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last orders!
what the new EU budget means for Britain's cities

Adam Marshall and John Adams

Abstract
EU Structural Funds have made a major contribution to economic development in Britain over the past two decades.

The UK's share of Structural Funds will shrink from €16.6 billion between 2000 and 2006 to €9.4bn for 2007-2013. Merseyside and South Yorkshire will lose their Objective 1 status, and receive less than a third of their current EU funding from 2007 onwards.

Brussels will still make an important contribution to the UK's cities and regions, but decreases in Structural Funding – coupled with slower growth in domestic public spending – mean that the UK will have to do more with less.

This paper explores the Government's developing strategy for the Structural Funds, and argues that European assistance should continue to be focused outside London and the South East. But this time, the UK should concentrate limited EU resources on city-regions – rather than spread them too widely. This will have positive economic benefits for the country as a whole.

Introduction
After marathon talks, the 25 member states of the European Union finally agreed a new seven-year budget in December 2005 (COM, 2005).

For the EU's newest member states, the 2007-2013 Budget promises substantial resources for urban regeneration, transport infrastructure, and business growth. By contrast, wealthier member states like the UK will have a much smaller share of European funding.

Over the years, British cities have been big beneficiaries of European programmes. Structural Funds have financed major regeneration projects and critical urban transport projects in all the UK's nations and regions. Birmingham's International Convention Centre, Sheffield's Supertram and Glasgow's Science Centre owe their existence to EU investment – as do a huge array of less visible initiatives aimed at tackling urban deprivation and encouraging enterprise.

Between 2007 and 2013, substantial sums of money will still flow to UK cities and regions. But this is the end of the EU gravy train: from 2007 onward, cities will need to do more with less. The Comprehensive Spending Review will result in slower growth in domestic public spending, and European funding will shrink substantially.

Against this backdrop, there are a number of unanswered questions about what is likely to be Britain's last major injection of European cash. This paper focuses on the implications of the new EU budget for Britain's cities. It asks whether the Government's proposals for the Structural

Funds are the right ones, and explores how we can make limited resources count.

The paper is structured in four sections.

- First, it summarises what the new EU budget means for the UK.
- Second, it suggests that EU and UK policy priorities can both be addressed – by concentrating the UK's remaining Structural Funds on 'areas of opportunity' within the poorer regions.
- Third, it examines the Government's proposals for the use of the Structural Funds – and argues that difficult choices will need to be made about allocation, control and delivery.
- Finally, it argues that the UK's remaining Structural Funds should be focused on city-regions – where they will add the most value.

"The vast majority of the Structural Funds will be spent in the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe"

The new EU budget – and what it means for British cities and towns

As agreed by heads of government in December 2005, the new EU Financial Perspective contains a record €308bn for cohesion policy, representing well over one-third of all EU spending (COM, 2005). This is an increase of 31 per cent on the 2000-2006 period.

However, the increases announced in Brussels do not mean more EU support for the UK's urban areas. Instead, the vast majority will be spent in the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, where per capita incomes in many areas are less than half those seen in Western Europe (CEC, 2004a).

As Table 1 shows, the new Financial Perspective commits €9.4 bn to the UK between 2007 and 2013 (Michael, 2005). At first glance, this is a substantial sum, promising resources for all areas of the UK.

Table 1: Structural Funds in the UK, 2007-2013

Total UK share of the EU Structural Funds: €9.4bn

Convergence objective: €2.6bn

(replaces Objective 1 – the category for the neediest areas of the EU)

- Only Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, West Wales and the Valleys, and Scotland's Highlands and Islands – all peripheral and rural areas – are eligible.
- No major urban area will benefit – a change from 2000-2006, when both Merseyside and South Yorkshire had Objective 1 status.

Competitiveness and Employment objective: €6.2bn

(covers all other areas of the UK, replacing the old Objectives 2 and 3)

- Merseyside and South Yorkshire will receive ring-fenced 'phasing in' funding under the Competitiveness and Employment objective. However, they are likely to receive only one-third of their 2000-2006 EU allocations.
- Merseyside received €1.3bn in EU funds between 2000 and 2006 – suggesting a future programme of less than €450m.
- South Yorkshire's €1.2bn programme will be cut to €400m.

The fate of the remaining €5bn remains uncertain, and up for debate. Whereas the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Strathclyde and Tyne and Wear each had dedicated programmes in excess of €500m during the previous funding period, they will have to make a strong case for large-scale investment this time around.

