



Guidelines on Invest NI's programme of Skills, Strategy and Innovation Solutions

December 2014

1. Title of aid scheme

Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions

2. Member State

United Kingdom

3. Region

Northern Ireland

4. Legal basis

The Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Order 1982

The Industrial Development (Northern Ireland) Act 2002

The European Communities Act 1972

5. Annual expenditure planned under the scheme

£15 million

6. Maximum Aid Intensities

GBER Aid Measure	Basic Aid Intensity / Amount
Article 18 - Aid for Consultancy in favour of SMEs	50%
Article 22 - Aid for Small Start Ups	EUR 600,000*
Article 27 - Aid for Innovation Clusters	50%
Article 28 - Innovation aid for SMEs	50%**
Article 31 - Training Aid	50%***

* Can be doubled for small innovative enterprises

** Can be increased up to 100 % of the eligible costs provided that the total amount of aid for innovation advisory and support services does not exceed EUR 200 000 per undertaking within any three year period.

*** Can be increased by 10% for medium sized enterprises and 20% for small enterprises

7. Date of Implementation

01 January 2015

8. Duration of Scheme

Until 31 December 2020

9. Objective

The Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions are discretionary funding awarded to support businesses in the following areas:

Consultancy Support for SMEs

- Financial Assistance to support SMEs to engage in non-routine activities such as business and financial planning, strategic management, marketing and design development.

New Small Start Ups

- Financial support to encourage entrepreneurship and new small start ups;

Innovation Clusters

- The animation and facilitation of collaborative networks of businesses engaging in focused knowledge sharing activities.

Innovation aid for SMEs

- Financial Assistance to support SMEs to secure patents, engage innovation advisory and support services and to second, if appropriate, highly qualified personnel to work on R&D and innovation activities.

Training

- Financial assistance to support non-mandatory training at all levels within both SMEs and large enterprises.

10. Economic sectors concerned

Assistance is available across all sectors, to companies of all sizes, in line with the European Commission's SME and State aid definitions.

11. Eligible activities & costs

Invest NI will make a judgement as to the reasonableness of all costs submitted by the applicant in relation to the Project. Costs associated with the following will be eligible for assistance under the Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions.

Aid for Consultancy in favour of SMEs

The eligible costs shall be the consultancy costs of services provided by outside consultants.

The services concerned shall not be a continuous or periodic activity nor relate to the undertaking's usual operating costs, such as routine tax consultancy services, regular legal services or advertising.

Aid for Start Ups

Eligible undertakings shall be unlisted small enterprises up to five years following their registration, which have not yet distributed profits and have not been formed through a merger. For eligible undertakings that are not subject to registration the five years eligibility period may be considered to start from the moment when the enterprise either starts its economic activity or is liable to tax for its economic activity.

Aid for Innovation Clusters

The eligible costs of operating aid for innovation clusters shall be the personnel and administrative costs (including overhead costs) relating to:

- (a) animation of the cluster to facilitate collaboration, information sharing and the provision or channelling of specialised and customised business support services;
- (b) marketing of the cluster to increase participation of new undertakings or organisations and to increase visibility;
- (c) management of the cluster's facilities; organisation of training programmes, workshops and conferences to support knowledge sharing and networking and transnational cooperation.

The aid intensity of operating aid shall not exceed 50 % of the total eligible costs during the period over which the aid is granted. It shall not exceed 10 years.

Innovation aid for SMEs

The eligible costs for Innovation aid for SMEs shall be:

- (a) costs for obtaining, validating and defending patents and other intangible assets;
- (b) costs for secondment of highly qualified personnel from a research and knowledge-dissemination organization or a large enterprise, working on research, development and innovation activities in a newly created function within the beneficiary and not replacing other personnel; or
- (c) costs for innovation advisory and support services;

In the particular case of aid for innovation advisory and support services the aid intensity can be increased up to 100 % of the eligible costs provided that the total amount of aid for innovation advisory and support services does not exceed EUR 200,000 per undertaking within any three year period.

Training Aid

The eligible costs shall be:

- (a) trainers' personnel costs, for the hours during which the trainers participate in the training;
- (b) trainers' and trainees' operating costs directly relating to the training project such as travel expenses, materials and supplies directly related to the project,

depreciation of tools and equipment, to the extent that they are used exclusively for the training project. Accommodation costs are excluded except for the minimum necessary accommodation costs for trainees' who are workers with disabilities;

(c) costs of advisory services linked to the training project;

(d) trainees' personnel costs and general indirect costs (administrative costs, rent, overheads) for the hours during which the trainees participate in the training.

Aid shall not be granted for training which undertakings carry out to comply with national mandatory standards on training.

12. Transparency of aid

Skills, Strategy & Innovation solutions shall provide aid in respect of which it is possible to calculate precisely the gross grant equivalent ex ante i.e. transparent aid.

13. Cumulation

The total amount of public support measures for a Skills, Strategy & Innovation solutions assisted project shall be taken into account, regardless of whether that support is financed from local, regional, national or community sources. Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions support may be cumulated with other Invest NI aid schemes as long as those schemes concern different, identifiable eligible costs.

Where Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions support is cumulated with other aid in respect of the same identifiable eligible costs, Invest NI shall ensure that such cumulation does not result in the highest allowable aid intensity being exceeded,

14. Incentive effect

Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions support shall have an incentive effect. Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions support to SMEs shall be considered to have an incentive either if, before work on the project or activity has started, the Client has submitted an application for support aid to Invest NI. For large companies, the incentive effect is fully addressed within the appraisal process.

15. Monitoring

Invest NI shall maintain detailed records regarding Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions. Such records shall contain all information necessary to establish that the conditions laid down in the General Block Exemption Regulation are fulfilled, including information on the status of any Client whose entitlement to aid or a bonus depends on its status as an SME, information on the incentive effect of the aid and information making it possible to establish the precise amount of eligible costs for the purpose of applying the Regulation. Records regarding the Skills, Strategy & Innovation Solutions programme shall be maintained for 10 years from the date on which the last aid was granted.

On written request, Invest NI shall provide the Commission within a period of 20 working days or such longer period as may be fixed in the request, with all the information which the Commission considers necessary to monitor the application of the General Block Exemption Regulation.

16. Name and address of granting authority

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