

<https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/>

European Social Fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund (ESF) was established as the European Union's (EU) primary vehicle for supporting employment, social cohesion and equity in employment within member states. A particular focus has been on supporting those who are finding it difficult to find employment, including disadvantaged groups. Its priorities and allocation of resources are determined jointly between the European Commission and EU states. Priorities include improving flexibility of workers with new skills, increasing access to jobs, supporting school leavers into employment, encouraging lifelong learning and further development of vocational training opportunities. Funds are distributed to EU member states to support agreed projects bid for by beneficiaries, public and private sector organisations who have been successful in bidding to the lead ESF organisation in their region. Collaborative and partnership working and co-financing, usually between 50% - 85% of overall project costs, are a pre-requisite of bids. The wealth of a region, based on regional comparison of GDP to the EU average, plays an important role in what projects are supported and the levels of funding available.

In terms of the UK, a primary focus is on enabling inclusive labour markets and skills for growth including social inclusion, employment of young people and those long-term unemployed and training and skills to boost economic productivity. The treasury stated in July 2018 that any funding secured through EU programmes up to the end of 2020 will be guaranteed by the UK government. The 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) across the UK support the delivery of ESF and send out direct calls for bids to the fund focused on regionally identified priority areas. The LEP is made up of local authorities, public sector organisations, educational institutions and private sector organisations who agree to work together to identify local economic imperatives, delivering initiatives to support economic development, increase employment and raise skills levels. ESF funding can also be accessed through co-financing organisations such as the Department for Work & Pensions, Big Lottery Fund and Education Skills Funding Agency, these organisations provide the match funding element for an ESF project.

<https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/>

Handy Tips

If you are considering developing an ESF bid it is worth considering the following:

- Contacting your local LEP to identify their priorities, when they will be issuing calls for ESF bids and what the focus of these bids will be
- Contacting your local FE College as it's likely they are involved in projects with the Local Authority to support local people. Recent initiatives have been improving Numeracy and Literacy skills for employed people and fully funded L2 & L3 NVQ/QCF programmes
- Consider the bidding process and how you will manage the project and auditing process if you are successful as this will be in-depth
- Identify at an early stage partner organisations and who will be the lead organisation in a bid
- Investigate what match funding different organisations may be able to provide to the project