

# Expression of interest

# Title: Strategic College Improvement Fund Initial Phase: Process Evaluation and Expert Advice

**Project reference: 2017/073**

**Deadline for expressions of interest: 5pm Friday 8th December**

## Summary

Expressions of interest are sought to provide a process evaluation for the projects funded by the pilot phase the Strategic College Improvement Fund, and to provide bespoke expert evaluation advice for the colleges involved. We are using an agile approach to support this fast-paced policy so potential contractors will need to work flexibly.

**Background**High quality skills are important for economic success and social mobility. However, a significant minority of further education and sixth-form colleges are failing to deliver the quality of education that learners need to succeed. For instance, roughly one in every four colleges is rated by Ofsted as either “needs improvement” or “inadequate”. And some colleges have shown poor results like these on a number of consecutive inspections.

The Government is currently rolling out a suite of initiatives to help address weakness in the quality of provision at colleges. For instance, the Further Education Commissioner is receiving an expanded role to help support improvement at colleges that are at risk of failure. A new National Leaders of Further Education programme was launched on 24th October 2017. And the [Strategic College Improvement Fund](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-applicants-to-the-pilot-of-the-strategic-college-improvement-fund--3) (SCIF) was also launched on that same day.

The SCIF is designed to help poorer performing colleges (Ofsted grades 3 and 4) improve their quality. It will support improvement projects that colleges develop and carry out in partnership with a high-performing college. Colleges that receive a SCIF grant will be expected to self-evaluate their project, and produce data that can be used to detect changes in quality.

Colleges that are awarded a SCIF grant will receive funding for one or more bespoke projects that are intended to improve educational quality. They will need to provide matched funding in the amount of £1 for every £3 of grant. A portion of grant funds will need to be used by 31st March 2018, and the remainder by 31st July 2018; matched funds provided by the college may, however, be spent at any time up until 31st December 2018. As part of the application process, colleges will be expected to produce a self-evaluation plan which will set out their key deliverables and the performance indicators/success measures that they intend to use to self-assess the impact of their project.

A pilot of 10-15 projects will be rolled out by January 2018, ahead of the national main stage in the first half of 2018. This research is needed now to help inform the national main stage. We require a process evaluation to assess if the application and assessment processes are working well, and to identify where improvements need to be made.

This research project will also provide bespoke expert evaluation advice to colleges regarding their self-evaluations. The successful bidder will be expected to provide the expert advice to each project to enable them to produce high quality self evaluations. The contractor will also consolidate lessons learned from the self-evaluations and develop evaluation guidance for applicants to the SCIF main stage.

## Process Evaluation Aims

The process evaluation will seek to answer the following questions:

* What initial benefits have the projects in the pilot phase of the SCIF generated? What type of projects are seeing benefits, and which are not?
* What challenges have projects faced? What lessons can be learned from less successful projects?
* Are the partnerships working between the colleges that are trying to improve, and the partner colleges that are providing them with support? What are their respective perceptions of these partnerships?
* Are the projects on track to meet their aims and objectives? If not, why?
* Would the funded projects (in full or part) be replicable at other colleges?
* Are there any key differences between projects at colleges that applied to the SCIF on their own initiative, and those the applied after receiving a recommendation from an Further Education Commissioner Diagnostic Assessment? Differences might include, for instance, the nature of the projects themselves; the ways in which they are implemented; and their outputs and early outcomes.
* Was the volume of applications right, given the funding available and other programme parameters?
* How did the bids vary in quality? How might bids for the full roll-out phase be improved ?
* What elements of the process have worked well? Why?
* What elements of the process haven’t worked well? Why?
* What have been the unintended consequences of the programme design?
* What changes need to be made to the processes to ensure that projects in mainstage roll-out stand the best chance of success?

## Methodology

A flexible methodology is required to ensure that we are sensitive to the needs of the colleges and their bespoke projects. However we anticipate that contractors will spend around 2 days per project advising them on self-evaluations. A range of methods will be required for the process evaluation including but not restricted to depth interviews and focus groups, as well as potentially surveys with key officials (including DfE, ESFA and the Office for the FE Commisoner), college senior leaders and other key stakeholders in the projects.

## Timing

* Deadline for EOIs – 5pm Friday 8th December 2017
* ITT issued- 14th December
* Deadline for ITTs- 12th January 2018
* Clarification interviews (to be held in Sheffield) – 22nd January
* Contract awarded (set up meeting held in Sheffield)- 1st February
* Fieldwork/expert advice required from February
* Headline findings presentation to DfE officials- mid May 2018
* Draft process evaluation report and guidance- early June 2018
* Final process evaluation report and guidance – mid June 2018

## Assessment criteria

Expressions of interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

* Understanding of the Department’s requirements and the overarching policy context within which this work is being taken forward.
* Experience of conducting research with and for the Further Education sector, particularly FE and sixth-form colleges in scope for this policy intervention.
* Experience and technical ability in developing high quality research designs trhat are flexible to the needs of different customers, and experience in working closely with policy makers.
* A record of success in enagaging with challenging samples.
* Project management skills and ability to deliver to timescales and within budget.

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| Scoring: |
| 1.    No evidence/very poor |
| 2.    Poor evidence |
| 3.    Some evidence |
| 4.    Good evidence |
| 5.    Excellent evidence |

**Each one of these criteria has equal weighting.**

Expressions of interests submitted must be no more than 1000 words – anything longer will be disregarded.

| **Closing date for EOIs: 5pm Friday 8th December 2017**  **Send your EOI form to: Sophie.aisbitt@education.gov.uk** |
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## How to submit an expressions of interest

You must submit an expression of interest (EOI) in order to be considered to be invited to tender. To do so, please complete the NEW EOI Form which can be found under attachments. A submission of an EOI does not guarantee an invitation to tender and the Department does not routinely advise organisations that they have not been successful in being invited to tender. Feedback is however available on request.

All contracts are let on the basis of the [Department’s Terms and Conditions](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eoi-guide). You are encouraged to check these before submitting your expression of interest, as these form part of your contractual obligations.

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