



## 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme

### Call for Proposals – Online Applications European Social Fund

#### Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth

<b>Managing Authority</b>	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
<b>ESI Fund</b>	European Social Fund
<b>Priority Axis:</b>	<b>Priority Axis 2: Skills for Growth</b>
<b>Investment Priority:</b>	2.2: Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems.
<b>Call Reference:</b>	Greater Birmingham and Solihull Skills for Growth & Apprenticeship Hub Support (call ref: OC12S20P1794)
<b>LEP Area:</b>	Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP
<b>Call Opens:</b>	16 December 2020
<b>Call Closes:</b>	Midnight – 02 March 2021
<b>Application Process</b>	<p>Applications for funding must be completed and submitted using the ECLAIMS IT system.</p> <p>Applications submitted via any other method will not be accepted.</p> <p>Please <b>do not</b> use ECLAIMS to access or apply against <b>ERDF</b> calls published on GOV.UK – the online application process is only applicable to specified ESF open calls.</p> <p>Please note: the ECLAIMS system can only be accessed from within the UK.</p>

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## Call Context

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

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

European Structural and Investment Funds are managed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (ERDF), Department for Work and Pensions (ESF) and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EAFRD). In London, the Greater London Authority acts as an Intermediate Body for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund programmes. Unless stated otherwise, the term “Managing Authority” will apply to all these organisations. These Departments are the Managing Authorities for each Fund. The Managing Authorities work closely with local partners who 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 in the development of project calls (decided by the Managing Authorities) that reflect Operational Programme and local development needs as well as match funding opportunities;
- Advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of Operational Programmes and the local ESIF Strategy to aid the Managing Authority’s appraisal of each Full Application.

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

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

This call for proposal sets out the requirements for any applicants to consider before applying. Applications against this call will be usually be appraised as part of a single-stage appraisal process and successful applicants will enter into a funding agreement with the DWP. Further information is given in sections 4 to 10.

However, if an existing ESF Grant Recipient submits an application to extend their existing ESF Project via this open call and, if the cumulative value of all Full Applications received against it is below the call value, the ESF Managing Authority

may choose to consider and assess that application via the Project Change Request route.

The decision on whether or not to use the Project Change Request route is a Managing Authority decision and will only be considered once the call is closed. To determine whether the Project Change Request route may be appropriate, the Managing Authority will take into account:

- Existing project performance against financial, output and result targets;
- The existing Grant Recipient track record within the ESF Programme;
- Completeness, robustness and detail of the information provided in the Full Application Form and supporting documents which would inform the Project Change Request assessment;
- Scale and complexity of any proposed changes between their existing ESF Project and their new Full Application proposal;
- Eligibility and availability of match-funding for the new/extended project delivery period.

This list is not exhaustive and, if there are any concerns about the delivery and/or management of the existing project, then the Full Application will be subject to the standard Full Appraisal process.

The same Project Change Request route may also be considered by the Managing Authority where the cumulative value of applications against an open call exceeds the overall call value, but the ESF Managing Authority then exercises their right to “increase the indicative allocation, or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received” as set out in this call specification or in cases where there is only one applicant against this call and that applicant is already delivering the same type of ESF Project in the same LEP Area under the same Investment Priority.

All ESF applicants will need to be aware of the requirement to collect and report data on all participants as per Annex 1 of the ESF regulation (see Appendix A). This will be in addition to the requirement to report on the output and result indicators referred to in section 3 of the call for proposal.

## **UK Withdrawal Agreement**

Under the Withdrawal Agreement, the UK will continue to participate in programmes funded under the current 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) until their closure.

This means that the vast majority of programmes will continue to receive EU funding across the programme’s lifetime. In many cases, funding will continue until after 2020 and the end of the transition period. In addition, UK organisations can continue to bid for new grant funding under the current MFF.

More information on the continued UK participation in EU Programmes can be found at the following [website link](#).

## 1.1 National Context

This priority axis aims to support skills for growth. It will support activities through:

**Investment Priority 2.2** - Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems, facilitating the transition from education to work, and strengthening vocational education and training systems and their quality, including through mechanisms for skills anticipation, adaptation of curricula and the establishment and development of work based learning systems, including dual learning systems and apprenticeship schemes

Where appropriate, training may complement activities delivered within the thematic objectives relating to innovation, low carbon, climate change, ICT and SME competitiveness, especially where improving intermediate and advanced skills can contribute to these thematic objectives. The focus on SMEs complements ERDF priorities, reflects the lower level of leadership, management and enterprise skills in smaller businesses and takes account of the fact that larger businesses in the UK are already eligible for skills support through the Employer Ownership Fund (EOF).

