

Questions & Answers

National Skills Academies

Growth and Innovation Fund

Date of issue 13 May 2011

Audience External

Publication intent NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Introduction

1 This document includes answers to all questions raised specifically regarding the National Skills Academies strand of activity within the Growth and Innovation Fund. This document will be updated regularly with the questions and answers which are raised and answered via the National Skills Academies email box.

2 Questions and enquiries regarding the Growth and Innovation Fund can be submitted through the following routes:

For general questions:

gif.questions@ukces.org.uk

For National Skills Academies related questions:

nationalskillsacademies@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

For Best Market Solutions related questions:

gif.questions@ukces.org.uk

For Joint Investment Programme related questions:

jointinvestmentprogramme@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

Questions submitted will be responded to within 2 working days and responses will be shared publicly through the [GIF website](#).

3 Applicants should ensure they have taken account of the information provided in this document when preparing their application(s). The names of the applicant submitting questions will remain anonymous.

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Question Themes

The questions in this document have been grouped into the following themes / sections

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1. The Programme

Q1.1. If a niche group of employers / supply chain is identified, could this be covered by an existing National Skills Academy or would a new National Skills Academy be required?

It will depend upon the sector they are from and may well be covered by one of the existing 17 National Skills Academies. The GIF is to support new National Skills Academies in sectors where there are none currently or for existing Skills Academies to expand their current footprint. It is for the applicant to decide on the best solution to address the needs of employers within a sector.

Q.1.2. What are the current sector definitions? The current network seems very traditional.

All National Skills Academies are approved on individual merit of the proposed solution meeting the needs of employers in a defined sector, supported by robust market evidence. It is for applicants to clearly define the sector they are proposing to deliver to and in the cases of those Academies already in the network; they have been established to meet focussed and specific needs in their sector. Not all existing National Skills Academies cover the entire footprint of their sector – defining the skills need in the sector / sub-sector is key.

Q.1.3. What is 'growth' / 'growth potential' and how does this relate to National Skills Academies?

It is about defining the added value of a National Skills Academy proposal – growth may not necessarily be about large volumes of learners in some niche or developing sectors for instance, but the impact that an Academy will deliver may still be high. Applicants must identify the skills need and demonstrate that a National Skills Academy is the best solution because of the transformational impact it will have on skills development and supply.

Q.1.4. Is there a conflict between YPLA funding (and DFE targets) and Skills Funding Agency policies given that National Skills Academy funding comes from the Skills Funding Agency?

Funding of a National Skills Academy is to support the development and infrastructure and not for learner participation.

Q.1.5. Is there an issue with the target 14-16 learner volumes outlined in the application as these fall within the remit of the YPLA not the Skills Funding Agency?

This is not about learner participation funds as funding of a National Skills Academy is to support the development and infrastructure and not for learner participation. The learner volumes requested in the application are not target

figures but rather an indication of scale, impact, reach and the priorities within the sector that the National Skills Academy will address.

Q.1.6. What is 'national' reach?

Each National Skills Academy must demonstrate that they have an 'offer' to all employers in their sector regardless of geography and location. It is expected however that dependant on the sector, some areas may be prioritised given the levels of employer/learner demand and location. The development funding from the Skills Funding Agency can only be used to develop the National Skills Academy within England and should be able to demonstrate sector transformation.

Q.1.7. Will a cash rich sector have an advantage over other sectors?

A robust assessment process is in place which has been tried and tested through five previous rounds of National Skills Academy applications. Each application must make the case to support sectoral transformation and clearly outline the support of employers. Investment from employers could come from a few, large employers or small amounts from many SMEs depending on the sector make up. Fundamentally applications must be able to demonstrate employer commitment and investment.

Q.1.8. Would the National Skills Academy generate tensions between mainstream colleges and entrepreneurial providers?

One of the core roles of National Skills Academies is to develop their provider base, ensuring that specialist provision in response to the demand of employers in the sector is in place - this is likely to require a mix of mainstream FE and private provider provision. National Skills Academies should be able to work collaboratively with and brigade the providers in their sector.

