



Special EU Programmes Body
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INTERREG VA PROGRAMME
NORTHERN IRELAND, THE BORDER REGION OF IRELAND AND WESTERN
SCOTLAND
(2014 - 2020)
CCI No: 2014TC16RFCB047

MINUTES MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday 10th May 2022
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

A list of attendees and apologies is attached at Annex II.

1. Welcome and Introduction by Chairperson

The Chair welcomed attendees to the fourteenth meeting of the INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) 2014 – 2020, the first to be held in a hybrid format of in-person and online via Microsoft Teams.

Members welcomed **EU Commission Desk Officer Ramses Grande-Fraile**, attending in person, and changes to the INTERREG VA PMC membership were outlined. Newly appointed Members were asked to extend a thank you on behalf of the SEUPB to the departing representatives they replaced.

The Chair extended particular thanks to **Anne Marie Caulfield of DPER**, who is replaced by **Andrew Condon**, also attending in person.

The Chair provided an update on developments in Programme implementation since the previous PMC meeting held on 25th November 2021 via MS Teams, which consisted of the following:

- The PEACEPLUS Programme was submitted to the EU Commission for approval in March 2022, and the first PEACEPLUS PMC will be held in the coming weeks.
- SEUPB has been assisting projects with modification requests and extensions to their end dates, given the end of Covid emergency payments.
- Approved extensions have taken the majority of INTERREG VA projects into completion in 2022 and 2023, utilising existing budget.
- The SEUPB has completed an exercise to review potential underspend for reallocation across the Programme objectives, and is working with Sponsor and Accountable Departments towards Programme closure over the next two years.
- The effects of Covid and increased costs post-Brexit have been most evident in the Environment and Sustainable Transport objectives, particularly the Greenways projects.
- **The Chair** discussed the uncertainties following recent elections in Northern Ireland and the SEUPB's hope for an established NI Executive as soon as possible. While the PEACEPLUS Programme will be largely unaffected, the political situation may present challenges in acquiring approvals for reallocations across the current Programme.

The DoF representative stated his confidence in reaching a pragmatic solution to the approval of reallocations despite the political situation. The representative also stated Finance Minister Conor Murphy's support for the PEACEPLUS Programme, the need for which has increased exponentially in recent months.

2. Agree agenda

The agenda was agreed.

3. Conflict of Interest

The Chair thanked those Members and Advisors who have returned Conflicts of Interest and Code of Conduct forms to the Secretariat in the mandatory annual exercise. **No further conflicts were declared.**

4. Video presentation: The North West Centre for Advanced Manufacturing project (NWCAM)

The Committee heard how the NWCAM project was awarded €8.5m under objective 1.1 Research and Innovation: Health and Life Sciences and Renewable Energy in April 2017.

Led by Catalyst Inc. and partnered by Ulster University, and the Atlantic Technological University (formerly Sligo IT and Letterkenny IT), the project aimed to create a new “cross-border super cluster” in the Health and Life Sciences Business sector.

The IBEC representative shared his experience of the project as a boost to the local area and local business while advancing the aims and ambitions of the Atlantic Technological University.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the project presentation video

5. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 25 November 2021

The IBEC representative asked for a minor change to the minutes before they were approved as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting. The minutes will be uploaded to the SEUPB website.

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| AP 1: Minutes to be amended and uploaded to the SEUPB website |
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6. Matters arising

The Chair provided an overview of the matters arising from the previous meeting, which have been actioned.

7. Update on Programme Implementation

The Chair asked **Joint Secretariat Director, Helen Donaldson** to provide a presentation on implementation from the Joint Secretariat perspective. The presentation consisted of the following main points:

- The JS' main challenge is around achieving the full commitment of expenditure, 100% drawdown of EU receipts across the Programme and full delivery of the outputs.
- Under the **Research and Innovation objective**, the BREATH project has now closed, and was recently highlighted in a Scottish parliament debate to mark World COPD day.
- With approval of extensions, projects under this objective are predicting full achievement of the PhD hours output target.
- The “number of enterprises engaged” outputs are currently under an amber risk category.
- All **Environment** projects are in their final 12 months of activity, with the COMPASS and MARPAMM projects planning a joint live closure event on 29th June. All projects are on target to meet or exceed the outputs.
- Under the **Sustainable Transport objective**, the FASTER project has almost completed their complex shortlisting of rapid EV charging points in all three regions. The project is currently rolling out a programme of activities to achieve a modal shift, challenging public perceptions of electric vehicles.
- Risks around timeframes for delivery of both the FASTER and Multimodal Hub projects are being managed, and both are expected to meet their targets. The Multimodal Hub was given an extension to assist in the delivery of cross-border services and will submit a proposal to amend project users targets after dramatic usage reductions over the period of Covid restrictions.
- Due to significantly increased costs since their initial approval in 2018, all three Greenways projects have requested additional funding. **The JS Director** thanked the Sponsor Departments and Accountable Departments for their work in identifying sufficient underspend elsewhere in the Programme to fund these requests.

- The requests will increase the collective value of the Greenways Letters of Offer to €37.7m, placing the Programme at risk of significant underspend if approvals are not achieved. A Steering Committee meeting scheduled for 17th May to progress the funding requests to approval has been cancelled to allow further time for decision making; the SEUPB is working with Accountable Departments to find a resolution.
- All **Health objective** outputs are on target to be met with the exception of an e-health evaluation, which is not linked to any Letters of Offer. This output is under internal discussion.

The DoF representative acknowledged the progress made to reach the Programme's current status, and outlined recent meetings between SEUPB and the Sponsor Departments to agree next steps and responsibilities in bringing the Programme to completion in an environment of constantly shifting costs.

In particular, **the DoF representative** welcomed progress in the FASTER project, given publicity around the increasing need for Electric Vehicles and EV infrastructure.

The DPER representative also acknowledged the challenges the SEUPB and the INTERREG VA Programme have faced, and suggested that it would be valuable to extract and record lessons learned from projects on their individual experiences of Covid.

Following the recent conversations between SEUPB and Sponsor Departments, **the DPER representative** expressed confidence in the ability to achieve full Programme expenditure, including the Greenways projects.

The EU Commission Desk Officer highlighted potential non-completion of the Greenways projects as a concern for DG Regio, with a potential effect on the legacy of the INTERREG VA Programme and public perception of the upcoming PEACEPLUS Programme.

The representative encouraged the SEUPB to focus efforts on ensuring full use of funds and speeding implementation within the agreed timeframes.

The IBEC representative complimented the SEUPB on achievement to date and advised careful consideration of the effect of unpredictable inflation and costs on the capital Shared Spaces projects and Programme closure overall.

The Chair noted the comments and assured the Committee the SEUPB and Departmental colleagues are working together to find resolutions.

The ICTU Ireland representative commended the SEUPB for substantial achievement over a difficult twelve months during which, he felt, a combination of factors made the current issues with the Greenways projects inevitable.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the progress made in the implementation of the Programme

8. Update on Programme Management

The Chair asked **MA Director Paul Beattie** to provide an update on Programme management, which consisted of the following main points:

- With less than two years of the programme remaining, the SEUPB is planning and preparing for project closure.
- Covid-19 restrictions had an impact on project delivery and several requested project extensions have been granted and are being monitored closely.
- The 2021 N+3 target was met and exceeded with a surplus to carry forward and contribute towards the achievement of the cumulative 2022 target of €47m.
- As at 31st March, an additional €19.6m of expenditure must be declared to the EU Commission to meet 2022 target. The SEUPB have an additional €41.6m of certified claims forecast to be declared by year end. Upon declaration, the 2022 N+3 target will be met and exceeded with a surplus of €30m towards the 2023 target.
- The SEUPB's 2021 Business Plan target of 'certification of 80% of claims within 42 days of receipt of adequate supporting documentation' has been achieved.
- The volume of claims received and the effect of Covid of claims processing remains a challenge for the SEUPB. The FCU are focused on improving claims throughput and completing the remaining 31 2020 claims by the end of this summer.
- Actions taken to improve the processing of claims include;