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

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

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

## 1.2 Local Development Need

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

The More Developed Area of Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) includes: Birmingham, Solihull, Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest and the Transitional Area includes: Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth.

**This ESF call takes place in the context of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the apprenticeship market and workforce skills requirements to aid economic recovery.**

Apprenticeships will form a key part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) COVID Response '[Recharge the West Midlands](#)' and the LGA have recently highlighted the declining number of apprenticeships available in the area in

a [report](#) of 11 August 2020. The report says *'For the West Midlands, the latest available apprenticeship data, shows approximately one third as many apprentices were recruited in the period of January to April than in the prior two quarters. This is further supported by a comparison of apprenticeship postings between June 2019 and June 2020 which dropped from 10,601 to 5,642. This is indicative of a sharp decline in recruitment across the region, which will likely also be felt throughout the UK'*.

GBSLEP is committed to ensuring residents can ascend a 'ladder of skills progression'. Placing an emphasis on the skills supply responding to the demand generated (particularly within the priority growth sectors) and ensuring employees are suitably skilled. Our ambition is to ensure residents are equipped with the skills to secure and sustain employment, progress through the labour market and that the workforce is equipped with the skills that employers need.

GBSLEP want to ensure the employment skills eco-system is demand led and skills provision responds flexibly and quickly to the local skills needs generated by:

- Adopting a broad response to this unprecedented challenge, in line with the approach set out in the WMCA Covid-19 Response Plan;
- Planned economic investment and major developments planned for the GBSLEP including, but not limited to: Green Manufacturing, Health Innovation, HS2, Enterprise Zone, Brownfield Regeneration and Housing, UK Central and the Commonwealth Games development and legacy.
- Key GBSLEP growth sectors and technologies previously identified in the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) as most likely to offer opportunities for higher level job creation and economic growth. These sectors are: advanced manufacturing & engineering; life sciences; business, professional and financial services; energy technologies and services; creative industries; digital and Digi-technologies;
- Sectors where there is significant job replacement demand or are key to local business needs: Health and Social Care, particularly Adult Care; Transport and Logistics, Retail; Hospitality and Tourism; Construction and Infrastructure, Digital and Tech; Food and Drink; Low Carbon; Emerging Technologies;
- Businesses that are new to the GBSLEP area and those that are planning direct foreign investments;
- The direct or supply-chain impact of Brexit on local employers;

GBSLEP has already begun to address the economic impact of the pandemic and the dramatic effect on the apprenticeship and employment market, through a series of initiatives in its **'Apprenticeship and Employment Support Triage Service'** launched in June 2020. This service supports employers, providers and apprentices to maximise apprentice retention and create new apprenticeship opportunities where programmes are unavoidably terminated. Many free opportunities have been made available for furloughed employees or self-employed residents to upskill or increase skills, before returning to work. Redundancy or at risk of redundancy support has

been made available, as well as additional Careers Information, Advice and Guidance provision.

### **Local Priorities:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an economic impact that is unprecedented in recent history and this may have far reaching effects on employment, unemployment and economic activity for many years into the future. The GBSLEP area has been disproportionately affected by this with a relatively young population combined with high reliance on employment sectors, such as manufacturing and retail operations, which have suffered under COVID-19.

### **Development of a Skills for Growth and Apprenticeship Hub approach:**

GBSLEP have a “Growth Hub” model of business support to assist companies across the LEP and surrounding area. The Growth Hub should now be complemented with the design and creation of a GBSLEP Skills for Growth Hub and/or Apprenticeship Hub that supports employers and learners to find apprenticeship and skills provision of the right breadth, quality and volume, which are key to driving productivity through skills in GBLSEP and to improve the quality and breadth of that provision locally.

The aim is to increase apprenticeships, intern and work experience uptake, as well as supporting skills development identified by employers, particularly in GBSLEP growth sectors and to increase the knowledge of and use of the employer apprenticeship levy locally.

Employers should be supported to identify how they will connect with the employment and skills system, through links with education, creating apprenticeships, accessing relevant skills support/up-skilling or developing their workforce activities. This includes the identification of skills gaps to better position these businesses to diversify into new markets, adopt new technologies and create more jobs.

