



Union Learning Fund

Prospectus: Round 17

2016/2017



BIS | Department for Business
Innovation & Skills

unionlearn
with the TUC

The Union Learning Fund

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998 to promote activity by trade unions in support of the objective of creating a learning society. Its primary aim was to develop the capacity of trade unions and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to work with employers, employees and learning providers to encourage greater take up of learning in the workplace. The scope of the ULF has gradually broadened over the last 15 years as union capacity has grown and government strategic objectives have changed and unions have been encouraged to work on improving access to work and to work in the community.

The ULF is managed and administered by unionlearn, the TUC's Learning and Skills Organisation under an agreement with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills which directs the level and type of learning activity that should be supported by the Fund.

This year unionlearn will bid for funding based on the programme of work that it is offering. A key part of this funding is the ULF and unions are invited to put in bids that will then go through a selection process based on what unionlearn and BIS have agreed are the types of activity that will achieve the outcomes and outputs that should be funded through public funding. There is no commitment on funding from BIS at this point in time and issuing of the Prospectus does not guarantee that funding will be available.

Unionlearn's main functions are to support unions to:

- Become effective learning organisations and broker learning opportunities for their members.
- Improve union engagement with and influence on learning and skills policy.
- Engage effectively with employers to develop learning and skills strategies that address both organisational and individual skills needs.
- Engage effectively with employers and other stakeholders to support the learning and skills developments required to tackle poverty and disadvantage and promote employment and the growth of the economy.
- Evaluate and provide an evidence base for the unique contribution that unions make to improving learning and skills.

and to effectively manage and administer the Union Learning Fund to:

- Build union capacity to sustain work on learning and skills and embed it in union strategy and structure
- Support Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) and learning champions in raising demand for learning, especially among workers with low skill levels and disadvantaged groups in the workplace.
- Maximise the union contribution to the development and delivery of the Government's strategy to improve the skills of the workforce and the performance of the economy and increase engagement in learning.
- Support unions and ULRs to stimulate the take up of learning, to provide high quality support to learners (information, advice and guidance) and to promote and support learner progression.
- Support unions to offer a growing range of learning opportunities to a wide range of learners and assist them to establish union-led learning centres and union learning centres and maintain the network of centres already established.
- Assist unions to work in partnership with employers to develop sustainable arrangements based on formal learning agreements and which tackle both organisational and individual skills needs.
- Support unions in establishing effective partnerships with learning providers which ensure learning opportunities are customised, quality assured, relevant and delivered effectively with appropriate support given to learners.

- Develop union capacity to engage in effective partnership working at regional and national level to help meet the skills needs of both the current and future workforce.
- Support unions in developing projects and activities that help deliver the skills needs of both the current and future workforce.
- Support unions in managing their projects and guide them on the requirements of public funding and the evidence and reporting requirements that they will need to meet.

Key themes and priorities for ULF projects in 2016-17

To a large degree the new government’s policy approach on learning and skills is building on the key policy developments implemented by the previous coalition government. However, apprenticeships have been given an even higher profile with an ambitious target of 3 million starts during the current Parliament and legislation requiring the government to report annually on progress against meeting this target.

The government has also established a new “implementation taskforce” made up of ministers from across all departments to drive forward achievement of the apprenticeship target and other measures to make sure that all young people are either earning or learning.

The government will also continue to focus on the priority themes identified in the Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills policy document published by the previous coalition government. At the heart of this approach is the overriding aim of ensuring excellent vocational provision from age 14 into adulthood. Key elements in support of this aim include the new apprenticeship target and also further expansion of high quality traineeships for young people needing a programme of support before progressing to an apprenticeship or another appropriate outcome.



Supporting people to progress to higher level skills is another recurring theme of government policy and ongoing reforms to vocational qualifications for young people and adults are being taken forward with this aim in mind. The government has also committed to expand the number of University Technical Colleges (UTCs) for young people and is also looking to extend vocational specialisation in colleges and establishing new institutions (e.g. like the national colleges already announced for high speed rail and nuclear). The overall aim is to increase very significantly the number of opportunities for more young people and adults to access higher level vocational education.

There also continues to be a strong policy focus on tackling the UK’s poor performance in equipping all citizens, both young people and adults, with the level of English and maths skills necessary to support sustainable employment and career progression. Whilst there remains a preference for all young people to pursue a GCSE grade in English and maths where at all possible, the government also remains committed to the important role of Functional Skills qualifications in the workplace and for those individuals – especially adults for whom the GCSE route is not appropriate.