Q.1.9. Is there a danger that the National Skills Academy will not meet the priorities of the Skills Funding Agency?

National Skills Academies are developed to address the skills needs of employers within a sector and it is those infrastructures that the Skills Funding Agency funds to develop.

Q.1.10. Will this be the last opportunity for organisations to bid for National Skills Academy development funding?

This is the sixth round of National Skills Academy applications, building on the successes of the previous rounds dating back to 2006. It is not currently possible to confirm whether there will be other rounds in the future.

Q.1.11. As a National Skills Academy, will I be required to work with all other training providers in the sector?

As well as co-ordinating, developing and delivering provision, National Skills Academies will be leaders of specialist provider networks. As a Skills Academy, you will improve the quality of training in your sector and develop strategies for sharing and developing best practice - we do not expect National Skills Academies to compete with existing learning providers.

Q.1.12. What recent policy areas should I be aware of in formulating a proposal?

Your proposal should fundamentally be driven by the needs of your sector and its employers. However policy areas to be mindful of when framing and formulating your proposal are 'Skills for Sustainable Growth' (November 2010) and 'The Path to Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth' (November 2010).

Q.1.13. Is public funding available if employers feel that higher education provision is a priority for their sector?

In some sectors employers are likely to identify skills at Levels 4 and 5 as a priority. We would expect this to be clearly set out in the initial application as well as identifying organisations that may be able to deliver provision at that level. Note that proposals should state what discussions/links have been made with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) who is responsible for funding at this level.

Q.1.14. Is it possible to have more than one National Skills Academy within a Sector Skills Council 'footprint'?

Yes it is and it is for you to demonstrate employer support for this. It is recognised that some employers may want to provide funds and support a National Skills Academy that focuses on the needs of a particular 'sub-sector' rather than the whole sector. Where this is the case it would need to be supported by robust market analysis, rationale and demonstrable support from employers in the sector/s affected.

Q.1.15. Can a National Skills Academy go outside the boundaries of a Sector Skills Council?

Yes. We would be happy to consider applications from groups of employers who want to work across Sector Skills Council boundaries to develop a National Skills Academy where there is strong rationale and support for such cross-sector delivery. We are looking for employers to develop models for National Skills Academies that work for them - Skills Academies are encouraged to work together, spreading best practice and avoiding unnecessary duplication wherever possible.

Q.1.16. What form will the National Skills Academies take?

In some cases, National Skills Academies will have their own buildings, but the training environments will be flexible – for example, training could take place at a National Skills Academy accredited training centre or at an employer's site. National Skills Academy centres are made up of a wide range of training organisations and are designed to deliver national reach - this may mean that some of the offer may be virtual but equal access must be demonstrated.

Q.1.17. What models are you looking for?

There is no single 'best' model for a National Skills Academy. We are looking for employers to propose models for a National Skills Academy that meets the needs of *their* sector and that can be self-sustaining over time. This means that models vary as there is not a 'one size fits all' solution and we welcome new and innovative ideas.

Q.1.18 As it will be quicker to extend the sector footprint of an existing National Skills Academy than set one up from scratch; will the timing of the Next Steps be different? If an existing Skills Academy is successful in its bid for an extension, will it be able to launch in 2011, would there be any restrictions as to when?

The timeline for National Skills Academy applications is the same for everyone. Should initial applications be successful and go forward to the Business Planning stage, all Business Plans would need to be submitted by 31st January 2012 and following a robust assessment and moderation process would need to be approved by a GIF board in March 2012. The timescales therefore for new or extensions are the same.

2. Application and Selection Process

Q.2.1. In cases where the skills needs identified touches across sectors that have existing National Skills Academy in operation, what kind of application would be expected?

See Question 1: In addition, where skills needs are identified in sectors that currently have National Skills Academies, the expectation would be that those existing Skills Academies would pick up and address those skills issues. There are increasingly good examples of National Skills Academies working together in partnership across sectors to address

Q.2.2. If an existing National Skills Academy submits an application for an extension; would development of new qualifications be accepted?

