



Department
for Education

The Flexible Learning Fund

Guidance on submitting proposals

October 2017

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to help providers of adult learning, employers and other organisations to understand how to complete a project proposal requesting funding to the Flexible Learning Fund, using the submission form provided.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed in April 2018.

Who is this publication for?

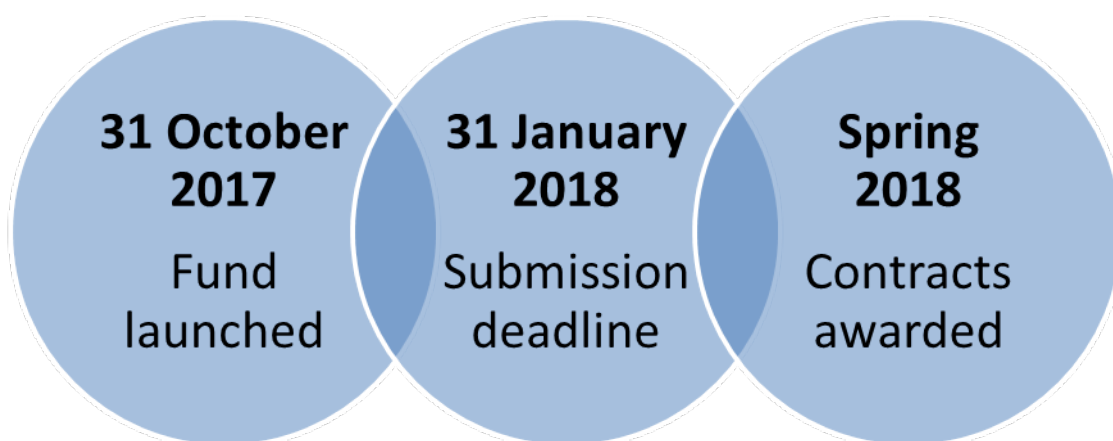
This guidance is for:

- Further Education Colleges
- Independent Training Providers
- Adult and Community Learning Providers
- Higher Education Institutions
- Employers
- Provider and employer representative bodies
- Third sector education organisations

Introduction

1. This document is intended to be used to support you – as lead organisations for a proposed project - in completing the submission form for proposals to the Flexible Learning Fund (the Fund). Before completing the form please ensure that you have read and are fully familiar with the specification for the Fund. The specification sets out in detail the aims and objectives of the Fund, the target groups of learners for the Fund, the provision in scope and the categories of interest for the Fund, and the eligibility and assessment criteria against which proposals will be judged.

2. The Fund was launched on 31 October 2017 and you can submit proposals for the Fund until midnight on 31 January 2018. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), will administer and operate the Fund, including the application process, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). The timescales and process for the Fund are:



3. Organisations who submit proposals to the Fund will receive grant funding to design and develop flexible learning approaches and packages. The specification identifies the type of approaches and packages (categories of interest) the Fund will support.

4. The number of proposals selected to grant fund will depend on the scope and range of projects received. Successful proposals will be funded on a time-limited basis, with grant support available up until the end of the 2018/2019 financial year. The Flexible Learning Fund will award up to £10 million with a maximum of £1 million for a single proposal (although in exceptional circumstances a single proposal in excess of this may be considered). However, proposals for a range of funding amounts, including those significantly below the maximum, are expected and encouraged.

5. Because it is intended that the Fund will support meaningful and positive outcomes for targeted groups of learners, all proposals are required to have a pilot

delivery phase where the flexible approaches that have been developed are practically tested with learners. You should be aware that the requirement to submit an Individualised Learner Record (ILR) for these learners will be applied, but that the ESFA will exclude these learners from Qualification Achievement Rates (QARs).

6. Where the pilot delivery of the approach is likely to incur costs over and above the core costs of delivering the provision in the standard way, this may also be covered by the grant funding awarded. However, proposals must still meet the core delivery costs of the provision through existing channels (for instance through the Adult Education Budget and/or Advanced Learner Loans). This does mean that, in the main, the provision to be delivered through the flexible approaches should be qualifications which are already eligible for Government funding through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and/or qualifications which are already designated for Advanced Learner Loans (loans). To confirm whether the provision is eligible for government funding and/or designated for loans you will need to check in the learning aims part of the [hub](#).