The Hub approach will connect employers to sources of recruitment, training and skills provision, as well as providing a gateway to opportunities for individuals and unemployed local residents seeking access to learning, jobs, apprenticeships, work experience and skills with these employers. The Hub approach will also be a key source of labour market intelligence to inform skills commissioning and improve careers guidance; it will promote skills opportunities and focus on raising productivity by working with employers. This approach to ‘business, careers and skills’ will enable local employers to be more involved in designing, delivering and enhancing skills for their workforce.

### **Call Outline**

The Hub approach should be closely aligned to the GBSLEP Growth Hub.

### **Applicants should consider how they will:**

- Provide employers with a first stop access point for skills support and advice, including how they will receive referrals from the GBSLEP Growth Hub, develop publicity campaigns and work with other partner organisations or projects;
- Meet the needs of individual employers or groups of employers through Operational Needs Analysis and Training Needs Analysis, and how they will work closely with the GBSLEP Growth Hub complement of Business Brokers and Sector Advisers;
- Employ and manage a team of skills or apprenticeship advisors/brokers who will provide a sector focussed, personalised and tailored package of support that will enhance business growth and performance including training packages and creating more apprenticeships.

### **Processes must include how the applicant intends to:**

- Work with the Growth Hub advisers to provide a service that compliments and expands the support already in place;
- Implement a fair and equal referral model within the skills and apprenticeship brokerage processes;
- Secure added value and efficiency for employers through access to relevant funding support that meets their needs and those of their employees, promotes progression and is delivered by bringing different funding streams together in a seamless manner;
- Put in place governance arrangements for the Skills/Apprenticeship Hub Services and explain how these fit with or work alongside the GBSLEP Growth Hub;
- Outline the funds that can be used for, any limit on funding amounts and proposed employer contributions with skills or apprenticeship developments, as well as the application, approval, monitoring and evaluation procedures;
- Overcome logistical and financial challenges in order to deliver high quality advice and opportunities across the whole GBSLEP area;
- Collaborate with neighbouring LEP's, to ensure a seamless referral of appropriate individuals and employers to similar support that is available in their LEP localities (outside the geography and remit of GBSLEP);

### **The outputs of the Skills for Growth and Apprenticeship Hub approach should include:**

- Supporting employers to enable employees to gain and/or increase their skills, apprenticeships and qualifications;



- Increasing employers, particularly SME's and micro businesses with employees in apprenticeships partaking in qualifications relevant to the labour market and GBSLEP's key growth sectors and particularly at NVQ3+;
- Increasing Apprenticeship opportunities and knowledge of skills training, as well as work experience, internships, work placements and graduate placements (especially the number of SMEs engaged in these);
- Developing programmes and activities which link employers to sources of recruitment, training and skills provision, as well as providing a gateway and support mechanism for local individuals, unemployed and disadvantaged residents seeking access to and taking part in skills learning, jobs, apprenticeships, work experience, and internships with local employers;
- Promotion of apprenticeships and provision of advice and guidance to learners and employers;
- Provision of impartial advice and guidance to employers to enable them to understand their skills needs and the opportunities available for these needs to be met;
- Promotion of skills and apprenticeships particularly to address labour market diversity and local disadvantaged individuals in GBSLEP;

### **Target Audience:**

Activities should be focused on support to SME and micro organisations as the primary target audience, however applicants should also provide information on the total number of participants expected to benefit from the project as a consequence of the ESF project support to SME organisations. This information should be recorded in the additional IP2.2 Annex template available on GOV.UK and then uploaded into ECLAIMS as a supporting document as part of their online Full Application. Performance of the ESF Project(s) will then include monitoring against the individual participant target (ESF Output Target O1) as well as the relevant SME Output and Result targets

### **Consortia/Partnership**

Applications are encouraged from consortia or other similar types of partnership arrangements. In each such case the application must be completed and submitted in the ECLAIMS IT system by the lead organisation on behalf of the partnership/consortia. The lead applicant must have the financial capacity to meet the required Due Diligence criteria and, if ESF funding is awarded, this organisation will then become the lead Grant Recipient, accountable for delivery of the overall ESF Project.

Details of the local ESIF Strategy can be found at:

<https://gbslep.co.uk/resources/reports/european-structural-investment-fund-strategy>

### 1.3 Scope of activity

This call invites Full Applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 2, **Investment Priority 2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems** of the European Social Fund Operational Programme and responds to the local development need set out in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Area European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy.

