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Welsh European Funding Office

**COVID-19 Conditions for Support and Frequently Asked Questions for ERDF, ESF & Ireland Wales European Territorial Co-operation Programmes**

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## VERSION HISTORY

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	19 March 2020	Not published on EU Funding pages of the Welsh Government website. Issued directly to ERDF/ESF beneficiaries.
2.0	24 March 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Title amended to include the Ireland-Wales Programme</li> <li>2. Amendment to question 6</li> <li>3. Further FAQs added</li> </ol>
3.0	3 April 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introductory paragraph amended.</li> <li>2. Amendment to questions 2 and 8.</li> <li>3. Further FAQs added</li> <li>4. Addition of Annex A</li> </ol>
4.0	1 May 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarity on staff costs - part time &amp; time-sheeted &amp; the ability to use an historical average</li> <li>2. Claim declarations &amp; the need for beneficiaries to confirm no 'double funding', particularly where access to 'furlough payments'</li> <li>3. Clarity on the use of the UK Government 'furlough scheme' for Third/ private sector organisations</li> <li>4. Document name change to 'Conditions for Support' to reflect that this is part of the WEFO National Rules.</li> <li>5. Management and Control systems for administering/ implementing the structural funds during the period covered by COVID-19</li> <li>6. Criterion for the eligibility of the 20% top-up to 'furlough payments'</li> </ol>
5.0	8 June 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Eligibility of National Insurance and Pension contributions, whilst beneficiary organisation in receipt of furlough payments via UK Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme</li> <li>2. Beneficiary evidence requirements to demonstrate the receipt of furlough payments.</li> </ol>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Impact of COVID-19 upon recording ESF immediate result indicator 'participants into employment upon leaving'</li> <li>4. Eligibility of premises adaptation and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) costs – in preparing for post COVID-19 project activity.</li> <li>5. Eligibility of overtime payments for redeployed staff.</li> <li>6. Clarity on deferred verifications and paying a claim.</li> </ul>
6.0	30 September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Update on Claim declarations.</li> <li>2. Use of email confirmation to confirm/ declare eligibility.</li> <li>3. Clarity on the rules of defrayment.</li> <li>4. Eligibility of office furniture costs for home working.</li> </ul>
7.0	11 November 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarification on support to 'undertakings in difficulty' due to reasons of the COVID-19 pandemic</li> </ul>

## **Coronavirus (COVID-19) & European Structural Funds supported projects**

The COVID-19 crisis creates significant challenges for us all. WEFO recognises that this is affecting the way in which European Structural Funds projects are being delivered. We ask that you continue to try and deliver project activity, as best you can, whilst ensuring that a robust audit trail is kept at all times. However we are committed to working flexibly and pragmatically with all of our beneficiaries to ensure stability in the short term and to support the recovery that will be needed post crisis.

Government guidance has been produced to assist individuals and businesses in preparations to minimise the risks and impact of COVID-19 and we recommend beneficiaries should familiarise themselves with this, if not already done so. Further details of this guidance and the appropriate links can be found at Annex A of this document.

**If you should experience any impact on the delivery of your structural fund project as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19), please refer to the relevant WEFO contact for further advice. WEFO recognises that this situation is evolving very quickly with advice likely to change at short notice. Taking this into account, we will look to make decisions as early as possible and on a case by case basis, making allowances where possible and appropriate. We will then update this FAQ document accordingly whilst taking into account all official advice at that time.**

**In the meantime this FAQ document has been produced for beneficiaries to reference before contacting WEFO. This document sits alongside the [‘Eligibility Rules and Conditions for Support from the European Structural Funds 2014-20’](#) and forms part of Wales’ national rules for the Structural Funds.**

**1. Eligibility of project costs – will project costs continue to be eligible where official restrictions are in place which affect ‘business as usual’ activity?**

Any necessary costs that have already been approved by WEFO, are featured within the operation’s Business Plan and included within the agreed Delivery Profile will continue to be eligible, even in situations where offices have been forced to close and staff are working at home or project activity is reduced. For example rental costs, other accommodation costs (including Flat Rates) and staff costs. As with all costs agreed by WEFO, there is an expectation that value for money is secured and where savings or reductions can be made then these options should be explored where possible.

