh policy context, climate change policy in Wales remains guided by the Climate Change Strategy for Wales, first published in 2010. However, a consultation document for a new Draft Climate Change Adaptation Plan for Wales was issued in December 2018, with responses invited up to March 2019. Protection of coasts and seas is identified as a key action area within the proposed draft plan, where the contribution of the Ireland Wales programme is again highlighted (Welsh Government, 2018).

Activity

4.9 Activity under Priority Axis 2 is progressing well. To date, five projects have been approved, with about €23.7 million in EU funding committed to these projects. Commitment as a share of the total Priority Axis budget of €27.7 million, therefore, is at 85 per cent.

Table 4.1: Projects approved under Priority Axis 2, June 2019

Project	No. of partners	EU funds (€ million)	Summary description
STREAM	3	4.3	Development of tools/platforms to monitor climate change impacts on coastal and estuarine waters
Ecostructure	5	3.3	Development of eco-engineering solutions for provision of coastal defence structures
Bluefish	6	5.3	Addressing knowledge gaps regarding the effects of climate change on commercial fish and shellfish
Acclimatize	2	5.4	Development of tools to monitor pollution levels and contributors in ‘at risk’ bathing waters
CHERISH	4	4.1	Addressing knowledge gaps regarding the impact of climate change on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands and headlands

Source: WEFO

4.10 Prospects for the further uptake of remaining funding under the Priority Axis also seem positive, as WEFO data on indicative financial commitments (for January 2019) suggest that other proposals, which are currently in the ‘business planning’

stage of the application process, would be sufficient to take up the balance of funding available, if approved.

- 4.11 Expenditure of EU grant aid to date under Priority Axis 2 amounts to €4.6 million, or 20 per cent of total aid committed to date. However, one of the funded projects has only recently completed its mobilisation phase, while other funded projects are generally about half-way through their project timelines. Expenditure, therefore, would reasonably be expected to increase as projects progress further.
- 4.12 Projects generally appear to be on track in terms of progress, and they do not seem to have encountered any significant barriers to progress. Delays in staff recruitment were experienced within a few projects, though these delays did not cause insurmountable problems for the projects. As noted by one of the projects, for example, 'these things happen'. Some projects, by their nature, also experienced some minor weather-related delays, but again this has not hindered project progress to any significant extent.

Alignment of projects against objectives

- 4.13 The five projects that have been approved to date under Priority Axis 2 appear to align well with its objectives, and also fit with the types of indicative actions that were identified for the Priority Axis. For example:
- the STREAM project promotes joint research on the impact of climate change in Irish Sea estuarine and coastal waters, including the development of new tools (e.g. sensors) to monitor these impacts
 - the Ecostructure project seeks to develop new, eco-engineering solutions for design, construction and maintenance of coastal defence structures, which are more sensitive to coastal habitats and biodiversity
 - the Bluefish project seeks to address knowledge gaps regarding the effects of climate change on the commercial fish and shellfish sectors (e.g. in terms of exposure to parasites/pathogens, invasion by non-native species), while also providing adaptation strategies to address these effects
 - the Acclimatize project seeks to close the knowledge gap relating to the pollution of 'at risk' bathing waters in urban areas and rural areas by identifying and quantifying pollution streams and determining associated climate change impacts on pollutions

- the CHERISH project seeks to increase cross-border knowledge and understanding of the impacts (past, present and near-future) of climate change, storminess and extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands and headlands along the Irish Sea.

4.14 In addition, dissemination of knowledge is a common theme across most funded projects, in particular through the use of web portals or mobile applications alongside workshops, newsletters, seminars etc.

Outputs and effects

4.15 In relation to Programme output indicators, project outputs to date seem positive. In this regard, current projects' forecasts for outputs are expected to either be close to or ahead of overall Programme targets for all but one indicator. For two indicators, outputs achieved to date are indeed already close to meeting or exceeding Programme targets. These are:

- number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or inter-regional research projects
- number of organisations co-operating in enhancing the marine and coastal environment.

4.16 This might suggest that the targets set for some of the indicators could have been higher. Previously, for example, the Ex-ante Evaluation for the Ireland Wales Programme 2014-20 had suggested that the indicator target for number of organisations co-operating on a cross-border basis to enhance the marine environment (24) was modest (Old Bell 3, 2014: 60). At the same time, the Ex-ante Evaluation also acknowledged that there are difficulties in identifying indicators for cross-border programmes, as budgets tend to be limited and the benefits from such programmes are expected to arise from creating links and exchanging knowledge and experience.

Table 4.2: Progress against output indicators under Priority Axis 2, June 2019

Indicator	Target	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or inter-regional research projects	10	21	18	15
Number of pilot projects completed	2	1	0	0
Number of new awareness raising initiatives targeting coastal communities	60	75	26	16
Number of organisations co-operating in enhancing the marine and coastal environment	24	54	34	23

Source: WEFO

Cross-border collaboration

- 4.17 The five projects approved under Priority Axis 2 to date include a total of 20 different partners (10 Ireland, 10 Wales), drawn from 12 different organisations. There are five organisations that are involved in two or more projects under Priority Axis 2 – Aberystwyth University is involved in four projects, Swansea University is involved in three projects, and Bangor University, UCC and UCD are all involved in two projects.
- 4.18 A number of projects are also building on collaborations that were approved under the 2007-13 Ireland Wales Programme. These include the STREAM project (WIT and Swansea University collaborated on the WIN-IPT project in 2007-13), the Bluefish project (Aberystwyth University and UCC collaborated on the SUSFISH project in 2007-13) and the Acclimatize project (UCD and Aberystwyth University collaborated on the Smart Coasts project in 2007-13).
- 4.19 The collaborations being delivered under Priority Axis 2 are further drawing on several benefits, which include the leveraging of complementary skills and expertise among Irish and Welsh partners (and the ongoing consolidation of previous collaborations, as per the STREAM, Bluefish and Acclimatize projects), and exchange of good practice or new ways of thinking. A planned outcome from the CHERISH project, for example, is the development of new joint-nation good practice guidance for standardising the recording and monitoring of the impact of climate change on the terrestrial and marine heritage assets of each region.
- 4.20 The geographic focus of the Priority Axis (i.e. on the Irish Sea and its coastal communities) also makes the cross-border collaboration very specific to the Programme area. In an Irish context, for example, the lead promoter of the

STREAM project has suggested that the project is helping to expand marine related research activity in the shellfish sector, but in a geographical area that normally receives less focus than, say, the Irish west coast.

