

Training Networks Programme 2008-2010

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 (EC) No 800/2008 (General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)).

Background to TNP

The aim of the Training Networks Programme (TNP) is to promote and support the development of Training Networks as a strategic response to existing and emerging competitive challenges facing the enterprise sector. Skillnets Ltd, the agency managing the TNP funded from the National Training Fund administered by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, aims, through the development of training networks, 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 Training 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

Applications under the TNP are now closed. The deadline for receipt of applications for the period 2008-2009 from prospective network promoters was 24 September 2007. The assessment and approval procedure was 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 was provided to successful networks for a two year period (2008 and 2009). Completion and closure of the TNP will be effected during 2010.

Extent of Programme

The TNP is available to networks of enterprises nationwide.

Any group of enterprises and/or any representative association can form a training 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 organisations 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 training networks at any time during the life of the TNP and take advantage of training organized and delivered on behalf of the member companies.

There is no aid available to enterprises as defined in Article 1 Sections 2, 4 and 6 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 800/2008 .

Eligible Projects:

Training programmes are aimed at supporting private enterprises in addressing individual and organisational learning needs. This support to enterprises is aimed at people in employment.

There are four main areas, or pillars, under which Skillnets Ltd prioritize 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.

Eligible Expenditure

Eligible costs incurred by TNP networks in providing training for beneficiary companies are in line with those set out in Article 39(4) of Regulation 800/2008 and include:

- Cost of trainers and other professional experts to design, deliver and evaluate training for network members
- Trainee personnel costs
- Guidance and counselling services.
- Workshops, seminars and conferences
- Provision of staff, office facilities and administration required for network activities

Support Intensity

In accordance with Article 39 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 800/2008., the maximum aid intensity applicable to the value of training provided under the TNP to enterprises is as follows:

	Large	Medium	Small
General Training	60%	70%	80%

No specific training to enterprises is provided under the TNP.

A further aid intensity premium of 10% may be payable if training is provided to disadvantaged or disabled workers.

A '*disadvantaged worker*' is defined as any person who has not been in regular paid employment for the last 6 months, has not attained an educational qualification at Leaving Certificate equivalent or higher, is over 50 years of age, lives as a single adult with one or more dependents; or works in a sector/profession where the gender imbalance is at least 25 % higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in that Member State, and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; or is a member of an ethnic minority who requires linguistic, vocational training or work experience to enhance their prospects of gaining access to stable employment.

A '*disabled worker*' means any person recognised as disabled under national law; or having a recognised limitation which results from physical, mental or psychological impairment;

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.

Small enterprises are defined as having 49 employees or less and an annual turnover not in excess of €10m;

Medium sized enterprises as having between 50 and 249 employees and an annual turnover not in excess of €43m;

Large enterprises are defined as having in excess of 250 employees and an annual turnover in excess of €43m.

The intensity of the planned support is dependent on the level of participation by enterprises in the programme activities of individual networks. Public aid received under the TNP does not exceed the maximum support intensities for any small, medium or large enterprises.

Incentive Effect

In accordance with Article 8 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 800/2008, applicants are required to submit an application form for the programme describing the training plan proposed, the priority areas addressed and the outcomes and objectives of the proposal. The training plan described is required to be based on the identified training needs of member companies (Large enterprises and SMEs) of the network.

Funding

Funding for the TNP is provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment from the National Training Fund. Funding is determined through the

annual estimates process and 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 are used.

Legal Basis

The national legal basis is the National Training Fund Act 2000. The Training Networks Programme is funded under Subhead N6 of Vote 65 Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.

State Aid Basis

The TNP is covered by the Article 38 and 39 of the General Block Exemption Regulation published in Official Journal No. 214, 9 August 2008, Commission Regulation (EC) No. 800/2008.

Period of Validity

The TNP shall operate from 1 January 2009 until 31st December 2010 including completion and closure.