

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals - Applications European Social Fund

Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth

Managing Authority	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Co-Financing Organisation	West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
ESI Fund	European Social Fund
Priority Axis	Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth
Investment Priority	2.2: Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems
Call Reference	Workforce for the Future - Call 01
Call Area	West of England (LEP / WECA)
Call Opens	10 February 2020
Call Closes	6 April 2020, 4:00pm
Application Process	2 stage: 1) Outline / Expression of Interest Application Form 2) Full Application Form



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1. Call Context

The 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) bring the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) together into a single European Union (EU) Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) Growth Programme for England supporting the key growth priorities of innovation, research and development, support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), low carbon, skills, employment, and social inclusion. The Government has confirmed that it will guarantee funding for ESF projects that are contracted by the end of 2020. This ensures that UK organisations, such as charities, businesses and universities, will continue to receive funding over a project's lifetime if they successfully bid into EU-funded programmes before the end of 2020. Details of how those receiving ESF grant will be affected after Brexit can be found at the following [website link](#).

All contracted ESF projects must be completed by the end of the programme period in 2023. Each application for ESF will be required to demonstrate that it delivers good value for money and domestic strategic priorities.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is the “Managing Authority” for ESF with the West of England acting as Co-Financing Organisation for the programme.

This call is issued by WECA to commission ESF Funded projects that will support the **Priority Axis 2 of the Operational Programme: Skills for Growth and Investment Priority: 2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems** as set out in the ESF Operational Programme.

All applications will need to be eligible under the European Social Fund Operational Programme for England 2014 to 2020. The [ESF Operational Programme](#) is available for applicants to read.

This call for proposals sets out the requirements for any applicants to consider before applying. Applications against this call will be appraised as part of a two-stage appraisal process and successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement with the Co-Financing Organisation, WECA. Further information is given in sections 4 to 9.

All ESF applicants will need to be aware of the requirement to collect and report data on all participants. This will be in addition to the requirement to report on the output and result indicators referred to in section 3 of the call for proposal.



1.1 National Context

This priority axis aims to support skills for growth. It will support activities through: Investment Priority 2.2 - Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes.

ESF will not fund activity that duplicates or cuts across national policy on grants and loans for tuition for skills activities. Exemptions to this principle will be considered only where a local specific need and/or market failure has been demonstrated and where the activity falls within the scope of the Operational Programme.

Full details of what can and cannot be supported under this Investment Priority are set out in the Operational Programme. Details of the specific objectives have been reproduced below.

Specific Objective	Results that the Member States seek to achieve with Union support
To promote improvements in the labour market relevance of skills provision through active engagement with relevant institutions and employers, particularly SMEs and Micro businesses.	The additional support from this investment priority will enable the design of skills provision which will help individuals gain skills and qualifications relevant to the needs of the labour market



1.2 Local Need

Projects must deliver activity which directly contributes to the objectives of Priority Axis 2, Investment Priority 2.2 of the Operational Programme, and which meets the local development need expressed in the text and table below.

Workforce for the Future responds to challenges set out in the West of England [Local Industrial Strategy](#) and [Employment and Skills Plan](#), reference should therefore be given to these two documents when responding to the Call. The Workforce for the Future [Guidance Document](#) should also be considered.

Local Priorities:

The West of England is a region with a strong tradition of innovation and a place where business grow and the creative, digital and technology sectors meet with traditional industry. Despite its strengths, the West of England recognises that there are still challenges to be overcome if the region is to meet its full potential. One area to address is the continued reporting by business of workforce skills challenges, including:

- Unfulfilled job vacancies (both current and future)
- Lack of management capacity to explore how to improve recruitment processes, develop existing personnel, conduct future workforce planning or scale up teams for growth effectively.
- Learners produced by local provision are not meeting their requirements or expectations
- Applicants leaving FE/HE education lack the personal aptitudes and experience required by employers for entering the labour market
- Current and ongoing skills shortages resulting from a migration to digital systems and an ageing workforce
- Lack of awareness of regional skills provision and. or lack of connection with learning and training providers
- Lack of diversity; both current and prospective workforce in some areas, is not reflective of our regional demographic

To address these challenges Workforce for the Future is seeking to deliver targeted solutions that help businesses, in particular SMEs, to build better relationships with and understanding of education and training systems, working with training providers to establish a current and future pipeline of talent and thus empower SMEs to bring about the change necessary to ensure the future prosperity of the region.