**NB: Organisations must not duplicate or ‘double fund’ where any of these costs are covered by other government grants received to deal with the impact of COVID-19.**

**2. Can Staff Costs continue to be claimed?**

Yes Staff costs for beneficiary staff contracted to work on the operation continue to be eligible and should continue to be claimed in line with the organisation’s own policies and in accordance with WEFO’s eligibility rules, as has always been the case. Where the beneficiary’s policies cover extraordinary circumstances (for example special leave for school closures) these costs continue to be eligible. Additionally where beneficiaries policies allow for staff to continue to work at home whilst self-isolating then these costs will continue to be considered eligible. WEFO will accept official emails as evidence to confirm what the organisation policy is for circumstances related to Coronavirus. Sick pay continues to be eligible if claimed in accordance with the WEFO eligibility rules.

Where these staff work across a number of operations the method for claiming their staff costs will continue to be determined by each individual contract i.e. whether a job description/ contract of employment/ letter of secondment specifies a fixed number of hours or percentage of time to be allocated to certain projects/ operations being supported by the structural funds then they should continue to be claimed in this way.

Where staff are employed on a flexible basis/ variable hours, the lead and/ or joint beneficiary must retain justification for the methodology used to claim these costs. For example, beneficiaries can use an historical average (minimum of 3 months where possible) in order to determine how much to claim. Any other method must be agreed with the Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations

Officer (OO). Please ensure that all documentation relating to the analysis is maintained for audit purposes.

**NB: Where a beneficiary decides to access the UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, or the Irish Government's Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, any staff costs associated with the delivery of the approved operation will not be eligible for structural fund support as receipt of these payments will be considered 'double funding'.**

**2a. What about organisations that need to use the Government Furlough scheme?**

Whilst we have confirmed that WEFO funded staff costs can continue to be claimed where project activity is reduced, we recognise that some organisations will need to make a decision on the use of the UK Government's Furlough scheme for their staff, particularly where staff costs are being matched by their own or other funds.

Organisations must not duplicate or 'double fund' staff costs, i.e. claim funding from HMRC through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) or the Irish Government's Temporary Wage subsidy Scheme, as well as the usual grant funding received from WEFO to cover staff costs. This would be an inappropriate use of public money and WEFO will seek to recover 'double funding' that has been claimed and paid.

Therefore, upon receipt of these furlough payments beneficiaries will need to ensure deductions are made from claims to WEFO for staff costs during/ for this period.

The WEFO claim form declaration has been amended to include the following statement:

I confirm, to the best of my knowledge that:

- all the details on this form are correct;
- all of the expenditure declared has been defrayed (paid out) on eligible activities in relation to the Operation;
- none of the expenditure declared has also been claimed or covered by other funding sources (double funded) e.g. from other grant funders, COVID-19 Emergency Funding/Furlough Schemes etc.;
- I have adhered to the User Terms and Conditions and all applicable WEFO conditions of funding, rules and guidance that may apply to this claim form.

**Private and Third Sector Bodies** - receiving support via the structural funds whom may also be dependent on income from other sources, including commercial activities, fees and/ or charges:

The decision to furlough staff and apply to the UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) is a decision for each & every organisation to make in discussion/ agreement with their employees. Upon applying to the JRS, you must claim in a proportionate manner e.g. where a loss of 50% of income only 50% of the associated staff costs to be claimed via JRS. Where you have an established organisation wide policy which enables the top up of the furlough payment i.e. the 20% gap, structural funds will be able to assist you in supporting this cost for those employees employed & undertaking activity on a supported operation/ project. However, please note this assistance will only be at the rate of the agreed intervention rate for the operation/ project, not the full 20% amount.

See Annex A for links to further details on this scheme.

**NB:** The UK Government continues to issue updates to this guidance, beneficiaries using the CJRS must ensure that they are familiar with these changes before submitting claims to WEFO.