Co-operation objective: €0.6bn

(replaces the old INTERREG Community Initiative)

- This objective funds cross-border projects, networks, and best practice exchange.
- Cities from all UK regions and nations may participate, but the financial resources involved are small.

Sources: DTI (2006), Michael (2005), Merseyside Objective 1 Partnership (2002), Objective 1 South Yorkshire (2002)

However, a closer look reveals that Britain's cities will need to make a strong case for concentrated support.

The UK's new Structural Funds allocation is less than 60 per cent of the 2000-2006 gross figure of €16.6bn. A large chunk of the remaining money (€2.6bn, or 28 per cent) is allocated to the UK's (peripheral, and largely rural) Convergence areas, which have GDP per capita below 75 per cent of the EU average.

Furthermore, the €9.4bn is spread over seven years, equivalent to roughly €1.3bn each year for the whole of the UK. By way of comparison, domestic spending on enterprise and economic development alone amounted to €6.8 bn in 2004-05 (HM Treasury, 2005).

For cities used to large-scale EU assistance, the new budget presents a very stark set of policy challenges. While cities will not go from huge, dedicated programmes to no European support at all, they will have fewer opportunities to use EU money than before. And after 2013, they are unlikely to have major EU support at all. Now is the time for cities to influence how Britain's remaining Structural Funds will be allocated and delivered.

"For cities used to large-scale EU assistance, the new budget presents a very stark set of policy challenges"

Objectives for the Structural Funds, 2007-2013

The new EU guidelines leave individual member states with a great deal of flexibility over the Structural Funds (CEC, 2005d). The UK Government and the devolved administrations – not the European Commission – will have a larger say over the allocation, control and delivery of the funds. However, the programmes they devise must support key pan-European objectives, as well as domestic priorities.

EU policy objectives

The EU's priorities – reiterated at the December 2005 European Council meeting – are encapsulated in the Lisbon Agenda, which aims to make Europe the world's 'most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy' (CEC, 2005e). Under the new rules, 75 per cent of Structural Funds money must be spent on activities that support the Lisbon priorities – that is, growth and jobs (CEC 2005a, 2005b, 2005d).

The Commission also wants Structural Funding to have a clearer urban dimension. Its *Third Cohesion Report* (CEC, 2004), for example, argued that Structural Funds resources were spread too widely and thinly, and that a greater focus on urban areas was needed. This has been confirmed by the Commission's latest paper on *Cohesion Policy and Cities* (CEC, 2005c), which argues that cities are the places where the Lisbon goals will be met.

UK policy objectives

Broadly speaking, the UK Government's headline goals match the European Commission's Lisbon aspirations. Raising productivity, promoting enterprise, improving levels of innovation and increasing employment are all part of the Government's approach to economic growth.

However, there are some important differences when it comes to regional policy. The Commission has long targeted a disproportionate amount of Structural Funding on the poorer areas of Europe, but the UK Government has found it harder to focus substantial resources on the problems faced by structurally weaker regions (Adams *et al*, 2003).

In England, the Government has committed itself to:

> *Make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all English regions by 2008, and over the long term reduce the persistent gap in growth rates between regions (HM Treasury, 2004).*

Interestingly, two recent urban policy reports argued that central government needs to do more to reduce the gap in regional economic performance. Both the *State of the English Cities Report* (Parkinson *et al*, 2006) and *A Framework for City-Regions* (SURF and CUPS, 2006) combine regional and urban objectives, and argue that cities matter to regional and national economic performance.

"The Government must ensure that this round of Structural Funds truly 'adds value', and does not simply subsidise existing public sector activities."

However, the Government has not yet articulated how it plans to integrate the Structural Funds with key domestic objectives. The DTI, for example, has argued that EU Competitiveness funding should be focused on 'both opportunities and needs' (DTI, 2006: 16). This could mean an emphasis on achieving full employment, the reduction of the UK's long-standing productivity gap, or both.

The Government is clear that it wants to see a 'better alignment between EU and domestic funding streams for regional development' (DTI 2006: 16) or 'greater coordination with domestic policy' (*ibid*, 31). But many observers worry that 'alignment' is a euphemism for using EU funding to pay for core UK programmes – which must not be allowed to happen.

The Government must ensure that this round of Structural Funds truly 'adds value' (Mairate, 2006) and does not simply subsidise existing public sector activities. Policy priorities have shifted, both in Brussels and Whitehall – yet there is still some uncertainty on how the money should be spent.