- Additional FCU resource to focus on Local Authority claims;
- Robust communication with Lead Partners on claim accuracy and;
- One-to-one support for projects.
- The SEUPB has reviewed its procedures to verify and report on output indicator achievement. The approach to verifying output indicators has been developed in cooperation with Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and has been subject to recent Internal Audit.
- Resulting actions include the development of indicator guidance for each output, published on the website, and recommencement of annual verification, which was previously disrupted over Covid. Moving forward, the SEUPB will only report on completed outputs over those in progress and is developing an action plan to ensure full verification before the end of Programme closure, benchmarked against international best practice where appropriate.
- The Programme is fully committed to a value of €288.7m, or 102.1% - around €6m overcommitted.
- Project underspend is currently forecast at around €8.5m, with a potential further €6m expected by Programme end.
- With all three Greenways projects requesting additional funding, the SEUPB has written to Accountable Departments regarding reallocation of funds from Objectives 1.2: Research and Innovation: SMEs, 2.3 Environment: Transitional Waters, 2.4 Environment: River Basins and 4.1: Health.
- PMC Members noted the four main risks on the risk register around project extensions into 2023, non-delivery of the Greenways projects, future N+3 targets and internal audit findings around the Performance indicators.
- Four impact evaluations are ongoing with final reports due imminently. **The MA Director** outlined the benefits of evaluation, particularly under the Sustainable Transport objective, where an evidence base exists to explain the effect of Covid on passenger number targets.

The Scotland Europa representative praised the Programme achievements despite external events, making particular reference to the achievement of N+3 figures with a surplus for another year.

The representative thanked Managing Authority for the quality of the meeting papers, and revision of the financial tables as per a previous request.

The DoF representative highlighted the importance of addressing the risks detailed on the risk register and maintaining the level of positive achievements against Programme targets.

The Chair reiterated that the SEUPB remains committed to full delivery of the current Programmes while working to open the PEACEPLUS Programme.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the progress made in the management of the Programme

9. Annual Implementation Report

The Chair informed Members of the Managing Authority's obligation to submit an Annual Implementation Report (AIR) to the EU Commission by 31st May each year, following Monitoring Committee approval.

Comments on the report received in recent days will be incorporated before final submission.

The Chair also drew Members' attention to the new AIR infographic, which provides an overview of the number of Programme beneficiaries and its impact in a reader friendly format.

The Scottish Government representative welcomed the AIR infographic as significantly more user-friendly than the Annual Implementation Report.

The Chair explained that the EU Commission's AIR templates must satisfy reporting from multiple Programmes across Europe, and welcomed the new infographic as a method of capturing the positive work of the Programmes.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Approved the 2021 INTERREG VA Annual Implementation report for submission to the EU Commission.
- Approved the INTERREG VA AIR infographic

10. Update on Implementation of the Communications Strategy

The Chair informed the Committee that today would be **Communications Manager John McCandless'** last PMC meeting, as he is leaving the SEUPB after 13 years for another role.

The Communications Manager took the opportunity to thank PMC Members for their engagement over the Programme, referencing a 2019 event with Scottish colleagues in the Dynamic Earth Centre Edinburgh as an example.

The Communications Manager provided an update on communication activities since the last PMC which consisted of the following;

- The Communications team's involvement in a number of virtual and in-person project closure events;
- Detail of a highlight of 2021 - the North West Multimodal Hub being awarded a REGIOSTARS Award in the "Enhancing green mobility in the regions - European Year of Rail 2021" category.
- Legacy videos as part of project closure during Covid restrictions have proven so successful that they will now be a mandatory Communications requirement for PEACEPLUS projects and added to the Peace Platform.
- Details of the 3rd March invitation to the SEUPB to speak at the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.
- Details of DPER Minister Michael McGrath's visit to SEUPB's Belfast office and projects, also in March;
- Details on the Winter and Spring editions of Your EU online;
- Details of an editorial in the Sunday Independent newspaper for Europe Day 2022 in May;
- Reporting on the Communications team's achievement against Technical Assistance output indicators, all of which have been exceeded;
- Reporting on media coverage and tone, and engagement with the SEUPB's website and social media accounts;
- An overview of anticipated 2022 Communications activity;
- Details of a specification for a new website, which went to tender this week;
- Details of the Annual Perception and Awareness Survey;
- Updates to the SEUPB Communications Strategy, taken to reflect the increased use of online approaches as a result of COVID-19.