Development of new specialist products and services responding to employer skills demand is very much part of the core function of a National Skills Academy. This may include the development of new qualifications and frameworks where gaps and demand have been identified; however, National Skills Academy funding cannot be used to develop National Occupation Standards or other activity where a Sector Skills Council clearly has this within their remit.

Q.2.3. What happens if we don't get approval? Can I still develop a National Skills Academy without Skills Funding Agency support?

'The National Skills Academy' is a brand name trademarked by the Agency and so you will not be able to use it if your project is not approved through the formal routes.

Q.2.4. The sector I am in is very broad but I wish only to look at one smaller sub-sector within that - is that acceptable for National Skills Academy proposals?

It is for you to articulate a convincing proposal. Your proposal will need to be clear in its ambitions, rationale and evidence for identifying the need - critically, you will need to demonstrate support from employers whether for a wide or more narrow sector approach.

Q.2.5. How long will it take to become a National Skills Academy?

If your initial application form is successful you will formally enter the business planning stage resulting in a full Business Plan for submission within 6 months - the assessment stage will take approximately 8 weeks. Should your Business Plan be approved, the next step would be to formally set up your organisation as a legal entity so that you can begin operating. Approved National Skills Academies are expected to begin delivering its products and services to the market within 6 months of being approved.

Q.2.6. Who should be involved in the development of proposals for a National Skills Academy?

Initial ideas may come from a wide range of sector organisations with an interest in raising skills levels. Proposals must however be led by employers and this must be demonstrated through your governance arrangements.

Q.2.7. What will the funding from the Skills Funding Agency support?

Once an initial application is approved, the Skills Funding Agency can provide a nominal amount to develop a Business Plan for submission - this will not cover all of the costs involved in developing a proposal so other funding and support must be identified. On approval of a Business Plan the Agency will agree what level of financial support it will provide for the first 3 years only - this funding will be available alongside investment from employers and other bodies. Note that £1.5m per Skills Academy is an average amount of public funding available.

Q.2.8. What if my proposal changes from the initial application to the Business Plan?

You will need to inform the Agency of these changes before moving forward with developments. The approval is for the proposal outlined in the application form and should this change significantly; the approval panel may wish to review this. Business plans must not exceed the level of public funding sought and stated in the initial application form.

Q.2.9. It does say that funding cannot be used to build or purchase equipment - how restrictive is this fund bearing in mind the need to site/refurbish any new National Skills Academy? Could you elaborate more on this possible process please?

Skills Funding Agency development funding is there to contribute to start-up costs in establishing the National Skills Academy over the 3-year development period. It can support items such as staffing, programme development, development of products and services and office running costs. Where new builds or refurbishing is required it is expected that the cost of these will be met by employers or other partners of the Skills Academy. For instance, many of the existing Academies have successfully developed partnerships with supporting employers to open up their own premises and equipment to other organisations - capital is also a key area where employers can directly demonstrate their investment in the Academy by meeting the costs of any work required. An important factor to consider is the overall model of the proposed National Skills Academy in determining whether it would need a front-facing HQ that would require significant improvement or investment.

3. Eligibility

Q.3.1. Are consortiums or employers and providers eligible to submit an application to develop a National Skills Academy?

For eligibility please see page 13 of the GIF prospectus which states “**For applications for a National Skills Academy only**, a lead employer working with employer groups or with the support of other employers and sector bodies is eligible to apply. This change from the standard eligibility criteria **applies only for applications under the National Skills Academy strand of the Growth and Innovation Fund.**”

Q.3.2. We are an existing National Skills Academy - can we bid for an extension to our sector remit?

Yes. Applications from existing Skills Academies will be accepted and these should be for new / expanded sector areas - applications for core funding for your existing model are not eligible. In assessing such bids the performance of your

existing Skills Academy in delivering the Business Plan and achieving the outcomes stated therein will be taken into account.