Making it work

There are no easy answers – and no 'win-win' situations. The Government's divergent objectives will require hard choices to be made. Few projects will contribute equally towards employment and productivity; not all areas will be both 'areas of opportunity' and 'areas of need'. At a time of increased pressure on UK public expenditure, the temptation to spread the jam thinly is very strong.

"The remaining Structural Funds would be best allocated to areas of opportunity – primarily cities – within the UK's lagging regions"

So how can both European and domestic priorities be addressed? There is little sense in spending valuable Structural Funds on the UK's richest areas, which are concentrated in southern England. That would increase, rather than decrease, inequality between regions. Instead, EU assistance should be concentrated on improving outcomes in the less prosperous regions and nations of the UK.

Within these areas, however, promoting employment and productivity within a few targeted areas is a better tactic than trying to promote employment and productivity everywhere. We argue that the remaining Structural Funds would be best allocated to areas of opportunity – primarily cities – within the UK's lagging regions. This would satisfy the Lisbon focus on areas of opportunity, while simultaneously aiding Whitehall's drive to narrow the performance gap between the South East and the rest of the country. HM Treasury, DTI, ODPM, DWP and DfES should take note.

Difficult decisions: allocation, control and delivery issues

The new EU guidelines give individual member states a great deal of flexibility over the Structural Funds (CEC, 2005). But while the UK Government has produced a draft National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – which is intended to serve as the master blueprint for Structural Funds for the next seven years – many key details are yet to be finalised (DTI, 2006).

The NSRF clearly acknowledges that cities and city-regions play an increasingly important role in both national and European policy. It includes a number of references to city-regional economic performance, as well as the principle of devolved decision-making (see also HM Treasury *et al*, 2006).

But as Table 2 shows (page 5), the draft NSRF leaves a number of important questions unanswered when it comes to Competitiveness funding. Will proposed regional and national programmes truly be 'flexible' enough to concentrate resources on specific themes and areas, rather than spread them thinly? Will it be easier, or harder, to co-ordinate different EU funding pots? Who will control Structural Funds in the English regions? And will cities have more freedom to access and deliver resources?

In contrast to previous years, the Government has proposed completely separate ERDF and ESF programmes. This is a step back, rather than a step forward, as it prevents the integration of business support, for example, with policies to develop workforce skills.

Table 2: Competitiveness and Employment Funding: NRSF proposals

Eligible areas will access money from two distinct funding streams:

- The **European Social Fund** (ESF) funds training, human resources and equal opportunities schemes to promote employability.
- The **European Regional Development Fund** (ERDF) aims to promote development and encourage the diversification of industry.

The DTI is proposing that the UK's €6.2bn of Competitiveness and Employment funding be split between ESF and ERDF on a 50/50 basis.

ESF

- *Key priorities:* extending employment opportunities; developing a skilled and adaptable workforce
- *Scale:* one national programme, replacing regional, targeted Objective 2 and national Objective 3
- *Control:* Department for Work and Pensions likely to retain control
- *Domestic policy alignment:* UK National Reform Programme
- *Delivery arrangements*: likely to be through Jobcentre Plus and/or Learning and Skills Councils

ERDF

- *Key priorities:* innovation and knowledge transfer; enterprise and business support; sustainable development; sustainable communities
- *Scale:* regional programmes, with no defined spatial targeting
- *Control:* Government Offices likely to lose control to RDAs
- *Domestic policy alignment:* Regional Economic Strategies, Regional Spatial Strategies, RDA Single Pot, Local Area Agreements
- *Delivery arrangements:* still to be determined – strong desire to integrate with RDA Single Pots and Local Area Agreements. Regions to 'consider how funds will support the emphasis placed on city-regions as drivers of growth' (DTI, 2006: 17).

Source: DTI (2006)

ESF

Whereas ESF resources were previously split between geographically-targeted Objective 2 programmes and a national Objective 3 programme, the Commission has not specified how Government should allocate ESF Competitiveness funding in the UK from 2007.

The Government has proposed an England-wide ESF programme, arguing that alignment with Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council programmes will make European funding simpler and easier to 'match' with domestic resources (DTI, 2006).

