**Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund**

The Department for the Economy’s ApprenticeshipsNI and Higher Level Apprenticeships programmes provide an effective route for social inclusion, creating pathways to education and future careers through employment. There are now over 13,000 people, of all ages, undertaking an apprenticeship across a wide range of occupational sectors. These are providing our workforce with the vocational qualifications and skills our businesses need to help raise productivity levels and compete locally, nationally and internationally.

However, our data shows us that there are certain cohorts currently underrepresented across apprenticeship provision. By supporting and encouraging a more diverse cohort of people to undertake apprenticeships, we can realise the latent opportunities to foster a higher degree of economic and social inclusion.

The Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund was announced by the Minister for the Economy on 2 July 2024. The Department is launching the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund to foster cross-sectoral collaboration and innovation, to test inclusion approaches in-line with economic and social inclusion objectives, and deliver key methodologies to increase future participation in apprenticeship and higher-level apprenticeship provision.

Projects supported by the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund will be developed in-line with the key themes of:

* Gender, to increase uptake from women;
* Disability, to increase uptake from people with disabilities; and
* Place, to increase uptake by people from areas of disadvantage.

Successful collaborations will be awarded around £100,000 for the implementation of their proposal.

**Eligibility**

The Fund will encourage collaboration across education, business and the voluntary and community sectors, ensuring that all projects are embedded in their contexts, and are developed in line with available evidence and guided by DfE policy. Collaborating parties must have experience or an interest in the NI Apprenticeships system. All activity funded under the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund **must** promote or broaden access to DfE-funded apprenticeship programmes.

The Fund must only be used for new activity which should complement the support/activity already in place, rather than replace it, and cannot be used retroactively to cover activity that takes place prior to the initiation of the project.

Eligible activity must commence in **January 2025** and should be delivered fully by **30 June 2026.** DfE will not fund any activity after this 18 month period.

Funding provided by DfE from the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund must only be used for the purpose intended. Successful providers will be subject to appropriate verification processes, which will be outlined in the Letters of Offer, and DfE will conduct verifications to ensure appropriate use of funding.

**Collaborative Applications**

Collaborations between education, business and the voluntary and community sectors are encouraged. These should be fully outlined in the application and full details of the financial relationship between partner organisations will be required prior to an award being made. A lead organisation must be identified. The lead organisation is responsible for submitting any joint application/s, ensuring that required / relevant confirmations are also provided from all other parties. If successful, a Letter of Offer will be made to the lead organisation, and they will be regarded as responsible / accountable for full project delivery.

**Ineligible expenses and activities**

These include, but are not limited to:

* salaries for apprentices;
* purchase of alcohol or tobacco;
* travel outside of NI;
* religious or political activity or material;
* purchase of capital items (e.g. computers); and
* organisational running costs, outside of those required to deliver the proposal.

**Applications for funding**

Applications for an award from the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund must be made on the application form contained at Annex A and returned electronically to ApprenticeshipPolicyInnovation@economy-ni.gov.uk **by 4.00pm on Friday 6 December 2024.**

Applicants should understand that by making an application to the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund there is no commitment by DfE to fund all or part of their application.

**State aid**

Please note that funding provided by this Challenge Fund may fall within the scope of the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 or the EU’s State aid rules, which continue to apply in Northern Ireland as a result of the Windsor Framework agreement. Therefore, applicants who engage in economic activities (i.e. the manufacture or trading of goods or the provision of commercial services) will need to clarify how this funding will be used. In particular, whether this funding will only be used for non-economic activities or may be used to subsidise the applicant’s economic activities. In the latter case, further information on financial assistance provided by UK public authorities may be required to ensure compliance with the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 or the EU’s State aid rules. This will only be required once the evaluation process has concluded.

**Evaluation process and award of funding**

Applications will be evaluated after the closing date for the Challenge Fund, in December 2024, by a panel made up of:

* a member of DfE staff with Economic Social Inclusion experience;
* a member of DfE staff with Apprenticeships Delivery experience; and,
* an external, independent member.

Applications will be categorised under each of the three themes: Gender, Disability or Place.

Each project proposal will be scored, and evaluated independently, using a scoring matrix, and ranked according to their score.

Applications will be scored against the following criteria:

* Proposed outputs (40%);
* Strategic alignment and methodology (30%); and,
* Value for Money (30%).

Ideally, after the evaluation process, DfE expect the top two highest-ranked proposals under each of the identified themes to be successful. Therefore:

* Two projects will focus on Gender;
* Two projects will focus on Disability; and,
* Two projects will focus on Place.

The budget for the Apprenticeship Challenge Fund is limited to £600,000 and this exercise is not planned to run more than once.

Six projects in total will be identified, in early January 2025, and each will receive funding of around £100,000 within the timeframe of the project.

Each applicant will be notified of the outcome of their application by early January 2025. The identified lead organisation in each partnership will be awarded an individual Letter of Offer.