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

## 2. Call Requirements

All applications are competitive.

<b>Indicative Fund Allocation:</b>	<p>Indicatively, through this call the Managing Authority expects to allocate approximately <b>£1,200,000 ESF</b>.</p> <p><b>Approximately 17% - £204,000 allocated to the Transitional Region</b></p> <p><b>Approximately 83%- £996,000 allocated to the More Developed Region</b></p> <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to decrease or increase the indicative allocation, or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received. 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>
<b>Minimum application level</b>	<p>European Social Fund investment is intended to make a significant impact on local growth. Applications are expected to demonstrate appropriate scale and impact. The Managing Authority does not intend to allocate less than <b>£150,000 to any single project delivering in the Transitional area only, £250,000 to any single project delivering in the More Developed Area only or £300,000 of ESF to any single project delivering across all GBSLEP areas.</b></p> <p><b>Applications requesting an ESF amount below the ‘Minimum Application Level’ will be rejected</b></p> <p>It is important to ensure a range of activity is supported as detailed in the call and also the need for coherence. Therefore, the MA favours a small number of projects being delivered.</p>

	<p>The minimum project size FOR both ESF &amp; match funding, is dependent on the intervention rate determined by Category of Region(CoR); 60% Transition Region &amp; 50% More Developed Region.</p> <p>As the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area spans two CoR – Transition and More Developed applicants will need to make it clear in their online Full Application how much of their requested project funding applies to each CoR and ensure that output and result figures are recorded for both CoR.</p>
<b>Duration of project</b>	<p>Projects must be financially completed (i.e. have a proposed Financial Completion Date) no later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023; however, the Managing Authority reserves the right to vary the maximum duration in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>All ESF Projects must complete delivery by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023. Project costs cannot be incurred beyond this date.</p> <p>NOTE: Delivery of activities and associated costs can be incurred up to and including 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, with the full and final claim expected no later than February 2024</p>
<b>Geographical Scope</b>	<p>All interventions should be focused on activity and beneficiaries within the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership area.</p>
<b>Specific call requirements</b>	<p>This is a call for ESF activity.</p>
<b>Call Deadlines</b>	<p>For this specific call, applications will be appraised following closure of the call. Applications submitted to the Managing Authority via the ECLAIMS IT system after midnight on the published call close date will not be considered.</p> <p><b>If you encounter any technical difficulties completing or submitting your Full Application via ECLAIMS, please send an email to <a href="mailto:E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK">E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK</a> .</b></p> <p><b>Technical support is available Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm.</b></p> <p>It is your responsibility to submit your application in good time to allow time to resolve any technical issues. Except in the unlikely event that there is a general failure of the system in the final hours, we will not normally extend the deadline for technical issues.</p>

	<p><b>If you do not already have ECLAIMS access, to avoid any unnecessary delays in submission of your Full Application, it is recommended that you submit new ECLAIMS access requests as early in the application process as possible by sending an email to <a href="mailto:E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK">E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK</a> .</b></p> <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to reject applications which are incomplete or not submitted in a timely and compliant way.</p>
<b>Application selection</b>	<p>All applications will usually be scored in line with the ESF scoring criteria, but the MA reserve the right to offer ESF funding where a project complements other activity or provides niche activity to target groups within the ESF Operational Programme.</p> <p>However, the Managing Authority reserves the right to assess applications from existing Grant Recipients via the Project Change Request route where appropriate, as set out in the 'Call Context' section of this specification.</p>
<b>Applicant proposals</b>	<p>These can only contain activities which are eligible for ESF.</p>
<b>Eligible match funding</b>	<p>Applicants will need to have eligible match funding for the balance of costs, which must be from a source other than the European Union. The applicant will need to provide information to demonstrate that the operation is likely to have the required level of match funding in place at the point of formal approval.</p> <p>The intervention rate in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP Area is 50% in the More Developed areas and 60% in the Transition areas, so 50% of match funding must be provided in the More Developed areas and 40% of match funding must be provided in the Transition areas</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	<p>All procurement must be undertaken in line with EU regulations.</p>
<b>State Aid law</b>	<p>Applicants must demonstrate compliance with State Aid law.</p>
<b>Audit/ Compliance</b>	<p>All expenditure and activities will be subject to rigorous audit and non-compliance may lead to financial penalty.</p>