The government is continuing to support an industry-led approach to skills provision, including giving employers and other stakeholders greater influence in the design and delivery of vocational qualifications (e.g. through the Apprenticeship Trailblazers). The national Industrial Strategy, including the prioritisation of certain sectors with the potential for greatest growth, is another key policy measure and this will influence future decisions to expand vocational specialisation and open more national colleges. In addition the government is planning for a stronger local dimension to FE and skills funding and provision as part of its strategy to devolve more powers to cities and local authorities, including building a Northern Powerhouse.

To support the strategy for raising skill levels we have agreed the following key themes and priorities for ULF projects supported in 2016-17 to focus on.

Key themes and priorities for ULF projects in 2016-7

1. Improving Equality, Engaging Disadvantaged Learners and Workers with poor English, Maths or Digital Skills by:

- Engaging those most disadvantaged in the labour market and developing routes to employment and progression that assist them.
- Tackling areas of inequality within workplaces, sectors or employment areas (for example where women or BME groups are under-represented or where people with a disability or mental health problem are not supported).
- Developing and strengthening training and support for Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to enable them to reach out and support disadvantaged learners, particularly those with Maths, English, Digital and ESOL needs but also those with health related disadvantage, in both the workplace and the local community.
- Helping to tackle the Digital Divide and its impact on the most disadvantaged groups in workplaces and local communities.
- Supporting national Community Learning objectives by raising the profile and take up of learning in the workplace and community, using it to motivate, build confidence and promote progress into further learning.
- Developing strategies and tailored approaches to support workers faced with redundancy or those likely to need support and retraining as change requires them to acquire new skills or career.
- Developing and supporting access to on-line learning and opening union and workplace Learning Centres to the wider community.
- Engaging disadvantaged learners through flexible delivery of learning, supported by ULRs, leading to progression pathways.
- Developing and enhancing existing equality and diversity policies and practices to fully support all learners.
- Utilising learner data to prioritise and target hard to reach cohorts of learners.
- Addressing the equality and diversity knowledge and skills of project teams, ULRs, employers, partners and learners.



2. Growing Apprenticeship, Traineeship, Young People and Skills Progression by:

- Working with employers to increase the number of high quality Traineeship work experience places available; in particular ensuring that Trainees are supported and that their experience provides them with skills and routes to employment.
- Working with employers to increase the number of high quality Apprenticeship places available; in particular focussing on those employers not yet involved in training apprenticeships and on promoting apprenticeships to disadvantaged groups which have the potential to benefit.
- Working with employers to develop new and tailored traineeships and apprenticeships that meet the needs of the economy (local and national) and develop the skills base of the workforce.
- Enabling ULRs/unions to give improved help and support to trainees/apprentices in the workplace.
- Developing partnership approaches to increase the opportunities for young people to enter work and to support the needs of young workers

3. Improving Productivity:

- Working with employers to identify and tackle skills issues that improve the productivity of the workforce.
- Developing approaches to identifying and tackling skills deficits, maximising the use of workforce skills, improving attendance and adopting new techniques and technologies.
- Working with employees to assist them in identifying their skills needs and in developing skills that increase their ability to respond to change at work.
- Working with employers, employer representative groups, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and other stakeholders to target union activity in support of skills development that supports economic growth and improved productivity.

4. Developing a Stronger Learning Infrastructure, Workforce Development and Higher Level Skills by:

- Engaging with employers to promote co-investment in skills, adopt professional and occupational standards, more effective skills utilisation, improved leadership and management and greater employee involvement and commitment in the workplace.
- Engaging with employers and providers to ensure high quality learning provision and underpinning this with agreements and structures to help define and monitor arrangements.
- Working with employers and employer representative bodies to tackle specific sector skills issues and improve overall business performance.
- Working with employers, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and other stakeholders to target union activity in support of areas of economic growth and future skills needs.
- Developing the ULR role in supporting learners and helping individuals in the workplace to develop and progress, access good careers advice and guidance and Adult Learning Loans.
- Providing advice and support to enable and encourage progression through workforce development opportunities including Continuing Professional Development (CPD) via the union route and improved access to Further and Higher Education (HE).

5. Demonstrating Sustainability, Value for Money and Mainstreaming of union learning activity by:

- Briefing and working with union officials and other union representatives to incorporate learning and skills within wider union roles, union branches and regions.
- Mainstreaming the role of the ULR within the union and incorporating learning and skills within the union's core activities.
- Devoting core union staffing to the promotion of learning to support the role of ULRs and union work on learning and skills.
- Consolidating the work and approaches developed in previous ULF projects, for example:
 - Methods and materials developed by one region of the union being rolled out to the rest of the union.
 - Sharing and disseminating experience with other unions and unionlearn.
 - Adapting and embedding the approach and methods piloted by other unions.
 - Developing of sector or employer approaches involving one or more unions and building on earlier ULF work.
- Demonstrating that projects represent value for money and illustrating this by for example:
 - Showing the added value of funding the project. Are funds levered in? Is the employer contributing towards the costs? What is the union contributing towards the costs?
 - Identifying who the learners are and what the impact of the project will be on them/their employer/ the community? Is this project adding value to existing support for these learners?
 - Showing that the management and governance of the project is cost effective and ensures delivery

Eligibility

- Any trade union based in England, or any national organisation representing trade unions based in England, whether or not it is affiliated to the TUC.
- Any trade union or organisation working in partnership with trade unions, including those that have not yet applied to the ULF.

