



European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020)  
Growth Programme for England

**Growth Programme Board March 2019**

**Updated ESF Scoring Framework** *(please note this paper should be printed in colour)*

**Purpose:**

This paper provides the Board with an updated ESF Scoring Framework document, amended to reflect EC Audit comments received as part of the ESF Early Preventative Systems Audit (EPSA)

**Recommendations:**

That the Growth Programme Board (GPB) approves the revised ESF Scoring Framework document, allowing it to then be published on GOV.UK.

The text in red within the ESF Scoring Framework document itself represents the proposed changes.

**Background:**

EU Auditors undertook their EPSA Audit in November/December 2017.

Against EPSA 'Finding 1' in their initial draft report, provided to the ESF Managing Authority in June 2018, EC Auditors noted that some specific types of ESF applications were not subject to the ESF Scoring Framework numerical scores. They therefore recommended that the ESF Scoring Framework document be updated to reflect these scenarios with GPB approval.

We undertook the relevant amendments to the ESF Scoring Framework and confirmed to EC Auditors that we would seek GPB approval of the revisions via written correspondence, as the next GPB meeting was not due to be held until September 2018.

The updated ESF Scoring Framework was then issued to the GPB on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018 for consideration by written procedure. It was formally approved on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018, again via written correspondence, and an updated version of the ESF Scoring Framework was uploaded to GOV.UK on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

Confirmation of this action was provided to EC Auditors on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2018 as part of a wider ESF managing Authority response to the final EPSA Audit report received in September 2018.

In a 'Position Note' received from the EC Auditors in February 2019, the auditors confirmed they were content for 'Finding 1' to be closed on the basis of the actions described above.

However, the same Position Note has now set out some additional requirements, where EC Auditors have requested further changes to the ESF Scoring Framework under Findings 2 and Finding 3. Given the risks associated with the wider Interruption linked to the EPSA Audit, we have taken action to make these required changes subject to GPB approval.

The changes are:

**EPSA Audit Finding 2:** Update to the ESF Scoring Framework to reflect the move to a single-stage application process.

Action Taken: We have annotated the ESF Scoring Framework to explain the context in which the Outline Assessment and Full Application scoring methodologies will apply.

As we have residual Outline Applications going through the pipeline at the moment it would be inappropriate and non-compliant to remove the Outline Application elements.

However, we suggest that, as the ESF Scoring Framework does not mandate use of the Outline Application stage or associated Outline Assessment scores, this additional wording explains the single-stage application impact for the ESF Scoring Framework to prevent the need for a further update of this Framework in the immediate future.

**EPSA Audit Finding 3:** Update to the ESF Scoring Framework to reflect that applications can be rejected solely on the basis of the Devolved Intermediate Body's decision on the following Strategic Fit Core Selection Criteria:

Action Taken: We have added a section to the ESF Scoring Framework to explain the role of the Devolved Intermediate Body in Outline Assessments and/or Full Appraisals, including the 2 specific Core Selection Criteria elements they are responsible for scoring/deciding under the terms of their Memorandum of Understanding with the ESF Managing Authority

**ESPA Audit Finding 4 & Finding 18b:** Introduce online Applications and Appraisals via the ECLAIMS IT system.

Whilst the EC Auditors have not made a specific request that the ESF Scoring Framework be updated to take account of the planned ECLAIMS online applications and appraisals service, we have taken this opportunity to amend the document to remove references to 'forms', reducing the risk of needing further amendments in future.



# European Social Fund Programme for England 2014-2020

## ESF Scoring Framework

# 2014-2020 European Social Fund Scoring Framework – minimum requirements and score rationale

## Overview

This document sets out the scoring framework for use on all applications received by the Managing Authority. The numerical scoring approaches described in this document apply to ESF Funding applications received from 11 July 2018 onwards.

The exceptions to this rule are those where the application is non-competitive, these include applications relating to Co-Financing activity, Technical Assistance and Community Led Local Development (CLLD). In these cases, the applicant is still required to meet the same minimum standards presented in this document to progress but no individual score or overall score will apply.

## Devolved Intermediate Bodies

In some Core Cities and other administrative areas within England, the Managing Authority has agreed to designate specific assessment/appraisal responsibilities to a small number of 'Devolved Intermediate Bodies'.