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

### 3. Deliverables required under this Call:

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

<b>Investment Priority</b>	<b>2.2 Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems</b>
<b>Specific Objectives</b>	To promote improvements in the labour market relevance of skills provision through active engagement with relevant institutions and employers, particularly SMEs and micro businesses.
<b>Indicative Actions</b>	<p>ESF will not support activities that duplicate or replace existing support within national programmes, but may be used to support additional activities, including provision co-designed with local partners.</p> <p>Examples of activities that may be supported include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support for collaborative projects, placements, internships or other activities with SMEs that enable students and graduates to gain industry-relevant experience and skills;</li> <li>• building capacity in SMEs to provide project/placement/ internship opportunities and enhance the contribution of advanced skills to SME growth, including programmes to specifically engage the most disadvantaged groups or those who face particular local disadvantages in utilising advanced skills;</li> <li>• brokering opportunities to encourage and increase work experience, work placements, traineeships, apprenticeships, and graduate placements particularly through wider employer engagement and involving supply chains;</li> <li>• promoting apprenticeships (especially at advanced levels in manufacturing and other priority sectors) by developing a supportive environment for employer engagement;</li> <li>• developing better links with business to equip students with the skills to start and grow a business to meet local business needs.</li> </ul>

## Results Table

**NOTE: When recording your quarterly profile figures for the following Result in ECLAIMS, please ensure you select the Result drop-down entry with the correct, relevant Category of Region suffix i.e. L = Less Developed, T = Transition, MD = More Developed.**

ID	Result Indicator	Minimum Target value for this call
R9	Small and Medium Enterprises successfully completing projects (which increase employer engagement; and/or the number of people progressing into or within skills provision)	75%

## Outputs Table

**NOTE: ESF applicants applying for funding under Investment Priority 2.2 must Provide Output target figures for “CO23 Number of supported micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)” and also for “O1 - Total Number of Participants”.**

**Target forecasts for CO23 must be recorded directly into the ‘Deliverables’ screen in ECLAIMS.**

**However, the target figure for “O1 Total Participants” should instead be recorded in the separate IP2.2 Annex, which is available on GOV.UK and which should then be uploaded as a mandatory supporting document in ECLAIMS as part of the Full Application.**

**When recording your quarterly profile figures for the CO23 Output in ECLAIMS, please ensure you select the CO23 Output Result drop-down entry with the correct, relevant Category of Region suffix i.e. L = Less Developed, T= Transition, MD = More Developed.**

ID	Output Indicator	Minimum Target value for this call
CO23	Number of supported micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)	More Developed 198 Transitional 34
O1	Total number of participants	There is no target value for this call however applicants will be expected to provide a total number of participants the project is aiming to support in both the application and associated IP2.2 Annex.

## Outputs and Results Rationale

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

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

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

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

Applicants will also need to ensure robust systems are in place, and be able to describe them, to capture and record the targets and to report quantitative and qualitative performance across the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area. All operations will be required to collect data and report progress against the deliverables with each claim. Where an operation underperforms against their deliverables they may be subject to a performance penalty.

In addition, applicants applying for ESF funds under I.P 2.2 will be expected to complete a short annex, along with the standard application Full Application form. This is to ensure that full consideration is being given to the 'Value for Money' (VFM). The [Annex for ESF IP 2.2](#) funding calls can be located on the European Growth Funding website pages.

There must be a fully evidenced audit trail for all contracted deliverables.

## 4. General Information

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

### 4.1 Compliance and Eligibility

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

European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) are governed by European regulations and national rules. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the relevant documentation listed in the 'Document Checklist' (Section 8 of this call specification) prior to completing and submitting their Full Application in the ECLAIMS IT system. If successful, Applicants will enter into the standard Funding Agreement and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to read these terms and conditions to ensure that they would be able to enter into such an agreement prior to responding to the call. Once a Funding Agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within a short timescale.

## **4.2 Intervention Rate & Match Funding**

ESF is funding used where no other funding can be obtained (the funder of last resort) and the maximum ESF intervention rate for the operation is 50% in the More Developed area and 60% in the Transition area. This means ESF can contribute up to 50% of the total eligible project costs in the More Developed area and 60% of the total eligible cost in the Transition Area, subject to State Aid regulations. The remaining 50% in the More Developed Area and 40% in the Transition Area or more must come from other eligible sources. For all full applications, the applicant will need to provide information to demonstrate that the operation is likely to have the required level of match funding in place at the point of formal approval.

