

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals European Regional Development Fund

Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Managing Authority:	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Fund:	European Regional Development Fund
Priority Axis:	Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises – International Trade
Call Reference:	OC50R18P 0893
Local Enterprise Partnership Area:	National call including the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tees Valley - West of England - Heart of the South West - Buckinghamshire Thames Valley - Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough - New Anglia - Oxfordshire - Thames Valley Berkshire
Area Indicative Fund Allocation:	£5,170,000 - See detail of maximum allocation per category of region in Annex 2
Call Open:	Friday 5 October 2018
Call Closes:	23:59 on Friday 23 November 2018

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1. Introduction

The 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds bring the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development together into a single European Union Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme for England supporting the key growth priorities of innovation, research and development, support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, low carbon, skills, employment, and social inclusion.

The Government has confirmed that it will guarantee funding for ERDF projects that are contracted by the end of 2020.

All contracted ERDF projects must be completed by the end of the programme period, 31 December 2023. Each application for ERDF will be required to demonstrate that it delivers good value for money and domestic strategic priorities.

The Funds are managed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the European Regional Development Fund, Department for Work and Pensions for the European Social Fund and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. These Departments are the managing authorities for each Fund. In London, the Greater London Authority acts as an intermediate body for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund programmes. In some other areas, intermediate bodies are being designated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to perform the following tasks:

- Input into project calls in respect of local development needs (with reference to ESI Funds strategies); and
- Assessment of applications against certain selection criteria in relation to fit with local priorities in respect of the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund.

The managing authorities and intermediate bodies work closely with local partners on ESI Funds sub-committees in each local enterprise partnership area. Partners on these sub-committees provide:

- Practical advice and information to the managing authorities to assist in the preparation of local plans that contribute towards operational programme priorities and targets;
- Local intelligence to the managing authorities (or intermediate bodies where designated) in the development of project calls that reflect operational programme and local development needs as well as match funding opportunities; and

- Advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the operational programme and the local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy to aid the managing authorities' (or intermediate bodies where designated) assessments at outline and full application stage.

This call is issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and invites outline applications in respect of the European Regional Development Fund for England 2014 to 2020.

2. Call Context

On behalf of the national Growth Programme Board, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (the managing authority) invites applications seeking European Regional Development Fund support under:

Priority Axis 3 Enhancing the Competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises

Investment Priorities:

- 3d** Supporting the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes

The **European Regional Development Fund operational programme for England 2014 to 2020** sets out how the European Regional Development Fund will focus on investment to support economic growth and job creation. **Priority Axis 3** of the operational programme aims to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises.

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it provides good value for money and supports domestic strategic priorities, including the 2017 [Industrial Strategy](#) (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that). Applications must meet the requirement of, and make a meaningful contribution to, the delivery of the relevant Priority Axis of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#) and where appropriate should reflect how such support will aim to improve productivity levels within small and medium sized enterprises.

In addition, applications will be expected to meet identified local development needs, as expressed in the scope of this call and as set out in the Annex 2, with for all participating LEP areas, a reference to each European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the detail of the operational programme, local European Structural and Investment Funds strategy and the

relevant documentation listed in sections 5 through to 8 **prior to** submitting an outline application.

Government is working with local enterprise partnership (LEPs) across England to establish a network of private sector-led growth hubs connecting businesses to the right support including access to local and Government funded support services. Applicants under this call will need to demonstrate how activity and delivery will be co-ordinated and made accessible through the growth hub in the local enterprise partnership area covered by this call. Applicants will also need to demonstrate how they will work locally with their growth hub and all business support provision provided by local public and private sector partners and not duplicate any existing services, including that provided by the growth hub. Where relevant, further detail on growth hubs is set out below and in the Annex at the end.

Export advice is provided by UK Trade & Investment through contracts for International Trade Services and UK Export Finance. The Greater London Authority work with a number of additional organisations providing export advice. Contact the Greater London Authority for further details.

3. Scope of the Call

3.1. Scope

This call invites outline applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund operational programme and respond to the local development need set out in the Annex 2 with. For all participating LEP areas, a reference to each European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

Indicative fund allocation:	<p>Indicatively, through this call the managing authority expects to allocate up to £ 5,170,000.</p> <p>The managing authority reserves the right to invite to full application (and subsequently approve) projects that have a cumulative value that is higher or lower than this indicative allocation, subject to the volume and quality of proposals received. The managing authority may also decide to place some projects submitted through this call on a reserve list and invite them to proceed at a later date, subject to the availability of funding.</p> <p>There is no indicative allocation of European Regional Development Fund funding between capital and revenue activity, both capital and revenue is eligible dependent on the nature of activities / investment priorities set out in the call.</p>
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Minimum application level	European Regional Development Fund investment is intended to make a significant impact on local growth. Applications are expected to demonstrate appropriate scale and impact. The managing authority does not intend to allocate less than £500,000 European Regional Development Fund to any single project. Consequently projects with a total value of less than £1,000,000 in More Developed areas or £833,333 in Transition areas will not normally be supported under this call.
Duration of project activity	Projects should plan to deliver activity for a maximum of three years, however the managing authority reserves the right to vary the maximum duration, upwards or downwards.
Geographical scope	<p>The England European Regional Development Fund operational programme operates on a national basis. All eligible European Regional Development Fund expenditure must benefit organisations located in England.</p> <p>Revenue projects should predominantly support businesses based within the local enterprise partnership areas listed in Annex 2 of this call.</p>
Specific call requirements	<p>Applications should cover at least one or more of the geographic annexes and its specific requirements as indicated in the attached Annex 2 A to C.</p> <p>Applications will be reviewed by all European Structural and Investment Funds Sub-committees of local enterprise partnership areas listed in Annex 2 A to C and should therefore, for each area, articulate clearly and specifically how they intend to address local needs as detailed in the Annex.</p> <p>Please note: Value for Money and alignment with Strategic Domestic Priorities , including the 2017 Industrial Strategy, (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that) will form a key part of the assessment and appraisal of all applications. Therefore proposals should clearly articulate and demonstrate how activities align with domestic strategic priorities and offer good value for money.</p>
Call deadlines	<p>For this specific call, applications will be assessed after the close of the single deadline.</p> <p>Applications received after the published call close date will not be considered. All applications will be assessed following closure of the call.</p>

3.2. Local development need

Projects must deliver activity which directly contributes to the objectives of Priority Axis 3 of the operational programme, one or more of the relevant investment priorities and meet the local development need expressed in the table below.