The focus of this call is therefore to help business identify their skills and workforce development needs and to build capacity within SMEs to provide opportunities to support people in gaining work placements and experience in its broadest sense and thus help towards the achievement of the West of England's Employment and Skills Plan, in



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particular Objective 5: Ensuring employers are able to recruit and retain the diverse skills and talent they need to thrive from within and beyond the region.

Call Outline

Through this call, WECA are seeking a broad programme of activity, which will establish:

1) A backbone service

This could be a service that is delivered by one organisation or consortia or several organisations /consortia working on individual components of the programme but who will closely liaise and work together to deliver a joined up and cohesive service that maximises the outputs and results of the programme. The Backbone Service provider(s) should provide evidence of broad geographic coverage and where possible the support of any other regional stakeholders. It is key for the provider(s) of the backbone service to act as a co-ordinator or ‘matchmaker’ and bring together SMEs and consortia to ensure:

- SMEs are engaged in the programme
- SMEs skills needs and challenges are identified
- SME opportunities for placements, in the broadest sense, are identified and made available to learners
- Dialogue and channels for continued discussions between SMEs and consortia are opened up

2) Consortia bids

Bids are welcomed across a range of system, sector and geographies. The proposals could amongst other things seek to:

- address the barriers that are preventing SMEs from providing placement opportunities in the widest sense
- engage learners who are under-represented in sectors
- help participants advance their skills

More information on the types of activities being sought can be found [here](#).

We are looking for bids across a range of intervention areas and will not fund more than one bid for the same intervention unless the two are either geographically independent or through the Steering Group a way to ensure that there is no duplication or competition can be found, otherwise WECA would instead work with both proposers to seek a combined consortia.

Bids sought should be of a level that will have impact and therefore WECA are seeking for most bids to be of £500,000 value or more, to allow for the intervention to be truly embedded and reach a wide audience.



Some smaller innovative bids which seek lesser funding amounts will be considered if they are testing new ways of engagement or seeking to trial new ways of working.

Proposals put forward against points 1 & 2 above should seek to create a legacy and evidence of how longevity will be achieved will be required in the application process.

In all bid instances, we recommend that you engage with WECA in developing your proposals to ensure that we can provide guidance and help join up proposals where there are synergies.

All applicants / consortia should be aware that although funding is likely to be split across multiple providers, all providers are to work towards one programme, outputs and results.

Alignment

Applicants must ensure that the proposed project activity does not duplicate or undermine initiatives currently being delivered within the region or national education and skills policy. Proposed projects may support and compliment initiatives already underway, though the additionality and added value of the proposal and its impact on the other initiative should be thoroughly explained.

Projects must support SMEs and must not compete with other regional ESF investments where relevant.

Target Audience

Activities should be focused on support to SME organisations as the primary target audience, however applicants should also provide information on the total number of participants expected to benefit from the project as a consequence of the ESF project support to SME organisations, with breakdowns of the data provided at e.g. skills achievement level, equalities level etc

The high level numbers should be recorded in the Full Application Form, Section 4 Delivery and in more details with breakdowns in the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan contained in Appendix 1 of the Full Application Form. Performance of the projects will then include monitoring against the individual participants target (ESF Output Target O1) as well as the relevant SME Output and Result targets.

Consortia/Partnership Applications

Applications are encouraged from consortia or other similar types of partnership arrangements. In each such case the application must be completed and submitted to WECA (workfoceforthefuture@westofengland-ca.gov.uk) by the lead organisation on behalf of the partnership/consortia. The lead applicant must have the financial capacity to meet the required Due Diligence criteria and, if ESF funding is awarded, this organisation will then become the lead Grant Recipient, accountable for delivery of the overall project.



1.3 Scope of Activity

This call invites applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 2, **Investment Priority 2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems** of the European Social Fund Operational Programme and responds to the local development need set out in the WECA Employment and Skills Plan

This call aims to address the identified shortfalls listed in section 1.2 Local Development Need above.



2. Call Requirements

All applications are competitive.

Indicative Fund Allocation	<p>Indicatively, through this call the Managing Authority expects to allocate approximately £3,000,000 ESF.</p> <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to decrease or increase the indicative allocation, or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received.</p>
Minimum application level	<p>European Social Fund investment is intended to make a significant impact on local growth. Applications are expected to demonstrate appropriate scale and impact. The Co-Financing Organisation does not intend to allocate less than £500,000 of ESF to any single project.</p> <p>Applications requesting an ESF amount below the ‘Minimum Application Level’ will be considered only if they demonstrate that they are seeking to deliver an innovate project which could lead to learning and new ways of working.</p>
Duration of project approvals	<p>All ESF Projects must be completed by 31st December 2023. Project costs cannot be incurred beyond this date.</p>

ESF cannot be used to duplicate existing activities or activities that do not address market failure. ESF can only be used to achieve additional activity or bring forward activity more quickly. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that proposals are additional to activity that would have occurred anyway or enables activity to be brought forward and delivered more quickly than otherwise would be the case in response to opportunity or demand.