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

## **4.3 Applicants**

Applicants must be legally constituted at the point of signing a Funding Agreement, and be able to enter into a legally binding Funding Agreement. The Applicant will be the organisation that, if the application is successful, enters into a contract for ESF and therefore carries the liability for ensuring that the terms of the ESF Funding Agreement are met by them and to all delivery partners. If there is more than one organisation applying for the funds, a lead organisation must be selected to become the Applicant. It is this organisation that carries the responsibility and liability for carrying out a compliant project.

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 with this (these) grant(s) have been identified, the Managing Authority will look into these and expect to see how and what steps have been taken to ensure that these have been addressed to mitigate the risk of further irregularities in the future. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to ESIF funding and will not have a track record.

## **4.4 Cross Cutting Themes**

All applications received under this Call should demonstrate how the Cross Cutting Themes have been addressed in the project design and development. Cross cutting



themes for ESF are 'gender equality and equal opportunities' and 'sustainable development'.

For ESF, the project applicants will be required to deliver their services in-line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (as defined in the Equality Act 2010). All projects must have a gender and equal opportunities policy and implementation plan which will be submitted at full application stage and in-line with Managing Authority guidance. Project applicants will also be required to answer a number of ESF-specific equality questions which will be set out in both the Full Application screens in the ECLAIMS IT system and the related ESF Online Full Application guidance.

For ESF, all projects will also be required to submit a sustainable development policy and implementation plan (in-line with guidance produced by the Managing Authority).

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

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

Further information is available in the [ESF Operational Programme](#) and in ESF Action Note 019/18: [New Assessment Scoring Procedures for Equality and Sustainable Development in ESF](#).

## 4.5 State Aid & Revenue Generation

Applicants are required, in the Full Application, to provide a view on how their proposal complies with State Aid law. Applicants must ensure that projects comply with the law on State Aid.<sup>1</sup> Grant funding to any economic undertaking which is state aid can only be awarded if it is compatible aid, in that it complies with the terms of a notified scheme or is covered by the De Minimis Regulation. Guidance for grant recipients, explaining more about State Aid, is available; it is important that Applicants take responsibility for understanding the importance of the State Aid rules and securing their full compliance with them throughout the project, if it is selected into the Programme.

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.

Where the Applicant does not perceive that there is any State Aid, it should state whether or not it considers Articles 61 and 65(8) of regulation 1303/2013 to apply. This revenue should be taken into account in calculating eligible expenditure. Article 61 refers to monitoring revenues generated after completion of the project, and

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

Article 65(8) how to deal with differences in the forecast and actual revenues at the end of the operation. The details of this will be tested at the full application stage.

#### **4.6 Funding Agreement**

The Funding Agreement is a standard, non-negotiable and legally binding document. Any successful Applicant will be subject to the terms and conditions contained within this agreement. Applicants are strongly advised to seek their own advice to ensure that they would be able to enter into and abide by the terms of the Funding Agreement.

Failure to meet any of the conditions of the agreement or the commitments within the application will result in claw back of funding.

Applicants should be aware that additional provisions and securities may be included within the Funding Agreement to protect the investment. These will be further discussed if relevant following the Full Application stage.

#### **4.7 Procurement**

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

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

It is recommended that applicants seek their own legal advice pertaining to their procurement and requirements to publicise any tendering opportunities.

The Managing Authority is not able to give legal advice on procurement. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the project is compliant in this respect.

#### **4.8 Retrospection**

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

For organisations applying for ESF funds through the Single-Stage Application process, the effective date for incurring eligible ESF expenditure will be the day after the relevant open call closing date. Any expenditure incurred by an ESF Direct Bid project prior to this date is ineligible.

However, any expenditure incurred by an ESF applicant, up to and including the date on which an ESF Funding Agreement is fully executed, will be at the applicant's own risk.

## 4.9 Duplication of Provision

Applicants are required, in their Full Application, to “identify any organisations offering the same or similar activity” as their proposed project. Applicants are also asked to “explain how the proposed project adds value to and doesn’t duplicate existing provision, and does not conflict with national policy”.

To help inform their response, applicants should access the ESF List of Beneficiaries published on GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/european-structural-and-investment-funds-useful-resources> and search for any other ESF funded projects operating under the same Investment Priority in the same geographical area(s) as their proposed ESF Project.

