



European Union

European
Social Fund

2014-2020 ESF Programme

Action Note

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New ECLAIMS Online Digital Service for ESF.

Who

ESF direct bid applicants, ESF Technical Assistance projects, local and national ESF Co-Financing Organisations, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Greater London Authority, Devolved Intermediate Bodies.

What

To confirm the ESF Online Digital Service for Applications and Appraisals is now live.

Cleared

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Background

As previously set out in Action Note 033/19 and Action Note 034/19, the ESF Managing Authority is moving to an online Applications and Appraisal process, using ECLAIMS.

This will replace current electronic, email based application and appraisal processes; and supports the work undertaken to streamline the appraisal process following feedback from Applicants, European Structural and Investment Fund Sub-Committees and other partners.

Following the design and development of new ECLAIMS functionality and supporting products, the new ESF Online Digital Service for Applications and Appraisals is now live, for all new ESF open calls published from Monday 29th April 2019.

Annex A of this Action Note sets out the key features of the new Online Digital Service.

Annex B of this Action Note contains Frequently Asked Questions about the new service.

Timing

All ESF open calls published from Monday 29th April onwards will instruct applicants to submit their Full Application via the ECLAIMS system.

Contact

For questions please contact: ESF.2014-2020@DWP.GOV.UK

Annex A: Key Features

Calls:

- ESF open calls will continue to be published on GOV.UK through the existing [Funding Finder](#) mechanism;
- New ESF open calls from Monday 29th April will be opened in ECLAIMS on the same day they are published on the GOV.UK funding finder – with the same call reference number in both locations;
- For ESF open calls published prior to Monday 29th April and Full Applications already in the ESF pipeline, application & appraisal forms and processes will continue to apply;
- The new ESF Online Full Application guidance on GOV.UK explains how applicants can request access to the ECLAIMS system if they are intending to apply against a published, online applications call.

Applications:

Under the new ESF Online Digital Service, applicants will no longer be required to:

- Complete a Full Application form, all full application information will either be entered or uploaded directly into the ECLAIMS IT system;
- Complete a separate Financial Annex at application stage – unless specifically stipulated in an individual ESF call;
- Complete a separate Indicator Annex at application stage – unless specifically stipulated in an individual ESF call;

In addition:

- Applicants will still be asked to provide the same range and type of information as part of their Full Application under the new online service;
- a new (optional) **Financial Annex – Simplified**, has been developed and published on GOV.UK as a working document, to help support applicants in developing and profiling their ESF Project costs, before entering this more complex information directly into ECLAIMS. As above, unless specified in the call, this Financial Annex does not need to be uploaded into ECLAIMS;
- a new (optional) **Granular Budget template**, has been developed and published on GOV.UK, to help support applicants in documenting a complete and compliant set of granular budget details for their ESF Project. A granular budget will still need to be uploaded into ECLAIMS as part of the Full Application in all cases, but applicants can decide whether to use this template or their own design;
- The published ESF Online Full Application Guidance is a comprehensive guidance document, consisting of both ECLAIMS user guidance elements as well as additional guidance explaining compliance and/or minimum requirements for an ESF Full Application.

Appraisals:

- We will retain the existing ESIF Selection Criteria and ESF Scoring Framework approaches when appraising applications and making funding decisions.

Technical Support:

If an applicant encounters any technical difficulties completing or submitting their Full Application via the ECLAIMS IT system, they should send an email to:

E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK

The technical support operating hours are Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm.

Supporting Online Application Products:

All new online application templates and guidance products are available to applicants via the [England 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds](#) pages on GOV.UK.

It is highly recommended that the new and revised guidance products are read in full by Applicant/Grant Recipient and CFO organisation staff involved in applying for ESF funding including Delivery Partners where applicable.

Annex B: Frequently Asked Questions

ECLAIMS Access:

Q. How do Applicants obtain access to ECLAIMS?

A. In order to submit a Full Application via ECLAIMS, an individual in the lead applicant organisation must have Applicant User Access permissions.

Even if that organisation or individual already has access to the ECLAIMS IT system for your other ESF Projects, this may not include Applicant User Access permissions.

To obtain Applicant User Access permissions, please request an 'ECLAIMS External Access Form' by emailing:

E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK

An External Access Form will need to be completed and returned for each person who requires ECLAIMS access. Applicants should make it clear in their email which current, published ESF call they are intending to apply against.