Local Development Need
<p data-bbox="188 533 549 566">Local growth priorities:</p> <p data-bbox="188 607 576 640">Local Economic Context:</p> <p data-bbox="188 645 1390 786">This call is specifically for trade support. It seeks activity which will deliver under investment priority 3d and which specifically focuses upon increasing the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises (subject to sector eligibility) to enter and increase trade in international markets.</p> <p data-bbox="188 826 1401 1043">The export agenda is critical as the UK re-calibrates its relationship with Europe and lays the foundations for trade deals with countries around the world. The Government's ambition is to make the UK more outward looking than ever before, a truly global Britain. It has launched the Exporting is GREAT campaign, and the trade hub great.gov.uk, to inspire and support more businesses than ever before to start their exporting journeys.</p> <p data-bbox="188 1084 1394 1413">Through getting more local companies exporting, and getting local companies exporting more, this will boost jobs and wealth coming into local economies. Business growth achieved through increased exports is genuine growth and not displacement. It will also make local economies more resilient to change and competition through companies becoming less dependent on a smaller number of customers or markets. If companies have a product or service that is performing well at home, then there will almost certainly be a demand for it overseas. The UK accounts for just 1/20th of the world's economy, so confining business to the domestic market is overlooking a huge potential.</p> <p data-bbox="188 1453 1353 1671">Exporting reduces risk by spreading it across a wider range of customers and protecting businesses if the UK demand for a product or service falls. As well as boosting profits, exposure to overseas markets makes for sharper UK businesses that are more innovative and better able to maintain a competitive position in their sector. Exporting also enhances a business's profile, whether for new clients at home or ones abroad.</p> <p data-bbox="188 1711 1382 1928">There is untapped demand for British goods and services abroad. At the moment less than 9% of registered businesses export. The Government is working with business to help forge a new culture of exporting amongst the UK business community. To do this, it is equipping companies with the tools and opportunities they need to succeed in the global marketplace, including through specialist finance and insurance from UK Export Finance.</p> <p data-bbox="188 1968 1289 2002">The Department for International Trade (DIT) helps businesses export, drives</p>

investment, opens up markets and champions free trade. DIT is an international economic department, responsible for:

- Bringing together policy, promotion and financial expertise to break down barriers to trade and investment, and help businesses succeed;
- Delivering a new trade policy framework for the UK as we leave the EU;
- Promoting British trade and investment across the world; and
- Building the global appetite for British goods and services.

Through its International Trade Advisor (ITA) teams located throughout England and expert staff in 177 locations overseas DIT identifies and stimulates overseas demand for UK goods and services, and supports UK companies to get export-ready and, in the case of existing exporters, to grow in new markets. These services are organised nationally, managed regionally, and delivered locally. They help businesses develop the skills they need to export successfully and to access market information and research.

DIT support is targeted where government can add most value. It prioritises its global export promotion activity by identifying the sector-market combinations that present the greatest opportunities to achieve the maximum impact and success.

DIT works closely with local enterprise partnerships and Growth Hubs to ensure that local companies are connected to DIT's global network and its services tailored to local needs.

- Applications to this call will need to set out how they will be complementing and building upon existing provision through DIT.
- Applications should explain how proposed activities will align with local Growth Hubs please (see Annex 1 for further details) to ensure:
 - (i) local priorities and needs will be met; and
 - (ii) the proactive referrals of small and medium sized enterprises to and from the Growth Hubs to enable on-going support of local small and medium sized enterprises to maximise opportunities of growth.

Preference will be given to applications that demonstrate evidence of engagement and alignment with local Growth Hubs.

Local priorities:

Proposals should demonstrate alignment with local development need and priorities including:

- see Specific Local Enterprises Partnership area priorities as provided at Annex 2 A to C

More generally, the applicant should explain how they will:

- complement and align with other European Regional Development Fund projects to enhance the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises that may impact on this activity, including business support and innovation activities.
- underpin international trade performance activities with robust data analysis which supports the development of capacity and capability
- provide baseline data and commit to quarterly performance reports and analysis of locally based exporters at LEP area level.

3.3. Operational programme investment priorities

Applications must specify the activities to be delivered and must directly contribute to **one or more** of the following investment priorities:

Investment priority	3d – Supporting the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes
Specific objectives	Increase the growth capability of small and medium sized enterprises.
Indicative actions	<p>The support provided through this specific objective will help businesses to develop their internal capability in order to improve their productivity, grow and create jobs:</p> <p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by European Regional Development Fund may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of efficient local referral routes to ensure that small and medium sized enterprises are able to identify and access the most appropriate and tailored support for their specific growth needs; • Support small and medium sized enterprises to develop focused growth strategies and update or introduce new business models which will drive business performance; • Advice and support for small and medium sized enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets; • Support events, trade fairs and missions to enable small and medium sized enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted grant schemes to support productive investment; and <p>Activities will target domestic and foreign-owned small and medium sized enterprises, including social enterprises.</p> <p>Activity under this investment priority will focus primarily on addressing the barriers that business face in identifying, accessing and understanding the different types of finance that is available.</p>
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4. Required Outputs under this Call

Applicants will need to demonstrate how the eligible activity, funded by the European Regional Development Fund will achieve the programme-level outputs for Priority Axis 3.

