



Theme: ICT and the Digital Divide

**ENGLAND AND GIBRALTAR EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND
CONVERGENCE, COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYMENT
PROGRAMME 2007-2013**

**CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR INNOVATIVE AND TRANSNATIONAL
PROJECTS**

31 OCTOBER 2008

Theme	ICT AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE
Regions	<p>This theme has been selected by the following regions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Midlands (Priorities 1 and 2) • South Yorkshire (Priority 1) • Yorkshire and the Humber (Priority 1) <p>The project applicant must be from one of these regions. The application will need to demonstrate how it will address the employment and skills strategies of the region within which it is submitted (see section on regional context). The application may include partners in other regions whether or not those regions have selected the theme.</p>
<u>ESF Operational Programme</u> priorities	<p>Projects within this theme must fall within one of the following priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority 1 – Extending employment opportunities (Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective) • Priority 2 – Developing a skilled and adaptable workforce (Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective) <p>Projects within Priority 1 will focus on developing and delivering innovative ways to improve the ICT skills of workless people to help them find, retain and make progress in employment.</p> <p>Projects within Priority 2 will focus on developing and delivering innovative ways to improve ICT skills in the workforce to support both business growth and individual progression.</p>
Aim	<p>Innovative projects will develop, test and deliver approaches to help widen participation in employment and learning through, for example:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving access to information and communication technology (ICT) equipment and learning; • providing advice and guidance on local learning opportunities; • developing learning content through ICT; • undertaking research and development to improve the quality of ICT skills provision, share knowledge and ideas, and encourage good practice and innovation; • designing new ways of improving ICT skills; • upskilling the workforce; and • understanding employers needs and enhancing local/regional partnership approaches and effective links to business.
<p>Eligible groups</p>	<p>All target groups identified in the ESF Operational Programme Priorities 1 and 2, and relevant regional ESF frameworks, are potentially eligible for support.</p> <p>In particular, there should be a focus on disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities and health conditions, lone parents, older workers, black and ethnic minority groups, and the low skilled.</p>
<p>Strategic context</p>	<p>We live in an increasingly connected society, with the rapid advance of information and communication technology (ICT) in business and in the home. But not everyone has joined in the digital age. There is a clear divide between small and large businesses, while in the home, ICT ownership and use is closely linked to household income.</p> <p>The ‘digital poor’ are in most cases, the poorest in society as a whole. The digital divide therefore follows some existing divisions of inequality in our society. Digital inclusion is not a simple issue; it involves not only physical access to technology but also concerns such as confidence, motivation, relevance, age, skills, content and trust. The aim of this theme is to use ESF to test new ways of reducing the disparity between the digital rich and poor in order to improve access to and progression within employment.</p> <p>Advances in ICT are changing the ways in which people work and the skills they need to secure and progress in employment. But not everyone is benefiting. There are particular issues for some small businesses and for individuals in terms of access and skills.</p>

	<p>Falling costs of digital equipment, rapid increases in functionality and features, improving user friendliness, increases in Internet and mobile access speeds, the take up of broadband and an increased focus on ICT in schools, have all contributed in expanding the number of people who use and more importantly make good use of information technology. Many examples exist where IT is enabling people to lead more active and fulfilling lives. However there are issues about the quality of delivery of ICT skills. For example ICT for adults has the highest take up, but the lowest achievement and retention.</p> <p>A survey by the OECD in March 2006 showed that the UK passed Japan and the US in broadband penetration during the first quarter of 2006. The UK's faster growth rate propelled it to second place in the G7, behind first place Canada. A quarter of Britons online come from households with £50,000 in annual income, and finance and travel-related sites tend to be those with the greatest concentration of wealthy UK visitors.</p> <p>There is however a flip side to the benefits that ICT and low cost Internet access have brought to many in society. Research carried out in the EU on eInclusion and eAccessibility, has identified these themes as particularly important in relation to employment, work and online services. This research concludes that those who may be at most significant risk of disaffection in our society, now face additional barriers in terms of 'learning the language and use ICT'.</p> <p>This is highlighted by an Office for National Statistics study in March 2007 which found that in the richest ten per cent of households, ninety per cent have Internet access, a home computer and mobile phones and eighty per cent receive a digital television service. By contrast, of the poorest ten cent, only a fifth has Internet access, thirty per cent have a computer, forty per cent have a digital television service and just over half have a mobile phone. There is therefore, a need to invest in the training and support of those at most risk of being left behind in the digital revolution to create a fair and inclusive society.</p> <p>In the workplace, technical advances, particularly the development of ICT, have allowed workers to be far more productive, but productivity gains have been strongly biased towards those with the skills to adapt to and utilise</p>
--	--

