

Frequently Asked Questions

Date of issue 7th March 2011

National Skills Academies

Please find some frequently asked questions with answers that you may find helpful.

QUESTION	ANSWER
Can a National Skills Academy be based at my employer site?	All National Skills Academies should be legal entities in their own right so you will need to decide what type of legal organisation you will need to set up. Depending on the model developed for your Skills Academy, it may need a central hub so any proposal would need to demonstrate the benefits to the rest of the sector should that hub be based on an employer site. National Skills Academies must ensure that there is access for all and your central base should reflect this.
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 application. 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.
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.

Skills Funding Agency

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An agency of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

<p>How long will it take to become a National Skills Academy?</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>What happens if we don't get approval? Can I still develop a National Skills Academy without Skills Funding Agency support?</p>	<p>'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.</p>
<p>How much employer investment is expected?</p>	<p>There is no set figure but government starts by looking at a matched funding proposal as a minimum, i.e. what funding you request from government is matched by employers and other stakeholders. The expectation is a 50:50 match. Note that funding support for capital developments is not available from the Agency so if your model requires new or refurbished premises / other infrastructure this may be an area where employers you are working with may wish to invest in.</p>
<p>As a National Skills Academy, will I be able to secure training contracts with the Agency?</p>	<p>National Skills Academies are not expected to become training providers in their own right for delivery of publicly funded provision and your proposal will need to have a compelling argument if your model is based on this approach. Delivery of public provision will be through Agency and YPLA approved provider networks so you will need to develop strong provider engagement strategies. Full cost provision that is not funded by the public purse may be delivered directly by the Skills Academy or other providers.</p>
<p>Will National Skills Academies focussing on young people be more favourable with government?</p>	<p>No. Applications will have to clearly state what the problem is within the sector and how the National Skills Academy will 'fix' this. This may mean that in some sectors there is a greater need to engage and train young people and this may be a priority for the Skills Academy. National Skills Academies will need to focus on priorities for their sector but recognising that the aim is that they meet the needs of all groups whether already in the sector or wanting to enter it.</p>
<p>As a National Skills Academy, will I be required to work with all other training providers in the sector?</p>	<p>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.</p>

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.
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.
What recent policy areas should I be aware of in formulating a proposal?	Your application should fundamentally be driven by the needs of your sector and its employers. However policy areas you need to be mindful of when framing and formulating your proposal are outlined in Skills for Sustainable Growth (November 2010) and 'The Path to Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth' (November 2010).
Does every sector have to have a National Skills Academy?	No. Skills Academies are one solution and may not be appropriate for all sectors.
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.
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.
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 that approval. Business plans must not exceed the level of public funding sought and stated in the initial application form.
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 are responsible for funding at this level.

Do employers have to contribute to the capital costs of a National Skills Academy?	Funding is not available to support capital costs. Applicants will need to source this from elsewhere. Employers are a primary group that government expects to make such contributions.
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.
Can a National Skills Academy go outside the boundaries of a Sector Skills Council?	Yes. We would be happy to consider applications who are seeking 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.
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 any interviews required as part of the assessment and approval process.
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.
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 <i>their</i> 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.
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.
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.

Further information

If you have any further queries please direct them to nationalskillsacademies@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk

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Date	7 th March 2011
Version	1.0