

**Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership**

**Employee Upskilling Fund 24/25**

**Guidance Notes for Applicants**

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15. **Background**

In response to current labour market shortages, Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership 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.

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 with an increase in wages by 30 June.

1. **Scheme Objectives**
* **Provide opportunities for residents to achieve relevant and practical industry knowledge and skills and therefore improve their employment opportunities;**
* **Target underemployed residents (job level or hour worked) to support them into appropriate level employment, in turn creating entry-level posts;**
* **To support local business owners with challenges recruiting appropriately skilled labour;**
* **To strengthen the working relationship between Council and the local business community, building capacity for future initiatives;**
1. **Grant Rate**

Business owners can apply for a maximum grant of up to £3,000 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.

There is a set budget to support businesses; therefore, the Council may reduce the maximum grant available or limit the number of employees supported depending on the number of applications received and demand for funds.

For training where the estimated total training cost exceeds £3,000, applicants should contact the LMP to discuss.

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

1. **Who can apply?**

Micro, small, and medium sized businesses can apply for the Fund. Businesses must meet the following conditions:

* Be based in the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey.
* Have fewer than 250 employees.
* Indicate they are struggling to recruit and retain staff, with a clear explanation of need for training in your organisation.
* Be a micro/small/medium sized business\*.
* 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.
* Create equivalent vacancies/opportunities for upskilled employees and entry-level roles.
* Commit to retaining supported employees for a minimum of 12 months.
* Businesses willing to participate in sector specific recruitment campaigns, career initiatives and job fairs to encourage residents to access the sector.

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

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

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

1. **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.

These can include:

* Relevant externally sourced industry related training i.e. manual handling, CPC, LGV, HGV.
* Associated costs i.e. medical, licence costs etc.

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

1. **What cannot be funded?**

The following will not be funded under the programme:

* Costs incurred for training that has already 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 outsourced.
* Associated travel costs for training.
* Training costs more than £3,000. The LMP may adjust the maximum support based on demand, business scale, and previous support received over the last 3 financial years. Funding will be dependent on need in the area and therefore the LMP may propose to part fund some applications.
* Costs that are assessed as poor value for money or that are purchased without following Council procurement guidelines (see section 8).
* Retrospective applications (for training already completed or underway).
1. **Assessment Criteria**

Allocation of funding will be scored using the following criteria:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Eligibility Criteria** | **Yes** | **No** |
| 1. The application was received by the deadline.
 |  |  |
| 1. The application form has been completed in full.
 |  |  |
| 1. The business is based within the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey.
 |  |  |
| 1. The business has fewer than 250 employees.
 |  |  |
| 1. The business is a micro/small/medium sized enterprise**\***.
 |  |  |
| 1. 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.
 |  |  |
| 1. Relevant qualification(s)/training needed has been specified in the application form.
 |  |  |
| 1. The training specified for upskilling in the application is eligible as outlined under point 5 & 6 of the guidance notes.
 |  |  |
| 1. The organisation has committed to upskilling at least one employee into a new and improved role and to raise their salary as per the criteria for funding.
 |  |  |
| 1. The organisation has signed the application to confirm they have read and understood the criteria for this grant.
 |  |  |
| 1. The organisation has provided quotations for training.
 |  |  |

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

1. **Conditions of Funding**
* All applications must be completed in full and received by the closing date.
* Applicants must meet all the conditions previously outlined to be eligible to apply.
* Applicants must commit to upskilling an employee into a new role and increase their salary.
* Applicants will be required to complete the LMP's monitoring forms quarterly to demonstrate how the organisation met the criteria detailed in their application.
* The LMP reserves the right to request further information or clarification on any request for support and to share information on support with other funders.
1. **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 skills@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk.
* Email quotes are acceptable for all value of items 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 £3,000) 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.