Where there is potential duplication and/or overlap, the applicant should ensure they explain how they will work with any other pre-existing ESF Projects to ensure their new project will add value and not conflict with existing provision.

## 5. Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology

The ESF application process is a single-stage process – Full Application only.

Applicants must fully complete the Full Application information required in the ECLAIMS IT system (section 9 refers).

The ESF Online Full Application guidance for Applicants, is available on the [European Growth Funding](#) website pages – this document includes step-by-step details of how to record your Full Application information in ECLAIMS, as well as guidance on the depth and content expectations.

Following the call closing date, applications will usually first be subject to a Gateway Assessment undertaken by the Managing Authority under the following criteria:

- Applicant eligibility
- Activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- The fit with the ESF Operational Programme and the call

Proposals that pass the Gateway Assessment will move into the Core Assessment which consists of the following:

- Strategic fit
- Value for money
- Management and control
- Deliverability
- Procurement / tendering and
- State Aid compliance.

The Managing Authority will seek advice from partners when considering applications to ensure its appraisal is informed by local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of Operational Programmes and the local ESIF

Strategy. This will include the relevant LEP Area ESIF Committee and other partners deemed relevant to the application.

The appraisal and any prioritisation will be undertaken using only the information supplied as part of the application process. The Managing Authority cannot accept further detail outside this process.

However, the Managing Authority reserves the right to assess applications from existing Grant Recipients via the Project Change Request route where appropriate, as set out in the 'Call Context' section of this specification.

Non-public sector Applicants may be subject to due financial diligence checks. Applicants will be required to submit accounts, and to clarify financial or other organisational information. New Applicant organisations may be required to provide details of a guarantor.

If, following the appraisal process, an applicant is not satisfied with the ESF funding decision for their project, they can submit an appeal in writing to the ESF Managing Authority.

## 6. Technical Support

All Full Applications for this call **must** be completed and submitted using only the ECLAIMS IT system. Applications submitted via any other method will not be accepted.

If you encounter any technical difficulties completing or submitting your Full Application via the ECLAIMS IT system, please send an email to:

[E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK](mailto:E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK)

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

**Technical support is available Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm.**

Please retain evidence of your request(s) for any Technical Support, in case there are any issues arising around this element of the application process which may need further investigation.

Please also note that, as this is a competitive call and to preserve impartiality, other than providing Technical Support, we are unable to enter into correspondence with applicants over their Full Application prior to the call closing date. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this calls document.

## 7. Key Reference Documents

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

- ESF Online Full Application Guidance;
- Local Enterprise Partnership area's ESIF strategy;
- [ESF National Eligibility Rules and Programme Guidance](#);

- [ESF Programme Guidance on Simplified Cost Options](#).
- [Annex for ESF IP 2.2](#).

## 8. Full Application – Supporting Document Checklist

The appraisal will be undertaken on the basis of the Full Application information submitted by the applicant using the ECLAIMS IT system, together with any supporting documents uploaded into ECLAIMS IT system by the applicant at the point of closure of the call.

As a minimum, applicants should upload the following documentation into the ECLAIMS IT system alongside completion of the required Full Application screens/fields in ECLAIMS.

Failure to upload the requested documentation could result in the application being rejected.

The ESF Online Full Application Guidance explains how documents should be uploaded into ECLAIMS and Annex B of the same guidance explains the naming conventions to be used for each document.

### Mandatory Supporting Documents

1. A **visual, high level customer journey** document e.g. flow chart;
2. **Confirmation of match funding** from each funder. Match-funding should be confirmed (with the exception of SME contributions) prior to the issuing of any Funding Agreement;
3. **Detailed Granular Budget breakdown** (All costs must be itemised, eligible, appropriate for the project and profiled across the project period. The granular budget should also include all hourly rate figures, per job role, for staff working part-time or part of their time on the ESF Project – calculated using the 1720 hour rate calculation set out in the [Simplified Cost Options Guidance](#) on GOV.UK. This includes match-funded staff roles);
4. **Equality & Diversity Policy and Implementation Plan** this can be a single, combined document or 2 separate documents. (Applicant is responsible for ensuring that Delivery partners also hold relevant policies);
5. **Sustainability Policy and Implementation Plan** this can be a single, combined document or 2 separate documents. (Applicant is responsible for ensuring that Delivery partners also hold relevant policies);
6. **Job Descriptions** at least 1 per lead applicant and 1 per each Delivery Partner;
7. **Organogram** covering all staff, including any delivery partner and/or match-funded staff posts;
8. **Sample HR letter** as per the requirements set out in the [ESF National Eligibility Rules and Programme Guidance](#) on GOV.UK;
9. **Project level risk register** (this should cover areas such as financial risk, output risks, delivery risks etc. please ensure that the register covers how these risks will be managed and mitigated);
10. **Anti-Fraud Statement** (a statement on how you will deal with suspected fraud in your organisation and if appropriate, with your sub-contractors);
11. Fully completed [Annex for ESF IP 2.2](#);

