
Flexible Workforce Development Fund – Frequently Asked Questions (2022-23)

Q1. What is the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF)?

The FWDF is a funding stream which enables businesses to access training for their employees to help address skills gaps. The central purpose of the FWDF is to provide employers in Scotland with flexible workforce development training opportunities to support inclusive economic growth through up-skilling or re-skilling of employees and to support economic recovery.

When referring to “employees” to describe who can attend the training we are meaning any individual who provides a service or generates revenue for the employer. Therefore individuals such as volunteers or stakeholders can receive the FWDF training as long as it is being provided to enhance their skills to increase the productivity of the employer accessing the FWDF.

The training routes available:

Colleges

- A £7m fund for colleges to deliver training to UK Apprenticeship Levy paying companies in Scotland.
- £3m fund for colleges to deliver training to SME employers.

The Open University in Scotland

- £0.5m fund for The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) to deliver online training at undergraduate and postgraduate level to Levy paying and SME employers.

Independent Training Providers

- A fund for Levy paying and SME employers to access training (from Independent Training Providers (ITPs) where this training is not available from colleges. Skills Development Scotland is managing this funding stream.

Q2. How much can I access?

UK Apprenticeship Levy payer

£15,000 via either a local college in Scotland, in the first instance or an ITP if specific training is unavailable at a college, or via The Open University in Scotland.

SME (for the purposes of FWDF, a SME is defined as a business with less than 250 employees)

£5,000 via either a local college in Scotland, in the first instance, (£4.5m fund) or an ITP if specific training is unavailable at a college (£1m fund), or via The Open University in Scotland.

If you are both a Levy payer and a SME you can access either the £15,000 or £5,000 funding but NOT both.

Each eligible organization can only submit ONE application.

The funding will be accessed on a first come first served basis

Q3. Are public funded bodies eligible for FWDF?

The Fund is available to all Levy-paying and SME employers in Scotland across the private public and third sectors. Employers must be based or operate within Scotland.

Q4. Where can I access more information on the FWDF?

You can access more information by contacting:

- Your local college directly - See [list of colleges in Scotland](#).
- Further information on [The Open University in Scotland](#).
- Further information on [accessing training via ITPs](#).

Q5. How do I apply for training via the FWDF?

Colleges, The Open University or Skills Development Scotland (as appropriate) will take you through the application process. Contact details can be found via the links above.

Q6. As a SME how can I access specialist training that is not available from a college?

In Year 6 (2022-23) the FWDF has been extended to allow SME employers to access training via ITPs when it is of a more specialist nature and not available via a local college.

In the first instance the SME should contact their local college to discuss their training needs and if it is identified that the college do not offer the training required, and they cannot identify another suitable college to deliver the training, then the college should refer the SME employer to SDS. This will enable SDS to know that the employer has already discussed their training needs with the college and that the college does not offer the required training.

When referring an SME to SDS the college should email SDS (fwdf@sds.co.uk), as soon as practicable to ensure the SME can access training via SDS in a timely manner. The College should

provide the following information:

- Employer's name and contact details; and
- Brief description of the training they are unable to provide.

Q7. How do I prove I am eligible for the FWDF?

Levy payers

You will need to provide a copy of an official document proving payment of Levy (e.g. EPS, P32, payroll report).

SMEs

You will need to provide a signed copy of an official document proving your status as a business, such as:

- A business bank account.
- VAT registration.
- PAYE registration.
- Companies House info (latest accounts, etc.)
- Registration for self-assessment tax return (HMRC).

Q8. Can I apply to use my FWDF allowance at more than one training provider?

You can only make one application to either a college, The Open University in Scotland (OUiS) or via Skills Development Scotland, however it may be possible to access training from more than one provider:

If you apply to either a college or OUiS they can collaborate with each other or, in a college's case, with another college, if they are unable to meet all of your training needs. In this instance all your FWDF training would be collated and reported back to SFC by just one of the training providers.

If you apply via the SDS route you will receive a grant which will allow you to use any remaining funds to purchase training from another training provider (independent training provider, college in Scotland or OUiS).

Q9. What type of training can be accessed using the FWDF?

Training that has been identified with the aim of increasing productivity and/or supporting economic recovery and/or filling known skills gaps.

Your training provider (college, OUIS or SDS) will help you identify needs through a training needs analysis.

Q10. Why is a training needs analysis necessary?

Through engagement between an employer and training provider, an agreement should be reached about what the employer's needs are, based on increasing productivity and tackling known skills gaps, including those of priority groups, and what they will apply to the FWDF for. This process should be proportionate to the size of the business and Fund size available. The analysis should form the basis of their application and training providers should work with employers to support the application process.

Q11. Why does the FWDF guidance talk about tackling inequality and child poverty when this is an upskilling support fund for businesses?

The [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#) (NSET) published in March 2022 sets out a vision for 2032 for Scotland to be a thriving, inclusive and entrepreneurial country delivering a just transition to a net zero, nature positive, wellbeing economy. A Skilled Workforce is one of five key themes included within the NSET.

As part of the Skilled Workforce strand of NSET, there is a commitment to a strategic lifetime skills offer. In developing this, we are committed to targeting resources at those living in or at risk of poverty.