For projects proposing to deliver activity against more than one investment priority, the appropriate outputs should be selected. Project will be required to report on, and evidence, the achievement of the outputs separately under each investment priority.

For projects coming forward under this call the expected outputs and results are:

Investment Priority 3d	
Output reference	Name
C1	Number of enterprises receiving support
C2	Number of enterprises receiving grants
C4	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
C5	Number of new enterprises supported
C6	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)
C8	Employment increase in supported enterprises
C29	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products
P13	Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage support

The managing authority expects the level of outputs proposed within outline applications to be realistic and achievable and to deliver good value for money. The

application should clearly state the methodology used to determine the levels of outputs proposed.

Projects will only be supported if they demonstrate good value for money. An important consideration when assessing value for money is the level of European Regional Development Fund outputs that the project would deliver.

The managing authority has not set specific output targets for this call and does not publish average or expected unit costs.

The local European Structural and Investment Fund strategy for each local enterprise partnership Area includes details of the local, notional European Regional Development Fund allocation to each priority axis and the type and number of European Regional Development Fund outputs that are expected in return for this investment.

All operations will be required to report regularly on progress toward achievement of targets. This will need to include both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the appropriate geographical areas. Applicants will need to explain how they will collect and record this information to maintain a fully evidenced audit trail. It should be noted that if an operation fails to deliver contracted outputs, a performance penalty may apply.

5. Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology

There are two stages to the European Regional Development Fund application process:

- (i) Outline application and, if successful
- (ii) Full application.

Acceptance of an outline application to progress to full application stage does not in any way indicate or constitute an offer of European Regional Development Fund grant.

Applicants must fully complete the [outline application](#) which will be assessed by the managing authority against all of the national [selection criteria](#) except where an intermediate body has been designated to assess against some of the selection criteria. Where an intermediate body has been designated to undertake delegated tasks, the intermediate body will undertake the assessment against the selection criteria in relation to fit with local priorities.

Outline applications will be assessed in two stages, Gateway assessment and Core assessment.

The Gateway assessment is undertaken by the managing authorities and considers:

- Applicant eligibility;
- Activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- Fit with the National operational programme and the local development need set out in section 2.

Applications that fail the Gateway assessment undertaken by the managing authority will be rejected. Applications which pass the Gateway assessment will then be assessed by the managing authority in relation to all Core assessment criteria.

In areas where an intermediate body¹ has been designated, the following will apply:

The intermediate body will assess the application against the following Core assessment criteria:

- Local strategic fit

The managing authority will assess the application against the following Core assessment criteria:²

- National strategic fit;
- Value for money;
- Management and control;
- Deliverability;
- Compliance;
 - Procurement
 - State Aid
 - Publicity requirements
- Cross cutting themes; and
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Equal opportunities

The intermediate body will also provide advice to the managing authority to assist the managing authority to make its assessment against the following Core selection criteria:

- Value for money; and
- Deliverability.

Having assessed projects against these criteria the relevant local enterprise partnership area European Structural and Investment Funds sub-committee will advise the managing authority or intermediate body as relevant on the contribution to local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the operational programme and local European Structural and Investment Funds

¹ This process works differently for the Greater London Authority. Please contact the Greater London Authority for further details.

strategy to aid the managing authority's assessments (at outline and full application stage).

Having concluded their assessments the managing authority and the intermediate body will prioritise the applications they wish to proceed based on their assessment against their respective selection criteria. Only projects that the managing authority and the intermediate body each agree should proceed, based on their respective core selection criteria, will be invited to submit a full application. Subsequently only those full applications that the managing authority and the intermediate body each agree should proceed, based on their respective selection criteria, will be approved.

Please note that the managing authority's decision is final and there are no appeals. If you wish to complain about the calls and application process, please follow the procedure set out at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/complaints-procedure>.

Potential applicants may wish to take advantage of information and support services funded through European Regional Development Fund Technical Assistance and available to assist the design and development of compliant projects / applications for the European Regional Development Fund. Details of local Technical Assistance funded project can be found on the [Technical Assistance website page](#).

6. General Information

6.1. National Eligibility Rules

When developing an application, applicants must refer to the [National Eligibility Rules](#) setting out the requirements of the 2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Fund programme. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the National Eligibility Rules are adhered to both at application stage and following approval. Failure to do so can lead to financial penalties leading to recovery of up to 100% of the grant value. If in doubt on any of the requirements, applicants are strongly advised to seek specialist advice.

European Regional Development Fund eligibility rules apply to **all** project spend within the eligible costs, including match funding.

The European Regional Development Fund is governed by European regulations and national rules. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the relevant documentation, (section 8 Key Document refers) prior to submitting an outline application. If successful at the full application stage, applicants will enter into [a Funding agreement](#) and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Once a Funding agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within 30 days, unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority.

Applicants are therefore strongly advised to read these terms and conditions to ensure that they are able to enter into such an agreement prior to responding to the call.

6.2. Eligible applicants

Section 4 of the [National Eligibility Rules](#) sets out who is eligible to apply. Financial Due Diligence checks will be undertaken on non-public sector applicants that are successful at the outline application stage. Checks will be carried out following notification of a successful outline application and may exclude applicants from further consideration. These checks will include assessment of the applicant's financial standing including ability to deal with cost overruns, the ability to cash flow a project in arrears and absorb a financial irregularity. Applicants must be legally constituted at the point of signing a funding agreement. If the application is approved the applicant organisation will enter into a legally binding Funding agreement and therefore will carry the liability for ensuring that the terms and conditions of the funding agreement are met.

If there is more than one organisation applying for the funds, a lead organisation must be selected to become the applicant (and grant recipient) with the remaining organisation(s) acting as delivery partner(s). In this situation the applicant would be responsible and liable for the delivery partner(s) and ensuring the project is operating compliantly.

