



Wales Union Learning Fund 2022-2025

Employability and Skills: Working with Unions

October 2021

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.



Contents

Foreword	2
The Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) 2022-25	2
The Employability Plan	3
Aims and Objectives funding	4
Funding and timescales	8
Eligible activity	8
Governance and accountability	10
Support	11
Assessment of applications	11
Additionality	11
Applications	11
Evidence of need	11
Objectives	12
Widening participation	13
Essential and vocation skills	13
Partnership working	13
Sustainability	13
Project planning and management	14
Participant investment	14
Monitoring and evaluation	14
The Application Process	15
Payments	15
Deadlines	15
Next steps	15

Wales Union Learning Fund 2022-25

Foreword

The better people's skills, the better their chances of getting fair, secure and rewarding employment, and the stronger the skills base is in Wales, the more chance we have of attracting new businesses and growing existing ones to improve prosperity.

Our 'Employability Plan' sets out how we will support people to build skills and confidence to find and stay in rewarding work.

Our employability agenda doesn't stop with finding work; staying and progressing in work is also vital. We need the building blocks to ensure that lifelong learning and skills development over a whole career is a possibility for all.

We have a commitment to making Wales a fair work nation and recognise the key role that Wales TUC and trade unions make in achieving fair work and progression opportunities for all workers.

The Welsh Government has adopted the definition of Fair Work set out by the Fair Work Commission in its 2019 report. That definition is accompanied by six characteristics which are intended to be read in conjunction with the definition and which provide it with further context. Fair work is defined as: *"where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected"*. The characteristics that accompany that definition are: (i) fair reward; (ii) employee voice and collective representation; (iii) security and flexibility; (iv) opportunity for access, growth and progression; (v) safe, healthy and inclusive working environment, (vi) legal rights respected and given substantive effect.

Our goal is to provide opportunities to create resilient individuals who have the skills, enthusiasm, drive and creativity to fulfil their potential irrespective of ability, background, gender, or ethnicity.

In the increasingly complex world where we need to be aware of the needs of sustainability, we need to support employment for enthusiastic, capable and flexible people who can adapt to a fast changing world.

Transferrable employability and essential skills are of paramount importance to Wales and unions have a unique opportunity to contribute real outcomes that will benefit Wales into the future.

Many workers face individual barriers to learning and without the support provided would never be able to take the first steps to improve their skills and progress.

Through the WULF projects, Trade Unions are playing a pivotal role in strengthening relationships between employers and employees and raising motivation and skills levels within the workplace. WULF is ideally placed to support the Fair Work agenda aimed at developing secure and sustainable jobs with the opportunity for progression.

More and better learning and development opportunities will support a more resilient workforce in a changing labour market. Fair work standards will ensure better and more equitable access to quality, well-structured learning at work that matches the long term interests of the Welsh economy, helping to overcome in-work poverty and underemployment.

[Employability Plan](#)

The Welsh Government's Employability Plan was published in 2017 and acted as the focus for the previous WULF programme. A refresh of the Plan is currently underway and is likely to be published in the Spring of 2022¹. For the purposes of this Prospectus, the key aims will remain from the last WULF programme and will support the following vision:

“We will look towards making Wales a full employment high tech, high wage economy where we are preparing people for a changing world of work, whilst ensuring that the benefits and employment opportunities provided by the foundational economy are retained locally. We will provide people of all ages and abilities with high quality education and skills to meet the challenges and work opportunities of tomorrow and we will aim to instil in everyone a passion to learn throughout their lives, inspiring them with the ambition to be the best they can possibly be. We will work in partnership to deliver this and to remove any barriers which stop people from contributing to the world of work”.

[Employability Plan](#)

Underemployment and ‘in work’ poverty remains a challenge in Wales, with many people in short-term, insecure and low paid jobs.

The plan identifies four main areas for focus:

- **Providing an individualised approach to employability support.**

Support for individuals needs to be based on individual need, and take account of personal circumstances, barriers, aptitudes and ambitions. A contextualised programme of support that identifies and addresses any barriers will provide the best chance of success.