We know many of those living in poverty in Scotland today are in work. Some families are much more likely to be in poverty, including families with a single parent, particularly where the parent is female and those with a disabled child or parent in the household.

In these particularly challenging economic times, we are committed to using all possible levers to help families out of poverty and we know that higher skills levels can help people move into better paid jobs. By targeting those workers who can benefit more from upskilling opportunities through funds such as the FWDF, businesses can support the greater financial security of their workforce, while supporting the business aims and objectives of the organisation.

Q12. What is the timeframe for funded activity to take place under FWDF?

All training must be contractually agreed by 31 July 2023 (and have commenced by 31 August 2023) to be included as part of colleges' Year 6 (AY 2022-23) funding allocations.

We expect all training provision associated with Year 6 funding to be delivered by the end of December 2023. Where there are exceptional or extenuating circumstances (e.g. delivery of HNC/SVQ training) colleges should contact SFC to discuss any possible revision to this deadline.

Q13. What training courses are not supported by FWDF?

Statutory training that organisations are required by law to provide, as part of running a service, or where a statutory body has instructed an organisation to provide certain training on the basis of specific legislation (see Q7 below for further information).

Lessons towards attaining a driving licence (category A or B).

Outward bound type courses and leisure or sporting activities other than those that lead to a recognised coaching or teaching qualification.

Q14. What is the difference between statutory and mandatory training and when could FWDF be used towards this training?

FWDF does not support provision of training which is a statutory requirement for the individual's continuing employment, including any training which an employee is required by law to undertake in order to carry out the duties associated with his or her employment. In other words, it is training legally required for businesses to operate. This remains the employer's responsibility.

However, where employers can evidence that statutory requirements have been met and additional statutory training is required, over and above the minimum statutory requirements, this training can be supported by FWDF (e.g. certain health & safety training).

In terms of mandatory training required by law and associated with specific job roles, where employers are looking to provide additional training relating to skills outwith their employees' core role or relating to a new area of work, then this would be considered as up-skilling/re-skilling and could be supported by FWDF. For example, if a plumber is being up-skilled into the role of a heating engineer or if an employer is up-skilling its workforce into a new area of work such as to address the transition to net zero.

The FWDF can be used to support businesses transitioning towards net zero. Employers who are transitioning to low carbon/net zero and developing trainer capacity in their workplace to upskill the workforce could access transition training via FWDF in advance of the need of future requirements for what would otherwise be mandatory training once the transition has been completed. Following the initial training for the post, employers will again be required to meet ongoing costs in line with existing FWDF guidance.

Any decisions on whether an employer is eligible to access transition training through FWDF will be made on a case-by-case basis. Training providers should contact either SFC (fwdf@sfc.ac.uk) or SDS (fwdf@sds.co.uk), whichever is appropriate.

Note: where it is agreed that FWDF can be used for statutory/mandatory training, it is only the training element of the qualification that can be funded by FWDF – any registration or exam costs are not eligible to be covered by FWDF.

Q15. What happens if an employer's FWDF application is declined?

The 'training needs analysis' undertaken between the college/training provider and employer should ensure an employer's identified training needs reflect FWDF criteria and priorities, including priority groups outlined in the guidance. Employers should be notified by the college/training provider, in writing, if their application has been unsuccessful.

If an employer wishes to appeal a decision taken by a provider, they should make an approach to the SFC in the first instance. Approaches will be handled on a case by case basis and led by an overseeing group of SFC and Scottish Government officials.

Q16. What happens if an employer applies to access training but the application is unsuccessful as the fund has already been fully utilised?

If an employer's application is unsuccessful as a result of high demand for the FWDF the employer's application should be held on a waiting list until funds become available, either through an in-year redistribution or until future rounds of funding become available.

Q17. Where can FWDF training be delivered?

The most appropriate and practicable arrangements for delivery of training should be discussed and agreed by the college/ITP and employer.

The OUIS training will be delivered online through its innovative platforms.

Q18. If an employee leaves their employment during or after receiving training funded by the flexible workforce development fund can their employer claim back the cost of the training from the employee?

No. The funding for FWDF training is provided by the Scottish Government, not the employer, to help upskill or reskill employees in Scottish-based companies therefore it is not appropriate for an employer to reclaim the cost of the course from the employee.

Q19. Why is an employer cap applied to FWDF?

The FWDF is designed to maximise the potential number of employers who are able to access each of the Funds, while providing a degree of simplicity for employers and training providers.

Q20. What happens if the cost of an employer's training needs exceeds the capped amount capped amount for the FWDF?

FWDF can be used as part-payment towards training of a higher cost.

Q21. How are the Scottish Government and SFC going to monitor the FWDF?

The FWDF will be monitored through regular college reporting on the quantitative outputs using the SFC reporting form provided. This may be subject to change as SG are currently reviewing the monitoring requirements for the fund. SFC expects colleges to have due regard to public value for money in the use of their FWDF allocations for training. As part of the reporting process SFC will monitor the activity delivered, costs associated with delivery and the volume of learners benefitting from the training.

SFC will share employer details with the Scottish Government and other relevant public bodies, including SDS, for the purposes of reporting, monitoring or evaluation purposes, and may be further processed by organisations contracted to undertake this work on their behalf.