Responsibilities and Requirements

- You should be sure that you fully understand your financial and reporting responsibilities in receiving ULF funding and are prepared to accept them prior to signing the contract. Each project's progress will be regularly monitored and audited and will require you to collect quantitative and qualitative impact evidence and quality assure the work of the project. For further details of these requirements please contact the national office.

Support

- Each project will be allocated a unionlearn support worker and will have support from unionlearn at both national and regional levels.
- Project managers will be supplied with detailed information on reporting requirements and an event is held at the start of all new contract years to provide further details. All project managers will be required to attend this and other specified ULF project seminars.

What can be funded and for how long?

Project duration

Funding, if available, will be for the financial year 2016-2017 commencing 1st April 2016 up to 31st March 2017, any funding for future years will be subject to approval by Parliament.

Project size

- There is no maximum amount for bids, but unions must scope activity and objectives rigorously before identifying funding requirements.
- The amount requested in the bid should reflect a realistic level of activity and outcomes, and represent value for money.

Salaries

- The ULF will support the payment of salaries to project staff responsible for running the project.
- There will be **no** ongoing commitment to funding salaries.
- Funding will **not** be given to cover the salary costs of existing union posts.
- Funding will **not** be given to cover employer costs of releasing union members to attend training/learning activities or to train as ULRs.

Employer-funded training

- It is not intended that ULF should be used to replace employer-funded training, for instance by funding purely job-specific courses for employees, which should be the responsibility of employers.

European Social Fund

- ULF monies can be used to match fund a European Social Fund (ESF) project in certain circumstances. Any proposals to do this must be cleared with the unionlearn delivery team.

Double funding

- Double funding is not permissible and applications will be checked to ensure that they avoid any possible double funding. Where unionlearn are operating a regional fund or specific project, unions will need to demonstrate additionality between activities funded under each funding stream in order to ensure value for money.

The application process

How to submit an application:

- A final application form which must be submitted by 12pm on **Friday 25th September 2015**.
- Application forms should be submitted on the electronic forms provided on the ULF website: **<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/ulf>**
- There is a requirement to send a letter signed by the union's authorising officer to confirm that the bid has the support of the union nationally by **12pm on Friday 25th September 2015**.
- Unionlearn will review and comment on draft applications submitted between the launch of the prospectus and up until **5pm on Friday September 11th 2015**.

Please send to:

**FAO Julia Jones
Union Learning Fund Team
Unite Office Liverpool
Jack Jones House
1 Islington
Liverpool. L3 8EG**

The ULF team will assist projects with the process. **For further information telephone the national office 0151 482 2711**

What are the key deadlines?

- Draft application form before 5pm on Friday September 11th 2015.
- ULF Application Form and supporting letter: by 12pm on Friday 25th September 2015.

Submissions received after these dates will not be considered.

What happens next?

You will receive feedback on any draft application within one week of submission and for those submitted at the final deadline of 11th September by the 18th of September 2015. The feedback will set out any issues or points that need to be addressed for the project to move to final bid.

Bid support will be available from the Prospectus launch in July with support from the unionlearn delivery team for submission in September.

The ULF Assessment Panel will meet in mid October 2015 and make a recommendation to BIS.

Contracts will be issued as soon as possible after final negotiations are completed, for projects to commence **1 April 2016**.

Who decides whether my bid is successful or not?

The ULF Assessment Panel, which is independently chaired and made up of representatives from unionlearn, BIS, trade unions and other external stakeholders, will make final recommendations on all applications to the Unionlearn Board and BIS Unionlearn Sponsorship Team.

How will Projects be assessed?

The panel will use a scoring system to evaluate bids and discuss which should be approved and make recommendations on any amendments or developments that would be required before projects can be approved.

The scoring system is designed to ensure projects meet the strategic and operational requirements that have been agreed between BIS and unionlearn. Further information can be obtained from the bidding guidance. Unionlearn will also hold workshops and offer support to those wishing to make bids or find out more about the application and scoring process.

ULF Prospectus Round 17

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