3. Deliverables required under this Call

Applications will be expected to achieve the minimum indicative level of Programme Deliverables by contributing to the following Investment Priority. The definitions of which can be accessed at the ESF Operational Programme.

Investment Priority	2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems
Specific Objectives	To promote improvements in the labour market relevance of skills provision through active engagement with relevant institutions and employers, particularly SMEs and micro businesses.
Indicative Actions	ESF will not support activities that duplicate or replace existing support within national programmes, but may be used to support additional activities, including provision co-designed with local partners.
Examples of activities that may be supported include: More information on examples available here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for intermediate and high-level vocational skills for career progression, with a particular focus on higher level apprenticeships (where provision is not currently available) • Develop the skills / capacity within SMEs to create apprenticeship opportunities, and to manage / support apprentices • Work with employers to provide placements or internships that enable students to gain industry-relevant, high quality, experience and skills, or for educators to improve their industry relevant experience • Build capacity in employers to provide placement and internship opportunities, particularly for those who face particular disadvantage or are from a disadvantaged group. • Develop mechanisms to involve employers in the design and / or delivery of skills provision • Support clusters of companies to work together to work together to address the challenges of recruiting / supporting employees to undertake a higher level / degree apprenticeship at NVQ Level 3 or above • Develop a mechanisms to gather feedback from employers on the appropriateness and relevance of the support provided



Outputs Table

ID	Outputs Indicator	Minimum Target value for this call
CO23	Number of supported micro, small and medium sized enterprises (including co-operative enterprises and enterprises of the social economy)	200
O1	Total number of participants	There is no target value for this call however applicants will be expected to provide a total number of participants the project is aiming to support in both the application

Results Table

ID	Result Indicator	Minimum Target value for this call
R9	<p>Small and Medium Enterprises successfully completing projects (which increase employer engagement; and/or the number of people progressing into or within skills provision)</p> <p><i>Projects must have demonstrated that: (i) more employers became engaged in skills provision as a result of the ESF-funded activity and/ or (ii) the project resulted in an increase in the number of people progressing into or within skills provision as a result of the ESF-funded activity</i></p>	75%

Outputs and Results Rationale

Applicants must explain in detail in their Full Application how they have estimated each of the outputs and results for their project, demonstrating clearly how each of the proposed outputs and results directly link to their specific project activities and objectives. The related output and results figures need to be consistent e.g. there should not be more 'Inactive Participant' forecast results than actual Inactive Participants recorded as taking part in the project in the forecasted output figures.



Applicants must also explain their approach for forecasting each deliverable; including the research they have undertaken to ensure their projected profiles are realistic and achievable and any assumptions they have made which impact on their forecasts.

Where an applicant is proposing one or more output or result figures below the expected minimum target value for this call, an explanation must also be provided by the applicant in their Full Application.

ESF Outputs and Results Indicator Definitions Guidance is available on GOV.UK [here](#).

Applicants will also need to ensure robust systems are in place, and be able to describe them, to capture and record the targets and to report quantitative and qualitative performance across the West of England area. All operations will be required to collect data and report progress against the deliverables with each claim. Where an operation underperforms against their deliverables they may be subject to a performance penalty. The following forms will need to be completed on a regular basis to monitor and help ensure project progress remains on track:

Annex G - Outputs & Results Profile	 Annex%20G%20-%20Output%20and%20
Annex M - Learner Monitoring Spreadsheet	 Annex%20M%20-%20Learner%20-%20M
Annex Q - SME Monitoring Spreadsheet	 Annex%20Q%20-%20SME%20Monitorin;
Annex P - Learner Progress Form	 Annex%20P%20-%20Learner%20Progres
Annex N - SME Support Summary Form	 Annex%20N%20-%20SME%20Support%;
Annex O - SME Meaningful Activity Completion Form	 Annex%20O%20-%20SME%20Meaningft



4. General Information

Essential information to support the drafting of an application and delivery of a successful ESF funded project is available at the European Growth Funding [website pages](#).

4.1 Compliance and Eligibility

When developing an application, Applicants should refer to guidance on eligibility, activities and costs. These are for guidance only and Applicants should take their own specialist advice if in doubt. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that the rules and guidance are adhered to both at application stage and following approval.