Q.3.3. We are a college / private training provider, can we apply to be a National Skills Academy?

National Skills Academies are employer-led so we would expect any application to have employer leadership in developing the application form itself and then the Business plan, as well as support from employers in the sector both financially and in terms of supporting what the Skills Academy will do. Colleges and private training providers will form part of the specialist networks that National Skills Academies will develop and so are an important element of any proposed model.

Q.3.4. We don't really fit into areas currently covered by a Sector Skills Council. Can we still bid?

We do consider applications from employers in a sector that is not covered by a Sector Skills Council and we are also keen to encourage employers to develop proposals with the support of the appropriate Sector Skills Council or trade body. We believe that employers would benefit from being part of a wider vocational network such as that provided by sector specific bodies.

Q.3.5. We noticed that several National Skills Academies are working in partnerships with FE and HE - we would seek as a core industry National Skills Academy to expand our opportunities externally to several other key sites. How does this work with the statement that other non eligible criteria state "alternative public or private sources of funding". To my mind FE is publically funded. It would seem a vital part of any 'good practice' example new build National Skills Academy, that it does access FE and HE as stipulated in the GIF briefing presentation of 17.3.11 ..."% of learners expected to be publicly funded"?

All National Skills Academies are required to form partnerships with FE and HE in order to deliver their offer to the sector. The matched funding requirement for the programme relates to direct financial investment into the Skills Academy rather than for learner participation costs, i.e. the overall matched funding must be a 50:50 public and private partnership. Learner participation costs do not contribute to this element.

Q.3.6 Under the Eligibility section (page 4 paragraph 9) you state that "*Proposals from existing National Skills Academies with a clear rationale for extending their current remit will also be accepted. In assessing these applications, account will be taken of the performance and financial stability of the existing National Skills Academy*".

Could you clarify what if any additional information needs to be supplied with our bid submission in order for you to have the information that you require to carry out this part of the assessment?

There is no requirement to submit any additional information with bids at this stage. Prior to any formal approval of bids to enter the business planning stage to develop a full proposal for an extension, the Agency would undertake a full financial assessment of the sustainability of the current National Skills Academy and this would require as a minimum, the submission of financial accounts and performance information.

Q.3.7 Is a National Skills Academy strand application eligible which covers a sector that has an existing Skills Academy but which takes a new approach/format that will run in parallel with the existing Skills Academy format?

Existing National Skills Academies are eligible to apply for an extension where there is a clear rationale for extending their current remit into a new sector or sub-sector. A new approach or format of delivery for skills academies would not normally fit within the criteria as it is likely that this would be viewed as 'core activity' for skills academies, i.e. being responsive to meeting the needs of their sector employers and developing / adapting delivery methodologies accordingly.

You may wish to consider exploring the Best Market Solutions strand as that may offer a more appropriate alternative

Q.3.8 We are thinking of up to 4 different academy strands to be "attached" to our current academy. Is this possible?

As you will have seen in both the Prospectus and the National Skills Academy Guidance notes (<http://www.ukces.org.uk/gif>) Page 9 of the prospectus specifically states that "applications are welcomed from areas of industry where there is currently no National Skills Academy in existence or from an existing National Skills Academy seeking to expand its sector footprint" You will therefore need to decide whether your proposed " 4 different academy strands" are accommodated within your existing footprint or represent an extension. If they represent an extension then such an application would be welcome. If the strands are all within your extended footprint then they could be accommodated within a single application

Q.3.9 One of the strands we are considering concerns the supply chain to one of our industries where the skills issues are not being addressed, and where there is employer demand – is this eligible?

Following on from Q.3.8, it is for you to articulate the employer needs in your sector and for any subsequent application to articulate a solution to those skills needs.

Section 1 of the National Skills Academies application form specially makes reference to SME engagement as outlined below:

Strategic Fit and Impact

The purpose of this criterion is to explain in more detail the logic chain between your proposed solution and your sector's vision and strategic challenges.