The IBEC representative complimented **the Communications Manager** on progress since the Programme's early years and asked him to share any learning gained during his time with the SEUPB.

Secondly, the representative asked whether the decrease of appreciation for the INTERREG Programme in Northern Ireland relates to debates around Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol in the region, and if the same issues will affect the PEACEPLUS Programme.

The Communications Manager stated that issues around Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol were expected to impact upon public perception of the INTERREG Programme, a result which is also reflected in the PEACE Programme.

In response to learning gained, **the Communications Manager** stated his appreciation for the wide scope of projects funded by PEACE and INTERREG Programmes, and his learning on prioritising Communications activity which link to the organisational objectives.

The Chair also explained that, due to lockdowns, projects had had fewer events and fewer other opportunities for visibility and press coverage, which has also had an impact on perception and awareness of the INTERREG programme. Numbers are expected to increase as the launch of the PEACEPLUS Programme is promoted.

The ICTU Ireland representative highlighted the importance of the promotional piece in the Sunday Independent in increasing public awareness of cross-border interventions in place. The representative wished John McCandless luck in his new job role.

The Highlands and Island Enterprise representative reflected on low levels of awareness of the Programme in Scotland in the early years of the Programme, compared to today's reported figures, and stated recent fluctuations are circumstantial. The representative welcomed upcoming promotion of the PEACEPLUS Programme, as the majority of Scottish organisations view EU funding as a historical interest rather than a current opportunity.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted the Communications Activities since the last PMC meeting, and;
- Noted the updated Communications Strategy for INTERREG VA.

10. PEACEPLUS Programme update

The MA Director provided a presentation on the work to develop the PEACEPLUS Programme since the previous meeting, which consisted of the following main points;

- The overall Programme budget has been confirmed at around €1.145 billion across six themes and 21 individual investment areas;
- The Programme was approved by the NI Executive, the Irish Government and the North South Ministerial Council in October 2021 and formally submitted to the EU Commission in March 2022;
- Approval and adoption is expected in May/June, with the majority of calls opening in late 2022, into early 2023.
- The SEUPB is composing a shadow PMC; the programme will open following the first PMC meeting.
- Development of individual calls for applications is underway, with nine in progress.
- A suite of pre-application support is in development, with an aim to improve the quality of applications from an early stage. The first workshop, Children and Young People, was held in in December 2021, and follow-up work is being progressed by the appointed consultant.
- Three elements of pre-application support, to include workshops and one-to-one assistance, are currently in planning; the Youth Programme, Victims and Survivors, and Local Authority Action Plans. Sustainable Transport, Geothermal and Water will be the next areas to receive pre-development support.
- Work is also underway to develop a user-friendly draft programme manual and online support portal, as well as the main JeMs database.
- Managing Authority has concluded on the specification for a new monitoring tool for data collection, which will capture real-time data on how the Programme functions and engages with project, and;.
- The Small Grants Programme is scheduled to launch in Q1 2023.

The Chair elaborated on the pre-application support being provided, making the following main points;

- A pre-development workshop will run three months before the call opens under each Investment area, and will include a high-level call document.
- The workshops aim to encourage high quality project applications and will be promoted in a multi-channel communications approach, as well as issuing invitations to all contacts on the SEUPB's extensive stakeholder database.
- Following the workshops, the SEUPB can offer individual support, potential partnership brokering, or signposting to alternative funding routes.
- Once the call opens, further workshops with the relevant Accountable Departments in attendance will be scheduled, allowing Departments to discuss their requirements from a policy perspective.
- A suite of videos on various application topics will be available online for the duration of the open calls, and;
- Tenders for provision of the pre-application support are in preparation, as is a framework in support of the assessment of smaller projects/ small grants.