If successful, Applicants will enter into a Grant Funding Agreement with WECA and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to read these terms and conditions before signing to ensure that they would be able to enter into such an agreement. Once a Funding Agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within a short timescale.

4.2 Claims

Grant funding claims should be submitted quarterly in arrears (using Annex J WFTF Financial Claim Form, embedded within the full application form). This form should be submitted on behalf of the consortia by the lead partner.

Funds will not be paid in advance and expenditure must be defrayed prior to the submission of any claims. Applicants may be asked to demonstrate how they are able to cash flow the operation.

4.3 Applicants and Consortia Structure

All applicants (partners within a consortia) must be legally constituted at the point of signing a Funding Agreement, and the lead organisation for the consortia able to enter into a legally binding Funding Agreement. If an application is successful it will be the lead applicant/ lead organisation for the consortia that enters into a contract and therefore carries the liability for ensuring that the terms of the Funding Agreement and a compliant project are met by them and all delivery partners. WECA will consider the lead applicant's track record, both positive and negative, in delivering projects as well as other partners. If the Applicant has been involved in the delivery of previous European grants or WECA & LEP funded projects and any irregularities with this (these) grant(s) have been identified, then this will be looked into with an expectation to see how and what steps have been taken to ensure that these have been addressed to mitigate the



risk of further irregularities in the future. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to ESIF funding and will not have a track record.

4.4 Cross Cutting Themes

All applications received under this Call should demonstrate how the Cross Cutting Themes have been addressed in the project design and development. Cross cutting themes for ESF are 'gender equality and equal opportunities' and 'sustainable development'.

For ESF, the project applicants will be required to deliver their services in-line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (as defined in the Equality Act 2010). All projects must have a gender and equal opportunities policy and implementation plan which will be submitted at full application stage (Appendix 2 of the Full Application).

For ESF, all projects will also be required to submit a sustainable development policy and implementation plan.

The ESF programme particularly welcomes projects that have an environmental focus that can meet the strategic fit at local and programme level whilst also adding value by:

- supporting environmental sustainability; and/ or □ complementing the environmental thematic objectives of other programmes such as ERDF; and/or
- using the environment as a resource to help motivate disadvantaged people

Projects should also demonstrate how they support the programme themes and values, in particular: Ambitious, Collaborative, Creative and Supportive.

4.5 State Aid & Revenue Generation

Applicants are required, in the Full Application, to provide a view on how their proposal complies with State Aid law. Applicants must ensure that projects comply with the law on State Aid¹. Grant funding to any economic undertaking which is state aid can only be awarded if it is compatible aid, in that it complies with the terms of a notified scheme or is covered by the De Minimis Regulation. Guidance for grant recipients, explaining more about State Aid, is available; it is important that Applicants take responsibility for understanding the importance of the State Aid rules and securing their full compliance with them throughout the project, if it is selected into the Programme.

¹ Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that: "Save as otherwise provided in the Treaties, any aid granted by a Member State or through state resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market."



WECA is not able to give legal advice on State Aid. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that the operation is State Aid compliant. Where the Applicant does not perceive that there is any State Aid, it should state whether or not it considers Articles 61 and 65(8) of regulation 1303/2013 to apply. This revenue should be taken into account in calculating eligible expenditure. Article 61 refers to monitoring revenues generated after completion of the project, and Article 65(8) how to deal with differences in the forecast and actual revenues at the end of the operation. The details of this will be tested at the full application stage.

4.6 Funding Agreement

The Funding Agreement is a standard, non-negotiable and legally binding document. Any successful Applicant will be subject to the terms and conditions contained within this agreement. Applicants are strongly advised to seek their own advice to ensure that they would be able to enter into and abide by the terms of the Funding Agreement. Failure to meet any of the conditions of the agreement or the commitments within the application will result in claw back of funding. Applicants should be aware that additional provisions and securities may be included within the Funding Agreement to protect the investment. These will be further discussed if relevant following the Full Application stage.

4.7 Procurement

All costs delivered by the Grant Recipient (the applicant) and/or delivery partners must be delivered on an actual cost basis. Other costs must be procured in line with EU regulations. The most common error identified during audit has been failure to comply with relevant procurement regulations and crucially to maintain a full audit trail to prove that they have complied with the relevant regulation. Robust and transparent procurement is required to ensure that Grant Recipients:

- consider value for money;
- maximise efficient use of public money; and
- maintain competitiveness and fairness across the European Union.