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| **Number of Quotations Required** | **Quotation Thresholds (£)**  |
| 1 | Minimum of 2 written/email quotations(internet quotes not permitted) | Up to £2,999.99 |
| 2 | Minimum of 3 written/email quotations (internet quotes not permitted) | 3,000.00 – 7,999.99 |
| 3 | Minimum of 4 written/email quotations (internet quotes not permitted) | 8,000.00 – 29,999.99 |
| 4 | Minimum of 5 written/email quotations (internet quotes not permitted) | Above 30,000.00 |
| **As part of our local sourcing ambitions, the Council encourages businesses to source services from suppliers based inside the ANBC Borough.**  |

The LMP reserve the right to enhance assessment criteria in the event that the number of applications exceed the funds available.

The decision of the Panel is final and there is no right of appeal on the decision made.

**INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE ASSESSED.**

**Please note** - 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.

**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.

1. **Monitoring Requirements**

Applicants are expected to complete and provide the following as per the conditions of funding:

* Project Monitoring Report
* Equality Monitoring Form
* Evidence Qualifications/certifications earned
* Names of training participants
* Current and new role of training participants
* Original and new salary of training participants

An Outcome-Based Accountability model will be in place to monitor Programme effectiveness, with clearly defined outcomes and measurable indicators.

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 applicants.

**Applicants must complete a pre and post programme survey form and be prepared to report on programme outcomes 6 months post completion of the programme.**

1. **How to apply**

Applications should be submitted via the online application form on the Council website.

The closing date for receipt of completed application forms is **4pm on 21 February 2025.** Late and/or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

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

1. **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.

1. **Grant Claim Process**

This grant funding scheme is retrospective and therefore costs will only be reimbursed once the following steps have been completed:1. Signed claim form detailing the items to be claimed, supplier/s and value.

2. Signed monitoring form, detailing beneficiaries of training and outcomes of support;

3. Invoice(s) for services/purchase(s);

4. 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);

5. Evidence of promotion of upskilled employee and wage increase.

**Please note:** Council officers and Programme auditors may request copies of formal training certificates as part of the monitoring of the Programme.

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

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

All projects must be completed as soon as practically possible to enable payment by 30 June 2025.

1. **What happens next?**
* Applications will be assessed: February 2025
* Details will be reported to the Partnership and Council: March 2025
* Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application and successful letters will be issued: March 2025
* Training must be completed and paid for by: 30 June 2025
* Final outcomes must be reported by: 30 June 2025

Complete and submit the online application form: [https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/business/skills-employability/upskilling-fund-(1)/](https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/business/skills-employability/upskilling-fund-%281%29/) If you have any queries, please contact the skills team by email on skills@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk or contact Jessica Smyth on 028 9034 0018.

1. **Additional Information for Applicants**
	1. **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 beneficiary, their postal town, their post code and the total amount of financial support received by the beneficiary.
Details of applications (successful and unsuccessful) will be submitted to Council, the LMP and DfC and applicant details will be published as part of the Council report, which are accessible to the public.

* 1. **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.

* 1. **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/>

* 1. **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.

**Employee Upskilling Fund Privacy Notice**

We are collecting information from you for the purposes of processing your application to, and administering, the Employee Upskilling Fund. This is in accordance with Section 6(1)(e) of the 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 the Council, Labour Market Partnership, Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

We will ask for personal information about you or your employees because, for example, employee training records/certificates/pay role reports/pay slips are required to verify the satisfaction of terms and conditions of funding and project completion. When you provide this information it is processed in adherence with the GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018 to enable us to communicate with you about the project and costs associated with the funding.

Information will not be transferred to countries outside the EEA.All information collected and processed may be subject to audit. The Council may also process the information for research purposes carried out in the public interest.

All information will be held in accordance with the Council’s retention and disposal schedule (see <http://www.antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/Council>) and will be disposed of securely when no longer required.

You have a number of rights with regard to data we hold on you – for further information see the Information Commissioner’s website <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

If at any point you believe the information we process on you is incorrect you can request to see this information and even have it corrected or deleted. If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter.

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, or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).