During the application process the managing authority will consider the applicant's track record, both positive and negative. If the applicant has been involved in the delivery of previous European grants and any irregularities have been identified, the managing authority will expect to see what steps have been taken to ensure that the risk of further irregularities in the future is mitigated. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to European Structural and Investment Funds funding and will not have a track record.

6.3. Contribution rate and match funding

European Regional Development Fund investment must not be used to replace existing funding sources. European Regional Development Fund investment must enable activity to take place that would not otherwise happen or to increase the scope, scale or intensity of activity. The level of European Regional Development Fund awarded will be the minimum in order for the project to proceed

The maximum contribution rate is 50% of the total eligible project costs in the More Developed areas and 60% of the total eligible project costs in the Transition areas subject to State Aid regulations.

The remaining 50% or 40% or more must come from other eligible sources as specified under section 6 of the National Eligibility Rules. During the application process applicants will need to satisfy the managing authority that they have, or are able to put in place eligible match funding for the balance of costs. Other EU funds cannot be used as a source of match funding.

European Regional Development Fund investment is limited by State Aid regulations and where the award of European Regional Development Fund would constitute State Aid the European Regional Development Fund grant rate may fall below the 50% or 60% maximum.

European Regional Development Fund is paid quarterly in arrears and expenditure must be defrayed prior to the submission of any grant claims. Applicants may be asked to demonstrate how they are able to cash flow the operation.

6.4. Project timescales

European Regional Development Fund funding will normally be approved for three years, however the managing authority reserves the right to extend the contract term in exceptional circumstances.

Projects approved through this call will normally be expected to:

- Submit a detailed and complete full application within three months of formal selection at outline stage. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected;
- Commence delivery (defraying European Regional Development Fund eligible costs) within three months of formal approval. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected; and
- Be closed by June 2023.

6.5. Project extensions

Existing grant recipients whose projects:

1. Do not involve the direct development of premises or infrastructure;
2. Have a funding agreement that ends/has a financial completion date during the period of this call or within **18 months of the closing date of this call**; and
3. Addresses the priorities set out in section 2

May apply for a second phase of delivery – this will be expected to be in the same form as the current project (i.e. a genuine continuation of activity) but may reflect improvement/some change to reflect experience of the first phase of the project. The application must be made using the standard outline application form. Where changes to the first phase of the project are significant, these should be presented as a new application. The relevant Growth Delivery Team will apply judgment in

considering the significance of any change. Projects may apply to be extended for up to 3 years.

Applications in respect of the development of premises or other infrastructure should be presented as new projects, this includes applications that have a link to an existing European Regional Development Fund project e.g. further phases of the development of sites or premises.

Please note - extensions to existing projects will be assessed against the criteria set out in this call in the same way as 'new' projects. There is no guarantee that extensions will be selected. Extension requests relating to projects that end more than 18 months after the closing date of the call or do not meet the requirements set out in this call will be rejected. The applicant's track record and the performance of existing contracts will be taken into account during the assessment process.

6.6. Capital projects

In developing the budget for the outline application, applicants seeking European Regional Development Fund to support a capital project should note that:

- New build projects will normally be expected to achieve the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) rating of 'excellent'; however BREEAM 'very good' will be accepted where this is the maximum feasible standard;
- Refurbishment projects will normally be expected to achieve the BREEAM rating of 'Very Good'; and
- Infrastructure projects will normally be expected to achieve the Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment rating of 'Very Good'.

6.7. Cross Cutting Themes / Horizontal Principles

All applications selected as a result of this call will be required to demonstrate how the Cross Cutting Themes have been addressed in the project design and development. Cross Cutting Themes for European Regional Development Fund are 'equality and anti-discrimination' and 'sustainable development'. Further information is available in section 11 of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

Some groups lack entrepreneurial understanding and appropriate skills and face entrenched attitudinal barriers. People in difficult social or economic circumstances face barriers to enterprise, but some groups have additional ones – for example women and black and minority ethnic groups are often under-represented in enterprise compared to the wider population, so investments under priority axis 3 should actively address barriers to business start-up and other types of business opportunities for such groups.

In providing support for small and medium sized enterprises, applicants under priority axis 3 are required to demonstrate, where appropriate, how resource efficiency is embedded into the business support offer. Where it is not thought appropriate a detailed explanation why it's not appropriate should be provided in the Cross Cutting Theme Section of the application.

6.8. Additionality, duplication and displacement

Additionality is a core principle of European Regional Development Funding. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the activity paid for out of European Regional Development Funding adds value to new or existing activity.

European Regional Development Funding cannot support activities that duplicate existing provision/services within the region.

Applications need to identify and evidence how the beneficiaries will use the service and demonstrate that the project does not displace other activity available in the market place.

6.9. State Aid and revenue generation

Applicants are required, in the outline 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 Aid. 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 under the General Block Exemption Regulation (EU) 651/2014.

Only if this is not possible should Applicants use the De Minimis Regulation or 'no aid'. [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.

The managing authority 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.

6.10. Procurement

All costs claimed by the applicant (grant recipient and / or delivery partner(s)) must be recovered on an actual cost basis. Other costs must be procured in line with National (including [Public Procurement Regulation 2015](#)) and EU regulations. Procurement will be subject to audit and verification and any irregularity will result in a financial penalty of up to 100% of the grant paid. 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 EU.

It is **strongly recommended** that applicants seek and follow legal advice in respect of procurement requirements. Procurement irregularities remain the most substantive cause of error and clawback of grants.

7. Support

Please note that this is a competitive call and to preserve impartiality the managing authority and, where appropriate, the intermediate body are unable to enter into correspondence with applicants over their outline application. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this call document. In exceptional circumstances, if there are issues with accessing this guidance, please contact: SW.ERDFenquiries@communities.gov.uk.

Whilst the decision of the managing authority is final, if you think consideration of your application has not followed the published ERDF process, please refer to the MHCLG complaints procedure available on GOV.UK.

8. Key Documents

- European Regional Development Fund operational programme;
- Outline application form;
- Outline application form guidance;
- Local enterprise partnership area's European Structural and Investment Funds strategy;
- Eligibility guidance;
- Target definitions;
- Funding agreement (revenue and / or capital);
- Summative assessments guidance; and
- 2017 [Industrial Strategy](#) (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that).

9. Document Checklist

Incomplete applications will be rejected. Please ensure the following information (documents) are submitted.

Outline Stage:

- Fully completed outline application;
- Financial tables; and
- Outputs, results and indicators tables.

10. Document Submission

Completed outline applications must be submitted via email to the address in Section 7. Applicants are asked to quote the call reference and project name in the subject line of your email as this will greatly assist the managing authority.

Outline application forms not received by the deadline will not be assessed. Outline applications which are not fully completed will be excluded.

The managing authority will normally acknowledge receipt of your application by email.

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

Any changes related to the deadline for the submission of the outline application form will be notified on the [European Growth Funding](#) website pages.

ANNEX 1

2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Funding for local business growth hub activities

Growth hubs (those governed by local enterprise partnerships) will ensure that support for business is simpler, more joined up and easier to access, providing targeted support to businesses tailored to local needs, for instance priority sectors, business start-up and those businesses with the potential to grow and scale-up. In the 2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Fund programme period, some growth hubs will also have a physical presence in the local area for businesses to seek advice, support and to network whilst others will offer a hub and spoke or virtual service via digital, telephone based and social media channels.

Whilst growth hubs are open to all businesses, regardless of size or sector, they will be able to offer European Regional Development Fund support only to those small and medium sized enterprises that are eligible under European Regional Development Fund priority axis 3. Local enterprise partnerships and their delivery partners in some localities have therefore sought further clarification as to whether the 2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Fund programme for England can be used to fund the following activities:

- Signposting and diagnostic activity (e.g. salary costs associated with business advisers, telephone support services);
- Facilitation of peer to peer networking events;
- Growth hub marketing activity;
- Development of website and customer relationship management systems (CRM) and maintenance and/or enhancements/development of new on-line tools;
- Growth hub back office and administration roles; and
- Managerial oversight of the growth hub.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has therefore worked with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to update this annex in relation to growth hub activities and how they may be supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

European Regional Development Fund objectives

Where growth hub activity is eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, it will be supported under priority axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund operational programme which is designed to improve the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises by increasing the capacity

and capability of small and medium sized enterprises and promoting entrepreneurship.

Eligibility of growth hub activities for European Regional Development Fund support

Local enterprise partnerships and other delivery partners are asked to note:

1. European Regional Development Fund requires minimum match funding of between 20% and 50%, depending on where in England the growth hub is located. As a result, a robust match funding package needs to be in place for a project to proceed.
2. European Regional Development Fund requires that the match funding and associated outputs must be accounted for and auditable, so transparent reporting systems for both funding and impacts will need to be in place.
3. As a general principle, European Regional Development Fund can support core functions (and revenue costs) of growth hubs, where they directly contribute to operational programme activity and outputs.
4. Any European Regional Development Fund support under priority axis 3 is limited to European Regional Development Fund eligible sectors, small and medium sized enterprises (not large companies) and potential entrepreneurs. This means that a universal offer for all businesses cannot be funded by European Regional Development Fund – we can only fund those parts that provide support to eligible potential entrepreneurs or enterprises.
5. Delivery of information, diagnosis, brokerage (IDB) is permitted, however, integrated delivery with further support, advice or grant is preferred (for reasons of practicality, deliverability and value for money), rather than standalone information, diagnosis and brokerage
6. Growth hub staff directly associated with the delivery of European Regional Development Fund project activity are eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, e.g. staff costs for posts directly related to the European Regional Development Fund project in terms of project delivery, management, co-ordination and monitoring; and posts directly related to referrals, signposting and diagnosis of needs of small and medium sized enterprises and potential entrepreneurs eligible for support from European Regional Development Fund.
7. Growth hub marketing collateral and peer to peer events; purchase, set up and maintenance of enhancements to the customer relationship management (CRM)

systems to assist with client management; website content, tools and diagnostics may **only** be supported where developed specifically for the purpose of helping to deliver European Regional Development Fund project activity and outputs.

8. Strategic partnership development between growth hubs and organisations/institutions involved in providing business support that involves agreeing appropriate referral mechanisms that are clearly linked to signposting and information diagnostic and brokerage support for eligible small and medium sized enterprises and outputs under European Regional Development Fund priority axis 3 may be supported.
9. 15% flat rate overheads are available (based on 15% of direct staff costs) and cover eligible overheads and back office costs – for example, indirect staff costs such as receptionists, human resources, legal, procurement support, governance and partnership development time (also see 7 and 8 above), information technology, shared premises costs and other associated costs.

European Regional Development Fund will **not** be able to support generalised local growth hub activity that does not deliver support to eligible individuals or enterprises, such as:

- a. Support for strategy development (including sector strategies).
- b. Support to simplify the business support landscape (e.g. mapping and analysis), except where this relates to the development of referrals and protocols linked to European Regional Development Fund project delivery and eligible European Regional Development Fund small and medium sized enterprises.
- c. Support for research or other development activity for the growth hub and/or Local Enterprise Partnership, including the production of annual growth hub performance reports.
- d. General growth hub website maintenance and tools development unrelated to the delivery of the European Regional Development Fund operational programme.
- e. Support for general day to day growth hub strategic partnership activity and governance.

Inevitably, this will result in some functions (or parts thereof) of each growth hub that must be funded from other sources, such as private contributions or other public funds.

