New Further Education (FE) Specialisation and Innovation fund launched

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From today FE colleges and training providers can tap into a new fund to help them connect with businesses in an innovative and collaborative way.

This fund has been created to help England compete in the global skills race – putting the FE sector at the heart of improving the skills of businesses and individuals. It will help unlock the talent of the FE workforce and drive business innovation, enabling FE colleges and training providers to refine and expand the way they manage and deliver their employer training solutions. Finally, it will allow them to learn from their experiences, and share that learning more widely.

FE colleges and training providers are particularly well placed to deliver business innovation by pooling their collective knowledge and expertise. The fund will help the sector drive a collaborative and practical approach to innovation through a small number of targeted pathfinder projects.

Ian Pearson, Innovation Minister

“One of the key challenges facing this country is the skills race – a race which we can and must win. The further education system is at the heart of helping deliver the Government’s aim to make the UK the leading place in the world to be an innovative business or public service. The Specialisation and Innovation Fund will help FE colleges to connect with business and enhance their reputation for innovation and specialism - establishing their vital support role in helping businesses to succeed in the global knowledge economy.”
Bids are now being taken and successful providers will be notified in the autumn. Funding of between £250,000-800,000 will be available for one year for successful applicants and providers need to apply by September 17th to be eligible.

The Learning and Skills Council are looking for FE colleges and training providers with fresh ideas backed with strong delivery plans which demonstrate eligibility, sustainability, potential and connectivity. Providers are encouraged to use the fund to connect with business and demonstrate their ability to deliver tailored high quality training.

For more information or to apply for the fund please visit [www.lsc.gov.uk/Innovation](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/Innovation) or contact [Innovation@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:Innovation@lsc.gov.uk).

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NOTES TO EDITORS
The FE Specialisation and Innovation Fund

The FE Specialisation and Innovation Fund (FESIF) was set up to deliver the governments aim to make the UK the leading place in the world to be an innovative business or public service as set out in the recent government white paper - *Innovation Nation*. This Fund will facilitate a number of ‘pathfinder’ projects to explore ways to develop the capacity and capability of the FE sector to drive business innovation.

These specialisation and innovation projects are investments in learning, not finance for developing or delivering new products and services. We want proposals to come from those who are already leading the way in FE knowledge exchange and business innovation solutions, and who already have a plan and funding to deliver those services, but also have aspirations to change and/or enhance what they do, to extend their reach and their impact.

Securing funding for your specialisation and innovation project will mean significant investment from the LSC to support lasting measurable change. Secondly, all those involved in managing these innovation projects will work together with the LSC and its partners to share their experiences and understand the lessons learned.

The years ahead hold the prospect of real challenge for the FE sector in stimulating and fulfilling a rising employer demand for skills. There are high ambitions set out in the Leitch Review and Train to Gain *plan for growth*. Investing in specialisation and innovation projects is a start in understanding how we can make the most of the
knowledge exchange and business innovation that happens as a result of the FE sector’s response to employers.

FE colleges and training providers have distinguishing features that could be of enormous benefit to promoting innovation in local businesses:

- Local knowledge including links to the knowledge base in other organisations;
- A practical rather than an academic or ‘intellectual’ approach;
- Access to subject specialists, with knowledge that could be deployed to great effect within a business context, and:
- Technical facilities to demonstrate the most up to date technology and its potential business application.