Q. Do I have to request ECLAIMS access as soon as an ESF call is published?

A. It is the lead applicant organisation's responsibility to ensure they request and activate their ECLAIMS access in sufficient time.

We strongly advise that applicants obtain and activate their ECLAIMS Applicant User Access as soon as they are aware they intend to apply against a current, published ESF call and at least 2 weeks prior to the advertised call closure date.

Q. Do I need to use a specific browser for E-Claims system?

A. The ECLAIMS IT system is a web based application available through the link below. It is recommended that you use the Chrome browser to access ECLAIMS, or if this isn't available, Firefox.

<https://ECLAIMS.communities.gov.uk/esif-web/>

Applications:

Q. If there is an existing call for ESF inviting word document applications can I submit an online application instead?

A. No. Unless the call specifically requests an online application you should apply using the word document application form and submit via email.

Q. Is there guidance available on how to complete an ESF online application?

A. The new, comprehensive ESF Online Full Application Guidance can be found by accessing the [European Social fund online full applications](#) page on GOV.UK. This is a comprehensive guidance document, consisting of both ECLAIMS user guidance elements as well as additional guidance explaining compliance and/or minimum requirements for an ESF Full Application.

Q. What happens if I have technical issues with ECLAIMS on the call closing date and this prevents me from submitting my online application on time?

A. If an applicant organisation encounters any technical difficulties completing or submitting their Full Application via the ECLAIMS IT system, they should send an email to E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK as soon as possible.

It is the applicant's responsibility to submit their application in good time to allow time to resolve any technical issues.

Except in the unlikely event that there is a general programme-wide failure of the system in the final hours, we will not normally extend the call closure deadline for technical issues.

Q. How will I know that the Managing Authority has received my online application?

A. When an applicant submits their application, they get an automatic on-screen acknowledgement message confirming their application has been submitted to the Managing Authority successfully.

In addition, in the Applicant's ECLAIMS homepage they will be able to see their application has a status of 'Submitted' and also the date and time of submission. The applicant will also be able to see the current, updated status of their application as it moves through the online appraisal and decision stages.

Q. Do I need to submit separate Financial and Indicator Annexes as part of my ESF online application?

A. As confirmed in Annex A of this Action Note and in the ESF Online Full Application guidance, separate Financial Annexes and Indicator Annexes will not need to be routinely provided as part of an ESF online application.

There may be some isolated instances where one or both Annexes are required as supporting documents at application stage. If this is the case, this will be made clear in the individual ESF open call specification in each case.

A new 'Financial Annex – Simplified' version has been developed and published on GOV.UK to help you collate and 'test' your ESF Project costs on paper, before you record the actual final details directly into ECLAIMS. However, unless specified in the individual ESF call, you do not need to submit this Annex as part of your online application.

Q. How do I upload supporting information/documents into ECLAIMS as part of my ESF online application?

A. The ESF Online Full Application Guidance, provides instructions on how to upload information/documents into the ECLAIMS IT system.

Each call specification includes a list of the documents which must be uploaded into ECLAIMS in each case. The ESF Online Full Application Guidance also sets out which documents are mandatory in all cases and which are optional, depending on the type of applicant organisation and/or other project characteristics.

The ESF Online Full Application Guidance also sets out the naming conventions and version control to be used for each supporting document.

Applicants should note that uploading supporting documents is not a substitute for completing the actual fields and questions in the ECLAIMS online application itself.

Q. Are there any document formats which cannot be uploaded into ECLAIMS?

A. The ECLAIMS IT system can accept most standard Office file formats such as MS Word documents and excel documents in the format xlsx. However, documents which contain active macros cannot be uploaded into ECLAIMS.

Q. Can information be 'cut and pasted' from another document into ECLAIMS?

A. Yes. It is possible to cut and paste from word documents into the free text fields in ECLAIMS. However, when doing this, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure the information has been pasted correctly and in full in ECLAIMS.

With financial figures, we recommend typing these in rather than cutting and pasting to avoid validation issues and also to avoid errors if there are formula or other hidden calculations in the source document which may prevent figures from being pasted accurately into ECLAIMS.

Q. Will the word version of the ESF Application Form be withdrawn from GOV.UK?

A. The current ESIF Full Application form will remain on GOV.UK for the foreseeable future. This current application form will continue to be needed for both existing ESF open calls published prior to Monday 29th April.