ANNEX 2

A – North East

LEP Area	North East
Local ESIF Strategy	Tees Valley https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/TV-CA-ESIF-Strategy-Doc-Update-DCLG-April-16.pdf
Local LEP Area Contact	Tees Valley Intermediate Body Linda Edworthy or Geraldine Brown: Geraldine.brown@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk
Priority Axis	3
Notional ERDF Allocation for this activity	Up to £1,000,000 ERDF (Transition category of region).
Duration	3 years
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NEED - Local priorities	
<p>Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area</p> <p>Tees Valley has a total population of 672,500 and offers 289,000 jobs across 17,500 businesses, of which 99.5% are micro, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The Tees Valley economy contributes over £12.8 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the national economy each year with goods exports accounting for close on £2.7 billion.</p> <p>As highlighted in the Tees Valley European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Strategy, the region has exporting strengths in key sectors of Chemical Processing and Advanced Manufacturing. SMEs and larger firms in these sectors are important contributors to key overseas export markets and supply chains around the globe. Chemical Processing across the wider Tees Valley economic area is particularly strong accounting for over twice the concentration of exports as nationally (37% of Tees Valley and Durham’s goods exports and 18% for the UK in 2016).</p> <p>However rates of exporting and enterprise need to increase, particularly among SMEs that have not previously exported. Many Tees Valley businesses are reliant upon a client base heavily dependent upon domestic market demand. In terms of goods exports just 1,264 (7.4%) of Tees Valley firms were exporting to the European Union (EU) in 2016 whilst 1,183 (6.9%) had non-EU country exports. This identifies a significant untapped resource.</p> <p>The Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan sets out the ambition for Tees Valley to become a high-value, low-carbon, diverse and inclusive economy creating 25,000 additional jobs by 2026. A key priority to deliver this is support for business growth, including support for companies to diversify into new markets and access new supply chains. The Tees Valley ESIF Strategy further identifies</p>	

the region's priorities to provide businesses with the necessary support and incentives to enable them to export products and services across the globe.

Applications should demonstrate how they will:

1. support Tees Valley priorities for business growth, focusing on priority sectors identified in the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), and increase overall levels of exporting in these sectors (Tees Valley priority sectors are: Advanced Manufacturing; Process, Chemicals & Energy; Logistics; Health & Biologics; Digital & Creative; Culture & Leisure; Business & Professional Services);
2. provide a package of advice and funded support to develop and increase businesses export potential, and to help new and potential exporting businesses move into new markets;
3. have a particular focus on supporting 'first time' exporters, enabling them to enter new markets and increase levels of trade through export;
4. provide support for pre-export companies, through a co-ordinated programme that could include: funding; advice & support; peer networking; masterclasses; export explorer and trade missions;
5. support supply chain development to help effective trade;
6. increase Tees Valley presence in international markets;
7. support Research and Development and innovation for export, including through market identification, collaboration, and service / product development;
8. complement and align with other European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded activity, designed to enhance business competitiveness (including business support and innovation activities);
9. commence activity after the current Business Compass ERDF funded project comes to an end (Growth Consultant and Business Fund elements); and,
10. ensure alignment with the Business Compass model (the Tees Valley Growth Hub) throughout delivery of the project (the Growth Hub model will continue beyond the life of the current ERDF project). Business Compass is the brand for the Tees Valley Growth Hub, providing a one stop shop for business support and funding available to help business growth. Its remit includes: marketing and promotion of business support activities; undertaking initial diagnostics; and sign posting to relevant provision that can meet individual business needs. Alignment with the model should include branding, datasharing, account management and a shared philosophy in working towards common aims.

B – South West

LEP Areas	Heart of the South West West of England
Local ESIF Strategy	Heart of the South West LEP https://heartofswlep.co.uk/about-the-lep/strategies-and-priorities/esif-strategy/ West of England LEP http://westofenglandlep.co.uk/funding/eu-sif/
Local LEP Area Contact	Heart of the South West LEP Eifion Jones - eifion.jones@heartofswlep.co.uk West of England LEP Antony Corfield – Antony.Corfield@WestOfEngland-CA.gov.uk
Priority Axis	3
Notional ERDF Allocation for this activity	Up to £ 2,300,000 ERDF - For applications relating to this Annex, it is anticipated that the total European Regional Development Fund investment will follow the distribution below: Heart of the South West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to £500,000 in the More Developed category of region; • up to £800,000 in the Transition category of region. West of England Up to £1,000,000 (More Developed category of region).
Duration	3 years
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NEED - Local priorities	
<p>Heart of the South West</p> <p>As identified in the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area's recently published Productivity Strategy, HotSW suffers from comparatively lower propensities to export than other parts of the country. According to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) records, HotSW exported £3.75bn in goods in 2016, of which £1.6bn were sent to the European Union (EU), and £2.16bn went to non-EU markets. This accounts for 8.9% of the region's total Gross Value Added (GVA). The South West region overall exported 14.2% of its GVA internationally.</p> <p>However, the number of businesses exporting goods internationally from HotSW was significant - 5.6% of all HotSW businesses exported to the EU, and 5.3% of total exported elsewhere in the world. This compares with 4.7% and 3.2% respectively for the South West region as a whole. Looking across the proportion of exporters and the value of exports as a proportion of output (GVA), this indicates that the value of HotSW exports per enterprise is lower than regionally.</p> <p>Within HotSW, the picture varies with Plymouth and Somerset standing out as more likely to export</p>	

goods internationally. Devon County and Torbay's demand for exports make up smaller proportions of their areas' GVA. However, although exports make up a smaller proportion of its GVA, Torbay has the highest proportion of exporting businesses.