**2b. If an organisation decides to pay the 20% top up of the furlough payment, are these costs eligible?**

If a beneficiary has made an organisation-wide decision to top up the furlough payment received via the UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), this can be considered an eligible cost for staff contracted to work on structural funded operations, but only on the basis that this policy is also applicable to **all other staff** within that organisation. This will also apply to/ include national insurance and pension contributions, where the full amount of such payments are not met via the UK CJRS. This is subject to there not being any increased cost implications to the operation and a reminder that WEFO will only pay at the approved intervention rate of the 20% salary amount.

**2c. What evidence will need to be provided to show that project/ operation staff have been placed on furlough?**

Where project/ operation staff have been placed on furlough & are in receipt of furlough payments, the following evidence requirements will apply:

- Where furlough payment equates to 80% of staff salary and the beneficiary organisation is **not** paying the remaining 20% of staff salary – sight of organisation policy in respect of the furlough process, together with a list of the project/ operation staff placed on furlough and (a) payroll audit trail showing furlough payments to project/ operation staff, (b) letter from the beneficiary to project/ operation staff confirming placed on furlough

- Where furlough payment equates to 80% of staff salary and the beneficiary organisation **will** pay the remaining 20% of staff salary - sight of organisation policy in respect of the furlough process, inclusive of confirmation of the 20% top up of salary being paid to all employees of the organisation, together with a list of the project/ operation staff placed on furlough and (a) payroll audit trail showing furlough payments and defrayment of NI/ pension costs for project/ operation staff, (b) letter from the beneficiary to project/ operation staff confirming placed on furlough & top up of 20% of salary being applied by the beneficiary organisation.

### **3. Restrictions on travel abroad.**

This concerns operations/ projects that contain costs for travel abroad within approved business plans and/ or those operations/ projects where individual journeys abroad have been authorised by WEFO. Where travel has been booked & it is to a country/ territory that the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has advised 'against all travel' or 'against all but essential travel' – a beneficiary will firstly need to approach its own travel insurance provider (where applicable) & claim against the insurance. If for any reason, the travel insurance policy will not reimburse the cost of travel, the reasons for this will need to be provided to WEFO. Pending the reasons for the insurance policy not paying out & where WEFO accepts as being reasonable/ justified to claim from structural funds, then the foregone travel costs will be considered eligible. Insurance excess fees are considered to be an eligible cost.

### **4. What is the impact of having to extend projects and increase costs with little or no increase in targets and outputs?**

If beneficiaries are unable to deliver their projects as planned because of the virus, we will consider the situation on a case by case basis, as we would for any other situation which prevents a beneficiary from delivering their contractual obligations as planned. We will of course be sympathetic to this, and will consider extensions etc; as appropriate but being mindful that these dates cannot go beyond the Programme eligibility date of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, with a preference for dates not to be later than June 2023 in order to enable all closure activity to occur. Your WEFO Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO) will be the point of contact to discuss this in detail.

### **5. Would cancellation fees be eligible?**



Where a beneficiary has incurred costs which turn out to be fruitless because of events or decisions beyond their control e.g. meetings are cancelled by third parties or following Government advice, that expenditure will not be made ineligible for EU funding, as long as reasonable steps have been taken to minimise that cost e.g. they have made any possible insurance claims. Looking ahead beneficiaries should exercise caution when booking attendance at events and avoid doing so whilst movement/ travel restrictions are in place, unless there is a fully refundable option in such scenario.

**6. Can alternative methods of providing participant evidence be used – for example scanned/ electronic signatures, email confirmation and scanned copies where not possible to have sight of original copies?**

Yes scanned copies of identification or emailed enrolment forms can be accepted as evidence for management verifications, the same applies to participant results that can be self-declared under existing rules. For example we will accept email confirmation from a participant (e.g. please see attached my application form), this along with the email could replace the signatures for the time being. It has also been agreed that we will allow passports etc; to be provided without being certified. These flexibilities have been introduced on the condition that, at a future date, projects will need to go back over this evidence as per normal requirements and at the earliest opportunity. Beneficiaries **must continue** to ensure that GDPR rules are taken into account whilst implementing these revised measures.