- 4.21 However, while several of the projects (as noted above) are building on collaborations that were first initiated in earlier Ireland Wales Interreg programmes, it is notable that projects would still generally look to future Interreg programmes as the means to continue partnerships, at least for projects of similar scale.

Effects and emerging impacts

- 4.22 It is too early at this stage to identify emerging impacts arising from Priority Axis 2, given the stage of progress that funded projects are at. However, several projects have noted strong positive feedback among wider stakeholders, and positive engagement with the projects among such stakeholders.

Case Study 4 – Acclimatize, Priority Axis 2

Timescale

4.23 January 2017 to January 2022.

Budget

4.24 Total project budget of more than €6.7 million, including an Ireland Wales Programme contribution of nearly €5.4 million and match-funding of more than €1.3 million.

Project partners

4.25 The project partners are University College Dublin (UCD) and Aberystwyth University. UCD is the lead partner, receiving nearly €2.9 million in ERDF funding, with Aberystwyth University receiving €2.5 million in ERDF funding.

4.26 The partner organisations have previously collaborated together on the Smart Coasts project, which was funded under the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-13, and which sought to develop ICT tools and real-time public information systems to improve the maintenance of bathing water quality at two demonstration sites – Bray, Co. Wicklow and the Swansea Bay area. In addition, the partners also co-operated on the SMART project (Sustainable Management of near shore water quality for Aquaculture, Recreation and Tourism), funded under the Ireland Wales Programme 2000-06, and the Achieving EU Standards in Recreational Waters project, funded under the Ireland Wales Programme 1994-99.

Background, aims and activities

4.27 The Acclimatize project seeks to close the knowledge gap relating to the pollution of 'at risk' bathing waters in urban areas (Dublin Bay in Ireland) and rural areas (Pembrokeshire, Anglesey, Ceredigion in Wales) by quantifying pollution streams, identifying the contributors to pollution, and determining pollution's impact on waters through climate change.

4.28 Bathing waters, for example, are impaired by different factors and experience different effects from climate change. Bathing water quality, for example, is strongly influenced by weather conditions, in particular rainfall and solar radiation. Climate change will affect the amount, intensity and timing of precipitation, and will therefore have significant impacts on future bathing water quality and, hence, on local

economies that rely on bathing water quality for tourism and marine economic activities.

- 4.29 Climate change, however, will also impact on bathing waters in different ways, depending on the origins of pollution. According to the project promoters, existing indicators under the Bathing Water Directive, and the designation of bathing waters (e.g. the Blue Flag status), only indicate whether or not a problem exists, but they do not indicate why there is a problem, or what the contributors to the problem are. Local authorities, therefore, 'only know that there is a problem, not what's causing it', so they can readily identify problem bathing waters as part of their monitoring protocols during the bathing season, but they often lack the resources and technical know-how to identify and quantify the sources of pollution.
- 4.30 Acclimatize focuses on the effects of climate change on the faecal pollution of bathing waters and the river catchments that discharge into these. Acclimatize thus seeks to identify what the sources of pollution are (e.g. geographical sources, biological sources) while also quantifying their contribution to the problem.
- 4.31 The project involves a multidisciplinary team, including biologists, engineers, geographers and ICT specialists, and work packages are based on specialisations, but with all partners being in some way involved in the different packages. The focus in the Irish area is on urban bathing waters, while the focus in the Welsh area is on rural bathing waters, as the contribution of sources of pollution will vary between urban and rural settings.
- 4.32 'Climate proofing' of regulatory and infrastructural decisions affecting bathing water quality is a policy challenge. However, lack of knowledge regarding contributing pollution streams severely hampers the ability to predict the specific effects of climate change on a particular bathing water. Acclimatize, therefore, seeks to develop an evidence base and associated climate projections so as to develop statements of potential impact for the bathing waters, which can then be used to design appropriate sustainable remediation strategies.
- 4.33 For more information on [Acclimatize, visit its website.](#)

*Progress and outputs***Table 4.3: Case Study 4 Acclimatize output indicators, June 2019**

Indicator	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or inter-regional research projects	2	2	2
Number of new awareness raising initiatives targeting coastal communities	16	13	13
Number of organisations co-operating in enhancing the marine and coastal environment	12	19	19

Source: WEFO

- 4.34 The project is on track to achieve or surpass its output indicators and is in alignment with planned timelines. Expenditure of EU grant aid to date, as at end June 2019, is about €900,000, equivalent to about 17 per cent of total EU funding.
- 4.35 There has not been anything that has hindered the progress of the project to date, and there have only been small 'foreseen administrative issues' that would have been anticipated anyway. Recruitment of staff, for example, took time to complete.
- 4.36 In this regard, according to the lead promoters, having the mobilisation phase before implementation began was very helpful to the project, as it gave time to deal with start-up issues like recruitment.
- 4.37 There have also been no barriers to the delivery of the project. Instead, according to the promoters, there has been a lot of buy-in from stakeholders, and some stakeholders have also proactively contributed to the project in ways that were not originally envisaged, e.g. through access to equipment and resources.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

- 4.38 By its nature, the Acclimatize project is closely aligned with the Ireland Wales Programme's wider sustainable development objectives, as it seeks to improve knowledge regarding the impact of climate change on water quality. In addition, the project's planned activities also strive to adopt wider practices that promote sustainable development objectives, where possible, although these tend to be practices that are being more commonly adopted in general. These include adopting travel plans that encourage car sharing and other ways of reducing the impact of travel, for example, or taking account of environmental considerations in its use of supply chains.

- 4.39 Regarding the other CCT (Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming), both University College Dublin and Aberystwyth University adopt equal opportunities policies that do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability or race. The project strives to establish a minimum 40 per cent/60 per cent female/male gender balance on research teams, boards and committees (e.g. the student fieldwork team is estimated to be about 70 per cent female), and recruitment requirements have been advertised widely using a range of methods, including job centres, agencies, national, local and specialist press, third sector organisations and other websites where appropriate and affordable.
- 4.40 All materials aimed at the public are made available in Welsh, Irish and English where appropriate. Venues sought for public information meetings strive to be accessible to people with disabilities and, whenever possible, be held in areas close to public transportation. The project website is also trilingual, which the project thinks is probably unusual for a science-based website.

Cross-border collaboration

- 4.41 As noted earlier, the collaboration involves a team that already has a lot of experience of working together, with the two institutional partners having collaborated under previous Interreg programmes dating back to the 1994-99 period. The team leaders on both the Irish and Welsh sides of the Acclimatize project played the same role for the Smart Coasts project funded under the 2007-13 programme, for example, while several other members of the Acclimatize research team also worked on the Smart Coasts project.
- 4.42 The main strengths of the collaboration, from the project's perspective, lie in the previous experience of working together on several occasions, but also in the complementary skills that each side brings to the project. Both sides see themselves as having different experience doing different types of studies, for example, and each side is therefore drawing on the other's skills and experience to improve their own. As noted previously, the project involves a multidisciplinary team, including biologists, engineers, geographers and ICT specialists, and work packages are based on specialisations, but with all partners being in some way involved in the different packages.