Proposals should demonstrate alignment with local development need and priorities including:

1. How they will address low levels of exporting and support existing exporters in increasing the value of their exports;
2. How they will maximise opportunities, such as digital – where heavy investments have been undertaken in broadband infrastructure and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) digital utilisation. Applicants should articulate how they intend to work closely with local key partners to ensure maximum use of digital infrastructure to help boost export capacity;
3. How they will tailor support for businesses at different levels of exporting – pre-export, exporting to EU, international exporters –to support their individual needs;
4. How they will support exporters to the EU and exporters of perishable goods to comply with legislative changes and new frameworks;
5. How they will ensure SMEs are aware of the funding mechanisms required to support exporting activities including invoice discounting, credit insurance and currency hedging;
6. How they will support all exporters to reach new markets and take advantage of emerging opportunities;
7. How the delivery approach will be tailored to our business demographic and make best use of existing and emerging workspace and innovation infrastructure (such as Exeter Science Park, Plymouth Science Park, Oceansgate, EPIC and Somerset Enterprise Centres) and how they will reach into the areas with the highest concentration of exporting businesses as well as rural and peripheral areas;
8. How they will align activity with the [Heart of the South West Smart Specialisation Approach](#) and the recently published [Productivity Strategy](#), whilst recognising that the service is expected to be available to all eligible SMEs;
9. How they will work with the [Growth Hub – Service for All](#) and the [Growth Support Programme](#); and,
10. How activities will make the most of opportunities offered by existing transport links in the HotSW area (infrastructure links to Europe through Exeter, Bristol and Newquay airport and Plymouth ferry port) and series of key events planned in the area (such as Mayflower 400) to maximise business support and reach.

West of England

The West of England economy is strong, and its export performance mirrors the national picture. Approximately 2,000 SMEs registered within the West of England area currently export to some degree, with another 2,000 or so with an internationally tradeable business model. However there is more that could be done to increase export activities. Increasing exports is an efficient way of achieving economic growth and productivity gains. The West of England has strengths in high value-added activities in advanced manufacturing and aerospace, as well a strong digital and creative sector. The area also has a number of innovation and incubator assets used by SMEs which offers another area for service focus.

The many barriers faced by those expanding into new markets are well documented and they are particularly challenging for SMEs who are new exporters and to growth firms given their more limited resources and capacity. Strong evidence connects international trade with innovation,

investment, productivity, profitability and growth. Management experience, attitudes and limited internationalisation capabilities can also be key to the decision to export or not.

Applications should explain how they intend to:

1. provide an outcome driven service that focusses on the quality of engagements, leaving the businesses they support with a sustainable exporting future;
2. work with businesses across the entire West of England geography particularly in key sectors and maximising opportunities highlighted above; and,
3. generate strong links with the West of England Growth Hub and the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) office so that the co-ordination of export support with other support activities is well managed and joined-up and to facilitate useful cross-referrals.

C – Greater South East

LEP Areas	Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough New Anglia Oxfordshire Thames Valley Berkshire
Local ESIF Strategy	Buckinghamshire Thames Valley http://www.buckstvlep.co.uk/eu-investment-plan Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough http://www.gcgp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/GCGP_European-Structural-and-Investment-Funds-Strategy_February-2016-Update-V2-FINAL-1.pdf New Anglia https://newanglia.co.uk/european-investment-strategy-esif/ Oxfordshire https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/sites/default/files/uploads/Oxfordshire%20ESIF%20Strategy%20August%202018_0.pdf Thames Valley Berkshire http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/eu-structural-and-investment-funds
Local LEP Area Contact	Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Ian Barham - ian@btvlep.co.uk Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Combined Authority Andrew Luff – andy.luff@europeanfunding.org.uk New Anglia Hugh Goldring - hugh.goldring@norfolk.gov.uk Matt Jones - matt.jones@suffolk.co.uk Oxfordshire Sebastian Johnson - sebastian.johnson@oxfordshireLEP.com Thames Valley Berkshire Joanna Birrell - joanna@thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk
Priority Axis	3
Notional ERDF Allocation for this activity	Up to £1,870,000 ERDF - For applications relating to this Annex, it is anticipated that the total European Regional Development Fund investment will follow the distribution below: Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Up to £500,000 (More Developed category of region) Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Up to £250,000 (More Developed category of region) New Anglia Up to £500,000 (More Developed category of region) Oxfordshire Up to £120,000 (More Developed category of region)

	Thames Valley Berkshire Up to £500,000 (More Developed category of region)
Duration	3 years
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NEED - Local priorities	
<p>Buckinghamshire Thames Valley</p> <p>Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area is looking for an international trade support programme, targeted at growth companies in key sectors identified in the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) strategy, Strategic Economic Plan and emerging Local Industrial Strategy prospectus. The specific aim will be to increase overall export and international trading performance of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP area.</p> <p>Project applications are therefore sought which will build on the significant growth of the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP area and provide pre-export businesses with the knowledge and support to develop a commercially viable export strategy and provide jointly branded specialist advice to experienced exporters to enter new markets.</p> <p>Applications covering the Buckinghamshire area should explain how activity would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. be fully integrated and imbed capacity into and add value to Buckinghamshire Business First, the Buckinghamshire Growth Hub. This will include but will not be limited to the following (with regard to European Regional Development Fund eligibility criteria): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Delivery of a package of integrated, targeted and proactive activities and services for high growth, scale-up and manufacturing companies. b. Provide pre-export businesses with the knowledge and support to develop commercially viable export and trade strategies and provide specialist advice to experienced exporters to enter new markets. c. Support for pre-export companies to take them through an integrated programme of advice/support, peer to peer networking, master-classes, export explorer visits, trade missions and events. d. Support to experienced exporters with a focus on high growth, scale-up and priority sectors/markets and other specialist areas such as joint ventures adding value to national Department of International Trade (DIT) initiatives. e. Support high growth / Research and Development (R&D) / innovative companies to enable them to access new markets faster than would otherwise be the case and a LEP area exporter's network. f. Support to small and medium sized enterprises according to both their ability to grow/implement a growth programme and addressing the complexity of barriers to growth the firms face in international markets. 2. support growth in our high value sectors of the Creative & Digital Industries, Space Propulsion, Medical Technologies and high performance engineering and advance business growth and international investment at the Enterprise Zone Sites at Silverstone, Aylesbury Woodlands and Westcott. <p>Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough</p> <p>The economy of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is far from ordinary. Real specialisms exist in</p>	

information technologies (IT), life sciences, manufacturing (both high-tech and standard) and primary sectors. A huge range of international companies, from bio-medical and agri-tech to advanced manufacturing and creative digital, have been attracted to the area due to the favourable conditions that have been created for development, innovation and growth.

