



Education & Skills  
Funding Agency



# ESFA Business Plan

2024-25



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The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is responsible for delivering and assuring over **£70 billion** of funding to the education and skills sectors. This makes us one of the largest funding operations anywhere in government – with responsibility for delivering and assuring one in every £10 of central Government resource spending.

## **Our vision**

**Every pound spent on education and skills has the greatest possible impact on ensuring all learners can realise their potential.**

Our vision helps us build a shared understanding of what we are trying to achieve and sets the direction for ESFA over the coming years.

It places learners at the heart of everything we do and builds a strong link between the funding we provide and the learner outcomes we want to see.



## How we deliver

Our vision links closely with the Department for Education's (DfE) broader vision to be the department for realising potential.

This business plan explains the outcomes that we will work with the education and skills sectors to achieve, in order to realise our vision.

As an arm's length body of DfE, we have a clear role in helping to achieve the department's priorities as well as our own outcomes. DfE on behalf of the Secretary of State is focused on a range of priorities; we, alongside parts of the department contribute to those.

For instance, we enable providers to plan ahead with certainty about what funding they will get, how much and when, which in post-16 institutions means they can scale up and deliver skills programmes including apprenticeships.

We ensure funding is spent as efficiently and effectively as possible enabling the education sector to maximise the resources focused on raising standards, maximising funding available for teaching and learning by enabling efficiency in support functions. We tackle financial challenges quickly meaning more pupils learning in high performing schools. More broadly, DfE delivery across skills, schools, and families and the functioning of the education system is underpinned and supported by the core funding operations of ESFA.

We cannot deliver our vision in isolation, and we will continue to work closely with our partners across the department, government and the sectors we work with.

## Our outcomes

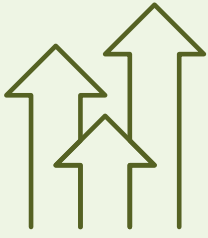
Our business planning activity is framed around outcomes for the sector.

We've developed a set of headline performance metrics which we will measure during the 2024 to 2025 financial year, to assess progress towards our outcomes. We will continue to review whether we're measuring the right things, and how well our measures are reflecting our outcomes.

We acknowledge that to understand how well we are achieving our outcomes we must also gather feedback from education providers in the sector on their experience of working with us, as such we are developing more ways in which we can seek sectoral feedback to strengthen our understanding of our impact and the development of our approach.







## Certainty

Those we fund have certainty in their funding, enabling them to plan effectively.

We know that it is not possible to guarantee all funding over the long term, and that in a year that will involve a General Election and a Spending Review, a degree of change and uncertainty is inevitable. Within that context our aspiration is nonetheless to give providers as much certainty of funding as we can.

Providers need to know what funding they will be getting, how much and when, to have the ability to plan ahead, and clarity in their roles and responsibilities for using that funding.

When providers are able to plan more effectively, they can focus more on delivering outcomes for learners.

We will aim to give providers:

- certainty on what will be paid and when
- confidence they will be paid the accurate amount at the right time
- clarity on what could be paid in future

- clarity on how to comply with funding rules
- services that are accessible and easy to use
- confidence that queries will be resolved quickly and fully

## Headline measures



**Delivering a reliable funding service that ensures the accurate amount of funding goes to the right place, at the right time:**

100% of allocations are produced accurately and on time.

100% of payment instructions are issued accurately and on time.



**Seeking feedback from stakeholders on clear and accessible rules, guidance and services:**

75% of respondents rate their experience of using Funding Service products as either satisfied or very satisfied.





## Support

Those we fund can access high quality support and guidance.

The education sector will only secure good learning outcomes for children, young people and adults, if finances are well managed, funding is spent efficiently and effectively, and financial challenges are tackled quickly.

We will work proactively with providers to pre-empt issues before they arise. We will work directly with schools and academies, and work collaboratively with DfE to support other institutions. We will respect the autonomy of providers and the need for a proportionate approach, but sometimes need to be more directive with our support.

To do this, we will work with the department to support the institutions we fund by:

- building financial management, school business and governance capability
- working with providers facing financial challenges
- recognising that some providers will need more active support



## Headline Measures



**Uptake of key support and capability-building offers –** proportion of schools and trusts accessing one or more ESFA-led support offers.



**Seek feedback from stakeholders on provider satisfaction and experience, including:**

75% providers who have received a visit from a School Resource Manager rate their experience as good or very good.

75% of academy trusts rate their experience of working with the agency on financial oversight as good or very good.

75% of providers rate their experience of our Specialist Restructuring support services as good or very good.



**We will respond quickly and resolve issues in a timely manner – working with DfE to resolve enquiries:**

80% of tier 1 enquiries within 3 working days.

90% within 5 working days.

80% of tier 2 enquiries within 10 working days.

90% within 20 working days.

80% of tier 3 enquiries within 12 weeks.