4.43 The project partners suggest that the Ireland Wales Programme has been instrumental in fostering collaboration between them and suggest that projects of the scale of Acclimatize would not have happened without the Ireland Wales programme. In this regard, the Ireland Wales Programme is believed to serve a particular niche, as it focuses on local benefits (for the Programme area), and such a locally focused project would be hard to get funding for through other avenues, for example, Horizon 2020. Future collaborations of similar scale would also most likely depend on funding, however support from successive Ireland Wales programmes has helped to consolidate collaboration between the project partners, and there has been some early exploration of further potential opportunities for collaboration (for example, through the Atlantic Area programme).

Effects

4.44 The strength of the positive feedback received from wider stakeholders was probably unanticipated, and the project partners have now become more engaged with these stakeholders (for example, the project partners have been sought out by stakeholders to advise on other related issues). The project has not experienced any unforeseen effects to date, although it is probably too early to gauge the delivery of either intended or unintended effects at this stage.

Case Study 5 – Bluefish, Priority Axis 2

Timescale

4.45 January 2017 to December 2020

Budget

4.46 Total project budget of €6.63 million, including an Ireland Wales Programme contribution of €5.31 million and match-funding of €1.32 million.

Project partners

4.47 The project partners are Bangor University, Swansea University and Aberystwyth University in Wales; and Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Marine Institute and University College Cork in Ireland.

4.48 The university partners collaborated previously on the SUSFISH project, a fisheries management project funded under Priority Two of the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-13. According to the Bluefish Project Director, the lead partner, Bangor University, had informal links with Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute before Bluefish, but they had not been able to collaborate with each other.

Background, aims and activities

4.49 Climate change is affecting the world's oceans and coasts and predictions suggest that the functionality of shallow marine ecosystems is likely to change in ways that will affect species of food and/or other commercial relevance to coastal communities.

4.50 The Bluefish project aims to increase knowledge and understanding of the effects of predicted climate change on commercial fish and shellfish in the Irish and Celtic Seas. Using the increased knowledge, it aims to provide region-wide adaptation strategies for the benefit of coastal communities. The risks and opportunities identified by the project will be communicated to stakeholders (stakeholder groups, SMEs and other interested members of the coastal communities) using a variety of mediums.

4.51 The project has six work-packages that are led by the different project partners. These work-packages include ecosystem understanding, resources sustainability,

health and well-being and change, as well as communication and dissemination and project management.

4.52 For more information on [Bluefish, visit its website](#).

Progress and outputs

Table 4.4: Case Study 5 Bluefish output indicators, June 2019

Indicator	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Number of research institutions participating in cross-border, transnational or inter-regional research projects	6	6	6
Number of new awareness raising initiatives targeting coastal communities	10	8	0
Number of organisations co-operating in enhancing the marine and coastal environment	10	8	0

Source: WEFO

4.53 The project reports that it is behind profile with regards to two of its output indicators (number of new awareness-raising initiatives and operations co-operating), but it expects to achieve its targets by the end of its delivery period. The Project Director suggested that the reasons for this was due to a number of factors, including the cumulative effect of minor issues concerning access to research vessels, Brexit uncertainty and the strain this caused on staff, and a desire to pace the programme of communication and dissemination activity so as to avoid stakeholder fatigue with the process.

4.54 As of June 2019, project expenditure is about €1.4 million, equivalent to around 24 per cent of total EU funding.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

4.55 The Bluefish project appears to have successfully embedded the Cross-Cutting Themes into various aspects of its delivery. Amongst the sustainability measures it has adopted are eco-codes, single-use plastic minimisation in research laboratories and sustainable travel policies.

Cross-border collaboration

4.56 As discussed above, from the perspective of the Project Director, the Bluefish project provided an excellent opportunity to bring together partners who had wanted to work together for some time but had not been able to do so. This cross-border collaboration has brought together Welsh research institutions with Irish

government and industry institutions, and the project reports that this has enabled the academic institutions to work with industry experts with a unique and valuable viewpoint on shared challenges.

4.57 The Project Director also reports that the cross-border collaboration has enabled the sharing of good practice, both from Wales to Ireland and Ireland to Wales, and has encouraged various project partners to expand their boundaries and explore new areas.

4.58 Going forward, the Project Director suggests that project partners are keen to continue collaborating outside of the Ireland Wales Programme, should other funding sources be found.

Effects

4.59 Whilst the project has not identified any unexpected emerging effects up to this point in time, the Project Director suggested that engagement from some non-academic stakeholders was perhaps less forthcoming than hoped. To counter this, the project is working to ensure that it is regarded as an industry- and community-focused project, rather than an academia-focused one.

5. Priority Axis 3 – Cultural and Natural Resources and Heritage

- 5.1 This section presents the findings of the evaluation relating to Priority Axis 3.
- 5.2 Priority Axis 3 can be seen to follow on from one of the main Themes contained within the Ireland Wales Operational Programme 2007 –2013. Here, within Priority 2 Climate Change and Sustainable Regeneration, Theme 2 dealt with Sustainable Regeneration of Communities that was covered by an objective to ‘develop and promote joint opportunities for sustainable regeneration giving recognition to the natural environment, built assets and the culture and heritage of the cross-border region’ (Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly, 2007: 56-57). Of relevance is that earlier Programme’s concern with the opportunity to increase the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the cross-border region which is reflected in the objectives and guidelines of the current Programme’s Priority Axis 3.
- 5.3 Welsh Government’s economic action plan - Prosperity for All identified tourism as a key ‘foundational’ sector in the Welsh economy that makes a valuable contribution to jobs and growth in communities across Wales (Welsh Government, 2017: 15).
- 5.4 In Ireland, national policy priorities have also been put in place through the National Development Plan 2018-2027 including a major national capital investment plan relevant to the Objectives of PA3. For example, a National Strategic Outcome 3. dealing with Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities and National Strategic Outcome 7, responding to Enhanced Amenity and Heritage (Government of Ireland, 2018: 45, 67).