Where an agreed Devolved Intermediate Body is in place, in line with the standard Devolved Intermediate Body Memorandum of Understanding, they will be responsible for assessing/appraising each ESF Project Application against 2 specific elements of the Strategic Fit Core Selection Criteria:

- i. The proposed operation contributes to the needs/opportunities identified in the Call for Proposals to which it is responding;
- ii. The proposed operation is aligned to the local growth needs set out in the local ESI Funds Strategy and contributes to the specific objectives, outputs.

In carrying out their delegated role in appraising an ESF application against these specific Core Selection Criteria, the Devolved Intermediate Body will apply the relevant numerical scoring approach set out in this ESF Scoring Framework and decide whether they wish to Approve, Approve with Conditions or Reject these aspects of each relevant application. The Devolved Intermediate Body will also be responsible for seeking advice from the local LEP Area ESIF Sub-Committee to inform their assessment/appraisal.

The ESF Managing Authority retains the responsibility for appraising and applying the relevant numerical scoring approach set out in this ESF Scoring Framework against all other aspects of the Core Selection Criteria.

In order to proceed to Funding Agreement, two decisions then need to be made:

- A) The Devolved Intermediate Body needs to approve the application based on their appraisal of the 2 specific elements of the Strategic Fit Core Selection Criteria within their remit; and
- B) The ESF Managing Authority needs to approve the application based on their appraisal of all of the other Core Selection Criteria (with the exception of the 2 specific elements covered by the Devolved Intermediate Body).

If either Decision A or Decision B is negative – the application will not proceed to the Funding Agreement stage.

## Outline Application

Where an ESF open call requires an Outline Application as part of a two-stage application process, the following scoring methodology will apply.

### Minimum scores

Any answer scoring 0 means that the application will not go forward to full application stage. The score for each question is shown throughout the scoring framework, and is as follows:

Criteria	Yes (3) No (5)	Yes (5) No (0)	Yes (0) No (5)	Yes (5) No (0) N/A (5)	Fully (5) Partially (3) Not at all (0)	Fully (0) Partially (3) Not at all (5)	Fully (5) Partially (3) Not at all (0) N/A (5)
Strategic Fit					1.1, 1.2, 1.3 1.4, 1.5	1.6	
Deliverability					2.1, 2.2		
Value for Money					3.1		
Management & Control	4.7, 4.8	4.1, 4.2	4.3	4.4, 4.5, 4.6			
Compliance	5.1.1 5.2.1	5.3.1 5.3.2				5.1.3, 5.2.4	5.1.2, 5.2.2 5.2.3
Cross-Cutting Themes					6.1, 6.2		

**\*\*\*Question 5.4 Revenue Generation** - This question is not applicable to ESF and therefore does not need to be scored.

To ensure all applications are of an acceptable standard they must achieve a minimum score of 100 out of 140 (71%). This is based on scoring 5 for questions with “yes” or “no” options and a minimum of 3 for questions with “fully”, “partially” or “not at all” options.

To avoid disadvantaging projects, we have allowed a “not applicable” section for some criteria, which will score a 5 if selected. Additionally, for questions where “no” is the preferred answer, the weighting of the scoring has been adjusted to reflect this (see table above).

The gateway questions in the Outline Application are not scored but if any fail to meet requirements this would mean the application would not go forward to full application.

In addition, the MA reserves the right to invite projects to Full Application stage where they complement other activity or provide niche activity to target groups within the Operational Programme and have met the minimum score required, even if they have scored less than other applications. The use of this discretion will be the exception and will be considered during the Outline Assessment process. All attempts will be made to ensure applying this discretion will not result in any duplication of provision or activity at the local level. The outcome of other applications received, the call content and the Value for Money test will influence the decision to invoke this right.

Some examples of this are below, the list is not exhaustive:

- A project that works exclusively with single parents, where this compliments other provision such as help understanding finances, assistance with travel planning, and training in basic skills, as this would help in reaching a specific target group and help in the transition to more mainstream support.
- A project for injured military veterans to help them rebuild their confidence and skills and support them back into work and the community.
- A project supporting offenders on release from prison, including short sentence prisoners, to help secure employment.