- **Underlining the responsibility of employers to up-skill, support their staff and provide fair work.**

Employers have a key role to play in promoting healthy and inclusive workplaces and prioritising skills development so that those in employment can thrive in work.

¹ Once the new Employability Plan has been published, an addendum will be made to the prospectus to cover the two remaining years of 2023-24 and 2024-25. New applications will not be required as this will be covered as part of the annual review process.

- **Responding to current and projected skills gaps.**

The nature and type of work is a vital consideration. There are regional and sectoral variations in the types of vacancies available across Wales, and this impacts the skills and entry requirements. Ensuring that people have the right skills and knowledge to progress and meet the needs of employers is key to ensuring sustainable employment.

- **Preparing for a radical shift in the world of work.**

The rapid developments in automation, artificial intelligence and digitalisation require an education and training system that will prepare our nation for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. Unions are well placed to support vulnerable workers, identify industry or sector needs, encourage individual participation, develop new and innovative ways of plugging skills gaps and share best practice.

The Aims and Objectives of the Wales Union Learning Fund

Achieving the objectives within the Employability plan requires a coordinated and focused effort across the employability network. The role of the unions in delivering in-work support to aid progression and maximise skills and confidence is key. We want to ensure that people are in work which is fairly paid, stable and meaningful.

The Trade Unions, through the work of the WULF projects, have demonstrated their unique ability to encourage a wide range of learning with workers, whether in the workplace, self-employed, or freelance. The learning supports workers to develop the skills needed to carry out their work to the best of their ability, opening opportunities for them to progress within the workplace and succeed in everyday life. WULF plays a key role in engaging workers in learning and supporting them to progress in their career, by raising awareness, providing learning opportunities and by addressing and overcoming any personal barriers to learning experienced by some workers. In many cases, it may be necessary for individuals to receive support to address health and wellbeing issues, before they can progress in their learning journey.

The overarching aims of WULF are to:

- raise the skills of the workforce and facilitate progression by supporting Trade Union-led learning activity, in partnership with employers and others, with a focus on increasing the essential and digital skills levels and employability skills of the Welsh workforce, and also supporting workers to progress onto further learning and to gain relevant qualifications
- support the recruitment and networking of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in raising demand for learning from non-traditional learners, especially workers with low skill levels and disadvantaged groups in the workplace, helping them to overcome barriers to learning;

- be responsive to the emerging skills and employability needs of workers, helping to deliver the skills needs of both the current and future workforce;
- work with employers to assist with workforce development including establishment of collectively bargained learning agreements and provision of advice on workplace policies and practices that encourage participation thus increasing the likelihood of progression, resulting in more workers benefiting from fair work.
- encourage employers to recognise the value of developing individuals through workplace learning in support of employability and progression.
- Increase diversity and inclusion within adult learning by removing barriers to learning and working with employers to widen access to workplace learning and skills.

The Programme for Government

The 'Programme for Government' sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to WULF and vows to continue a focus on improving skills for employment.

[Programme for government 2021 to 2026 | GOV.WALES](#)

The Programme sets out over 100 areas of priority for this government term and clearly identifies a number of key actions linked to adult learning and skills. The commitments around '***building an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and industries and services of the future***' should be considered as WULF bids are prepared, with particular reference to one of the key commitments, the Young Person's Guarantee, which aims to give everyone under 25 the offer of work, education, training or self-employment. Consideration should also be given to the environmental skills and employment requirements for now and the future with a focus on addressing skills gaps that relate to the need for a just transition of workers to a net zero economy.

There is also impetus to extend and improve opportunities for lifelong learning and Increase training and employment support for under-represented groups such as disabled workers and BAME workers.

The WULF Programme

The WULF programme must focus on the employability plan and the Programme for Government priorities, ensuring that union led learning is at the very heart of our employability offer.

Projects may support one or more of the four themes of the Employability Plan; however, we do not expect projects to support the Employability Plan in it's entirety.

Examples of how WULF projects can address the objectives of the Employability Plan include;

Providing an individualised approach to employability support.