Policy context

- 5.5 Overall the objectives and priorities under PA3 remain broadly consistent with policy developments in both Ireland and Wales that have been in place since the beginning of the Ireland Wales Programme.
- 5.6 Priority Axis 3 addresses the need to drive economic growth through natural and culture heritage and in particular by, inter alia, promoting joint management of natural and cultural heritage and resources, exploiting the growth potential of natural and cultural heritage and fostering entrepreneurship in cultural/creative industries

- 5.7 The Welsh Government’s tourism action plan has, since 2012, included objectives to develop more activities and cultural/heritage experiences that can increase the appeal and reputation of Wales and to maximise the tourism potential of the Welsh coast.
- 5.8 Partnership for Growth 2013 – 2020 has the aim of growing the Welsh tourism industry by 10 per cent by 2020 (Welsh Government, 2012). Wales has further developed its thematic approach to promoting sustainable tourism, with 2018 designated as Wales’ Year of the Sea. In particular, the strategy seeks to offer visitors a compelling motivation to visit the region and working with coastal and communities and tourism and cultural heritage businesses and organisations, helping them to exploit their physical and social assets.
- 5.9 In Ireland, tourism and rural development policy continues to acknowledge the importance of natural, cultural and heritage assets in a way that aligns well with the Objective of PA3. Further, People, Place and Policy 2015, which acts as the national policy for tourism up to 2025 and the 2017 Action Plan for Rural Development is Ireland’s national plan to support economic and social development in rural areas.

Activity

- 5.10 To date, under PA3, two projects have been approved involving 10 partners across 8 different organisations. The projects are led by Welsh local authorities – Carmarthenshire County Council and Pembrokeshire County Council – and, in two instances, have partners engaged in both projects - Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and Wexford County Council.

Table 5.1: Projects approved under Priority Axis 3, June 2019

Project	No. of partners	EU funds (€ million)	Summary description
Celtic Routes	6	1.6	Encourage visitors to explore new areas of Wales and Ireland en route to their final tourist destination.
The Saints	4	1.9	Motivate communities to rediscover their shared heritage; and to use this shared heritage as a means of attracting people to the cross-border region.

Source: WEFO

- 5.11 Out of the total priority axis budget of €15.0 million, €3.49 million has been allocated, representing 23 per cent of the total budget allocation for the Priority.

Both PA3 projects are still at an early stage and therefore expenditure to date is at a low level of €0.05 million, or 2 per cent of the total budget.

- 5.12 The project development and selection approach adopted for the Priority Axis 3 projects was adjusted during the course of the first stages of the Programme. The Secretariat note that this adjustment was not due primarily to the failure of the initial strategic approach but was a reflection of the response of the third sector organisations initially assumed to be likely to come forward with projects. It transpired that there was a need to ‘reinvigorate’ the demand from the third sector with a more streamlined and supportive approach to project development and selection.
- 5.13 However, although the adjusted approach allowed the Programme to effect a mini ‘relaunch’ with a new profile and a specific call arranged, stakeholders suggested that this has only worked to a limited extent. While more bids were received, it transpired that the quality of the bids have not been as high as could be wished for and it is felt that small organisations still struggle to gather momentum, partnerships and information necessary for a good quality project to emerge.
- 5.14 Therefore, it is estimated that although 25 proposals were received after call, to date only 3 have been pursued. (Celtic Routes emerged from the early stage pre-call process). It is felt by the Secretariat that that the limitation of the Priority to coastal communities may have resulted in some inland-based projects falling out of consideration.
- 5.15 There were some delays reported by both projects with full time staff being appointed to the projects in both Ireland and Wales. However, for Celtic Routes, the main time delay is said by the Project Manager to arise from rescheduling of key project mobilisation activities. For example, the need to commission market research and branding consultants ahead of public launch and engagement with brand partners and stakeholders. The Celtic Routes Project Manager described this in the following terms: ‘So much of the timescale issues are about scheduling issues, not really delay issue’.

Alignment of projects against objectives

- 5.16 The objective of Priority Axis 3 is ‘To sustainably realise the potential of natural and cultural assets in increasing visitor numbers to coastal communities in the

Programme area'. To date, two projects have been committed by the Programme: 'Celtic Routes' and 'Rediscovering Ancient Connections – The Saints'.

- 5.17 These projects are both, in contrasting ways, aligned with the Priority objectives. For example, Celtic Routes aims to use cross border market research, branding and 'pathways' to encourage visitors to explore new areas of Wales and Ireland en-route to their final tourist destination, recognising that tourists travelling through the cross-border region are most commonly in 'transit' rather than 'touring' mode (That is, on their way to other, more high-profile destinations elsewhere in either Wales or Ireland).
- 5.18 By contrast, the Saints project is about building on the shared heritage of ancient connections and working with communities to use this heritage to attract tourism and visitors to the cross-border region.
- 5.19 Some stakeholders have expressed concern that the nature of Priority Axis 3 means that inevitably the projects supported are highly likely to be more localised and less strategically focused than those supported under the other Priority axes. The development of these two projects is still only at a relatively early stage and therefore the extent to which this concern may be justified is difficult to assess.
- 5.20 Other stakeholders regard Priority Axis 3 projects as important on the grounds that they allow greater access for smaller organisations (originally envisaged as social enterprise / third sector bodies) and are more likely to originate from the identification of local needs 'on the ground'.
- 5.21 Given that tourism and visitor 'capture' are highly localised in their effects, it may inevitably be the case that these projects could place partners in competition for the tourism numbers. However, since the two projects so far supported are based on highly specific local attributes and assets, the promoters hope that building collaborations along the same themes will create stronger brands that can be exchanged across borders and between communities.
- 5.22 Due to their perceived local roots and 'bottom-up' development, stakeholders felt that Priority Axis 3 projects are potentially more visible locally and, in particular, in the coast communities. Here it was noted that with the challenges facing coastal communities, the way that Priority Axis 3 projects seek to directly address these

communities and their needs could be more widely disseminated and publicised once the projects begin to show results.

Outputs and effects

- 5.23 With regard to Celtic Routes, a considerable amount of planned project mobilisation activity has taken place and in May 2019 public launches involving ‘brand partners’ in the tourism industry were held in both Wales and Ireland. Even so, Celtic Routes is some 6 months behind the original schedule. In the case of the Saints, little activity has so far been possible.
- 5.24 The output indicators for the Celtic Routes and the Saints projects are in line with those specified for PA3 but in both cases, it is regarded as still too early to assess the likelihood of full achievement. For Celtic Routes, the project manager is confident that the anticipated number of new networks will be created and participants engaged, however better baseline information is still required before the number of supported enterprises can be confidently assessed.