During a clarification period, in January 2025, DfE will engage with successful applicants to refine objectives, activities during the timescale and costs.

Negotiations will commence to agree Key Performance Indicators as relevant and appropriate to their project theme.

The details of funding, including a payment schedule, will be agreed with successful applicants and reflected in a final Letter of Offer.

Successful applicants will subsequently be advised how to submit a claim and what supporting documentation is required.

DfE reserves the right to establish a shortlist of applications which will be considered in the event that any of the successful proposals do not proceed past the clarification period.

DfE intend to make payments as follows, within the Delivery Phase – on a staged milestone approach:

* 30% on agreement of project initiation;
* 40% on receipt of midpoint reporting; and,
* 30% on receipt of final report of activity.

The conditions attached to the grant will be included in the final Letter of Offer and will take into account the level of funding and appropriate requirements relating to grant funding.

The following conditions will be incorporated into the final Letter of Offer;

* compliance with relevant employment, equality and health and safety law and human rights standards;
* adherence to relevant collective agreements;
* adoption of fair work practices for all workers engaged in the delivery of the project. The job quality dimensions as defined by the Carnegie UK Trust[[1]](#footnote-1) are:
* Terms of employment;
* Pay and benefits;
* Health, safety and psychosocial wellbeing;
* Job design and nature of work;
* Social support and cohesion;
* Voice and representation; and,
* Work-life balance.
* All staff involved in delivering projects must be paid at least the National Living Wage.

**Annex A**

**Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund
Application for funding**

**SECTION 1 – APPLICANT DETAILS**

|  |  |
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| **Name of lead organisation** |  |
| **Name of lead contact/project manager** |  |
| **Position in the organisation** |  |
| **Contact address** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (daytime)** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (mobile)** |  |
| **Contact email address** |  |
| **VAT Registration Number (if applicable)** |  |
| **Main purpose of the organisation (300 words)** |
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| **As lead organisation, please outline your experience or interest in the NI Apprenticeship system (300 words)** |
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| **Does your organisation engage in economic activities?** |
| **YES / NO** |  |
| **If so, please detail whether these economic activities relate to either:**  |
| 1. **the manufacture or trading of goods;**

**or,** 1. **the provision of commercial services.**
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| **Please also detail whether the funding will be used:**  |
| 1. **exclusively for non-economic activities; or,**
2. **may be used to subsidise the applicant’s economic activities.**
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**APPLICANT DETAILS CONTINUED**

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| **Name of second partner organisation** |  |
| **Name of representative** |  |
| **Position in the organisation** |  |
| **Contact address** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (daytime)** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (mobile)** |  |
| **Contact email address** |  |
| **VAT Registration Number (if applicable)** |  |

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| **Main purpose of second partner organisation (300 words)** |
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| **Please outline your experience or interest in the NI Apprenticeship system (300 words)** |
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| **Does your organisation engage in economic activities?**  |
| **YES / NO** |  |
| **If so, please detail whether these economic activities relate to either:**  |
| 1. **the manufacture or trading of goods;**

**or,** 1. **the provision of commercial services.**
 |  |
| **Please also detail whether the funding will be used:**  |
| 1. **exclusively for non-economic activities; or,**
2. **may be used to subsidise the applicant’s economic activities.**
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**APPLICANT DETAILS CONTINUED**

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| **Name of third partner organisation** |  |
| **Name of representative** |  |
| **Position in the organisation** |  |
| **Contact address** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (daytime)** |  |
| **Contact telephone number (mobile)** |  |
| **Contact email address** |  |
| **VAT Registration Number (if applicable)** |  |
| **Main purpose of third partner organisation (300 words)** |
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| **Please outline your experience or interest in the NI Apprenticeship system (300 words)** |
|  |
| **Does your organisation engage in economic activities?** |
| **YES / NO** |  |
| **If so, please detail whether these economic activities relate to either:**  |
| 1. **the manufacture or trading of goods;**

**or,** 1. **the provision of commercial services.**
 |  |
| **Please also detail whether the funding will be used:**  |
| 1. **exclusively for non-economic activities; or,**
2. **may be used to subsidise the applicant’s economic activities.**
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| **If a fourth (or more) partner is included, please provide the same details as requested above.**  |
| **Outline how collaborative arrangements will be operated (500 words).** |
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**SECTION 2 – PROPOSAL DETAILS**