## European Social Fund Scoring Framework for Outline Applications

1. Strategic Fit		
1.1 Does the proposed operation contribute to the needs/opportunities identified in the call to which it is responding?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.2 Does the proposed operation represent an appropriate means of delivering the relevant specific objectives, outputs and results of the relevant priority axes set out in the Operational Programme?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.3 Does the application link activities, costs, outputs/results and delivery of the priorities in the Operational Programme?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.4 If appropriate does the application demonstrate that the project would meet any requirements set in the Operational Programme for this type of activity?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.5 Does the proposed operation align to the local growth needs set out in the local ESIF Strategies?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.6 Does the proposed operation duplicate or conflict with existing national policy?	Fully (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Deliverability		
2.1 Is the operation deliverable within the requirements of the Operational Programme?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
2.2 Is Match Funding in place?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Value for money		
3.1 Additionally, does the application confirm that ESIF investment adds value in terms of activities and impacts?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Management and Control		
4.1 Has the applicant confirmed they have read and understood the document: Management and Control Requirements for ESIF Projects	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)
4.2 The applicant organisation already has systems in place to comply with these requirements; or has the capacity to establish systems that will meet these requirements	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)

4.3 Does the applicant's track record give any suggestion that the applicant does not have or would not have the necessary management capacity, systems and processes to meet the requirements of the Fund? *		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (0)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (5)
4.4 Does the application demonstrate a compliant approach to apportioning costs between LEP areas?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)
4.5 Does the application demonstrate a compliant approach to apportioning costs between COR?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)
4.6 Does the application demonstrate a compliant approach to apportioning costs between Investment Priorities?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)
4.7 Does the project intend to incur any expenditure before a funding agreement is agreed		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (3)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (5)
4.8 Due Diligence: Is due diligence necessary?		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (3)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (5)
<b>5. Compliance</b>			
<b>5.1 Procurement</b>			
5.1.1 Does the project involve any procurement		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (3)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (5)
5.1.2 Does the application set out an approach to procurement that is compliant with the Procurement Law ESIF Compliance Guidance Note?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
5.1.3 Does the applicant's track record give any suggestion that the applicant does not have or would not have the necessary management capacity, systems and processes to meet ESIF procurement requirements?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Fully (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Not at all (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>5.2 State Aid</b>			
5.2.1 Would the project provide State Aid to any third parties.		Yes (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	No (5) <input type="checkbox"/>
		Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	



5.2.2 Is the applicant and any delivery partners eligible to receive the grant requested within the State Aid Regulations?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>			
5.2.3 If yes. Has State Aid been considered? If so is it lawful and is the applicant and any third parties eligible to receive grant aid at the level requested within the State Aid Regulations?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
5.2.4 Does the application or the applicant's track record give any suggestion that the applicant does not have or would not have the necessary management capacity, systems and processes to meet State Aid requirements?	NA <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	Fully (0) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Not at all (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>5.3 Publicity</b>			
Has the applicant confirmed that:			
5.3.1 They have read and understood the Branding and Publicity Requirements	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)	
5.3.2 The applicant organisation already has systems in place to comply with these requirements; or has the capacity to establish systems that will meet these requirements	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (5)	No <input type="checkbox"/> (0)	
<b>6. Cross Cutting Themes</b>			
6.1 Does the application demonstrate that the applicant will take positive measures to support the sustainable development theme?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>		
6.2 Does the application demonstrate that the applicant will take positive measures to contribute towards the gender equality and non-discrimination cross cutting theme?	Fully (5) <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Partially (3) <input type="checkbox"/>		
	Not at all (0) <input type="checkbox"/>		

## Full Application

Where an ESF open call requires a Full Application as part of a single-stage application process, or where an ESF applicant is invited to submit a Full Application following assessment of their Outline Application under a two-stage application process, the following scoring methodology will apply.

In addition, where Full Application is submitted as part of a single-stage call, the appraisal will first be subject to a Gateway Assessment. The Gateway Assessment questions are not scored but if any fail to meet requirements, the application will not go any further in the appraisal process.

## Minimum scores

Applications must achieve a minimum score of 3 for each criteria by the end of the Full Application process to be successful. All criteria are deemed to be critical and a minimum overall score of 57 (42.8% of the total available) needs to be met. Failure to achieve this by the end of the full application process will result in the application being rejected. Where an application is successful and a Funding Agreement is issued, this will be conditional where the final score for any criteria remains at 3.

## Score rationale

Where a call indicates that scoring will be used, the framework in this document will apply; all applications will be scored in line with the ESF scoring criteria. The methodology for scoring is described below with the key indicators. At Full Application stage, a maximum score of 133 is possible using the scale below.

## Score where criteria is not applicable

Where a criterion is shown as not applicable in the call (questions 5.1 and 5.2) then a score of '5' will be awarded. This is required to ensure no applicant is either advantaged or disadvantaged where a particular criterion does not apply. Awarding '5' indicates that the requirement is met, thereby not disadvantaging the applicant.

