

The ACCEL Initiative

ACCELERATING IN-COMPANY SKILLS



Call for Proposals

Skillnets Services Ltd (on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment), invites applications from interested parties for a new in-company training initiative – ACCEL. This new programme is aimed at accelerating skills of people at all levels within firms in Ireland. It provides a unique opportunity for enterprises, management and staff to rapidly upskill workers to provide career progression and employability and respond to specific competitive challenges. It recognises human resources, skills and capability of people as a leading factor in every company and in all sectors and seeks to provide a new and significant opportunity for enterprises.

Accel is an initiative of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and is managed by Skillnets Services Ltd on its behalf. The programme is funded by the European Social Fund and the National Training Fund. Up to €16 million total grant funding will be allocated to approved projects for the period 2006-8.

Background

The National Development Plan 2000-2006 notes that “enterprises in Ireland need to increase, and better leverage, their investment in Human Resources Development”. This theme was spelt out in the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP) 2000-2006, which stated that the aim of the measure was “to support sustainable productivity and competitiveness improvements in existing businesses, and SMEs in particular, by improving education and training levels, and to intensify policy efforts to that end”.

Under Measure 18 of the EHRDOP a number of actions have already been implemented to enhance human resources development in enterprises. The Accel initiative will complement and enhance the overall range of support for workers in enterprises to upskill, reskill, cross skill and improve knowledge, competence and qualifications.

The Accel programme responds in particular to the recognised need for even greater commitment to training, and particularly in-company training,

Following a public tendering procedure, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Employment and Training Strategy Unit) as Managing

Authority appointed Skillnets Services Ltd to act as the Technical Support Unit for this measure and administer the initiative on its behalf.

Context

The availability of a highly skilled and well educated labour force was a key factor underpinning Ireland's recent economic success. The numbers of young people leaving schools and colleges each year provided a sound foundation for meeting the demands of the labour market.

However, Ireland is on the cusp of significant demographic change. Over the next decade, there will be a decline in the number of school and college leavers joining the labour force. The existing labour force will therefore increasingly be required to meet the emerging skills needs of the economy.

At the same time, the manner in which work is organised is constantly changing. The last 10 to 15 years have seen a significant growth in knowledge-based business throughout the developed economies of the world. The impact of technology affects all areas of industry and services and, as a result of these developments, the skills requirements of many sectors are altering. Many people are in danger of finding themselves unemployed because of structural changes in the economy which have devalued their existing skills set.

More than ever, Ireland needs to invest in the skills, knowledge and competencies of the existing workforce to maintain economic competitiveness and enhance the employability of workers.

At the Lisbon European Council held in March 2000, the Heads of State and Government acknowledged that "*the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy*" and set the Union a major strategic goal for 2010 "*to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*". It stressed that this would require not only a "*radical transformation of the European economy*", but also a "*challenging programme for the modernisation of social welfare and education systems*". The role played by education and training systems in the economic and social strategy and the future of the Union is now acknowledged as vital.

Identified needs

The European Employment Guidelines highlight the need for Lifelong Learning strategies in order to meet the needs of workers and employers in the increasingly knowledge-based economy. The European Council has recommended that special attention should be paid to in-company training in Ireland.

A range of reports in recent years by various Irish bodies (e.g. Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, National Competitiveness Council, FORFAS, NCPP,

Enterprise Strategy Group) have emphasised the need to improve the skills base of the workforce if the economy is to remain competitive. In particular a number of significant sectoral analysis conducted by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the work of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, the strategic direction set out by the Enterprise Strategy Group, and the NCPP Workplace of the Future have highlighted key needs across the economy and within the labour force. These clearly point to a number of key opportunities and challenges for workers and employers to align skills development and training strategies with the changing landscape of current and future employment.

The priority needs that have been identified in these reports are:

- Improving the knowledge, skills and competence of those at work and moving skills up the value chain.
- The need for increased participation by SME's in providing skills development for employees.
- The need for regional assessment of changing technology trends and skill requirements provides a basis for regional growth as it can inform and support collaboration between industry and education at local level.
- The need for training to be relevant, flexible and adaptable to the needs of enterprises.
- The need to identify and train key senior personnel in SME's in training need identification, training planning and implementation.
- The need for skills development strategies for workers and employers to recognise;
- future challenges and opportunities for workers within individual sectors,
 - emerging and declining technologies,
 - the changing nature of work and work organisation,
 - the emergence of the knowledge economy,
 - the retraining of workers in vulnerable sectors.
- Ensuring an adequate training infrastructure for the delivery of in-company training.
- Ensuring that cost is not a significant barrier in the provision of training for people in employment.
- The need to encourage the take up of life long learning by adults in the work place.
- The need for the development of accreditation for in-company training which should involve engagement between industry groups and the national qualifications framework.

The Accel Programme

The Accel programme will support the training of people in employment (in-company Training). It aims to give employers and workers an opportunity to rapidly improve, realign or revise their current skills base.

Projects approved for funding under Accel will have one, or a number, of the following features:

- High levels of enterprise participation in the design, development of delivery of training.
- Actions in which the social partners take the lead.
- Groups of enterprises working collaboratively (e.g. training networks, clusters or other group based approaches).
- Actions which will lead to the development of accreditation for in-company training.
- Actions led by industry/education partnerships.
- Actions where local enterprise bodies, local employer and employee groups and enterprise groups form local training alliances.