- Develop innovative ways of encouraging learning. This includes developing new or different ways of promoting the benefits of addressing employability skills and essential skills learning needs and encouraging further learning through arrangements with learning providers. Where practicable, identifying and spreading good practice from projects to the wider workforce;
- Provide additional advice, guidance and support for learners. This may be provided in partnership with employers and should add to the existing range of support services;
- Significantly improve essential skills in the workforce for example by providing opportunities for employees to learn at all levels in a relevant and flexible way, through the development and/or provision of appropriate learning in the workplace that meets the needs of the learner;
- Supporting individuals to assess their learning and development needs and signposting to appropriate external support and relevant funded schemes

Underlining the responsibility of employers to up-skill, support their staff and provide fair work.

- Encourage businesses to recognise the positive role that union led learning can have on growth, productivity and the commitment of their workforce
- Continue to increase the number of employers who place emphasis on creating workplaces which are inclusive and supportive environments for disabled people and those with long term health conditions.
- Widen participation and break down barriers to learning in the workplace by supporting interventions which focus on equality of opportunity, reducing social exclusion, and engaging non-traditional learners;
- Support businesses to facilitate, coordinate and signpost opportunities through other learning routes, where possible
- Encourage businesses to recognise and support the need for mental health and wellbeing, recognising that in many instances, this represents a significant barrier to any additional or further learning
- Develop new or improve existing workplace agreements, policies and practices on learning and skills, employability and workplace wellbeing through collective bargaining

Responding to current and projected skills gaps.

- Be responsive to emerging employment and skills needs within their associated sectors by advocating for vocational learning and apprenticeships
- Address the strategy contained within the “Regional Skills Action Plans” developed by Regional Skills Partnerships to ensure that that local management information is taken into account, including issues faced by the foundational economy and other low-pay, low-skilled sectors, worker voice and workplace best practice are recognised within regional employment and skills planning
- Address skills gaps that relate to the need for a just transition of workers to a net zero economy
- Focus on potential skills gaps in areas identified as priorities in the Economic Action Plan, and in those specific sectors expected to be impacted by digitalisation and automation
- Respond to, and support the issue around lack of digital skills within existing workplaces by providing opportunities for up skilling

Preparing for a radical shift in the world of work.

- Increase Trade Unions’ capacity to promote learning. This is not only about providing new facilities and materials (where appropriate) but also about developing a systematic, long-term approach to promoting learning centred around essential skills and employability skills;
- Form part of, and add value to, a Trade Union’s strategy for learning; eg.by bargaining for skills and learning and establishing learning agreements and learning committees in the workplace
- Support and foster effective learning partnership activity between employers, other Trade Unions, learning providers and community based organisations in order to encourage more people to engage in learning;
- Create sustainable learning by effectively accessing resources and support from partners capable of sustaining activity beyond the initial WULF funding period. This involves securing longer-term commitment and, where possible, resources from partners e.g. employers, providers and other unions.
- Provide support for self-employed, recognising that this represents an area of huge potential growth
- Respond to, and prepare for the rapid developments in automation, artificial Intelligence and digitalisation, preparing our workforce for the challenges of tomorrow.
- Support workplace partnerships that seek to transition workers skills that relate to the green economy.

Applications must clearly demonstrate how they address the key themes as outlined in the employability plan.

Funding and timescales

The life span of each project will be 3 years, covering the financial years 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25. Unions must provide a 3 year plan outlining intended provision, however funding will be confirmed, and made on an annual basis. A yearly Grant Award Letter (GAL) will be provided to unions in advance of each funding year, confirming agreed funding and details of delivery.

We will allow 1 application (i.e. 1 project) per union, with a maximum amount of funding for 2022-23 of £62,500 per union. However, in recognition that some unions may have much larger memberships and therefore a higher possible demand for providing support, we will increase this funding cap where membership in Wales exceeds the following:

- 15,000 members or over (in Wales)- maximum funding of £125,000 per annum
- 50,000 members or over (in Wales)- maximum funding of £187,500 per annum

All funding will be paid in arrears on a quarterly basis providing the expenditure forms part of the approved project and there is evidence that the cost has been incurred and paid.