Table 5.2: Progress against output indicators under Priority Axis 3, June 2019

Indicator	Target	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Achieved to date
Employment increase in supported enterprises	10	6	0	0
Number of pilot projects completed	2	0	0	0
Number of new tourism networks promoting cultural, natural or heritage assets	12	4	2	0
Number of coastal communities participating in cross-border cooperation around cultural, natural or heritage tourism	20	12	6	6

Source: WEFO

Cross-border collaboration

- 5.25 For the approved PA3 projects, the nature and success of cross border collaborations will be critical in assessing the current projects’ success. In particular, this is due to the potential for competition amongst partners for visitors and therefore the partners’ attitudes regarding collaborations and joint marketing across Irish Sea will need to be key measures of success.
- 5.26 Based on current experience of the projects, it does appear that there are some encouraging signs emerging. However, it is inevitably still too early to be able to make an objective assessment regarding cross border collaborations.

5.27 For example, with both projects, the Irish project partners have maintained a senior Director-level involvement and shown a willingness to participate in the project discussion alongside their project officers. With the Celtic Routes project, the initial mobilisation stage and the preparatory work around branding and the planned learning journeys between tourism stakeholders in both regions will be crucial.

Case Study 6 – Celtic Routes, Priority Axis 3

Timescale

5.29 January 2018 to August 2020.

Budget

5.30 Total project budget of approximately €2.0 million with an Ireland Wales Programme ERDF contribution €1.6 million matched by partner funding of €0.4 million.

Project partners

5.31 The project is led by Carmarthenshire County Council with a total budget allocation of €0.6 million. Other partners include Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and Ceredigion County Council in Wales while Irish partners include Waterford County Council, Wexford County Council and Wicklow County Council with total budget allocations ranging from €0.25 million to €0.29 million.

5.32 Wexford CC and Carmarthenshire CC have previously worked together in an earlier Wales-Ireland project (CORACLE 2010 – 2015). However, although both Waterford and Wicklow CC have also had previous Wales-Ireland Interreg participations, none of the other partners have worked together before. Further, none of the project partners claim extensive experience of working in Cultural, natural resources and heritage – the Priority Axis 3 area of activity. In addition, it is notable that none of the officers have previously worked together on Interreg projects.

Background, aims and activities

5.33 Celtic Routes will bring together coastal communities on both sides of the Irish Sea to develop a new joint cultural and heritage tourism brand underpinned by new tourism products based on the cross-border region's natural, cultural and heritage assets and thus provide a compelling motivation to visit the Ireland Wales Region.

5.34 The project will encourage visitors to explore new areas of Wales and Ireland en route to their final tourist destination by testing the feasibility of cross-border tourism trails. The trails will, it is anticipated, combine natural, cultural and heritage assets in Ireland and Wales to increase visitor numbers (both day visitors and overnight) to the benefit of the economy in both Ireland and Wales, thus providing jobs and contributing to economic growth.

5.35 The project will be delivered through a series of interlinked, sequential activities including:

- The mapping of cross-border natural and cultural heritage assets including an audit of the key events/festivals in each area
- Commissioning of market and consumer intelligence reports and analysis
- Exchanging knowledge and engagements at the level of community, business and academia including trade engagement events and cross border 'learning journeys'
- Establishing a unique Ireland/Wales brand built around key tourism themes that link the cross-border communities
- Developing a marketing campaign based around shared identities.

5.36 The ultimate aim of the Celtic Routes project is to convert the sizable 'footfall' of potential visitors driving through the Region's counties with other final locations in mind, into becoming staying and paying visitors as well as attracting new visitors to cross the Irish/Celtic Sea.

5.37 By harnessing the collective strengths of the region's counties, the Celtic Routes project therefore aims to transform transit zones into new touring sites, increasing the time visitors spend in these regions and capitalising on the opportunities to boost local economies. By converting transient tourism visitors into day and overnight visitors Celtic Routes will increase and spread visitor 'dwell' and visitor spend across the Region's counties.

Progress and outputs

Table 5.3: Case Study 6 Celtic Routes output indicators, June 2019

Indicator	Project forecast	Profiled to date	Progress to date
Employment increase in supported enterprises	2	0	0
Number of new tourism networks promoting cultural, natural or heritage assets	3	2	0
Number of coastal communities participating in cross-border Cooperation around cultural, natural or heritage tourism	6	6	6

Source: WEFO monitoring data

5.38 The project partners initially identified seven themes around assets including heritage trails, saints and stones, etc and the counties' key assets have been mapped onto the seven themes.

- 5.39 A specialist market research company was engaged to provide a market intelligence report and to test the Celtic Routes themes in the tourism marketplace. This was concluded in August 2018 allowing the partners time to refine the 'offer' and the branding ready for a launch with stakeholders that took place in May 2019. Stakeholder feedback from tourism partners is reported to have been very positive.
- 5.40 The marketing plan and materials are currently being developed ready for a public and trade launch in the autumn of 2019 in time for the launch of promotion for the 2020 tourism season.
- 5.41 The lead partner believes that given the extensive 'set up' and mobilisation activities already undertaken within the project, the project outputs and impacts will be achieved. A number of positive indications exist including that the planned Networks will be created and the communities on both sides are engaged.
- 5.42 The number of supported enterprises will need to be baselined and the partners believe that it will be important to not only assess jobs created and visitor numbers increased but also to assess as key measures of success the attitudes of the tourism operators and enterprises in the sector regarding collaborations and joint marketing across Irish Sea.
- 5.43 The delay to approval of the project did lead to some uncertainty and the appointment of lead officers were delayed as a result although that mostly affected the lead partner who had the resource to 'gap fill' with staff seconded in from other economic development activities.
- 5.44 In respect of the progress made by the project since approval, it is noted that some of the key milestones were intentionally 'fluid' largely because the partners were not sure how long it would take to commission the detailed market intelligence and branding elements of the project.
- 5.45 The partners recognised early on that identifying 'brand ambassadors' would be essential and therefore some effort has been taken to achieve this. The recent launch to stakeholders in May 2019 event is felt to have successfully consolidated their engagement in the brand promotion and the marketing plan.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

- 5.46 As a regular participant in ERDF and ESF programmes over many years, the lead partner has been 'comfortable' with both the need to integrate the crosscutting themes into the project activities and outputs as well as the importance of adequately capturing and systemising the data capture processes.
- 5.47 To this end, the Celtic Routes project has the benefit of a shared resource at Carmarthenshire CC. This shared role also covers the capture of Monitoring information and Quality and Performance as well as CCT indicators. The integration that this enables is, the lead partner believes, a strength of the Celtic Routes project.
- 5.48 Within the delivery of the project, the lead partner is well suited to work with the Welsh language and is fully aware that because of different policy and different traditions the status of the Irish language is not always so much at forefront of Irish partners minds. It has been particularly crucial therefore for the Celtic Routes partners to work closely together in order to develop an agreed brand for the project and for the promotional literature. For example, a trilingual logo has been required and time and effort were invested to ensure that it was agreed to the satisfaction of all partners on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Cross-border collaboration

- 5.49 The partners believe that it is still too early to assess the extent to which cross border collaborations will be strong and whether they will persist. However, the lead partner notes that the attitudes of partners on both sides of the Irish Sea have been very positive and encouraging.
- 5.50 Inevitably, without Interreg funding, its collaborations may not be sustainable or as frequent as they are currently however it the intention to maintain the momentum created by Celtic Routes. For example, the marketing and promotional programme will be in place only 12 months ahead of the anticipated project closure date. Therefore, the effort that has been made to build strong brand ambassadors and collaborations and learning journeys will be important. Those between tourism stakeholders will be crucial and will hopefully carry collaborations forward.
- 5.51 In addition, the very creation of 'tourism trails' that are heavily featured in the marketing and will be location specific across all counties should ensure some

additional longevity for collaborative actions into the future, particularly if trade organisations can be motivated to 'pick up' the campaign and integrate into their thinking.

6. Programme Delivery Processes

6.1 This section of the report presents the findings of the evaluation related to the Ireland Wales Programme processes.

Communications

6.2 The external communications of an intervention like the Ireland Wales Programme have two major functions: to raise awareness of the Programme amongst potential beneficiaries and thereby encourage project applications, and to raise the profile of the effects of the Programme and its projects within communities in the programme area. Responsibility for the communications is shared between the Managing Authority and the Programme beneficiaries.

6.3 In respect of the first function—generating interest that results in applications—the Programme’s communication strategy can be regarded as broadly successful, as the level of committed budget is high for Priority Axes 1 and 2. The strategy appears to have been less successful for Priority Axis 3, where the Programme has faced more challenges in fully committing its assigned budget. This may be partially explained by the fact that many of the delivery partners in Priority Axes 1 and 2 were involved in previous Interreg programmes and therefore reported being aware of the Programme at a very early stage. In response to these challenges, the Programme did adopt a revised strategy—a public call for applications—that was successful in generating increased interest.

6.4 Some stakeholders in both Ireland and Wales expressed concern that the nature of the delivery partners involved in the ongoing projects, including the fact that many of them participated in previous Interreg programmes, might result in the Programme being perceived as a ‘closed shop’, and suggested that the Programme could do more to advertise itself to enterprises through other networks to address this. Similarly, some stakeholders were sceptical as to the level of awareness of the Programme amongst enterprises in the programme area. The projects themselves, however, did not report particular challenges around demand amongst enterprises, suggesting that awareness of them is sufficient.

6.5 With regards to communicating about the Programme (particularly about its impact) to the general public both inside and outside the programme area, there was some

concern amongst stakeholders that the Programme should do more, particularly with the more research-related and institutionally-focused projects under Priority Axes 1 and 2. It is likely, however, that this communication will increase as the effects of the projects begin to be realised and more easily communicable to the general public. One useful platform for this will be the Programme's website, which is comprehensive and could evolve to move away from providing information about applications to showcasing the Programme's impacts in an accessible way, as long as wider communications activity drives traffic to it.

- 6.6 The communications within the Programme management, such as between the Managing Authority, the SRA and DPER, or between the Joint Secretariat and projects, appear to generally be functioning well. From the perspective of the projects delivery partners, however, there is a need for greater clarity from the Managing Authority as to how long it will take to receive an answer to a query in order to maintain trust.

Project application, selection and development

- 6.7 The project selection and development process, which involves a pre-planning stage and a business planning stage, appears to be robust but is highly resource-intensive for both Programme stakeholders (members of the Joint Secretariat and members of the Programme Steering Committee) and applicants.
- 6.8 The robust nature of the process was remarked upon by both stakeholders involved in the project selection process and Programme beneficiaries. Stakeholders stated that the 'cradle to grave' approach to project development adopted by the Programme allowed it to work with applicants to ensure the proposed projects aligned closely with the objectives of each of the Priority Axes. Project delivery partners were generally positive about this aspect of the project development process, describing it as 'very robust and very comprehensive' and believing it led to projects that were 'very nailed down' once approved.
- 6.9 Related to the robust nature of the application and development process is its length and resource-intensity, aspects which were frequently criticised by project delivery partners. Specifically, project delivery partners were critical of the length of time taken to get through the project development process (words and phrases

used to describe it include 'frustrating', 'over-thorough' and 'extremely slow') and what they perceived as a lack of transparency in the Programme's communication about the reasons for delays, which may themselves have been a result of the length of the applications, as discussed below.

- 6.10 Corresponding to this were concerns about the resource required to draft the applications (Business Plans). The projects considered the applications to be very detailed (more so than other proposals for funding, such as Horizon 2020 applications) and therefore resource-intensive to complete. This led to concerns that, along with the length of process and the absence of clear timescales, the application and project development process might dissuade smaller organisations, particularly SMEs or social enterprises with little administrative support, from applying for funding.
- 6.11 At the same time, the length of the applications not only strain the resource of applicants but also the Programme itself. This is particularly the case for the Programme Steering Committee, whose members review and provide feedback on applications, often in a voluntary capacity. To try and streamline the process for the Programme Steering Committee by reducing the number of physical meetings required, an online portal was developed in which the members can comment on the applications and discuss them in a forum. Stakeholders were generally positive about this development, although it was suggested that the experience of interacting with the portal could be improved, by, for example, providing more space and more structure.
- 6.12 The support provided to applicants during the project development process by the Ireland Wales Operations Officers and other members of the Joint Technical Secretariat seems sufficient. The Operations Officers themselves were generally highly praised by the lead project delivery partners engaged with as part of the evaluation, with comments describing them including 'exemplary', 'very supportive' and 'very approachable'.