Accordingly, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough four-year plan (2018/22) has the ambition to increase international trade by £300m by 2021. Supporting our businesses to export is a vital priority in the area and will form part of the Local Industrial Strategy.

Project applicants are invited to explain how they will:

1. increase the number of SMEs exporting successfully and accelerate the growth of international sales by existing exporters, across priority sectors in the region;
2. provide an ESIF area wide programme of work through work packages tailored to area-specific requirements, and how they will work closely with the Growth Hubs to engage participant SMEs and embed local export support for future sustainability;
3. add value to the national core offer of support provided through DIT, and how they will engage SMEs locally around sector development and capacity building in companies to make export plans happen;
4. develop and support trade in the area's key and priority sectors;
5. provide local events targeting priority sectors covering business education, sector focused market visits, trade missions, trade fairs and meet the buyer events; and,
6. ensure the project proposals aligns with provision available through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Growth Hub [Signpost2Grow](#) missions, trade fairs and meet the buyer events.

In developing project proposals applicants are encouraged to consider the emerging evidence base from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) which can be accessed [here](#).

New Anglia

The Norfolk and Suffolk Economic Strategy sets out the need to create by 2036:

- 88,000 new jobs
- £17.5 billion growth in our economy
- Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour of £39
- 30,000 new successful businesses

Norfolk & Suffolk exports approx. £3.6bn of physical goods per year alongside a similar value in services (based on the UK export value of services being about 10-15% less than the value of goods) which has a major impact on our economy. Set in the backdrop of a national deficit in exports/imports, this means more business in Norfolk & Suffolk will be reliant on importing (£5.91bn, 10,000 businesses) than exporting (£3.64bn, 7,600 businesses), however our own knowledge indicates a significant proportion of larger, high growth businesses are exporters meaning the benefit to jobs and the local economy are disproportionality higher for those that export.

The East of England has a total export value of £26bn with 31,000 business exporting; the import value is £45bn with 42,000 business importing. Norfolk and Suffolk represent 13% of both the

import and export share of the East of England, this is significant as Norfolk and Suffolk also represents 28% of the East of England population, meaning the area is underperforming substantially per capita.

To impact our job, productivity (GVA), start-up rate and achieve New Anglia's economic growth targets, support will be needed for local businesses to enter new global markets, capitalising on new trade links and enhance the New Anglia LEP's (NALEP) "trade global, supply local" campaign.

Applications should explain how they will:

1. focus on projects that seek to support export growth in underperforming areas where substantial gains can be made, rather than supporting well served areas that have smaller margins for growth; and,
2. provide targeted support for those key sectors where the area has a competitive advantage and specific trade opportunities including agri-food, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and information and communication technologies (ICT), aligning with the Economic Strategy for Norfolk and Suffolk.

Oxfordshire LEP area

Oxfordshire has international potential - many of Oxfordshire's industries already complete on a global level. Investing in Oxfordshire will support us in reaching our international potential.

Applications should explain how they will:

1. engage companies to stimulate exports and where already exporting, identify new markets;
2. build on the targeted approach and pilot programme being run with hi-tech business in the Science Vale;
3. provide free advice and subsidised access to national and international conferences/events and trade missions;
4. provide access to grants;
5. support resource for a local network of Export Champions working alongside International Trade Advisors (ITAs); and,
6. support wider internationalisation projects alongside Oxfordshire LEP and DIT's investment, international trade and capital investment teams.

Thames Valley Berkshire

The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area is seeking to increase the proportion of firms involved in exporting, through its Business Growth Hub service, which is supported by the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, a proven deliverer of export services and the LEP's local delivery partner.

It is recognised that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the area would benefit from additional support in realising their growth ambitions, in particular exporting to improve their trade position in terms of both access to and from international markets. The LEP area needs to capitalise more on existing assets, such as its proximity to London Heathrow Airport and the planned extension and new runway. These will provide additional and new routes to international markets for existing companies located in the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP area and contribute to attracting inward investment into the sub region.

In terms of exporting, some 59% or about £4 billion, of Berkshire's annual exports of goods went to the European Union in 2015 (latest available HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) data). This is a higher proportion than the South East average of 47%. Germany was the main destination in the European Union, accounting for 13% of total export value, followed by Belgium (9%) and France (9%). Outside the European Union, exports to the United States accounted for 13% of the total export value. Just over half exports (in terms of value) were classified as 'machinery and transport', 20% were classified as 'chemicals'.

With a highly skilled workforce and easy access to national and international markets, the LEP area has the highest concentration of foreign owned companies in the UK. The area boasts excellent connections to the rest of the UK, Europe and the world via road, rail and air. There are particularly strong investment opportunities in a variety of sectors and more information is available on the LEP's website: <http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/international>

Applicants should explain how they will:

1. prepare SMEs for the uncertainties related to Brexit, as well as exploring new opportunities for internationalisation
2. better promote current and additional export services, whatever their source
3. complement the activities of the Business Growth Hub and local delivery partner, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, and other, related ERDF-funded projects
4. contribute to the implementation of a Local Industrial Strategy for Thames Valley Berkshire.