But this proposal leaves some unanswered questions around targeting, control, and integration:

> *Geographical targeting:* Within a national programme, will Government concentrate limited ESF resources on areas with higher levels of worklessness and low skills? Major cities suffer disproportionately from worklessness. For example, the Core Cities and London need to raise the number of people in employment by 500,000 just to match the national employment rate (DWP and HM Treasury, 2003).
>
> *Control:* How can a national ESF programme – delivered through Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Councils – link up to economic development programmes at the local, city-regional and regional levels? Will there be enough flexibility in a national programme to tackle specific local employment and skills issues? And how

will small local groups play a real role in programme management, as required by the Commission?

Integration: How will ESF money relate to domestic employment and skills policy – and how will the Government demonstrate added value? This is especially difficult because Government adult skills policy is very narrowly targeted, generally towards qualifications which have a very limited impact on economic growth (Adams, 2005). Jobcentre Plus offices and the local Learning and Skills Councils are undergoing a substantial re-organisation, and face severe funding pressures. Will ESF 'add value' or simply replace stretched core budgets?

“Greater devolution of economic development resources to city-regional level can lead to better outcomes... Structural Funds are no exception.”

ERDF

ERDF Competitiveness programmes will continue to have a regional focus, but the European Commission no longer demands geographical targeting, nor produces indicative regional allocations. Furthermore, control over ERDF programmes is likely to pass from Government Offices to Regional Development Agencies in England.

The DTI has suggested that it does not want to follow the allocation method the Commission uses to distribute Competitiveness funding to member states. This is to be encouraged. ERDF funding must not be used to further business growth in prosperous areas, such as the 'Golden Triangle' of South East England or the M4 corridor. Instead, ERDF programmes should focus resources on areas of opportunity within the less prosperous regions of the UK. The Government should need little convincing to do this, as it made a similar argument at European level (HM Treasury *et al*, 2003).

A number of other important issues also need to be cleared up:

Geographical concentration: Some areas, many of them urban, see the lack of geographical targeting as a clear threat. In the past, big city-regions have had focused Objective 1 or Objective 2 programmes that levered in private investment (CEC, 2004a), improved governance (Marshall, 2003, 2005), and bridged regeneration funding gaps (Bache and Marshall, 2004). The new programmes should continue to concentrate resources on city-regions in order to promote growth.

Control: Government is minded to make RDAs, rather than Government Offices, the managing authorities for the new programmes. The current level of uncertainty and speculation is unhelpful – as emphasis needs to be shifted to delivery, rather than to turf wars over control. More clarity is needed about the types of freedoms and flexibilities local areas will get to deliver elements of a regional ERDF programme. For example, will cities get 'global grants' – chunks of delegated funding – to implement their own priorities, or will they have to go back to RDAs at every stage of the process? Greater devolution of economic development resources to city-regional level can lead to better outcomes (Marshall and Finch, 2006). Structural Funds are no exception.

Match-funding: In a critical shift from previous years, private co-financing cannot be used during the 2007-2013 programmes. So the public sector needs to develop new match funding mechanisms – typically 50 per cent of a project's value – to ensure that ERDF money can be spent. Unless the Government, RDAs and local authorities collaborate to develop new match-funding mechanisms, the potential of ERDF programmes may never be realised.

The NSRF suggests that EU money will be integrated with RDA Single Pots and Local Area Agreements, but it is unlikely that these moves will provide enough flexibility for regions, cities and towns to match-fund without Government support. The 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review will now include a review of sub-national economic development and regeneration programmes. This will aim to rationalise the proliferation of funding streams. We welcome this step, but urge the review to ensure that future arrangements are sufficiently devolved to allow cities to access key match-funding resources.

Yet despite these concerns, the flexibilities and vagueness built into the NSRF have a silver lining. They offer an important opportunity to concentrate limited European resources on Britain's city-regions – which are best placed to drive wider economic growth.

"Cities must show how a clear spatial focus on urban areas will help to achieve key national goals, such as boosting regional economic performance"

City-regions: Britain's areas of opportunity for 2007-2013

Why city-regions? First, the Government's new ERDF and ESF priorities all have a heavy bias towards big urban areas. Programmes to build up the business base, extend employment opportunities, and build sustainable communities will deliver real added value when concentrated in Britain's biggest conurbations.

Second, rural areas benefit from ring-fenced Rural Development Programmes of their own, although about 80 per cent of this money goes to agriculture and forestry. A root-and-branch reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and a full transfer of resources from Pillar 1 (farm subsidies) to Pillar 2 (broader rural development measures), will help to promote rural vitality (Midgley and Adams, forthcoming). Britain's remaining ERDF and ESF money can logically therefore be focused on economic development in cities and towns.