The EU Commission Desk Officer stated the Programme assessment under the EU Commission's adoption process is progressing smoothly, facilitated by informal consultation with the SEUPB and a shared positive working relationship.

The Desk Officer reiterated that, while intermediary body Pobal has the ability to support the call for small projects, the selection of operations must be undertaken by a Steering Committee and cannot be delegated.

The MA Director confirmed SEUPB is currently composing the Steering Committee

The ICTU Ireland representative queried the current Monitoring Committee's remaining obligations as the current Programmes close and the PEACEPLUS PMC takes seat.

The Chair stated that the current PMC will continue to function until late 2023, running parallel with a separate PEACEPLUS PMC.

The Department of Health NI representative queried whether the workshops involving Accountable Departments referred to will afford the opportunity to further discuss the measurement of Programme performance through outputs, and the quality of outcomes.

The Chair stated the Accountable Departments will be heavily involved in the development of the calls, including the outputs and outcomes measures. In addition, **the Chair** detailed a draft Monitoring and Evaluation plan for the Programme, which is currently out to tender.

The Scottish Government representative encouraged the SEUPB to use the pre-development workshops to inform potential applicants of the functional areas under the Programme and therefore the potential to engage with Scottish partners. The representative stated there is a high level of demand in the pipeline from Scottish organisations.

The Chair thanked the representative, stating that many new organisations have expressed an interest in the Programme, as well as those with established historical relationships with INTERREG funding; the SEUPB hope to continue engagement with Scottish partners, old and new.

The Scotland Europa representative welcomed discussion around the PEACEPLUS functional areas and reiterated that Scottish partners are committed to participating in PEACEPLUS and building on the legacy of INTERREG VA.

The Chair stated the inclusion of a significant section of INTERREG VA work in the PEACEPLUS Programme, bringing together statutory bodies and communities in the interest of social community innovation, will also increase awareness of previous INTERREG work.

The Monitoring Committee;

- Noted progress in preparing for the PEACEPLUS Programme

10. AOB

The IBEC representative highlighted the anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 2023 as a platform to promote the SEUPB and the PEACEPLUS Programme.

The representative put forward examples, from his own experience, of the increases in cross-border trade between Northern Ireland and Ireland since 1995, and increased levels of trust in cross-border business and collaboration; outcomes which the INTERREG Programme will have directly contributed to.

In an external environment he described as inconducive to trusting business relations and collaborative activity, **the IBEC representative** welcomed the PEACEPLUS Programme and the work ahead for the PEACEPLUS PMC.

The Chair confirmed the SEUPB will be promoting the PEACEPLUS Programme across the country in the coming year, including visits to Dublin.

11. Date of next meeting

The Chair stated the next meeting will take place in Autumn of 2022, most likely in a hybrid format.

ANNEX I

ACTION POINTS/ISSUES OF CLARIFICATION

ARISING FROM MONITORING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 10TH May 2022, hybrid meeting

ACTION POINTS

| ACTION | TIMING | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Previous minutes to be uploaded to SEUPB website | Immediately following meeting | Managing Authority |

ANNEX II

Attendance – INTERREG VA Programme Monitoring Committee –Tuesday 10th May 2022, hybrid meeting

Chair

Gina McIntyre Chief Executive Officer, SEUPB

Members – in person

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Jim Millard | Scottish Government |
| Dominic McCullough | Department of Finance NI |
| Andrew Condon | DPER Ireland |
| Francesca Giannini | Scotland Europa |
| Michael D’Arcy | IBEC |

Members – online

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|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Blair Horan | ICTU Ireland |
| Robin Clarke | Highlands and Island Enterprise |
| Prof Julian Orford | CNCC |
| Barbara Love | SCVO |
| Dr Maura Farrell | Irish Rural Link |
| Sean Cronin | NI Environment Link |
| Brian McCann | CBI |
| Donna Brodie | SEPA |
| Wesley Aston | Ulster Farmers Union |
| Jacqueline Healey | IHREC |