Here you need to describe the scale and impact your solution can offer in more detail and how the nature of the transformation needed in the sector can be achieved. Your response should include the following:

- What the sector will look like in 3, 5 and 10 years time and how impact will be evaluated
- What the key measures of success will be
- The overlaps that exist with other National Skills Academies / sectors and how the proposal will address this to ensure clarity to employers
- What the benefits for employers are
- What the proportion of SMEs is in the sector and what the National Skills Academy 'offer' is, how the Academy will engage with this group
- How it will support equality and diversity in the sector

Q.3.10 Another of the strands is focussed on a particular segment of one of our industries, where a company wishes to establish an academy for a particular business area and its related skills. This could be focused on a product line. Is this eligible?

Eligibility is outlined in the prospectus as follows:

Page 13 Applications are invited from Sector Skills Councils, Industry Training Boards, formally constituted Sector Bodies, National Skills Academies, Employer Associations, Trade Associations and Professional Bodies. Collaborative applications are welcomed from multiple sector organisations

Page 13 for applications for a National Skills Academy only, a lead employer working with employer groups or with the support of other employers and sector bodies is eligible to apply. This change from the standard eligibility criteria applies only for applications under the National Skills Academy strand of the Growth and Innovation Fund

Any application will need to demonstrate sectoral transformational change and be able to evidence commitment from employers across the sector. Applications will need to identify clear solutions to the skills challenges identified across the sector and therefore it would be difficult to see how an application from a single employer focussed on a single product line would achieve this.

4. Employer Engagement and Investment

Q. 4.1. Must the balance of public and private investment be a 50/50 split?

Each application must evidence significant private investment to secure the sustainability of the National Skills Academy after Skills Funding Agency

development funding has ceased – a 50:50 partnership is the expectation. In some sectors, other public investment could make up part of the overall package but ultimately any successful applications will need to demonstrate private employer investment without an over reliance on other streams of public funding.

Q.4.2. Could a National Skills Academy hold the Skills Funding Agency funding contract on behalf of small/niche providers?

Any organisation wishing to deliver Skills Funding Agency funded provision will need to be registered on the `ACTOR` system in order to tender for a Skills Funding Agency contract for provision.

Q.4.3. Why should employers want to be involved in National Skills Academies?

Your offer to employers must be clearly articulated and tested with the market - it is for you to demonstrate to your employers that the Skills Academy is worth getting involved with. There are many reasons why an employer would wish to get involved. National Skills Academies provide employers with an opportunity to design a sector-specific curriculum which results in employees with the skills that business needs, an opportunity to have direct influence on the corporate governance and strategic management of the Skills Academy in their sector, consistent quality of national delivery of training, improved flow of new entrants to the sector and improved training and up-skilling of existing workforce.

Q.4.4. How are employers involved in the development of proposals for National Skills Academies?

Employers are key to any proposal for a National Skills Academy and proposals should demonstrate and evidence employer leadership and engagement. This means that applications must be employer driven, with named employers providing their support and input to proposals. All project teams in the development of a Business Plan must involve employers in their development. Your employers will also be required to attend interviews at the Skills Funding Agency as part of the assessment and approval process.

Q.4.5. What is meant by `employer investment`?

Employers may support a National Skills Academy in different ways including contribution in-kind through equipment or people resource. Employer investment overall however has to include cash to support the set up the National Skills Academy, fund development costs (including capital) and to ensure sustainability. Government requires that any financial support to be provided through the public purse is matched with other funds.

Q.4.6. I would like to know if we do bring together £1,000,000 of professional assets would the GIF fund be able to allocate capital funding for a refurbish cost for a realistic National Skills Academy new Central London site as part of the 3 year bid? This site would be self-efficient with many other industry partners.

There is no capital funding available through this GIF strand, employers and other partners are expected to meet the costs of any capital requirements.

Author	Mickey Burke / Stef Bellini
Date created	5 May 2011
Publication no.	
Document ref.	G:\Organisational Data\Skills Group\Skills Development Networks\GIF R6\SFA NSA GIF Q&A V3 5MAY11
Version	3