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Minutes of the INTERREG VA Review Panel Meeting

Thursday 07 January 2015, 10.30am
SEUPB Offices, Belfast

In Attendance:	Gina McIntyre	SEUPB (Chair)
	Sean Cronin	MC Panel Member
	Bob Harper	MC Panel Member
	Robert Gompertz	MC Panel Member (via VC)
	Robbie Davis	Independent Member
	Sarah Reid	SEUPB (Secretariat)
	Tara McCormick	SEUPB (Minutes)

1. Introductions

The Chair welcomed Members to the first Review Panel meeting of the INTERREG VA 2014 – 2020 Programme.

2. Agenda

Members agreed the agenda.

3. Register of Interests/Conflicts of Interest

The Chair explained the need for Members to declare any potential conflicts of interest in relation to the project under assessment at today's meeting, the Research and Innovation Exchange (RIEX) project, with South West College as the Lead Partner.

RD stated that he was employed by the Department for Employment and Learning, which has links with South West College, however, he has no direct contact with them.

The Chair noted RD's interest, and no further Interests were declared.

4. Review

The Chair began proceedings by providing an overview of the Review Procedure for Unsuccessful Applicants.

She informed applicants that the Procedure was adhered to in a timely manner in processing this project's review. She reminded the panel that the applicant has requested a review on the grounds that; "the outcome was a decision that no reasonable person would have made on the basis of the information provided to the Steering Committee".

The Chair drew Members' attention to the formal correspondence between the applicant (South West College) and the Joint Secretariat (JS), neither of which attend today's Review Panel meeting to allow assessment of the Steering Committee's decision to reject the project via written procedure only.

The Chair confirmed that in line with the Review Procedure, the panel can only consider information which had been originally provided in the application – no new information can be considered.

The project was assessed under five application Scoring Criterion, each of which contains a required threshold score of 3. Following assessment and steering committee consideration, the application failed to score the minimum under two of the criteria, namely;

- Criteria 2 - Quality of Project Design; and
- Criteria 4 - Quality of the Project Team and Implementation Arrangements.

In advance of providing comment on criteria 2, the panel noted the following observations in relation to scoring of criteria 1 – *Contribution of the project to the defined results and outputs of the programme;*

- The application scored the minimum score (3) under this criteria. The panel agreed with the Steering Committee decision to reduce the 5 points awarded by JS to 3 points; similar action was taken on other applications under the same theme;
- In order to score 5, the applicant would have provided much greater detail;
- It was clear from the SC minutes that the Steering Committee decision was taken after lengthy discussion, and the review panel agreed with the score of 3

In relation to the score of 2 awarded under Criteria 2 – *Quality of project design*, the panel made the following observations;

- This section of the application contains a regurgitation of the information provided to all applicants in terms of the call material;
- The information provided in terms of the activity due to take place in each strand is not clear;
- There was a greater focus on structure over implementation – expected to see a balanced focus between the two;
- The comments made were aspirational statements and did not reflect the journey of the SME in the process;
- There was limited information on an SME engagement strategy;
- The quality and detail of information provided did not reflect the amount of funding sought and the size of the project.

Members agreed that given the information provided, a score of 2 awarded against this criteria was appropriate.

In terms of Criteria 3 – *Cross-border cooperation with demonstrable added value*, the panel made the following observations;

- The application scored the minimum score (3) under this criteria, the panel felt that greater detail could have been provided regarding roles within the organisation;
- The panel questioned the detail regarding the depth of co-operation with the West of Scotland as it is unclear in the application;
- Detail on the engagement between academia and SMEs is missing from the application.

In terms of Criteria 4 - *Quality of the Project Team and Implementation Arrangements*, the panel made the following observations;

- The application lacks detail particularly in terms of the stakeholder group – more detail is required on who is being engaged and the relationship between the stakeholder group and the project board;
- The implementation structure is parallel over the 5 strands but would more appropriately be sequential;
- The numerous mentions of referral to other agencies questions whether stakeholder relationships had been fully established, and this would be considered essential in this size of a project at this stage in development;
- The panel would have expected to see a process map outlining the ‘client’s’ journey – the diagram presented does not show this in terms of a critical path through the strands
- There were numerous errors and inconsistencies throughout the application which indicated that there had been no critical review of the application document by the applicant prior to submission. Members agreed the project team’s experience was not under question, and the geographical area is covered effectively.

The Chair noted that pre- application workshops had been available to assist all potential applicants in completing their application form; the workshop for this theme took place a month prior to the application deadline.

Members agreed that given the information provided, a score of 2 awarded against this criteria was appropriate.

In terms of Criteria 5 – *Value for Money*, the panel made the following observations;

- The application scored the minimum score (3) under this criteria, the panel felt that the proposed parallel implementation approach did not demonstrate value for money and that a sequential approach removed the need for 5 strand managers;
- A degree of investment in staffing costs would have been better directed towards advertising and promotion as part of the development of the project/programme

- The score of 3 was upheld by the panel

The Chair thanked the review panel for their participation in this important inaugural review.

The panel agreed that based on the information presented to the Steering Committee and that presented to the Review Panel, the decision of the Steering Committee was not unreasonable and therefore should be upheld