Third, there is a growing consensus at the heart of Government that city-regions play a critical role in driving wider economic performance (SURF, 2004; Parkinson *et al*, 2006; HM Treasury *et al*, 2006; SURF and CUPS, 2006). RDAs are under pressure to focus their Economic Strategies more closely around city-regions as areas of opportunity. These shifts have clear resonance with the stated aims of the Structural Funds.

Over the past two years, British policy-makers have developed a new and welcome focus on cities. In addition, they increasingly accept that different cities have different needs – and that economic development powers and funding need to be devolved downward (Marshall and Finch, 2006).

The forthcoming Local Government White Paper and the Lyons Inquiry are expected to explore ways to empower England's major cities. The 2006 Budget included a major paper devoted exclusively to the critical role that city-regions play in regional and national economies (HM Treasury *et al*, 2006). And a number of Whitehall departments, such as the DWP, DfES and DfT, are all beginning to engage in the city and city-regional agendas. The DWP has even announced a new city-based initiative to promote employment (DWP, 2006).

Whitehall's shift towards city- and city-regional policy should be mirrored in Britain's 2007-2013 Structural Funds programmes. But cities and their supporters must speak up and win this argument – both in Whitehall and at the regional level.

How can they do this?

First, big cities outside the Greater South East must make a strong case for concentrating EU resources on urban areas. The lion's share of Structural Funding has been spent in the Midlands and North in the past, but has had a regional rather than city-regional focus. Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds and Newcastle need to set out a strong economic case for EU support, and convince RDAs, the Government and the European Commission to accept Operational Programmes that focus funding on urban economic development. They must show how a clear spatial focus on urban areas will help to achieve key national goals, such as boosting regional economic performance, as well as the Europe-wide 'growth and jobs' agenda.

Second, cities must investigate other potential European funding streams. In the past, Structural Funds have been seen by many urban areas as a 'cash cow' for infrastructure and flagship buildings (Loftman, 1996). But cities also need to tap into other EU-wide efforts to achieve the Lisbon priorities (CEC, 2005a). For example, cities should work harder to access 'the smart money' – especially the €50bn budgeted for scientific research and innovation under the new EU budget (Giordano, 2005). Joint bids for European innovation funding would give universities, cities and local businesses a key boost – and a tool with which to tackle Britain's well-documented failure to capitalise on its science base (Lambert, 2003). In the past, a lot of European innovation money has been won by universities in the 'Golden Triangle' of Oxford, London and Cambridge. From 2007, Science Cities in the Midlands and North need to make a co-ordinated effort to lever in more of this investment for their own economies.

"It is the big city-regions outside London – such as Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow – that can most effectively use limited EU resources to deliver a step-change in economic growth."

Conclusions

The UK has one final chance to access a substantial amount of European Structural Funding – a chance that it cannot afford to waste.

But rather than spread the remaining EU funding thinly across the country, we have one final opportunity to use Structural Funds to support the Government's goal of stronger regional economic performance. Focusing the remaining resources on cities and city-regions will help make this a reality.

As EUROCITIES notes, 'cities could deliver much more, and more effectively, with the support of the national and European levels' (2006: 4). In Britain, it is the big city-regions outside London – Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Tyneside and Glasgow – that can most effectively use limited EU resources to deliver a step-change in economic growth.

The big decisions will all be taken in the next few months – and a substantial sum of economic development money is at stake. Whitehall needs to sharpen its strategy for planning and delivering Britain's last big tranche of EU investment. Cities and their allies need to make a stronger case for getting the money, using Whitehall's growing focus on city-regions to demonstrate their economic importance. At the same time, cities must also explore the big, untapped sources of European cash – such as the innovation and research budgets – which will be available to them long after Structural Funding leaves the scene.

The bell has rung for last orders – but Britain's cities have one last chance to make it to the bar before time is called.

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The **Centre for Cities** is an independent urban research unit based at ippr, the Institute for Public Policy Research. We are taking a fresh look at how UK cities function, focusing on the economic drivers behind city growth – investment, enterprise, innovation, skills and employment.

This paper is part of our rolling series of discussion papers which will be posted on our website www.ippr.org/centreforcities

Adam Marshall is a researcher at the Centre for Cities. He can be contacted at a.marshall@ippr.org. **John Adams** is research director at ippr north. He can be contacted at j.adams@ippr.org.

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