

IEE Employer Fund 2026

IEE Skills Innovation Fund

Specification

Introduction

As labour market conditions continue to present challenges for many employers, Capital City Partnership (CCP), as the Integrated Employer Engagement (IEE) lead for the Edinburgh and South East Scotland (ESES) City Region Deal, is delivering a Small Grants Programme to support micro businesses and SMEs across East Lothian, Edinburgh, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian. The programme aims to help businesses respond to workforce needs, enhance skills development and strengthen business resilience.

This year's Skills Innovation Fund will specifically target innovative skills solutions in the following sectors:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Engineering & Robotics
- Construction: Net Zero and Retrofit

Businesses can apply for up to £10,000 which is reflective of feedback we have received from regional partners and directly from industry around fund impact, combating the rising cost of *'doing business'* and providing the flexibility for businesses to test innovative skills solution projects to enhance workforce and business development. Applications should support the core aims of the fund – to create, develop and implement innovative skills projects and solutions which will aim to create or positively adapt job roles, enable staff upskilling or support employee/citizen career progression.

The proposed Integrated Regional Employability and Skills (IRES) 2027+ programme contains an innovative skills grants programme and this year's fund is seen as a precursor to this. Additionally, this allows IEE to provide a comprehensive support package to successful businesses, helping bring to life their proposed projects, across the remainder of this financial year and beyond.

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1. Invite for Applications

Applications are invited from micro-businesses and SMEs for those individuals who are aged 18+ years old. Applicants must adhere to the fund's eligibility criteria and demonstrate clearly, how their application supports the core aims of the fund – to create, develop and implement innovative skills projects and solutions which will aim to create or positively adapt job roles, enable staff upskilling or support employee/citizen career progression. Each company can only make one application to the fund and must not have received financial help from IEE over the past 12 months.

Applications should be emailed to IEEemployerfund@capitalcitypartnership.org

The deadline is 5pm, Friday 14th August 2026

Late submissions will not be accepted. If the fund is not fully allocated, it may be reopened, subject to uptake. IEE reserves the right to close the fund early should applications be over-subscribed.

2. Use of Grant Monies

Financial assistance may be used for the following (but not limited to):

- **Developing career pathways** for under-represented groups, helping businesses access a wider talent pool
- **Creation and development of training programmes** that enhance the workplace readiness of prospective employees, improve industry engagement/knowledge and provide employment opportunities
- **Curriculum and Learning Resource Design** that addresses current gaps in skills training provision and can be replicated across the sector
- **Industry-academia partnerships** that connect businesses with colleges, universities or training providers to address skills shortages
- **Collaborative training programmes** where several businesses work together to address shared skills gaps

3. Fund Administration

IEE will promote this small grant fund through our partnership networks within East Lothian, Edinburgh, Fife, Midlothian, the Scottish Borders and West Lothian.

The grant award for each application is up to **£10,000**, which is the maximum award threshold. Monies are to be spent and evidenced within 12 weeks of receipt.

4. Funding Allocation Split & Impact

The administering of grant funds of up to £10,000 per businesses has resulted in a change to the overall funding allocations across the City Region. Rather than allocating each local authority with a portion of the fund based on population, the fund will be an open application process across all six local authority areas, with no limitations in relation to business' location. This underpins the region's need and ability to develop innovative skills solutions to support industry and grow our workforce.

As the purpose of this year's Skills Innovation Fund aligns with future IRES priorities and existing workstreams within IEE, we are able to offer a comprehensive support package to all successful businesses across the remainder of financial year 2026/27. If beneficial to the applicant, we are able to co-ordinate introductions to relevant skills partners or public sector bodies who may be able to support your project and wider business remit.

5. Additional Information

For more information on eligibility criteria and administration of the fund, please consult our Eligibility and FAQ document.

6. What do CCP do with the Information Provided?

The Edinburgh South East Scotland City Region Deal require CCP to store application data as part of the monitoring and evaluation framework under the Integrated Regional Employability and Skills (IRES) programme. Please click [here](#) which tells you how we do this in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

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