## 2014-2020 European Social Fund Full Application Scoring Scale

### **7 Meets the requirement with additional assurance**

The evidence provided is comprehensive, demonstrating that they completely meet the requirement. They have supplied clear and detailed information. Additional assurance is also provided that the service offered significantly exceeds the minimum service requirement.

### **5 Meets the requirement**

The evidence provided is comprehensive, demonstrating that they completely meet the requirement. They have supplied clear and detailed information.

### **3 Mostly meets the requirement with minor weaknesses in certain areas**

The evidence provided demonstrates reasonable ability, mostly meeting the requirement with minor weaknesses in certain areas. The evidence is fairly clear and convincing with only minor reservations.

### **1 Mostly fails the requirement with major weaknesses in certain areas**

The evidence provided is unclear and, unconvincing and mostly fails to meet the requirement. Some risk to the delivery of service is identified or insufficient information is provided to give assurance that the minimum requirement will be met.

**0 Fails to meet the requirement**

The evidence provided fails to satisfy the stated requirement.

## 2014-2020 European Social Fund Scoring Framework for Full Applications

Selection criteria	Score
<b>1. Strategic Fit</b>	
1.1 The proposed operation contributes to the needs/opportunities identified in the Call for Proposals to which it is responding.	0 – 7
1.2 The proposed operation represents an appropriate means of delivering the relevant specific objectives, outputs and results of the relevant Priority Axis set out in the Operational Programme and fits the guiding principles for selection within each Priority Axis.	0 – 7
1.3 The proposed operation is aligned to the local growth needs set out in the local ESIF Strategies.	0 – 7
1.4 The proposed operation must add value to and not duplicate existing national provision and must not conflict with national policy.	0 – 7
<b>2. Deliverability</b>	
2.1 Is the operation deliverable within the requirements of the Operational Programme?	0 -7
2.2 Is this an effective delivery model? Have the risks been identified and managed?	0 - 7
<b>3. Value for Money</b>	
3.1 Has the applicant produced a very detailed granular budget breakdown with all eligible, appropriate and justified costs?	0 – 7
3.2 Comment on the status of the match funding from the project (deliverability core selection criteria)	0 – 7
3.3 Does the project represent reasonable value for money in terms of the amount of funding it is requesting when compared with the outputs and results it will achieve?	0 - 7
3.4 Does the application demonstrate a clear case that the investment will deliver activities and impacts that would not otherwise take place?	0 - 7
<b>4. Management and Control</b>	
4.1 The appropriateness of the resources involved in the project in terms of capacity and capability (e.g. expertise, skills, responsibility, experience, structures and processes to deliver a compliant project)	0 – 7
4.2 The applicant's description of how well they describe how they will ensure that delivery partner(s) will comply with the requirements of ESI funding and how they will monitor and manage the performance of delivery partners and / or sub-contractors	0 – 7
4.3 The applicant's financial management and control procedures (e.g. are they already in place? How will claims be compiled and authorised? Are they aware of the cash flow requirements? Is the VAT response satisfactory?)	0 – 7

4.4 The applicant's description of their document management system, understanding the importance of audit trails and accessibility of documents	0 - 7
<b>5. Compliance</b>	
5.1 State Aid. Any state aid would be lawful and the applicant is eligible to receive grant aid at the requested level within the State Aid regulations, if applicable. Any aid granted through the project to third parties is permissible under State Aid regulations and would be managed in accordance with them. <b>If not applicable, award 5.</b>	0 – 7
5.2 Procurement. Any procurement already undertaken as part of the operation is compliant with the European Structural and Investment Funds procurement requirements. Any frameworks that they intend to use must be identified and compliant. <b>If not applicable, award 5.</b>	0 – 7
5.3 Publicity. Publicity activities undertaken as part of the operation are compliant with the European Structural and Investment Funds publicity requirements. Any publicity already undertaken must be compliant if the applicant wishes to claim that as eligible expenditure.	0 – 7
<b>6. Cross Cutting Themes</b>	
6.1 Sustainable Development. The project takes account of and contributes to the Cross Cutting theme (horizontal principle) of sustainable development and meets the relevant legal obligations.	0 – 7
6.2 Gender equality and non-discrimination. The project takes account of and contributes to the Cross Cutting theme (horizontal principle) and meets the relevant legal obligations of Gender, Equality and non-discrimination.	0 – 7