**6a. September 2020 Update:** Use of email confirmation to confirm/ declare eligibility to participate in ESF/ ERDF supported operations. Following further research on the use of email to provide electronic confirmation/ declaration of eligibility, WEFO has incorporated the following into its Eligibility rules:

Email confirmation/ declaration from a participant/ individual employee within a SME/ business organisation can be accepted in place of a 'wet' or fully electronic (eIDAS) signature in the following circumstances:

- Where it is as clear as possible that the email used is that of the participant – for example is accompanied by other correspondence to that address e.g. enrolment form, other correspondence.
- Where it is supported by a package of evidence confirming that individual's eligibility – for example; ESF - evidence of right to live and work in the UK along with priority/ project level eligibility, ERDF – evidence of eligibility of SME/ business organisation via a completed SME declaration and evidence of individual employees attendance at workshops.

- For ESF, evidence that the four step process has been followed for assessing and evidencing a participant's eligibility.

**NB:** This approach can also apply to a text message declaration from ESF participants, however only where used as a last resort and evidence in place to demonstrate that (a) the telephone number of the participant reconciles with other evidence noting the number for the particular participant and (b) the declaration cannot be obtained by any other means.

The above can then be considered to meet the fundamental requirement set out for the electronic execution of documents - 'intention to authenticate clearly expressed & with corresponding audit trail to support intention'. Therefore, if it can be evidenced that these arrangements are in place, this will negate the requirement to retrospectively revisit evidence at a future point in time and once COVID 19 restrictions have been lifted.

The following conditions also apply:

- Where the conditions set out above cannot be evidenced then beneficiaries will still be required to revisit evidence, as per normal requirements, at a future point in time and once it is possible to do so.
- As always the case for EU projects, beneficiaries to note that, when subject to future audit, the auditors may, on occasion, seek additional evidence to support the eligibility of specific participants, should they conclude that the documentation originally provided is not sufficient to meet eligibility requirements. However, it is important to note that the auditor will also take into consideration the guidance and restrictions in place at the time.

This approach is advised only for ESF participant eligibility evidence and certain ERDF operations where SME eligibility and individual employee attendance at training events/ workshops required. For other documents, such as signature of Funding Agreements, and other such legal documentation, we will still expect the usual procedures to be adopted wherever possible – only where this cannot be demonstrated will there be a need to follow up in the future

## **7. Can electronic signatures be used on the assumption that the organisation's own policies and procedures allow for this?**

There is no WEFO or EC requirement that hard copy documents or 'wet signatures' are used or are preferable to digital records and the use of electronic systems, where at all possible, is encouraged. If alternatives to 'wet signatures' are used then the beneficiary must conform to the requirements set out in section 5.1.4.2 of the WEFO 'Rules' so as to ensure that the authenticity and integrity of the records can be relied upon for legal/ audit purposes, there are the

required certification processes and controls in place and the ICT systems used conform to the required BSI standards.

Further information can also be found in the link below, to the UK Gov site document, which contains a link to a UK regulation and the eIDAS regulation.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/545098/beis-16-15-electronic-signatures-guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545098/beis-16-15-electronic-signatures-guidance.pdf)

**8. Redeployment of staff – where operation/ project staff are being redeployed to other core critical services to address the impacts of COVID-19 will operation/ project staff costs still be eligible for support via the structural funds?**

Where there is a need for operation/ project staff to be redeployed to undertake urgent work on minimising the impact of COVID-19, please contact your WEFO Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO) and provide the following information:

- (a) copy of the organisation policy or similar evidence which enables redeployment of staff – e.g. organisation email/ bulletin or terms of employment contract;
- (b) details of the operation/ project staff members to be re-deployed;
- (c) time period of redeployment i.e. start and end dates (latter where known);
- (d) redeployment activity & wider benefits of undertaking the activity, particularly if/ where the activity has some alignment with the original WEFO approved operation aims/ objectives/ activity.

The above will enable the PDO/ OO to provide informed advice & will ensure a sufficient audit trail for the future.

Please be mindful of the final paragraph at question 2 should a beneficiary exercise their right via the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme or the Irish Government's Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme.