Year 1 of the projects must start on 1st April 2022 and will need to be completed by 31st March 2023. Projects must ensure that they achieve the maximum impact in the time available. Consideration must be given to the time required to actively engage workplaces and recruit learners, allowing time for the delivery and closure of the project in a way that promotes continuation of the learning following closure at the end of the three year term.

Eligible activity

The Welsh Government will consider WULF project proposals that clearly demonstrate how they meet the objectives of the Employability Plan and the broader commitments in the Programme for Government including supporting the Young Person's Guarantee, increasing the number of adult learners and progressing the Fair Work Commission's recommendations.

WULF proposals should focus on essential skills, employability skills and in-work progression. The primary focus of WULF should be aimed at level 3 and below. However WULF can support courses delivered at QCF level 4 where appropriate and where it supports employability and progression (for example, depending on the needs of the individual and the sector that the project is supporting) this must be agreed with Welsh Government on a case by case basis.

All projects must involve an element of joint working with partners. These include third sector voluntary/community organisations and other expert stakeholders such as Mind Cymru, Shelter, Digital Communities Wales as an example. Support will not be available for projects which focus on, the training of Union representatives (including Union Learning Representatives), formal careers advice and guidance, or projects which aim to replace employer-funded training or any statutory obligations.

WULF projects should encourage investment from Unions, employers, employees and other relevant partners in order to maximise the use of WULF funding and create sustainable learning models for delivery when projects come to an end.

WULF funding may be used for informal learning, including provision that results in qualifications and provision that is not qualification-based. The focus for all learning activity must be skills and employability, contributing to the continued productivity or progression within the workplace by participating individuals. Projects will be required to demonstrate the link to employability and/or progression within the workplace for all activities delivered.

Consideration should be given to the quality of provision and value for money when submitting a WULF proposal. Your application must set out clearly how you will ensure both principles are embedded into your project.

Once an application has been approved, prior agreement must be sought from the Welsh Government if there is any doubt about whether a particular learning activity is eligible for WULF funding within the agreed project outcomes.

Where applications involve new or improved facilities (capital expenditure) such as learning centres or IT equipment, it will be necessary to demonstrate that this is directly linked to the delivery of learning. In all cases, full use should be made of existing resources, especially where these have been purchased through previous WULF provision. If equipment is to be purchased, this shall be limited to a maximum of 5% of the total value of the proposal and the proposal should explain how this will be used during the life of the project and after the project ends.

WULF projects should commit to delivering specific, measurable learning outcomes and establish GDPR compliant data collection systems to identify learning progression.

Examples of activities eligible for WULF funding include:

- supporting the cost of learning provision such as the development of new courses or new approaches to learning, purchasing learning provision to improve the employability of individuals and to further their progression within the workplace; where these costs are not covered through other publicly funded provision;
- salaries of project staff and associated costs for the duration of the contract, providing these are reasonable and align with staff undertaking a similar role

within the organisation (please refer to the guidance document for eligible activity);

- marketing, publicity and dissemination linked to the promotion of learning, where marketing and publicity is promoting the WULF project or the learning. All marketing and publicity materials must be considered for long term use and not short term or single use;
- setting up and equipping of learning centres (subject to the conditions outlined above)

Governance and Accountability

Any certificated Trades Unions with members based in Wales, whether or not it is affiliated to the Trades Unions Congress, is eligible to apply for WULF funding. Applications will be particularly welcomed from Trades Unions working in partnership with others, such as other unions, employers, education and training providers, Local Authorities.

Applications must show that projects can be successfully completed within the time frames listed above. It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that the terms, conditions and responsibilities related to WULF funding are fully understood prior to signing the grant agreement. The Welsh Government will regularly conduct quarterly financial monitoring and contract management reviews with the projects, in line with the terms of the grant agreement, to ensure financial probity, delivery is on track and activity complies with programme requirements.

All WULF Projects are expected to identify and respond to demands for learning. If a Learning Needs Analysis has already been carried out then it should be submitted with the application as evidence of need. .