It is recommended that applicants seek their own legal advice pertaining to their procurement and requirements to publicise any tendering opportunities. WECA is not able to give legal advice on procurement. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the project is compliant in this respect.



4.8 Retrospection

There will be no retrospection for applications made against this call.

For organisations applying for ESF funds, the effective date for incurring eligible ESF expenditure will be the day after the relevant open call closing date. Any expenditure incurred by an project prior to this date is ineligible. However, any expenditure incurred by an applicant, up to and including the date on which a Funding Agreement is fully executed, will be at the applicant's own risk.

5. Application Process and Prioritisation Methodology

Application for funding is through a two-stage process. Stage 1 seeks an Expression of Interest / high level information on the proposal. Stage 2 is a full application process which requires more detail and supporting documents to be completed. Applicants can submit a full application form only should they wish however we would advise that unless discussions with WECA on the project proposal have taken place that an Expression of Interest application (Stage 1 Form) is submitted first.

Following the Call application forms can be downloaded from the WECA website ([Workforce for the Future webpage](#)). Call 1 will open on 10 February 2020 and close on 6 April 2020 at 4pm - this is the deadline for both Stage 1 & 2 applications.

The Stage 1 application assessment will assess the suitability of the proposal against Gateway criteria:

- **Consortia eligibility** - project proposer is eligible to apply for funding / ESF funding
- **Project proposal eligibility** - Proposed activity eligible for support / ESF funding & only funding WFTF activity
- **Supportive of the Call** - Evidence to support contribution to the needs and challenges identified in the Call, the Investment Priority, and wider links to the LIS and ESP.

The Stage 2 application assessment will review the bids against a broader set of criteria including:

- **Strategic Fit** - the linkages with the ESF Operating programme and its priority, WECA priorities, links to existing initiatives & evidence to support the proposal
- **Value for Money** - the financial aspects of the proposal and the return on investment
- **Management** - the way in which the project will be run and governed



- Deliverability - engagement proposals, linkages to cohorts (SME & participants), forecast outputs
- Support of Cross Cutting Themes - Equality and Diversity, Sustainable Development, Additionality and Added Value

Non-public sector applicants may be subject to due financial diligence checks. Applicants will be required to submit accounts, and to clarify financial or other organisational information.

Only information supplied as part of the application process will be considered in the assessment process, WECA will not accept further detail outside this process.

An Assessment Panel will be established drawing on internal expertise within WECA. The Skills Advisory Panel within WECA will review the shortlisted bids and make recommendations to WECA CEOs meeting.

6. Submission Information

All Full Applications for this Call must be completed and submitted using only the Stage 1 & 2 application forms. Applications submitted via any other method / form will not be accepted.

All forms should be submitted to the email - workforceforthefuture@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

It is your responsibility to submit your application in good time to allow time to resolve any technical issues such as emailable size limits. Except in the unlikely event that there is a general failure of the system in the final hours, we will not normally extend the deadline for technical issues.

7. Key Reference Documents

When developing your Full Application, it is recommended that you refer to the following documents as a minimum:

- [Local Industrial Strategy](#)
- [Employment and Skills Plan](#)
- [ESF Operational Programme](#)
- [National ESF Eligibility Rules](#)
- [ESF Data Evidence Requirements](#)
- [ESF Output and Result Indicator Definitions Guidance \(page 73\)](#)



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8. Full Application - Supporting Document Checklist

Full Application Form		<input type="checkbox"/>
Annex J Financial Claim Form - forecasts columns [Quarterly Breakdown tab]		<input type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring and Evaluation Plan Including completion of forecasts within Annex's		<input type="checkbox"/>
Annex G - Outputs & Results Profile	 Annex%20G%20-%20 0Output%20and%20 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Annex M - Learner Monitoring Spreadsheet	 Annex%20M%20-%20 20Learner%20-%20M <input type="checkbox"/>	
Annex Q - SME Monitoring Spreadsheet	 Annex%20Q%20-%20 0SME%20Monitorin <input type="checkbox"/>	
Equalities and Diversity Plan		<input type="checkbox"/>
Sustainable Development Plan		<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Register		<input type="checkbox"/>
CFO Letter of Support		<input type="checkbox"/>
Project Team Structure Chart		<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Timescales

Launch of Call 1	Monday 10 February 2020
Application submission (Stage 1 & 2)	6 April 2020, 4pm

For this call applications will normally be required to commence delivery/activity within three months of the award of contract.



Any changes related to the deadline for the submission of the Full Application will be notified on the WECA [Workforce for the Future webpage](#).



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