**NB:** Where operation/ project staff are redeployed and excess hours are worked i.e. they work over their normal agreed contracted hours. Any overtime payments which they will qualify for as a result of working over their normal agreed contracted hours, will have to be met via the beneficiary's own resources/ budget. This also includes any travel and subsistence costs associated to the redeployment. Overtime payments are only classed as eligible for Structural Funds support when they relate directly to the delivery of an EU operation. There should be no increase to the usual/ agreed budgets for staff costs claimed on the EU operation.

**9. Will deadlines for claim submissions, verification checks and review findings be extended under the current circumstances?**

Claims will still be invited in line with the individual Operation's delivery profile with an expected date towards the end of the third week following the end of the claim period. This has always been a target date and Operations can submit before or after this date if necessary.

WEFO would like operations to submit claims in line with their delivery profiles. If beneficiaries are struggling to submit claims, please contact the Lead Payment Officer or Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO) so we can assist in any way we can. Missing a claim "deadline" does not mean the opportunity to claim is lost.

You will be aware that since March 2020 MVT has offered an option for beneficiaries to defer their verifications. This was in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic which found many beneficiaries at a disadvantage as they had to leave their premises at short notice and many did not have the IT capabilities that allowed them to provide the necessary evidence remotely. However, since that time beneficiaries have been able to adapt and have found ways to be able to deliver the evidence required. As a result the vast majority of beneficiaries who are now offered the option to defer are turning down that offer and are choosing to continue with their verifications. Therefore, WEFO's Programme Performance Board have decided to end the option to defer, for any samples issued from 14th September 2020.

However, we appreciate that beneficiaries may still be experiencing difficulties providing full and complete audit trails for some evidence items. If this is the case, then please contact MVT to discuss your situation with them and they will consider what flexibilities MVT can implement on a case-by-case basis. If you are experiencing difficulty in submitting your claims, please contact your Lead Payment Officer or Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO).

- 10. Face-to-face support to participants and businesses has now ceased and is being delivered remotely i.e. telephone/ email/ skype. Can alternative methods of providing evidence of this support be used, such as:**
- **notes of the discussion**
  - **email verifications for registration/ attendance records/ achievements of results that are not signed by the participant/ business**

- **Microsoft forms that gather registration information and audit trail consent from participants/ businesses**

Under the current circumstances WEFO will accept this approach. All notes of discussions should be retained alongside the date/ time. When the COVID-19 crisis ends, beneficiaries should ensure that the participant/ business signs and dates the relevant paperwork required to confirm that the support has taken place.

**11. Is the European Commission considering changes to regulations to respond to COVID-19 e.g. state aid?**

Yes. The European Commission has introduced a series of flexibilities under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII), Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+) and the Temporary Framework for State Aid in response to the current situation. One such flexibility has been the update to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Regulation EU 1301/ 2013, effective from 24 April 2020, to enable support to businesses that (a) have been in existence for more than 3 years and (b) have been experiencing financial difficulty as from 31 December 2019 **due to reasons of the COVID-19 pandemic**. Prior to this date the ERDF Regulation did not allow support to be provided to 'undertakings in difficulty' as defined under EU State Aid Rules and as outlined/ contained within the WEFO eligibility rules for both the ERDF/ ESF Programmes and Ireland Wales Programme. WEFO has decided to highlight this particular flexibility in order to provide clarification to beneficiaries.

WEFO will continue to maximise the flexibilities that have been put in place and will work directly with beneficiaries, where required/ necessary. If you have any further questions on this please contact your PDO/ OO.

Please note that the new REACT EU Regulatory Package of proposals published by the European Commission on 28 May 2020 does not apply to the UK.

**12. Are there any changes to procurement rules as a result of COVID-19? Can I release advance payments to my suppliers to ensure continuity once the crisis is over?**

The procurement regulations already contain provisions to enable a response in cases of extreme urgency. Where beneficiaries intend to use these they should obtain the appropriate procurement advice.