Budget forecasts should be detailed and as accurate as possible. The Welsh Government will monitor spend to ensure delivery is on track and outcome targets are being met. Please remember, any unspent funding cannot be carried forward from one financial year to the next.

The Welsh Government will monitor projects as they progress and, as part of this process, will discuss spend against budget with the successful applicants in order to identify potential underspend and/or proposed changes to the contract at the earliest opportunity.

From March 2016, the Welsh Government was governed by the Welsh Language Standards. WULF projects will be required to adhere to these requirements which can be viewed by following this link:

[Welsh Language Standards](#)

All projects must ensure that they are fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Further information can be found in the link below;

[General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\)](#)

Support

Advice and support will be available from your Welsh Government Contract Manager throughout the duration of the project. The Wales TUC will provide on-going support during project development and delivery stages. They will provide a key point of contact for project staff for the successful projects, host the WULF network to provide advice and support to all projects on anything other than formal contract compliance.

Assessment of applications

This is a discretionary grant scheme approved by Welsh Ministers and administered by Welsh Government officials on their behalf.

When assessing applications, advice will be sought from the WULF Assessment Panel which is made up of nominees from the Welsh Government and key stakeholders.

Applications will be considered and assessed by the panel against the criteria in this prospectus. The panel will give due consideration to under-represented sectors and prevailing economic conditions when evaluating evidence of need. The panel will then provide recommendations to the 'Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning' for consideration and approval.

Additionality

Additional funding to support learning can be sought from other sources such as Welsh Government-funded programmes and those funded through the European Social Fund. Advice and support can be obtained from the Welsh Government and Wales TUC if required. Where additional funds are sought, the project must maintain clear and separate audit trails and provide evidence to show that the activity has not been claimed from more than one funding stream.

Applications

When drafting bids, applicants should not assume that the WULF Assessment Panel has any prior knowledge of their sector, business or any learning activity carried out by Trade Unions.

Each application will be assessed against the criteria set out below.

Evidence of need

Applications must clearly describe the purpose of and need for the project, including how the project will support the 4 key objectives of the Employability Plan.

The application should explain how the project will add value to and not duplicate any existing provision.

Applications must show the evidence that has been used as the basis for the project bid. This might include a profile of learning and skills needs of project target groups, surveys of employees and employers, learning needs assessments, the vulnerability of employment within target groups and other research such as that undertaken by academics or the Welsh Government.

Details should also be provided of established working groups, employer partnerships, steering groups or other bodies that have concluded the need exists and who endorse the proposal.

The proposal should clearly demonstrate how it will address employability and progression as the core function of its activities.

Objectives

Applications must evidence how the outlined objectives support and address the key themes of the employability plan. The specific outlines of the WULF programme are outlined above and should also be taken into account when setting objectives.

SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) criteria must be used when describing the aims and objectives.

All applicants will be required to set targets for the following performance indicators:

- **Number of Learners completing full or part accredited qualifications**
- **Number of Learners completing non accredited learning**
- **Number of Learners completing Essential skills courses**
- **Number of Learners supported in their progression from one level of learning to another**
- **Number of learners referred to further learning opportunities at either the same level or at a higher level**
- **Number of learners referred to other organisations for advice and guidance**

In addition, applicants will be required to outline details of employers they intend to work with.

Applicants will be required to outline the specific activities which will be undertaken in order to achieve these objectives, and how they will be managed and monitored.

In this bidding round, there will be an emphasis on the actual 'learning' activity. Projects must be able to evidence the impact that their learning activity has had and

how this evidences success against the 4 core themes of the employability plan. This must link to the targets and outcomes for the project.

With regard to the Young Person's Guarantee, the learner form will include an entry that captures participants who are aged under 25.

Widening participation and breaking down barriers to learning in the workplace

Activity should focus on equality of opportunity, social inclusion, vulnerable or atypical workers and non-traditional learners. Applications should encourage widening of access to lifelong learning for people in Wales irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances. The projects must support the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Supporting the Programme for Government agenda in respect of addressing essential skills and/or vocational skills needs in the workplace

Supporting Essential skills and vocational skills needs remains a key priority of the programme. This includes Literacy/Communication, Application of Number/Numeracy and ICT/Digital Literacy up to and including level 2 qualifications. In addition, increasing the number of adult learners in Wales, progressing the Fair Work Commission's recommendations and delivering on the Young Person's Guarantee are all key areas of the Programme for Government, amongst others, that WULF can have play a significant role in supporting.