90% within 15 weeks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Relating to enquiries received through the customer help portal only. Tier 1 enquires are answered directly by our customer support team; tier 2 enquiries are referred to specialists in ESFA to answer; tier 3 enquiries are referred to specialists in ESFA to investigate.



## Assurance

Taxpayers' money is used for its intended purpose.

The agency provides over £70 billion of funding to schools, colleges and independent training providers with a mission to ensure that every pound spent on education and skills has the greatest possible impact to support learners to achieve their full potential. Ensuring that every pound of funding is used for its intended purpose is a key element of achieving our mission.

We have an active approach to identifying fraud and error within the education and skills system. To achieve this outcome we will:

- Support our sectors with clear guidance and frameworks, and by sharing lessons learnt from funding audits and investigations;
- Focus on prevention by working with the Department to strengthen upfront assurance of our funding;
- Work with our sectors to focus on the areas that will deliver the greatest improvements in assurance; and
- Deliver a robust assurance programme to provide assurance that our funding has been used as intended.

## Headline Measures



**Maximise the level of fraud and error prevented**



**Maximise the value of fraud and error detected**



**Deliver timely assurance activities** – by completing three-quarters of counter fraud investigations within nine months and three-quarters of post-16 funding audits in 100 days.



**Seek feedback from stakeholders on our counter fraud and assurance activities** – 75% of stakeholders reporting good or very good engagement with these teams.



## Our behaviours

The final contributing element in achieving our vision is our behaviours. Alongside the core values within the Civil Service Code, we are embedding these behaviours in how we operate. They are vital in creating a positive and open culture in our agency.



### User Centric

Our service users and their needs are at the heart of everything we do. We recognise that our work is part of a wider system that aims to realise the potential of learners. Our ambition is that by better understanding our users' needs we can be clearer on what we need to do to drive greater levels of certainty in our funding and ensure that those we fund feel supported by ESFA.



### Respectful

ESFA is a great and inclusive place to work. We want our people to thrive in a workplace where everyone feels respected and can be the best of themselves. This behaviour is intertwined with our interactions with our stakeholders and our support, certainty and assurance outcomes. By embedding respect in all we do internally, we will also embed it in our interactions with our stakeholders.



## Collaborative

All ESFA staff work collaboratively with colleagues across different areas of the business with an acknowledgement that we are all striving to achieve the same outcomes. There are also areas of our work where ESFA and the department rely upon one another. A close and collaborative relationship between ESFA and the department is key to delivering for the sector in a cohesive way that makes interacting with us and understanding our tools, commissions, and guidance simple. Embedding this collaborative approach within our interactions with other stakeholders, including the department, will help us deliver our outcomes.



## Creative

Our creativity is heavily linked to collaboration. It is our ability to work across boundaries, think innovatively, challenge each other where appropriate, discover new and creative solutions to issues we face as an organisation, and challenges faced by the sector which will ultimately improve the overall quality of the service we provide to the sector.

## Annex: Our measures

The detailed measures for how we will hold ourselves to account for influencing our Vision and Outcomes.

### Certainty

Measure	Target
<b>We will:</b>	
Produce allocations for our sectors on time.	100% in month.
Produce accurate allocations.	100% in month.
Issue payment instructions on time.	100% in month.
Issue accurate payment instructions.	100% in month.
Improve feedback from Funding Service Tools.	75% satisfied or very satisfied.
Ensure services are inclusive and accessible.	Baselined from March data.

### Support

Measure	Target
<b>We will:</b>	
Respond quickly and resolve issues in a timely manner.	80% of tier 1 enquiries within 3 working days. 90% within 5 working days. 80% of tier 2 enquiries within 10 working days. 90% within 20 working days. 80% of tier 3 enquiries within 12 weeks. 90% within 15 weeks.

Measure	Target
Increase the level of take up for our support offers within the sector.	Increased % of the sector accessing ESFA-led support.
Ensure providers receive a positive SRMA experience.	75% rate their visit good or very good and find the recommendations useful.
Track stakeholders assessing their experience of our Specialist Restructuring support services.	75% rate their experience as good or very good.
Track academy trusts assessing their experience of working with the agency on financial oversight.	75% rate their experience as good or very good.

## Assurance

Measure	Target
<b>We will:</b>	
Maximise the value of fraud and error detected.	£20m detected by our Counter Fraud and Prevention team.
Maximise the level of fraud and error prevented.	£40m prevented by our Counter Fraud and Prevention team.
Issue provisional findings of investigations to the provider .	75% within 9 months.
Conclude investigations.	75% within 3 months of issuing provisional findings.
Deliver timely Pre-16 funding audits.	75% within 28 working days.
Deliver timely Post-16 funding audits.	75% within 100 working days.
Track stakeholders assessing their experience of the professionalism of our Assurance Team.	75% rate their experience as good or very good.
Track stakeholders assessing their experience of the professionalism of our Counter Fraud and Prevention team.	75% rate their experience as good or very good.



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