



Westmorland and Furness UK Shared Prosperity Fund & Rural England Prosperity Fund

Call for Projects – Support to Address Barriers to Accessing Education and Training

Funding Call	Support to Address Barriers to Accessing Education and Training
Funding Call Reference	UKSPF – E37
Summary	Westmorland and Furness Council is seeking to support projects that provide tailored support to help people in employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision, to address barriers to accessing education and training courses. This includes supporting the retention of groups who are likely to leave the labour market early.
UKSPF/REPF Intervention(s)	UKSPF E37 - Tailored support to help people in employment, who are not supported by mainstream provision, to address barriers to accessing education and training courses.
UKSPF/REPF Available	UKSPF £627,022 (revenue)
Geographic Location	All Westmorland and Furness
Applications Open	26 January 2024
Applications Close	26 February 2024 12 noon
Application Assessment Period	February – March 2024
Anticipated Decision	March 2024
Anticipated Contract Award	April 2024

Purpose of the Call

This call contributes to the People and Skills Investment Priority

The Westmorland and Furness area is one of great diversity. This diversity is one of our greatest assets but can also present challenges. The rurality and/or level of deprivation of much of the area can limit many of our residents' access to the same life chances and labour market, skills and training opportunities.

Cumbria has a shrinking labour force due to demographic trends. There is a need to provide skills, apprenticeships and volunteering opportunities for all demographic groups. With an ageing population the area will likely see our skills gap worsen in the next two decades as the potential labour pool contracts and many current skilled workers retire.



Skills gaps are particularly acute in the Barrow area where 11.4% of the working age population have no qualifications (compared to 7% in the UK) and only 29.7% are qualified to RQF level 4 or higher (45.5% in the UK).

The Eden locality also struggles, with 20% of the working age population having no or only RQF level 1 qualifications (compared to 14.4% in the UK) and only 37.1% qualified to RQF level 4 or higher.

Staffing and recruitment challenges across all sectors in the area are significant and therefore developing the skills of all those currently in the workforce is vital to improve lagging productivity. The Cumbria Skills Report 2022 identified a strategic focus on nurturing, attracting and retaining talent in order to mitigate the decline in the future workforce.

Employers also indicate demand for graduates or those with specialist vocational skills, but find it difficult to retain and attract higher skilled workers from the local population. There are acute skill needs and gaps in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, energy, health and social care, agriculture and land-based industries, hospitality and tourism, education and construction.

The Cumbria Local Skills Improvement Plan 2023 identifies a number of priority employer needs including basic and functional skills, employability skills, engagement with providers, curriculum development, IT and digital, leadership and management, and sector specific requirements.

We can capitalise on the presence or close proximity of high performing schools, colleges and universities who can work closely with local employers to meet future skill needs and increase the pool of higher level skills in the district.

There are significant opportunities in the Furness locality area in particular to benefit from developments including the AUKUS programme at BAE Systems Submarines, the growing carbon storage and energy cluster, and the University of Cumbria's new Brilliant Barrow Learning Quarter. Where projects intend to deliver in the Furness locality area they should consider how they can align with priorities and objectives of Team Barrow's new Education, Employment & Skills Taskforce.

In the more rural areas of Westmorland and Furness projects should consider how they can address the barriers of sparsity and remoteness to accessing skills, education and training.

This funding will support projects in the local area which fill gaps in local skills provision to support people to progress in work, and supplement local adult skills provision e.g. by providing additional volumes; delivering provision through wider range of routes or enabling more intensive/innovative provision, both qualification based and non-qualification based. This should be supplementary to provision available through national employment and skills programmes. Projects can deliver qualifications, licences and skills at entry level and Level 1 and above.



The Council would particularly encourage applications from projects which deliver innovative approaches to reducing adult learning barriers by targeting adults with no or low level qualifications and skills. Projects could demonstrate an innovative, bespoke or creative approach that provides genuine additionality to existing skills support and fills identified gaps in existing provision. This could include targeted 1-2-1 support for individuals or short courses in essential skills which can fit flexibly around the needs of employers.

The subjects and sectors covered by the skills, education, training and qualifications delivered through these projects could include but are not limited to; communication and emotional intelligence, IT and digital, energy and sustainability, land based, manufacturing, engineering.

Key Requirements

- Projects must be able to demonstrate they are delivering clear added value. Projects that duplicate existing publicly funded provision will not be supported.
- Applicants should demonstrate a robust awareness of the range of funded skills programmes in the local area and ensure proposed activity does not duplicate this.
- Applicants should be able to demonstrate a robust awareness of the range of existing statutory and non-statutory education and training provision. The application should demonstrate how proposed activity will align with these to deliver the maximum benefits for participants.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate they have robust systems and processes for capturing and reporting against a range of beneficiary data.
- Applications to deliver a programme of activities are eligible however applicants must demonstrate they are able to manage in line with UKSPF requirements including cashflow, reporting and subsidy control.
- Where a consortia application is submitted a lead partner must be identified for contracting purposes.
- In line with Government requirements UKSPF monies must be fully expended, and projects delivered by 31 March 2025. The Council does not have the facility to support projects that go beyond this deadline. Applicants should refer to the UKSPF guidance on outputs/outcomes which provides definitions and units of measurements – this can be found at [UK Shared Prosperity Fund: outputs and outcomes definitions \(2\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-outputs-and-outcomes-definitions-2)
- The Funding Call sets out priority outputs and outcomes, however applicants can identify if their project will deliver any other outputs and outcomes contained in the above guidance.



Target Group(s)

- People in employment looking to retrain or upskill
- People in employment who are likely to leave the labour market early
- People living in remote rural areas
- People living in areas of socioeconomic deprivation
- People from under-represented groups including but not limited to, LGBTQ+, black and minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people

Geographic Focus

Applications are welcome from across the Westmorland and Furness geography.

Funding Available

Revenue 2024/25 - **£627,022**

There are no requirements for match funding, however those projects that can demonstrate an element of match/aligned funding will be prioritised.

The minimum grant request is **£75,000**

Timescales

1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

Expenditure incurred before approval of UKSPF/REPF investment is ineligible. Projects can start before final contract award, however applicants should be aware this will be at their own risk.

All projects must be financially complete by 31 January 2025 with outputs achieved by 31 March 2025. Projects that anticipate delivery beyond this date will not be supported.

Priority Outputs/Outcomes	
Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of people supported to participate in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of people gaining qualifications, licences and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of people retraining	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of people in employment engaging with the skills system	
Completed applications to be sent to UKSPFDelivery@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk	