

Training Networks Programme

The purpose of this document is to show how training aid provided to beneficiary companies under the Training Networks Programme (TNP) complies with the provisions of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 (General Block Exemption Regulation or GBER).

Background to TNP

The aim of TNP is to promote and support the development of Business Networks as a strategic response to existing and emerging competitive challenges facing the enterprise sector. Skillnet Ireland, the agency managing the TNP, receives funding from the National Training Fund through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. Skillnet Ireland, through the development of Business Networks, aims to increase participation in enterprise training by firms to improve competitiveness and provide improved access for workers to skills development.

The overall objectives of the TNP are as follows:

- to promote an enterprise-led approach to learning through the establishment of Business Networks where groups of enterprises can develop strategic solutions to their joint training needs;
- to promote increased active participation in training and development by enterprises, especially within small and medium sized firms, to address the reluctance to invest in human resource development and learning;
- to improve the adaptability and long-term employability of workers, especially through addressing the basic skills requirements of workers with lower qualifications;
- to facilitate the provision of quality customised training by supporting the development of new, innovative and flexible methodologies, to deliver more effective and user-friendly training solutions to enterprises;
- to enable enterprises to expand and access more training options by addressing gaps in current provision, rather than duplicate existing activity;
- to create value-added training by promoting best international practice within Networks, including impact measurement, benchmarking, accreditation of new and prior learning, and strategic approaches to learning and development;
- to contribute to the development of national policy on the development of in-company training by working with all stakeholders, including employer bodies and trade unions, training and education providers, awards bodies, support agencies and policy groups.

Application and Approval

Skillnet Ireland issues calls for proposals under the TNP at least once a year. Open calls for proposals will be published on its website (www.skillnetireland.ie). The assessment and approval procedure is a competitive process with awards of grants being made to the highest ranking projects based on the merits of their respective applications. Following an assessment of valid applications, funding will be provided to successful Networks.

Extent of Programme

The TNP is available to networks of enterprises nationwide.

Any group of enterprises and/or any representative association can form a Business Network and apply for funding, provided that they have a strategic and long-term common interest to pursue in relation to the development of human resources, across any sectors and/or regions in Ireland.

Who Can Benefit?

Any network of private enterprises and/or representative organisation with a strategic and long-term common interest in pursuing the development of human resources across any economic sector and/or geographical area in Ireland is eligible to apply.

Enterprises throughout Ireland are permitted to join Business Networks at any time during the life of the TNP and take advantage of training organised and delivered on behalf of the member companies.

The TNP does not provide aid in the circumstances described in Article 1(2) - (5) of the GBER.

Eligible Projects

The TNP is aimed at supporting training measures undertaken by enterprises with the purpose of developing and updating the knowledge of their workforce. The aim is to address the individual and organisational learning needs of people in employment.

There are four main areas, or pillars, under which Skillnet Ireland prioritise projects for the TNP:

1. Driving skills strategies through sectors and partnerships to encourage training participation at sector level.
2. Growing the skills base by giving workers access to lifelong learning opportunities.
3. Developing local learning responses to allow enterprises to develop training opportunities for employees at local level.
4. Building training and development methods in enterprises by continuously identifying and promoting best practice and quality in all aspects of the design, delivery, evaluation and dissemination of enterprise training.



In accordance with Article 31(2) of the GBER, training which is mandatory under Irish law (eg health and safety training) will not receive funding under the TNP.

Eligible Expenditure

Eligible costs incurred by Networks in providing training for beneficiary companies are in line with those set out in Article 31(3) of the GBER and include:

- cost of trainers' personnel costs, for the hours during which they participate in the training;
- trainers' and trainees' operating costs directly related to the training project (eg travel expenses, office facilities, materials and supplies) to the extent that they are used exclusively for the training project;
- costs of advisory services linked to the training project;
- cost of trainees' personnel costs and general indirect costs (eg administrative costs, rents, overheads), for the hours during which they participate in the training.

Support Intensity

The intensity of the planned support is dependent on the level of participation by enterprises in the programme activities of individual Networks. Aid received under the TNP will not exceed the maximum support intensities for any small, medium or large enterprises as set out in the table below.

In accordance with Article 31(4) of the GBER, the maximum aid intensity applicable to the value of training provided under the TNP to enterprises is as follows:

	Large enterprises (% of eligible costs)*	Medium-sized enterprises (% of eligible costs)*	Small enterprises (% of eligible costs)*
General Training	50%	60%	70%
Training to Workers with Disabilities or Disadvantaged Workers	60%	70%	70%
Specific Training	Not provided under the TNP		

*For the purposes of calculating aid intensity and eligible costs, all figures used must be taken before any deduction of tax or other charge and must be supported by documentary evidence which must be clear, specific and contemporary.

A 'medium-sized enterprise' is defined as having between 50 and 249 employees and an annual turnover not exceeding €50m, and/or an annual balance sheet not exceeding €43m.

A 'small enterprise' is defined as having 49 employees or less and an annual turnover and/or a balance sheet not exceeding €10m.

A 'worker with disabilities' means any person who:

- (a) is recognised as worker with disabilities under national law; or
- (b) has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment(s) which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in a work environment on an equal basis with other workers.

A 'disadvantaged worker' is defined as any person who:

- (a) has not been in regular paid employment for the previous 6 months; or
- (b) is between 15 and 24 years of age; or
- (c) has not attained an educational or vocational qualification at Leaving Certificate equivalent or is within 2 years of completing full-time education and has not previously obtained his or her first regular paid employment; or
- (d) is over the age of 50 years; or
- (e) lives as a single adult with one or more dependents; or
- (f) works in a sector/profession where the gender imbalance is at least 25 % higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in Ireland and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; or
- (g) is a member of an ethnic minority who requires development of his or her linguistic, vocational training or work experience profile to enhance prospects of gaining access to stable employment.

Incentive Effect

Applicant Networks are required to submit a training plan in which the profile of the membership between small/medium and large enterprises is set out. The training plan must be based on the identified training needs of member companies (small, medium-sized and large enterprises) of the Network.

In accordance with Article 6 of the GBER, Business Networks are required to submit an application form for the programme before work on the project starts. The application must describe:

- the applicant's name and size;
- a description of the training plan proposed, including its start and end dates;
- location of the programme;
- list of programme costs and the type of aid and amount of public funding needed;
- the priority areas addressed and the outcomes and objectives of the programme;
- the effect of the aid on the scope of the programme, the completion dates of the programme and the total amount spent.

Funding

Funding for the TNP is provided by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science from the National Training Fund. Funding is determined through the annual estimates process. The final amounts made available to the TNP, as noted in the Estimates for Public Services, are approved by Dáil Éireann.

Form of Aid

Only transparent forms of aid, i.e. grants, will be eligible for funding under the TNP.

Legal Basis

The national legal basis for the TNP is the National Training Fund Act 2000. The TNP is funded under [Subhead N6 of Vote 65] Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The TNP is covered by Article 31 of the General Block Exemption Regulation published in Official Journal No. L187, 26 June 2014.