The same form is also used by the ERDF 2014-2020 Programme and, at present, ERDF are not expecting to introduce an online application service.

In addition, the ECLAIMS IT system development has been based on the current application form format and mirrors the questions asked on that document, therefore new ESF applicants who are working with a range of delivery partners may want to use the existing ESF Full Application form as a working document to inform their final, collated ESF online application responses.

Q. My organisation has a range of delivery partners; can they view or access the ECLAIMS online application for my proposed ESF Project?

A. Only the lead applicant organisation will be able to view the ECLAIMS online application information in the system. In addition, once an individual in that organisation has started to complete the online Full Application, the same individual will be the only person who can update, amend and submit that online application. Other individuals in that organisation who have Applicant User Access permissions will be able to view the online application, but as 'view only'.

As above, if you need to work with a range of delivery partners to develop your Full Application content, you can use the ESF Online Full Application Guidance to give your partners sight of the type of information you need from them. You can also use the current ESIF Full Application Form, Indicator Annex, Financial Annex – Simplified and/or Granular Budget templates on GOV.UK as 'working documents' to gather your individual Delivery Partner contributions. Your organisation will then need to collate the responses into a single set of information which can then be recorded directly into the relevant screens and fields in ECLAIMS.

'Working documents' should not be uploaded into ECLAIMS as supporting documents under any circumstances.

Q. Can I print my ECLAIMS online full application?

A. Yes. Accessing any of the key sections of the online Full Application screens in ECLAIMS will bring up a 'print' icon in the top right hand corner of the ECLAIMS screen.

Selecting that icon will open a new window showing all of the Full Application information you have recorded in ECLAIMS. Moving your cursor to the bottom, middle section of this screen will bring up icons which allow you to save or print a copy of your Full Application.

The print/save icon can be used for partially completed and fully completed Full Applications.

Appraisal:

Q. Will ESF online applications still be presented to LEP Area ESIF Sub-Committees for their advice on Strategic fit and Value for Money? If so, what documentation will be provided to the LEP Area ESIF Sub-Committee?

A. As now, the relevant LEP Area ESIF Sub-Committee will continue to provide their advice on both the Strategic Fit and Value for Money of each ESF Full Application received via the online service.

As per the current process and Terms of Reference, the LEP Area ESIF Sub-Committee will be provided with an appraisal report for each application. This report will provide a synopsis of the project (which will be repeated verbatim from the online

application) and outputs, results and financial data. A PDF copy of the relevant document will be downloaded from ECLAIMS by the Managing Authority and this will be circulated to the relevant LEP areas ESF Funds sub-committee in the usual way.

Q. How will my appraiser contact me if they have any questions or need any information from me during the appraisal process?

A. If your ESF Online Full Application successfully passes the Gateway Assessment, as now, it will move into the iterative part of the appraisal process.

If, as part of this iterative stage, your ESF appraiser has any questions or needs any additional or revised information from you, they will raise those queries in ECLAIMS and notify you via email that you need to access ECLAIMS to view and respond to those queries, including uploading any new or revised supporting documentation that may be needed.

The ESF Online Full Application Guidance explains how to access, view and respond to appraisal queries via ECLAIMS.

Q. How will I be notified of the ESF Managing Authority decision on my online application?

A. Once a decision is made on the outcome of your online Full Application, you will be issued with a notification letter via the ECLAIMS IT system.

Your appraiser will email you to let you know a decision has been made. You can then access ECLAIMS to view the relevant notification letter, as per the ESF Online Full Application Guidance.

Q. If my ESF Online Application is successful, how will my Funding Agreement be issued?

A. Once prepared, your Funding Agreement will be uploaded into ECLAIMS by your appraiser. You will then need to access ECLAIMS to download, print and sign your Funding Agreement before scanning and uploading your signed version back into ECLAIMS for the Managing Authority to then take their signatory action.

Again, this is explained in more detail in the ESF Online Full Application guidance.

Q. If my ESF Online Application is successful, can I use the same ECLAIMS access to manage the resulting live ESF Project?

A. No. At the Online Application stage, you will have been given User Access permissions which are for Applicants only. If you are then awarded ESF funding for your project, you will then need to submit new 'External Access Forms' for the individuals in your organisation who will be responsible for compiling, submitting and/or authorising claims for your ESF Project, as well as other contract management activities via ECLAIMS.