Employee Upskilling Grant 2026

Category: Grant to Business

Information for Applicants

Employee Upskilling Fund 2026/2027

Guidance Notes

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1. Background

In response to current labour market shortages, Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is offering local businesses the opportunity to apply for funding to upskill existing employees to help address some of the challenges being faced around sourcing appropriately skilled labour.

Funded by the Department for Communities, LMPs create targeted employment action plans for council areas, allowing for collaboration at local and regional level to support people towards and into work.

The funding is designed to upskill current employees, such as those who are underemployed (working 16 hours or less), at risk of redundancy or wanting to skill up and **facilitate their transition into new or improved roles** within the organisation, therefore open positions at entry level.

Upskilling training must be aligned to a job promotion and career progression opportunity i.e. Class 2 Driver to Class 1 Driver.

Training must be completed and staff upskilled by **28 February 2027**

Funding will be administered by Council's Grant Funding Hub on behalf of LMP.

2. Scheme Objectives

- **To support local business owners with challenges recruiting appropriately skilled labour;**
- **To target underemployed staff (job level or hours worked) to support them into appropriate level employment;**
- **Provide opportunities for employees to achieve relevant and practical industry knowledge and skills and therefore improve their employment opportunities;**
- **To create entry-level posts for unemployed residents;**
- **To strengthen the working relationship between LMP and the local business community, building capacity for future initiatives;**

3. Grant Rate

Business owners can apply for a maximum grant of up to £10,000 for upskilling training directly aligned to a job promotion and career opportunity for employees i.e. Class 2 Driver to Class 1 Driver.

Grant aid will be awarded based on net costs (exclusive of VAT).

The Council will base any Letter of Offer on the cost of the lowest quotation or the quotation offering the best value for money.

Due to all LMP programmes being subject to funding Council may:

- Reduce the maximum grant available
- Limit the number of employees supported

- Depending on the number of applications received and demand for funds, conduct a value for money assessment to prioritise applications.

Please note: Applicants are responsible for **paying their contractor(s) upfront and claiming back costs from LMP and VAT (where appropriate)**.

4. Who can apply?

Micro, small, and medium sized businesses can apply for the Fund. Organisations who represent or support businesses can apply on **behalf** of a number of businesses.

- Be based in the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey.
- Be struggling to recruit and retain staff, a clear explanation of need for training in your organisation must be provided
- Commit to upskilling existing employees into new higher paid roles with a clear pathway for employment progression. Evidence must be provided through copies of a P11 or wage slips, including copies of certificates and qualifications.
- Support underemployed employee into appropriate level employment, in turn creating entry-level posts for unemployed residents
- Commit to retaining supported employees for a minimum of 12 months.

Be willing to participate in sector specific recruitment campaigns, career initiatives, PR initiatives and job fairs to encourage residents to access the sector. **Please note that priority will be given to applicants who have not previously availed of this grant funding.**

*****Classification of businesses is based on:

- 1 – Staff headcount
- 2 – Either turnover or balance sheet total

Company Category	Staff Headcount	Turnover or	Balance Sheet total
Medium	< 250	≤ £50m	≤ £43m
Small	< 50	≤ £10m	≤ £10m
Micro	< 10	≤ £2m	≤ £2m

5. What can be funded?

Costs for:

- Training or qualification that is relevant and required for new post i.e. Category C+E (Class 1) to upskill a Class 2 Driver to Class 1 Driver role.
- Training that allows employees to transition from their current role to a new, upskilled role, therefore leaving a vacant entry-level role.
- Industry related training i.e. leadership training, project management, manual handling, forklift, CPC, LGV, HGV, health and safety, SIA licence, etc.
- Associated costs i.e. medical, licence costs etc (excluding travel costs).

Businesses must specify the qualification/s required in the application form and provide quotes for relevant delivery providers in a follow-up email to fundingunit@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

6. What cannot be funded?

The following will not be funded under the programme:

- Costs incurred for training that is already underway, commenced or taken place prior to a Letter of Offer from the LMP (retrospective funding).
- VAT on all invoices, irrespective of whether or not the applicant is VAT registered.
- Training which is not relevant to the potential new post.
- Training which will not upskill employees into a new role and/or raise their salary
- Training for those due to start employment in the business.
- In house training provided by employees/managers. All training must be externally sourced.
- Associated travel costs for training.
- Training costs more than £10,000. The LMP may adjust the maximum support as per point **3. Grant Rate.**
- Costs that are assessed as poor value for money or that are purchased without following Council procurement guidelines (see section 8).

7. Conditions of Funding

- All applications must be completed in full and received by the closing date of **Monday 30th November.**
- Businesses must meet all the conditions previously outlined to be eligible to apply e.g. commit to upskilling an employee into a new role and increase their salary.
- Businesses must complete the LMP's monitoring forms to demonstrate how the organisation met the funding criteria.
- Provide the LMP with further information or clarification on any request for support and to share information on support with other funders.
- Agree that the LMP can publicise details of funding.
- Agree to be involved in PR related to the programme e.g. be named and involved in Council social media posts etc.
- Participants must complete equality monitoring forms, pre-project, post-project, and 6-month follow-up questionnaires.
- Copies of certifications earned must be given to the LMP.