12. **Due Diligence Financial Information.** If your organisation is a private or voluntary and community sector organisation or a Further Education College, you must upload:

- Financial accounts for the most recent 3 years;
- Proof of existence - Certificate of Incorporation, Charities Registration, VAT Registration Certificate or alternate form of incorporation documentation;
- Proof of trading - Financial Accounts/Statements for the most recent two years of trading including, as a minimum, Profit and Loss Account and Balance Sheets;
- Completed FVRA Applicant Template (for applications requesting annualised funding of greater than £1m).

### Optional Supporting Documents

13. **Recruitment Policy** this can be a single, combined document or 2 separate documents. (Applicant is responsible for ensuring that Delivery partners also hold relevant policies);
14. **Sample Timesheet** applicable if you or your Delivery Partners have members of staff working part of their time on your ESF Project;
15. **Procurement policy** applicable if your ESF project is expecting to incur procurement costs from existing or future procurements and you are not intending to use the 40% Flat Rate Indirect Cost option;
16. **Retention Policy** this can be a single, combined document or 2 separate documents. (Applicant is responsible for ensuring that Delivery partners also hold relevant policies);
17. **Draft SLA with Delivery Partners** applicable if your ESF Project will have one or more Delivery Partners;
18. **Independent state aid advice** applicable only if you have obtained independent advice to support your quoted ESF project State Aid position;
19. **Proof of Irrecoverable VAT** applicable only if you have Irrecoverable VAT which is relevant to your ESF Project

**NOTE:** The ECLAIMS IT system can accept most standard Office file formats such as MS Word documents and excel documents in the format xlsx.

However, documents which contain macros cannot be uploaded into the ECLAIMS IT system.

In addition, the ECLAIMS IT system cannot accept tables, graphics or other visuals in the narrative fields within the Full Application screens. If you wish to include this type of information as part of your Full Application, you will need to upload this information as part of a supporting document.

## 9. Full Application Submission

Completed Full Applications must be submitted to the ESF Managing Authority via the ECLAIMS IT system.

Although the ECLAIMS IT system is designed to be intuitive, it is strongly recommended that you closely follow the steps in the [ESF Online Full Application Guidance](#), published on GOV.UK to give the best chance of you submitting a fully completed, compliant Full Application.

The Managing Authority reserves the right to reject applications which are incomplete or not submitted in a timely and compliant way.

## 10. Accessing ECLAIMS

If you do not already have access to the ECLAIMS IT system, please send an email to [E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK](mailto:E.CLAIMSSUPPORT@DWP.GOV.UK) as soon as possible.

You should complete a form for **each** individual person in your organisation who will be responsible for completing and/or submitting your Full Application.

Each new ECLAIMS user will then receive an email from an organisation called Datamart – this will contain their unique log-in details. The user will need to follow the instructions within the email to change their password in the first instance. They will then be able to access and use the ECLAIMS IT system.

**NOTE:** To avoid any unnecessary delays in submission of your Full Application, it is recommended that you submit new ECLAIMS IT system access requests as early in the application process as possible.

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

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

## 11. Timescales

Launch of Call advertised on GOV.UK	16 December 2020
Deadline for submission of Full Application via the ECLAIMS IT System	Midnight 02 March 2021

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

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

## 12. Appendix A – Common output indicators

### Appendix A - extract from Annex 1 of the ESF regulation

Common output indicators for ESF investments

Common output indicators for entities are:

number of projects fully or partially implemented by social partners or non-governmental organisations
number of projects dedicated at sustainable participation and progress of women in employment
number of projects targeting public administrations or public services at national, regional or local level
number of supported micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (including cooperative enterprises, enterprises of the social economy)