**Proposed outputs and Strategic Alignment**

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| **Proposal name** |  |
| **Proposal start date**(expected to be no earlier than 20 January 2025) |  | **Proposal end date**(No later than 30 June 2026) |  |
| **Thematic Project targeted cohort:****Gender /** **Disability /** **or Place** |  |
| **Outline your combined experience of effective partnerships/collaboration leading to successful outcomes. (500 words)**  |
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| **Describe how your themed proposal will promote, broaden / increase access and participation to DfE strategy and funded apprenticeship programmes (1000 words)** |
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| **Outline the barrier(s) to growing the inclusive supply of apprenticeship opportunities that you seek to address within your thematic proposal.** **Please include any relevant data, statistics or research here.** **(1,000 words)**  |
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| **Describe your collaborative proposal’s goal, objectives and activities.** **The GOAL should be a short statement on the output(s) you aim to achieve to overcome the barriers identified above.** **The OBJECTIVES are the things you want to achieve to meet the goal.** **The ACTIVITIES are the things you plan to do to achieve your objectives.** **There can be more than one objective and activity.****(no more than 2,000 words in total)** |
| **GOAL:**The output(s) to overcome the barriers identified. |  |
| **OBJECTIVES:**Reflect key stages and important components. Objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. |  |
| **ACTIVITIES:**The things you plan to do to achieve your objectives. In particular, what non-economic and economic activities will be undertaken with the funding?This is to determine whether the project falls within the scope of the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022 or the EU State aid rules. |  |

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| **Describe how the activities you have outlined above will help you achieve your project’s collaborative objectives and goals and how those may align with Departmental objectives.** **Is there any research suggesting this approach will overcome the barriers identified, or what general principles lead you to think the activities you plan to carry out will result in a successful outcome?** **Please include any relevant data, statistics or research here.** **(no more than 1,000 words)**  |
|  |
| **Please identify any potential or actual risks that may affect the development or delivery of your collaborative proposal and how you propose to mitigate these.** **(no more than 500 words)** |
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**SECTION 3 – FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS AND VALUE FOR MONEY**

Describe in detail how your collaborative partnership will use the funding provided by the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund.

Best Value for Money is defined as the most economically advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to meet the Department’s requirements.

In this context:

* cost means consideration of the whole life cost;
* quality means meeting a specification which is fit for purpose and sufficient to meet the Department’s requirements; and,
* sustainability means economic, social and environmental benefits in support of the Programme for Government[[2]](#footnote-2).

**Notes about budget and funding request:**

* List all the individual activities that make up your project, providing a breakdown for each as appropriate, including whether these are non-economic or economic in nature.
* Give the total cost of each activity.
* State how you are applying the funding from the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund.
* You **must not** include VAT in your figures (i.e. VAT, that you can reclaim from HM Revenue & Customs).

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| **Activity** | **Non-economic / Economic** | **Cost** |
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| **TOTAL COST** |  | **£** |

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| **Provide detail of how the funding will be controlled (e.g. bank account, invoices, who will be in charge of managing funds, etc.) and who will be held accountable.** **(500 words)** |
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| **How will Value for Money be ensured?** **(1000 words)** |
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| **Please provide information about any funding from other sources which will be used in the delivery of your proposal. (Other funding is not required, however applicants should detail any investment they intend to make in the delivery of the proposal.)** **(500 words)** |
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Any Clarification Questions relating to the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund application may be emailed toApprenticeshipPolicyInnovation@economy-ni.gov.uk **by 4pm on Friday 22 November 2024.**

ALL Clarification Answers will be made available to the general public on the NIBusinessInfo website: [https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/apprenticeship-inclusion-challenge-fund](https://eu-west-1.protection.sophos.com?d=nibusinessinfo.co.uk&u=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cubmlidXNpbmVzc2luZm8uY28udWsvYXBwcmVudGljZXNoaXAtaW5jbHVzaW9uLWNoYWxsZW5nZS1mdW5k&i=NjY5ZTg1ZDY1NGQ3MTc3YWY0YjM2MzU3&t=b0xHSm5nM3pxUVFRcnFDOStpaFdUWDRXNnYyTHV3OCs4K3ptSjhlNHgzdz0=&h=bb7f77b7e18f4192890ccb412ec26d0a&s=AVNPUEhUT0NFTkNSWVBUSVYDZ71V7Gp2kr3vo3uBCxnSfulc9K-QaLpmp31p3Ouz6Q)

An application for an award from the Apprenticeship Inclusion Challenge Fund must be made on this application form and returned electronically to ApprenticeshipPolicyInnovation@economy-ni.gov.uk **by 4.00pm on Friday 6 December 2024.**

**Declaration**

* I declare that the information supplied in this application is accurate and complete.
* In submitting this application, I acknowledge that any award must be used for the purposes outlined and for no other business purposes.
* I understand that there is no commitment from the Department for the Economy to meet my application in full or in part, and that the amount of any award may be limited due to wider demand.

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| Signature: |  |  |
| Print name: |  |  |
| Lead Organisation: |  |  |
| Position: |  |  |
| Date: |  |  |

1. https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/pex\_carnegie2021/2018/09/06105222/Measuring-Good-Work-FINAL-03-09-18.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/topics/making-government-work/programme-government [↑](#footnote-ref-2)