Call for proposals

Proposals are now invited for funding under the Accel initiative for

- New in-company training projects,
- The development of in-company training systems,
- Projects under development.

New In-company training projects

Any skills needs which are identified by enterprises and others (and where evidence is provided of the enterprise need) is eligible for funding under the programme. This may include any or a combination of the following.

- Training to address specific sector skills needs.
- Training measures in vulnerable sectors or for vulnerable groups of workers.
- Basic skills training for those in employment, including training in literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and learning skills.
- Management development and key staff skills.
- Problem solving, teamworking, managing information, and other soft skills.
- Information and Communications Technology skills.
- Marketing and Sales skills.
- Training leading to new qualifications.
- Training which did not previously exist or brings new accessibility to enterprises and workers.
- Training new groups of employees who have not previously had the opportunity to engage in training.
- Training in management and entrepreneurial skills, with a particular focus on SMEs.
- Training measures focused on non-national workers.

Development of In-company training systems

- The development of new skills and competency frameworks and/or standards for people in employment or in particular occupational groups, including frameworks which recognise prior learning or which are designed for people who have no formal qualifications.

- The development of generic supports or mechanisms to improve the capacity of companies to engage in training (information, awareness building, advice, models, materials etc)
- The development of e-Learning models and other new flexible models for the delivery of in-company training.
- The development of new approaches to training which involve employers and workers operating in partnership.

Projects under Development

A limited fund is available to support projects that are not currently in a position to make a full application but display the potential to develop into projects which meet the key aims and objectives of the Accel Call.

Due to funding constraints only a limited number of projects will be funded under this section. Projects funded here will be expected to be in a position to make a full application by Friday 24th February 2006. Funding under this initiative does not guarantee continued funding in the February call. The maximum grant available for development projects will be €15,000. This must be applied for, by Wednesday 9th November 2005, using the prescribed "Development Grant Application Form".

Items to be funded under this section:

- Assistance in making a full application in February including;
 - Training Needs Analysis
 - Development of a training plan
 - Engagement with companies likely to become involved in the ongoing project

Training carried out under the project proposals should seek to adopt or involve the development of recognised certification or accreditation, where possible.

Funding will only be provided in respect of activity carried out on or after the date of approval of successful projects. Activity, which is currently funded or formally has been, granted approval for public funding should not be included in proposals submitted under the Accel initiative.

Who is eligible to apply?

The Accel initiative will be available to support the types of actions outlined above which are operated by;

- employer bodies,
- trade unions,
- business associations,
- groups of companies,
- educational and training institutions acting in partnership with industry

Proposals co-ordinated by County Enterprise Boards on behalf of groups of companies will also be eligible for funding.

Funding will not be provided for proposals from individual companies.

Duration of Accel co-financing

Projects approved under this call of the Accel programme will be funded, at maximum, from the date of contract approval for a period of two years, up to 31st December 2007.

Grant Payments

Grants of up to 75% are available to approved projects. The maximum grant % is determined by the size of companies involved in the project.

Grants approved under the Accel programme will be provided on the following basis.

50% of the first year grant on signing of the project contract
30% of the first year grant on receipt of half yearly reports
20% retention on receipt of annual report and certified accounts

Details of further payments will be attached to the funding agreement but will be in advance and subject to a retention of 20% at the end of Year 2.

This scheme fulfils the conditions of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 68/2001 of 12 January 2001 on the Application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to training aid, published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 13 January 2001.

Reporting

Projects approved will be expected to comply with all reporting arrangements outlined by Skillnets Services. All reports must comply with the Claims regulations and requirements of the European Social Fund, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the National Training Fund. The ESF is subject to very specific requirements with regard to financial management and control and is subject to periodic audit by the EU and other bodies. Successful projects will be advised of their full financial management obligations including eligibility and reporting on approval.

Management of the In-Company Training measure

This call for proposals is being administered by Skillnets Services Ltd on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Department has engaged Skillnets Services Ltd as a technical support unit to oversee the administration of the initiative and the implementation of the successful projects. Successful projects will be required to report to, and co-operate with, the Department and Skillnets Services Ltd on an on-going basis.

Project Assessment and Approval

Project Assessments will be carried out by the technical support unit to the Accel In-company Training Programme – Skillnets Services Ltd who will make recommendations to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Projects will be approved by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The criteria for selection of proposals will include areas such as;

- relevance to the priorities identified in this document
- clarity of aims and objectives
- impact on companies and/or employees
- extent of industry involvement
- capacity of the promoter to deliver on the proposal
- availability of match funding
- overall cost and value for money
- level of innovation
- non-duplication with activity already in receipt of funding or approved for funding through FAS, Enterprise Ireland, the Skillnets Training Networks Programme and/or other publicly funded bodies.

Closing date

The **final** closing date for receipt of applications under this call for proposals is 5.00pm on Wednesday 9th November 2005. Two copies of the application in hard copy format must be delivered to Skillnets Services Ltd. Level 2, Frankfort Court, Dundrum Road, Dublin 14 not later than the time and date stated. In addition one copy of the application should be delivered in electronic format to info@acceltraining.com not later than the time and date stated. Late applications will not be entertained.

Application form

All applications must be submitted on the prescribed application form available from Skillnets Services Ltd. The form can be downloaded from www.acceltraining.com



an roinn fiontar, trádála agus fostaíochta
department of enterprise, trade and employment

Skillnets SERVICES



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