Advisors – in person

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| Ramses Grande Fraile | The EU Commission |
| Helen Donaldson | Joint Secretariat, the SEUPB |
| Paul Sheridan | Certifying Authority, the SEUPB |
| John McCandless | Communications, the SEUPB |
| David Lynch | Department of Finance NI |
| Catherine Clynes | DPER |
| Jacqueline McDevitt | Department of Health NI |

Colin Breen
Lorna Conway

DAERA
Department of Health Ireland

Advisors-online

Joanne Knight
Dave Loyal
Brendan Fitzpatrick
Ciaran Crosbie
Michael Power
Deirdre Dunworth
David O'Neill
Derek O'Neill

The EU Commission
Department for the Economy NI
Department for Infrastructure NI
Department for Infrastructure NI
NISRA/SEUPB
DHLGH
DBEI
Department of Transport, Ireland

Observers – in person

Michael Doyle
Peter Molloy
John Murray
Mary T Hally
Sean McAteer
Brian Coleman

NISRA
DPER
DAERA
Department of Health Ireland
NSMC
NSMC

Observers – online

Caroline Coleman
Mary Maguire
Julie Leathem
Geraldine McKenna
Matthew Magrath
Eimear Coleman
Paul Boylan

Scottish Contact Point
Department of Finance NI
Department for the Economy NI
JS, SEUPB
JS, SEUPB
JS, SEUPB
JS, SEUPB

Glenny Whitley

JS, SEUPB

Secretariat (SEUPB)

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| Tara McCormick | Managing Authority (minutes) |
| Phil Heaton | Managing Authority |
| Nora Winder | Managing Authority (technical support) |
| Ciera Kane | Managing Authority (technical support) |
| Pamela Meekin | CEO's office, SEUPB |
| Sarah Carlin | Communications, SEUPB |
| Emma Purdy | Communications, SEUPB |

Apologies

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Maura Young | FCU, SEUPB |
| Ald Alan Bresland | NILGA/DUP |
| Cllr Alex Baird | NILGA |
| Cllr Enda McGloin | NWRA |
| Gerry Doyle | NWRA |
| Geraldine McGahey | The Equality Commission NI |
| Aedin McLoughlin | The Environmental Pillar |
| Sam Curran | SEPA |
| Geoff Nuttall | NICVA |
| Ivan Cooper | The Wheel |
| David McNeill | SCVO |
| Pamela Dooley | ICTU Northern Ireland |
| Maeve Hamilton | Department for the Economy NI |
| Gearoid Cassidy | Department for Health NI |
| Deirdre Bourke | NSMC |

Departing Representatives

- Anne Marie Caulfield of DPER, replaced by Andrew Condon.
- Hugh O'Reilly of the Wheel, replaced by Emma Murtagh;
- Dr Ruth Gallagher of The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. replaced by Jean O'Mahoney;
- Nicholas Meny has left Nature Scot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) and a replacement is being sought;
- Nicola Mellis and Kristoffer McKeown have both moved roles in Scottish Government's International Innovation and replacements are being sought.

ANNEX III

Glossary of acronyms used in the minutes:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| CNCC | Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside |
| DAERA | Department Of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs NI |
| DBEI | Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation (Ireland) |
| DfC | Department for Communities (Northern Ireland) |
| DfE | Department for the Economy (NI) |
| DfI | Department for Infrastructure (NI) |
| DHPCLG | Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Ireland) |
| DJEI | Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Ireland |
| DoE | Department of Education (Northern Ireland) |
| DoF | Department of Finance (Northern Ireland) |
| DoH | Department of Health (Northern Ireland) |
| DPER | Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Ireland) |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation |
| HMT | Her Majesty's Treasury (UK) |
| ICTU | Irish Congress of Trade Unions |
| NICVA | Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action |
| NILGA | Northern Ireland Local Government Association |
| NISRA | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency |

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|--------------|---|
| NSMC | North South Ministerial Council |
| NWRA | Northern Western Regional Assembly |
| SCVO | Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations |
| SEPA | Scottish Environment Protection Agency |
| SEUPB | Special European Union Programmes Body |
| JS | Joint Secretariat |
| MA | Managing Authority |