8. Assessment Criteria

Application for funding will be assessed using the following criteria:

Eligibility Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
1. The application was received by the deadline.			
2. The application form has been completed in full.			
3. The business is based within the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey.			
4. The business has fewer than 250 employees.			
5. The business is a micro/small/medium sized enterprise*****.			
6. The business has indicated they are struggling to recruit and retain staff, with a clear explanation of need and benefit for training in the organisation.			
7. Relevant qualification(s)/training needed has been specified in the application form.			
8. The training specified for upskilling in the application is eligible as outlined under point 5 & 6 of the guidance notes.			
9. The organisation has signed the application to confirm they have read and understood the criteria for this grant.			
10. The organisation has provided quotations for training.			
11. The application for upskilling training does not duplicate other funding streams or programmes.			
12. Available to attend a mandatory online claim workshop			
13. The organisation has previously applied for the Employee Upskilling Grant.			

Preference will be given to applicants who have not previously availed of this grant funding.

The LMP reserve the right to enhance assessment criteria in the event that the number of applications exceed the funds available e.g. by conducting a value for money assessment.

An appeals procedure will be available to unsuccessful applicants. For further information please contact the officers detailed at the end of this document.

Applications will be considered at Assessment Panel and ratified by the Labour Market Partnership.

Where information is missing, we may be able to provide limited support. However, due to tight application deadlines, we cannot guarantee that we will may not have capacity to contact applicants or follow up on for outstanding information.

9. Procurement

Applicants must demonstrate value for money has been obtained when purchasing all items/services to be grant aided;

- You should seek the required number of quotes based on the thresholds below - the threshold is the value of the full item. For example, if you are procuring training for several employees, the value will be the cost of training for all required employees, not an individual cost.
- You must follow the thresholds for each item or service that you are sourcing.
- You must ensure that the quotations obtained are 'like for like.'
- The grant request should be based on the lowest quotation received.
- Quotes must be submitted with this application. You should forward quotes on to fundingunit@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk.
- Email quotes are acceptable and should include any covering email.
- Quotes must be dated prior to close of application call and contain the supplier's name.
- Internet searches (items costing less than £5,000) should be saved as a print screen or printed and sent with your application – website addresses / links to websites will not be accepted. The submission must clearly show the website used and the cost of the item.

Grant funding will not be paid out for items that have been purchased without following this procurement process. The Council will base any Letter of Offer on the cost of the lowest quotation or the quotation offering the best value for money.

Cost of Purchase (excluding VAT)		**Requirement**
1	Below £5,000	Two price checks required
2	Between £5,000 and £14,999	Minimum of three written quotations required
3	Between £15,000 and £49,999	Minimum of four written quotations required
4	Over £50,000	Procured via the 'electronic' procurement portal' and Council approval
5	UK Public Tender Thresholds[2]	Procedures for UK tendering apply
As part of our local sourcing ambitions, the Council encourages businesses to source services from suppliers based inside the ANBC Borough.		

Please note: Council officers and Programme auditors may contact suppliers of quotations and / or invoices to verify that the quotation / invoice has been provided to the applicant as part of audit and fraud-prevention checks at application and grant claim stage. Any quotation / invoice that cannot be verified by the supplier, will be passed to the Councils Internal Audit Department for further investigation and result in the grant not being paid.

10. Monitoring Requirements

Businesses and Employees are expected to complete and provide the following as per the conditions of funding.

Employees must complete equality monitoring, pre-project, post-project, and 6-month follow-up questionnaire forms and businesses should be prepared to report on programme outcomes 6 months post completion of the programme.

Completed by the Business:

- Project Monitoring Report
- Evidence of Qualifications/certifications earned
- Names of participants being trained
- Current and new role of participants
- Original and new salary of participants

Completed by Employee(s):

- **Equality Monitoring Survey**
- **Baseline Project Survey**
- **Completion Project Survey**
- **Follow Up Survey**

The questionnaires will be completed via the Council's Grants Manager. Links to these will be issued with Letters of Offers.

Please note that completion of these forms is monitored and is part of the vouchering process.

An Outcome-Based Accountability model will be in place to monitor Programme effectiveness, with clearly defined outcomes and measurable indicators monitored through the pre and post project questionnaires and project monitoring reports.

An example of expected monitoring below:

How much did we do?

- Number of participants enrolled on the project

How well did we do it?

- Number of participants enrolled who completed upskilling training
- Number of participants reporting satisfaction with the training

Is anyone better off?

- Number of participants moved into higher paid employment
- Number of participants still in employment after 6 months
- Number of participants who gained a qualification after completing training

Project and equality monitoring forms will be provided to successful businesses and have been included in Appendix A – E for information.

11. Letter of Offer

Successful applicants will be issued with a Letter of Offer. This agreement will set out the terms and conditions associated with the grant funding which must be adhered to:

- The amount of grant awarded / grant reserved for your scheme;
- The terms and conditions associated with the grant; and,
- Time-bound completion date.