Additionally the following note also applies in Wales - UK Government Cabinet Office Policy [Note - Supplier relief PPN02 /20](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/procurement-policy-note-0220-supplier-relief-due-to-covid-19>

Due to the current COVID-19 crisis it may be that advance payments to suppliers are unavoidable, in order to support those suppliers at risk to ensure that they are better able to cope and resume normal service delivery and fulfil their contractual obligations when the crisis is over. Therefore payments in advance for services as part of an approved contract & which are applied in line with the Cabinet Office Policy Note will be eligible for support.

In addition the WEFO eligibility rules already accommodate paying for goods and services in advance where:

- these are the standard business terms of the supplier or contractor and is at their request or unavoidable; and
- to secure the best price or secure significant discounts (for example, travel tickets and accommodation); or
- to secure the best quality (e.g. book early to secure the best venue for a key event integral to the success of the project).

Further guidance entitled WEFO COVID-19 Guidance for Contracting Authority Beneficiaries is now available [link below]. Beneficiaries should only consider following the guidance for buying goods or services that are needed as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://gov.wales/eu-structural-funds-programme-purchasing-during-coronavirus-crisis>

Non-contracting Authorities will need to follow their existing established procurement policies for any procurement activity undertaken during this period. The existing policies may detail processes to be adopted where exceptional measures are encountered e.g. COVID-19. A robust audit trail will need to be maintained of any procurement activity undertaken during the period and/ or as a direct result of COVID-19. A link to the Guidance from the European Commission on using the public procurement framework in the emergency situation related to the COVID-19 crisis can also be found below

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0401\(05\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0401(05)&from=EN)

**12a. Due to remote working, how do organisations ensure that 2 people are present in the opening of tender documents?**

It is important to ensure transparency with regards to procurement even during this period. If possible & the technology is available, the tender could be opened via skype or any type of video call with a second person and the process documented for audit purposes.

**13. Will the European Commission waive the obligation to comply with applicable management and control requirements?**

Despite the exceptional flexibilities laid out in the EC Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+), the Commission has made very clear in its communications that the legislative framework for the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds programmes remains fully applicable even under the current exceptional circumstances.

Therefore, beneficiaries must continue to maintain their already agreed/ established accounting/ management & control/ monitoring systems for operations/ projects, in order to claim support from the structural funds & satisfy audit requirements.

It has been recognised however that some verifications and audits are currently not possible and the regulations already allow for these to be performed at a later date. Desk-based verifications/ audits will be undertaken, where possible, until such time as it is safe for staff to perform visits again. Please see question 9 for more detail relating to verifications.

**13a. Has there been any change to the rules on defrayment as a result of COVID-19?**

No. As outlined in the above question, there has been no change to the rules on management and control systems. All expenditure must be fully incurred and defrayed before it can be included in a claim form to WEFO. For example, where beneficiaries have chosen to take up the HMRC option to defer National Insurance payments, then we would not expect those payments to be included in a claim until they have been paid to HMRC.

**14. Can we change our project activity under current rules to help respond to the situation?**

We recognise that there are opportunities for existing projects to amend their approach or refocus their support to respond to the current situation. These will be considered by WEFO on a case by case basis. In the first instance you should

contact your Project Development Officer (PDO)/ Operations Officer (OO) setting out all of the changes that you anticipate and they will inform you of WEFO's decision.

**15. Outcome reporting by beneficiaries of ESF employability projects/ operations where the achievement of the immediate result indicator, 'participants in employment upon leaving', will potentially be affected by the impact of COVID-19.**

Where a participant is ready to leave an ESF intervention due to a job offer, however, cannot then commence the employment until COVID-19 restriction measures are relaxed/ removed. The beneficiary organisation can consider the following options:

- retain the individual as an 'active' participant i.e. do not exit them from the ESF supported intervention until they are less than 4 weeks away from a genuine employment start date, beyond the employer's COVID-19 shutdown. Where this option is taken the beneficiary organisation will need to ensure the 'active' participant is supported/ advised during the extended period, in order to justify treatment as an 'active' participant. Support/ advice could involve: continued engagement by the project mentor/ advisor to maintain the 'active' participant's motivation and work preparedness/ work-ready status, sharpening up employability skills ready for the first few months in work.
- where necessary to exit a participant from the ESF intervention and employment does not commence within the required 4 week period, the immediate result indicator, 'participants in employment upon leaving', cannot be captured. However, it will be recognised as a valuable metric and can be captured via evaluations, surveys etc.