Management and governance

- 6.13 The processes in place for managing the Programme are comprehensive and robust but are resource-intensive for both the Managing Authority and stakeholders whose involvement is required.
- 6.14 As the Managing Authority for this Programme, WEFO implemented their systems already in use for managing and delivering other EU regional programmes, such as the mainstream ERDF and ESF programmes. The systems introduced included the use of the Programme and Project Information Management Systems (PPIMS) for the submission and storage of information. The management processes and systems are regarded as robust by stakeholders and the European Commission, but their rigidity has led to some issues for the Programme in areas where there are differences between existing Welsh and Irish systems, such as with public procurement and accounting for pension contributions. WEFO and the SRA have, where possible, worked together to address these issues. Some stakeholders expressed frustration about the time taken to do this, but the Managing Authority highlighted that these are often complex issues which take time and effort on all sides.
- 6.15 Project delivery partners are also largely positive about the management of the Programme, notwithstanding the issues discussed above and some frustration about the burdensome nature of the administration and financial claim deadlines which were regarded to be overly tight. They also highlighted the key role played by the Operations Officers in terms of providing ongoing support to project delivery teams and suggested that these were a real asset to the Programme.
- 6.16 The governance processes for the Programme are heavily reliant on voluntary contributions of resource by Programme Monitoring Committee and Programme Steering Committee members and this has led to challenges for the Programme that it is yet to overcome fully.
- 6.17 The Programme Monitoring and Programme Steering Committees contain a wealth of expertise and represent a wide range of stakeholders from across the programme area. Some stakeholders suggested that the Committees were at times overly representative of the public sector, but this is perhaps inevitable for a programme of this type, and it is clear that the Ireland Wales Programme works to

address this as much as possible by including stakeholders from organisations working with enterprises such as the Wales TUC, Irish Congress of Trade Union, Commerce Cymru, Enterprise Ireland and Chambers Ireland.

- 6.18 The governance of the Programme is provided by the Programme Monitoring Committee, which should convene twice a year (once in each country) to review the progress of the Programme and discuss matters at a strategic level. The functioning of the Programme Monitoring Committee has been hampered, however, by the fact that many of the stakeholders in attendance are providing their time and the resource required to attend a meeting out of their own organisations pool of resources. Perhaps as a consequence of this, some places on the Programme Monitoring Committee remain vacant and at times the meeting quorum has not been reached and so a planned meeting has had to be postponed. Stakeholders report that this has hampered the governance of the Programme and further strains the resources of the Programme's Joint Secretariat who organise the meetings. The evaluation understands that the Joint Secretariat has attempted to address these issues by, for example, organising the meetings in the most easily accessible locations and suggesting the use of videoconferencing. The fact that the most recent Project Monitoring Committee meeting, held in central Dublin in early June 2019, was well attended suggests that either this issue was temporary or that the Joint Secretariat's changes are having a positive effect.

Integration of Cross-Cutting Themes

- 6.19 The approach to integrating the integration the Cross-Cutting Themes under the Ireland Wales Programme is more light-touch than within the mainstream EU funding programmes. For example, the Programme does not have any CCT formal indicators or targets at a Programme level, and as a result the projects do not have specific CCT targets, although they are required to integrate actions to address them and can voluntarily report on them. Some stakeholders expressed disappointment with the absence of Programme-level Cross-Cutting Theme indicators as they suggested that this both made it more difficult to analyse the Programme's contribution towards them and also risked creating a perception that the Ireland Wales Programme is less concerned about the Themes than other programmes.

- 6.20 The level of integration of the CCTs into the Programme is reflected in the limited opportunities available to WEFO's specialist CCTs Team for providing input into the Programme's integration approach. For example, the Cross-Cutting Themes team is provided with an opportunity to comment on a prospective project's proposed approach to addressing the CCTs at the business planning stage, but they do not routinely receive feedback about whether their recommendations are taken into account. When a project is underway, any queries about CCTs from project delivery partners are generally answered by Operations Officers, and so their understanding of the Themes is critical.
- 6.21 Guidance on integrating the CCTs is primarily provided to Ireland Wales Programme stakeholders, its Joint Secretariat, and project delivery partners through a Matrix produced by the Managing Authority. The document provides actions which should be undertaken by projects funded through the different Priority Axes to support the two Themes. Awareness of the guidance document varied amongst project delivery partners, with most reporting it to be highly useful but a small minority were not aware of it. As is discussed in section 2, most project delivery partners were confident that their project was adequately addressing the CCTs, but there was some call for further guidance as to how the project could best evidence and communicate its CCT actions.
- 6.22 The evaluation did not find evidence of significantly different approaches to or attitudes towards integrating the Cross-Cutting Themes between Programme beneficiaries in Ireland and in Wales, despite some suggestion from Programme stakeholders, including those in the Managing Authority, that this might be the case.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- 7.1 With its focus on innovation, climate change and cultural and natural resources, the Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 remains strongly aligned with strategy and policy in both Ireland and Wales and the European Union's Atlantic Strategy and Europe 2020 Strategy.
- 7.2 As of June 2019, the Programme had committed 65 per cent of its total budget. The levels of commitment were highest for Priority Axes 1 and 2 but significantly lower for Priority Axis 3, something that the Joint Secretariat and the Managing Authority have sought to address. Total Programme expenditure to the end of March 2019, however, stood at only 14 per cent of forecast expenditure.⁶
- 7.3 The projects approved under Priority Axes 1, 2 and 3 appear to be closely aligned with the objectives of the Priority Axes and the Programme as a whole. One of the reasons for this is the robust project development process, which is resource-intensive for both Programme management and applicants but provides opportunity for the Programme to work with applicants to maximise alignment.
- 7.4 The projects currently active are making good progress and expect to meet their output indicator targets. Some projects are behind profile on expenditure due to delays in delivery, such as recruitment of staff. The projects are being well supported by the Programme's Operations Officers and are broadly happy with the management of the Programme, although there is scope for improvement in the communication between the Managing Authority and projects.
- 7.5 The Programme has integrated processes for addressing and monitoring the Cross-Cutting Themes of Sustainable Development and Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming to a lesser extent than other European programmes delivered by the Managing Authority.
- 7.6 The processes and systems used for managing the Programme appear to be comprehensive and robust, but their rigidity has caused some issues when trying to take into account differences in practice between Wales and Ireland around, for

⁶ Total Programme expenditure here refers to the amount of eligible expenditure claimed by the projects, not the funding that has been drawn down from the European Commission

example, public procurement. The Programme governance processes are highly reliant on the voluntary input of resource by stakeholders, and this has presented challenges, particularly around organising quorate Programme Monitoring Committee meetings.