	<p>new technology. As a result, high-skilled workers are in increasing demand by employers, and even low-skilled workers are increasingly expected to use ICT.</p> <p>Research by e-skills UK (the Sector Skills Council for IT and telecoms) suggests that within the current workforce there is a need for up to 7.6 million people to up-skill over three years – with around 60% of this up-skilling up to level 2 and 40% at level 3 and above.</p> <p>ICT has a major role to play as a means of initially engaging people or bringing them back into education and training. For example research has shown that improving your ICT skills carries much less stigma than studying other basic skills, specifically literacy and numeracy and has proved particularly successful for engaging the hardest to reach learners.</p> <p>The Government’s strategy is intended to equip people with the skills they need to function effectively in an increasingly ICT-mediated society, in both work and leisure. This will contribute to economic productivity and help provide those at risk of social exclusion with the ICT skills and understanding they need.</p> <p>From 2008, ICT is a basic skill alongside literacy, and numeracy within the Skills for Life strategy.</p> <p>In autumn 2008, the Government will publish its digital equality action plan. ESF innovative projects will be well placed to complement and add value to the implementation of the plan.</p>
<p>Regional context</p>	<p>The following regions have set out regional context for the ICT and digital divide theme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Yorkshire • Yorkshire and the Humber <p>The regional context identifies specific regional issues that should be addressed by applicants. The regional context documents are available on the innovation page of the ESF website. Applicants should also take account of the relevant regional ESF framework.</p>
<p>Indicative activities</p>	<p>Innovative projects should address one or more of the following areas. The bullet points set out indicative activities. These are not prescriptive, and applicants may propose other activities within the scope of the</p>

	<p>Operational Programme and regional ESF frameworks.</p> <p>Improving access to ICT skills (Priority 1)</p> <p>Engaging those without access for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• exploring the role of mentors, champions and role models in accessing ICT skills;• exploring and removing the barriers for specific ESF target groups (e.g. people with disabilities, older workers, ethnic minority groups);• exploring the role of informal support networks for improving accessibility to ICT skills (e.g. family, community and social networks). <p>Widening access to all types of ICT to increase labour market participation (Priority 1)</p> <p>Engaging ESF target groups with some access to ICT but who do not benefit fully by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• exploring the methods for providing advice guidance and support;• exploring the support of mentors, champions and role models in utilising ICT more effectively;• embracing all new technologies (e.g. mobile, broadband). <p>Supporting ICT skills development (Priorities 1 and 2)</p> <p>Improving the effective use of ICT in supporting the development of people's skills by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• exploring how ICT is used to support the creation of new content and delivery methodologies for skills development and learning;• exploring how ICT content is enabling the inclusion of specific groups who are at most disadvantage in the labour market;• enabling and training the trainers to support the effective use of ICT;• exploring the innovative uses of ICT in supporting basic skills. <p>Understanding employers' needs and upskilling the workforce in SMEs (Priority 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• exploring how effective use of ICT skills can increase the growth and competitiveness of small and medium enterprises;• understanding the skills needs of SMEs to ensure their engagement and benefit of rapidly changing
--	---

	<p>ICT;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exploring and understanding the link between the supply of skills and labour and the actual demands of businesses; • exploring how ICT skills can support SMEs in emerging high growth sectors; • exploring and developing innovative methods and content for upskilling a 21st century workforce; • exploring how more effective use of ICT skills can create opportunities and open up new markets.
<p>Results</p>	<p>The primary output of projects within this theme will be the development and delivery of innovative measures to improve ICT skills so as to enhance employability and meet both individual and employer needs.</p> <p>This will include producing new tools, methods and service provision, and/or adapting and applying existing tools and methods to new regions, sectors or target groups. It will also include piloting these products with ESF target groups. The outcomes will therefore include improving the employment prospects and skills of participants, and where appropriate helping them to achieve qualifications and enter sustainable employment.</p>
<p>Transnational working</p>	<p>Each project must include an element of transnational working. This will involve working with at least one partner from another EU Member State.</p> <p>The transnational dimension of projects must bring real benefits to the innovative activity by learning from, adapting or mainstreaming approaches from other Member States, and where appropriate transferring good practice to other Member States. ESF will not support transnational activities that merely seek to establish or develop partnerships with other Member States.</p> <p>Projects should allow the exchange of knowledge, experience and in particular best practice that can offer clear added value to regional objectives and targets. They should aim to achieve strategic benefits that can be widely shared rather than purely operational or organisational benefits.</p> <p>Applications should explain why the activity should be undertaken transnationally and the proposed benefits of working with the chosen transnational partners.</p> <p>Applications should identify transnational partners (which may be organisations at local, regional or national level)</p>

	<p>that have a clear track record in this theme and can support exchanges that will facilitate innovation and fresh ideas. Transnational partners should be willing to work collaboratively in order to share good practice and learning.</p> <p>Transnational partners do not have to be in receipt of ESF funding in their own Member State.</p> <p>Some examples of transnational working may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thematic workshops; • study visits; • joint research/studies; • piloting or testing new tools, methods, approaches etc; • work shadowing towards practice development; • events, seminars and conferences; and • new joint development initiatives.
<p>Mainstreaming</p>	<p>All applications must identify appropriate policy linkages and provide clear evidence of their mainstreaming potential. They must have mainstreaming strategies showing effective engagement with decision makers from relevant Government departments, regional and local bodies, sectoral organisations, employers' organisations and other appropriate stakeholders, which demonstrate how innovation, learning and best practice will influence policy development and delivery in this theme. Mainstreaming strategies should include clear methodologies for recording, evaluating and disseminating the learning and best practice, alongside the methods to be used to engage with decision makers.</p> <p>Outcomes may be disseminated through channels such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good practice case studies; • reports capturing learning from exchanges • policy impact reports; • conferences, seminars and exhibitions; and • new websites, DVDs, CDs etc. <p>Proposals should set out links to, and plans to engage with e-skills UK, Becta, Ufi/learndirect and other relevant organisations and initiatives.</p>