7. You will also need to ensure that either you (if you are submitting a proposal as a single organisation) or one of your partner organisations (if you are submitting a proposal as a consortia of organisations) is both approved by an appropriate awarding organisation to offer the provision and is on the [register of training organisations](#) with either a current AEB allocation and/or loans facility agreement.

8. All successful proposals will need to allow for and support an evaluation by an external research organisation (which will be appointed by DfE).

9. If you have any questions about the Fund, the process of applying to the Fund and/or completing and submitting the form please email us at fund.FLEXIBLE-LEARNING@education.gov.uk.

Completing the submission form

10. Proposals must be submitted to us using the form provided. While there is not a page limit on the proposal as a whole, page limits are specified for some individual components of the proposal. You should consider how you respond to each section of the form and ensure you include the information requested. Where further information is asked for and/or you submit supporting information as part of your proposal, please ensure this is appropriate.
11. Please ensure that you are fully familiar with the Fund specification and the assessment criteria against which your proposal will be evaluated.
12. Your proposal and any annexes and/or attachments must be submitted as word documents, with the exception of your costings plan which may be submitted as an excel spreadsheet.

Section 1 – Summary information

13. In this section please include the name of the lead organisation submitting the proposal. This will be the organisation which, if your proposal is successful, will receive the grant funding and be responsible for allocating it to any partner organisations, if applicable. Please also include the full contact details of the individual who will be the authorised contact/project leader for your proposal. This will be the individual who will be directly contacted with any queries relating to your proposal, and who will be notified about the outcome of the proposal. If you are submitting a proposal as a single organisation, please also confirm that you are on the ESFA register of training organisations with a current AEB allocation and/or loans facility agreement.
14. Please include the title of your proposal (for instance: 'Developing online packages for level 4 dementia awareness for care workers looking to refresh and return to work'). Please also include the total funding you are requesting and a summary of the timescales for your proposal (including when you anticipate pilot delivery will commence and finish).
15. In the box headed 'Additional Information' please also include a short summary of your expertise and any previous experience or work you have undertaken which you believe to be valuable in terms of the proposal (for instance: existing experience in the development of flexible learning approaches, or a track record of learning delivery to adults).

Section 2 – Partner organisation details

16. Where your proposed project involves a collaboration between several organisations, please list and include the details of these organisations. Please include their respective roles and responsibilities (for instance: developing service delivery

platform, leading on pilot delivery). At least one of the delivery organisations must be on the ESFA register of training organisations with a current AEB allocation and/or loans facility agreement. The UKPRN for each delivery organisation on the ESFA register must be included in the proposal.

17. Where you list other organisations you must have their permission to be included in the submission of the proposal. Evidence that these organisations have agreed to be part of the proposal may be asked for as part of the assessment process.

18. In the box headed 'Additional Information' please also include a short summary of the expertise and any previous experience or work any of the partner organisations have undertaken which you believe to be valuable in terms of the proposal (for instance: existing experience in the development of flexible learning approaches).

Section 3 - Details of the provision to be delivered through flexible learning

19. The proposal must specify the provision that will be delivered to learners through a flexible approach. This provision should satisfy the minimum standard criteria (please refer to the specification), including being economically valuable (as defined in Annex B of the specification), and falling within the appropriate skills level.

20. Please include details of the provision. This should include the awarding organisation(s) which offers the qualification (or qualifications), the level and full title of the qualification and its qualification accreditation number (QAN). The proposal must include confirmation that the awarding organisation offering the qualification, if not included as one of your partner organisations, has given approval for their qualification to be delivered through a flexible learning approach. Please include this confirmation as part of the supporting information accompanying your proposal.

21. By exception proposals will be considered which include the delivery of provision which is not currently eligible for funding through the AEB or designated for loans. If you wish to use such provision you need to be clear why existing eligible or loans designated provision cannot be used and the rationale for using non-AEB/loans eligible provision. Please include full details of the provision you wish to use, including the level it corresponds to. If the provision is not subject to any external regulation or external quality assurance regime you must also set out how this provision is quality assured. In the main it is expected that this will be through a process such as [recognising and recording progress and achievement](#).

Section 4 – Target group

22. Please confirm what target group of learners your proposal is focussed on and the estimated number of learners who will participate in the pilot delivery phase. Please also explain how you have arrived at the estimate.

23. The target group of learners needs to fit within the groups set out in the specification. You should indicate whether you are intending to narrow down the focus and include a subset of the target group, and you should also indicate the skills level you expect the target group to hold.