- 7.7 The Programme's progress against its result indicator presents a complex picture. With regards to Specific Objective 1, analysis of primary data suggests that the level of investment in research and development and innovation from cross-border collaboration amongst enterprises in the Programme area has greatly decreased since the baseline. It is highly likely that changes in the external environment played a significant role in this negative trend. With regards to Specific Objective 2, analysis of primary data suggests that communities and businesses' awareness of initiatives aimed at adapting to the effects of climate changes has decreased since the baseline. There is no rational explanation for this change, but it highlights the importance of projects funded through this Priority Axis promoting their activities as strongly as possible. Finally, with regards to Specific Objective 3, analysis of secondary data suggests a large increase in the number of overseas visitors to the Programme area since the baseline. With only one project currently delivering towards this Programme, it is unreasonable to link the change to this Programme's activity at this point in time. The Programme's progress should also be considered in the context of the low proportion of total expenditure to date (discussed above).
- 7.8 The complex picture presented by the result indicators is to some extent an inevitable product of the problematic nature of the indicators and the data that was used at the baseline and mid-term stages to measure progress towards them. The problems with the result indicators were acknowledged by all parties involved in the Programme, but there is little scope for changing them, and therefore the final evaluation of the Programme should look to adopt another approach to assessing the impact of the Programme, such as Contribution Analysis, alongside the quantitative assessment.
- 7.9 More positively, evidence is emerging of the Programme facilitating cross-border collaboration at multiple levels and delivering benefits to beneficiaries and wider stakeholders. Feedback suggests that this collaboration would not have occurred without the Ireland Wales Programme, and may be scaled-back or disrupted in the future if similar sources of funding are not available. The Programme's projects are

contributing to the Cross-Cutting Themes through their delivery approach and day-to-day activity, but it is too early to assess the extent to which the projects' effects are also contributing to the Themes of Sustainable Development and Equal Opportunities and Gender Mainstreaming.

Recommendations

- 7.10 Recommendation 1: The Managing Authority should continue with the open/rolling call process for project applications but seek to increase communication with applicants around the expected time taken for delays in applications and provide deadlines by which time applicants can expect feedback.
- 7.11 Recommendation 2: In recognition of the importance of having high levels of attendance at Programme Monitoring Committee meetings, the Managing Authority should explore the possibility of drawing up Memoranda of Understanding or using other mechanisms to ensure that stakeholders resource commitment is recognised by the organisation they are representing.
- 7.12 Recommendation 3: The Programme's Joint Secretariat should further explore ways to improve attendance at Programme Monitoring Committee meetings, including the use of robust videoconferencing solutions, if required.
- 7.13 Recommendation 4: The Managing Authority should work with projects to draw up a charter that clearly sets out what a project can expect when engaging with the Programme's management, particularly in terms of response times to queries and timescales for decision-making.
- 7.14 Recommendation 5: The Programme should develop a plan for the communication of the benefits/emerging impacts of the Programme and its projects to the general public. One mechanism for doing this would be to reorganise the Programme website so that it focuses on the benefits of the Programme's projects.
- 7.15 Recommendation 6: In light of the problematic nature of the Programme's result indicators, the Managing Authority should specify that the Final Evaluation should adopt a Contribution Analysis approach to assessing the impact of the Programme, in addition to the required quantitative approach.

- 7.16 Recommendation 7: The Managing Authority should provide guidance to projects to ensure that they and/or their project-level evaluations collect qualitative and quantitative data on their effects that can be used by the Programme's final evaluation to explore the impact as a whole.
- 7.17 Recommendation 8: The Managing Authority should also provide guidance to projects to ensure that they and/or their project-level evaluations collect evidence of the project's contribution towards the Cross-Cutting Themes.
- 7.18 Recommendation 9: The final evaluation of the Programme should explore the rationale for the Programme's approach to Cross-Cutting Themes and analyse the extent to which it has been successful.

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Annex A – Methodology

Rationale

The methodology for the evaluation was proposed by the evaluation team in response to a specification put together by the Welsh European Funding Office on behalf of an evaluation steering group.

The evaluation steering group comprised representatives of the Welsh European Funding Office, the Southern Regional Assembly and the Government of Ireland's Department of Public Expenditure Reform.

Research activity

The evaluation involved a number of complementary research tasks.

Scoping interviews

Ten scoping interviews with Programme stakeholders from the Welsh European Funding Office, Southern Regional Assembly and Department of Public Expenditure Reform were undertaken in order to inform the evaluation approach.

Review of Programme documentation and existing research

Programme documentation, including Programme-level and Operation-level documents, was reviewed. The findings informed the development of key evaluation tools including the evaluation logic model and evaluation framework, which set out the research questions to be answered by the evaluation, and sections of this report.

Scoping workshop

The evaluation logic model was reviewed and developed at a workshop run by the evaluation team and attended by the evaluation steering group and other key Programme stakeholders.

Inception Report

A short Inception Report (not published) summarised the activity undertaken during the scoping phase of the evaluation.

Engagement with stakeholders

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders with an interest in the Ireland Wales Programme. Feedback and contextual data from the interviews are integrated into this evaluation report. A list of organisations engaged with can be found in Annex B.

Engagement with beneficiaries

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of all Operations/Projects part-funded by the Ireland Wales Programme. These representatives were most often the Project Managers, but Project Directors and groups of project delivery stakeholders were also engaged with.

Case studies with beneficiaries

In-depth, qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of two Operations from each of the three of the Programme's Priority Axes. The case study subjects were chosen by the evaluation team to achieve a balance of Operations with lead delivery partners in Wales and Ireland.

Surveys of businesses and communities

In order to gather data required to assess the Programme's progress towards its result indicator targets, the evaluation team commissioned quantitative research partners to undertake surveys of businesses and communities in the Programme area.

Due to the need to produce data comparable to baseline data, the evaluation team largely replicated the survey approach commissioned by the Managing Authority at the outset of the Programme.

For this evaluation, three surveys were undertaken:

- Beaufort Research undertook a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing survey of business decision makers within SMEs based in the Welsh local authorities in the Ireland Wales Programme area. The sample achieved was 249.
- Beaufort Research undertook a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing survey of SMEs based in the Irish counties in the Ireland Wales Programme area. The sample achieved was 100.

- YouGov's Welsh Omnibus survey was used to survey 1000 Welsh adults aged 18 and over, and a YouGov partner panel survey was used to survey 1000 Irish adults aged 16 and over.

Analysis of Programme monitoring data and primary data

Programme monitoring data provided by the Programme's Managing Authority and primary data collected through fieldwork was analysed by the evaluation team according to the evaluation questions in the evaluation framework.

Annex B – Evaluation Consultees

Aberystwyth University

Bangor University

Carmarthenshire County Council

Chambers Ireland

Enterprise Ireland

Football Association Ireland

Government of Ireland (Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment; Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

Higher Education Authority

National University of Ireland Galway

Pembrokeshire County Council

Southern Regional Assembly

Swansea University

Trinity College Dublin

Tyndall National Institute

University College Dublin

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Vi-Ability

Visit Wales

Waterford Institute of Technology

Welsh European Funding Office

Welsh Government (Department of Innovation)