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**Executive Summary**

This E Note invites the sector to contribute to the UK HE sector response to the European Commission consultation on the future of EU cohesion funding.

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## European Commission consultation on European Union Cohesion Policy

**Introduction**

1. This Europe Note alerts the UK higher education (HE) sector to a European Commission consultation on the future of European Union (EU) cohesion policy. Stakeholders are invited to send comments to the UK HE Europe Unit by 25 January 2008 to inform a UK HE sector response to the consultation.

**Background**

2. The current cohesion funding programmes will run until 2013. The European Commission has launched a consultation on the future of this funding beyond 2013. The European Commission's 'Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion'<sup>1</sup> informs the consultation.

**'Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion'**

3. The report provides an overview of the economic and social cohesion of the enlarged EU of 27 member states and its regions. In summary, the report highlights:

- A narrowing in disparities in income and employment across the EU but a need to address remaining inequalities between rich and poor
- A positive impact of cohesion policy on regional convergence and employment and reducing social exclusion and poverty
- A decline in public investment due to ageing population and economic reform leading to consolidation of public finances. A slow trend towards decentralisation of public investment to regional and local levels.
- The potential of EU policies – R&D and innovation, agriculture, competition and state aid - to increase the effectiveness of cohesion policy. The report

<sup>1</sup> The report can be downloaded at the following link:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/index_en.htm)

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shows that this is increasingly happening but that there are still synergies to exploit.

### **Consultation questions**

4. The report proposes the following questions for a wide debate on the future of cohesion policy.

1. What lessons can you draw from the experience of preparing the 2007-2013 programmes? In this context and in the light of the analysis provided by this report, how far is cohesion policy adapted to the new challenges European regions will face in the coming years? For example:

1.1. How can the regions react to restructuring pressures from dynamic competitors in low and medium tech sectors?

1.2. Given wide differences in birth rates, death rates and migratory flows at regional level, what is the role of cohesion policy in responding to demographic change?

1.3. To what extent is climate change a challenge for cohesion policy?

2. How can cohesion policy further develop an integrated and more flexible approach to development/growth and jobs in this new context?

2.1. How can cohesion policy better promote harmonious, balanced and sustainable development taking into account the diversity of EU territories, such as least favoured areas, islands, rural and coastal areas but also cities, declining industrial regions, other areas with particular geographic characteristics?

2.2. What are the impacts of the challenges identified in the report for key elements of social cohesion such as inclusion, integration and opportunity for all? Are further efforts needed to anticipate and counteract these impacts?

2.3. What are the key future skills that are essential for our citizens in facing new challenges?

2.4. What are the critical competencies that should be developed at the regional level to make regions globally competitive?

3. Following the appraisal of the previous questions what is the assessment of the policy management for 2007-2013 period?

3.1. Given the need for efficient management of cohesion policy programmes, what is the optimum allocation of responsibility between the Community, national and regional levels within a multi-level governance system?

3.2. How can cohesion policy become more effective in supporting public policies in Member States and regions? What mechanisms of delivery could make the policy more performance-based and more user-friendly?

3.3. How can we further strengthen the relationship between cohesion policy and other national and Community policies to achieve more and better synergies and complementarities?

3.4. What are the new opportunities for co-operation between regions, both within and outside the EU?



### **Conclusion**

5. The Europe Unit will produce a UK HE sector response to this consultation to influence European Commission thinking on this important area of EU policy. The response will support future lobbying by the Europe Unit and other UK HE sector representatives on the future of cohesion policy.
  
6. UK HE sector stakeholders are invited to send comments to the Europe Unit ([Tanja.Schubert@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk](mailto:Tanja.Schubert@UniversitiesUK.ac.uk)) no later than 23 January 2008 to inform the UK HE sector response.

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