**16. Upon preparing for project activity post easing of the COVID-19 lockdown measures, will beneficiaries be able to request structural fund support for costs associated with adaptation to project/ operation premises and the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?**

Any costs necessary for the delivery of an EU funded project/ operation are eligible where in line with the beneficiary organisations policy and with any relevant UK/ Welsh/ International guidance and/ or legal requirements on adaptations to project premises for the return of project staff and project activity post COVID-19.



Where a beneficiary's standard/ established policy exceeds UK/ Welsh/ International guidance and /or legal requirements, requests will need to be submitted to the assigned WEFO Project Development Officer/ Operations Officer for the project/ operation along with a robust justification as to why such adaptations are considered necessary for the delivery of the project/ operation. WEFO will address such requests on a case by case basis.

**However, beneficiaries will need to be mindful that any necessary adaptations to premises/ additional consumables etc.; that are deemed eligible by WEFO will need to be funded via existing project budgets.**

**16a. Is the provision of office furniture (i.e. desks, chairs) for home working an eligible cost?**

Beneficiary organisations will have statutory obligations in ensuring the Health & Safety of its employees therefore the expectation is that the costs of purchasing items that allow staff to work from home safely are covered by the organisation's core expenditure. Where requested from EU funds, WEFO would expect there to be an organisational policy in place supporting the provision of desks to **all** staff, not just those funded by EU Structural Funds. The provision of office furniture can therefore only be considered eligible on an exceptional basis and where a business case to support this is provided

If the purchase of desk(s) is deemed as eligible to the operation then consideration must be given the following:

- (a) that the desk is used for the delivery of the EU operation, if the staff member undertakes work on anything else other than the EU operation then the pro-rata cost of the desk must be allocated to the operation accordingly;
- (b) there will be no increase in cost(s) to the operation, these cost(s) will be funded via existing budgets;
- (c) the cost(s) will be paid at the agreed intervention rate for the operation and
- (d) that all purchases are recorded appropriately on the operation's asset register.

## ANNEX A

The Welsh Government & Irish Government have published advice and information on COVID-19 for individuals, business and employers, the social, community and residential care sector and the education sector. This advice can be found at

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

The UK Government has recently produced an action plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>) for how the UK has planned for and what further action will be taken to tackle the current coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. To assist beneficiaries in locating further advice/ guidance in respect of COVID-19 and its impact on a specific topic, hyperlinks to these various documents have been included below.

UK Government Business support

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-employees-employers-and-businesses>

Claim for wages through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wages-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

UK Government guidance to employers and businesses about COVID-19 including information and guidance on areas such as Statutory Sick Pay, advice for employees which have travelled to high risk areas and home working

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>

HMRC also has a Coronavirus helpline for businesses and is available on 0800 0159 559.

### **Further advice/ guidance produced by the Welsh & Irish Governments:**

Welsh Government financial support and grants for employers – including Economic Resilience Fund & Development Bank of Wales Loan scheme:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/support/financial-support-and-grants>

<https://developmentbank.wales/covid-19-wales-business-loan-scheme>

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/support/business-rates-relief>

Welsh Government guidance for employers and businesses about COVID-19 including what to do if someone develops symptoms on site:

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-employers-and-businesses-guidance>

Welsh Government guidance regarding businesses and premises that should close:

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-closure-businesses-and-premises>

Please also refer to the Business Wales website for further regular updates:

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice>.

Government of Ireland guidance for employers and businesses about COVID-19 including the temporary wage subsidy scheme

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/612b90-covid-19-information-for-employers/>

Government of Ireland business support

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Supports-for-SMEs/COVID-19-supports/Government-supports-to-COVID-19-impacted-businesses.html>

Please also refer to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Government of Ireland

<https://dbei.gov.ie/en/#>



For further information:

[www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales)

[@wefowales](https://twitter.com/wefowales)/[@wefocymru](https://twitter.com/wefocymru)

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