Promoting Partnership

We encourage effective partnership working, for example with other Trade Unions, learning providers and community-based organisations, in an effort to maximise the number and quality of education and training opportunities available and achieve economies of scale where possible.

Please note that partners who are named in the bid must provide a letter of support outlining their commitment to the project. These letters must be attached to the bid at the time of submission.

Sustainability

The proposal must demonstrate how it has the potential to create and support a learning culture beyond the project period. Applications should indicate how Trade Union policies, systems, working practices and future resource planning (including staffing) will evolve to help sustain learning activities and services and support the continued role of 'Union Learning Reps' (ULR's).

Information should be provided about recent WULF projects that have or are currently being delivered through your Union, with an explanation as to why further funding is needed.

Project Planning and Management

A detailed project timeline must be submitted, with key milestones identified such as appointment of project staff, setting up of steering groups, completion of Learning Needs Analyses, launch date and course dates. Outcomes and a related spending profile must be fully forecasted.

Project management mechanisms and structures must be outlined, with reference to the role of any steering groups and identification of key workers and roles. Applicants must also demonstrate how their project will be linked to and supported by their wider Union infrastructure and/or linked to other project partners and schemes.

A risk register will need to be submitted outlining any perceived risks with rationale of how these will be mitigated.

Participant Investment

Projects are required to consider and demonstrate a suitable level of financial investment from Union/employer/employee when agreeing to fund learning activities. The application must clearly set out how this will be implemented.

Monitoring and Evaluation Arrangements

Applicants must demonstrate how they intend to monitor achievement against the specified objectives and targets, and how they intend to evaluate and evidence success.

The project must have robust activity monitoring systems in place to effectively manage and report this information when required to Welsh Government.

If the Welsh Government raises concerns regarding late submission of claims or lower than expected delivery a project may be asked to provide additional assurances and/or be subjected to increased monitoring activity.

The Project Manager will be responsible for completing:

- an initial impact assessment (start of project)
- an interim impact assessment. (end of years 1 and year 2)
- a final impact assessment at the end of the three year term

Projects should ensure that they have systems in place for collecting and sharing learner and employer data to support any future evaluations. Further guidance will be provided upon project approval.

The Application Process

The official Welsh Government application form must be used to apply for funding. We cannot accept applications which are not in this format. All applications must be signed by an appropriate senior official of the organisation.

The Wales TUC Learning Services team can provide advice and support to all Trade Unions considering applying for a grant from the Wales Union Learning Fund. In submitting a WULF application, unions thereby agree that details of the application and delivery of the project can be shared with the Wales TUC.

For further information on submitting an application please contact the designated Welsh Government WULF mailbox WULF@gov.wales

Payments

Payment of grant will be made quarterly in arrears upon receipt of an accurate and complete claim, accompanied by an invoice addressed to the Welsh Government and a detailed progress report. A Welsh Government Contract Manager will be appointed to ensure that the project remains on track and that grant claims are submitted on time. Failure to submit timely claims may impact on the budget available to the project. The Welsh Government must be consulted about any possible changes to project timings, outcomes, activities or patterns of expenditure. Projects will be required to make available both activity and financial records to support their claims during routine financial review meetings, it is the responsibility of the Project Manager to ensure these records are maintained, retained and made available upon request.

Deadlines

Applications must be submitted by 19th November 2021.

An electronic copy of the completed and signed application form must be sent to WULF@gov.wales

Next steps

The WULF assessment panel will meet to discuss and evaluate all applications during the week commencing 6th December 2021. Applicants will receive feedback following this assessment and will be informed if the project has been successful, by letter, the week commencing 13th December 2021.

Formal Grant Award Letters will be drafted and issued to all successful projects within a month.