24. Please also briefly explain how you will ensure that the project effectively targets the group(s) you have identified.

Section 5 - Categories of interest

25. Please indicate which of the categories of interest, outlined in the specification, your proposal aligns to. Your proposal must align to at least one of these categories.

Section 6 – Proposal outline

26. You must submit an outline plan for your proposal. This should include a description of each phase of the project, the timeframes and key milestones for these, the key activities involved and how each will be delivered, including what role each organisation will play. Although timescales may change, should your proposal be successful this outline plan will be used as a basis for agreeing the detail of progress reporting, payment schedule and monitoring with you. Please attach this outline plan as a separate document (of no more than 8 pages) to your submission.

27. You are required to submit an explanation of the concept the project will develop and test – the specific flexible learning approach. Please include a rationale for how it will meet the specific needs of the selected target group.

28. Please also briefly explain how this delivery approach is scalable – in effect, the features that mean it has the potential to be delivered to a broad range of adult learners and by a variety of providers, rather than being suited narrowly to one niche group.

Section 7 - Employer support

29. As referred to in both the minimum standard criteria and the excellence criteria sections of the specification, you need to provide good evidence that your proposed project has the backing of employers. At the bare minimum, you need to demonstrate this by either including an employer as a partner organisation in the project, or providing

letters of support from 5 relevant employers (more details on this requirement are in the specification).

30. In addition to this, proposals will be assessed on how strong their overall evidence is that there is meaningful employer support, so additional evidence of this would be beneficial. There is more guidance about what kinds of evidence to think about in the excellence criteria section of the specification.

Section 8 – Monitoring and costing plans

31. We will also require information on how you intend to monitor the project. This includes data and information you intend to gather and/or what data and information could be gathered by the external research organisation. Further details of what your monitoring plan should cover can be found in the specification. This plan should be a maximum of 3 pages.

32. You will also need to supply us with a costings plan for the proposal. This should give details of the full budget of the project (including the requested grant funding as well as any other sources of funding), and how much money will be spent on each phase and specific activity. You should explain how you will ensure that you spend money in a way that is economical, effective and efficient. Again, further detail on what is expected in terms of information on costings can be found in the specification. This plan can be submitted as an excel spreadsheet and/or should be a maximum of 3 pages.

Section 9 – Risks and mitigations

33. Please also include details of the key risks that the project will face, and how you and any partner organisations plan to mitigate these risks. For instance, you may identify a risk that you will not attract enough learners from your identified target group to take part in the delivery phase; a mitigation activity could be to have an explicit focus in the delivery organisation's marketing and communications activities to encourage people from your target group to enrol in this learning. You may wish to attach a risk register to the submission to illustrate this.

Section 10 - Any other information

34. Finally, if there is any other relevant information you believe would support your proposal and/or help us understand it, please include it in this last section. This might include, for instance, that you believe your proposal has wider relevance and could support other initiatives at local, regional or national level.

Submitting an application

35. Please be aware that proposals submitted after midnight on Wednesday 31 January 2018 will not be considered.
36. Please submit your completed form and all supporting annexes/information to fund.FLEXIBLE-LEARNING@education.gov.uk.
37. Successful applicants to the Fund will be informed during Spring 2018.

Glossary of terms

Term	Meaning
Adult Education Budget	This is the budget through which participation and support funding is available for all learners in England aged 19 plus (excluding Advanced Learner Loans and Apprenticeships). More information on the Adult Education Budget can be found here .
Advanced Learner Loans	These are available for eligible learners aged 19 to undertake designated qualifications . More information on loans can be found here .
Individualised Learner Record	Part of the data collection requirements for providers on the register of training organisations. More information on the ILR can be found here .
Qualification Achievement Rates	<u>QARs</u> are part of the measures of quality of the education and training courses a provider delivers.
Qualification Accreditation Number	This is the indicator assigned by Ofqual to each regulated qualification appearing on the register of regulated qualifications .
Recognising and Recording Programme and Achievement	RARPA is an approach for measuring the progress and achievement of learners who may be undertaking non-regulated provision.
Register of Training Organisations	A list of all organisations eligible to tender for education and training services.
The Hub	The Hub contains the learning aims database which contains details of all provision eligible for ESFA funding.
UKPRN	This is the United Kingdom Provider Reference Number. UKPRNs are allocated through the UK Register of Learning Providers .



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