All projects must be completed as soon as practically possible after receiving a Letter of Offer, and by the end date stated in your Letter of Offer.

Note: Do not commence any work or pay deposits until an offer letter has been signed and returned to the Council. The Council will not fund any works that have commenced prior to the signed Letter of Offer being returned.

12. Grant Claim Process

This grant funding scheme is retrospective and therefore costs will only be reimbursed once the following steps have been completed:

1. Submit claim form detailing the items to be claimed, supplier/s and value.
2. Submit monitoring form, detailing beneficiaries of training and outcomes of support;
3. Copies of formal training certificates
4. Completion of Baseline Project Survey, Equality Monitoring Survey and Completion Project Survey.
5. Invoice(s) for services/purchase(s);
6. Copy of relevant bank/credit card statement(s) showing payment clearing your account. Electronic banking printouts will be sufficient for these purposes (irrelevant information can be redacted);
7. Evidence of promotion of upskilled employee and wage increase.

CASH OR CHEQUE EXPENDITURE WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS FUND.

Payment of grant will be made to the applicant via direct BACS payment.

Project completion date **28 February 2027**, Claims submitted by **10 March 2027** with Claim payments completed as soon as possible.

13. How to apply

Applications should be submitted via the online application form via the link below antrimandnewtownabbey.flexigrant.com

The closing date for receipt of completed application forms is **30 November 2026.**

Late and/or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

The LMP reserve the right to re-open the fund for applications.

You will receive an email receipt confirming the Council have received your application.

14. What happens next?

- Complete and submit the application form by: **30 November 2026**
- Applications will be assessed: **December 2026**
- Details will be reported to the Partnership: **December 2026**
- Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application and successful letters will be issued: **January 2027**
- Training must be completed and paid for by: **28 February 2027**
- Final outcomes must be reported and grant claims received by: **10 March 2027**

If you have any queries, please contact the Funding Unit by email on fundingunit@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

15. Additional Information for Applicants

a. Publication of Data

If your application is successful and your project is awarded funding, please note that the Council. LMP and Department for Communities (DfC) may publicise details of all financial support awarded/paid out to beneficiaries. This will include the name of the business, their postal town, their post code and the total amount of financial support received by the business.
Details of applications (successful and unsuccessful) will be submitted to Council, the LMP and DfC and business details will be published as part of the Council report, which are accessible to the public.

b. Data Protection Act

We will use the information you give us on the application form during assessment and for the life of any grant we award you to administer and analyse grants and for our own research.

We might use the data you provide for our own research. We recognise the need to maintain the confidentiality of vulnerable groups and their details will not be made public in any way, except as required by law.

c. Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to request any information that we hold, subject to certain exemption that may apply. This includes information received from third parties, such as, although not limited to, grant applicants, grant holders and contractors. If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act, we will release it, subject to exemptions; although we may consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, you should let us know when you apply. For further information please visit the Information Commissioner's Office at https://ico.org.uk/

d. General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

When you apply for Employee Upskilling, we will ask for some personal information because, for example, your personal email address or telephone number is used on the applicant organisation's behalf or details of employees trained through the Programme. When you provide this information, it is processed in adherence with the GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018 as well as the scheme's Terms and Conditions to enable us to communicate with you about the application.

We take care to ensure that any personal information supplied is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. This means that any personal information you supply will be processed principally for the purpose for which it has been provided.

For further details on your privacy see the Privacy Statement.

e. Employee Upskilling Fund Privacy Notice

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council is the data controller for personal information collected through the Employee Upskilling Grant Fund. This information will be used to process your application, administer the programme, make grant payments where applicable, and meet audit and funding requirements.

The information collected may include your name, business and contact details, property information, application details, supporting evidence, payment information and correspondence records. If your application is successful, we will also collect information and documentation required to administer and process your grant claim and payment. Relevant information and documentation relating to your application and any grant awarded will be held on the Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Flexi Grant Manager systems.

The lawful basis for processing your application and grant information is Article 6(1)(e) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) – the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the Council.

Information collected may be shared with relevant Council departments, the Department for Communities, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, and the European Commission for the purposes of administering, monitoring, auditing and evaluating the programme.

You can choose to join the Council's Business Directory and receive information about relevant business support programmes, funding opportunities, events and other business opportunities. This is optional and will not affect your application. The lawful basis for this processing is Article 6(1)(a) of the UK GDPR – your consent. You can withdraw your consent or unsubscribe from these communications at any time.

Where personal information is transferred or processed outside the UK, appropriate safeguards will be in place in accordance with data protection legislation. All information may be subject to audit and will be held in accordance with the Council's retention and disposal schedule.

You have a number of rights in relation to your personal data. Further information is available from the Information Commissioner's Office: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/individual-rights/

If you have any concerns about how your personal data has been handled, please contact:

Data Protection Officer
Antrim Civic Centre, 50 Stiles Way, Antrim, BT41 2UB
T: 028 94 463113
E: DPO@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).